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## Are Sub-Governors Leaders or Bureaucratic Managers in Turkey?

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### Abstract

It is widely acknowledged that Turkish public administration, with its centralized, hierarchical, rule driven bureaucratic structure and administrative style, is unable to adjust effectively to current developments requiring strong and effective leadership. In this context, the leadership skills of the sub-governors as top level district managers in Turkish administrative system are significantly important on which this study focuses. Accordingly, the paper presents a short review of the current structure and problems of Turkish public administration. Then, it discusses the findings of a survey conducted with 325 sub-governors, indicating that sub-governors exert leadership in their jobs despite several obstacles.

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### 1. Introduction

International and national developments, ICT revolutions and rapid political, social and economic changes in recent decades have necessitated public or private organizations to adapt to these changes. Besides, increased needs, expectations and standards, requirements by EU, WTO etc. also require improvements in the management and provision methods of public services. If these challenges are not met sufficiently, public or private organizations cannot successfully compete in global economy and provide efficient, effective, timely and quality services to their clients.

Turkey has taken important steps towards reforming its public administration in order to meet the abovementioned challenges especially since the 1980s. Yet, the pace of the change was not as high as one would have expected (Hicks, 2001: 78). Particularly an autocratic administrative style focusing on status-quo, obedience and risk minimization along with a centralized and statist structure (Heper & Keyman, 1998, p. 259) seems to have slowed down the success of such reforms and the adaptation of the public organizations to rapid change. Rapid change and need for managing this change adequately require strong organizational and transformational leadership in public administration as well as in private sector companies. In today's competitive yet interdependent global world, leaders have to have such skills as environmental consciousness, networking, collaboration, teamwork, entrepreneurship, ability to lead the change and transform the organization and followers with a vision (Bass, 1999;

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Burns, 1978; Gökçe, 2007, p. 45; Gül & Alican 2007, p. 490; Keskin, 2009, pp. 125-127). Besides, effective leaders see their organizations as a system involving many interdependent and cooperating sub-systems (Barth, 1996, p. 195; Kuhnert, 1993, p. 199; Peker & Aytürk, 2000, pp. 55-60).

This paper focuses on management styles and leadership in the Turkish public administration system with a specific emphasis on the sub-governors considered to be the top level managers in the districts as the administrative units under the provinces in Turkey. It is important to specify their problems and possible solutions to these problems because the sub-governors have important responsibilities as the top managers in their districts and are the candidates for future governorships and other top level managerial positions in the public and private sectors. Accordingly, the paper first presents a short overview of Turkish public administration system. Second, it gives a brief review of the contemporary problems and reform efforts in Turkish public administration. And last, the paper discusses the findings of a survey conducted with 325 sub-governors. The results of the study identify the obstacles for leadership in the sub-governorship and their causes, and provide important insight into the ways of improving the capacity and opportunities of sub-governors for effective leadership.

## 2. Administrative structure in Turkey

Turkey has had a strong state tradition and centralized administrative system with a system of tutelage by the national government over local governments since the Ottoman times (Heper & Keyman, 1998, p. 259). Thus, local autonomy has always been limited and local governments have not developed to become powerful administrative bodies in Turkey (Gül, 2008; Heper, 1992). According to 1982 Constitution, Turkish public administration system is based on the coexistence of the principles of ‘centralization’ and ‘decentralization.’ In this system, local administrations as public corporate entities have to be there, but it is up to the central government to determine the level of their power and autonomy. Similarly, Article 123 of the Constitution provides that all local and central administrative units and bodies should function in unity and coherence according to the rule of “unitary state” in order to maintain integrity in public administration in terms of organizations and duties. Thus, local governments are called as “local administrations” in Turkey despite the fact that decision making (councils) and executive bodies (mayors) of these local administrations are all elected by popular vote and the autonomy of local administrations has increased in recent years as a result of administrative reforms.

The central government also reaches out to the localities and regions through its local branches. The Constitution states that the layers of the central administration include provinces and districts determined according to geographic and economic conditions as well as the need for public services. According to Article 123 of the Constitution, the principle of “*de-concentration*” within the organizational hierarchy of the central administration is also employed and, thus, some powers and resources of the central administration is transferred to its local branches and officials.

Turkey is divided into 81 provinces and the provinces are also divided into around 950 districts. A governor is a strong executive figure appointed by the central government, and runs and supervises the whole provincial administration. A sub-governor is the head of a district. Both the governor and sub-governor have responsibilities as the agents of the central government and oversee the local branches of the central agencies and ministries. Besides, they represent the interests of their provinces or districts. Especially the governor, as the head of the special provincial administration, an autonomous local government body with a popularly elected council, acts to stand for local interests. There is further an executive board made up of the heads of the local governmental departments of the ministries and central agencies to carry out the functions of the central government at the local level and supervised by a governor.

## 3. Problems in Turkish public administration, reform efforts and approaches

It is widely acknowledged that Turkish public administration has been unable to follow and adjust effectively to current developments in today’s rapidly changing, global environment. The main reason for this is that Turkish administrative system has been beset with such problems as rigid and rule driven structure and procedures, inefficiency and excessive red-tape, centralist and excessively bureaucratic traditions, partisanship and favoritism in

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