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[Recent Changes in Turkey's Language Legislation

Dr. Özlem Eraydin Virtanen

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0. Introduction

European public opinion has often discussed and criticised Turkey's policy towards minorities and, especially, its policy towards non-official languages. With the recent impetus to relations between Turkey and the European Union (EU), Turkey has taken several steps to liberalise its language legislation on non-official languages. The question of whether these legal changes constitute a significant reform requires a deeper analysis of Turkey's language policy.

The role of the EU in the recent language reforms of Turkey is noteworthy. As is known, over the last decade, the EU, along with the United Nations and the Council of Europe, has emerged as an actor on the international level capable of influencing the language policies of many states. Ironically, however, it has a greater influence over the language policies of candidate countries rather than over those of its

own member states¹ because its internal legislation in this area has not been developed. After including “*respect for and protection of minorities*” among criteria for membership, the EU has begun to observe the developments in linguistic rights in candidate countries and to include linguistic issues in its Regular Reports. While not the only dynamic force, the EU has been very influential in the liberalisation of language policy in Turkey.

Many references to relations with the EU and international law can be found in Turkish official documents explaining the grounds for the recent language reforms.² Several EU documents on Turkey also refer to these reforms.³ The fact that EU relations gave a significant boost to the reforms leads the researcher to broach the issue initially from the framework of Turkish-EU relations, although a deeper study of Turkish language policy would require a broader framework.

Turkey is not the only candidate country whose language policy is discussed within the scope of full membership to the EU. However, Turkey has several features that set it apart from other candidates: not only its large and mostly Muslim population, but also its longer association with the EU. Yet, despite a longer relationship, it would be difficult to suggest that there is a deeper understanding between the parties on minority protection and linguistic rights. In European discourse, which highlights the failures rather than the successes of Turkish democratisation, there are few, if any, signs of interest in the role and importance of language policy in Turkish modernisation and nation-building.

On the other hand, Turkish debates on linguistic rights have a very restricted conceptual framework. Few attempts have been made to introduce the paradigms of sociolinguistic research conducted outside Turkey into current debates

¹ F. de Varennes, *Vade-Mecum*, “Introduction”, ed. by Donall O Riagain, Dublin, 1998, p. 9.

² See for example, Prime Ministry General Secretariat for European Union Affairs, *Analytical Notes on Constitutional Amendments*, <http://www.abgs.gov.tr/abportal/uploads/files/Analytical%20Note%20on%20Constitutional%20Amendments%20.doc>.

³ See for example, *2002 Regular Report on Turkey's Progress Towards Accession*, {COM(2002) 700 final}, SEC(2002) 1412, Brussels, 9.10.2002, p. 41-42, www.deltur.cec.eu.int/english/e-g-regular2002.html.

on non-official languages.⁴ Even though there are indicators to suggest that the right to a mother tongue is widely tolerated⁵, probably as a matter of common sense, its relationship with democracy has not been sufficiently discussed. There is little awareness about international legal regulations on linguistic rights and the emphasis is still on confirming the status of the official language.

This paper aims to address part of this problem by introducing the main issues of Turkish language policy, as discussed in Turkish public opinion. The paper will begin with a brief summary of the historical background, without which a deeper understanding of Turkish language policy cannot be obtained. The role of language policy in Turkish nation-building is another issue discussed in this paper, rarely studied from the point of view of contemporary theories on nationalism. The subsequent section will deal mainly with the policy on non-official languages with reference to relevant legislation. The result of this policy on the sizes of linguistic groups can be observed in the demographic data, although these data are based on rough estimates. This will be followed by a discussion on recent language legislation.

1. Historical Background to Turkish Language Policy

A historical analysis will be useful for an understanding of the dynamics and characteristics of Turkish language policy. A brief overview of the historical developments is sufficient to point out that, since the Middle Ages, the inferior status of the Turkish language in society has urged leaders to concentrate their efforts, if any, on improving this status. One Turkish historian, E. Z. Karal, writes that;

⁴ The absence of works in the fields of sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics is noted in the report by the Special Expert Committee on the Turkish Language for the 8th Development Plan. *Sekizinci Bes Yillik Kalkinma Planı*, “Turk Dili OIK Raporu”, <http://ekutup.dpt.gov.tr/turkdili/oik542.pdf>.

⁵ According to research conducted by TESEV, 74% of interviewees thought that the right to a mother tongue should not be restricted under any condition. A. Carkoglu et. al., *Turk Halkinin Avrupa Birligine Bakisi*, (The Turkish People’s Perception of European Union Membership), TESEV, June 2002. <http://www.tesev.org.tr/sunum.zip>.

“In the history of Turkey, the language problem indicates efforts made to transform Turkish into an independent, national and modern language.”⁶

As early as the 10th century, when the Turks adopted Islam, the Turkish language was heavily influenced by Persian and Arabic. Although, in line with Turkish expansion to the West, the Turkish language had spread from sedentary groups to semi-sedentary groups and then to settled groups, this did not prevent the dominance of Arabic and Persian in science, education, literature and even administration. It is recorded that during the Seljuk period the language of the palace was Persian and that some Turkish sultans did not hesitate to adopt Persian names.⁷ Ironically, the poets of the time who wrote in Turkish pointed out that *“Turkish, in comparison with Arabic and Persian, is limited, crude and inexpressive and their shortcomings must therefore be overlooked”*.⁸

When Karamanoglu Mehmet Bey, the leader of a principality that emerged after the dissolution of the Seljuks, prohibited the use of languages other than Turkish in 1277, it was not to confirm the superiority of Turkish, but rather to prevent the domination of other languages. *“From now on,”* he ordered, *“no one should speak any language other than Turkish in council (diwan), at the lodge (dergah), in audience (bargah) or in public places (meydan)”*.⁹

The Ottoman dynasty did not follow the Seljuk model and used Turkish in the Ottoman palace. However, the territorial expansion of the Ottoman Empire also failed to contribute to the status of Turkish. In fact, expansion degraded

⁶ E. Z. Karal, “Osmanli Tarihinde Turk Dili Sorunu” (The Turkish Language Problem in Ottoman History), *Bilim Kultur ve Ogretim Dili Olarak Turkce* (Turkish as the Language of Education, Culture and Science), TDK, Ankara 1994, p. 7. Translations from Turkish texts are by the author unless otherwise stated.

⁷ E. Z. Karal, “Osmanli Tarihinde Turk Dili Sorunu” (The Turkish Language Problem in Ottoman History), p. 20.

⁸ Kopruluzade quoted in G. Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform; A Catastrophic Success*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, p. 6.

⁹ E. Z. Karal, “Osmanli Tarihinde Turk Dili Sorunu” (The Turkish Language Problem in Ottoman History), p. 25.

the status of Turkish in two ways: by reducing the proportion of Turkish speakers in the overall population of the empire, and by elevating the status of Persian and Arabic because of the increased importance of Islam, particularly after the reception of the Caliphate.

The elite of the Empire spoke a synthetic language called Ottoman Turkish (*Osmanlica*). Loaded with Arabic and Persian words and influenced by their grammatical rules, *Osmanlica* was almost unintelligible to common people.¹⁰ While the Turkish language was undervalued, the word Turk carried negative implications such as “vulgar, inconsiderate, and illiterate”.¹¹ Language was a central feature of the cultural duality in Ottoman society where two different cultural worlds existed. As opposed to the world of *folk* culture, which is based on orally-transmitted literary traditions, the media of communication in *palace* culture were controlled by a relatively small group of Doctors of Islamic law (*ulema*), higher employees in central administration and a few additional unattached ‘*hommes de lettres*’.¹²

Despite the growing European interest in Turkish, it was not taught at any level of general education in the Ottoman Empire. Turkish was used at just one school (*Enderun*); however, Turks were not permitted to attend this school, which trained students for administrative posts. Although minorities were allowed to print books in their languages since 1494, Turkish was not used in printing until the 18th century. The translation of the Qur’an into Turkish was prohibited by *ulema* until the 20th century.

The minorities were free to use their languages. Moreover, the Ottoman Sultans sometimes addressed the minorities in their respective languages and used foreign languages in their diplomatic correspondence with European states. Translation services were provided mainly by the members of minority groups. As a

¹⁰ K. Yagmur, “Languages in Turkey”, *The Other Languages of Europe*, Ed. by G. Extra and D. Gorter, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon, 2001, p. 408.

¹¹ B. Oran, *Ataturk Milliyetçiligi, (Nationalism of Ataturk)* Bilgi Yayınevi, Ankara, 1997, p. 53.

¹² E. Kongar, “Turkey’s Cultural Transformation”, *The Transformation of Turkish Culture*, ed. by G. Renda and C. M. Kortepeter, The Kingston Press, Inc., Princeton, 1986, p. 27.

result of this policy, unlike many other empires of the time, the Ottoman Empire did not leave the language of the dynasty behind.¹³

Thus, Karal identifies the period between 1453 and 1517 as being marked by the growing influence of Arabic and Persian, and 1517-1718 as the period in which the superiority of these languages over Turkish was completed.¹⁴ It was not until the 18th century that language awareness emerged among the Turks. Specific measures to improve the status of Turkish were not introduced until after 1839. Among Turkish intellectuals, language awareness emerged both with the influence of and against the West. Yet, as with debates on the form of the state, discussions on the status of Turkish were not resolved until the Republic of Turkey was created. Moreover, the widespread debates on language, which took place during the late period of the Ottoman Empire, failed to effect a radical change in the status of Turkish language.

The strong resistance of the *ulema* prevented the introduction of Turkish to *medreses* until 1910. Several schools based on the European model, such as the Navy School (1773) and the Military School (1793), began to make partial use of Turkish. It was the adoption of compulsory education, creation of a Translation Bureau and publication of an Official Gazette that brought significant changes to the status of Turkish in education and science. Yet, when high schools and universities were set up almost a century later, the difficulties involved in using Turkish at these levels of education once again became clear and the previous measures were acknowledged as being insufficient.

Turkish was made the official language of the Ottoman State, in the wake of its collapse, with **Article 18 of the Constitution of 1876**. This article held that “A prerequisite for Ottoman subjects’ employment in State service is that they know Turkish, which is the official language of the State”.¹⁵ The efforts to create unity

¹³ K. Yagmur, “Languages in Turkey”, p. 407.

¹⁴ E.Z. Karal, “Osmanli Tarihinde Turk Dili Sorunu” (The Turkish Language Problem in Ottoman History), p. 30.

¹⁵ Translation quoted from G. Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p. 16.

among the peoples of the State led to the idea of focusing on a common language around which the *Ottoman nation* would gather. As yet, there was no agreement as to which language variety (the palace or the folk language) should become the standard language. During the first assembly of Parliament, another problem concerning language became evident. The differences between the various dialects of Turkish were so great that the secretaries were unable to type the speeches of the members of parliament. Eventually, one member was assigned the task of transforming the spoken language into written language.¹⁶

The second constitution made Turkish compulsory in all primary schools. In regions where they constituted the majority, minority groups were allowed to learn their languages at school, in addition to Turkish. The Turkish language would also be compulsory at secondary level, where the regional language would be elective. Private schools were permitted on the condition that they would be under state control. Another law was passed making the use of Turkish in court compulsory. This led to resentment, particularly in provinces with a large Arabic-speaking population. There was a proposal to teach regional languages to judges, but this proved inapplicable because of the number of languages spoken in the empire.

These language policy measures proved to be counterproductive. The minorities, who had enjoyed greater linguistic rights until then, reacted against the new rulings because they saw them as a policy of Turkification. Instead of uniting minorities or peoples, these policies gave rise to language movements that went hand in hand with national revolts.

It can be concluded that, unlike many other examples in history, and contrary to the arguments made accordingly, between the 10th and 20th centuries, the status of the Turkish language had not increased in line with the political and military power of the Turkish State. On the contrary, as the state became more multilingual and multi-ethnic by expansion, the language of the main *ethnie* was unexpectedly pushed into the colloquial domain. Unlike in Africa, it was not the colonial

¹⁶ E.Z. Karal, "Osmanli Tarihinde Turk Dili Sorunu" (The Turkish Language Problem in Ottoman

powers who imposed a foreign language upon the Turkish people, but the rulers and intelligentsia.¹⁷ Moreover, language awareness among the Turks developed later than many of their European counterparts, in accordance with the late emergence of nationalism as a political doctrine.

2. The Role of Language Policy in Turkish Nation-Building and Modernisation

It has long been taken for granted that language plays a significant role in nation-building. Only in recent decades has the issue become a popular subject in scholarly works. Taking into account the multiple functions of language in society and the numerous manifestations of nationalism, relations between the two form an intricate network. The explanation for this network requires a deep analysis of the two phenomena. However due to lack of space here, this paper will only summarise the interaction between the two.

As is known, a common language is one of the objective elements constituting nation. However, it is neither necessary nor sufficient for nationhood. As Gurr says, “The key to identifying communal groups is not the presence of a particular trait or combination of traits, but rather the shared perception that the defining traits, whatever they are, set the group apart.”¹⁸ The central role of subjective elements of nationhood, such as consciousness and will, does not render objective elements totally unimportant. As they are easily discerned and conveyed to others, objective elements such as language are used to refer to a more complex set of features under single attribute.

Boundary making is only part of the role of language in nation-building. With its symbolic and communicative functions, language can build and

History), p. 61.

¹⁷ K. Yagmur, “Languages in Turkey”, p. 408.

¹⁸ T. R. Gurr, 1993, p. 3.

enhance an emotional and instrumental attachment to nation.¹⁹ Just as nationalisation involves planned and unplanned processes, the link between language and nationalism can be both arbitrary and deliberately manipulated. Language influences – and is influenced by – the *nation-building process*, which can be defined as *‘the formation and establishment of the new state itself as a political entity and the processes of creating viable degrees of unity, adaptation, achievement and a sense of national identity among people’*.²⁰ National and official languages are means to enforce political integration, and the degree of political and economic integration in the political unit is a factor that, in turn, influences linguistic situations. It is important to remember that, unlike assimilation, integration does not aim for absolute homogeneity.

On a sentimental level, a national language serves as a major object and symbol of attachment by bridging immediate loyalties with transcendent ones;

*“Language provides a continuity and scope without which a sense of overarching nationality could not be constructed; it provides concrete, emotionally significant products that the individual received from previous generations and will pass on to future ones and that, in the present, link him to a widely dispersed population, most of whose members he does not and never will, know personally.”*²¹

Thus, with its symbolic functions related to group identification, sense of belonging and national pride, language plays an important role in the creation and maintenance of subjective elements of nationhood. On the other hand, language is unique among other objective elements of nationhood with its central role in the

¹⁹ H. C. Kelman, “Language as Aid and Barrier to Involvement in the National System”, *Advances in the Sociology of Language*, C. 2, ed. by J. A. Fishman, The Hague, Mouton, 1974.

²⁰ W. Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 55.

²¹ H. C. Kelman, “Language as Aid and Barrier to Involvement in the National System”, p. 194.

dissemination of the objective and subjective elements of nationhood among group members.

If nationalism is taken as a sentiment deriving from group identity, language has always been closely related to it. On the other hand, if nationalism is taken as a political doctrine, language has been important since its emergence with modernity, as the same developments leading to the emergence of nationalism elevated language to a central role in social life. With the political and economic changes brought about by modernisation, language became an economic and political phenomenon.

Unplanned integration such as the integration of markets and urbanisation inevitably influenced the language behaviours of individuals. The same economic, political and social changes of modernity that led to the emergence of a nation created an environment favouring linguistic homogeneity. However, once it had emerged, the centralised state power began to support deliberate integration, also by means of language policies. In many cases, concerns for efficiency led to policies favouring linguistic homogeneity rather than linguistic diversity. The principles of “participation” and “consent” of the new political order, which required efficient communication between rulers and peoples, made language a political target as well as a political tool. Once it had emerged as the legitimate political model, the nation-state model with a strong link to a national language, served as a model for the rest of Europe and the world. Thus, in many cases nation-building processes in Europe followed either the “one state, one nation, one language” or “one language, one nation, one state” route.

Like most nationalist movements that developed in areas outside Western Europe, Turkish nationalism has both similarities and differences with the nationalist movements that emerged in Western Europe. The nationalist movements of developing nations, Oran claims, have three functions: *independence from colonialism*, *political* (unification and institutionalisation) *and economic*

(development) *modernisation* and *appraisal of original identity*.²² A common language had a significant role in all three of these functions of nationalist movements.

Language reform was one of the pillars of the Turkish Revolution, whose major aim was to transform the religion based state into a modern secular state through modernisation and nation-building. It was closely linked to other reforms, such as educational reform, and the principles of the emerging state, such as secularity and nationalism. Although a better understanding of the role of language in Turkish nation-building would require a comprehensive analysis of Turkish modernisation and nation-building processes, some significant aspects will be mentioned in this paper to point out the complicated nature of language question in Turkey.

Turkish was instrumental in many ways in the Turkish Revolution. Firstly, it was one of the criteria that legitimised the new nation-state both internally and externally. According to the 1927 census, 11,777,810 out of 13,629,488 (86.4%) people in Turkey spoke Turkish as their mother tongue. Secondly, it was fundamental in creating a national identity, which included many references to Turkish roots and was expected to replace the emphasis on religion-based identity. Thirdly, it was instrumental in communicating the new ideology to the people. Although essential for all of these tasks, the language was not “ready” to be used in any of the above ways. Therefore, the efforts to change society by means of language policy were accompanied by a change in the status and corpus of the language.

As the new nation-state was based on the principles of secularity and unity, neither religion nor ethnic origin alone could be the sole criterion for nationhood, although both were relevant. Instead an emphasis was placed on a

²² B. Oran, *Ataturk Milliyetçiligi, (Nationalism of Ataturk)*, Bilgi Yayinevi, Ankara, 1997, p. 37. Oran underlines the contradiction between the first and second functions; the goal of being free from the Western influence and the goal of achieving a similar level of development, of becoming like them.

common past and shared ideals. On the other hand, *the core values*²³ of the nation were culture, language and common purpose. As an acquirable element of nationhood, language has also been regarded as being congruous with the volunteer definition of nation. The programme of the party founded by Atatürk provided the following definition for the nationhood;

*“Nation is a political and social unity composed by citizens who are bound to each other with the ties of language, culture and ideal.”*²⁴ Likewise, Article 5 of the party programme declared the dissemination of the Turkish language and culture to be a guiding principle since *“among compatriots unity of language, feelings and thoughts forms the strongest tie”*.²⁵ Likewise, during the 1930's the criterion used for migrants to Turkey was *“belonging to Turkish culture”*.²⁶

The new policy undertook the task of creating a new social identity to replace the previous one with its emphasis on the Islamic community. The creation of national identity and pride required objective elements and Turkish, as “an old and rich language”, was one such element. Appraisal of Turkish and the elevation of its status has been a means to build sentimental attachment to a nation. Given the lack of material resources after decades of war, it was an inalienable one. As Lewis notes;

*“There was a pressing need to raise morale, to make the people see themselves as a nation with a great past and a great destiny, who would one day take their place among the civilised nations of the West. Turks must have no feeling of inferiority vis-à-vis Europe; they were not outsiders”*²⁷

²³ J.J. Smolicz, “Language – a Bridge or a Barrier?”, *Multilingua*, 14-2, 1995, s. 158.

²⁴ B. Oran, *Atatürk Milliyetçiliği*, s. 173. Oran points out that, during the population exchanges of the first decade of the republic, religious criterion overrode linguistic criterion and Muslim groups speaking languages other than Turkish were allowed to migrate to Turkey in exchange for non-Muslim groups speaking Turkish, p. 173-174.

²⁵ E. J. Zürcher, *Identity Politics in Central Asia and the Muslim World*, “Fundamentalism as an Exclusionary Device in Kemalist Turkish Nationalism”, London I. B. Tauris, 2001, p. 210.

²⁶ B. Oran, *Atatürk Milliyetçiliği*, s. 176.

²⁷ G. Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p. 42.

Thus, Atatürk praised the Turkish language in the following way;

*“The Turkish language is one of the most beautiful, rich and easy languages in the world. Therefore, every Turk loves his language and makes an effort to elevate its status. The Turkish language is also a sacred treasure for the Turkish nation because the Turkish nation knows that its moral values, customs, memories, interests, in short, everything that makes it a nation was preserved through its language despite the endless catastrophes it has experienced”*²⁸

However, pride in the Turkish language was a totally unknown sentiment for the masses until the Revolution, and massive efforts were required raise it. As Turkish was the language of the nation, which should be the ultimate source of loyalty, it deserved the efforts and resources required to purify and revive it.

The Turkish national identity has had two conflicting dynamics, in line with the dual aim of the Turkish Revolution: to be free from Western economic and political exploitation by becoming a Western society.²⁹ Hence, after the War of Independence, Atatürk said: *“If we had been beaten, the Europeans would have been beaten. We won, we made Western ideas and Western principles victorious against the Europeans.”*³⁰ The fact that Turkish was a separate language shared by the majority of people was one factor legitimising “independence” from the West, although this ideology emphasising a national language was a Western product itself.

Modernisation required the abolition of old political and social structures, as well as the modification of the identity deriving from these structures. At this point a difficulty arose: how to use language as a means and focus of a new social

²⁸ Quoted in *Sekizinci Bes Yillik Kalkinma Planı*, “Turk Dili OIK Raporu”, p.4.

²⁹ E. Kongar, “Turkey’s Cultural Transformation”, *ibid.*, p. 29, also B. Oran, *Ataturk Milliyetçiligi*, p. 37. Oran says that these dynamics can also be seen as complementary.

³⁰ H. Suphi, *Türk Yurdu*, Vol. 4-24, No 29-223, May 1930, p. 8, quoted in B. Oran, *Ataturk Milliyetçiligi*, p. 164.

identity in line with Western thinking when this language is the main embodiment of a culture and history that has developed and flourished in the East. Nation-building required a certain degree of continuity for its legitimacy, and language provided that continuity and antiquity. However, drastic changes were needed both in the corpus and status of Turkish to enable it to fulfil the new functions tailored for it. Combining continuity and change in language for the purpose of nation-building was a challenging task, and involved disadvantages and painful processes not only for the speakers of non-official languages, but also for the masses who were not ready to face these changes.

The secularity principle required the removal of religious structures and classes from the centre of political life.³¹ The effect of this policy on language was the alphabet shift and the removal of Arabic and Persian words from the language. It was a symbolic move, but so massive and effective that in the end it was instrumental in curbing links with Ottoman history and the rest of the Islamic world. Lewis holds that, “*The purpose of the change of alphabet was to break Turkey’s ties with the Islamic east and to facilitate communication domestically as well as with the Western world*”.³² With this shift, *not only would Turkish children be able to learn reading and writing in a much shorter period, but they would also be able to learn European languages more easily and quickly.*³³

Abandoning the prestige and privileges of the *palace* language and elevating the status of the *folk* language was part and parcel of the cadre replacement. Nationalist ideology foresaw the sovereignty of the ‘nation’. From this point of view, making the ‘nation’ its own master required elevating the status of its language *vis-à-vis* Arabic and Persian, which were presented as symbols of religious

³¹ Six consecutive reforms were executed on the same day, 3rd March, 1924: the abolition of the Caliphate, the end of the religious educational system, the unification of education in secular schools, the closing of the Ministry of Canon Law, the abolition of the Ministry of General Staff and the establishment of the General Directorate of Religious Affairs.

³² G. Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p. 27.

³³ O. Baskan, “Turkish Language Reform”, *The Transformation of Turkish Culture*, ed. by G. Renda and C. M. Kortepeter, The Kingston Press, Inc., Princeton, 1986, p. 101.

fanaticism and tools of oppression by the dynasty and religious elites. Thus, Kongar holds that, “Coupled with the legal alphabet reform, the reform of the Turkish Language became not only a cultural, but also a political, symbol of the struggle of Turkish nationalism against Ottoman-style culture.”³⁴ Hence, Ataturk said;

*“We are going to defeat Ottoman. Turkish is going to be as free and as independent as the Turkish nation, and with it we shall enter the world civilisation at one go”.*³⁵

Along with other measures, the alphabet shift rendered thousands of learned men illiterate. Unlike Central Asia where debates on alphabet change lasted for years, alphabet change was introduced very quickly in Turkey.³⁶ On 1st November 1928, the Grand National Assembly passed **Law No. 1353 on the Adoption and Application of the New Turkish Letters**, according to which the printing of books in the old letters would be stopped after the end of the year and official correspondence would be written in the new letters from 1st June 1929. The law also prohibited the use of books in the old alphabet at schools. Western public opinion applauded the alphabet shift. On 31st of August 1928, The Times of London wrote,

*“By this step the Turks, who for centuries were regarded as a strange and isolated people by Europe, have drawn closer than ever to the West. It is a great reform, worthy of the remarkable chief to whom the Turkish people has entrusted its destinies.”*³⁷

The new ideology had to be supported by studies on Turkish history and language. Two organisations were formed to carry out such research: the

³⁴ E. Kongar, “Turkey’s Cultural Transformation”, p. 41.

³⁵ G. Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p. 49.

³⁶ When shown the draft alphabet and informed of the plans for a transition of either five or fifteen years, Ataturk said; “*Either this will happen in three months or it won’t happen at all!*”

Once the alphabet was prepared, Mustafa Kemal himself introduced it to the people on 9 August 1928. It was taught to the officials of the presidential staff and university teachers in a couple of days. Between 8 and 25 October 1928 the proficiency of officials were examined. G. Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p. 34.

³⁷ Quoted from G. Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p. 38.

Turkish Society for the Study of History on 10th April 1931 and the *Turkish Society for the Study of Language* on 12th July 1932. The Society's by-laws set out two aims: "To bring to light the beauty and richness of the Turkish language and to raise it to the level it merits among the languages of the world".

The Turkish Language Organisation undertook the task of renovating vocabulary, which was a fundamental part of Turkish Language Reform. Baskan holds that the renovation of vocabulary "entailed a novel world-view through language, a new aesthetic appreciation, and a different set of mental and verbal habits".³⁸ Vocabulary renovation also aimed to bridge the gap between the upper and lower levels of the society. Another expected outcome of the language reform was to increase literacy, which was fundamental for the dissemination of the new ideas. The importance attributed to science required the development of scientific terms, and this became an important field of work for the language reformers.

Thus, language policy was used for all four processes in Turkish modernisation: *Anti-Islamic secularisation*, *De-Ottomanisation*, *Pro-Westernisation* and *Re-Turkification*.³⁹ While unity was achieved through religion during the Ottoman period, during the Republican era it was to be achieved through *linguistic Unitarianism*.⁴⁰ Turkish language reform has been considered to be successful in achieving its aims and this success is attributed to its speed as well as the degree of *penetration* that the government enjoyed.⁴¹

On the other hand, the conflicting dynamics in Turkish modernisation are reflected in language policy from the beginning. Such was the fact that the Republic of Turkey has been founded by a liberation movement against the West, however, it had followed a pro-Western ideology in the aftermath. Turkish

³⁸ O. Baskan, "Turkish Language Reform", *ibid.*, p. 102.

³⁹ O. Baskan, "Turkish Language Reform", 1986, p. 99.

⁴⁰ K. Yagmur, "Languages in Turkey", p. 413.

⁴¹ W. Fierman, *Language Planning and National Development*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 1991, p. 13.

nationalism sought authenticity for its identity by looking further into its past, albeit by forgetting its more recent history. Populism was one of the six principles of the new ideology, carried out through the systematic efforts of “a *statist-elitist group formed by the civilian and military bureaucracy*”.⁴² It is also argued that the reforms created a new elite class instead of a more populist system. It is claimed that the *palace* language was replaced, not by a *folk* language, but “*by a supposedly pure Turkish language which might be considered as an equally esoteric and equally unintelligible class dialect*”.⁴³

The language efforts went so far, as witnessed by the development of the Sun-language theory (according to which all languages derived from Turkish), that they caused resentment and opposition among the people. In the early years, language policy created new ideological fronts in society. Yagmur also points out that “*Even though the Turkish language reform has largely been a successful enterprise, there are signs that the same type of ‘self-inflicted wound’ caused during the Ottoman period surfaces in different forms.*”⁴⁴

3. Turkish Language Policy towards Non-Official Languages and Linguistic Groups Up to the Millennium

As summarised in the preceding section, language policy has been both a tool and a target of nation-building and modernisation processes in Turkey. On the other hand, the choice of the political model of nation had significant implications for language policy. By approaching ethnocultural diversity from within a political (territorial, civic, Republican) model based on the principle of equality before the law and constitutional citizenship, Turkey does not give any official recognition to ethnic background at State-level. Ethnocultural identification and expression of ethnocultural identity are regarded as matters of personal choice. The Treaty of Lausanne recognises only non-Muslim groups as minorities in Turkey and allows them

⁴² E. Kongar, “Turkey’s Cultural Transformation”, p. 43.

⁴³ O. Baskan, “Turkish Language Reform”, p. 109.

⁴⁴ K. Yagmur, “Languages in Turkey”, p. 411.

to manage their own churches, schools and hospitals freely.⁴⁵ The rest of the population has been accepted as “Turkish”, which does not refer to membership of an ethnic group, but to “an upper identity”, “an umbrella concept” or “a legal status” according to the Turkish authorities.⁴⁶

The political model of nation was not only chosen because of an ideological orientation; it was also the result of political, historical and cultural imperatives. One important factor derived from the political culture inherited from the Ottoman administrative system (millet system), which was based on the communal rights of the religious groups, rather than on ethnic origin. The other legacy of the empire affecting the model of nation was the multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious composition of the population. In the 1927 general census, 14 linguistic and 7 religious groups were registered. In 1965, a more detailed categorisation was made: besides Turkish, 13 languages spoken by Muslim groups, 3 languages spoken by non-Muslim minorities, 7 Slavic languages, 3 Latino languages and 3 Anglo-Saxon languages were registered.⁴⁷ In his book on ethnic groups in contemporary Turkey, P.A. Andrews categorises 47 ethnic groups.⁴⁸

The political model of nation is referred to in all three of Turkey’s Constitutions: Article 88 of the 1924 Constitution stated that, “*In Turkey, from the point of view of citizenship, everyone is a Turk without regard to race or religion*”;

⁴⁵ Treaty of Lausanne, Articles 39-41. <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupe/ed/eda/edaa/Part1.htm>. For example, according to The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) Report, in 2000, the Armenian community had 19 schools, the Jewish community had 3 schools and the Greek Orthodox community had 26 schools. ECRI, Council of Europe, *Second Report on Turkey*, CRI (2001)37, Strasbourg, adopted on 15th December 2000, made public on 3rd July 2001. http://www.coe.int/T/E/human_rights/Ecri/1-ECRI/2-Country-by-country_approach/Turkey/Turkey_CBC_2.asp#TopOfPage.

⁴⁶ “Observations by the Turkish Authorities on ECRI’s Report On Turkey”. ECRI, Council of Europe, *Report on Turkey*, CRI (99)52, Strasbourg, 9 November 1999.

⁴⁷ http://www.coe.int/T/E/human_rights/Ecri/5-Archives/1-ECRI's_work/1-Country_by_country/Turkey/Turkey_CBC_1.asp#TopOfPage.

⁴⁸ F. Dundar. *Türkiye’de Nüfus Sayımlarında Azınlıklar (Minorities in Turkish Censuses)*, Cıviyazilari, Istanbul, 2000.

⁴⁸ P. A. Andrews, *Türkiye’de Etnik Gruplar (Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey)*, Ant Yayinlari, Istanbul, 1992.

Article 54 of the 1961 constitution stated, “*Every individual who is bound to the Turkish state by ties of citizenship is a Turk*”, and Article 66 of the present constitution, adopted in 1982, states that, “*Everyone bound to the Turkish State through the bond of citizenship is a Turk.*”⁴⁹ Accordingly, in the Turkish political context, nation is defined as “*a community living on the patria that has the aim and the will to live together and whose members are bound to each other with a common ideal and culture*”.⁵⁰ In the words of Atatürk, the Turkish nation is “*the people of Turkey who founded the Republic of Turkey*”.⁵¹

However, despite the full legitimacy of the ‘political’ model, the way it has been interpreted by Turkey continues to raise concern in the international community. Some internal critiques also hold that the practices have not been in line with the conceptual framework that bases nationhood on citizenship. According to this claim, whereas in theory the upper identity embraces all sub-identities, in practice it has been associated only with one of these sub-identities.⁵²

It is difficult to claim that the definition of Turkishness has had *no* relation to blood and ethnic origin. In fact, the word Turk is used to refer both to the *ethnie* and the nation. Andrews claims that these two meanings have been combined and that Turkish policy has avoided making a distinction between them.⁵³ In fact, the emphasis on blood in the definition of Turkishness has fluctuated in accordance with the tides of world politics. This supports the arguments of Anthony Smith who claims that, every nationalism contains civic and ethnic elements in varying degrees and that, in order to survive, political nations would strive to gain some ethnic elements.⁵⁴

The Turkish policy on recognising non-Muslim groups as minorities has not changed, nor have there been any signs of change. Although the

⁴⁹ Translations are from *Human Rights Watch Reports by Country, Turkey, 1999*, “Restrictions on the Use of the Kurdish Language”.

⁵⁰ Decision of Constitutional Court (Decision No. 1999/1, Date: 26.2.1999), *Official Gazette*, No. 24591, 22.10.2001, s. 79.

⁵¹ Decision of Constitutional Court (Decision No. 1999/1, Date: 26.2.1999), s. 81.

⁵² Decision of Constitutional Court, Decision No. 1999/1, Date: 26.2.1999, “Defence”, p. 102.

⁵³ P. A. Andrews, *Türkiye’de Etnik Gruplar (Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey)*, p. 10.

⁵⁴ A. Smith, *National Identity*.

new government, which was elected in November 2002, diverged notably from the traditional lines of foreign policy in some areas, the AKP leader Tayyip Erdogan made it clear during his meetings with foreign politicians that non-Muslim groups can not be accepted as minorities in Turkey.⁵⁵ Thus, in the recent language reforms, the term “minority languages” is not used. Non-official languages are referred to as “*the different languages and dialects used traditionally by Turkish citizens in their daily lives*”. This usage also avoids ascertaining whether certain language varieties are a separate language or a dialect. However, it is useful to recall that, according to international documents, enjoyment of cultural rights does not depend on the recognition of minority status.

In this respect, the situation of non-Muslim groups, whose rights have been recognised under the **Treaty of Lausanne**,⁵⁶ should be distinguished from the linguistic situation of Muslim groups.⁵⁷

Non-Muslim groups were guaranteed broad-ranging linguistic rights by the Treaty of Lausanne. According to the **Article 39 of Treaty of Lausanne**,

"No restrictions shall be imposed on the free use by any Turkish national of any language in private intercourse, in commerce, religion, in the press, or in publications of any kind or at public meetings. Notwithstanding the existence of the official language, adequate facilities shall be given to Turkish nationals of non-Turkish speech for the oral use of their own language before the Courts."

⁵⁵ For example during his visit to Finland, in response to remarks made by Prime Minister Lipponen on minority rights, Erdogan said “We cannot accept that Kurds in Turkey constitute a minority”. “Mektupla Rapor Edin”, *Radikal* (Turkish daily), 27.11.2002.

⁵⁶ <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupe/ed/eda/edaa/Part1.htm>

⁵⁷ A Turkish professor of international relations, Baskin Oran, claims that the relevant articles of the Lausanne Treaty refer not only to non-Muslim minorities but to all Turkish citizens; *Cumhuriyet* (Daily Newspaper), 11-12.08.2000. However, his arguments do not have many supporters in Turkey. P. Tacar holds that paragraph 4 of Article 39, which foresees free usage of the mother tongue in daily and professional life, refers to all Turkish citizens.

Article 40 gives Turkish nationals belonging to non-Muslim minorities,

“equal rights to establish, manage and control any charitable, religious and social institutions, any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein.” However, this would be *“at their own expense”*.

For primary school education, **Article 41** of the Treaty states,

“As regards public instruction, the Turkish Government will grant in those towns and districts, where a considerable proportion of non-Moslem nationals are resident, adequate facilities for ensuring that in the primary schools the instruction shall be given to the children of such Turkish nationals through the medium of their own language. This provision will not prevent the Turkish Government from making the teaching of the Turkish language obligatory in the said schools.”

The EU's Regular Report of 2000 and ECRI reports state that the language policy towards the non-Muslim minorities is not restrictive as far as the use of languages other than Turkish is concerned. Yet, it is known that the population of the minorities has shrunk since the Republic was established.

However, the languages of the Muslim groups have not enjoyed special protection under law. On the contrary, with perceived threats to the nation-state and the fragility of the regime, the efforts to create a unified nation have sometimes led to restrictive language legislation, particularly in the public sphere. The restrictions started as a reaction to the rebels following the nation-building and secularisation policies, which had characteristics of ethnic, religious and elite conflict.⁵⁸ In 1925, the Ministry of Education issued a proclamation on **‘Currents Trying to Undermine Turkish Unity’** that banned the use of the terms describing minority

⁵⁸ P. White, *Primitive Rebels or Revolutionary Modernizers*, Sed Books, London, 2000, Chapter 4.

communities and the areas they inhabited, such as Kurd, Laz, Cerkez, Kurdistan and Lazistan.⁵⁹

Soon after the Reforms, failure to speak Turkish began to be seen as an impediment to nation-building and several measures were taken. In 1928, the Student Society of Istanbul University started a campaign called “*Citizen, Speak Turkish*”. In 1934, a law requiring surnames to be in Turkish came into force. In 1935, the **Law on Compulsory Settlement** was passed giving Turkish-speaking immigrants more freedom to choose their place of settlement.⁶⁰ In 1949, the **Provincial Administration Law** gave the Ministry of the Interior the right to change village names that were not in Turkish.

The transition to a multi-party system was followed by another debate on language: the language of worship. During the term in office of Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, calls to prayers began to be conducted in Arabic instead of Turkish. The debate also extended to secularism and the role of religion in life. The Menderes government ended with military intervention, after which a liberal Constitution was put in place in 1961.

However, Turkish democracy suffered further crises afterwards. The constitution was replaced in 1982, following military intervention in 1980. The new Constitution, which is still in force, has often been criticised for its broad restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms. At the end of 1983, the military left power. The measures introduced during this period included **Law No. 2932**, which prohibited the use of languages other than Turkish as the mother tongue and activities to publicise other languages.

In the late 1980s, many politicians, intellectuals and officials began to discuss the policy towards ethnic and linguistic groups. Former President Turgut Ozal said he had Kurdish blood. In 1991, the Deputy Prime Minister Erdal Inonu

⁵⁹ E. J. Zürcher, *Identity Politics in Central Asia and the Muslim World*, “Fundamentalism as an Exclusionary Device in Kemalist Turkish Nationalism”, London I. B. Tauris, 2001, p. 210.

⁶⁰ F. Dundar. *Türkiye’de Nüfus Sayımlarında Azınlıklar (Minorities in Turkish Censuses)*, p. 51.

called for recognition of the cultural identity of Kurdish citizens. In 1992, Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel declared that his party recognised the Kurdish situation. However, in spite of the debates in intellectual and political circles, the legislative framework did not change. Until recently, legislation called for the exclusive use of Turkish in the public sphere.

Although one of these laws, **The Law on Publications and Broadcasts in Languages Other Than Turkish (Law No. 2932 of 1983)** was repealed and publishing in non-official languages became legally unrestricted in 1991, the constitutional basis for such prohibitions remained. The **Political Parties Law**, the **Law on the Founding and Broadcasts of Television and Radio**, the **Foreign Language Education and Teaching Law**, and the **Law on Fundamental Provisions of Elections and Voter Registries** and the **Provincial Administration Law** all included articles restricting the use of non-official languages.⁶¹ For example Article 81 of the Political Parties Law prohibited political parties with

“the goal of destroying national unity or ... engaged in activities to this end, by means of protecting, developing, or disseminating language or cultures other than the Turkish language and culture through creating minorities in the Republic of Turkey.”⁶²

In 1999, on the basis of this law, the Constitutional Court decided to suspend a political party for creating a division on the grounds of language and race and for basing itself on regional and racial principles.⁶³ Emphasising the status of Turkish as a common language and condemning the creation of divisions on the grounds of language, the decision held that the *“only national culture in the country*

⁶¹ The English translations of the relevant articles in these laws can be found in; *Human Rights Watch Reports by Country, Turkey, 1999*, “Restrictions on the Use of the Kurdish Language”, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/turkey/turkey993-08.htm>, *Human Rights Watch Reports by Country, Turkey, 2000*, “Ensuring Language Rights”, http://www.hrw.org/reports/2000/turkey2/Turk009-04.htm#P278_66096.

⁶² *Human Rights Watch Reports by Country, Turkey, 1999*, “Restrictions on the Use of the Kurdish Language”.

⁶³ Decision of Constitutional Court, Decision No. 1999/1, Date: 26.2.1999, “Reasons for Suspension”.

is the Turkish culture” and *the languages which remained local and undeveloped cannot enable individuals to improve their spiritual beings.*⁶⁴ According to the decision, the expression of ethnic identity was not prohibited, but this identity should not be put forward in a way that could harm national identity and citizenship.⁶⁵ Although the decision concerned the activities of political parties and not individuals, the underlying premises about languages were in total contrast to international norms.

The delayed improvement in linguistic rights is sometimes attributed to the armed conflict against a terrorist organisation, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) in the Southeast.⁶⁶ With the death toll reaching 30,000 and colossal material costs, the integrity and indivisibility of the nation became the most immediate concern of the State, prevailing over efforts to improve democratisation. The State refused to negotiate with the PKK and the improvement in cultural rights, in line with the developments in international law, was delayed until the end of the severe armed conflict.

4. Demographic Data on Languages in Turkey

As mentioned above, there is no up-to-date demographic data on language groups in Turkey. The official censuses up to 1985 included questions about mother tongue and second languages, but the data between 1965 and 1985 have not been made public. After 1985, questions about mother tongue were omitted. The data collected from official censuses up to 1965 are regarded as not being entirely reliable.⁶⁷ The substantial variation between data collected in different censuses support this view.

⁶⁴ Decision of Constitutional Court (Decision No. 1999/1, Date: 26.2.1999), p. 78.

⁶⁵ Decision of Constitutional Court, Decision No. 1999/1, Date: 26.2.1999, p. 89.

⁶⁶ For the Turkish official account about PKK and terrorism see;

<http://www.mfa.gov.tr/grupe/eh/eh01>.

⁶⁷ F. Dundar, *Türkiye’de Nüfus Sayımlarında Azınlıklar (Minorities in Turkish Censuses)*, p. 137.

For the purpose of the censuses, mother tongue was defined as the language spoken at home among family members.⁶⁸ The main aim of the question about second language was to learn about the knowledge of Turkish among other linguistic groups.⁶⁹ The number of registered linguistic groups has changed over time: 14 in the 1927 census, 31 in 1935 and 1945, 28 in 1950, and 25 in 1955, 1960 and 1965.⁷⁰

		1927	1935	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965
Abaza	Mother tongue	-	10,099	8,602	17,200	13,655	4,689	4,563
	2nd language	-	2,108	1,265	-	1,489	8,018	7,836
	per 1000*	-	0,75	0,53	0,82	0,63	0,46	0,40
Albanian	Mother tongue	21,774	14,496	14,165	16,079	10,893	12,000	12,832
	2nd language	-	26,161	17,701	-	25,898	37,144	40,688
	per 1000	1,69	2,52	1,69	0,77	1,52	1,78	1,70
Arabic	Mother tongue	134,273	153,687	247,294	269,038	300,583	347,690	365,340
	2nd language	-	34,028	60,061	-	95,612	134,962	169,724
	per 1000	9,85	11,62	16,35	12,84	15,34	17,39	16,99
Armenian	Mother tongue	67,745	57,599	47,728	52,776	56,235	52,756	33,094
	2nd language	-	9,782	12,354	9,322	6,084	19,444	22,260
	per 1000	4,97	4,17	3,18	2,96	2,59	2,60	1,76
Bosnian	Mother tongue	-	24,615	10,900	24,013	11,844	14,570	17,627
	2nd language	-	13,526	9,599	-	12,669	37,526	39,589
	per 1000	-	2,36	1,09	1,14	1,01	1,87	1,82
Circassian	Mother tongue	95,901	91,972	66,691	75,837	77,611	63,137	58,339
	2nd language	-	14,703	9,779	-	22,861	65,061	48,621
	per 1000	7,04	6,60	4,07	3,62	4,17	4,62	3,40
Georgian	Mother tongue	-	57,325	40,076	72,604	51,983	32,944	34,330
	2nd language	-	16,255	9,337	-	24,720	54,941	44,934
	per 1000	-	4,56	2,63	3,47	3,19	3,16	2,52
Greek	Mother tongue	119,822	108,725	88,680	89,472	79,691	65,139	48,096
	2nd language	-	67,547	64,736	55,280	58,990	82,830	78,941
	per 1000	8,80	10,90	8,16	6,91	6,91	5,32	4,05
Hebrew	Mother tongue	68,900	42,607	51,019	35,786	33,010	19,399	9,981
	2nd language	-	3,578	2,800	3,770	4,107	4,375	3,510
	per 1000	5,06	2,86	2,86	1,89	1,54	0,86	0,43
Kurdish**	Mother tongue	1,184,446	1,480,246	1,476,562	1,854,569	1,679,265	1,847,674	2,370,233
	2nd language	-	114,456	117,130	215,352	263,020	469,458	447,080
	per 1000	86,90	98,69	84,82	98,82	80,71	83,49	89,75
Laz	Mother tongue	-	63,523	39,323	70,423	30,566	21,703	26,007
	2nd language	-	5,061	4,956	-	19,144	38,275	55,158
	per 1000	-	4,23	2,36	3,36	2,07	2,16	2,59
	Mother tongue	-	32,661	10,287	36,612	16,163	24,098	23,138

⁶⁸ F. Dundar. *Türkiye’de Nüfus Sayımlarında Azınlıklar (Minorities in Turkish Censuses)*, p. 67.

⁶⁹ F. Dundar. *Türkiye’de Nüfus Sayımlarında Azınlıklar (Minorities in Turkish Censuses)*, p. 68.

⁷⁰ F. Dundar. *Türkiye’de Nüfus Sayımlarında Azınlıklar (Minorities in Turkish Censuses)*.

Pomak	2nd language	-	8,380	5,594	-	22,816	28,602	34,234
	per 1000	-	2,48	0,85	1,74	1,62	1,90	1,83
Romani	Mother tongue	-	7,855	4,463	-	-	-	-
	2nd language	-	-	193	-	-	-	-
	per 1000	-	0,58	0,28	-	-	-	-
Tatar	Mother tongue	11,465	15,615	10,047	-	-	-	-
	2nd language	-	4,106	2,255	-	-	-	-
	per 1000	0,84	1,22	0,65	-	-	-	-

Table 1. Number of Speakers of Non-Official Languages in Turkey (1927-1965)

Source: F. Dundar, *Türkiye’de Nüfus Sayımlarında Azinlikler (Minorities in Turkish Censuses)*

*proportion of non-official language groups in overall population

**Kurdish was divided into 3 groups in the 1950 census and 4 in the 1960 census.

As Table 1 shows, the percentages of speakers of the two biggest non-official language groups, Kurdish and Arabic, in the overall population increased between 1927 and 1965⁷¹, whereas the percentages of smaller language groups and non-Muslim minorities decreased. According to Ethnologue, in 1987, 90% of the population spoke Turkish as their mother tongue (86.4% in 1927 and 90.1% in 1965).⁷² A higher degree of assimilation could have been expected, given the pace of migration from Eastern to Western parts of Turkey, improvements in schooling and the development of communication technology during these years, in addition to the absence of legal protection. A number of explanations can be found such as a higher birth rate among speakers of at least some non-official languages, the low degree of state policy penetration, and free usage in the private sphere.⁷³

Nevertheless, data from official censuses up to 1965 shows that almost all Muslim language groups lived mainly in the rural areas of Turkey and

⁷¹ The annexation of the Hatay province, heavily populated by Arabic speakers, following a referendum is one factor affecting the increase of the Arabic speaking population.

⁷² Ethnologue: *Languages of the World, 14th Edition*, SIL, 2002, http://www.ethnologue.com/ethno_docs/contents.asp.

⁷³ Despite its highly critical reports on Turkish language policy, Human Rights Watch, for example, notes that “members of Turkey’s ethnic minorities speak their own language at home and in the street and have always done so, but significant restrictions remain in other parts of Turkish life.” Human Rights Watch, “Questions and Answers: Freedom of Expression and Language Rights in Turkey”, 2002, www.hrw.org/press/2002/08/turkeyqa041902.htm.

that their literacy rate was below average.⁷⁴ Another important piece of information drawn from the censuses is the high number of monolinguals in 1965. The percentage of monolinguals among speakers of non-official languages decreased in the cities.

Kurmanji 3,950,000 (1980) out of 6,500,000 (1993)	Romani 25,000 to 40,000
South Azerbaijani 530,000	Serbo-Croatian 20,000 (1980) out of 61,000 (1980)
North Levantine Spoken Arabic 500,000	Domari 20,000 (1982) out of 61,000
Western Farsi 500,000	Albanian 15,000 (1980) out of 65,000 (1993)
North Mesopotamian Spoken Arabic 400,000	Abaza 10,000 (1995)
Balkan Gagauz 327,000	Chechen 8,000
Bulgarian 270,000 (1993)	Ladino 8,000 out of 15,000 (1976)
Kabardian 202,000 (1993)	Abkhaz 4,000 (1980) out of 35,000 (1993)
Kirmanjki 140,000 (1972)	Greek 4,000 (1993)
Adyghe (Circassian) 71,000 out of 130,000	Turoya 3,000 (1994) out of 50,000 to 70,000
Mesopotamian Spoken Arabic 100,000	Uzbek 1,981 (1982)
Armenian 40,000 out of 70,000 (1980)	Lezgi 1,200
Georgian 40,000 out of 91,000 (1980)	Kirghiz 1,137 (1982)
Laz 30,000 out of 92,000 (1980)	

Table 2. Mother-tongue Speakers of Non-Official Languages* in Turkey

Source: *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, 14th Edition, SIL, 2002*

*Languages with more than 1,000 speakers

Table 2 offers estimates of the number of mother-tongue speakers, the total number of individuals in the ethnic group and the year estimated after 1965.⁷⁵ It is calculated that 34 living languages currently exist in Turkey.⁷⁶ As 46,278,000 out of 51,420,000 people spoke Turkish as their mother tongue, roughly 5.1 million spoke languages other than Turkish as their mother tongue in 1987. The size of the Kurdish population living in Turkey is also controversial. Although estimates oscillate at around 10-20 percent of the entire population, statistics from the last twenty

⁷⁴ F. Dundar, *Türkiye'de Nüfus Sayımlarında Azınlıklar (Minorities in Turkish Censuses)*, p. 138.

⁷⁵ Unfortunately the data from the table cannot be easily compared with the Table.1 because of differences between the dates the estimates were made.

⁷⁶ For information about some of these languages see; P. A. Andrews, *Türkiye'de Etnik Gruplar (Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey)*, and K. Yagmur, "Languages in Turkey".

years give a steady population rate.⁷⁷ If these estimates are correct, it will be difficult to argue about significant ethnic assimilation of the Kurds in Turkey. However, neither linguistic diversity nor healthy Kurd population indicators would justify restrictive linguistic legislation. Last but not least, the sociolinguistic data reminds the argument of H. Schiffman, who claims that the linguistic legislation does not necessarily show the actual language policy.⁷⁸

5. Critical Analysis of Turkish Language Policy

From the discussion above, we can conclude that Turkish language policy has a dual role: on the one hand, the modernisation and secularisation of society and, on the other, the integration of people from diverse religious, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds under a common national identity. The complicated series of relations emerging from this picture has made language policy issues a delicate topic in Turkish politics. The fundamental role of language in Turkish modernisation and nation-building processes has conferred an almost sacred character to language issues. Thus, until recently, discussions on language policy, loaded with emotions and ideological connotations, have easily extended to the fundamental principles of the Republic and therefore become almost unmanageable. Threats to the survival and integrity of the State increased sensitivity over the already politicised issue.

The conceptual tools of Fierman's work can be used to analyse Turkish language policy. In *Language Planning and Development*, Fierman analysed the link between language planning and five crises of political development; namely *penetration, participation, distribution, identity and legitimacy*.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ The Turkish Democracy Foundation, *Fact Book on Turkey Kurds and The PKK Terrorism*, <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/8572/i.htm>.

⁷⁸ H. F. Schiffman, *Linguistic Culture and Language Policy*, Routledge, London, 1996.

⁷⁹ W. Fierman, *Language Planning and National Development*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, 1991, p. 6. These concepts are taken from a classical volume *Crises and Sequences in Political Development*, Binder et. al.

According to Fierman, the degree of *penetration* of a government measures how much effective control it exercises and is linked to the power and authority of the latter. Accordingly, success in language planning reflects a regime's penetration. The *participation* problem is one of determining "who will take part in governmental decisions or have influence on them". Participation is related to language, since access to the political process can be facilitated or hindered by knowledge of the appropriate language. *Legitimacy* is defined as "the basis on which the decisions of government are accepted by the populace of a society because of normative beliefs on the part of the populace as to the rightness of the decisions that are made".⁸⁰ A government's legitimacy is likely to affect a language community's receptiveness to government-sponsored language change. Legitimacy is closely related to participation and identity. "Citizens who feel that they have participated in a meaningful way in the political process are more likely to view the decisions which emerge from that process as legitimate".⁸¹ Moreover, "the perception that a political system fairly represents the ethnic and cultural diversity in the policy contributes to its legitimacy".⁸² Finally, language planning may entail substantial financial costs as well as benefits. Linguistic choices can affect both the production and allocation of material resources. It is important that the costs as well as the benefits of the policy choices are shared equally by all groups of the society.

As explained above, the Turkish Revolution, at least in principle, aimed for greater *participation* of the masses and regarded a common language as a means of attaining this. As the success of language reform indicated, it enjoyed a high degree of *penetration* in the initial period. It also targeted *mass manpower* to replace elite manpower. Creating a new *identity* was its major challenge and language policy was also regarded as essential for that long-term goal.

However, if analysed from a dynamic point of view, the policy must be evaluated with these criteria taking national and international developments into consideration. Thus, the following questions need to be asked:

⁸⁰ W. Fierman, *Language Planning and National Development*, p. 8.

⁸¹ W. Fierman, *Language Planning and National Development*, p. 9.

⁸² W. Fierman, *Language Planning and National Development*, p. 9.

1. How successful was the language policy in terms of penetration, *participation, distribution, identity* and *legitimacy*?
2. Did the language policy increase the level of *penetration, participation, legitimacy, fair distribution* of resources, and help to develop a common national *identity*?
3. Was success or failure due to the choice of language policy?
4. Were all necessary measures taken to increase government success in dealing with the five crises of development through and in language policy?
5. Given the new level of national and international developments, does the language policy require changing to deal with the five crises of democracy in a better way?

A critical analysis of Turkish language policy in the light of domestic and international developments would indicate a need for a change in language legislation. The reasons for the need of change are both internal and external.

Firstly, over the last decade there has been a growing international understanding that linguistic rights are inalienable fundamental human rights. It is acknowledged that language diversity *per se* is not an impediment for national integration but the way it is handled can be. It is also widely accepted that in this era of modernisation and globalisation, there is a growing need to protect languages. In addition to general developments on international scale, in its relations with candidate countries, the EU has begun to place an emphasis on the adaptation of international norms on human rights and minority protection. Moreover, in the new context of international relations, where the importance of Turkey's links with Central Asian and Balkan countries grows, the need to form a more congruent and comprehensive language policy has become clear. Finally, developments in information and communication technology have caused a decline in the importance of state policies.

International developments inevitably increased the language awareness of people in Turkey. Secondly, as the security threat posed by the PKK

decreased, a more suitable environment for change emerged. Moreover, during the struggle against terrorism, it came to light that restrictive legislation could be used as a weapon against the State and its legitimacy and could therefore become counter-productive. We could also add that multilingualism has been a part of life for the Turks for centuries.

Research carried out by TESEV provides information about the support given to linguistic rights among Turkish people.⁸³ According to the research, 74% of the interviewees (3,060 people) said that they regarded the right to a mother tongue as an inalienable human right. However, when asked about abolishing the ban on broadcasting in the mother tongue; 47% said that they would not support that change, whereas 41% said that they would. As regards abolishing the ban on teaching in the mother tongue, 47% of the interviewees were against this and 41% were for the abolition.

When the interviewees' mother tongue was taken into consideration, it was found that the abolition of the bans was favoured more by the Kurdish speakers. When asked whether they would support the abolition of the ban on broadcasting in the mother tongue if this was the only requirement of accession to the EU, 56% of all interviewees answered 'No' and 39% said 'Yes'. The percentages for Kurdish speakers were 27% 'No' and 69% 'Yes', respectively. Support for education in the mother tongue was similar: a total of 58% of all interviewees did not support education in the mother tongue, even if it was the only criterion for full membership, whereas 37% did. The percentages among Kurdish speakers were 29% 'No' and 68% 'Yes'.

One implication of the survey is the discrepancy between the first and second answers. Although 74% of all interviewees regarded linguistic rights as inalienable human rights, support dropped to 42% and 41%, when the right concerned

⁸³ A. Carkoglu et. al., *Türk Halkinin Avrupa Birliğine Bakışı*, (Turkish People's Perception on European Union Membership).

broadcasting and education in the mother tongue. This can suggest that a considerable amount of people regard linguistic rights as being limited to the private sphere. The researchers concluded that linguistic rights appear as the needs and demands of the speakers of non-official languages and therefore the reforms should take their concerns into consideration.

Several beliefs and opinions against the reform process can be heard in public debates, the media and academic works. Some of these opinions derive from misbeliefs about languages such as:

- “some languages cannot be used for the spiritual and material progress of human beings as they are undeveloped or ‘backward’”;
- “language diversity can harm national integrity”;
- “maintenance of a mother tongue can impede the spread of the official language”;
- “there is no need to protect languages, especially when they are undeveloped”.

A second group makes comparisons with Europe and concludes that, unlike in the developed countries of Europe, the political, economic and security conditions of Turkey do not allow for improvements in linguistic rights.

- “European states can afford multilingualism as they have progressed further in national integration. At a lower level of integration, language diversity can work against nation-building”;
- “European states can afford the risks brought about by more liberal minority policies because of their safer international environment, whereas Turkey cannot with its unstable environment”;
- “European states do not have to emphasise emotional attachment to a nation, as they can provide better material incentives for instrumental attachment to a nation, whereas Turkey should maintain a high level of national pride and sentiment to survive as a nation, and a common language is an important part of this”;

- “Unlike European states Turkish democracy is under threat from the revival of religious fundamentalism and liberal policies can lead to weaknesses in this respect”.

A third group seems to adopt conspiracy theories about linguistic rights. The proponents of these theories regard the support for linguistic/minority rights as a means of covering up attempts to disintegrate the country or as tools of power politics.

6. Recent Language Laws

As mentioned above, EU relations have been influential in the fast adoption of new language laws. In its Regular Report of 2000, the European Commission was still critical about linguistic rights in Turkey,

*“Regardless of whether or not Turkey is willing to consider any ethnical groups with a cultural identity and common traditions as “national minorities”, members of such groups are clearly still largely denied certain basic rights. Cultural rights for all Turks, irrespective of their ethnic origin, such as the right to broadcast in their mother tongue, to learn their mother tongue or to receive instruction in their mother tongue, are not guaranteed. In addition, these citizens are not given opportunities to express their views on such issues.”*⁸⁴

Provisions on linguistic rights were detailed in two key documents: the **Accession Partnership Document (APD)**⁸⁵ for Turkey, approved on 4th December 2000, and **The National Programme of Turkey for the Harmonisation of the European Union *Acquis Communautaire*** (NP)⁸⁶, adopted by the Council of Ministers on 19th March 2001.

⁸⁴ 2000 Regular report From European Commission on Turkey's Progress Towards Accession, 8 November 2000, http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/report2001/tu_en.pdf.

⁸⁵ http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2001/l_085/l_08520010324en00130023.pdf.

⁸⁶ http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/turkey/pdf/npaa_full.pdf.

The APD⁸⁷, which serves as a guide for the membership preparations of Turkey, covers provisions on linguistic rights among its short-term and medium-term objectives. The short-term objectives of the document include the “removal of any legal provisions forbidding the use by Turkish citizens of their mother tongue in TV/radio broadcasting” and “strengthening legal and constitutional guarantees for the right to freedom of expression”. Among the medium-term objectives is “to ensure cultural diversity and guarantee cultural rights for all citizens irrespective of their origin”. Accordingly, any legal provision preventing the enjoyment of these rights is to be abolished, including in the field of education.

In the NP, Turkey declared that she would accede to all relevant international conventions and take the necessary measures “for their effective implementation for further alignment with universal norms manifest in the EU acquis and the practices in EU Member States, particularly in the areas of democracy and human rights”. As regards political criteria, it was stated that constitutional amendments would have priority and establish the framework for the review of other legislation. In the section on “Cultural Life and Individual Freedoms”, the following statement was made,

“The official language and the formal education language of the Republic of Turkey is Turkish. This, however, does not prohibit the free usage of different languages, dialects and tongues by Turkish citizens in their daily lives. This freedom may not be abused for the purposes of separatism and division.”

No further measures were detailed in this section. Some other sections of the programme mentioned some specific measures that would fall under linguistic rights.

In line with the provisions of the APD and the NP, and with developments in the field of linguistic rights within the framework of the Council of

⁸⁷ COUNCIL DECISION of 8th March 2001 on the principles, priorities, intermediate objectives and conditions in the Accession Partnership with the Republic of Turkey (2001/235/EC).

Europe, Turkey has begun to change its legislation decisively within a short period of time. The first development was a judgement passed by the Supreme Court of Appeal on 31st March 2000, confirming the freedom of individuals to give any name of their choosing. In 2001, a more intensive period of reforms took place. One major step was the constitutional amendment, which would prepare the grounds for further reform. **Law No. 4709** was passed for this purpose.

a. The Law Amending Several Articles of the Constitution (No. 4709, dated 3rd October 2001) was published in the Official Gazette on 17th October 2001. It covers 35 articles, two of which aim to remove restrictions on the use of different languages and dialects. According to **Article 9** of the law, the sentence reading, “*No language prohibited by law shall be used in the expression and dissemination of thought*” is deleted from Article 26 of the Constitution. Likewise, according to **Article 10**, the second paragraph of Article 28 of the Constitution, reading, “*Publications shall not be made in any language prohibited by law*” is deleted.

Article 42 of the Constitution, which reads, “*No language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training and at education.*” remains intact.

b. Law No. 4771⁸⁸. The second step taken in the area of linguistic rights was the passing of **Law No. 4771** by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 3rd August 2002. The **Law Amending Various Laws** was published in the Official Gazette on 9th August 2002. This law contained two articles enabling broadcasting in non-official languages and allowing private courses to be opened for the teaching of non-official languages, which are referred in the law as “*the different languages and dialects used traditionally by Turkish citizens in their daily lives*”.

⁸⁸ For the unofficial translation provided by SGEU see; <http://www.abqs.gov.tr/abportal/uploads/files/Law%20Amending%20Various%20Laws%20and%20Reasoning%2003.08.2002.doc> .

Article 8 enables broadcasting in non-official languages by adding the following provision to **Law No. 3984** on the **Establishment and Broadcasting of Radio Stations and Television Channels** dated 13th April 1994,

“Furthermore, there may be broadcasts in the different languages and dialects used traditionally by Turkish citizens in their daily lives. Such broadcasts shall not contradict the fundamental principles of the Turkish Republic enshrined in the Constitution and the indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation. The principles and procedures for these broadcasts and the supervision of these broadcasts shall be determined through a regulation to be issued by the Supreme Board.”

The Secretariat General for European Union Affairs provides the following justification for the article,

“By amending article 4 of the Law No.3984 with paragraph (A) of the article, it has been aimed to enhance cultural life within the scope of individual rights and freedoms, in line with the objectives of the Accession Partnership document and the NPAA of Turkey. This arrangement has secured conformity with the amendments made to articles 26 and 28 of the Constitution with law numbered 4709. This amendment is also in line with the international conventions of the Council of Europe where Turkey is a founding member and the Copenhagen political criteria.”

Another significant change in the area of linguistic rights was brought in by **Article 11** of the law. This article amended the **Foreign Language Education and Teaching Law (No. 2923)**, dated 14th October 1983, by changing its name and purpose to include the **‘Learning of Different Languages and Dialects Used by Turkish Citizens’**. The following paragraph was also added to **Article 2**,

“Private courses subject to the provisions of the Law on Private Educational Institutions No. 625 dated 8.6.1965 can be opened to enable the learning of the different languages and dialects used traditionally by Turkish citizens in

their daily lives. Such courses cannot be against the fundamental principles of the Turkish Republic enshrined in the Constitution and the indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation. The procedures and principles related to the opening and regulation of these courses shall be undertaken through a regulation to be issued by the Ministry of National Education.”

With the amendment to **Law No. 2923**, the legal obstacle preventing learning of the different languages and dialects used traditionally by Turkish citizens in their daily lives was removed. Nevertheless, the first sentence of Article 2, which stipulates that “*The mother tongues of Turkish citizens can not be taught in any language other than Turkish*” remained intact.

After lifting the prohibitions and preparing the legal basis for use of the mother tongue in broadcasting and education, two regulations were issued to set forth the rules for implementing these changes.

c. The By-law on the Learning of Languages and Dialects Used Traditionally by Turkish Citizens in Their Daily Lives⁸⁹ was drafted by the Ministry of National Education and published in the Official Gazette on 20th September 2002. It was drafted on the legal basis of Law No. 625, which regulates the opening, and functioning of Private Education Courses. The regulation consisted of 5 sections and 16 articles.

The by-law stipulated that courses teaching non-official languages could be established and start to teach once they had fulfilled the required conditions and received the permits issued by the Ministry. According to Article 7, the personnel appointed to these courses had to be Turkish citizens and fulfil the qualifications required by **Law No. 625**. The personnel should not have been convicted of crimes committed against the State in the past.

Article 8 allowed Turkish citizens with at least a primary-level education to register on the courses. Persons under 18 years of age could be

⁸⁹ Published in Mercator-Bulletin No. 53; <http://www.ciemen.org/mercator/bulletins/53-04.htm>

registered with the permission of parents or legal guardians. According to Article 10, the course syllabus had to be approved by the Ministry and the list of trainees was to be submitted to the Director of National Education. The article also stipulated that the course syllabus should only cover the learning of non-official languages. Those attending these courses would have to obey the dress code of the Ministry of Education.

d. The Regulation on the Language of Radio and Television Broadcasts⁹⁰ was prepared by the Supreme Board of Radio and Television and published in the Official Gazette on 18th December 2002. The regulation consisted of 4 sections and 11 articles. The fourth article declared that the main language of broadcasts was Turkish. **Article 5** allowed broadcasts in non-official languages;

“Broadcasts can also be made in the different languages and dialects traditionally used by Turkish citizens in their daily lives.”

According to this article, the broadcasts would be made by the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT). The article also defined the duration and content of the broadcasts. Accordingly, the broadcasts would be made *“for adults on news, music and culture.”* It specifically stipulated that *“No broadcasts can be made towards the teaching of these languages and dialects.”* Furthermore,

“The duration of radio broadcasts in these languages and dialects shall not exceed 45 minutes per day and a total 4 hours per week. TV broadcasts shall not exceed 30 minutes per day and a total of 2 hours per week. TV broadcasts shall be accompanied by Turkish subtitles which will fully correspond to the broadcast in terms of timing and the content. As regards radio broadcasts, a Turkish translation will be broadcast after the program.”

According to **Articles 6 and 7**, the plans containing details of the broadcasting area, languages and dialects to be used and types of broadcasts, the

⁹⁰ Published in Mercator-Bulletin No. 53; <http://www.ciemen.org/mercator/bulletins/53-06.htm>.

day(s) these broadcasts would be made and their schedule in the daily, monthly and annual broadcasting would be prepared by the executive board of the TRT. The TRT would submit these plans to the Supreme Board and the latter will make its final decision on the application *“not restricting itself to the information and documents in the application of the TRT”*.

Article 8 defined the restrictions on the broadcasts in non-official languages as follows,

“Radio and Television broadcasts in the different languages and dialects traditionally used by Turkish citizens in their daily lives cannot violate the supremacy of the law, the basic principles of the Constitution, basic rights and liberties, national security, general morality, the fundamental characteristics of the Republic as set out in the constitution, the indivisible integrity of the state with its country and people, Law no. 3984 and the principles and procedures set out in the regulations published based on this law, the requirements foreseen by the Supreme Board and its conditions of permission and guarantees and should be made within the framework of a public service approach.”

The regulation was drafted on the basis of the current implementation in EU member states. To date, the protocol between the TRT and Supreme Board has not been signed. As the regulation can be implemented upon signature of the protocol, there is not much information about the details of the broadcasts to be made.

In its regular Report 2002 the EU evaluated the regulation as *“a positive development that brings Turkey closer to EU standards.”*⁹¹ The report recommended defining the measures for implementation quickly to ensure concrete benefits for all Turkish citizens regardless of their ethnic origin. However, it also noted that the broadcasting law contained various discrepancies, such as,

⁹¹ 2002 Regular Report on Turkey's Progress Towards Accession.

“The reference made in the Law to ‘national and moral values of society’ as well as to ‘general moral social order and family structure’, are rather vague and might be subject to various interpretations, thus jeopardising editorial freedoms and pluralism of views.”

The last step in the area of linguistic rights thus far was made with the adaptation of the 4th harmonisation package by Parliament on 2nd January 2003. With the amendments made to the law on associations, the prohibition on the use of languages and scriptures other than Turkish in declarations of associations was abolished, in line with the constitutional amendment in Article 26. Using foreign languages in non-official communications and communication with institutions abroad was also permitted by the law.

Since the new legislation has come into force some improvements in the enjoyment of cultural rights have been reported. As there is no official body specialised in language policy, the information on improvements is gathered from newspapers and reports of international organisations. One example was a concert supported by Ministry of Culture where a famous Turkish singer performed in several languages on Turkey’s Victory Day. The EU Regular Report of 2002 reports several positive signs in the Southeast, such as a photographic exhibition, a European film festival, a Culture and Nature festival with no ban on bands singing in Kurdish and the abolition of bans on journals and newspapers.⁹²

However, in spite of legislative developments, several incidents concerning restriction have also been reported. Among them are several incidents of investigations about singing in Kurdish and refusal of Registry of Birth Administrations to register children with Kurdish names.⁹³ Opening private courses for

⁹² 2002 Regular Report on Turkey’s Progress Towards Accession, s. 42..

⁹³ For example; *Turkish Daily News*, “Despite Turkey’s EU reforms, Kurdish Name Problem Remains”, 24.10.2002.

non-official languages is said to be costly for those who are already in the business, as a new building, equipment and personnel are required to obtain a license.⁹⁴

Another important incident concerning linguistic rights took place in December 2001 and January 2002, when students began to campaign for optional courses in Kurdish to be put on the university curriculum. The Higher Education Board recommended university rectors to impose disciplinary sanctions on the petitioners, claiming that the right of petition was being exploited in this case. According to *Radikal* (Turkish daily newspaper), up to February 2003, 104 students had been expelled from school, 1,215 students had been suspended from higher education and 44 had lost scholarships as a result.⁹⁵

Some students were also subject to criminal proceedings by the State Security prosecutor for having connections with the PKK. Following the legal changes, a number of cases were dropped. Some cases ended with verdicts of imprisonment, while students were acquitted in others.⁹⁶ In some cases, the Supreme Court of Appeal overturned the verdicts of lower courts.⁹⁷ The incidents caused heated debates in public opinion, and many institutions and human rights supporters opposed the actions brought against the students.

A recent court decision passed by Diyarbakir Regional Administrative Court also deserves mention as it is in sharp contrast to the previous decision of the Constitutional Court. The case was brought to the court to suspend the disciplinary punishment given to a student by Dicle University for petitioning for Kurdish education. Pointing out that language loss can lead to the death of the nation and that a language can survive only if it becomes a written and literary language, the court held that,⁹⁸

⁹⁴ *Radikal*, "Kurdish Fast Yatti" (The Idea of 'Kurdish Fast' Collapsed), 08.10.2002.

⁹⁵ *Radikal*, "Yargidan Tam Uyum Karari" (Decision for Absolute Harmonisation from Judiciary), 12.02.2003.

⁹⁶ *Turkish Daily News*, "Court Acquits 32 Suspects Demanding Kurdish Courses", 26.9.2002

⁹⁷ *Turkish Daily News*, "Supreme Court Overturns Sentence on Kurdish Educational Demand", 24.10.2002.

⁹⁸ *Radikal*, "Yargidan Tam Uyum Karari".

“It must be accepted that, just as every human being has right to life, every language has the right to life and protection...To create a humane universal ground to enable the survival of nations and ethnic groups is the duty and responsibility of all societies and it is necessary to protect the natural structure of humankind.”

The court continued as follows,

“There is nothing wrong in demanding education and training service from relevant public institutions or bodies that will enable the person to learn his/her mother tongue, which is one and the most important part of his/her identity and personality. It is not acceptable that such a demand would cause polarisation on the grounds of religion, language, race, colour and sect. Thus, no tension or clash has aroused between the Kurdish speaking petitioner, and Turkish-speaking Turkish citizens because of the action which has been subject to discipline punishment.”

Pointing out that the public authorities should give reasonable and intelligible responses to the legitimate and fair demands of people (even if they reject them), the court suspended the disciplinary punishment.

7. Conclusion

Turkish language policy serves as a very good example of the role that language can play in social and political change. Unlike many other cases in Europe, the deliberate changes in the status and corpus of the language were made in a very short space of time. Language has been central for modernisation and nation-building with its symbolic and instrumental functions. However, the emphasis on a common language brought about the neglect of non-official languages. Language laws amounting to prohibitions caused further politicisation of language issues and rendered them less manageable for a period.

Within the general framework of Turkish language policy, the recent reforms have constituted significant steps. By abolishing the ban on the use of non-official languages, Turkey has met the minimum requirement of internationally-accepted linguistic norms. Furthermore, broadcasting in non-official languages is decided to be made by the state television channel. It can be observed that the aim is to liberalise the legislation under state control and, most likely, in a gradual way. The decision of Diyarbakir Court quoted earlier is significant, not only because of its liberal approach, but also because it is a sign that the judiciary has begun to refer to the need to protect languages, in line with the understanding of the **European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages**⁹⁹

The reforms made thus far are mainly legislative, and prospective administrative and institutional measures are as yet unclear. The time passed between the regulations and the writing of the conclusion of this paper has been too short to evaluate the implementation of the former. However, one can say that full adaptation to the new legal framework will take time. Nevertheless, the psychological impact of the free use of Kurdish in broadcasting and education could be considerable. This could also be instrumental in easing the tension left behind after a decade of fighting against terrorism.

Finally, the success of the reforms will depend mainly on the reception and support of the Turkish people. Increasing awareness of the importance of the mother tongue for the spiritual and material well-being of the people and the value of language diversity for humanity would be influential. A deeper understanding of the multiple links between democracy and linguistic rights would be beneficial for the success of the reforms and for further improvements.

⁹⁹ <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/CadreListeTraites.htm>



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* Disponible en català “La diversitat lingüística europea. Per a quí? Els casos de Finlàndia i Suècia”, a *EI dret a la diversitat lingüística* (2002), Col·lecció CIEMEN-Drets lingüístics, Ed. Mediterrània, Barcelona