

TRAVELS OF PRIME MINISTER SÜLEYMAN DEMİREL TO EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN ANATOLIAN PROVINCES IN 1968

BAŞBAKAN SÜLEYMAN DEMİREL'İN 1968 YILI DOĞU VE
GÜNEYDOĞU ANADOLU İLLERİ GEZİLERİ

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Abstract

Founded in 1961, the Justice Party (AP) emerged victorious from the 1965 elections and came to power alone. Among the issues that the AP Government had to solve during its years in power, the primary objective was to prevent the growing Kurdish activities facilitated by the freedoms introduced by the 1961 Constitution and to finish the ongoing discussions regarding the neglect of the Eastern provinces. The efforts of the Kurdish circles and the left-leaning Workers' Party of Türkiye (TİP) to organise a certain segment of the population by using the ethnic belonging of the citizens living in the region, to organise rallies further increased the interest of the government and political parties in the region. In this study, Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel's trips to the Eastern provinces with a large group of politicians and bureaucrats, the first of which took place on 18-24 August and the second on 16-22 September 1968 were examined. A total of 4,500 km was covered in the first trip and 3,000 km in the second trip. During the visits, the foundations of many investments were made or completed projects were put into service. Demirel, who mingled with the citizens during the visits and held rallies in about 70 places, said that the accumulated problems of the East would be solved as soon as possible. In addition, he advised the people not to give credence to the ideas trying to divide the country and gave messages of unity and solidarity. Archival documents, periodicals and studies in the literature were utilised in this study. Document analysis method was used in this qualitative study.

Keywords: *Justice Party, Süleyman Demirel, Eastern development, Workers' Party of Türkiye (TİP), Eastern rallies.*

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Öz

1961 yılında kurulan Adalet Partisi (AP), 1965 seçimlerinden zaferle çıkarak tek başına iktidara gelmişti. İktidar yıllarında AP Hükümetinin çözmek zorunda olduğu konular arasında, 1961 Anayasası'nın getirdiği özgürlük ortamında artan Kürtçülük faaliyetlerini engellemek ve Doğu vilayetlerinin ihmal edildiği tartışmalarını sonlandırmak ilk sıralarda yer almıştır. Kürtçü kesimlerin ve sol eğilimli Türkiye İşçi Partisi'nin (TİP) bölgede yaşayan vatandaşların etnik aidiyetlerini kullanarak halkın belli bir kesimini örgütlemeye çalışması, mitingler tertip etmesi Hükümetin ve siyasi partilerin bölgeye yönelik ilgilerini daha da arttırmıştı. Bu çalışmada Başbakan Süleyman Demirel'in kalabalık bir siyasetçi ve bürokrat grubuyla ilki 18-24 Ağustos ikincisi de 16-22 Eylül 1968 tarihlerinde gerçekleşen Doğu illeri gezileri konusu işlenmiştir. İlk gezide toplamda 4.500 km. ikinci gezide ise 3.000 km. yol kat edilmişti. Ziyaretlerde birçok yatırımın ya temelleri atılmış ya da tamamlanan projeler hizmete alınmıştı. Ziyaretlerde vatandaşla kaynaşan, yaklaşık 70 yerde miting yapan Başbakan Demirel, Doğu'nun biriken sorunlarının en kısa zamanda çözüleceğini söyledi. Ayrıca ülkeyi bölmeye çalışan fikirlere itibar edilmemesi gerektiğini tavsiye etmiş ve halka, birlik ve beraberlik mesajları vermiştir. Çalışmada arşiv belgeleri, süreli yayınlar ve literatürdeki çalışmalardan istifade edilmiştir. Nitel bir çalışma olan bu çalışmada doküman analizi yöntemi kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Adalet Partisi, Süleyman Demirel, Doğu kalkınması, Türkiye İşçi Partisi (TİP), Doğu mitingleri.*

Introduction

On 27 May 1960, following the military coup d'état, the Democrat Party (DP), which had been in power for ten years, was dismissed from office and its leaders were arrested. The Justice Party (AP) was one of the new parties founded after the military paved the way for civilian politics once again. AP was founded on 11 February 1961 by retired Chief of General Staff Ragıp Gümüşpala.¹ As soon as it was founded, it wanted to be against the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the heir of the old DP votes. In this regard, its biggest rivals were the New Türkiye Party (YTP) and the Republican Peasant Nation Party (CKMP), but it was one step ahead of these parties in political life both in terms of organisation and staffing and because it adopted DP values earlier than the other two parties. In the 1961 general elections, AP emerged as the second largest party just behind CHP (CHP 36.7%, AP 34.8%, YTP 13.7% and CKMP 14%).²

After the elections, since the military wanted a government to be formed under İsmet İnönü as the prime minister, President Cemal Gürsel gave the task of forming the government to İnönü. Parties other than the CHP did not want to join the government headed by İnönü. However, after a while, due to the political conjuncture, AP became a partner in the government even though it did not want to. This reluctant partnership ended with a split after only seven months, especially when the issue of amnesty for former DP members came to the agenda.³ Thus, the AP's years of opposition began. In this process, upon the death of Ragıp Gümüşpala in 1964, Süleyman Demirel, who was supported by the business and press circles and who was believed to keep the relations between the army and the party in a positive direction, was elected as the general president at the Second Grand Congress on 28 November 1964.⁴ Under Demirel's leadership, the Party had increased its political power. As a matter of fact, on 13 February 1965, the budget of the İnönü Government was rejected and the government was overthrown. AP took part in the new coalition government formed under the prime ministership of Suat Hayri Ürgüplü until the general elections to be held eight months later.⁵

With 52.9 per cent of the votes it received in the 1965 general elections, AP had 240 deputies out of 450 deputies. CHP, on the other hand, managed to get 134 deputies with 28.7 per cent of the votes.⁶ Between 1965 and 1969, when AP was in power alone, Demirel kept good relations with the military⁷ and İnönü and wanted to spend his energy more

¹ Merve Dişiaçık Teknaz, Turkey under the power of Justice Party (1965-1971), Marmara Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, İstanbul, 2023, p. 5.

² Filiz Demirci Güler, *Türkiye'nin Yakın Siyasetinde Bir Örnek Olay Adalet Partisi*, Türkiye ve Orta Doğu Amme İdaresi Enstitüsü, Ankara, 2003, pp. 55-60.

³ Cemal Fedayî, "The First Era Of The Justice Party: 1961-1971", *Muhafazakâr Düşünce Dergisi*, 16(57), 2019, p. 125.

⁴ Tanıl Bora, *Demirel*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 2023, p. 75; For a political biography of Süleyman Demirel, see also: Murat Arslan, Süleyman Demirel, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul 2019.

⁵ Derya Şimşek, *Life and political activities of Süleyman Sami Demirel*, Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Ankara, 2011, p. 69-71.

⁶ *1950- 1965 Milletvekili 1961, 1964 Cumhuriyet Senatosu Üye Seçimleri ve Sonuçları*, Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Yayınları, Ankara, 1966, p. 1.

⁷ Zeynep Çağlıyan İçener, *Presidents, the state and "democracy" in Turkey: The ideas and praxis of Süleyman Demirel*, İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent Üniversitesi/ Ekonomi ve Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Ankara, 2010, p. 96.

on the economy and the problems of the peasantry, apart from internal party conflicts. In this direction, he established the Road, Water and Electricity Organisation in 1965 and gave importance to the construction of dams and power plants. The significant facilities initiated during this period included the following: Keban Dam and Hydroelectric Power Plant (1966), Ambarlı Thermal Power Plant (1969), Gökçekaya Dam (1967), Seyit Ömer Thermal Power Plant (1969), Istanbul Bosphorus Bridge (1970). Demirel was known as the “King of Dams” due to the importance he attached to dam construction.⁸

In this study, the subject of the visits to the eastern and southeastern provinces of the Republic of Türkiye (AP) by Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel, who travelled to the eastern and southeastern provinces on two campaigns in 1968, together with many ministers and bureaucrats, is examined.

1. Reasons for Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel’s trips to the Eastern Provinces

In addition to the obvious reason that Prime Minister Demirel travelled thousands of kilometres in August and September of 1968 and visited many places, either to lay the construction foundations of many investments or to put them into service, there are two other reasons. One of these is the increasing Kurdish activities in those years and the other is the intensification of the debates on the neglect of the East. Of these two reasons, the issue of the Kurdish movement was addressed first. Although the history of Kurdish activities dates back to ancient times⁹, it can be said that¹⁰ one of the events that contributed to the increase in Kurdish activities in those years was the developments in the neighbouring state of Iraq. On November 14, 1958, a military coup took place in Iraq. The ruling King Faisal was removed from office by the coup d’état carried out by General Abdulkarim Qasim. In the new Iraqi constitution prepared after the coup, it was declared that Iraq was the homeland of Arabs and Kurds. In order to consolidate his power, Qasim asked support from Soviet Russia and Mustafa Barzani, the head of the Barzan tribe, who had been in exile there for a long time.¹¹ Mustafa Barzani came to Iraq after 11 years and restarted the activities of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). These developments in Iraq also excited some people in Türkiye. One of the events caused by this excitement was the opening of a case known as “the 49s” in those years. The defendants were accused of establishing a ‘Kurdish Independence Party’, but the case was dropped due to statute of limitations before a verdict could be reached. Thus, the detainees were released without any punishment.¹²

It can be said that one of the most important developments that accelerated Kurdish activities in the country in the early 1960s was the establishment of the Workers’ Party of Türkiye (TİP) in the atmosphere of freedom brought by the 1961 Constitution. TİP was founded in 1961 by 12 trade unionists. A year later, with Mehmet Ali Aybar taking the

⁸ Cüneyt Arcaş, *Demirel Dönemi 12 Mart Darbesi 1965-1971*, 2nd Edition, Bilgi Yayınevi, Ankara 1985, p.78-79; Cemal Fedayi, “The First Era Of The Justice Party: 1961-1971...”, p. 134.

⁹ Fatih Ünal, *Kürt Meselesinin Ortaya Çıkışı (II. Meşrutiyet Dönemi)*, İstanbul Üniversitesi Unpublished master’s thesis, İstanbul, 1995, p. 23-24.

¹⁰ Şadillili Vedat, “Türkiye’de Kürtçülük Hareketleri ve İsyanlar 1”, Kon Yayınları, Ankara, 1980; Oya Girit, *Kurdish Movement in the Period of National Struggle*, Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, İstanbul, 1994; Bilal Şimşir, *Kürtçülük II 1924-1999*, Bilgi Yayınevi, 2011.

¹¹ Resul Köse, “The Wave Of Migration To Turkey Caused By 14 July 1958 Revolution In Iraq”, *Middle East International Conference On Contemporary Scientific Studies-V*, March 27-28, 2021, Ankara, Volume II, Farabi Publishing House, p. 362. pp. 362- 373.

¹² Hıdır Göktaş, *Kürtler II Mehabad’dan 12 Eylül’e*, Alan Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 1991, pp. 68-70.

presidency, it transformed into a class party with a socialist character.¹³ In the words of its chairman Mehmet Ali Aybar, there were three main groups in the leadership of TİP. These were trade unionists, Easterners and socialist intelligentsia.¹⁴ Eastern intellectuals thought that the TİP was the right place for them to engage in politics. For this reason, even before the Party's grand congress was held, there was a request from Diyarbakır to establish a provincial organisation of TİP. In response, the Party administration gave permission for the Diyarbakır organisation in order to spread throughout the country. Approximately two months after the establishment of the Diyarbakır organisation, a meeting of the Party's executive board was held in Gaziantep on 12 May 1963. In the statement made on behalf of the Party, it was claimed that the citizens living in the East who "speak Kurdish and Arabic and belong to the Alevi sect" could not benefit from constitutional rights sufficiently and that this geography was neglected, and this issue was considered a "big issue". The party's interest in the region led to an increase in the number of supporters in the region.¹⁵ The Party, which increased its number of supporters with these discourses, made more courageous statements or engaged in activities regarding the people of the region or the issues of the region.

At its congress held in Izmir on 10-12 February 1964, TİP gave a special place to the issue under the title "Eastern Development" in its party program. In the program, it was claimed that the issues of the region should not be examined only from an economic perspective, and that the citizens in the region were also socially and culturally lagging behind and even discriminated against on the basis of their ethnic identities and sects.¹⁶

On 10 October 1965, during the general elections, in the election manifestos distributed, TİP stated the following "... The Workers' Party of Türkiye will give priority to this region in the establishment of new industrial facilities, schools, hospitals and all kinds of welfare projects in order to put an end to the shameful situation of our eastern and south-eastern provinces as soon as possible."¹⁷ After the grand congress, TİP started to organise rapidly in the eastern provinces. In the general elections of 1965, four of the 14 deputies who came from Diyarbakır, Kars, Şanlıurfa and Malatya were elected from all over Türkiye.¹⁸ Shortly after the elections, the Party organised some groups of people from the region and organised the Eastern rallies.

As mentioned above, TİP was closely interested in the "Eastern problem" in line with the suggestion of Eastern intellectuals in order to find a base for itself. The social movements arising from this interest emerged in the form of Eastern rallies. The first Eastern rally was held in Silvan on 13 August 1967 with the organisation of TİP district executives. One of the speakers at the rally was TİP Diyarbakır MP Tarık Ziya Ekinci.¹⁹ Ekinci makes the following statement about the role of TİP in the rallies: "Among the contributions of the TİP to the Kurdish enlightenment movement, one of the most important activities

¹³ Tarık Ziya Ekinci, *Sol Siyaset Sorunları Türkiye İşçi Partisi ve Kürt Aydınlanması*, Cem Yayınevi, İstanbul, 2004, p. 221.

¹⁴ Mehmet Ali Aybar, *Türkiye İşçi Partisi 3*, BDS Yayınları, İstanbul, 1988, p. 66.

¹⁵ Tarık Ziya Ekinci, *Sol Siyaset Sorunları...*, pp. 273-284.

¹⁶ Mehmet Ali Aybar, *Türkiye İşçi Partisi 3*, p. 64; Tarık Ziya Ekinci, *Sol Siyaset Sorunları...*, p. 296.

¹⁷ İbrahim Etem Gürsel, *Kürtçülük Gerçeği*, Kömen Yayınları, Ankara, 1977, p. 93.

¹⁸ Tarık Ziya Ekinci, *Sol Siyaset Sorunları...*, pp. 300-301.

¹⁹ Naci Kutlay, *21. Yüzyıla Girerken Kürtler*, Peri Yayınları, İstanbul, 2002, p. 577.

it pioneered was the mass meetings called the Eastern rallies.”²⁰ The Silvan rally was followed by rallies in Diyarbakır (16 September), Silvan again (24 September), Siverek (1 October), Batman (8 October), Tunceli (15 October), Ağrı (22 October) and Ankara (19 November). These rallies were called “Protest rallies against the underdevelopment of Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia”.²¹

The slogans chanted at the rallies, it can be said that these rallies were not only rallies to demand rights, but also there wanted to make Kurdishness based on a certain segment of society. In addition, by using discourses such as the Kurds being treated as “second class people” and being “especially left behind”, a certain segment of the population may have hostile feelings towards other segments of the society or the government forces, which can be said to be a very dangerous attitude in the context of the unitary structure. The claim that Republican Türkiye has ulterior motives towards the region and its people is not acceptable. Because it was not possible for a state and nation that had just emerged from many years of wars to produce solutions to the centuries-old problems of the region at once. The fight against epidemics, the world economic crisis towards the end of the 1920s, and the outbreak of World War II prevented the desired investments in the region. However, in the last years of the CHP government after the war, very important investments were made in the region by allocating special appropriations to the budget under the name of “Eastern Provinces Development Program”. These investments continued in many areas such as education, health and public infrastructure, although not under a special program during the DP period. In fact, these investments were periodically carried out at levels exceeding those in the Western provinces. In other words, regional provinces were subjected to positive discrimination. However, it can be said that centuries-old socio-economic problems, geographical and climatic conditions of the region, periodical budget and personnel problems were the most important reasons for the failure to reach the desired level in the development of the region. For this reason, it is not consistent with the realities of the history of the Republic that the Republican Governments treated the people of the region as “second class people” because of their ethnic belonging.²²

As a matter of fact, these activities and discourses were met with reactions from both the state-government forces and the public. In Erzurum, about forty right-wing-nationalist organisations came together and issued a declaration that a counter-demonstration would be held against the eastern rallies. In the declaration, it was stated that “we will always oppose the mentality that is active to divide the country by any means whatsoever”. On 12 November 1967, this rally, called the “Rally for the Rise of Anatolia”, was organised by the Tradesmen’s Associations, the Associations for Combating Communism, the Erzurum Executive Committee of the National Union of Turkish Students and the Nationalist Teachers Union. At the rally, the slogans such as “Communists are coming”, “Religion is being lost”, “Our National Integrity is disintegrating” were chanted with the slogan “Act before Religion, Faith, Homeland before gone”.²³

²⁰ Tarık Ziya Ekinci, *Sol Siyaset Sorunları...*, p. 304.

²¹ İsmail Beşikçi, *Doğu Mitingleri'nin Analizi (1967)*, Yurt Yayınları, Ankara, 1992, p. 15.

²² See Resul Köse, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu'da Devletin Şefkatli Yüzü (1923-1960)*, Gazi Kitabevi, Ankara, 2021; Resul Köse, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu'da Hükümet Politikaları (Asayiş, Adli, İdari, Eğitim) (1923-1960)*, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Yayınları, Ankara, 2022.

²³ İsmail Beşikçi, *Doğu Mitingleri'nin Analizi (1967)*, p. 71.

Travels Of Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel To Eastern And Southeastern Anatolian Provinces in 1968

Eastern rallies were among the agenda items of the National Security Council meeting held under the chairmanship of President Cevdet Sunay in October 1967. Informing the members of the Council, the officials claimed that “there was provocation in the Eastern rallies” and asked the parties to take measures in this regard.²⁴ In this context, during the Mardin portion of his tour to Mardin, Siirt and Muş in October 1967, AP’s Deputy Chairman Talat Asal, after evaluating that inciting the people of one region against the people of the other region would lead the country to disaster, warned that “no patriotic person can allow or tolerate such a situation. The adventurers will hit their heads against the wall of law.”²⁵

The second reason for Prime Minister Demirel’s visits to the Eastern provinces—addressing the debates regarding the region’s neglect—can be understood within the context of the 1960s, when discussions about increasing investments in the East intensified both within Kurdish circles and in Parliament compared to previous years. Undoubtedly, these debates had existed in previous years, especially after the transition to multi-party rule.²⁶ However, the establishment of many parties in Turkish political life during the period of the 1961 Constitution, the existence of ideological parties, the parties’ concern to win votes, and the advancement of Kurdishism by taking advantage of the constitutional freedom exacerbated these debates.

After the 1965 elections, the first budget law negotiations prepared by the AP were an example of this issue. Erzincan MP Nafiz Giray had submitted a parliamentary question to the Presidency of the Parliament to learn from the Prime Minister whether a special plan was being considered for the underdeveloped Eastern and Southeastern Anatolian regions of the country. The parliamentary question was answered by State Minister Cihat Bilgehan on behalf of the Prime Minister on 30 November 1965.

Cihat Bilgehan stated that the answer to this question was given in detail in the Government program²⁷ and that it was accepted in the program that these regions would be given “greater attention by the Government”, but that the underdevelopment was not only in the East, and that there were structures in other regions similar to the ones in the East, and that there was a need for special attention and importance for the Eastern provinces. However, Bilgehan stated that there was no need to consider a special program when the government program and the Development Plan had already set targets to overcome the underdevelopment in the East. Bilgehan said that the Development Plan gave priority to the Eastern provinces in the investments to be made in the fields of education, health, transport and agriculture, and that the Government’s main objectives included the development of the region’s transport network, mining and animal husbandry, development of water resources, advancement of industry in the region, completion of the university being established, establishment of new universities, opening of technical schools, completion of the Keban Dam, and that these objectives

²⁴ *Milliyet*, 17 October 1967, p. 1.

²⁵ *Milliyet*, 23 October 1967, p. 3.

²⁶ *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Period 8, Volume 19, Meeting: 3, TBMM Matbaası, Ankara, 1949, pp. 288-289; *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Period 8, Volume 23, , Meeting: 4, TBMM Matbaası, Ankara, 1950, pp. 54-56.

²⁷ Türker Sanal, *Demirel Hükümetleri Koalisyon Protokolleri ve Programlar*, Sim Matbaacılık, Ankara, 2000, p.105-107.

would be taken into consideration in the annual budget programs. Bilgehan continued his speech by giving examples and listing the objectives of the Government. Accordingly, while the amount of public investments allocated for the Eastern provinces was 568 million liras in the 1963 budget, it was increased to nearly two billion liras in the 1966 budget. Investments to be made by local administrations were excluded from these figures. In addition to public investments, it was considered important for the development of the region to direct private enterprise investments for the aforementioned regions. In this context, it was planned to support private enterprise investments by opening branches of the Industrial Development Bank in a few cities of the Eastern provinces. It was also considered to establish branches of the Mining Bank in some centres of this region. Cihat Bilgehan, who gave this information, stated that the government, as Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel had said in his Diyarbakır speech, considered “the development of the Eastern region as the most sacred ideal”. Bilgehan went on to say that in order to realise the investments to be made in the East and to carry out other state affairs, serious and important emphasis had been placed on the adequacy of the state organisation and personnel from the central administration to the local administration. In this context, necessary legal arrangements had been made. According to this regulation, it was decided to grant deprivation allowances to civil servants working in the underdeveloped regions of the country. This would ensure a more balanced distribution of administrators and civil servants throughout the country.²⁸

The issue of making more investments in the eastern provinces came to the agenda again during the 1968 budget negotiations, in a debate in which Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel took part. The two major parties of those years, CHP and YTP, had criticised or made demands to the government. For this reason, Prime Minister Demirel himself gave the answer.

Bülent Ecevit, who took the floor on behalf of the CHP group at the 15 February 1968 session of the budget negotiations, started his speech by accusing the AP government of neglecting social justice among the regions. As evidence for this, he stated that “nothing specific had been done to develop the East” and that no concrete measures could be presented in the Second Five-Year Plan. In his speech, Ecevit also addressed the claims and concerns about whether there was a Kurdish movement in the region. According to him, “There are undoubtedly some individual Kurds in the East. But there is no Kurdish movement that has taken hold among the people. The people of this region were not longing to break away from Türkiye, but rather to be part of Türkiye”. The cause of the people of the region was the fight against poverty. Saving the East from poverty and developing it was not as difficult and expensive as it was thought to be.

Bülent Ecevit suggested to the government that the livestock potential of the region should be utilised at the highest level. He also stated that if the region’s need for bread wheat was met, the region could also meet Türkiye’s meat demand. However, the decrease in the number of pastures in the region and the fact that the existing pastures were owned by the rich or rented to the poor at very high prices had a negative impact

²⁸ *Resmî Gazete*, 23 July 1965, No: 12056; *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, Period 2, Volume 1, TBMM Matbaası, Ankara, 1965, pp. 422-427.

on animal husbandry. This problem had to be solved and a feed industry had to be established rapidly in the region. State leadership and assistance should be provided so that the people of the region could export their animals, and smuggling should be prevented.

The lands in the Iğdır and Kağızman region could provide both the livelihood of the people of the region and a large foreign exchange inflow to the country with a number of measures to be taken. Ecevit said that the money necessary for the realisation of all these proposals was the hundreds of millions of liras allocated from the state budget every year for the creation of private enterprise should be used for the development of the East by giving up this passion, so that the region could develop beyond recognition in five years. If these were to be done: “Neither separatists, nor exploiters, nor aghas, nor sheikhs would be able to exist in the region. The sheikhs and aghas of the East, some of them do not actually own any land or assets. In fact, they fill the void left by the state in the East, or pretend to fill that void and take advantage of it.” At the end of his speech, Ecevit stated that in the past, the CHP had put special funds in the budget for the development of the East, but the DP and the AP, which came to power later, did not put these special funds, and that these parties either slowed down or neglected the measures taken by the CHP for the East.²⁹ As for the issue Ecevit was referring to, during the period when the CHP was in power (1923-1950), 10 million liras were allocated to the budget in 1949 and 13 million liras in 1950 for the development of the Eastern provinces.³⁰

The day after Bülent Ecevit’s speech, the YTP was another party that brought the issues of the East to the agenda. Speaking on behalf of his party’s group, Ağrı Deputy Kasım Küfrevi said that CHP Secretary General Ecevit’s remarks about the East were in line with the truth and that he was “fully in favour” of these issues. He started by saying that he agreed. According to him, it was important that for the first time in the parliament, a secretary general of a party had boldly put forward his observations on the East. On behalf of the Party Group, Küfrevi listed the measures to be taken in this region. Accordingly, the population of the region should be made more productive through education. Moreover, since only 15 per cent of the land in the region was suitable for cultivation, attention should be paid to animal husbandry. In addition to state investments, it was important to encourage private sector investments in the region.³¹ It is observed that YTP differed from the CHP in its views on private sector investment.

Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel responded to the spokespersons of both parties in the Parliament on 28 February 1968. The Prime Minister preferred to start his speech by responding to the propaganda in the Eastern rallies held a short while ago. In his speech, the Prime Minister stated that all three claims used in the rallies, namely “The Second Five Year Plan does not bring anything to the East”, “Nothing has been done to the East”, “Nothing can be done to the East”, were not true and that it was obvious that the rallies were organised with “separatist provocation” and that the claim of seeking the right to

²⁹ *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, Period 2, Volume 24, TBMM Matbaası, Ankara, 1968, pp. 548-549.

³⁰ Resul Köse, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu’da Devletin Şefkatli Yüzü (1923-1960)*, p.179.

³¹ *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, Period 2, Volume 24, pp. 617-618.

freedom was also a lie. Because, according to the Prime Minister, the government was genuinely committed to making investments in the East. While the Development Plan outlined the amount of investment allocated to various sectors, it did not specify the exact locations where these investments would be implemented. Therefore, these criticisms were unwarranted. Demirel said that it was not possible to make a separate plan for the East without amending the Constitution, which was criticised by the opposition. In his speech, Prime Minister Demirel gave some information about the East. According to this, 16 per cent of the investments made by the State in the Eastern provinces during the First Five Year Plan³² had been realised. The population in the Development Plan period was 18 per cent. Looking at the figures, it could be said that there was a consistency.

Prime Minister Demirel had previously stated that roads were the first priority in the East and that nothing could be achieved without transport. Accordingly, at that time there was no asphalt-free road in the East. Work was only continuing in the Pervari, Şırnak and Uludere, Beytüşşebap, and Şemdinli districts. When the bridge over the Tigris River between Cizre and Zahar was completed, it would be possible to travel from Istanbul to Baghdad on asphalt roads. The project, which had started in Iğdır in 1934 in co-operation with the Russians, was left unfinished due to the breakdown of relations with the Russians.³³ The project, which was put into effect and completed in 1952, irrigated three to four hundred thousand decares of land. A hydroelectric power plant was built in Iğdır. During the AP government, a meat plant was started to be built in Kars and some studies for a cement factory were started. In Erzurum, plans were initiated for the construction of the Erzurum Cement Factory. Additionally, sugar factories were established in both Erzincan and Erzurum, and irrigation projects were underway in Uluova, Elazığ. The construction of the Keban Dam was underway. The construction of a fertiliser factory in Sivrice had begun under the AP government.

From Elazığ to Tatvan, it was possible to travel by railway and asphalt road along the Murat Valley. A meat plant in Tatvan, a cement factory in Van and a hydroelectric power plant were built. Erciş, Muradiye and Gevaş Plains were provided with water. An irrigation network was built in Nusaybin, Mardin. The construction of a 27-thousand-kilowatt hydroelectric power plant was about to completion. In Diyarbakır, the Devegeçidi Dam was being constructed together with an irrigation system. A meat combine was about to completion in Elazığ. A cold storage depot and a cement factory were established in Gaziantep, and a meat plant in Urfa. In addition, electricity was being supplied to Gaziantep and Urfa from Seyhan. In the last three years, 95 million liras had been spent to supply drinking water to another 3,700 villages in the Euphrates Plain. A railway from Van to Kotur was being built at a cost of 300 million liras and was to be operational in 1969. Thus, the railways in Türkiye would be connected to the Iranian railways. Meat combines were to be built in Ağrı and Bingöl in 1969.

³² *Kalkınma Planı (Birinci Beş Yıl) 1963-1967*, Başbakanlık Devlet Matbaası, Ankara, 1963.

³³ Resul Köse, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu'da Devletin Şefkatli Yüzü (1923-1960)*, pp.147-148.

Travels Of Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel To Eastern And Southeastern Anatolian Provinces in 1968

Prime Minister Demirel also touched upon the issue of land reform³⁴ in his speech and said, “We are totally against the mentality that makes Turkish peasants slaves in the hands of landlords”. According to Demirel, there were 240 million acres of land in Türkiye. Three million families cultivated up to 500 acres of this land. The proportional equivalent of this land was 93 per cent. More than 500 acres of owned land constituted only seven per cent of the total land. The number of families cultivating this land was 15,000. According to Demirel’s own calculations, 15,000 families owned 18 million acres of land. If 500 acres of this land were left to the landowners, 7.5 million acres would have to be left to the landowners. This left 10 million acres of land. If this land was distributed as 100 acres each, it would have 100,000 families, but this would not solve the problem since there were 398,000 families with less than five decares of land, 375,000 families with 6-10 decares, and 495,000 families with 11-20 decares. Because there was an imbalance between the distribution of land and population in Türkiye. While there was a shortage of land in the Black Sea region, there was plenty of land in the Southeast. For this reason, Demirel stated that the problem could not be solved by taking these 10 million lands from their owners and that maquis lands and hillside lands could be utilised, but then the Forestry Law was brought against the Government. At the end of his speech, Demirel stated that with the Second Development Plan, which was in force during the 1968-1972 period, large investments would be made in the Eastern provinces in the fields of education, health, industry and infrastructure. He also stated that in this program, very favourable conditions in terms of tax reductions, interest and credit rates were offered to private sector representatives who wished to invest in the East.³⁵

2. Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel’s First Eastern Provinces Tour

Months after his speech to the opposition parties in February 1968, Prime Minister Demirel embarked on a multi-day tour of the Eastern provinces, the first in August and the second in September. The aim of these visits was to commission the investments already made and to lay the foundations for new investments. In addition, although it was not an election period, he wanted to mingle with the people through public meetings and rallies.³⁶ In this context, he warned the public against harmful activities. Wherever he went, Demirel said that solutions would be produced together by being patient against the problems of the country and the region that had accumulated for years. In this way, it can be said that he wanted to put an end to the discussions that the East was neglected both in political circles and in the environments where Kurdish activities were carried out.

³⁴ For the Justice Party’s policy on land reform, which could not be solved in Türkiye in those years, see: Ezgi Aydoğmuş, *Agricultural policies applied during the period of Justice Party governments and its socio-economic reflections in Turkey (1961-1980)*, Balıkesir Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Balıkesir 2021, p.113-118; The number of landless families was higher in the eastern and south-eastern provinces than in other regions. For example, the number of landless families in Urfa was 29,564 in these years. In Diyarbakır, the figure was 26,750. The proportional equivalent of these figures within the total number of families was 53.7 per cent in Elazığ and 46.7 per cent in Diyarbakır. Fehmi Yavuz, “Toprak ya da Tarım Reformu”, *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol.22, Issue: 2, (1967), p.39.; See also about this subject: Reşat Aktan, “Türkiye’de Toprak Reformu Çalışmaları”, *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 21, (1971). pp.37-83.

³⁵ *Millet Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, Period 2, Volume 26, TBMM Matbaası, Ankara, 1968, pp. 717- 726; *İkinci Beş Yıllık Kalkınma Planı 1968-1972*, no date, pp. 268-269.

³⁶ Demirel was born into a rural family, which made him a political leader with a talent for connecting with the people. For more on Demirel’s personality, see also, Fuat Süreyya Oral, *Süleyman Demirel’in Kişiliği*, Cihan Matbaası, Ankara 1973; Ayşegül Komşuoğlu, *Siyasal Yaşamda Bir Lider Süleyman Demirel*, Bengi Yayınları, İstanbul 2008.

The distance to be travelled by Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel during his first visit to the Eastern provinces was approximately 4,500 km. He visited the provinces of Van, Hakkâri, Muş, Bitlis, Siirt, Mardin, Urfa and Diyarbakır. Minister of State Seyfi Öztürk, Minister of Industry Mehmet Turgut, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Refet Sezgin, Minister of Rural Affairs Turgut Toker, some senators and deputies, undersecretaries, general managers and members of the press participated in this trip together with the Prime Minister.³⁷

Prime Minister Demirel started his tour of the Eastern provinces from Van. In his first speech in Van, he had stated that citizens should not be provoked and should be in unity and solidarity with the following words “We have no problems that we cannot solve. We should work without paying heed to discord, mischief and provocations.” In his speech, Demirel explained that the country had many long-standing and accumulated problems and that these problems could be solved by working together, but that there were conditions: “This country will live as one, it will live together, and the people of this country will not let the intellectual struggle of ideas turn into fights and discord. This is the condition: a Türkiye living in peace and tranquility. This does not imply a Türkiye devoid of noise. Rather, it is a Türkiye that maintains the struggle of ideas within appropriate bounds, ensuring that resentment and anger do not transform into hostility.” These remarks by Demirel can be interpreted as a response to the slogans frequently voiced during the rallies held in the East.

During his speech, the Prime Minister stated that he had started his first tour of the country in 1968, except for election trips, in Van and said that he had not come to ask for votes from the citizens, but to greet them and to see the work done on the spot.³⁸ During Demirel’s speech, the people asked for the elimination of unemployment, the construction of a large mosque in Van, the establishment of an Eastern university and an increase in the number of doctors.³⁹ In fact, the idea of establishing an Eastern university on the shore of Lake Van was also Atatürk’s dream.⁴⁰

After the inauguration of the Ergil Hydroelectric Power Plant, Prime Minister Demirel visited and received information about the construction of the Cement Factory and the Van-Kotur railway, which would be put into operation in 1969, opened the 100-bed state hospital and the Erciş Hydroelectric Power Plant, and travelled to Tatvan.⁴¹

After Van, Prime Minister Demirel was the first Prime Minister in the history of the Republic to visit Hakkâri. In his speech to the people there, after mentioning that the country had many problems, he said that all problems would be solved “as long as Türkiye is in peace, tranquillity and togetherness, brotherhood and unity. There will always be supporters of sedition, mischief and separatism.” In Hakkâri, Demirel visited the state hospital, ordered to those concerned for the construction of an indoor sports hall and other facilities, and received the delegations of the districts. Meanwhile, speaking at the

³⁷ Zafer, 18 August 1968, p. 1.

³⁸ Zafer, 19 August 1968, pp. 1, 7.

³⁹ Cumhuriyet, 19 August 1968, p. 1, 7.

⁴⁰ Resul Köse, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu’da Hükûmet Politikaları...*, p. 415.

⁴¹ Zafer, 20 August 1968, pp. 1, 7.

groundbreaking ceremony of the new hydroelectric power plant in Hakkâri, YTP Hakkâri MP Ali Karahan thanked the Government as a Hakkâri resident, saying that the services provided to Hakkâri in two and a half years had not been provided in the 45-year history of the Republic. Ahmet Zeydan, a former CHP MP from Hakkâri, had said to Demirel: "You are the apple of our eye".⁴²

Following his visit to Hakkâri, Prime Minister Demirel addressed the citizens in Erçiş and Tatvan. In his Tatvan speech, he said: "Our country is great. Its problems are not the problems of today. Problems have accumulated. There are two ways for the development of this beautiful country. Either to enter into each other in the absence, poverty, or to work in a way worthy of our ancestors by pushing away the discordant, the corruptor. We desire unity, solidarity, brotherhood, peace, tranquility and harmony. We are in the love of serving the nation. The common sense of the nation distinguishes the discordants and defeatists very well."⁴³

Within the scope of the Prime Minister's visit to Tatvan, the foundation of the Meat Production Plant was built in Tatvan. As for the objectives of the government in the establishment of the meat plant, this plant was to be of great importance in the development of the East, especially in the valorisation of animal products. The fact that Tatvan was located on the CENTO road would also increase its value. For years, the livestock in the region had been smuggled to Iran, Syria and Iraq and replaced by goods of no monetary value. In addition to this, there was a considerable amount of outage due to weight loss in animals while being transported live to distant cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Adana. With the establishment of the plant here, a large hinterland would be covered and butchered animals would be bought on time and at their value, providing the producer with the expected profit. Smuggling would be prevented and export of slaughtered meat to Iran and Syria would be realised when necessary. The meat shortage experienced in the region in some seasons would also be prevented with the slaughtering in meat plant and the protein needs of the citizens would be met through normal means and at normal prices. Unemployment would be prevented by creating a new employment area in the region and the people of the region would not leave their families and go to distant neighbourhoods. With the Combine, the spread of animal diseases in the region would also be prevented. The meat and bone obtained from the destroyed meat and offal would be used in the feed industry to produce protein, one of the main ingredients of this organisation. By combining the slaughterhouses in the vicinity, by-products would be better valued, and business lines such as the leather industry would develop. Thanks to the storage feature and capacity of the meat plants, cheeses produced in the region would be stored and foodstuffs not available in the East would be stored in this plant, enabling citizens to consume these foodstuffs easily and at their value whenever they wanted. This facility was planned to be completed in 1969 and its budget was organised accordingly.⁴⁴ This plant was conceived as a requirement of the decision in the Second Five-Year Development Plan to prioritise the Eastern region, where livestock breeding is more intensive, for the establishment of meat plants and the leather industry.⁴⁵

⁴² Zafer, 29 August 1968, p. 7; See also for details of the joy that Demirel's visit to Hakkâri caused among the people of Hakkâri: Tekin Erer, *Lider Demirel*, 1977, p.42-43.

⁴³ Zafer, 21 August 1968, pp. 1, 7.

⁴⁴ *Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Devlet Arşivleri Başkanlığı Cumhuriyet Arşivi (BCA)*, Fund Code: 30 1 0 0, Location No: 2 16 16, p. 10.

⁴⁵ *İkinci Beş Yıllık Kalkınma Planı 1968-1972*, p. 416.

Prime Minister Demirel then visited Muş and Varto to see the houses built after the Varto earthquake of 19 August 1966 and addressed a crowd of thousands in Muş. In Muş, the Prime Minister spoke in front of a banner reading 'We are Turks, we are brothers, we are together' in front of the State House. The Prime Minister had given the following information in his speech in Muş: 'In the last disaster, no one was left hungry or in deficit. We have recovered from the earthquake disaster by spending one hundred million liras. It is necessary to appreciate what has been done. In the Muş plain, 175 million liras worth of construction has been put out to tender. Irrigation canals will be constructed. We are endeavouring to do much more. One billion liras will be spent on the Muş plain and the yield will be increased five times. Thus, Muş will take its place in the great Türkiye.' In the rest of his speech, the Prime Minister said that he had not come to ask for votes from the people of Muş and concluded his speech as follows: 'As long as our country is in order, peace and tranquility, it will develop in a very short time.'⁴⁶ In Muş, the Prime Minister inaugurated Muş Public Education Centre, Tandoğan Topraksu Cooperative Artesian Wells and Irrigation Canal and 50 houses built for flood disaster victims in Sungu Village, and laid the foundations of Varto NCO Lodgings, Muş Central Gendarmerie Officer Lodgings, Central Post Office Building and Muş Real Estate Credit Bank.⁴⁷

Prime Minister Demirel had spoken at the handover ceremony of 554 houses and 122 shops destroyed in the earthquake in Varto two years ago to the people of Varto. Demirel was welcomed in Varto with a banner reading 'Architect of Varto'.⁴⁸ The groundwork for the Bitlis high school hostel building was laid in Bitlis.⁴⁹

Prime Minister Demirel was also welcomed with a great flood of love in Siirt and addressed tens of thousands of Siirt residents. In Siirt, Siirt State Hospital and Batman Institute of Art for Men were opened and the groundwork for the Central Regional Agricultural School and the Central Institute for Girls was laid.⁵⁰ In his Siirt speech, Prime Minister Demirel stated that Siirt had many local problems and that efforts were being made to resolve these problems, 'First of all, we are endeavouring to connect the districts of Siirt to Siirt. We are trying to make it possible to go to Pervari, Şırnak, Erüh and all districts in all seasons'. Demirel also said that efforts were being made to complete health and education facilities, to develop various industrial investments in Siirt, which is an oil region, and to open new business areas. In the continuation of his speech, Demirel said that the country had many troubles and that the condition for getting rid of these troubles was that peace and tranquillity prevailed in the country.

On his way from Siirt to Batman, Prime Minister Demirel also visited Kurtalan and Beşiri. In his speeches there, he emphasised in particular: 'Freedom is an essential condition. This country will never again see what it is like to be without freedom. As a nation, it is necessary not to give opportunity to those who sow discord, those who exploit poverty, those who want to make it seem as if centuries-old problems can be solved in a day. We are striving to provide every corner of the country with all civilised

⁴⁶ *Hürriyet*, 21 August 1968, p. 7.

⁴⁷ *BCA*, Fund Code: 30 1 0 0, Location No: 2 16 16, p. 3.

⁴⁸ *Cumhuriyet*, 21 August 1968, pp. 1, 7.

⁴⁹ *BCA*, Fund Code: 30 1 0 0, Location No: 2 16 16, p. 1.

⁵⁰ *BCA*, Fund Code: 30 1 0 0, Location No: 2 16 16, p. 2.

means.' Demirel, who travelled to Batman after his Siirt visits, addressed thousands of citizens in Batman and said, 'We will make the land of none a land of haves'. Demirel had visited İPRAŞ and Batman Refinery facilities in Batman and asked for acceleration of the works by getting information from the relevant people. After the opening of Batman Institute of Art for Men, the delegation travelled to Mardin.⁵¹

Addressing a large group of people in Mardin, Prime Minister Demirel particularly mentioned the water problem and said that they were closely interested in every problem of Türkiye. Demirel stated that they had laid the groundwork for 245 houses in order to rescue the people living in the caves in Hasankeyf and that these citizens would be able to live in their houses in the spring of next year. During his visit to Mardin, Demirel also attended the ceremony of providing 60 villages with drinking water in Gülharrin village. Because of Demirel's interest in Mardin, the Mardin Municipality Council, composed of AP, CHP and Trust Party (GP) members, held an extraordinary meeting and unanimously decided to grant Demirel an honorary citizenship certificate for Mardin.⁵²

Prime Minister Demirel also addressed large crowds in Kızıltepe and Ceylanpınar.⁵³ Çağçağ Hydroelectric Power Plant, Cizre Bridge, Mardin Agricultural Vocational School, Mardin Agricultural Vocational School, additional construction of Provincial State Hospital, 48 km of Midyat-Nusaybin road, Gercüş Regional Boarding School and drinking water of 329 villages were put into service in Mardin and the groundbreaking of a primary school in Kızıltepe was symbolically laid for the construction of 57 primary schools in Mardin in 1968.⁵⁴

Within the scope of the trip, the construction of E Type Regional Prison in Urfa, Harran 60 village group drinking water and electricity network facilities to be provided to Harran Sub-district, Central Direkli Drinking Water, Central High School Building were put into service, while the construction of the drinking water group that will provide water to 205 villages in Edene Village of the Centre and the construction of the Viranşehir drinking water group for 96 villages were put into service.⁵⁵ In Diyarbakır, the bazaar and business centre in the provincial centre were put into service and the foundation stone was laid for the Çınar-Aşağıkonak Group Drinking Water facilities for 38 villages. The Prime Minister and the accompanying delegation left Diyarbakır for Ankara by plane on 24 August.⁵⁶

Prime Minister Demirel and his delegation travelled 4,500 km. in seven days, averaging 643 km. per day. During this time, Demirel made a total of 25 hours of speeches in 32 places.⁵⁷ As part of the tour, he visited Van, Hakkari, Bitlis, Siirt, Mardin, Urfa and Diyarbakır. Aşkale, Gevaş, Erciş, Muradiye, Adilcevaz, Ahlat, Tatvan, Varto, Baykan, Kurtalan, Beşiri, Batman, Gercüş, Midyat, Savur, Viranşehir, Hilvan and Siverek districts

⁵¹ BCA, Fund Code: 30 1 0 0, Location No: 2 16 16, p. 2.

⁵² Zafer, 24 August 1968, pp. 1, 7.

⁵³ Zafer, 25 August 1968, p. 1.

⁵⁴ BCA, Fund Code: 30 1 0 0, Location No: 2 16 16, p. 4.

⁵⁵ BCA, Fund Code: 30 1 0 0, Location No: 2 16 16, p. 6.

⁵⁶ BCA, Fund Code: 30 1 0 0, Location No: 2 16 16, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Zafer, 28 August 1968, p. 1, 3.

and Güzelsu, Gümüşdere, Edremit, Sarmansuyu, Tandoğan, Timar, Mercimekkale, Çukur, Bölük yazı, Sarıkonak, Narlıdere, Hasankeyf, Ceylanpınar, Çamlıdere, Akziyaret, Karacadağ, Mercihan sub-districts and Hasköy, Harran, Akıncı and Karabağçe towns as well as Çavuştepe, Gülharri, Yeşilli, Kalaba, Altınova, Karaağaçlı, Güroymak and in nearly 100 villages he had identified the wishes and needs of the people.⁵⁸ While Demirel was inaugurating the facilities built in the villages, his wife Nazmiye Demirel talked to the village women and listened to their requests.⁵⁹ The Prime Minister was given honorary citizenship of 13 places during his visit. Citizens showed their love for the Prime Minister wherever he travelled. The number of sacrifices slaughtered had reached 500. He was welcomed with military ceremonies in every place he visited.⁶⁰ The investment value of the facilities that the Prime Minister laid the ground for or inaugurated during the trip amounted to 720 million liras.⁶¹

When the Prime Minister's seven-day visits evaluated, it can be said that the fact that he stayed in the region as much as any prime minister had stayed in the past and travelled to more places than any other prime minister did in the past is an indicator of the importance given to the region and the people of the region. For this reason, the visit was considered as a 'historical event' by the people of the region.⁶² On the other hand, it could be argued that this visit was not of a political nature, but rather a research-oriented journey, as it involved traveling to the most remote areas and villages of the region and engaging directly with the local population. Thanks to such a visit, the problems of the citizens and the region could be seen on the spot. The fact that this visit had the characteristics of a research trip can also be understood from the participants. In fact, the Prime Minister was accompanied by many executive ministers as well as general managers and technical delegations in charge of road, water and electricity works. One of the most important aspects of the Prime Minister's speeches during the trip was the theme of the fraternity. For this reason, in every speech he spoke of unity and solidarity and advised the citizens not to give any opportunity to 'separatists and spoilers'.

3. Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel's Second Eastern Provinces Tour

Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel's second visit to the Eastern provinces took place between 16-22 September 1968. The Prime Minister was accompanied by State Ministers Seyfi Öztürk and Hüsamettin Atabeyli, Minister of Industry Mehmet Turgut, Minister of Agriculture Bahri Dağdaş, Minister of Rural Affairs Turgut Toker, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Refet Sezgin, some senators, deputies, general managers and press members. The tour covered a distance of 3,000 km. and visited the provincial centres of Malatya, Elazığ, Tunceli, Erzincan, Erzincan, Erzurum, Kars, Ağrı and nearly 30 district centres, as well as the easternmost districts of the country, namely Iğdır and Doğubayazıt. Within the scope of the tour program, the groundworks of some facilities were laid in villages, towns and provincial centres, while others were put into service.⁶³

⁵⁸ Zafer, 29 August 1968, p. 7.

⁵⁹ Zafer, 22 August 1968, p. 1, 7.

⁶⁰ Zafer, 28 August 1968, p. 7.

⁶¹ Zafer, 28 August 1968, p. 3.

⁶² Zafer, 22 August 1968, pp. 1, 7.

⁶³ BCA, Fund Code: 30 1 0 0, Location No: 2 16 17, p. 1.

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Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel started his second Eastern provinces tour from Malatya, where he landed on 16 September. The Prime Minister, who was welcomed with a military ceremony, addressed the enthusiastic crowd gathered in front of the Malatya Provincial Governor's Office and expressed his desire to equip every corner of the country with works and said: 'I am not in favour of the division of citizens in any way. Every Turkish citizen has equal rights under Turkish laws, will be treated equally under Turkish laws, and will get her/his share from the developing Türkiye'.⁶⁴

During the Elazığ phase of his visit to the eastern provinces, the Prime Minister inspected the ring road after making inquiries in the city and listened to the concerns and wishes of the citizens by receiving delegations at the Governorate.⁶⁵ In the meantime, the Keban Dam in Elazığ, the construction of which was continuing rapidly, was visited. This project was seen as one of the important development moves of the Government. Elazığ Atatürk High School with 12 classrooms and Elazığ Meat Plant with a capacity of freezing 20 tonnes of meat per day were opened.⁶⁶

Demirel, who travelled to Tunceli after his visit to Elazığ, first visited Sivrice and examined the construction of the Sivrice Azote Factory on site.⁶⁷ Demirel made a speech to a large group of people there and then visited Pertek and Tunceli on 17 September.⁶⁸ Demirel had received a request for a football field in Pülümür.⁶⁹

As the first prime minister to visit Tunceli after Şemsettin Günaltay, in his speeches, he mentioned the investments made in Tunceli, especially in the field of education, and said that the investments would continue to increase. Demirel opened the public library in Tunceli and gave proprietorship certificate to the houses of the residents of Cumhuriyet Neighbourhood in Pülümür who were relocated due to landslides. He had also laid the groundwork for a regional boarding school.⁷⁰ After laying foundations of the regional boarding school, Demirel told the people that no sacrifice would be avoided in order to raise the level of education in Tunceli to higher levels. Demirel also handed over the keys of 82 prefabricated houses built for the people whose houses were destroyed in the earthquake on 26 July the previous year to their rightful owners. Demirel had announced that 1,050 families whose houses had been damaged had been provided with dwellings and that 200 kilometres of village roads had been constructed.

In his speech to the people in Erzincan on 18 September, following Tunceli, Prime Minister Demirel compared the budgets of 1963 and 1968 and stated that while the budget had doubled in five years, the money spent on the Eastern provinces had tripled. During his visit to Erzincan, Demirel made inspections in the city and distributed deeds

⁶⁴ *Hürriyet*, 17 September 1968, s. 7; *Zafer*, 17 September 1968, pp. 1, 7.

⁶⁵ *Zafer*, 18 September 1968, p. 1, 7.

⁶⁶ *BCA*, Fund Code: 30 1 0 0, Location No: 2 16 17, p. 2.

⁶⁷ *BCA*, Fund Code: 30 1 0 0, Location No: 2 16 17, p. 2.

⁶⁸ *Zafer*, 18 September 1968, p. 1, 7.

⁶⁹ *Cumhuriyet*, 18 September 1968, p.1, 7.

⁷⁰ *Hürriyet*, 18 September 1968, p. 7; In 1968-1969, the number of regional boarding schools in the country increased to 42, 37 of which were located in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia. See also: Muhabbet Doyran, Education policies of Adalet Party governments between the years 1965-1971, Marmara Üniversitesi Unpublished Master Thesis, İstanbul, 2004, p.84; Şengül Büyükboşacı, *The reflections on the Turkish media of educational policies and their implementations during the era of Suleyman Demirel (1965-1971)*, Süleyman Demirel University Institute of Social Sciences Unpublished Doctorate Thesis, Isparta 2018, p.94.

to 250 farming families from Sazlıpınar and Değirmenköy for 3,200 decares of land given by the Treasury. Demirel then laid the groundworks of the Municipality Commercial Site and the Foundation Business Inn. He then travelled to Tercan, laid the building grounds of the regional boarding school, listened to the wishes and wishes of the people and then moved to Aşkale.⁷¹ Prime Minister Demirel had given some directives to the general directors accompanying him during his Eastern tour up to Erzincan. One of these directors was the General Director of Highways. The Prime Minister had requested that the work on the asphaltting of the roads in this part of the country from Elazığ onwards should be accelerated and that the villages in the region should be connected to the main connection roads and provided with electricity. In response, General Director Servet Bayramoğlu said that the asphalt works in this region would be completed in 1970 at the latest and that from this year onwards, a person travelling from Edirne would be able to go all the way to Kars without passing through dusty roads.

The Prime Minister officially opened a cement factory in Aşkale, which would produce 350,000 tonnes of cement per year.⁷² On the fourth day of the tour, he addressed thousands of people of Erzurum and touched upon various problems of the country and explained that the Government did not discriminate between East and West by giving examples based on figures. On 19 September, he inaugurated Atatürk University Morphology Institute and Higher Education Student Residence in Erzurum and laid the foundation of the first part of the construction of the Faculty of Medicine Research Hospital. The Research Hospital was to include 675 beds, and the polyclinic and service building was to care for 800 patients a day. The foundations of the Industrial Estate, indoor sports hall, Erzurum Maternity Home, Foundation Business House, Special Administration Business House and Lignite Briquette Factory were also laid. This factory would serve to meet the region's need for fuel. Erzurum Air Terminal Building was also inaugurated on the same day.⁷³

Prime Minister Demirel, while inaugurating the facilities of Atatürk University in Erzurum, complained about one issue. That was that doctors did not come to the East for service. Demirel said in his speech that there were 72 health centres in Erzurum, but only 18 of them had doctors.⁷⁴ In fact, the problem of doctors in this region was not a problem was not a problem in this region, but this region, but it was a problem that was felt throughout the country except for the big cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. In other words, doctors preferred to live in big cities both because of their high earnings and high living standards. So much so that even doctors from the Eastern provinces did not want to work in their own regions.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the state sought ways to send more doctors to the East. In 1960, there were 11,400 inhabitants per doctor in the Eastern provinces, while in 1965 this number had fallen to 7,700.⁷⁶ Erzurum was the place where the Prime Minister stayed the longest during his trip. While inaugurating or laying the foundations of many facilities here, he had also travelled around Erzurum from district

⁷¹ Zafer, 19 September 1968, p. 1, 7; *Hürriyet*, 19 September 1968, p. 1.

⁷² Zafer, 19 September 1968, p.1, 7; *Hürriyet*, 19 September 1968, p.1.

⁷³ Zafer, 20 September 1968, p. 1, 7.

⁷⁴ *Hürriyet*, 20 September 1968, p. 9.

⁷⁵ Resul Köse, *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu'da Devletin Şefkatli Yüzü (1923-1960)*, pp. 294-315.

⁷⁶ *İkinci Beş Yıllık Kalkınma Planı 1968-1972*, p. 265.

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to district and even street to street. He had contacted people from all classes, including university professors, students and delegations from villages, and listened to their problems and received their wishes and hopes.⁷⁷

After Erzurum, Demirel travelled to Kars on 21 September. On the way, he listened to the problems of the citizens in Güzelova village and Dumlu sub-district. On his way to Tortum, Demirel visited the health centre and received information. Demirel then visited Narman, Oltu, Kömürlü, Şenkaya, Akşar, Şenkaya and Şenkaya districts and sub-districts before travelling to Göle, where he spent the night and departed for Kars in the morning.⁷⁸

Demirel visited six districts and nearly 20 towns and villages in Erzurum and Kars. The Prime Minister addressed a large crowd in Kars. He laid the foundations of some facilities and inaugurated others. Among the facilities opened were a 200-bed state hospital and a secondary school building. The foundation of Kars Meat Factory was laid.⁷⁹ In a public speech, a citizen had asked the Prime Minister for coal.⁸⁰

On the sixth day of the tour, the Prime Minister visited Iğdır district. In his speech there, he talked about the efforts for the development of the region in every field. Demirel visited the Serdarabad Regulator on the Turkish-Russian border and made inspections, followed by a visit to the Karakale Border Post. Demirel also visited the Iğdır Plain Irrigation Facilities, the project of which was prepared during his term as the General Directorate of State Hydraulic Works and the construction of which had begun.⁸¹ During Demirel's visit to Iğdır, the people of the region presented him with a three and a half metre petition with 1,500 signatures for the construction of a canning and spinning factory in Iğdır.⁸²

In his speech to the people during his visit to Ağrı, the Prime Minister, after talking about the country's progress in a short period of time, said that electricity would be brought to Ağrı from Keban, unemployment in Ağrı would end, and roads would be built, and emphasised the sentence 'We will save our Eastern provinces from the pain of the East, and our Eastern citizens from the pain of the East, this is the goal of our development philosophy'.⁸³

Before leaving Ağrı, the Prime Minister visited the 12th Division, the Ağrı Girls' Primary School and took a tour around the city. On his way from Ağrı to Eleşkirt, the Prime Minister visited some irrigation facilities and inaugurated the fountain built by the Ministry of Rural Affairs, which would provide drinking water to the village of Güvence. Demirel then visited Tahir Nahiyesi on the way and inaugurated the second fountain that would provide clean water to this neighbourhood. The Prime Minister made a speech to the crowded group waiting for him in Eleşkirt and said that the region and the country would have better opportunities with the new investments to be made.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ Zafer, 21 September 1968, p. 1, 7.

⁷⁸ Zafer, 22 September 1968, p. 7.

⁷⁹ Zafer, 23 September 1968, p. 1, 7.

⁸⁰ Hürriyet, 22 September 1968, p. 1, 9.

⁸¹ Zafer, 23 September 1968, p. 7.

⁸² Hürriyet, 23 September 1968, p. 1, 9.

⁸³ Zafer, 24 September 1968, p. 7; Hürriyet, 24 September 1968, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Zafer, 24 September 1968, p. 7.

In his speech in Hınıs, the Prime Minister mentioned that the country's resources were abundant and sufficient for everyone and then warned the people against some ideological movements as follows: 'We are ready for the struggle and debates in any form, provided that they remain within civilised boundaries, are not directed against the survival of the state and are not mired in some outdated doctrines. If the debate and struggle of ideas are carried out in our country within these limits, our country can only benefit from it. However, those who have the ambition of injecting our beloved nation with some doctrines which are not accepted by the Turkish Constitution or which are directed against the survival of the state and the integrity of the nation will always be disappointed.'

In Pasinler, the last stop of the tour, the Prime Minister said, 'Those who say that AP neglected the East are telling the biggest lie.' As proof of this, he said that when they came to power, there was only a plant in Erzurum in the East, while the plants in Urfa and Elâzığ were in service, the foundation of the Diyarbakır plant would soon be laid, and the foundations of Tatvan and Ağrı were also being laid. In addition to increasing the capacities of Gaziantep, Elazığ and Sivas factories in order to meet the need for cement, which is one of the most important needs of the East, he said that six more cement factories were established or would be established in this region during his term. At the end of his speech, the Prime Minister said, 'Turkish homeland is a whole. It is a whole from one border stone to the other border stone. It is an indivisible and indivisible whole. For this reason, what is it, dear citizen, that some ignorant people want to achieve by sowing some seeds on the surface of the country by some purposeful ignorant people?'

The Prime Minister returned to Ankara from Erzurum by plane on 22 September after making nearly 35 speeches during an eight-day tour covering seven provinces and nearly 30 districts. On the plane on his way back to Ankara, he said, 'It is necessary to tell the Turkish people the truth. When we took over power in 1965, only 20 per cent of the development plan had been realised. None of the big investments had been made' and he explained that the people should be given dreams and promises that could be realised instead of unrealisable dreams. In this regard, he said that development without electricity was unthinkable and that education and social services would follow, and he expressed his opinion on the investments to be made and said that he had ideas to add new links to the 1969 budget program.⁸⁵

4. Results of Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel's Eastern Provinces Travels

Prime Minister Demirel's travels to the Eastern provinces had many consequences. One of these outcomes was that the CHP and YTP became more interested in the Eastern provinces and even organised research trips to the region. Just a few days after the Prime Minister's second visit to the Eastern provinces, CHP Secretary General Bülent Ecevit embarked on a ten-day tour of the Eastern Black Sea and Eastern provinces, which started on 24 September. YTP Chairman Yusuf Azizoglu also planned to visit the Eastern provinces on the same days.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ *Zafer*, 25 September 1968, p. 7.

⁸⁶ *Cumhuriyet*, 22 September 1968, p. 1.

For the results of the trip, the report titled 'Eastern Development' prepared by the AP shortly after the trip should also be analysed. Although it is not clear when and by whom the report was prepared, it refers to the AP as 'four years in power' in its content. For this reason, it can be said that the report was prepared in 1969. In the report, it is possible to get an idea about how the AP viewed the regional issues after the trips.

In the report, the importance of the problems of the region by the Party was expressed as follows: 'The dire need for the economic, social and cultural development of Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia is a national issue of vital importance that will unite us all as a nation'. According to the report, the reasons for the region's backwardness were listed as the neglect of the region for centuries, the long history of wars, invasions and migration movements. These reasons also responded to the claims of some circles such as TIP that the East was particularly neglected. AP was also very uncomfortable with the fact that discussions on the underdevelopment of the East were being dragged towards 'divisive, separatist and disintegrative ideas'.⁸⁷

In the report, it was stated that it was wrong to attribute the deficiencies of the East to only one government, especially to their own government, and that the Second Five-Year Development Plan gave importance to the economic, social and cultural development of the East. In addition to infrastructure investments such as roads, water and electricity, investments in agriculture, animal husbandry and mining were made in the region in the last four years to pave the way for industrialisation.⁸⁸

AP complained that the issue of the development of the East was made a subject of ideological exploitation by some circles. What these circles wanted was that the development of the East could only be possible through the statist model and not through private enterprise. AP, on the other hand, believed that the development of the East could be realised within the same economic and social constitutional order as was applied throughout the country, and that this was not a choice but a legal obligation. In other words, different practices between regions were not possible. For this reason, AP advocated a mixed economic model for the development of the East. However, it was also of the opinion that the private sector should be encouraged to invest in the East, and prior to this, it was necessary to establish the necessary infrastructure facilities in the region.⁸⁹

The report also rejected the opposition parties' recommendations, made since 1965, for a separate program dedicated to the development of the East, countering them with the following reasoning: 'The idea of a separate Eastern program is far from having any serious meaning beyond a political concession to the people of a particular region.'⁹⁰ Thus, it can be understood that besides the legal impossibility of implementing a separate program specific to the East, AP also had such a concern.

⁸⁷ BCA, Fon Kodu: 30 1 0 0 Yer No: 133 863 5, p. 1.

⁸⁸ BCA, Fon Kodu: 30 1 0 0 Yer No: 133 863 5,p. 2.

⁸⁹ BCA, Fon Kodu: 30 1 0 0 Yer No: 133 863 5,pp. 3-5.

⁹⁰ BCA, Fon Kodu: 30 1 0 0 Yer No: 133 863 5, p. 6.

The AP also deemed the criticism from the opposition and certain circles, which argued that the government had failed to implement land reform, as unjustified. The rationale behind this view was that seizing land from large landowners without simultaneously creating opportunities to enhance agricultural production in the region would yield no tangible benefits, aside from fulfilling ideological goals.'

In the report, it was stated that the policies of the leftist circles to organise and mobilise the people were also carried out for the purpose of exploitation and were actions that would disrupt the unity and solidarity of the people: 'The extreme leftist politicians who exploit the psychological ease of mobilising people around feelings of hatred and enmity against each other are more concerned with their own propaganda interests than with the welfare of the people. In our country, as elsewhere in the world, they find class struggle and the division of the masses of the people into hostile groups, and finally the creation of divisions and enmities between the regions, suitable for their own destructive purposes.' For this reason, AP believed that the fate of the East could only be changed through big projects. Keban project, oil facilities and pipelines, development of animal husbandry, irrigation facilities, investments in health and education were listed among these big projects.⁹¹ When the report is evaluated in general, it can be said that there is a consistency in the AP's perspective and policies towards the region before and after the visits.

Another outcome of this trips is that it is necessary to look at the results of the general elections held in the year immediately following the trips. In the general elections held in 1965, AP had won 52.9 per cent of the votes and 240 deputies out of 450 deputies, while CHP had won 28.7 per cent of the votes and 134 deputies. In the 1969 general elections, although AP received 46.6 per cent of the votes and decreased its votes compared to the previous elections, due to the changed electoral system, it was able to get 256 deputies out of 450 deputies and CHP was able to get 143 deputies with 27.4 per cent of the votes. Compared to the 1965 elections, AP increased its number of deputies in the Eastern provinces. The number of deputies, which was 34 in 1965 elections, increased to 41 in 1969 elections.⁹² Of course, the policies implemented throughout the country had an impact on this result. In addition, as a result of the AP's interest in the problems of the region, it can be said that it was also effective in mingling with the people by travelling to the remotest corners of almost all Eastern provinces shortly before the elections.

Conclusion

Between 1965 and 1971, AP came to power alone in Türkiye. During these years, the development of the eastern provinces and the prevention of Kurdish activities, which increased during these years, were among the issues that AP was most occupied with.

It can be said that the environment of freedom caused by the 1961 Constitution was effective in the increase of Kurdish activities. The organisation of Eastern rallies by some Kurdish figures and the left-leaning TİP, based on the ethnic belonging of a group of the people of the Eastern region, drew the attention of state authorities, the government and political parties to this region. Although these rallies were called as protest rallies

⁹¹ BCA, Fon Kodu: 30 1 0 0 Yer No: 133 863 5, pp 8-9.

⁹² 1950- 1965 Milletvekili... s. 1; 12 Ekim 1969 Milletvekili Seçimi Sonuçları, Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü Yayınları, Ankara, 1970, p. 7.

against the underdevelopment of the East, the chanting of slogans and the carrying of banners that would harm the unitary state structure aroused the opinion of Prime Minister Demirel that something should be done by the Government. For this reason, in order to take this material from the hands of both Kurdish figures and all groups who used the issue of the neglect of the East as political material, Prime Minister Demirel went to the Eastern provinces with a large group, the first on 18-24 August 1968 and the second on 16-22 September 1968. A total of 7,500 kilometres were travelled during these trips. In a period of more than two weeks, almost all the Eastern and Southeastern provinces were visited from district to district and even to villages in some places.

During the tour, many investments were put into service and the foundations of many projects were laid. During his visits, Prime Minister Demirel held rallies in nearly 70 places and also held public meetings and listened to the problems and complaints of the citizens. In fact, it can be argued that these visits were not politically motivated, but rather investigative and research-oriented, aimed at directly observing the region's issues and gaining the support of the local population, the Prime Minister emphasised in many places that these visits were not a visit to ask for votes. The general elections were still a year away. Therefore, it can be said that this statement of the Prime Minister was sincere. In addition, considering that the region's greatest need is for infrastructure investments such as roads, water and electricity, the fact that the participants were ministers, bureaucrats and technicians who manage these tasks strengthens the impression that the visit was an investigation and research trip. In addition to this, Demirel travelling to places where no Prime Minister had ever been before and spending weeks in the region was unprecedented until then. The people of the region had already considered this as a 'historical event'. As mentioned above, the fact that a prime minister inaugurated even a village fountain should be proof that this visit was not made for political purposes.

At the rallies during the visits, Prime Minister Demirel, as the highest executive authority of the country, did not hesitate to admit that the country and the region had many long-standing and accumulated problems. He did not promise that these problems would be solved immediately. In this respect, he had tried to be honest with the people and had drawn a sincere image. Wherever he went, he insisted that citizens should work together to solve the problems of the region, and that in doing so, they should not be caught up in ideas and movements that would divide the country and its citizens.

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