

More police spending turning Turkey into a 'security state'

A decrease in Turkey's military spending has increased the share of social protection expenditures, according to an expert group. Instead, there has been a rise in domestic security expenditures. 'This shows that Turkey is becoming a security state,' says Nurhan Yentürk from the Public Expenditures Monitoring Platform

ONE-ON-ONE WITH Barçın Yinanç

Turkey should reduce its military spending in order to increase social protection expenditures, which fall far behind the level of developed countries, according to an expert group. Turkey witnessed a reduction in military expenditures in the first half of 2000s, which increased the share of social protection spending, said Nurhan Yentürk, a spokesperson for the Public Expenditures Monitoring Platform. However, there are no expectations of further reduction in military spending while there has been a sharp increase in domestic security expenditures, indicating that Turkey is becoming a security state. Yentürk recently told the Hürriyet Daily News.

Tell us first about the Public Expenditures Monitoring Platform.

We first got together as 30 NGOs to monitor public spending in 2010. But when we saw the importance of the outcome not only for the NGOs but the public as well as the parliamentarians, we decided to become a platform and share our findings with lawmakers. We now have

What motivated the initiative?

Istanbul Bilgi University's NGO training and research center were told by NGOs that they were not informed about public expenditures in the areas where they were working. So in 2009 we prepared a guide for NGO members to enable them to monitor public spending. We started training courses and as we ended up with concrete analysis, we decided to share them with parliamentarians. We have now more than 50 NGOs in the platform.

So this year it's the fourth report. Tell us about your findings.

Social protection expenditures, covering social security, health, social services and social assistance (excluding local governments) have registered an important increase in the course of the last years. This year's ratio of social protection expenditure is 13 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). It was around 8 percent a decade ago. Yet this is still insufficient and low when you compare it to the OECD average, which is 28 percent. A large portion is earmarked for pensions and then comes health expenditures. The share of social services and social assistance is just 1 percent; in other words, the share of expenditures targeting the poor needs to increase. A citizenship-based regular income support program financed through general taxation, as implemented in many countries, is the most important

missing component of the social protection system in Turkey.

You are saying the poor in Turkey are not sufficiently supported; yet it is estimated that more than 20 million receive social assistance in Turkey and many believe this is one of the reasons why the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has won elections in Turkey.

But we object to the way the support is provided. Most of the time they get assistance in [things] like coal or food. Meanwhile, we do admit that there is an increase in the assistance for those with disabilities and widows.

But any citizen that has an income below a certain level should be entitled to regular income support.

We believe resources can be generated for the needy if there is a cut in military expenditures. Personnel expenditures for military institutions, and the goods and services procurement for the personnel constitute 75 percent of total military institutions, while the remaining 25 percent is earmarked for modernization. We propose to reduce it to 1.8 percent of the GDP, the NATO average. That will provide the resources to support the needy. A million households could get 300 liras per month.

Can you further elaborate on the situation with the military spending?

Military spending was higher than that of education for the period ... between 1988 and 2004. Following the 2001 economic crisis and the AKP's coming to power, we saw an important decrease in military spending and the resources that emerged as a result of this decrease was transferred to social protection, health and education. The ratio of military expenditure to GDP used to be around 3, 4 percent. But the government has now stabilized it and plans to keep it at the same levels for 2015. Yet the decrease could have continued. Now that there is no decrease in military spending; this will mean the increase in social protection and health expenditures will slow down, since we don't see how resources can be generated, other than by cutting military expenditures. In addition we are seeing a steady increase in domestic security expenditures; this will also negatively affect the share of social protection in total expenditures. The increase in domestic security expenditure is leading Turkey into becoming a security state.

What makes you say that?

Our first calculation for domestic security spending dates back to 2006. The ratio to GDP was 0.8. In 2013, it increased to 1.3 percent. When we analyze this increase, we see that it stems from the recruitment of personnel by the Interior Ministry. The same is valid for the

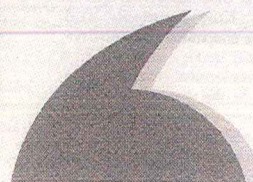
General Directorate of Security and Intelligence Agency, so more police officers, security personnel and intelligence experts are being recruited. On the other hand, there is also a rise in secret expenditures which includes the Prime Ministry's secret budget. We don't exactly know where these funds are spent, but we believe they are used for military and security expenditures.

In 2011, 392 million liras was spent from the Prime Ministry's secret budget. In 2012, this number reached 694 million liras and in 2013, 624 million liras. So there is a sharp increase which coincides with developments in Syria and the Gezi events [widespread street protests against the government in summer 2013]. Several questions were forwarded by parliamentarians to the government on how much military assistance was sent to Syria and how much pepper gas [used during Gezi] were purchased. The answers are far from satisfactory. In 2012, only 33 answers were provided to 56 questions; we examined each of them; they are very vague. On the question of how much pepper gas was purchased, the answer given is, for instance, "we purchased the amount needed."

So as military spending will continue as it is and domestic security expenditures will increase, this will inevitably affect spending on other areas.

Leaving education aside, resources allocated for children and youth are very low, for instance. One third of the youth neither go to school nor to a job; they are on the streets. More resources should be allocated so that they can acquire certain skills. The ratio of public spending on justice to GDP increased from 0.35 percent in 2008 to 0.55 percent in 2013. This needs to be increased. The average per inhabitant expenditure covering services of courts, prosecutors' offices and legal aid is 52.16 euros in European Council member countries, while Turkey's is 15.90 euros.

There are countries whose military spending is higher than us, but the resources they allocate to social protection or justice is much higher. We need to question what degree military spending is efficient. The fact that 75 percent is spent on military personnel suggests that this is not about efficiency but about ideology to keep the mentality of "every Turkish man is born a soldier" alive. When it comes to domestic security spending, if you allocate fewer resources to social protection and education, this breeds social tension, and then you allocate resources to domestic security to deal with the social tension. If you allocate more to education, you will have to allocate less to domestic security as there will be less reason for potential social tension.



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