

The Turkish state's GAP hocus-pocus

The Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) goes back many years. However, it was only in the 1980s that it started to materialize. Former president Süleyman Demirel laid claim to it, saying “They can’t snatch it away from me” with reference to the then prime minister Turgut Özal. The GAP project was presented as the panacea for the long-neglected southeastern region of Turkey, the world champion in regional inequality. Even more importantly, GAP was supposed to serve as a levee against the rising tide of the Kurdish movement, as the locals would no longer support “a bunch of bandits”, once they had jobs and food.

Likened to a “charming bride”, GAP was meant to generate electricity from the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, and provide irrigation to arid swathes of land. This was an urgent concern for Turkish capitalism, heavily dependent on foreign providers of electricity. Besides, irrigation would boost the growth of agricultural capitalism and support a thriving food industry, which would bring civilization to these backward lands.

In practice, however, energy projects were prioritized while irrigation was given a back seat. From the 1980s until the 2000s, GAP accounted for around 7% of total Turkish public investment. GAP was purportedly a regional development project, however, consecutive governments shaped it according to their own interests. They gave top priority to dam construction and hydroelectric power, which would not benefit the region directly in the short run. The energy generated by GAP dams came to provide 7% of the total electricity generated in Turkey; however, irrigation projects advanced very slowly and just 15% of the total was completed by the end of 2007.

GAP Action Plan and its results

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) government announced its “Kurdish opening” in 2009 with great fanfare, yet this grand initiative bit the dust in no time. One component of this failed attempt was the GAP Action Plan. The “opening” has been a failure as far as GAP is concerned. Only the half of total funds required to meet the targets were provided. As a result, in the period of 2008-2012, only slightly more than half of the total investment target was reached.

GAP's total financial cost had been calculated

as TL 41.2 billion in 2008 prices. Nonetheless only TL 26 billion was spent by the end of 2007, which corresponded to 62.2%. What would follow?

It was back in 2008 that the government had launched the GAP Action Plan, also described it as “the economic component of the Kurdish opening”. A planned TL 27 billion would be spent from 2008 till 2012 to achieve the targets set.

Some of the funding was to be generated from outside the general budget. Even as the public asked “from where?”, AKP tapped into Unemployment Insurance Fund and took out TL 10 billion TL from the funds supposed to be allocated to the unemployed, from 2008 till 2012. The Ministry of Development states that total funds spent on the Action Plan amount to TL 20 billion as of end-2012. Half of this total comes from the central budget, and the other half from Unemployment Fund. Accordingly, over one quarter of the TL 27 billion of spending envisaged in the Action Plan has yet to materialize. The financial overview of the second Action Plan in preparation phase has not been revealed; however, additional costs are expected and the state might reach into Unemployment Fund a second time.

What were the targets of the failed plan? GAP Action Plan allocated to irrigation 43% of its TL 27 billion in total investments. Energy investments again took an important share with 12%. Education accounted for only 11%, and health for less than 4%.

There were setbacks in irrigation projects, described as follows in the 2013 Program: “In the latest five-year period from 2007 till 2011, an annual average of 69 thousand hectares of land was without irrigation due to insufficient water supply, which points at the need for efficiency in water use. Besides, the climate change requires us to revise our plans in irrigation to prevent water scarcity.”

The plans are being revised so as to complete in the period of 2013-2017 all those actions left incomplete in the GAP Action Plan 2008-2012.

Although touted as a regional development project, GAP always prioritized energy projects rather than regional requirements. Even if the irrigation system is completed in the future, any advance in irrigated farming will mainly benefit large landowners owing to the immense inequality in land ownership. The very limited investment underway in other social areas, left



Mustafa Sönmez

Upon graduating from Middle East Technical University in 1978, Mustafa Sönmez worked as an expert and researcher at All Economists' Union (TİB), trade unions affiliated to DİSK, and various other agencies. He contributed to numerous newspapers and news magazines as columnist and editor-in-chief, and authored over twenty books on the Turkish economy. Since 2009, he is a columnist at Cumhuriyet.

Financial Overview of the GAP Action Plan (TL thousand)					
Action	Total Funding Required	Funds Earmarked at the Present (*)	Additional Funding Needed at the End of Action Plan	Funding Outside the Central Budget	Planned Additional Funding from Central Budget 2008-2012
I. Economic development	1.344.213	247.377	1.096.836	0	1.096.836
Centers of attraction	265.000	0	265.000	0	265.000
Incentive policies	0	0	0	0	265.000
SME support and clustering	110.000	50.000	60.000	0	60.000
Technoparks	6.000	0	6.000	0	6.000
Culture and tourism	192.024	62.170	129.854	0	129.854
Natural resources and renewable energy	79.039	33.207	45.832	0	45.832
Agriculture	692.150	102.000	590.150	0	590.150
II. Social development	5.114.770	2.416.618	2.698.152	0	2.698.152
Education	3.014.622	1.955.472	1.059.150	0	1.059.150
Employment	347.819	8.490	339.329	0	339.329
Health	999.190	412.000	587.190	0	587.190
Social services and assistance	345.839	11.756	334.083	0	334.083
Culture, arts, sports	407.300	28.900	378.400	0	378.400
III. Infrastructure	20.099.067	4.622.808	15.476.259	4.882.046	10.594.213
Irrigation	11.323.949	600.000	10.723.949	1.939.398	8.784.551
Energy	3.279.579	1.710.931	1.568.648	1.568.648	0
Transport	1.977.550	610.108	1.367.442	0	1.367.442
Social physical infrastructure	3.517.989	1.701.769	1.816.220	1.374.000	442.220
IV. Institutional capacity building	121.125	200	120.925	0	120.925
Local governments and regional institutions	121.125	200	120.925	0	120.925
GAP regional development	0	0	0	0	0
Additional reserves	22.890	0	22.890	0	22.890
Sum Total	26.702.065	7.287.003	19.415.062	4.882.046	14.533.016

(*) The ordinary requirement for reserves calculated previously according to the total project inventory, without taking the Action Plan into account.

Source: Ministry of Development

incomplete due to a supposed lack of funds, cannot give a boost to social welfare.

Anything besides energy and irrigation?

Does the GAP project feature anything other than energy and irrigation? A number of other schemes were added to the project later on, such as the Social Support Program (SODES). The progress in this direction is outlined in the 2013 Program as follows:

“Launched by the Ministry of Development in 2008 in 9 provinces of GAP so as to support human capital and social cohesion, Social Support Program (SODES) is geared toward further integrating disadvantaged social groups into social and economic life; and to enable local youth and women to better express themselves through culture, arts and sports. The program gives support to projects in social inclusion, culture and arts, sports, as well as employment, and was extended in 2010 to cover 16 other provinces under the Eastern Anatolia Project (DAP) 2010 and again in 2011 to include Adana, Mersin, Hatay, Osmaniye and Kahramanmaraş

as a pilot scheme, bringing the total number of provinces to 30. In the period of 2008-2012, a total of TL 674 million was allocated to 5,792 SODES projects developed locally under the coordination of governorships.”

TL 674 million for five years amounts to throwing the locals a bone –a matter of keeping up the appearances.

Yet another such program for show concerns animal husbandry. In Turkey, the price of red meat is on the rise due to the shortage of supply. The government opted for suppressing domestic prices via importation of livestock and meat, rather than supporting livestock breeding. As a result, during the year 2011 and the first eight months of 2012, roughly 500 thousand cattle, 1,7 million sheep, and 132 thousand tons of red meat were imported. However, Turkey must expand its domestic livestock, in particular sheep, in order to increase red meat production, and animal husbandry must be supported especially in Southeastern and Eastern Turkey.

Does GAP actually exist?

Does the Southeastern Anatolia Project really correspond to anything on the ground? In fact there isn't really a plan entitled GAP, and GAP Administration can hardly be said to have any clout.

Whenever the word GAP is mentioned, one tends to think that there is actually a plan and an

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accompanying budget covering the nine provinces, under the supervision of the GAP Administration. It is thought that the TL 35 billion spent until now was part of an overreaching GAP plan, supervised by GAP Administration. It couldn't be further from truth! Yes, there are large dams and power plants which account for 6 to 7% of the total national electricity generation. There are indeed irrigation channels in construction and other projects inching along, eventually meant to supply water to thousands of hectares of land. However, these projects are not carried out under some GAP plan or agency. GAP Administration is nothing but a screen; yet one with a 250-strong workforce and an annual budget of TL 50 million. All public investment destined for the southeastern provinces are determined by the central government, just like in other provinces, and funded by relevant public agencies. State Hydraulic Works (DSİ) is in charge of all investment in dams and channels, General Directorate of Highways (KGM) in highways, Ministry of National Education in schools, etc.

So, what purpose does GAP Administration serve? It is so to speak the “pretender” in an orchestra formed by investment agencies such as DSİ and KGM under the baton of the Council of Ministers. GAP Administration appears on stage and pretends to sing, but does not really play any role. Its true purpose is to enable the government to present all projects in the southeastern provinces as an investment drive for regional development. Investments to individual provinces are gathered under a single umbrella on paper and showcased as an overarching project to help an underdeveloped region flourish. This is an illusion. That is because, there is no regional plan, regional development concept, nor an instance of investment fully in charge. Even if the GAP Administration were to vanish into thin air overnight, all projects in the southeastern provinces would continue uninterrupted. However its absence would spoil the desired illusion.

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of deception. It serves the purpose of dissuading the locals from revolting. It is a magic mantra supposed to convince the masses. GAP is supposed to be indisputable. A case in point: As mentioned above, the AKP government tapped into Unemployment Insurance Fund and took out a total of TL 9 billion. “GAP investments” provided a perfect excuse for confiscation of funds for the unemployed. Most of us, unaware of the inner workings of the state, and even numerous parliamentarians thought that these funds were really allocated to some “GAP budget”. Well, there is no such budget. The confiscated funds were added to the central budget pool. Thus, the name “GAP” was simply used as an excuse to avoid any criticism, and the AKP government could decrease the budget deficit thanks to the GAP illusion. Otherwise, the government would have to allocate money to GAP projects, and thus inflate the deficit.

Even as all investments to the southeastern provinces are presented as “regional GAP investments” through this hocus-pocus, their true purpose is to meet the energy demand of well-established capitalist production in the west. Irrigation projects, an urgent need for regional farming, take but a tiny share from the total and they are only 15% complete. At the final act of this vaudeville, which will continue with years of consolation meant to leave the local population grateful to the central government, irrigation projects will benefit mainly large landowners, and poor Kurds will simply become the salaried slaves of rich Kurds.

The actors of true regional development must be local, not central. Regional objectives must be set with the participation of local actors, municipalities, and organizations, executed by local bodies, and controlled jointly by central and local agencies. GAP never was a regional plan, it never served regional development

The immense inequality of land ownership		
	Number of Farms	Share of Total Land (Decare %)
Turkey	3076650	184348232
Families without land	1.8	0
Small landowners	32.2	5.3
Medium landowners	64.7	83.3
Large landowners	1.3	11.3
Diyarbakır	50743	4201714
Families without land	13.6	0
Small landowners	28.6	4.1
Medium landowners	54.5	54.7
Large landowners	3.3	41.2
Şanlıurfa	51747	9821677
Families without land	0.6	0
Small landowners	26.4	3.6
Medium landowners	71.5	71.3
Large landowners	1.5	28.7

Source: TÜİK, 2001 Agricultural Survey Database

and will never do so. It always excluded local actors, and refused to meet local needs. Nonetheless there is and will continue to be demands for locally-based democratic development in the southeast and other Turkish regions. We need to ponder much more on participative, democratic and egalitarian models of growth focused on the local, without being deceived by the GAP illusion.

GAP lands and inequality

Land ownership and agricultural production relations form the essence of the political economy of the Kurdish problem. That is because agriculture plays a key role in the regional economy, and despite massive migration from rural to urban areas, agriculture and relevant industries seem set to dominate the region for years to come.

Southeastern Turkey boasts vast swathes of land with a high potential. According to the Turkish Statistical Institute's (TÜİK) Agricultural Survey of 2001, these lands have rich water sources above and under the ground, and account for 10% of the national landmass. Economically irrigable lands, on the other hand, constitute 20% of the national total. GAP covers a total of 3.2 million hectares of arable land. Of this total, 1,7 million hectares are irrigable, whereas the remainder is used for dryland farming. The GAP Action Plan for 2008-2012 set the objective of irrigating a total of 1 million 60 thousand hectares of land and the construction of 1232 kilometers of irrigation channels. However, construction is underway in just one half of the total.

What about land ownership? In the region, Diyarbakır and Şanlıurfa are the champions of inequality in land ownership. According to the agricultural survey by TÜİK, landless families and those with little land (22 thousand families) account for 42% of the total in Diyarbakır. These own just 4% of the entire land area. However, just 3% of Diyarbakır families control 41% of the total land. In a similar vein, in Şanlıurfa, too, just 1.5% of families control close to 30% of the entire land of 10 million decares.

The high land concentration visible in Diyarbakır and Şanlıurfa is the legacy of feudal land ownership dating back centuries. Land reform has been a burning issue throughout republican history. No government could dare launch a land reform that would arouse the ire of rich landowners, or "agha". Despite the

occasional fragmentation of land due to inheritance issues and the transformation of large landowners into an urban bourgeoisie, the yawning disparity in land ownership still necessitates a land reform in the southeast. Who can carry it out? The AKP government strives to form an alliance with Kurdish large landowners, rather than struggle against them, especially since Kurdish feudal lords are expected to

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become agricultural capitalists after the completion of the irrigation network.

The Kurdish political movement, which initially had an anti-feudal discourse and was based on the poor peasantry, became increasingly "nationalist" in time, refrained from settling accounts with Kurdish lords, and pushed the provision of land to poor peasants towards the very bottom of its political program.

The Kurdish population is of rural origins. Most of them have fled their villages due to war and famine, and huddled in cities as unemployed masses. Yet still 45% of the southeastern population lives in rural areas and most with little or no land.

The key to decreasing unemployment in the region, which officially stands above 15%, is a return to agriculture. An effective land reform will entail the distribution to peasants of two million hectares of land zoned by the state, and land confiscated from large landowners. Then peasants will be able to come together under democratic cooperatives and manage production and marketing, and take loans.

Then there is the mined terrain of the region. These normally productive lands cover 13,600 hectares. These, too, can be distributed to landless peasants once they are cleared of mines. The de-mining operation has been left to the Turkish Armed Forces, and is supposed to be funded from the central budget. However, as of end-2012, no concrete action was taken.