



A REVIEW OF THE 2015 ELECTION MANIFESTOS FROM A CULTURAL POLICY PERSPECTIVE

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The policy document titled “Cultural Policy Priorities and Recommendations to Political Parties for Election Manifestos”, drafted in scope of İKSV’s cultural policy studies and published in January 2015, aimed at identifying the areas in which Turkey needed commitment and policy measures in the field of cultural policies and encouraging political parties to draft their election manifestos with a consideration of these priorities. On the eve of the June 2015 general elections and in reference to the subject headings in the aforementioned document, we present below a comparative review of the political parties’ election manifestos.

AKP (the Justice and Development Party), which only included the heading “Culture” in its 2011 election manifesto, has broadened this heading as “Culture and Arts” for these elections so as to also encompass art. The declarations of **CHP** (Republican People’s Party), **MHP** (Nationalist Movement Party) and **HDP** (Peoples’ Democratic Party) also employ the heading “Culture and Arts”. AKP does not use subheadings under “Culture and Arts” and describes its objectives and policy proposals in a single list. CHP explains its objectives under subheadings such as “Legal Measures” and “Institutional Transformation”. MHP employs what could be defined as an “umbrella promise” as a title and outlines its proposals under it. While AKP also includes some sub-measures, some of which can be regarded as activities, CHP proposes more extensive policy measures. It is possible to say that HDP’s manifesto is a text that entails more emphasis on values (freedom and social rights) as opposed to policy proposals. HDP also lists its proposals one by one, however does not elaborate on most of these proposals. Even though MHP has copied verbatim most articles from the “Culture and Arts” heading of its 2011 manifesto, it devotes more space to culture and arts in this declaration.

Access to culture and right to participation

It is of utmost importance for election manifestos to fully promote cultural rights and include plans to broaden these rights. Cultural rights, and freedom of expression in relation to these rights, should be safeguarded by the constitution. Based on the recommendation which asserts “Artists’ freedom of expression and citizens’ right to access and participate in culture must be safeguarded by the constitution” in İKSV’s cultural policy text, we evaluated parties’ prioritisation of this issue, which is presented below in no particular order:

CHP’s manifesto underscores that access to culture is a human right and states that an arts law will be drafted to safeguard freedom of expression in particular. The declaration notes that citizens’ access to culture and arts will be made easier. Even though no details are provided as to the scope of the law or how access will be facilitated, it should be emphasised that approaching access to culture as a human right is a very significant step.

HDP focuses particularly on freedom of expression and the free expression of art in its manifesto and notes that mechanisms that allow for censorship will be eliminated.

MHP declares that “the artist will be protected in all his stages and at every age”, but does not elucidate on the scope and legal framework of this protection.

AKP envisions “a society in which everyone contributes to cultural and artistic activities” and states that it will increase mechanisms to ensure “the active participation of civil society in cultural and artistic activities.” On the other hand, it is of greater importance that a holistic approach based on shared wisdom is adopted in devising policies and mechanisms to promote the participation of civil society and sector representatives in decision making processes in the field of culture and arts in Turkey. While the **AKP** manifesto includes no reference to advancing freedom of expression, it states that “the legal framework to facilitate the free production of culture and art works will be developed”. However, it does not elaborate on what sort of legal measures are foreseen to this end.

Cultural heritage

Cultural heritage is the subject that is most emphasised in **AKP**'s election manifesto. In the declaration where words such as protection and preservation are frequently used, “the protection of cultural assets deemed holy and of symbolic value” and “the holistic unearthing and protection of the texture in urban regions” are accentuated. In order for these promises to be implemented, a change in policy should be adopted as compared to previous periods.

CHP's manifesto indicates that The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions will be signed and ratified. As also noted in **İKSV**'s text, making reference to this document adopted by UNESCO in 2005 for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions is of crucial importance for cultural heritage. However, this convention has already been signed, it only awaits ratification by the parliament. On the other hand, it is important to note that the contribution to the protection of immovable cultural assets deducted from property tax will be used for this purpose.

In **HDP**'s manifesto the promotion of “the production and exhibition of art works in modern and endangered languages” and the issue of intangible cultural heritage are also underscored.

In **MHP**'s manifesto, as in **AKP**'s, there is a strong emphasis on protection. However, this emphasis does not sufficiently stress cultural diversity; it is necessary to accentuate protecting, and most importantly advancing, cultural heritage with all its elements.

Additionally, all decisions pertaining to sites that are engrained in social memory and of symbolic significance (such as the function and naming of the former Madımak Hotel mentioned in **CHP**'s declaration)—from the name of the site to how it will be used—should be made in a participatory manner with utmost diligence and the inclusion of all stakeholders in the process. Employing the right approach in such processes is as significant as the outcome.

Structural measures

It is of vital importance for the state to assume a facilitative role providing incentive and infrastructure in the cultural policy field toward the goal of a country where arts and culture are experienced and practiced freely by all citizens. While it is not appropriate for the state to directly intervene with this field, this sphere should be supported through incentives. In this respect, as also mentioned in İKSV's recommendation text, increasing the budget of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism's share in the general budget—as in counterpart ministries in countries that place special import on culture and arts—to 1% may be considered an initial step.

CHP's proposal to turn the Ministry of Culture and Tourism into two separate ministries is important, since having a ministry solely and directly focused on the cultural sphere can only just meet the needs of this expansive field. Furthermore, the declaration mentions that the share of the ministry in the general budget will also be increased. This is a significant promise, however, the fact that the initial target share is not identified renders the proposal vague.

In **HDP's** manifesto there is no reference to budgetary measures concerning the ministry.

Similarly, **MHP** does not address the issue either.

In **AKP's** declaration there are no measures concerning the structure of the ministry, but it is stated that the share of culture and arts in the general budget will be increased. However, here also, there is no mention of the institution through which this budget will be allocated or the estimated increase rate.

The administrative structuring of state supported culture and arts institutions is also addressed in the manifestos.

HDP asserts in its manifesto that an arts council will be responsible for decision making processes. It is indicated that this arts council to be formed under the Ministry of Culture will be comprised of artists, though no details are provided.

The **AKP** manifesto states that it will “readdress the administrative organisation of the cultural and artistic field in the upcoming period”, but does not give any details as to the party policy on how this administrative organisation should be transformed. It is possible to consider this as a sign that the work on draft laws concerning TÛSAK (The Turkish Arts Institution), which was started by the previous government, will be brought back to the agenda.

CHP declares that the TÛSAK draft law will be shelved and a Culture Strategy Document will be drafted with broad participation. Like HDP, CHP indicates that mainly artists will be appointed to the administration of arts institutions and foresees improvement in personal rights and benefits of state employees. As stated in İKSV's opinion following the previous discussions around TÛSAK, “If there is going to be a restructuring of these

institutions, the issue should be addressed as a separate heading in a participatory, transparent manner based on the broadest possible consensus”.

MHP does not include any proposal which could be considered as institutional structuring in scope of its cultural policies.

Cultural policies as part of the development strategy

The field of culture and arts also comes to the fore with the economic value it generates. Once again, the recommendation from İKSV’s policy text “the state should provide constant support for the field of culture and arts to transform cultural wealth into economic value” draws attention to the cultural and artistic activities’ contribution to the economy. Measures that could be taken to this end as recommended in İKSV’s text include the expansion of the scope of the sponsorship law to include arts and culture activities, decreasing of tax rates or the allocation of a portion of the National Lottery revenues to this field. The funds and incentive mechanisms to be developed in this sphere play a crucial role in not only reviving the economy, but also diversifying and advancing artistic production. All four parties include the issue of incentives in their manifestos. Even though one of the most important needs in the field is increasing and diversifying incentives, the identification of funding criteria, application processes and methods through a transparent and accessible system bears as much significance. Taking measures so that support mechanisms do not discriminate between state and independent artists and to ensure that all artists can benefit from the funds and incentives will allow for the field to develop in a healthy manner.

While “increasing civil contribution through funds and incentives” is emphasised in **AKP**’s manifesto, there is no clear reference to the role of the public sector. On the other hand, even though the cinema incentives mentioned in the AKP declaration are an important need, the incentive mechanism is proposed to be founded toward “promoting national, religious, moral and folkloric values” whereas it is important for such an incentive mechanism to treat all thematic approaches equally. The emphasis in the AKP manifesto that in addition to the quantity, the quality of cultural activities will also be increased is noteworthy in terms of devising a quality oriented approach in culture and arts as opposed to quantitative and numerical targets.

MHP’s manifesto also refers to incentives and here as well there is an emphasis on the “national”. Ensuring that the proposed incentives embrace diversity is of vital significance for the development of a healthy social life. MHP also states it will assure that “all branches of arts are advanced and ... promoted for a wider outreach”.

CHP’s manifesto meanwhile includes provisions such as minimizing the taxes imposed on this field and the payment of artists’ insurance premiums by the Ministry of Culture.

In **HDP**’s manifesto on the other hand there is no mention of measures to be taken in fields such as taxation etc.; the declaration places emphasis on the fair distribution of existing incentives and refers to an “incentive for creativity”.

The **AKP** manifesto contains an ambiguous statement on “training culture and arts people who are at peace with their own society and history”; the emphasis should rather be on instituting the necessary mechanisms to support artists producing in all subjects and branches of arts.

A similar statement can be found in the **MHP** manifesto as well: “With the aim of guiding the artists to close ranks around common societal values, it will be ascertained that artists become role models for the society with an understanding that internalises and is at peace with national values”. While supporting artists, it is important to devise policies taking into consideration the diversity and plurality in the field of culture and arts and the fact that this field is nourished by these qualities.

Localisation

There is an ever increasing need for cultural policies to be shaped by local actors in accordance with the needs of each province and region. At this point, adopting the various measures described also in the **İKSV** policy document may ensure the localisation policies to be developed so as to meet the existing needs. To this end, in addition to enabling the local governments to take active role in the creation of cultural policies, it is important to design the venues according to the requirements of culture and arts events and furnish the culture centres with a management model that encourages the participation of actors operating in the field.

Reference is made to localisation especially in the manifestos of **HDP** and **AKP**. Although **CHP** does not emphasise localisation, it declares that it will draft master plans for culture and arts in provinces, and that libraries, theatres and courses will be opened with the support of local governments.

MHP does not refer to any aspect of localisation but pledges to “increase the number of cultural centres, scientific research institutions and museums”.

AKP's manifesto states that “local governments’ purview in the field of culture and arts will be increased” and mentions the “transfer of cultural facilities to local governments” which are important developments. It is of vital importance for these processes to be carried out without reducing the number of existing cultural centres such as Atatürk Cultural Centre (AKM) and by opening these venues for culture and arts events with the participation of all relevant actors, and adopting a long term plan to meet the needs of existing culture centres such as programme content, resources, qualified staff, etc. Similarly, conducting the culture and arts events at the neighbourhood centres instead of only at shopping malls will increase access to such activities. Rather than venues being multifunctional, having spaces that are appropriate for the targeted activity will increase the quality of the activities.

Lastly, the **HDP** manifesto underlines the localisation process with the statement “organisation and exhibition from the local to the global”, however does not expand on it.

Creative sectors

Creative sectors are among the foremost sectors that can produce high added value. Making creative sectors a central element of the development strategy may lead to the constitution of a strong economic vision. This should also entail the elimination of obstacles before the advancement of this sector. In this regard, the possibility of addressing provisions pertaining to intellectual property rights mentioned in **AKP** and **CHP** manifestos can be considered as a positive development. Both manifestos attribute special weight to creative sectors.

The **HDP** manifesto declares that “the physical obstacles before the organisation and exhibition of art will be eliminated”, however no specific information is provided as to the measures envisioned to be taken in this field.

If the **AKP** manifesto’s emphasis on maintaining the tradition of foundations is of a nature that will lead to the adoption of regulations to facilitate the activities of all not-for-profit culture and arts institutions (foundations, associations, NGOs) it may then create an improvement. Furthermore, it is important that the regulations include the subject of the annulment of taxes in delivery and service payments of foundations working in the fields of culture and arts as mentioned in the **İKSV** policy document and meet the current needs of cultural institutions.

MHP’s manifesto states that foundations will be supported by the state, which is a significant promise, however it does not elaborate on this promise. Moreover, it contains an ambiguous statement of “bringing [the foundations] in line with their founding objectives”.

The publicity and translation support for the sector mentioned in **AKP**’s and **CHP**’s declarations can be deemed important. Moreover, the emphasis in **HDP**’s and **CHP**’s manifestos on supporting artists’ social rights and their organizing points at a very significant gap in the sector.

Arts education and databank

For devising the requisite policies in the field of culture and arts, identifying the priorities based on the needs in the field, and the most opportune use of resources, it is important to have easily accessible, up-to-date and accurate data in this field. Statistical data will ensure that the correct strategies are followed in cultural policies. As mentioned in the **İKSV** policy document, there is need for scientific data on issues such as “cultural consumption; employment in the cultural sector; and contribution of culture to local and national economy”.

The **AKP** manifesto makes note of digitalisation, digital archives, and inventory works. **CHP** touches upon virtual museum works. **MHP** underlines archive works. On the other hand, there is no promise on scientific data collection in the field of culture and arts in the parties’ manifestos.

In addition to the need for statistical data, culture and arts should become part of a comprehensive education programme for the personal development of the individual. Furthermore, in line with the conditions of the current day and age, it is important for this education to treat all arts disciplines and traditions equally, and encourage the learners for free and creative thinking. As it is well known, access to arts education is considered among the fundamental components of the right to access culture.

There are no proposals on this subject in **HDP's** or **MHP's** manifestos. It is worthy of note that the **CHP** manifesto has a separate heading titled "Culture and Arts Education" and promises to allocate more resources to this field. **AKP's** declaration also has provisions that can be interpreted in relation to arts education. These include "teaching the world classics" and "transforming cultural centres into places of continuous education for amateur and professional artists". It is also stated that "our cultural and artistic values will be addressed in institutions of education". However, this education which, as noted in the manifesto, aims to "strengthen the sense of identity and belonging" can only reach its goal if it promotes free and creative thinking.

Cultural diplomacy

Policies mentioned in the İKSV text towards "developing comprehensive programmes that will reflect the cultural wealth and diversity of Turkey and underscoring the potential contribution of Turkey to future global culture in cultural diplomacy" will at the same time facilitate the global interaction and visibility of the arts produced in Turkey.

In reviewing the parties' manifestos from the perspective of cultural diplomacy, while the promise in **AKP's** manifesto on "actively continuing the cultural and artistic activities... of the Yunus Emre Institute and increasing the support provided to scientific research" seems important, it is equally important for these activities to be actively pursued to reflect the diversity and multifaceted nature of cultural and artistic production in Turkey and also to be open to international interaction and collaborations.

While **MHP** talks about "developing international cultural collaboration programmes", it shapes its promise upon identity building. It is important for these programmes to be addressed with a more inclusive approach and be impartial to all elements of cultural diversity.

Although there is no special emphasis on cultural diplomacy in the **CHP** manifesto there is mention of publicity support to be provided to people of letters who go abroad.

In the **HDP** manifesto there is no proposal to be categorised under the heading of cultural diplomacy.

Conclusion

It is possible to note that as the 2015 elections draw near the four major political parties dedicated more space to culture and arts in their election manifestos as compared to previous years but that the subject was addressed only towards the end of their

declarations. It can be inferred that the importance and potential of culture and arts and cultural policies on a broader level have yet to be sufficiently appreciated. The fact that the promises describing the policies are not fleshed out in the manifestos or remain as a set of isolated activities that cannot be referred to as policies comes to the fore as a problem. Similarly, it can be observed that the manifestos are not rid of statements that might be ambiguous or hold multi meanings for the electors. Moreover, it is possible to see that multidimensional issues that are beyond the scope of cultural policies are addressed under the title of culture and arts. In order for a holistic approach to be developed in the field of cultural policies, the scope of the cultural policies must be well defined.

In line with its constantly evolving nature which is enriched through interaction, culture and arts should be supported with liberating and holistic—rather than protective—policies that encourage innovation and are equidistant from all branches and views. It is important for legislative regulation and decision making processes to be shaped with the participation of different segments, experts and NGOs active in the field, and to adopt policies that unite rather than divide the actors in the field. Development of the field will be possible by ensuring that the positive proposals in these manifestos do not remain as mere promises and by demonstrating the necessary political will to this end.