

# Turkey's New Government Model and the Presidential Organization

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- What is the perspective of Turkey's new government model based on the presidential system?
  - What are the functions of offices and councils (and departments) in the presidential organization?
    - How are ministries in the new government model structured?
  - What are the differences and similarities of the newly designed government model with government structures in other presidential systems?
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## INTRODUCTION

With the transition from the parliamentary system to the presidential system, Turkey aims to end the tutelary mindset and structures, which have historically tried to design Turkish politics and society by any means other than the national will, to eliminate the double-headedness of the executive branch, and to ensure stability in government and a rapid and effective executive performance.

The presidential government system puts an end to the use of executive authority by a collective body (parliament) and allows the exercise of executive power by a person who is elected directly by the people to serve for five consecutive years.

In the new system, for five years, the president will directly or indirectly, determine and execute all public policies that are of concern to society, from security to foreign policy, education and health, and will follow their implementations. The president is expected to find solutions to chronic societal problems within the scope of these policies; to ensure effective and productive procurement of public services; and to meet social demands and needs.

The adoption of the presidential system has created the need to abandon the dual executive structure, to abolish the prime ministry institution, and to redefine structures, duties and functions of ministries and

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the Council of Ministers; in other words, to restructure the government system. The reason is that the strong and healthy organization of the executive body in a presidential government system constitutes one of the essentials of rapid and effective execution. In fact, President Erdoğan introducing the new government model stated that he and his team wish to constitute a government model composed of plain, rapid decision-making, result-oriented coordination and consultation mechanisms in which inefficient structures, or many redundant institutions functioning in the same sector, are transformed and numbers of posts are reduced.

Hence, this essay intends to analyze the new government model which is designed to be put into force after the June 24, 2018 elections. Taking into account the experiences of the countries governed by a presidential system, the paper evaluates the steps taken to increase the capacity of the president to form, implement and evaluate public policy, and discusses the changes at ministerial levels.

### **PRESIDENTIAL ORGANIZATION IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT MODEL**

With the transition to the presidential government system, the president, directly elected by the people, becomes the leading actor in matters related to the executive power such as formation and conduct of basic public policies, providing public services, and the fulfillment of social needs. In this direction, the president will ensure coordination among ministries, control the administrative body, and appoint or dismiss high-ranking public personnel.

The new position of the president grants him many duties, authorities, and responsibilities. In order for the president to fulfill these tasks and use his authorities effectively and rationally, the formation of an organization consisting of many units and individuals under the president is necessary in the new system. To put it differently, a complete transition to the presidential government system, following the June 24 elections, necessitates the formation of a presidential organization, like in the case of the “Executive Office of the President of the United States” yet “unique to

Turkey,” by bearing in mind the political culture, government structure, traditions, problems, and strategic priorities of the country.

The presidential organization will include a spate of units fulfilling different political and administrative tasks. This body will assist the president in various tasks, from the design and implementation of public policies to the management of his daily programs and the conduct of his relations with the press and the public. In other words, there will be “primary” and “auxiliary” units carrying out institutional and administrative operations within the presidential organization.

Primary units are important as regards to increasing the capacity of the president to form, implement and develop public policy. In the new government model, offices and councils stand out as primary units. Thus, it is beneficial to take a closer look at these structures.

### **Offices**

Offices are the most critical bodies of presidential organizations in the countries governed by a presidential system. Looking into country examples, in this sense, shows that offices usually collect data and information to formulate public policies in their policy areas, generate field information, develop appropriate policy alternatives accordingly, prepare policy and decision drafts, and report to the president. In some countries, it is seen that offices, sometimes, can be assigned with the tasks of coordination and assessment. Therefore, offices are among the most important bodies that play a role in the development of the president’s capacity for public policy-making and implementation.

Following the June 24 elections, offices that will be directly linked to the president according to the new presidential government model of Turkey – as in other countries run by a presidential system – are: The Office of Finance, the Office of Human Resources, the Office of Digital Transformation, and the Office of Investment. President Erdoğan considers these offices as his closest staff under the new government model, terming them as “backyard” with reference to the development of policies and projects. It is pointed out

that these units will work on projects in accordance with the president's priorities and without tackling bureaucracy. The offices will work individually with the president and have an executive nature.

As expertise offices are established within the presidential organization, it is noted that Turkey's 2023 goals, problems in the public administration system, and necessities of public services will be paid special attention.

### Councils

Councils are another category of bodies that are formed to improve the president's capacity for public policy-making in countries run by presidential systems. They are primary units that function as consultative and advisory structures. We see councils under different names or in different formats in presidential system countries. For instance, councils in the United States are both temporary and permanent in nature, they may consist of ministers (secretariats) or bureaucrats, but also may have civilian stakeholders such as representatives of relevant sectors.

In the Executive Office of the President of the United States there exist plenty of advisory boards and committees. In the U.S., presidents naturally have a wide range in authority and discretion in the formation and abolishment of temporary bodies. For instance, during the term of President Barrack Obama, the Executive Office included advisory boards such as the President's Council on Jobs and Competitiveness, the President's Management Advisory Board, the White House Council for Community Solutions, the President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and the President's Global Development Council in addition to permanent councils.

During the term of the new president, Donald Trump, the Council of Economic Advisers, the Council on Environmental Quality, the National Security Council, the Domestic Policy Council, the National Economic Council, and the President's Intelligence Advisory Board are part of the Executive Office.

Advisory boards (councils) function to give advice and provide independent information about the pol-

icy areas they have expertise in. These types of boards are planned for different sectors or different policy matters. They ensure participation of stakeholders in the process of public policy-making, and also allow cooperation and coordination among institutions and sectors for the solution of multidimensional problems.

Again, in the newly designed government model – similar to those of the countries governed by presidential systems – councils are included in the presidential organization. These councils are as follows: The Local Governing Council, the Social Policies Council, the Health and Food Policies Council, the Culture and Arts Policies Council, the Legal Policies Council, the Security and Foreign Policy Council, the Economic Policies Council, the Education and Teaching Policies Council, and the Science Technology and Innovation Policies Council.

These councils are expected to develop policy suggestions, send feedback to ministries, prepare progress reports on the performances in relevant areas, and increase the participation of stakeholders in the policy-making process (NGOs, sector representatives and academics, etc.). They are, thus, expected to put their shared wisdom into operation. Furthermore, through these entities in the new management model, it is desired to reduce the number - reaching 60 - of such entities in the existing administrative structure which look in disarray and to reorganize them within the new framework.

### Departments

In the new government model, certain structures called "Presidencies/Heads/Departments" will work under the president, such as the Department of General (Chiefs of) Staff; the Department of National Intelligence; the Department of Defense Industries (in the now defunct government structure, it was an undersecretariat, but in the new system it has been promoted to a department); the Department of National Security; the Department of Religious Affairs; the Department of State Supervision; the Department of Communication; and the Department of Strategy and Budget. Some of them, such as the Undersecretariat of

Defense Industries and the State Supervisory Council, were already under the Presidency of the Republic in the parliamentary system.

The General Staff, the National Intelligence Organization and the Religious Affairs were under the prime ministry and were accountable to it. Since the prime ministry is abolished in the new government model, these institutions will be placed under the president's office in the organization chart.

The Department of Communication and the Department of Strategy and Budget stand out as newly formed bodies under the new government model. The Department of Communication will coordinate all matters regarding the press, and the publication and communication of and by the state and the president. The Department of Strategy and Budget is equivalent to the Management and Budget Office in the U.S. and will focus on the process of budget-making and its management which is under the responsibility of the president from now on.

With the formation of departments in the new government model, some institutions which were under the presidency or the prime ministry in the old system will now be directly responsible to the president and set in a new framework.

## **MINISTERIES IN THE NEW GOVERNMENT MODEL**

Some changes in ministries, as well, are proposed in the new presidential government model. The first move in this direction is to reduce the number of ministries. In addition, the roles and the functions of ministries in the presidential government system have inevitably changed. The main reason for this is that in the new system, the president and his close team will be the primary policy-makers, while ministries will be the lower level policy-makers and primarily concentrate on implementation and supervision of policies.

In presidential system countries, apparently, each state configures ministries according to its traditions and social needs. Names and coupling areas of service differ from one country to the other. In some coun-

tries, there are even ministries difficult for an outsider to comprehend in formation and activities.

For instance, in France, the tasks regarding the youth and sports are associated with urban issues, and in this context, France has the Ministry of Urban Affairs, Youth and Sports. In Austria, the Ministry of Agriculture, Environment, Forestry and Water Administration brings many different functions under one roof. In South Korea, the Ministry of State Procedure is rarely seen at the ministry level in other country examples. This and similar other examples indicate that states name ministries for very different reasons.

A general assessment of ministries in Turkey reveals that the number of ministries has been reduced during the periods of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) governments, and that ministries are set in an utmost rational framework.

In fact, the coalition governments in the 1990s created a gradually increasing burden on the state due to the increasing number of ministries during coalition formation processes. The AK Party governments taking the issue in hand, throughout the years, reduced the number of ministries from 37 to 26.

In the new government model, which is to officially usher in following the June 24 elections, the number of ministries will be reduced, their functions will be increased, and some ministries will be merged to improve productivity. Thus, the number of ministries in the new government model will be reduced to 16: the Ministry of Justice; the Ministry of Internal Affairs; the Ministry of National Defense; the Ministry of National Education; the Ministry of Health; the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources; the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization; the Ministry of Culture and Tourism; the Ministry of Youth and Sports; the Ministry of Treasury and Finance; the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure; the Ministry of Foreign Relations; the Ministry of Labor, Social Services and Family; the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry; and the Ministry of Industry and Technology.

In this regard, the most radical changes at the ministerial level have been made in the area of economy. This

move intends to simplify the economy administration and aggregate it under one roof in order to overcome the problems of coordination. In the area of economy under the new model there will be the Ministry of Trade, the Ministry of Treasury and Finance, and the Ministry of Industry and Technology. In this context, the upgrade of the Undersecretariat of Treasury in the existing government structure to the ministry status and the merger of this ministry with the Ministry of Finance, and the merger of the Ministry of Development with the Ministry of Industry and Technology are envisaged in the new model. At the same time, the economy administration will be supported by the Offices of Finance and Investment under the president.

It is noted that by looking at the move to reorganize the economical undertakings, the AK Party has closely examined countries such as the United States and Great Britain and has been inspired particularly by the implementation of the concept of the “super ministry” in East Asia countries, such as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. These countries have increased added-value in rapid industrialization, development and production, and almost all of them have implemented super ministries which provide coordination among sectors during periods of rapid development. The envisaged Ministry of Treasury and Finance contains overtones of such an implementation.

Moreover, the mergers of the Ministry of Foreign Relations with the Ministry of European Union, the Ministry of Family and Social Policies with the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, and the Ministry of Forestry and Water Works with the Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock are envisaged in the new government model. In this case, the titles of the Labor and Social Security Ministry and the Food, Agriculture and Livestock Ministry have changed. Again, the titles of the Ministry of Transportation, Maritime Affairs

and Communication, and the Ministry of Science, Industry and Technology, under the existing government structure, have also changed.

## CONCLUSION

A primary goal of the new government model is a system change followed by the increase in the capabilities of the presidential organization in public policy formation, implementation, and assessment, where the president becomes a central executive figure for politics and the administration. For this reason, it is envisaged to establish offices and councils (and departments) in direct connection with the president. This move is similar to the practices of the countries governed by the presidential system. However, it may be said that a structure unique to Turkey is created in determining the formation of offices and councils (and departments), and their roles and functions within the contexts of Turkey's 2023 targets, the current structure and problems of the Turkish public administration system, and the new trends in the field of public administration (corporate and intersectoral coordination, cooperation, consultation and negotiation processes, etc.).

In parallel with the practices in developed countries in general, it is noted that the number of ministries is reduced. The major ministerial level changes have been made in the area of economy administration. It can be claimed that the super ministry model primarily targets the reconstruction of the economic arena.

Certainly, the new (presidential executive) government model, presented to the public (before the June 24 elections), reveals only the general framework and the basic perspective and motives of the reconstruction process, which will start rapidly after the elections. The new governing model is subject to a variety of institutional and functional changes both in terms of the structure and central administration directly linked to the president, and the personnel system.



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