

## THE ADMINISTRATIVE TRADITION OF THE TURKISH MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

Perceptions of general incapacity of the bureaucracy has triggered persistent public administration reforms. The administrative tradition of the Turkey was seen a major barrier to develop high standard public services. Instead, this article try to understand and describe the administrative tradition of Turkey, especially Turkish Ministry of Interior (Mol). In addition, it suggests the administrative tradition as valuable repository of experience and challenge that highlight how to tackle current and future possible issues. Furthermore, this article provides robust reasons for how the tradition of the Mol has persisted in spite of these reforms. I chose the ethnographic qualitative research design that describes the political-administrator elites' world from their own standpoints.

**Keywords:** Bureaucratic capacity, Turkish administrative tradition, public administration reform, prefectoral culture, the Ministry of the Interior of Turkey.

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## **İÇİŞLERİ BAKANLIĞININ YÖNETİM GELENEĞİ**

### **Öz**

*Bürokrasinin kapasitesinin genel yetersizliği ile ilgili algılar Kamu yönetimi reformların sürekli tetiklemiştir. Türk yönetim geleneği yüksek standartlı kamu hizmetlerinin gelişmesinde baş engel olarak görülmüştür. Bu algıların aksine, bu makale yönetim geleneğini, özellikle İçişleri Bakanlığının, şu andaki ve gelecekteki muhtemel sorunlarda yol gösterici olan değerli tecrübe ve mücadelenin deposu olarak önermektedir. Ayrıca bu makale sürekli reformlara rağmen İçişleri Bakanlığının yönetim geleneğinin sürekliliğine dair güçlü sebepler sunmaktadır. Bu çalışmada, politikacı ve yönetici elitlerinin dünyalarını onların gözünden tasvir ettiği için etnografik methodu seçtim.*

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Bürokratik kapasite, Türk yönetim geleneği, kamu yönetimi reformları, mülki idare kültürü, İçişleri Bakanlığı.

## INTRODUCTION

Mol is, outside the Prime Ministry, the most senior, highest status public department in the Turkish government. It handles the most delicate areas of the country's policy-making, including national internal security, law enforcement, national border protection, the administration of migration policy, the administration of provinces, and the coordination of all public servants via the country's system of territorial administration. Therefore, the capacity of the Ministry to respond to present-day problems is a crucial issue for the Turkish government. This article is directly interested in how the Mol safeguards their security priority tasks in a dynamic, dangerous environment because of the robust administrative tradition despite their having significant deficiencies in bureaucratic policy capacity. This article directly addresses the question of whether current reforms, which have aimed to change administrative tradition, are efficient or not.

The scarcity of empirical research on Turkish administrative tradition raises the need for an ethnographic, single case study in order to facilitate the triangulation of the data sources, including conversations, observations, and written documents. To directly obtain the views of political-administrators<sup>2</sup> is at the heart of this thesis. I was able to interview fifty one elite political-administrators, including top politicians and top-ranking civil servants (prefects) of the Mol. Furthermore, my insider role provides a unique position from which to interpret these findings.

The scope of this study is limited to the administrative tradition of the Mol, being a strong ministry with a long-standing tradition for the following reason.

- The Mol is a good example for understanding the effects of the public administration reforms on bureaucratic policy capacity since it plays a central role

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<sup>2</sup> "Political-administrator" term includes ministers, deputy ministers and prefects. "Prefect" term (called "mülki idare amiri" in the Turkish administrative tradition) refers to member of the elite Turkish bureaucratic class ("prefectoral class") which only includes governors, deputy governors, and district governors and Mol's administrators who gain this statue before being appointed into Mol's central organisation cadres (State Personnel Law 657, act 36). In this article, I will use "prefect" term for undersecretary (U), deputy undersecretary (DU), general directors (GD), and their deputies(DGD), chief inspectors (CI), legal advisors (LA), head of division (HD), director of branch(DB), inner circle of minister (general secretaries (GS), personal private secretaries(PPS), and advisors (A)) who have prefects background.



in administering public reforms and integrating the EU's standards throughout the country.

- Secondly, due to my being a member of the prefectural class and due to my working for this ministry for 20 years, I can use my insider role and previous experience and knowledge about the MoI to draw a colourful portrait of the administrative tradition of the MoI.

### **1. TURKISH ADMINISTRATIVE TRADITION**

Administrative traditions were seen as composed of both ideas and structures (Painter and Peters, 2010, p. 6) First, administrative tradition is “a set of inherited beliefs and practices about the institutions and history of governments’ (Rhodes, 2011a, p. 2)

Second, administrative tradition has a structural dimension ‘contained within established and taken-for-granted institutions, organizations, formal rules and procedures ... that have come into being in the past and that still are present’ (Yesilkagit, 2010, p.148).

This study adopts above conceptualization of administrative tradition because both organisational structure and ideas have been significant regarding bureaucratic policy capacity. I will elucidate characteristics of the Turkish administrative tradition in two strands: characteristic of Prefectoral strand and characteristic of Weberian strand. Feature of prefectural strand of Turkish administrative tradition could be considered as embodied by ideas whereas feature of Weberian strand of Turkish administrative tradition could be considered as embodied by structures. Thus, looking at the characteristics of Prefectoral and Weberian strand of Turkish administrative tradition could provide one with a better understanding about the administrative tradition of the MoI in particular. Table 1 demonstrates main characteristics of Turkish administrative tradition as:

**Table 1: Dominant Characteristics of the Turkish Administrative Tradition**

Feature of Prefectoral strand of Turkish Administrative Tradition	Feature of Weberian strand of Turkish Administrative Tradition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>The State:</b> State sovereignty, protection of the State authority and public order; interventionist, a political philosophy of the State which sees the State as being above society; highly centralised and formal relations within society;</li> <li>• <b>A unitary structure:</b> Uniformity;</li> <li>• <b>Field (territorial) administration (governors):</b> prefectoral class speaks for the state to citizens and for citizens to the state</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Formalistic and hierarchical bureaucratic (career) system</b></li> <li>• <b>Political control:</b> Ministerial Discretion  (sharp distance between politicians and bureaucrats)</li> <li>• <b>Legalistic administration (Rule of Law)</b></li> <li>• <b>Legalistic Accountability (ex-ante control by administrative jurisdiction);</b></li> </ul>

Source: Author (inspired from Rhodes, 1999; Peters, 2008; Painter and Peters, 2010; Varol, 2015; Feslihan, 2016.)

Following section, these characteristics will be discussed in detail.

### ***Prefectoral Strands of the Turkish Administrative (Mol) Tradition***

The Turkish public administrative system has adopted the Napoleonic tradition since the early years of the Turkish Republic in emulation of the French administrative system. Having prefects and territorial (field) administration were distinctive feature of this tradition. Territorial administration are governed by the prefects who are the representative of the state, representative and the administrative executive of President. Thus, the prefects and their unique administrative tradition became the most important factors in Turkish public administration and in Mol administration since appointments to senior positions in the ministry have to be filled amongst prefects.

This research will argue prefectoral strand of Turkish administrative tradition rather than French version of Napoleonic tradition, which is not sufficient for Turkish administrative tradition given the fact that Turkey have



unique political and administrative contexts, administrative tradition, and semantics. For instance, the Napoleonic tradition tends to have fewer barriers between the political and the administrative than most other traditions. 'Indeed many politicians begin their careers as civil servants trained by the state and then move into political careers' (Peters, 2008, p. 123). Nevertheless, characteristic of formalistic and hierarchical bureaucratic (career) system and relation between politicians and bureaucrats tended to be more Weberian characteristic. These characteristics will be demonstrated through following dimensions: the state, uniformity, and field (territorial) administration (governors).

### ***The State***

The strong and unquestioned State tradition is roots in the Rechtsstaat model, which developed historically from the Ottoman to Turkish polity, and has always been a fundamental characteristic of the Turkish prefectoral system (Heper and Keyman, 1998: 259 cited in Varol, 2015, p. 58). The State, under this philosophy, has "high interests" which are regarded more important than the interests of individuals or the community. Similarly, the Mol and its prefectoral class are assumed to be the representatives of the state.

We consider ourselves as representatives of the state. We act on behalf of the state rather than on behalf of the nation. So, you should not expect our class to welcome changes that disturb our traditional role (DU2, TI).

This participant's opinion complies with Law 5442, as well as a recent perception research whose findings revealed that citizens identified the Mol and its prefectoral class with the State's identity itself (TIAV, 2013, pp. 31 and 67). As Peters (2008, p. 127) notes, 'the relationship between the state and citizens is similar to a father and sons stressing public services [who benefit] automatically [from] public life including protection and care in return for obedience'. The Turkish State tradition that values the maxim, "Let man flourish so that the State can flourish." All of the participants supported this maxim.

Yet, the sharing of the responsibilities of state authority has not been included in Turkish administrative tradition. Instead, there is a tradition in which mechanisms work in a top-down fashion and authority is concentrated in one dominant leader to ensure uniformity.

### ***Uniformity***

Uniformity has been a top-down strategy of state-building. It assumes that ‘reducing differences [is] the best way to generate commitment to the state [and that] ... [c]itizens should be treated fairly and equally according to their needs and their eligibility for services’ (Peters, 2008, p. 125).

Having territorial administration, which is ‘the governance of the territories of a country on its own lands in accordance with the central administration principles’ (Ciner, 2014, p.445) and prefectural class — is generalist-elite and represents the State and central government as protectors of the status-quo; state authority and public order— ensures uniformity.

First, historically, the prefecture was passed down from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey... and was considered an instrument of centralization of the Empire. Second, the prefectural system was used to provide a social ground with territorial administration (*mülki idare*) following the centralization, in order to create a subsequent nationalization and found a new regime to develop the country (Ciner, 2014, p.445).

Thus, having prefects and territorial administration became distinctive features of prefectural strand of the Turkish administrative tradition.

### ***Territorial administration***

Territorial administration and prefectural class are still among the most important actors in Turkish public administration and MoI central administration. This prefectural class speaks for the state to citizens and for citizens to the state. It means that (central) prefects know what happens in the field. This experience underpins their claim to be the premier department.

Prefects’ ‘upbringing style, education, and professional training process make them identify themselves with the state’ (Ciner, 2014, p. 446). Thereby, prefects, which have a unique philosophy and vocational virtue, were seen as being natural leaders with more than 180 years of tradition and experience.<sup>3</sup> All of the participants, including those from ministers<sup>4</sup> and representative of the

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<sup>3</sup> DU2, CI5, GD2, TI.

<sup>4</sup> Former Minister 1 and Minister 2 and Minister 3, TI.



stakeholders, shared this opinion.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, according to recent perception researches' findings, several vocational groups, heads of village, mayors, lawyers and politicians approved this situation.<sup>6</sup>

In sum, considering these features (the state notion, uniformity, and field administration), the findings confirm that the prefectoral strand of Turkish administrative tradition which creates an atmosphere which is quite conservative and resistant to change. Furthermore, Weberian strand of Turkish administrative tradition strengthens this atmosphere.

### ***Weberian Strands of the Turkish Administrative (Mol) Tradition***

These characteristics will be demonstrated through following dimensions:

- The legality of the administration (rule of law);
- Formalistic and hierarchical bureaucratic (career) system;
- Political control: Ministerial Discretion (sharp distance between politicians and bureaucrats); and
- Legalistic Accountability (ex-ante control by administrative jurisdiction).

### ***The Legality of the Administration (Rule of Law)***

In Turkish administrative tradition, legality is also the foremost value and the beginning point — rather than the ending point. As Peters (2008, p. 122) notes, 'the constitution, laws and regulations became the main source of administrative action and administration was based on the supremacy of law.' This could be interpreted as the necessity for a legal provision or framework with which to cover every action of a public servant, including the performing of tasks, making decisions and policies, implementing them, etc. Participants mostly support this legality criterion.

You have to look from the perspective of legality when you consider things in front of you. You must fulfil your duty within the lines of the framework of the legislation (GD8, TI).

<sup>5</sup> HIA, DGD7 and GS of Union, TI.

<sup>6</sup> TIAV, 2014a, pp. 14, 62, 104 and 140.



This is stressed strongly by almost every Mol grey report which has been published. For instance, as one grey report (Mol, 2009a, p. 53) states, 'legality guides strategy development in the Mol.' Participants' accounts mostly support this pillar.

As a result, there is a system in which everyone has to comply with these laws and regulations, including both prefects and ministers. Namely, they are able to use their own initiative in line with these regulations (DGD2, TI).

Participants stressed the distinct role of the Mol comparing other ministry in line with legalisation.

All public services surely must be conducted within the framework of the law in a constitutional state since the Mol deals with delicate activities. For instance, security and law enforcement lead to effective results regarding personal freedom. So, searching for the compliance with the legislation in such a case should be the first priority (FGD2, TI).

Finally, the state is defined as a structure which is formed by an accumulation of certain rules which highlight how to do things, as well as who will do them. (FGS3, TI)

The findings have revealed that risk awareness supports this statement.

If you strictly obey the regulations, you are unlikely to get into any trouble. Quite on the contrary, you will struggle to improve alternative ways of tackling issues since you are likely to face difficulties. (Atbas\_FGD2, TI)

The vast majority were satisfied with the laws and the other regulations which highlight their ways and daily practices. These basic laws and other regulations are very detailed and mostly well codified.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, there were some critics regarding the availability of proper legislations – i.e. regarding either their absence or their overlapping or contradicting one another (Mol, 2008, p. 520)

Moreover, formalistic administration was seen as the main reason for the limits to policy capacity by a few prefects who stressed that regulations should

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<sup>7</sup> See in detail: <http://www.mia.gov.tr/ministry-legislation> last retrieved 21/09/2018.



be dynamic in character for the purpose of responding to citizen necessities. This aim creates difficulties in dealing with some practical issues.

Sometimes, you should do things fast. If you wish to comply with the legislation, you cannot step forward. Rather, we solve problems comply with the tradition regardless of what the law says. Only after the emergency is resolved, will we create legal procedures. You do not have any chance to tell the citizens 'you should wait until we make a tender to provide you this service.' (DGD2, TI)

Lastly, it should be underlined that regulations which overlook or stand in conflict with the government's choices cannot be implemented

### ***Formalistic and hierarchical bureaucratic (career) system***

In the Turkish public administrative system, Law 657 regulates civil servants' status, payment, and other rights, as well as the fundamental principles of the civil service system, such as career, equality, merit, classification and impartiality, all of which are in line with the Weberian rational bureaucratic model.

Legally and traditionally, public servants have been at the core of the civil service. Almost all senior civil service positions are occupied by public servants. Their status is constitutionally assured and can only be regulated by law... Public servants are appointed for life on the basis of competitive examinations and are removed only in exceptional cases... They must remain loyal to the constitution and cannot join political parties (Varol, 2015, pp. 221-223).

Nevertheless, this model did not create an overall operative Turkish civil service system due to the favouritism and nepotism, inefficiency, the lack of clear and exact definitions of the function, capacity, authority, and responsibilities of personnel, wage inequalities etc.

Yet, there is an established and strong administrative tradition dominated by the practice of a strict hierarchy and state protocol (LA2, TI) With exceptions,<sup>8</sup> ministers mostly tend to keep power to themselves due to their willing to know and control everything about the MoI's daily activities in order to ensure political control, which are all rooted in Turkish administrative tradition.

<sup>8</sup> Research findings confirmed that Minister Atalay gave a mandate to Undersecretary Gunes regarding the external relations of the MoI with parliamentary and key stakeholders. He applauded his political acumen skills and statesmanlike character. (Former Minister 3\_Besir Atalay, TI)

### ***Political control: Ministerial Discretion***

The roles which divide ministers and bureaucrats is so clear that it reflects a typical Weberian-based bureaucracy. The minister represents the political side that simply is responsible for the ministry's policies and, in turn, represents the ministry in politics and the public arena, whereas their prefects who fulfil their commands are the bureaucratic side of the relationship. All matters concerning the Ministry — its policies, strategies and priorities — are stated by the minister (see impacts of ministerial role over policy capacity in Chapter 7). Issues or topics which are on the Ministers' agendas, therefore, are more important than everything else.

Most of the prefects whom I interviewed believe that a leader-based command tradition is pervasive within the Turkish administration, within the Mol in particular. This power should not be debateable by bureaucracy as if it was holy writ. (FGS3, T1) Criticism is sometimes perceived as being against the current government's programmes.

When you criticise policies even in an academic way, someone may label you as an enemy of the government. In other words, you might be ostracised for offering different opinions. (CI3, T1)

Therefore, senior bureaucrats try to learn or anticipate these actors' opinions. That is to say, intuition is their most desirable skill.

The government prefers to work with bureaucrats who sign pro-government songs. (MP 1, T1)

Ministerial discretion is not always clear and makes the bureaucrats struggle in order to learn or predict their opinions — something which is rather challenging to do on time.

Recently, bureaucracy has been required to read the minister's body language and mind. They should think and do just like the ministers — not much more or much less! (LA4, T1)

In sum, political control is the main characteristic of the Turkish administrative tradition.



### ***Legalistic form of Accountability***

In the Turkish administrative tradition, accountability is formal and legalistic. External monitoring and inspection by the Council of State and the Court of Accounts, traditionally, has been the most important institution in Turkish Administration with regards to auditing accounts rather than parliamentary and public scrutiny. Moreover, the administrative tradition has a secretive nature that obstructs the transparency and accountability of the government.

Besides administrative tradition of Turkey, administrative tradition of the Mol in particular should be examined to understand and describe bureaucratic policy capacity of the Mol due to the distinct feature of the Mol's tasks, everyday challenges and actors.

### ***Characteristics of the Administrative Tradition of Mol***

Characteristics of Mol's administrative tradition shall be examined in detail in the following sub-sections:

#### ***Value of tradition***

The Mol, which is a guardian of the established order [state], has traditionally been the heart of the Turkish public administrative system. (Former Minister 2, TI)

The Mol has existed for over 180 years, having first been established under Ottoman rule. The Mol is one of three ministries that have been able to preserve their identity in the Turkish Administration History.

You can observe this kind of tradition inside the Mol, [the Ministry of] Foreign Affairs, and [the Ministry of] Finance since the Ottoman era. I could also add the State Planning Organisation considering my 8 years' of experience there. (Former Minister 3, TI)

All my participants agreed that the Mol has been the most deep-rooted mechanism in the state's administrative arsenal. Furthermore, the majority of prefects perceive the Mol as being identical with state bureaucracy. A minister who had an academic background confirmed that statement.

Once I took over the ministerial position in the Mol, I found a well-established ministry. Even though there were exceptions, the Mol fulfilled its tasks successfully because of its strong tradition and well educated prefectural class. In addition, I could not observe any significant institutional deficiency while I was running the Mol. (Former Minister 3, T1)

That tradition makes its members proud. Some prefects reminded me not to underestimate the tradition of the Mol.

Both the Turkish public administration and the Mol have tradition. Sometimes, the tradition of the Ministry and go before the law. Even though laws may change, the Mol's tradition nevertheless endures. There is some tradition that have existed since the Ottoman era, and even before the Ottoman period. (DGD2, T1)

Tradition is associated with institutional memory (IM) which stores useful experiences for the purpose of dealing with daily life's problems. As Rhodes (2011a) stresses, past experiences highlight current, — even unexpected — new and future issues with pre-tested and reliable methods. The risk awareness tradition tacitly feeds this idea. The following comment was made by an administrator:

Since it was like this before, we do it in the same way. (FGS3, T1)

The Mol's wide-range of vital tasks force the Mol to keep its tradition. My participants supported such conservative position as well:

I do not think from the perspective of the services such as law enforcement and security we provide that it would be beneficial to consider very different alternatives. You should not play with them so much. (DU2, T1)

Naturally, accounts show that the Mol will not change in a short amount of time.

The ministry is not going to change from today to tomorrow. This Ministry has been deeply loyal to its tradition. (DGD3, T1)

One former minister confirmed that:



I worked very comfortably within the MoI's bureaucracy, but I should confess that it was not easy to change anything inside the MoI. You could face some resistance (Former Minister 3, TI).

Similarly, prefects tend to object to the reactivity<sup>9</sup> since it conflicts with the administrative tradition of the MoI and its members. They complain about the recent public administration reforms and regulations which have inclined to ignore IM, choosing instead to solve problems with new regulations from foreign countries' best experience instead of their own (Varol, 2015, p. 168). Similarly, my participants shared the anxiety that these top-down reforms should not be transferred directly without modification to the unique system of the country. most of them asserted that they have not solved problems but, rather, that they have been growing them.

Another shared concern was hurriedness. One legal advisor pointed out that hurriedness prevents debates being had about recent regulations. Since they had to regulate them in a short amount of time, the prefects did not have enough preparation in order to support the legitimation process (LA1, TI).

On the other hand, a number of participants have claimed that a powerful conservatism and strong traditionalism have also had various negative consequences on the MoI. For example, as mentioned before, the MIAPER (Performance Appraisal) could not be implemented even if it had been adopted in the strategic plan and supported by top political-administrators (CI6, TI).

Nevertheless, post-2002, the MoI's prefects could not resist rather adopting two things. First, one was the government's priorities and reform agenda. Since the MoI has a tradition of responsiveness and a lack of power to resist the government, they had to make some regulations even if they might damage the power of prefectural class. Secondly, prefects have voluntarily adopted technological developments, even going so far as to play the pioneer role in Turkey's public life.

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<sup>9</sup> Reactiveness can be defined as 'opposite of incrementalism which refer[s] to change should [occur at a] slow pace instead of [in a] radical way to abolish past experience immediately' (Sen, 2015, p.29).

### ***Value of loyalty to minister***

I like the Mol's bureaucracy. They accept their ministers, regardless of political identity and personal background. They even sometimes exaggerated protocols for the sake of keeping my position high. (Former Minister 3, T1)

Turkey's overall administrative tradition is based on loyalty. It is widely believed that 'cheating ministers is a big sin' (Rhodes, 2011, p. 129). One of the quote represents this common opinion.

Regardless of their political identity, no prefects deliberately prepare wrong documents [against legality and political priorities etc.] and presents it to the minister to sign. (GD6, T1)

The findings show that the prefects will to support the minister to be a strong position.

I have spent 12-13 years of my life in the Ministry's Central Department. I saw that this bureaucracy has fulfilled their duties regarding the government's policies in a heartfelt way in order to strengthen their minister's position inside the government. (DU2, T1)

### ***Having a strict hierarchy and state protocol***

Everyone knows his place in the hierarchy of the Mol. (CI2, T1)

All of the participants agreed that the Mol is undoubtedly a hierarchical public department. Some of them understood that hierarchy positively, whereas some preferred to stress its harsh and detrimental characteristics, including its having barriers to speaking to the truth, improving innovative opinions and analytical skills, and strengthening command and control and the status quo.<sup>10</sup> The most striking comment made by one former minister:

During my era in the Mol, I observed that hierarchy was such a vital element for the public department that you could not govern that department using the logic of a private company. The Mol was one of the best ministries, having a strong hierarchy and a robust discipline. I do not consider hierarchy as a barrier; instead, given that everyone knows their own places, you can govern there more

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<sup>10</sup> i.e. DU2, FPPS3, LA4, T1.



successfully. (Former minister 2, TI)

Hierarchy could be observed in the everyday life of the MoI through its policy making process, as well as its intra- and inter-departmental relationships. Brotherhood of prefects inside the MoI does not break this strict rule. This strict hierarchy, however, sometimes is camouflaged as respect which, in turn, often prevents them from telling the truth; rather, they have to allude to their opinions whenever a superior-subordinate relationship exists.

Command and control is a reality inside the Turkish administrative system rooted in our patriarchal Asiatic culture.... Everything is decided by top [political administrators]. Objection to their ideas does not even exit. (GD1, TI)

On the other hand, command and control does not just consist of cons. Since the minister and senior prefects' leverage role has been so important for almost every issue, command and control could: (i) make things work faster; (ii) make things work in a more collaborative way; and (iii) break the resistance to some new duties which have not been internalised by the departments yet.

The Honourable Undersecretary values internal audits. With his support, we progressed relatively well. (HIA, TI)

Since command and control is so pervasive in the MoI, the prefects' accounts reveal that its decision-making system's flexibility is contingent on the top politico-administrators' personal will to share power with other actors. This phenomenon will be further examined in the next sub-section.

### ***Unwillingness to Share Power***

Seniors tend to behave timidly with regards to sharing power with juniors. Evidence shows that nothing has changed. One of the grey reports underlines this fact:

...most of the authority is still centralised. Thus, only the top senior level has most of the responsibilities. [Thus,] [t]he senior level, including ministers, have to tackle an overload of signatures (The MoI, 2008, p. 508).

One of the most important barriers was the current regulations, which gave the sole mandate to the minister. (Former minister 1, TI) This corresponds to



one of the recent research findings.

Particularly the legalistic philosophy of the state requires almost all changes to be carried out by new legislation and complicates the situation by adding further obstructing factors to the process (Varol, 2015, p. 162).

Secondly, risk awareness and the wish to make zero mistakes could trigger this anxiety. They believe that more documents mean more awareness. Participants who had been working in the inner circle as GDs and PPSs acknowledge that:

I suggested that he (minister) should issue an order in order to decrease the number of documents. He was convinced. I wrote up a regulation to delegate mostly routine task. I presented it to him. He told me, however, to 'hang on a second! Unless these documents come to me, how can I know what is happening at the Mol. Leave it now. I'll consider it later.' I got the message, and I never asked him about it again. (FGS1, T1)

The general unwillingness of superiors to give over their authority to their juniors relates to the capacities of the juniors as well. Not only important tasks but also some routine basic tasks had to be drafted by senior level prefects due to the lower level prefects and administrative staffs lacking enough analysis and writing skills amongst themselves as they complained.

Last, but more importantly, with exceptions, ministers mostly tend to keep power to themselves due to their being involved in daily political life and, more importantly, their willing to know and control everything about the Mol's daily activities in order to ensure political control, which are all rooted in Turkish administrative tradition.

### ***Field based solution practice***

Most of the accounts revealed that prefects' district experiences were based on solving daily issues conveyed by the central departments. Thus, the district governor's experiences shape their actions, policies and decisions. Most of the participants tended to use stories when they practiced as district governors in order to explain their behaviours, policy preferences and learning processes. I felt that they do not wish to lose their roots.



Since they knew the field and citizen life very well, the prefects were considered as field based problem-solver. (Yildiz\_FPPS3, T1).

The prefectural class is not problem-based but, rather, solution-based. They do not think about what problems would occur if they did something wrong; instead, they consider which solutions they could implement in order to tackle those issues. We felt that we were responsible for relieving the citizens' problems in advance. (Karaca\_LA4, T1)

The management paradigm was also rejected by all of the participants seeing as they do not see citizens as consumers. Rather, they all favoured a more human-oriented administration [not management] of service delivery.

The citizen as a customer! No! The citizen is not a customer for us. The citizen is the owner of the business! (DU1)

### ***The Mol's Reflexive, Firefighting (i.e. Crisis Management) Practices***

Most of the accounts acquired from the participants acknowledged that the Mol's reflective skills have improved in line with the government's priorities, new emergency situations, and daily political developments.

I hold the Mol in very high regard considering its ability to cope with unexpected issues. The majority of them could read the external environment and its crises. I benefitted from their skill at giving early warnings, which was rooted in their previous daily life experiences in the districts. Furthermore, they struggled as much as I did with ameliorating crises in an idealist manner. Therefore, I respected and valued their altruistic practicality. (Former Minister3, T1)

For hot issues, normal mechanisms work faster than during normal, casual times. The minister and undersecretary's attention and support accelerated this phase. Recently, the Syrian refugee crisis has been monitored by them very closely (LA3, T1). The Ministry established a new mechanism in order to tackle this issue. The territorial administration, administered by prefects, under the minister's authority also strengthened the implementation process (DU2, T1).

Since that crisis, sudden developments have become usual for the Mol to deal with. I observed that:

The prefects always monitor recent developments despite their busy daily lives. TVs were always on and the participant watched the news, especially the speeches made by the President and the Minister. (FWNB)

Since the ministry's responsibilities are so great, they have to anticipate developments which might pertain to their responsibilities.

The news mentioned that one committee of the EU will come to Turkey next week. We should anticipate that they will likely visit our Ministry. Thereby, we prepared the proper documents. (GD5, TI)

The MoI not only appointed people in case of new, emergent issues but also changed its structure as such. During the post-2002 period, the MoI established new departments and units (e.g. Centre of Research, Department of Strategy, and the EU Department) in line with its meeting the essential step of adapting to the new reform era. Likewise, unexpected and new issues have made the MoI reflective and has led to its introducing new units. For example, in the past, immigration was not a big issue for the MoI until the Syrian Refugee crisis; nevertheless, in just three years' time, the Immigration Bureau has turned into an enormous department of its own right. Furthermore, technological developments, and especially cyberterrorism, have triggered the establishment of a Department of IT with a huge budget.

It should be noted that the reflective skill has been associated with the MoI's firefighting competence. Firefighting refers to the ability to administrate (domesticate) crises.

Firstly, we should accept the reality that the best definition for the MoI is a ministry which manages crises. You cannot say that we simply sit around making lengthy strategic plans like the Agricultural or Cultural Ministries do. You do not have a comfortable seat [at the MoI]. A bomb explodes in one place; at another, you face natural disasters and an influx of refugees. At the same time, you have to respond to all of those problems and deal with them. Namely, you are in a place in which crisis management permanently occurs. (FPPS1, TI)

The crisis administration process does not start unless the issues become blind. Namely, if an issue needs intervention, the MoI interferes with it.



Participants did not blame top political-administrators since they are always busy with other blind issues. (GD5, TI)

As always, the motto of coping and surviving determines the level of intervention given to any situation. As one participant noted:

Of course, intervention is just to ward off those things instead of solving the problem fundamentally. (Avsarbey\_CI3, TI)

For both the Ministry and its actors, the current events and emerging issues which require firefighting determine everyday life at the Ministry. This is rooted in the prefects' district field experiences. The prefects, who constitutes the majority of the MoI's administrators, incline to focus on day-to-day administrative issues due to their experience as provincial administrators, where both crisis management and problem solving held priority. There, urgent issues always had priority over important, bureaucratic issues.

The Minister, his top senior team, and his inner circle have to deal with daily issues. Recently, terror and migration were the main issues that the Ministry attended to. Therefore, the MoI requires a flexible, rather than a long-term and plan-based, administration. The opinion that "there is no tomorrow" was expressed by most of the participants.

You cannot plan for something for ten years in Turkey. Everything could change in three months. You have to accept the fact that we have no chance to manage the agenda in Turkey due to the stemming geography and rapid changes which occur. Therefore, we have to take reactionary steps. (CI4, TI)

Therefore, their routines and programs (meetings, visits, preparation of regulations, evaluations, etc.) are arranged according to these priorities. These findings show similar concerns with their international counterparts.

The APS [Australian Public Sector] may have become too reactive, too focused on the short-term and the delivery of tasks, and unable to generate the range of new ideas that it might have liked (Tiernan, 2015, p. 215).

Prefects feel this pressure immensely. While most of them internalised this situation, they complained about the last-minute atmosphere which exists. They

wished to administer the agenda casually. For instance, one stressed that they could not implement some strategic plans because unexpected events oftentimes forced the ministry to take actions exactly contrariwise to their strategic aims.

Recent experiences in Turkey have shown that we sometimes cannot support the policies which we had made into our strategic plan. The MoI must deal with responsibilities in a dynamic environment. So, you are not allowed to maintain daily administrative operations consistent with the strategic plan. (Former\_GD1, TI)

This daily struggle not only damages the strategic aspect of the MoI, but also plays a role in triggering stress and tensions. The next section will examine this side of working at the MoI.

### ***A Busy Everyday Life: The Stressful Work Atmosphere***

There is no such thing as a typical day. All days come with surprise, with stress with last minutes changes (Rhodes, 2011a, p. 75).

The MoI has had wide range duties and coordinator role in the Turkish public administration, especially crisis management due to the governing territorial administration. Thereby, the MoI and its top political-administrators should work almost 24/7 since their agendas are always busy. Recently, the terror and migration issues, have overburdened the MoI's roles. Ministers feel this overburden more than others. If ministers work, prefects should work as well. Undersecretaries, GDs, and the minister's inner circle especially must always be ready to respond to his demands and fulfil his orders regardless of time restrictions.

For the most part, their work time is not standard. They can work for long hours until midnight, even during the weekends. Anyways, their moods become increasingly exhausted because of their workloads. These senior and key supporting personnel are traditionally not allowed to go home until they deal with any particular problem. Tomorrow, maybe a new issue might arise and continue their being restless for longer.<sup>11</sup> I observed that:

After the normal working time, senior prefects were waiting in their PPS's

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<sup>11</sup> GD1, GD2, GD8, GD3, FPPS3, FPPS2FGS2, TI.



office or their own offices for the purpose of either responding to or giving an explanation or taking orders from their superiors until their Minister and Undersecretary left the Ministry. (FWNB)

While it seems time consuming, it has been beneficial for strengthening intra-departmental coordination and avoiding failures and entertaining any contradictory views regarding the Minister's aims.

A busy daily life forces them to work after normal working times. Even at weekends, they preferred to come and complete their job or, at best, read reports and prepare special documents without the interference of visitors or phone calls which they usually experience throughout the official work week. They mostly confirmed that this is the best time for thinking and analysing.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, the administrative practices of the Ministry was internalised by its members, with them feeling extremely stressed.

The Ministry has been engaging with a more political, consistently hot, very busy agenda. We have been working under constant stress, thereby causing within us intense panic. (GD1, TI)

Speed is required, but speed reduces the quality of their work. Moreover, some papers — even those vital for the department — could be ignored by the top because of their busy firefighting daily agenda. Thus, the stress is constant for those who work at the Ministry. The long quotation below is important for demonstrating their interaction with daily routine.

If you want information, they must bring it as soon as possible. GDs thought 'The Undersecretary is waiting for me. I need to go to him in the shortest possible time.' Otherwise, as PPS, I have to push him to be in a hurry; he pushes his juniors as well. Everyone joins the stressful game. Anyway, they prepare something in order to get rid of stress regardless of quality and further consideration. They know that the person who fulfils orders in the shortest amount of time will be considered the "best man." (FPPS3, TI)

Ministerial discretion and a lack of devolution with juniors are other issues that cause stress. The heads of department need to receive top political-

<sup>12</sup> DGD2, CI2, GD5, TI.

administrators' approval. It means waiting a long time to meet with them and explain their aims and priorities. The stress which is caused during this waiting, or uncertain, phase made some more tired than when they were faced with their heavy daily tasks.

Nevertheless, most of them claimed that their field experience and daily life practices enable them to handle the stress. Besides their adaptation skills, they believed that dealing with different tasks in their daily life helped to keep them alive and ensure their concentration (FGS3, TI).

Gaining the support of the minister is another main aim that they have which helps them to endure all of the stress.

### ***Risk Awareness (Zero Mistake Pressure)***

All participants stress that the fact that they do not have a chance to make mistakes. This forces them to be aware at all times, especially with regards to unforeseeable issues. They have to be ready to respond, especially to the minister and his\her deputies' preferences and demands.

Although some asserted opposite views,<sup>13</sup> some participants similarly pointed out that prefects avoid speaking the truth to power; instead, they tell them whatever the minister wishes to hear.

Ideas that the minister would not wish to hear or which are seen to be against the government's programmes and priorities would be unwelcomed. This discourages prefects from speaking from their hearts. (CI3, TI)

This is because, if they wish to keep their position, or even be promoted to a better position, they are required to be cautious and harmonise with the current situation (GD6, TI). A lack of correlation between promotion and performance measurement, rather than political patronage relations, supports this opinion (CI6, TI).

Risk awareness feeds the necessity for caution, intuition, secrecy and a lack of trust with anybody for your personal record.

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<sup>13</sup> Former Minister 1 and Former Minister, Besir Atalay, told me that they enjoyed listening to different views without any hindrance.



Successors observe and draw lessons from this experience that make them more cautious. (FGD2, TI)

In line with both the International literature (see Tiernan, 2015 and Mulgan, 2009), the Turkish literature, and some accounts of my participants underlined that ministerial style is also not very willing to take risks. Ministers are inclined to save their chair just like prefects, especially given the effects of the external political environment, such as the rising dominance of the President, the unpredictability of Turkish political and daily life, the pressure of the media, endless reform sinfonias etc.

### ***Speak the Truth to Power***

Speaking the truth to power is an important indicator of risk awareness in everyday practices. Most participants related the opinion that prefects have not been able to express its views freely because of the ministry's strictly hierarchal control, anxiety regarding the loss of their positions, etc.

In addition, however, even though the tradition of the brotherhood of the prefects provides better coordination, better informal training, and better solidarity, this fraternal tradition makes the MoI less internally argumentative and decreases the likelihood of having debates about issues since, as some participants have asserted, differing opinions could be perceived as being disrespectful behaviour by seniors.

They [the prefects] are generally respectful of seniors in this context and do not project any such negative behaviours, such as disrespectful acts, and will not posit many objections! (FGD2, TI)

The findings corroborate this. The following comments highlight this dimension and place more stress on hierarchy:

Our council meeting is headed by the undersecretary. Since hierarchy exists, bargaining does not take place at those meetings. (DU2, TI)

This experience transfers to other generations to such an extent that one deputy undersecretary labelled this phenomenon as a kind of "learned helplessness" (DU2, TI). The administrative tradition feeds political leadership.



Most of the participants confirmed this. In other words, prefects, who lead their districts using command and control, also dislike objections. This feeds a lack of toleration for, and protection of, people who think differently from the majority.<sup>14</sup>

It is not easy to control people who think differently or in an opposite way than you do. This is true even of me. On the one hand, everybody tells you, 'You can fly! You are so smart!' You like them. On the other hand, these *sui generis* people assert that 'You can neither fly nor succeed. You cannot even walk properly!' That attitude humiliates you and breaks your pride. You hate them. (FGD1)

The minister's style is important. If the minister tends to listen, that encourages the prefects to speak up. If not, though, they prefer to remain silent:

If our political master behaves as if he knows everything, we do not talk. How can you explain something to someone who believes that he knows everything better than everyone else? (GD6, T1)

Most times, prefects expect their seniors or ministers to encourage them. One participant shared the following story:

The meeting was chaired by the undersecretary. He knew the Mol. The members of the meeting began to talk respectfully. While a group of GDs were talking, the undersecretary interfered and invited them to explain their "real opinion freely." It was at that moment that the meeting's atmosphere, with the members presenting relatively radical ideas. Even someone who had talked before wished to talk again and amend their views. (GD6, T1)

Furthermore, the prefects have a political nous. They know that, if the government has a set of priorities or if recent events are pressuring the ministry, they should not work against the minister's top-down policies (LA4, T1). Protecting the minister and the Mol are still the foremost values for all prefects. For example, one former minister confirmed that:

The prefects know what the minister can and cannot do. They did not do anything that would have disturbed my position. During this period, I felt this protective manner that they had for me. (Former Minister 3, T1)

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<sup>14</sup> C13, FGD1, GD6, GD5, T1.



Yet, in sum, of course, their idealism and amateur spirit has been revealed in the findings; nonetheless, they mostly have not had enough chances or courage to speak the truth to power and demonstrate their capacity. The Mol's administrative tradition is dominated by other characteristics of Turkish administrative tradition (strict hierarchy, political control), which is a vital barrier to their improvement and ability to show their competency.

***Pragmatism for knowledge and academic studies: value for experience, not evidence based policy***

A pragmatic approach is adopted with regards to the value for knowledge and academic studies vis-à-vis an evidence-based policy and decision-making manner. Nevertheless, these findings have revealed that the Mol's pragmatism could not be understood as being Machiavellian in manner. Instead, its main aims are to provide solutions and make the life of the public easier.

***Incremental error correction for surprises, not systematic evaluation***

The Mol does not have an administrative practice of systematically analysing the results of any policy that they have implemented. Instead, the Mol inclined to evaluate and amend solutions during their implementations. Gaining feedback about the problems that occurred from those solutions has been a priority mechanism rather than monitoring and evaluating them in a structural manner. Thus, acting upon complaints is perceived to be an important characteristic of the Mol (and Turkish) bureaucracy. They claimed that everything could not be planned during the policy-making phase and asked 'how could you know or predict outcomes without implementation?' (GD5, TI).

***The Ministry of the Prefectural Class: A brotherhood tradition rooted in shared field experience***

Prefects, which have a unique philosophy and vocational virtue, were seen as being natural (administrative) leaders in Turkish public administration and Mol administration. Findings confirmed that the prefectural class also determines the bureaucratic policy capacity of the ministry. Solidarity — aka the "brotherhood of prefects" — has consistently been its foremost value.

You know that there has been some competition amongst the prefects

and their departments. Imagine that one department [also its head] had a rough time and that the others did not attempt to benefit from their weakness and that they, rather, tried to support them like a family member in order to recover their position. Once one of them “gets into the soup,” their solidarity will be revealed. (DU2, TI)

Furthermore, the findings derived from the interviews, documents and observations from the Ministry seem to acknowledge that neither street level bureaucrats<sup>15</sup> nor administrative staffs hold the key role regarding the MoI’s administration. Instead, the administrative staff role was framed as doing ordinary bureaucratic things, supporting technical issues and fulfilling administrators’ orders by the majority of the prefects. A few expressed their opinion in an ironic fashion, stressing that analysis and thinking were to be considered as solely prefects’ job.

The administrative staff are responsible for serving the prefects and understanding their orders correctly; in other words, their “just doing them.” Their duty is not to think but just do. (FGS2, TI)

According to the administrative staff’s perspective, however, they respect and mostly internalise the leadership role of the prefects, they feel like stepchildren. (GS of the Union, TI) They stressed that the lack of opportunity to promote themselves to upper levels and receiving awards diminished their motivation and organisational policy capacity.

In sum, the prefects still have a monopoly role inside the MoI while a few political advisors, who are mostly prefects, have supportive roles. Findings revealed that prefects could mostly provide the minister with the advice necessary to reach a decision in a restricted, policy-making area, although speaking the truth to the seniors was identified as an issue that cause a limit to bureaucratic administrative capacity.

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<sup>15</sup> See Page and Jenkins, 2005.



## 2. THE TURKISH ADMINISTRATIVE TRADITION AND BUREAUCRATIC CAPACITY

In this section, I will argue impact of the Turkish Administrative Tradition on bureaucratic capacity of MoI. With regards to the MoI's administrative tradition;

Including security-based and strict hierarchical structure, political control, and risk awareness could limit to policy capacity, while field-based solution practice, being a pioneering ministry, coping with and surviving pressure, and prefectoral altruism could drive improvements in policy capacity.

Being a strong coordinative and pioneer ministry, despite of some concerns, the MoI has an adequate administrative policy capacity to address their wide-ranging traditional tasks. Both informal internal diplomacy and personal training have been used to mitigate deficiency of training, coordination and collaboration within the MoI. Lack of appropriate collaboration and shared IM within the MoI are still barriers which are signs of the limits to policy capacity.

The goal of everyday practices within the MoI is to cope with and survive existing pressures. However, it should be noted that the MoI needs to address and every changing environment and persistent complex issues, such as Kurdish terror attacks, ISIS, and Syrian Refuge crises. The MoI can only continue to successfully address these challenges because of the storage of past experiences and strong tradition despite of having issue of shared IM. Their main aim is that of coping and surviving in a dynamic and unpredictable internal and external environment. Prefects are mostly considered as successful with how they are able to tackle that challenge.

Having territorial (field) administrations, prefects —their shared field experience and their brotherhood tradition — is the hearth of the MoI public administration. This could be interpreted as the prefects being the backbone of the MoI. Their field experiences likely affect MoI's policies and decisions as well as informal training and internal diplomacy. Namely, MoI's practices and the relations amongst both the senior and low levels prefects are determined by a special tradition of brotherhood, even the prefectoral minister is perceived as being the father of the Ministry rather than as a political boss. The prefectoral ministers are especially trusted in the prefects since they are their colleagues.

Brotherhood of prefects generates the respect of others, solidarity, trust, and self-confidence in line with the MoI's protocols that strengthen bureaucratic administrative and political policy capacity.

Loyalty and a willingness to support the minister to have a strong position and are the foremost values which could strengthen trust between the ministers and prefects whereas their too responsiveness to political demand rather than (sometimes) avoid speaking the truth to minister could be interpreted as a limit to policy capacity. This is still a great issue for the MoI.

The MoI has a very busy everyday life and a stressful work atmosphere because its having a wide range of duties, as well as a strong coordinative and pioneering role within the Turkish public administration system. That could limit to advisory policy capacity, analytical policy capacity as well.

Error correction for surprises, not systematic evaluation and having a pragmatism for knowledge and academic studies, rather than its having an evidence-based policy or decision-making manner has both pros and cons.

In sum, robust administrative tradition has both pros and cons regarding bureaucratic policy capacity.

### **3. THE TURKISH ADMINISTRATIVE TRADITION VERSUS PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORMS**

Persistent top-down public administration reforms have aimed to shift the mentality of the Turkish public administration towards the New Public Management story due to several reasons including attaining a more effective, efficient, strategic and performance based public administration. I found that this attempt has mostly had a negligible impact on the practice and tasks of MoI namely, triumph of Weberian and prefectural tradition over reform pressure. This was because:

1. They did not align with the MoI's tradition and classical, secrecy and security-based tasks. Considering the tasks of the MoI and its role in the Turkish administration, most of the reforms were not expected to be put into practice. This was confirmed by one former minister, who had had a leading role in the preparation of these reforms.



2. Personal administration shows traditional character, not based on objective character. Assessing prefects' performance still belong to senior political and administrators' discretion. Furthermore, it should be stressed that neither the prefects were regarded as managers, nor Mol has been seen as a private company dominated by the several complex management schemes.

3. At the face of challenges, I observed the adoption of traditional bureaucratic routines—cope and survive through informal diplomacy, a method learned from institutional memory—rather than the utilisation of crisis management techniques. This can be seen as “triumph of tradition”.

4. Prefects who rejected of politicisation still had a monopoly of advisory and administrative roles and kept their senior position and brotherhood tradition.

5. Mostly, Ministers remained unwilling to take risks and undertake reforms.

6. The research showed that new units had to comply with the Mol's tradition, otherwise, they are likely to encounter resistance.

7. Accountability, monitoring and evaluating policies and decision pointed out traditional character such as hierarchical control of undersecretary and minister rather than systematic evaluation.

On the other hand, it should be noted that this research does not claim that these top-down reforms had no impact on Mol's administration, viz. policy capacity, specifically regarding the local administration and information technology, and good governance reforms. Indeed, the prefects and some ministers internalised and put some reforms into practice if the reforms complied with Mol's tradition. For instance, some good governance tools (i.e. being human- based) were welcomed and internalised since they complied with the administrative tradition, however, some good governance tools, including participation, transparency have not adequately put into practice because of clashing with secrecy and the state notion of the Turkish administrative tradition. Rather, they started to adopt tokenistic actions to satisfy laws and regulations.

## CONCLUSION

There is a persistence and triumph of the Turkish administrative tradition against reform pressure. Despite several official papers and rhetoric used by political actors; prefects as well as some ministers rejected this pressure either explicitly or implicitly relying on the leverage from the strong MoI tradition. “Things happens as usual.” In detail, this article aims to make outsiders aware of the importance of the oral administrative tradition determined by unique (brotherhood) tradition of prefects within the MoI as well as MoI’s unique tasks within the Turkish public administration. Seeing as the MoI has had to survive in a dynamic environment with many persistent, crucial issues, such as Kurdish terror attacks, ISIS, the Syrian Refuge crises, etc., the MoI could keep going on successfully due to its having a large storage of past experiences coupled with an adamant-like tradition.



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