Turkish Big Business in the Age of Democratic Consolidation:

The Nature and Limits of its Influence

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Abstract

The article addresses the nature and limits of the contribution of big business to democratic consolidation by focusing on the role of TÜSİAD, the major association of big business interests in Turkey, during the country's democratisation process in the 2000s. While TÜSİAD has been an important pro-democratisation actor, big business's contribution to the consolidation process is contingent on the broader institutional and political environment. The issues of secularism and EU membership prospects play an important role in Turkish politics and in understanding TÜSİAD's stance, as they have constrained its ability to act as the vanguard of democratisation reforms.

Keywords: *Democracy; European integration; civil society; economic actors; business associations; globalisation; Turkey*

The relationship between big business and democratisation remains controversial throughout the world. It would be unfair to claim that big business in Turkey was at any stage a supporter of authoritarian rule, but its commitment to democracy remained ambiguous, especially during the democratisation experience of the 1970s and the 1980s. Criticisms from big business were among the factors that led to the collapse of Bülent Ecevit's government in 1979. No similar reactions against the military government were evident after the coup of September 1980, which suggests that substantial segments of big business were not distraught with the 1980-83 authoritarian interlude (Arat 1991). However, from the late 1990s onwards, big business has emerged as one of the main supporters of Turkish democratisation. TÜSİAD (*Türk Sanayicileri ve İşadamları Derneği* – Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association) became the main non-governmental organisation focusing on democracy issues, suggesting a significant transformation in its attitude.

What is unclear from past research is the extent to which big business will support democratisation. This is a crucial topic as democratic consolidation is still a major issue on the agenda. Despite the high number of democracies today and the dominant position of big business in late-industrialising societies, questions on the durability of democracy remain, as

indicated, for example, by the 2006 Thailand coup. Some new democracies appear deficient in dimensions such as personal liberties and accountability and have been referred to as 'illiberal democracies' (Zakaria 1997). This situation was reflected in the Freedom House index (2008) in which 60 countries were classified as partly free in 2007. Only 48 of all the 90 countries listed as free received top marks for political rights and civil liberties.

As business associations play an important role in late-industrialising societies, it is necessary to understand their position regarding democratisation. We focus here on TÜSİAD, a voluntary interest association representing Turkish big business, which arguably has emerged as the most vocal element within the Turkish business community in its push for democratisation reforms and the process of Turkey's full-EU membership. TÜSİAD's role has been significant, both in the process leading to the formal recognition of Turkey's EU candidacy in 1999 and in the major wave of Europeanisation reforms accomplished in the subsequent era (Öniş & Türem 2002).

Turkey is an interesting case when compared with other South European countries which are now recognised as having attained democratic persistence (Gunther et al. 1995). Despite three brief interruptions, key features associated with democracy, such as regular, free, and fair elections continue, but questions remain about Turkish democracy. Thus, Freedom House (2008) assessed Turkey as partly free in 2007, with scores for political rights and civil liberties just outside of the free category.

Building on previous work (Öniş & Türem 2002; Öniş 2005), we examine TÜSİAD's contribution to the process of democratic consolidation in Turkey in the post-2002 era, under the government of AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* - Justice and Development Party), by drawing on a variety of empirical evidence. The key question is the extent to which TÜSİAD was able to confront controversial issues relating to the process of democratic consolidation and deepening in Turkey. We identify five crucial areas of reform: (a) the establishment of civilian control over the military; (b) the extension of minority rights, particularly in relation to the Kurdish problem, (c) the secularism and religious freedoms debate; (d) initiatives in the direction of constitutional reform to eliminate authoritarian legacies; and (e) the extension of social rights and specifically, women's rights. We find that TÜSİAD's impact has been rather limited. We provide a broad analytical framework based on the notion of intra-elite conflicts to explain why a major organisation like TÜSİAD was not able to exert a greater influence on the nature and depth of the democratic consolidation process. However, before turning to examine the Turkish case study in more depth, we will first consider the role of business in democratisation.

Big Business: Contributor Or Brakeman On The Path To Democratisation?

The basic features of democracy are competition and participation (Dahl 1971). Democracies entail more than regular, free, and fair elections: accountability, citizenship, and rule of law are also crucial features. Many of these elements are still lacking globally and democratic consolidation remains a distant goal in most societies. For Linz and Stepan (1996), democratic consolidation refers to situations where no significant actors contemplate the end of democracy, the majority of the public does not consider an alternative to democracy, and democratic institutions resolve political conflict. Schedler (1998, pp. 91-92, p.100) argues that democratic consolidation has both a negative connotation, i.e. 'stabilisation of democracy' and a positive connotation, i.e. 'deepening of democracy'. While deepening of democracy focuses on turning societies that are electoral democracies into liberal democracies, for instance by moving beyond elections to extensive civil and political rights, the negative connotation refers to the survival of the existing democratic structure. This is connected to the process of democratisation 'whereby the rules and procedures of citizenship are either applied to political institutions previously governed by other principles... or expanded to include persons not previously enjoying such rights and obligations... or extended to cover issues and institutions not previously subject to citizen participation...' (O'Donnell & Schmitter 1991, p.8). Thus, even after a society has met the minimum criteria for democracy, some areas can require work, e.g. civil-military relations.

It is vital to study both deepening and stabilisation. A comparison of Western and Latin American democracies reveals the latter looking 'underdeveloped' in 'fields as diverse as governmental performance, public administration, judicial systems, party systems, interest groups, civil society, political culture, and styles of decision making' (Schedler 1998, p. 100). Our interest is in the role of big business in furthering civil liberties and political rights in late-industrialising democracies as well as contributing to the improvement in the quality and survival of democracy in such societies. The literature on the contribution of business to the development of democracy in Western Europe is extensive. The argument here is that the material interests of the bourgeoisie led them to challenge the existing state apparatus and bring about parliamentary democracy. Moore's 'no bourgeoisie, no democracy' (Moore 1966, p. 418; Rueschemeyer et al. 1992) is an eloquent summary of this position.

What about the case of late-industrialising countries? The early research from Latin America suggested that business preferred authoritarianism due to ties with foreign capital and concern for stability (Cardoso & Faletto 1978; Evans 1979; O'Donnell 1978). Recent research indicates that business support for democratic transition, let alone consolidation,

remains limited in cases such as China (Chen 2002), Jordan, and Morocco (Greenwood 2008). The 2006 coup in Thailand is particularly interesting as several business groups in democratic Thailand supported the coup (Pathmanand 2008). At the same time, there is scholarly literature on late-industrialising states maintaining that big business has increasingly become a force for democracy. Examples of entrepreneurs supporting democratisation have surfaced from Latin America (Bartell & Payne 1995) and Far East Asia (Moon 1990). The explanations of business support for democratisation focus on the importance of profits, order, and clear-cut rules of the game (Payne 1994). Thus, these 'contingent democrats' (Bellin 2000) will support democratisation if they believe their material interests will be promoted.

International factors are increasingly important in these discussions. Diffusion of images of democratisation is often discussed as contributing to the spread of democratisation (Whitehead 1996) but democratisation can also be associated with destabilisation (Greenwood 2008). Neo-liberal globalisation has contributed to a more conducive environment for democratisation, as business elites realise the economic costs of not conforming to global norms of democracy (Öniş & Türem 2002). Noteworthy in this discussion is the increasing importance attributed to supranational organisations. The European Union (EU) has received extensive attention as it has become more interested in political and civil rights (Pridham 2005). As the EU's view of democratisation is broader, this can result in businesses operating within the EU's sphere becoming more interested in democratisation issues broadly defined, as membership benefits big business (Öniş 2005).

For business operating in unconsolidated democracies, something besides narrow economic self-interest might be the reason for their interest democratic deepening. The maturity of capital thesis (Öniş & Türem 2002; Neylan 2007) suggests that as business over time becomes less dependent on state assistance in economic terms, it will also seek more independence from state officials in political terms. In this regard, democratisation can become important as a way to reorder state-business relations, providing business elites with greater scope for autonomy. Yet, it is not clear why this would necessitate business becoming concerned with deepening of democracy to include extensive civil rights. It is possible that once business reaches a certain level of development, society expects business to be more involved in politics. Thus, reputation costs next to the maturity thesis may matter in deepening.

Another reason may be that members of big business develop an inherent preference for extensive civil liberties and stabilisation of democracy. However, it is doubtful that all representatives of big business will possess such preferences in late-industrialising societies

and thus, there can be disunity in the ranks. Moreover, members of big business can have other preferences, for example regarding religion, which might rival the importance given to civil liberties.

A third more persuasive reason is that there may be an exogenous element affecting the preferences of big business and making it more concerned about civil liberties and stabilisation than would otherwise be the case. Since external and internal processes are connected, an external actor such as the EU can influence the preferences of business. Thus, big business can alter its calculations if it realises that an external actor expects it to be operating within a society enjoying extensive civil liberties. However, not only must the external actor credibly signal that it cares about democratisation, but also it must possess something that business values and indicate convincingly that there is a realistic chance that it will offer the reward. If all of this is in place, it is likely that big business may become more concerned with democratisation. However, its support is unlikely to be wholehearted as it is imposed from outside.

Taking all these factors into consideration, big business can act as a force for democratisation in late-industrialising societies. Yet, there exist important structural limits on its ability to push for democratic deepening. The pro-democratisation aspirations of big business tend to be instrumental and often induced by powerful external pressures. Divisions within big business, concern for stability, and other interests will constrain its role. Indeed, if there is a clear trade-off between stability and further democratic deepening, big business is likely to opt for the former. However, once the level of democratisation reaches a certain threshold, and given a basic preference for stability, we would not expect big business to attempt to destabilise the democratic system and encourage its breakdown.

Turkish Big Business And Democratisation In Turkey In An Era Of Europeanisation

The early history and development of TÜSİAD, the first independent non-profit voluntary association of businesspeople in Turkey, has received considerable attention (Gülfidan 1993; Arat 1991; Buğra 1994; Buğra 1998). TÜSİAD is particularly appropriate to examine for several reasons. It is arguably the most important civil society actor in Turkish politics and has considerable clout. In 1971, its original membership consisted of 12 major companies. In December 2007, according to TÜSİAD itself, it had 576 member companies, accounting for 44.5 per cent of Turkey's exports and with a total sales volume of \$156 billion. This sets it apart from all other business associations in Turkey, which do not have comparable resources

and also, more importantly, have tended to be less visible in the public sphere. For example, MÜSİAD (Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği - the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association), a conservative association with close links to the governing party, AKP, has a wider membership pool but its role in democracy discussions has been more limited.

Our main focus will be on 2002-07, a particularly interesting era when the governing AKP, the victors of the 2002 and 2007 parliamentary elections and the 2007 presidential elections, were not to the liking of traditional elite circles. This is also a period when the democratic effects of the Turkish bid for EU membership became more obvious. Although 2002-07 will be our focus, we begin our coverage from the late 1990s in order better to understand the democratisation process in Turkey as well as TÜSİAD's position.

There are several reasons why this article does not examine the full history of TÜSİAD. In addition to space limitations and to the fact its early history is already well-documented, TÜSİAD's interest in democracy discussions did not start in earnest until the mid-1990s. Moreover, while there is considerable anecdotal evidence that TÜSİAD has become a major actor on the Turkish democracy scene since the mid-1990s, so far there has been a lack of studies based on empirical evidence and covering the 2000s.

The sources used for this article include all the reports issued by TÜSİAD that touched upon democracy issues even tangentially; articles written by TÜSİAD officials in TÜSİAD's own publication, *Görüş (Private View)*; TÜSİAD press releases; and all articles appearing in the centrist Turkish daily *Milliyet* in 2002-07 that mentioned TÜSİAD. *Milliyet* was chosen for examination as a major Turkish daily newspaper which, unlike much of the press, is not decidedly pro- or anti-AKP government. We also examined other major daily Turkish newspapers to see if *Milliyet* might have missed stories on TÜSİAD but found this not to be the case. We then examined in detail all the TÜSİAD stories that touched upon Turkish politics and democracy discussions. The combination of the TÜSİAD documents and newspaper articles enabled us to obtain a more thorough picture of the organisation's daily behaviour and interest in political affairs.

We juxtapose TÜSİAD's history and its position on democratisation with the political and economic situation in Turkey as well as relations with the EU and the Europeanisation process in general.¹ 'Europeanisation' in this context refers to the EU's application of formal conditionality in a candidate country, a process in which the EU is able to tilt the balance towards pro-reform coalitions and promote the process of political and economic reform. The Customs Union agreement which became effective at the end of 1995 had been a major step

in Turkey's encounter with formal EU conditionality. Yet its impact was limited by the fact that at that point, conditionality was not accompanied by the prospect of full membership. The Helsinki Summit in 1999, at which Turkey was formally recognised as a candidate for full EU membership, provided a major impetus for reform during the 2000-04 period, culminating with the December 2004 European Council decision to open accession talks with Turkey and the actual opening of negotiations in October 2005.

TÜSİAD In The Late 1990s: A Grand Entrance

It was in the mid-1990s that democratisation became a key element of TÜSİAD activities alongside economic issues (Öniş & Türem 2002).² Haluk Tükel (1996), then Secretary General of TÜSİAD, stated that the Association's new goal was to 'help speed up the economic and social progress of Turkey and to consolidate democratic rule for Turkish society' (Tükel 1996). Our key hypothesis is that there was a direct correspondence between the pace of the Europeanisation process and the intensity of TÜSİAD's efforts on the democratisation front.

Europeanisation leading to full EU membership was important for TÜSİAD in the sense that it represented modernisation and progress on the economic and political fronts in line with global-Western norms. Europeanisation would also contribute to the institutional strength of the Turkish economy and democracy, contributing to a stable economic and political order conducive to both domestic and foreign investment and high rates of economic growth. Arguably, TÜSİAD's approach to democratisation and EU membership had an instrumental character with Europeanisation and democratisation, rather than ultimate ends in themselves, representing intermediate steps in the achievement of broader goals such as stability and progress in line with Western standards. An instrumental understanding of democracy would make it unsurprising that TÜSİAD's commitment to major democratisation reform lost some of its early intensity in more recent years, when EU membership began to appear a more distant process.

The report, *Perspectives on Democratisation in Turkey*, commissioned by TÜSİAD in 1997, stands out as one of the clearest commitments to democratisation by big business representatives anywhere. The report was one of the earliest attempts to confront the political role of the military as well as the Kurdish question. It made a series of proposals for constitutional reform concerning civil-military relations, political parties, elections, individual freedoms, and transparency, and drew a direct connection between the Kurdish question and Turkey's deficient democracy. Newspaper headlines proclaimed the report a 'historical call'.

It generated much debate and was criticised by many societal actors. The constitutional law professor who contributed to its preparation faced the possibility of a lifetime ban from university employment. TÜSİAD's report indicated the relatively strong emphasis placed by big business at that stage on a broader understanding of democratisation, with its call for the deepening of cultural and social in addition to individual and property rights (Öniş 2005). Discussions on the military and Kurdish question had not yet begun in earnest in Turkey and TÜSİAD's opening came as a shock.

It is necessary to consider here the roles of the economy and the EU. The report was prepared in the period after the Customs Union Agreement with the EU came into effect in January 1996. In 1994, Turkey had experienced a serious economic crisis, with triple-digit inflation and negative growth. TÜSİAD's position was that economic stability required political stability and a 'liberal economic system needs genuine democratic rules to strengthen its legal and institutional infrastructure' (Tükel 1997). TÜSİAD's stance was that membership would have a positive impact on the Turkish economy, in particular through foreign investment. As a subsequent (2003) TÜSİAD report concluded, the Customs Union reduced the effect of regional crises and increased Turkish trade. TÜSİAD was now actively lobbying for Turkish EU membership. When Turkey received candidate status at the Helsinki summit, it was required to fulfil the Copenhagen Criteria for EU membership,³ meaning that the EU expected Turkey to grant more minority rights, reduce the role of the military in politics, and abolish the death penalty and torture. As a result, entering the new millennium, TÜSİAD was at the forefront of democratisation debates in Turkey.

TÜSİAD's first major update to the 1997 report, published in May 2001,⁴ examined the extent to which reforms were meeting the Copenhagen Criteria requirements. The report was released after the approval of the EU-Turkey Accession Partnership by the EU Council of Ministers and the three-party coalition government's announcement of a National Programme for the adoption of EU *acquis*, including changes in broadcasting and teaching in languages other than Turkish, and the end of torture and capital punishment. In the economic sphere, the financial crisis of 2000-01 had peaked in February 2001, with the economic instability further proof of Turkey's problematic democratisation and need for macroeconomic structural changes. At the launching of the 2001 report, TÜSİAD drew a clear connection between political and economic stability, with Chairman Özilhan maintaining that the political system had much to do with the economic crisis (Hürriyet 22 May 2001).

For big business, the economic crisis added impetus to the necessity of joining the EU. Thus, the 2001 TÜSİAD report was critical of the government's programme, arguing that it

fell short of satisfying the EU's political criteria. It pointed out that the programme was vague on the abolition of the death penalty and called for specific legal changes concerning political parties, the death penalty, and individual freedoms. Yet, on some issues, such as civilian-military relations, the document was more silent than the 1997 report. The latter had proposed the elimination of the military-dominated National Security Council (NSC) as a constitutional body and the re-establishment of its pre-1960 predecessor, which was limited to matters of national defense. The 1997 report called for a more limited space for the military: 'If Turkey wishes to move in the direction of a modern democracy, the issues of domestic and foreign security and national defence must be differentiated, and the Turkish Armed Forces' sphere of interest must be restricted to national defence' (TÜSİAD 1997, p. 57). The 2001 report only demanded that civilian-military relations become more compatible with EU criteria and maintained that a constitutional change was not necessary.

The weakening of the tone here suggests there were divisions within TÜSİAD. Immediately after the release of the 1997 report, some TÜSİAD members had voiced their opposition to it. Disunity among TÜSİAD members had the result that those who supported discussions of civil-military relations pursued this issue outside the association, with these internal cleavages within TÜSİAD (Aydın 2001) making it hard to proceed.

At this time, Parliament was passing a considerable number of constitutional amendments on issues of democracy, rule of law, minorities, and human rights. In January 2002, a new Civil Code (the most comprehensive in 50 years) came into force with important changes for the status of women, followed in February 2002 by the first of several 'mini-democracy' EU harmonisation package. This first package made changes in the laws combating terrorism, reduced prison time, and provided further guarantees for the privacy of private life and for property rights. In April, another package addressed issues of torture and political parties. However, TÜSİAD criticised the government's slow speed and lacklustre stance on some issues, such as the death penalty (Hürriyet 31 March 2002). TÜSİAD's June 2002 report (2002, pp. 10-11) declared that the death penalty, cultural rights, and personal freedoms were elements impeding progress with EU. Two months later, the death penalty was abolished in peacetime, at a time when a significant section of society wanted the execution of Abdullah Öcalan, the captured leader of the main Kurdish terrorist group. In spite of the divisions within its ranks, there is no doubt that TÜSİAD was one of the key elements within Turkish civil society playing a significant role in pushing for major democratisation reforms during the coalition government's final months.

TÜSİAD During The AKP Years: Premature Withdrawal From The Scene

Following the November 2002 elections, a new party with an Islamist heritage, AKP, emerged as the new government with a comfortable parliamentary majority. The new government's commitment to fiscal stabilisation, economic reforms and the EU integration progress helped to dispel TÜSİAD's initial reservations concerning the AKP government's secularist and reformist credentials. Indeed, during the new government's early years, AKP and TÜSİAD joined forces as the principal actors in the country's pro-Europeanisation and reform drive in what subsequently appears as the golden age of Turkey's Europeanisation (August 2002 to the opening of formal accession negotiations in October 2005). TÜSİAD members were increasingly optimistic regarding AKP's economic policy and reforms on the EU front. The presence of a single-party government was welcomed. In 2004, TÜSİAD Chairman, Ömer Sabancı, described AKP as a conservative democrat party (rather than Islamist) and criticised the main opposition party, CHP (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* - Republican People's Party), for being behind the times (Milliyet 1 March 2004).⁵

Other TÜSİAD reports were expected to follow that of June 2002. Yet, this was the beginning of a sharp decline in the Association's reports on democracy. The October 2002 report emphasised the continued problem of torture and minority rights, and discussed the right of education and broadcasting in an individual's mother tongue as key elements of reform for the country's Kurdish population. Apart from a report on judiciary reform released in January 2004, no further reports on democracy were issued by TÜSİAD until December 2006.⁶ The 2004 report was written with the purpose of indicating where changes in Turkish law had to be made in order to make it compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights which, as the report mentions, is a reference point for the Copenhagen Criteria.

TÜSİAD's reduced interest in issuing reports during this period is perhaps understandable, as the reform process had gathered significant momentum. The AKP government completed several sets of EU harmonisation packages on democracy-related issues between late 2002 and 2004, including liberalisation of the regulations concerning the press, freedom of expression, religion, and broadcasting in languages other than Turkish. Some court cases were retried based on the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, most notably that of Leyla Zana, a Kurdish former Member of Parliament who was serving a prison term. The Turkish decision in January 2004 to abolish the death penalty was particularly welcomed by the EU and was something that TÜSİAD had consistently called for in its reports. In March 2004, the Council of Europe removed Turkey from the list of countries that it was monitoring for human rights and democracy practice. The reform process

continued with the adoption of a revised Penal Code in September 2004, including an increase in prison sentences for those found guilty of torture. At the end of 2004, the European Council agreed to open accession negotiations with Turkey on the grounds it had sufficiently fulfilled the Copenhagen criteria.

Given that AKP appeared committed to EU membership between 2002 and 2004, the TÜSİAD leadership appears to have concluded that it could move away from being at the forefront of democracy issues. At the end of December 2003, the association's Secretary-General, Haluk Tükel, declared TÜSİAD's focus in 2005-2015 would be on sustainable development (Hürriyet 20 December 2003). In 2004, Chairman Sabancı indicated that TÜSİAD would challenge movements away from secularism and democracy but said that TÜSİAD's two priorities were 'the economy and the EU' (Milliyet 1 March 2004). In June 2005, TÜSİAD's Chairman declared that democratic progress was complete and economic progress would be the next target (Milliyet 18 June 2005), indicating a certain degree of complacency.

However, there were many pressing issues, including in areas where reforms had been undertaken and TÜSİAD members were aware of problems. At the 2005 High Advisory Council meeting, Chairman Sabancı, while acknowledging advances in many areas, lamented the lack of progress concerning civil and political rights, the disproportionate use of force, the weak state of civil society, and the concern that cultural freedoms would result in the country's break-up. He also mentioned that court cases were hampering Turkey-EU relations (Milliyet 21 December 2005). The Turkish-Armenian journalist, Hrant Dink, and the novelist, Orhan Pamuk (as well as many others) were charged under Article 301 of the new Penal Code. In July 2006, Dink received a six month suspended sentence for 'denigrating Turkishness' in his writings on Armenian identity and in January 2007, he was assassinated. In September 2006, TÜSİAD had called for Article 301 to become a reform priority and opened its late January 2007 General Assembly by denouncing it, with Sabancı declaring this assassination was an attempt to reverse democratic gains. TÜSİAD joined other organisations calling for AKP to restructure the article to limit its scope.

The first major report in several years, released in 2007, was prepared by a professor of constitutional law who later became an AKP Member of Parliament. Like its predecessors, the report called for the relocation of the Office of Chief of General Staff under the Ministry of Defence (thus emphasising the need for civilian control over the military), the replacement of the NSC, instruction in Kurdish as an elective course in schools, and a reconsideration of the political party laws. It included concrete proposals regarding the role of the President of

the Republic, combating torture, and a dramatic curtailment of Imam Hatip high schools which were seen as direct violation of a secular political order.⁷ Freedom of expression received considerable attention. Thus, the report repeated much of what had not been achieved since the 1997 document. Like the 1997 report, the 2007 report examined anti-democratic legal formulations; it did not deal with issues of implementation. One area of difference was that it provided more suggestions on some areas where the 1997 document had been muted.

The EU was also becoming critical of Turkey's accession progress. Critical reports emerged first from the European Parliament (September 4) and then the European Commission (November 8). Lack of progress on the Cyprus issue resulted in partial suspension of negotiations on November 29 before the EU foreign ministers decided talks would not be opened in eight negotiating chapters related to the application of the Turkish Association Agreement to the new EU member, Cyprus, on December 11 2006.

TÜSİAD Chairman Sabancı described the EU's decision as unfair, maintaining that the EU wanted Turkey to accept a status falling short of full membership (Milliyet 1 December 2006). At the same time, another 2007 TÜSİAD (2007b) report called for a strong democracy in addition to a strong social structure and economy so Turkey could join the EU by January 2014. The proposals included limiting the responsibilities of the President, reforming Article 301, laws on political parties and the electoral system, progressively reducing the national voting threshold to five per cent, converting Imam Hatip schools into vocational schools, offering religious instruction in schools as electives (without grades), and eliminating restrictions to broadcasting in mother tongues. It also pointed out the inadequate response to the economic problems that had surfaced in 2006. It is hard to describe any of these demands as major new undertakings.

Figure 1 tracks the media coverage of TÜSİAD in order to assess the Association's monthly activism on democratisation between 2004 and 2007. It attempts to see if media coverage of TÜSİAD captures it as being consistently involved in democratisation debates. It relies upon coverage in the Turkish daily Milliyet and presents the number of TÜSİAD-related newspaper stories on any topic (dashed line) and those on the topic of democracy (solid line). TÜSİAD appears actively involved on all issues, e.g., economy, but as Figure 1 demonstrates, the coverage does not show TÜSİAD as consistently involved in the issue of democracy. Newspaper stories on TÜSİAD and democratisation were low until late 2005 and exhibit an increase in the second half of 2006. This coincides with some of the statements from TÜSİAD officials, which we mentioned previously, that their interest would be more on

economic issues during this period. TÜSİAD's interest in democracy debates increased considerably after 2006, with part of the reason being the general and presidential elections in 2007 and the ensuing crises.⁸

[Figure 1 about here]

The 2007 elections resulted in victory for AKP. However, the reform packages were not proceeding and the EU talks had not moved much beyond the point they had reached in 2006 when eight accession negotiating chapters were frozen. The public soured on the topic of EU membership. AKP demonstrated little interest in democratic reforms as it spent much of 2007 and 2008 in crisis-mode due to the parliamentary election, the selection of a new President, increasing terror attacks, and its attempted closure as a political party by the Constitutional Court. TÜSİAD's renewed activism from late 2005 and notably from mid-2007 onwards reflected concerns over the loss of momentum in Turkey's EU accession process and growing concerns relating to secularism.

In the past, the media had labelled TÜSİAD as 'secularist, big-bourgeoisie' and the 2007 elections brought the issue of secularism to centre stage. A commitment to secularism⁹ has been part of the Turkish Constitution for over five decades. TÜSİAD officials had said in 2004 that they did not fear secularism receding because the Islamist AKP had changed its ways (Milliyet 1 March 2004). Now they criticised the government's proposals to re-examine secularism. TÜSİAD argued that the issues of the *turban* and head veiling¹⁰ could not be tied to discussions of women's rights and were not the country's priorities (Milliyet 24 January 2008). In 2005 the TÜSİAD Chairman received a ringing endorsement from the members when he said that there should be no backpedalling regarding secularism (Milliyet 4 June 2005). In December 2005, Prime Minister Erdoğan charged TÜSİAD's High Advisory Council Chair, Mustafa Koç, with committing a constitutional crime and called on TÜSİAD to focus on business following Koç's criticism of the treatment of the secular Rector of a provincial university facing corruption charges (Milliyet 22 December 2005). In June 2006, TÜSİAD indicated its concerns about secularism, the presidential election and the EU, and again the Prime Minister brushed aside these concerns (Milliyet 3, 7, 15 June 2006). TÜSİAD's comments regarding secularism were in line with the military's views. By April 2007, TÜSİAD had joined the voices calling for early elections. Later in 2007, TÜSİAD released data showing that since AKP had come to office, the number of people who had moved from the Presidency of Religious Affairs to other ministries had dramatically increased, the significance of this being that it affected the quality of the bureaucracy and raised concerns about AKP cadres within the state apparatus (Milliyet 8 September 2007).

Nonetheless, many TÜSİAD members may have voted for AKP in the July 2007 parliamentary elections because of its economic policies. However, TÜSİAD was much more vocal about the choice of a Presidential candidate. The Association's new Chairwoman, Arzuhan Yalçındağ-Doğan, declared that the President should promote societal reconciliation, presumably thinking that a governing party candidate would be too incendiary for others in society who would see this as a challenge to secularism. High-ranking officials also voiced opposition to a Presidential candidate whose wife wore the *turban*, also seen as a challenge to secularism. While TÜSİAD did not necessarily welcome AKP's eventual choice of presidential candidate - Abdullah Gül, AKP Foreign Minister and briefly former Prime Minister - TÜSİAD officials had seen the possible choice of Prime Minister Erdoğan himself as a more polarising choice (Milliyet 2 March 2007).

After the election, TÜSİAD's Chairwoman declared that the new AKP cabinet was not as centre-right as had been expected (Milliyet 8 September 2007). This was significant as it demonstrated that AKP was not going to have a honey-moon period and that TÜSİAD was re-examining its past views that AKP was not a radical party. Yalçındağ's criticism of the government programme was more vocal and systematic than that of any other major civil society actor and TÜSİAD was depicted by the media as a more effective opposition party than those in Parliament. Yalçındağ criticised the government's programme for its (lack of) policies on the informal economy, industry and finance, and reform of elections and political parties. She maintained that AKP's handling of discussions was rushed and lacked societal contribution and transparency (Milliyet 8 September 2007). While TÜSİAD criticised the 1982 Constitution, it called for the new Constitution to be in line with the Republic's core founding values. The TÜSİAD Chairwoman's speech was widely endorsed by many (but not all) TÜSİAD members and newspaper headlines, noting the Association's emergence from past complacency, proclaimed that 'TÜSİAD has awoken' (Milliyet 9 September 2007).

Under Yalçındağ's leadership, TÜSİAD became particularly vocal on women's rights. The first woman to lead the organisation, she came from a media background. Before the 2007 elections, she called for affirmative action through a quota system to increase women's participation in Parliament to at least 30 per cent¹¹ and for a sandwich model whereby male and female candidates would alternate on the party list to prevent women being listed at the bottom of party lists (Milliyet 10 June 2007). Yalçındağ maintained that the AKP approached the topic of women's rights in a bellicose and half-hearted manner (Milliyet 15 December 2007).

Although our analysis focuses on the 2002-2007 period, recent events lend further support to our arguments. In 2008, TÜSİAD Chairwoman Yalçındağ criticised the government for abandoning the reform process and for its increasing turn towards populist policies. During the same year, a TÜSİAD official referred to a ‘brain freeze’ among all politicians (Milliyet 19 June 2008). TÜSİAD voiced concerns regarding economic instability, tensions between various constitutional bodies, and problems regarding democratisation. At the same time, TÜSİAD also indicated it was happy that AKP had not been closed down by the Constitutional Court (Milliyet 30 July 2008),¹² but secularism continued to be a central concern for the Association.

TÜSİAD’s call for a Constitutional Convention (Milliyet 19 June 2008) fell on deaf ears, particularly among the opposition. The lacklustre pace of government reform had not changed. No dramatic change had occurred regarding election or political party law or civil-military relations. Moreover, TÜSİAD remained silent when the government undertook initiatives towards the resolution of the Kurdish conflict in Autumn 2009. Meanwhile, TÜSİAD’s goal of EU membership by 2014 was no closer to being achieved.

The Limits Of The Role of Big Business In Democratic Consolidation In Turkey: The Multiple Forces At Work

It is useful to conceptualise Turkish politics in recent years as a contest between two broad camps, ‘conservative globalists’ and ‘defensive nationalists’ (Öniş 2007). A key member of the former group is the governing AKP, supported by significant elements of its electoral coalition, notably the rising Anatolian bourgeoisie and its representative institutions such as MÜSİAD. The defensive nationalist camp, in turn, includes the main opposition parties, CHP and MHP, key elements of the state bureaucracy including the military, and key representatives of organised labour such as TÜRK-İŞ, the largest Turkish labour union. This group of actors is Eurosceptic not because it is against the idea of Turkey’s EU membership *per se*, but because it fears that EU conditionality and the associated reforms would undermine the basic pillars of Turkey’s existing constitutional order, namely the unitary and secular character of the Turkish state. This contest is characterised by the conspicuous absence of a European-style left-of-centre or social democratic party with a ‘liberal globalist’ orientation.

Within this overall political contest, TÜSİAD has occupied an uneasy middle ground. Its interests converged with AKP on the issue of Turkey’s EU membership and these two key

actors have emerged as the two dominant elements of the pro-EU and pro-reform coalition in Turkey in recent years. Indeed, TÜSİAD, in terms of its understanding of democracy and its focus on issues such as gender rights could be considered much more liberal in its understanding of democracy than its conservative globalist counterparts, such as AKP (Uğur & Yankaya 2008). Yet, TÜSİAD was not willing directly to challenge key elements of Turkey's power elites such as the main opposition party, CHP, or the military, given its strong commitment to a bounded understanding of 'secularism'.

On the issue of secularism, the interests and outlook of the key pro-EU actors, TÜSİAD and AKP, appeared to diverge sharply. The nature of the intra-elite conflict placed a major structural constraint on TÜSİAD's ability openly to tackle the major challenges confronting further democratisation in Turkey, given the fact that adapting such an open and pro-active stance would necessarily mean an open confrontation with key segments of Turkey's political and bureaucratic elites. This highlights an important difference between Turkey and key South European countries such as Spain on the path to democratic consolidation and EU membership. Whilst the Spanish case was characterised by considerable elite unity and commitment, the Turkish case, in contrast, has been characterised by pervasive intra-elite conflicts and weak commitment on the part of key actors to democratisation and the EU accession process (Chislett 2008).

Examining the 1990s and 2000s, it would be unjustified to suggest that TÜSİAD at any point wanted a coup or a breakdown of democracy. This is true despite the fact that Turkey went through several economic and political crises. TÜSİAD members have not necessarily directly challenged the military as a key arm of the state apparatus but it is clear that they do not want the military assuming power. In this regard, they have also opposed political party closures. One of their main tools in making democracy the only game in town has been to link it with Turkey's relations with EU. Any coup or democratic breakdown would not only worsen Turkey's chances of joining the EU but would also negatively affect Turkish-EU economic ties. Indeed, once the Europeanisation process gathered momentum, TÜSİAD was happy to delegate responsibility to an external actor, the EU, to take care of the reform process, allowing the Association to distance itself from controversial issues.

The process of delegating responsibility to the EU and the on-going Europeanisation process tends to highlight the somewhat instrumental nature of the organisation's commitment to democratic deepening. Based on the principal reports published during the period examined and statements made by the Association's leadership, TÜSİAD's primary political concerns appear to have been stability, secularism, and satisfying internationally acceptable norms.

While tying Turkey's democracy discussions to EU membership might have helped with some of the reforms and making it clear that TÜSİAD did not want a breakdown, the reports and speeches of TÜSİAD officials lead to the conclusion that EU membership was the real goal, with its associated benefits on the economic as well as the democratisation front. An important corollary of this observation is that a loss of momentum in Turkey's progress towards full EU membership is also likely to dampen TÜSİAD's enthusiasm and its willingness to push actively for further democratisation reforms.¹³ While it is likely that TÜSİAD officials genuinely believe that EU membership will result in democratisation debates terminating in Turkey as democracy will have been consolidated, they seem to be ignoring the issues surrounding the state of democracy in many Central and Eastern European countries which have already become EU members (Grabbe 2001; Mungiu-Pippidi 2007).

TÜSİAD's discussion of democratisation also suggests a rather limited understanding of the subject. There is little focus on issues of implementation of the reforms. TÜSİAD was too quick to turn its attention away from democracy to other important societal concerns. It is revealing that following the 2007 elections, TÜSİAD proclaimed the calm atmosphere during the elections as demonstrating the success of Turkish democracy, ignoring the fact that the holding of elections has not been one of the Turkey's democratic problems.

It is also clear that there is an upper limit to what TÜSİAD can achieve on a unilateral basis in the absence of sufficient support from other segments of society or the political system. Once the government appeared to lose interest in the reform process, TÜSİAD's criticisms *per se* were not a sufficiently powerful inducement to bring the government back to the necessary reform path. As a result, TÜSİAD found itself after ten years still complaining about election and political party rules. It took the assassination of Dink and months of deliberation before Article 301 was amended. Despite explicit calls for political parties to have more women's representatives, the outcome was far from what TÜSİAD wanted.

However, it is also clear that not all TÜSİAD members agreed with the Association's stance. At different times, members (few at least publicly) criticised the Association as not sufficiently democratic, too conservative, too driven by the representatives of the biggest corporations, and too critical of the military, AKP, and state policies on Cyprus (Milliyet 15 April 2010). It might be useful to conceptualise TÜSİAD in terms of a centre-periphery divide. The Association's core constituency imparts a certain conservative bias to the organisation. Hence, TÜSİAD has been reluctant to take a pro-active stance on highly sensitive questions such as the Kurdish issue and civil-military relations. On the periphery, those elements within TÜSİAD more sensitive to such issues on the democratic agenda

(which we call the more liberal/peripheral wing of TÜSİAD) have chosen to push for progress regarding these issues in alternative organisational fora.

TÜSİAD has pushed other organisations to become more involved in politics. MÜSİAD, which is seen as closer to the AKP on issues such as secularism, criticised the government for the lack of economic reforms after the 2007 elections. There has been some collaboration between TÜSİAD and other civil society organisations but not as much as would be expected from a leading non-governmental organisation. There is an unwillingness or inability to link up with others, which leads TÜSİAD to appear as if it is on an individual crusade and out of touch with society. Reservations about working together seem to come from both sides. Given that civil society is not strong in Turkey to begin with, this further limits the ability of individual civil society associations to make a dramatic impact on the country's on-going Europeanisation and democratisation processes.

It is also clear that TÜSİAD members value secularism and Europeanisation highly in addition to stability.¹⁴ Secularism is sensitive for TÜSİAD members, many of whom fear AKP's religious and populist views and are also concerned about the impact of this debate on political stability. Once AKP's commitment to European integration seemed to decline, these fears intensified. The important point to underline here is that TÜSİAD's understanding and commitment to 'secularism' has led to a certain convergence of interest with other components of the Turkish political and military elites which are strongly nationalist Eurosceptic in their orientation and highly critical of key elements of the democratisation agenda. Hence, TÜSİAD was squeezed between two important component of Turkey's ruling elite or 'power bloc'. Its position was more closely aligned to the governing AKP on the issue of EU membership and the associated reforms which involved a significant expansion of civil liberties. Yet, in terms of its interpretation of and commitment to the principle of secularism, TÜSİAD's position was much more in line with key segments of the Kemalist establishment. This paradoxical situation, in turn, has imposed a structural limitation on TÜSİAD's ability to act as a major democratisation force in the recent era.

Big Business And Democratic Consolidation: Conclusions And Comparative Perspectives

It is important to emphasise that an organisation such as TÜSİAD is not a unitary actor. Indeed, the dominant elements within the organisation tend to exert a conservative or status quo bias, with the natural implication that the more liberal elements within the organisation

tend to be marginalised. This, in turn, restricts the ability of TÜSİAD's leadership to tackle sensitive issues, such as the role of the military in Turkish politics, which would involve a direct clash with powerful actors.

Our analysis highlights the importance of the specific national context in understanding the nature of the big business-democracy relationship. In the Turkish setting, the debate over secularism emerges as a sensitive issue. The high value attached by TÜSİAD to the objectives of secularism and stability imply that the organisation is often unwilling to come into confrontation with other key political actors such as the military or CHP. Hence, intra-elite dynamics and tension in a society which is heavily polarised over the secularism issue create important obstacles to the ability of big business to pursue even more extensive democratisation. This kind of constraint is more characteristic of the Middle East and may not be relevant elsewhere. This point also illustrates the importance of lack of elite unity and commitment as a major element differentiating the Turkish experience from its Southern and Eastern European counterparts, placing an important constraint on the country's on-going Europeanisation and democratisation drive.

From a comparative perspective, the Turkish experience can be illuminating in two key respects. First, big business can play a positive role in the democratisation and democratic consolidation process. However, there are limits to the quality and depth of the latter, especially if the process is driven primarily by big business. Second, the ability of big business to push for deep democratisation is constrained by the overall commitment to democratic values within society as a whole. If it is weak, this will then exert a downward tendency on the ability of big business to push for democratisation reforms. The importance of elites and leadership, noted in previous work on democratisation (Diamond et al.. 1989; Morlino 1998), is also highlighted here. The Turkish experience clearly testifies that it is ultimately the degree of commitment of the major political parties and the strength of civil society as a whole which determines the pace and magnitude of the democratisation impulse. Hence, the net contribution of big business to the process of democratic consolidation and deepening is dependent on the overall democratisation impulse originating from the other key political and societal actors.

Finally, the complementary role of external actors tends to be crucial and deserves particular emphasis. The European Union provided a major impetus for radical democratisation reforms in Turkey, through a strong mix of conditions and incentives, notably in the post-1999 era. The decline in the momentum of the EU process in the post-2005 period, with weakening commitment on the part of the AKP government and reduced enthusiasm for

EU membership on the part of the public at large, has also placed an important structural constraint on the ability and willingness of an organisation like TÜSİAD to act as a major force for further democratic deepening.

Figure 1. Patterns In TÜSİAD's Recent Democratisation Drive

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Notes

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¹ See Özbudun (1999) and Öniş and Keyman (2007) on the nature of the Turkish political system and recent political developments, Cizre (1997) on the role of the military as a key actor in Turkish politics, and Özbudun (2007) and Müftüler-Baç (2005) on the democratisation reforms implemented in Turkey during the recent era and the EU role in this process.

² In 1992, TÜSİAD commissioned a group of academics to work on a new Constitution, which was then presented to the Parliament Speaker's Office. This report received little attention.

³ The Copenhagen Criteria are the requirements for a candidate country to obtain EU membership, including democratic governance and human rights, a functioning market economy, and the acceptance of the EU aims and acquis, including treaties and laws.

⁴ Previously, a 1999 progress report had been published which responded to the reactions to the 1997 report.

⁵ TÜSİAD's relations with the Nationalist Action Party were also contentious due to the Kurdish question.

⁶ TÜSİAD released a report in 2005 on the ethical state, including the armed services, which focused on issues of corruption and violations of rule of law.

⁷ These schools were originally established to train government employed *imams*, but over time they became popular among conservative families and became much more than just vocational schools. As their popularity and number of graduates increased, secularists associated them with preparing cadres for the Islamist parties in Turkey. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan attended such a school.

⁸ Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül was the AKP candidate in the 2007 presidential elections. The opposition parties did not support him, partly due to questions about his commitment to secularism. When he was not elected, AKP called for early elections, resulting in a new victory for AKP, which won 46.6 percent of the popular vote (12 percent more than in 2002). AKP then passed a constitutional amendment for the President to be directly elected and Gül was subsequently elected as Turkey's 11th President.

⁹ Rather than secularism, a more accurate term for the Turkish word, *laiklik* would be laicism, which has different connotations. However, we use secularism here as it is more used in English. See Çarkoğlu and Toprak (2007) for discussions of religion in Turkey.

¹⁰ In 2007, AKP campaigned with a promise to end the head scarf ban in universities and following the election, passed an amendment allowing for such a change (see Çelik Wiltse 2008). This was subsequently annulled by the Constitutional Court as violating the Constitution's founding principle of secularism.

¹¹ Women's participation in formal political institutions remains very low in Turkey. The election of 46 women Members of Parliament in 2007 was clearly an improvement compared to the 24 women in the previous

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Parliament. Nevertheless, Turkey ranked considerably behind even recent EU members such as Bulgaria and Rumania when it came to women's political and economic empowerment indices.

¹² In 2008, AKP found itself facing closure as a party and banning of many of its senior members from politics for alleged anti-secular activities. The Constitutional Court ultimately decided, with a majority of one, against disbanding AKP for violating secularism.

¹³ A good example of this weakening commitment and the reluctance to confront the military directly was TÜSİAD's opposition in July 2009 to a change that would enable civilian courts to try military personnel who attempt to stage a military coup, potentially a crucial step in the direction of introducing civil control over the military. TÜSİAD's opposition raised question marks about the organisation's commitment to democratic deepening (Dağı 2009).

¹⁴ It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the reasons for TÜSİAD's support for secularism. TÜSİAD members, with their family backgrounds and political socialisation, are likely to belong to social strata which value secularism highly.