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CHANGING DYNAMICS OF THE MIGRATORY REGIME BETWEEN TURKEY AND ARAB COUNTRIES

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People from Turkey have been major participants in international migration for more than three decades. Hundreds of thousands have gone abroad since the early 1960s, particularly to Western Europe, but also, to a much lesser extent, to Australia, and later, in larger numbers than to Australia, to Arab countries, and more recently to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This essay discusses trends and patterns in migration from Turkey to Arab countries since the late 1960s. It relates this migratory movement to the wider context of Turkish emigration. By examining the ongoing migration ties between Turkey and the receiving Arab countries, the paper concludes with a discussion of likely migration flows and their implications.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the particular differences distinguishing the modern world demography from its predecessors is the significantly dynamic pattern of international migration. For instance, recent changes in the volume, direction and composition of migration to the oil-exporting Arab countries reflect that migratory flows directed to these countries tend both to fluctuate and to comprise significant proportion of migrants originating from the increasingly diverse countries. Whatever these changes are however, Arab countries remain an important region for international labour migration (Shah, 1994:3). One major assumption to be kept in this context is that historically experienced patterns of change in migration to the Arab countries are outcomes of quite complex interactions among the characteristics of migrants themselves, of the country they leave, and of the country they enter. Similarly, social and political changes both within and between the involving countries are likely to influence the future flows of migration (Abdel, et al, 1993:25). The purpose of this essay is to offer some observation regarding the recent changes in the pace, forms, directions and conditions of Turkish labour migration to the oil-exporting Arab countries. The objective of the exercise is not to speculate on how migratory regimes in the main migrant-receiving countries of the Arab world have affected, or been affected by, the changes in the migratory flows from Turkey, but rather to reflect on the likely impact that ongoing structural changes in the wider context of

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migratory regime of Turkey have had on the flows to Arab countries.

This essay discusses trends and patterns in migration from Turkey to Arab countries since the late 1960s. It relates this migratory movement to the wider context of Turkish emigration. The data are derived from official statistics made available by the Turkish Employment Service (TES). The usual problem of incomplete information on migratory flows inevitably raises a number of complex issues which need to be resolved in order to obtain a credible estimate of these migration flows, but this is, of course, an impossible task to achieve in such a descriptive and documentary essay. The main focus therefore will be upon trends and their implications for the future. From the beginning it is important to note that some migrant workers have left Turkey without exercising the control of the TES, so that figures presented here might reflect a level of underestimation. One can ignore this underestimation, however, since the number of workers directed to Arab countries by the TES represents a vast majority of all emigrants from Turkey to this countries.

People from Turkey have been major participants in international migration for more than three decades. Hundreds of thousands have gone abroad since the early 1960s, particularly to Western Europe, but also, to a much lesser extent, to Australia, and later, in larger numbers than to Australia, to Arab countries, and more recently to CIS countries. The growth of this movement has been impressive: starting from a few in the early 1960s, there were by the mid-1990s, nearly 3 million Turkish migrants in Western Europe, some 140,000 Turkish workers in Arab countries, and some 50,000 workers in CIS countries (TCÇSGB, 1993:3; TEO, 1993: 67-72; TCÇSGB, 1996:5) (see Table 1). In addition to these expatriates, there were more than 250,000 Turkish citizens living in various countries of the globe, with approximately two-thirds residing in the traditional immigration countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United States.

From 1967 to 1995, more than 700,000 workers from Turkey have left home to sell their labour power in the oil-exporting Arab countries. The flows of Turkish migrants to Arab countries differed sharply from the flow to other receiving countries. Although the migration to Europe and even to the traditional immigration countries began mainly as a temporary movement of workers, there soon developed within a more permanent movement including families. The migration to the oil-exporting Arab countries (and that to CIS countries) was always, and is still, exclusively a temporary movement of the male workers. Their duration of stay is determined by the completion period of the construction work, where these workers are usually employed for a period of two years. The return rate of these project-tied workers is very high, because only a small proportion of them could be hired by the same firm for a new project or by a new firm.

This essay begins with a review of the emigration flows from Turkey since the early 1960s. Then it focuses on the migration to Arab countries. The concluding remarks
will be upon trends and their implications for the future.

II. BRIEF HISTORY OF EMIGRATION FROM TURKEY

Although Turkey only began exporting labour after the negotiation of an official agreement the Federal Republic of Germany in 1961, by 1970 it had become one of the largest supplier of new workers in various labour importing countries (Paine, 1974:59; Içduyuğ, 1991:39). Preceding the agreement with Germany, the Western European labour market had already started to draw a number of workers from the labour pool in Turkey; however, the size of this frontier movement was small, and it was sporadic and relatively unknown because workers often migrated illegally, owing to difficulties in obtaining passports and visas (Abadan-Unat, 1976:14; Lieberman and Gitmez, 1979:204). Within the context of European migratory regimes of the 1960s a structurally organized emigration from Turkey was not possible without the negotiation of an official agreement between governments. After the new constitution of 1961, the First five-year Development Plan (1962-1967) in Turkey evaluated the 'export of surplus labour power' as an aspect of development policy in terms of a return flow of remittances and reduction in unemployment. Consequently, to promote the policy Turkey first signed a bilateral labour recruitment agreement with Federal Germany in 1961. Similar bilateral agreements between the governments, specifying general condition of recruitment, employment and wages, were signed with Austria, the Netherlands, Belgium in 1964, with France in 1965, and with Sweden and Australia in 1967. Less comprehensive agreements were signed with the United Kingdom in 1961, with Switzerland in 1971, with Denmark in 1973, and with Norway in 1981 (Franz, 1994:307). These agreements shaped the initial stages of migratory flows significantly, even if they did not make any considerable impact on the later stages of flows. In other words, migratory movements have gained their own dynamics and mechanisms, which are quite independent from the previously structured measures of the bilateral migration agreements.

In the broadest terms, the flows of Turkish workers to Western European countries started in the early 1960s, gathered momentum in mid 1960s, expanded dramatically in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and then ceased in the 1970s. The movement of worker migrants, over the period from 1961 to 1975, fluctuated as a consequence of changes in the European labour market. The number of workers going abroad increased immediately after 1961, and peaked at 66,000 departures in 1964. Then, the recession of 1966-67 caused a rapid decline in these numbers. In 1967 only 8,947 workers were sent by the Turkish Employment Service, or TES, while over 900,000 were on the waiting list (Içduyuğ, 1991:54). After the recession, the number of emigrants increased sharply. The increase was more rapid in 1970, with some 120,000 being successful in going abroad. Since then the number of departed workers declined slightly, although it peaked at 132,000 in 1973. The figure did indeed decline rapidly, just after this increase, giving a total of 17,000 departees in 1974. By that time, the West
European governments had stopped the entry of workers because of economic stagnation. The year 1975 marked the end of large-scale Turkish labour migration to Europe. In the following years the direction of Turkish emigration shifted to another labour market which had formed in the oil exporting countries of the Middle East and North Africa. This trend is clearly seen in Table 2. Considering the migratory flows to Western Europe, one should note that although the labour movement from Turkey ceased in the early 1970s, the migration did not end, rather it continued taking the other forms of migrations such family reunion, refugee movement, and clandestine labour migration (Böcker, 1995:167; İçduyu, 1995:3; 1996:5). Even today, through the various types of migration there is a movement of more than 300,000 people annually going from Turkey to Europe.  

As noted earlier in this paper, the economic stagnation of 1966-67 caused a cutback in labour migration to the Western European countries. Naturally, this halted the Turkish emigration to these countries. For example, the number of Turkish workers going to Europe decreased from 35,000 in 1966 to 8,500 in 1967. Meanwhile, in 1967 over 900,000 workers were on the waiting list to go abroad, while less than 1 percent of those people were being sent to European countries. Consequently, under the pressure of the unemployment problem the Turkish government quickly moved in search of a new market to make the labour exporting process possible for a continuing period. Indeed, the Turkish emigration to Australia --- as well as that to the Arab countries --- started under these circumstances. The timing of the bilateral labour recruitment agreement in 1967 with Australia reflected the efforts of the Turkish emigration strategy by 'falling back on another country if one showed signs of saturation and diminished absorption ability' (Bahadir, 1979:105). There was, of course, a significant contrast between the migration policies of Turkey and Australia at the time. While Australian immigration policy was based upon the assumption of permanent settlement of migrants, Turkish emigration policy was guestworker-oriented. The signing of a migration agreement with Australia was a new step taken to maintain the continuity of emigration. From 1968 to 1995, a total of over 12,000 workers went to Australia; in the first seven-year period after the agreement almost 6,000 migrants from Turkey had arrived in that country compared with another 6,000 who arrived in the last twenty years. The level of emigration to Australia fluctuated around 200 to 500 persons each year since 1975. Here it should be noted that the number of Turkish migrants going to Australia represented only a very small fraction of all emigrants from Turkey (Young, 1983:35).

As emphasized by Gökdere (1994: 39), after the collapse of the former USSR, some of the newly emerging states in the region launched reconstruction programs. Active involvement of various Turkish firms in these programs led to a significant level of project-tied and job-specific migration. In terms of its impact on the continuity of emigration from Turkey the importance of the migration to CIS countries was overwhelmingly clear: in a period when a downturn of migratory flows to the labour receiving Arab countries began in the Gulf Crisis, the migratory movement to some
members of CIS countries and to some other newly emerging states became remedy for the emigration pressure in Turkey. The level of Turkish labour migration to these states started to increase steadily: from 8,000 workers in 1992 to over 20,000 in 1993, and later to over 40,000 in 1994. The trend shown with the category of "others" in Table 2 mainly refers to this migratory flow.

In summary, the 35-year history of Turkish emigration carries the legacy of four successive periods (see Table 2): 1) the period of 1961-1973/4 when there was a considerably high level of labour emigration to Western Europe; 2) a transitional recovering period of 1975-1980/1 in which predominantly migration to Arab countries evolved; 3) a relatively steady migration period of 1980-1990 when the migration to Arab countries dominated the process, 4) a transitional period since the early 1990s when a considerable decline in the migration to Arab countries is observed as well as a sharp increase in the migratory flows to CIS countries.

III. TURKISH EMMISSION TO ARAB COUNTRIES: PAST AND PRESENT

During the late 1960s and the early 1970s, only Saudi Arabia and Libya were the main destination points for the Turkish workers. Turkish labour migrations to Arab countries started with the arrival of the first group of 342 male workers to Saudi Arabia and 92 to Libya in 1967; however the level of the migratory flows had remained at very low values until the early 1970s. Numbers arriving in Saudi Arabia and Libya increased steadily during the following decade. The year 1981, which marked the beginning of migrations to Iraq and Kuwait, was the peak point of Turkish labour migration to the Arab countries: more than 55,000 workers left Turkey for the oil-exporting countries compared with only 21,000 in the preceding year. The period between 1981 and 1991 was a period of relatively stable migration, during which Turkish labour movement to the Arab countries totaled 40,000-50,000 persons per year. The Gulf Crisis in 1991 affected the related migratory regimes significantly. The last distinguishable period emerged with the sharp decline after 1992: the level of migration from Turkey to the Arab countries declined to an annual level of 10,000 in these last three years between 1993 and 1995 (see Table 3).

In short, three distinctive periods characterize the migration between Turkey and the Arab countries: 1967-1980, 1981-1992, and 1993 onwards. Some basic characteristics of these periods are discussed in the following paragraphs.

1967-1980: This period represents a period of steadily increasing migration flows to the two receiving countries: Libya and Saudi Arabia. From 1967 to 1980 nearly 50,000 workers fled to Libya and some 27,000 to Saudi Arabia. 1973 Oil Crisis was a turning point in the pattern of Turkish labour migration: there were increasing new demands for fresh labour power in the oil-exporting Arab countries, and at the same
time there were closing Western doors to foreign workers (Gökdere, 1994:38). In January 1975, a labour force agreement signed between Turkey and Libya and it caused the diversion of Turkish labour migration from West to oil-exporting Arab world. The years between 1975 and 1980 should be considered with differing migratory trends to Libya and Saudi Arabia: flows to Libya dominated the whole migratory regime from Turkey to Arab countries and reached its peak point just after this period, in 1981 with the annual figure of 31,000, and then started to decline; whereas movement to Saudi Arabia, carrying smaller numbers than that to Libya, was increasing steadily. There were only 31 female workers registered among the total of 77,000 workers arrived in the Arab countries between 1967 and 1980.

1981-1992: The second period was characterized by growing numbers of emigrating workers and by expanding spectrum of destination countries, including Iraq, Jordan, and Kuwait. In this period, over 500,000 Turkish workers, including only a couple of hundreds females, left Turkey for the Arab countries. Migration to Iraq started with an annual figure of more than 10,000 workers in 1981, which actually signified the peak year of whole migratory process between Turkey and Iraq, then it followed a declining trend to the Gulf Crisis in 1991, and stopped in that year. Jordan and Yemen were the two new destination countries emerged in the early 1980s, but numbers of workers going to these countries were not substantial: there were only 2,800 people moved to these countries between 1981 and 1992. Kuwait was another new receiving country for the Turkish workers; she received over 2,500 migrants, with only 6 females. After reaching its peak in 1981, the downturn of migratory flows to Libya began in 1984-85, when the Libyan labour-recruiting companies became insolvent about Turkish workers (Gökdere, 1994:39). Then, emigration to Libya lost its momentum: after decreasing to the lowest annual figure of 8,000 in 1986, the level again started to increase to 11,000 in 1987; and to 13,000 in 1989, but started to decline steadily: from 8,000 in 1990 to 4,700 in 1991. The dominant receiving country remained in this period was Saudi Arabia: although there was fluctuating trends, the level of annual flow was around 15,000 to 20,000 workers in the first half of the 1980s and around 25,000 to 30,000 in the second half of the decade. The peak in migration from Turkey to Saudi Arabia occurred in 1992 with the figure of 46,000, but then the movement started to decline rapidly. What was clear that at the peak point of migration to Saudi Arabia in 1992, the general decline of migration to the Arab countries began.

1993 onwards: Turkey has been the source of relatively small numbers of emigrants to the Arab world in the recent years. Even with the annual number of almost 36,000 workers arriving in Saudi Arabia in 1993, Turkey have produced only 70,000 migrants to the Arab countries in the period of 1993-1995, a figure well below those for previous periods. The Gulf Crisis was probably one of the main causes for the declining migration movements, but there were also other additional reasons: Yemen had already cut its ties with Turkey with respect to labour-importing, and Libya had minimized the flows. There was no migration directed to Iraq and Yemen in this period. Annual
migration to Libya dropped from 2,600 persons in 1993 to 1,800 in 1995. After the Gulf Crisis Saudi Arabia and Kuwait became the two main receiving countries for Turkish workers: from 1993 to 1995 the TES directed around 63,000 of Turkish workers to Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait received only 600 Turkish workers in the last three years of migration. Generally speaking, from 1993-1995 labour migration to the Arab countries per year decreased to a level, which is 70 percent less than that in the previous period from 1981 to 1992.

It is now almost 30 years since the start of large-scale migration of Turkish workers to Arab countries. By 1995 over 140,000 Turkish workers were living in these countries. The great majority of them, 91 percent, was in Saudi Arabia (see Table 4). As far as the general picture of Turkish emigration is concerned, during the year 1995, what is seen is a rising trend of emigration to CIS countries and a declining trend migration to Arab countries. However it is obvious that the Arab countries still remains as one of the major receiving countries for Turkish migrants towards the turn of the century (see Table 5). In 1995, three of every ten of the Turkish emigrants were received by the Arab countries while six of them were admitted by CIS countries; and the remaining one left Turkey for other receiving countries. Saudi Arabia was again at the first place with regard to the total number of workers who migrated to the Arab countries: in 1995, around 87 percent of those who left Turkey for the Arab countries moved to Saudi Arabia, 10 percent fled to Libya, and the remaining three percent migrated to other countries, mainly to Kuwait. (see Table 6). In short, during the last couple of years, the migration pattern to Arab countries shows a consistent downward trend with some fluctuation.

As stated by Appleyard (1995:3), after 1973, when oil prices rose dramatically, thus increasing income of the oil-exporting Arab states with very small populations, demand for labour led to large flows of contract workers from other developing countries. Migration from Turkey to Arab countries also occurred within this larger context. Today 70 to 80 percent of labour force in these oil producing Arab countries is composed of foreign workers. Comparing to situation in the late 1970s and early 1980s in which migrant workers from Turkey were forming one of the most notable stocks of foreign workers in Arab countries, the share of Turkish among these foreigners in these countries in the 1990s is not so visible: for instance, only 3 percent of the total 4.6 million foreign workers in Saudi Arabia in mid-1990s were Turks (TCÇSGB, 1996:139), and this proportion was less than 1 percent among 1 million foreigners in Kuwait and 1.5 million Libya (TCÇSGB, 1996:132). Partly due to the fact that the infrastructural big projects in the oil-exporting are being completed, and partly due to the circumstances after the Gulf crisis, the number of Turkish workers in Arab countries has been declining: indeed, it fell by more than 100,000 from a figure of 250,000 in the late 1980s to 140,000 in the mid-1990s.
IV. CONCLUSION

There have been dramatic changes in the annual flows of Turkish workers to Arab countries as well as in the size of the Turkish population in these countries over the past 20 years. What these changes probably correspond to the fact that labour migration to these countries "is impermanent, risky and unreliable", as it was concluded by Shah (1995:596). Within the context of ongoing dynamics of established Turkish emigration, of particular note are the declining importance of migration from Turkey to the oil-exporting Arab countries and its substitution by other migratory flows such as contract-base migration movements to the CIS. In short, current trends suggest a shrinking share of migration to Arab countries and a growing share of migration to other receiving countries. This is an expected but nonetheless interesting outcome of the ongoing dynamics of Turkish migration to Arab countries.

In conclusion, it is possible to make two main observations concerning the dynamics and mechanisms of the recent migration from Turkey to the oil-exporting Arab countries. First, the preceding discussion leaves very little room for doubt about the existence of substantial levels of declining flows in the early 1990s. Although direct evidence is lacking for the present situation towards the late 1990s, it is plausible to assume that a similar kind of mobility would also exist in the late the 1990s -- but mostly with some stability. As Martin (1991:106) argued, there was significant emigration pressure from Turkey, and the same would be likely to be true for the future. Indeed, some recent figures suggest that Turkey will continue to experience modest increases in the migrations to Arab countries but that increase will be neither rapid nor uniform. The pace of change will be slower in the context of the success of economic developments in Turkey, the persistence of migration network dynamics between Turkey and other receiving countries, and the ongoing supply of labour from other countries rather than Turkey. It is obvious that such reasons may not necessarily keep the Turkish migration flows low. A critical factor in this regard is the attitudes and policies of the oil-exporting countries toward Turkish immigrations.

Second, in an international environment where impermanent, risky and unreliable conditions put limits on emigration from Turkey, differential migratory response to broad-based international migratory regimes would result in some fluctuating and diversifying trends in emigrations from Turkey. Some clear tendencies to this direction have been already seen recently: for instance, late in 1996, national newspapers reported the story of 200 Turkish workers who went to Malaysia to sell their labour (Hürriyet, September 16, 1996); and it was also reported to the author by some local people from Adıyaman, a province of South-eastern Turkey, during a recent survey of emigration from Turkey, that there had been a number of people who went to Japan to work... thus, Malaysia and Japan came into the picture of Turkish emigration for the first time. Even though these new migratory movements are sporadic and restricted to individual cases, they still reflect the recent dynamic nature of Turkish emigration,
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which often shift from one attractive receiving country to another. The shift, which marked the rapid transformations in the migration between Turkey and Arab countries, are conspicuous but not complete. There are some clear indications that they are under way. Certainly, there remains a need for further explanatory studies to exactly pinpoint the roles of different factors and processes, which determine these transformations.

NOTES:

1 Only in Saudi Arabia there was additionally private labour recruitment for Turkish workers. Without indicating any direct evidence, the TES gives the figure of these undocumented Turkish workers in Saudi Arabia as 20,000 in the 1980s, and as 10,000 in the 1990s. See Unbehau, (1996), p.292.

2 Particularly in the case of migration to Arab countries, the workers are fully surrendered to their employers, who are also their 'sponsors', and are usually employed under extremely unfavorable conditions. For a more detailed description of the employment conditions in Arab countries see Unbehau, (1996).

3 Although figures from the TES indicate that only around two thousand migrants left Turkey annually for Europe in the early 1990s, this figure, which only reflects the limited movement of labour under the TES control, does not give the real picture of migrations from Turkey to Europe. What is the reality is that Turkey has produced hundreds of thousands of emigrants annually in the forms of family reunification, marriage migration and asylum seeking. For a more detailed description of the recent migration between Turkey and Europe see İçduygu, (1996).

4 The crucial changes occurred in the migration flows from Turkey to Libya in 1980s were described in detail by Unbehau, (1996), p.39.

5 A detailed analysis of the dynamics of migration from Turkey to Saudi Arabia, which provides a fully understanding of the recent changes of the movement, was being undertaking by Unbehau (1996).
REFERENCES


