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Conflict of Interest in Turkish Public Administration: Perceptions and Practice

Prof Dr Omer Faruk Genckaya, Marmara University, Istanbul (Turkey) & M. Erdal Okutan, PhD Candidate, Bilkent University, Ankara (Turkey)

Conflict of interest existed in public service is as old as public administration. Whereas in many societies in the past it had been assumed that elected or non-elected public officials would take advantage of public office to promote their own personal interests in modern societies they should be expected to act exclusively in the interests of the state. As societies democratized and their governments became accountable to their publics citizens ask public officials to 'discharge their duties in the public interest and with fairness and impartiality' Clean politics in democratic countries is subject to the effective and productive operation of democratic institutions as well as sustainable trust and guiding principles in government, namely openness, transparency and accountability. Contrary to the countries where democratic control is high 'transparency' in public service and clear separation between 'public' and 'private' objectives are major problems in several democratizing countries due to corruption and abuse of power in their past.

The aim of this study is twofold: first, to describe the awareness of Turkish public officials about conflict of interest, and second, to underline the shortcomings of Turkish legislation with special reference to ethical infrastructure. The scope of this study is basically limited to conflict of interest; however, it covers a diverse range of issues extending from public service values to available infrastructure for establishing an effective ethical regime in Turkish public service. Keeping in mind that Turkish public administration has been passing through a transformation for decades and the reform in public service has been a continuous but failed objective, this research is more concerned with picturing a general perspective of the situation in Turkey.

This study with special focus on ethical standards assessed by the first hand knowledge of higher public officials might provide an overview on the legal and institutional reforms in ethics.