

Signaling Economy at The National Security Council: Turkish Case

MUHAMMET ALİ ZURNACI

Signaling emphasis on economy in the last NSC (MGK in Turkish acronym) meeting of 2021 might tell us more than a speculation. When I first saw the word “economy” in the press release, some quick pulses influenced my mind. How come there is a comparative and relative way of thinking in a bureaucratic state tradition? Economy is normally up to the Ministry of Economy. Security is the business of the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of Interior. However this time things may be converging.

- “Upon the robust infrastructure that Turkey has built, in accordance with her targets; challenges and threats in the process of implementation of her -investment, production, employment and export-oriented- policies were evaluated. Determination to reach our Republic’s Centenary strong also economically as in every field was highlighted.”¹

If not self-esteem, besides the interesting perception of threat, aforementioned “determination” seems more like an expectation or an assumption of the Ministry of Economy but not a MGK emphasis. Here are the questions come up:

Do we usually see the word “economy” in the press releases?

What has been highlighted about “economy” in the last 20 years?

Can we compartmentalize the emphasis into two categories as “interior & exterior”?

Could MGK provide any improvement in his “view of the economy” throughout the years?

Is it possible to connect the emphasis to the related points of “political history”?

Could we please cut the word short and be clearer?

- Sure.

From 2003 up to now, we have 125 press releases.

Each single of them was checked one by one.

¹ Presidency of the Republic of Turkey Secretariat-General of the National Security Council, Press Release of the Meeting held on 25 November 2021, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/25-kasim-2021-tarihli-toplanti> February 6, 2022

“Economy” in the Press Releases

10 releases of the year 2003² don't contain any economic emphasis. There is not even a single word. **(Nothing) 0/10**

9 releases of 2004³ Neither do not have any economic focus except the April meeting including an emphasis on fulfilling promises of economic recovery. (2004 Cyprus Referendum) **(Exterior +) 1/9**

6 releases in 2005⁴ do seem relatively emphasizing economic points in three meetings. One is the August 23 Meeting, pointing out the necessity of **economic**, social, cultural efforts in order to eliminate the disparities between the provinces and regions. **(Interior +)**

The other is the October 24 Meeting, highlighting the measures to be taken to use the entire technical and **economic** potential in hydroelectricity production by **2023**. **(Interior +)**. **(Strategic)**

The last is the December 29 Meeting, underlining the measures to solve **economic**, sociocultural and public order problems caused by internal migration. **(Interior -) 3/6**

6 releases of 2006⁵ do not contain any **economic** focusing. I couldn't find even a single word. **(Nothing) 0/6**

6 releases in 2007⁶ have a relative economic emphasis. One is the April 10 meeting which has a note to the government of Iraq and emphasis on political, **economic** and other approaches to be followed. It was right after a tension between Turkey and Iraqi authorities. **(Exterior -)** The second meeting was on October 24 underlining the **economic** measures against PKK. **(Exterior -)** The last meeting was on December 28 stressing the **economic** dimension of counterterrorism. **(Exterior -) 2/6**

6 releases of 2008⁷ have some economic highlighting. On 24 of February, the release gave points to developing bilateral cooperation with Iraq in political, **economic**, commercial, cultural and military areas. **(Exterior +)** The next meeting held on 28 of February harped on further development of bilateral cooperation with Iraq in various areas primarily **economy**

² Press Releases 2003, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2003-yili-basin-aciklamalari> February 6, 2022

³ Press Releases 2004, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2004-yili-basin-aciklamalari> February 6, 2022

⁴ Press Releases 2005, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2005-yili-basin-aciklamalari> February 6, 2022

⁵ Press Releases 2006, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2006-yili-basin-aciklamalari> February 6, 2022

⁶ Press Releases 2007, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2007-yili-basin-aciklamalari> February 6, 2022

⁷ Press Releases 2008, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2008-yili-basin-aciklamalari> February 6, 2022

and energy. **(Exterior +)** If remembered, that year Erdoğan gave a popular speech on the 2008 global financial crisis and had said: “The crisis will pass at a **tangent to Turkey**. We will overcome the crisis with the minimum damage.”⁸ It seems MGK showed almost no interest.
2/6

6 meetings of 2009⁹ have only one focus in the February 26 Meeting that points out the strengthening cooperation with Iraq primarily on security, economy and energy. **(Exterior +)**
1/6

6 releases of 2010¹⁰ have two emphasis. First one is the June 24 Meeting which has a point on all dimensions of counterterrorism including security, diplomacy, **economy**, social, and psychology. **(Interior + Exterior +)** Second one is the December 29 Meeting highlighting the security, **economic** and social problems that the people of Iraq face. **(Exterior +)**. **2/6**

6 releases of 2011¹¹ have a fair economic emphasis. The first one is the February 24 Meeting. There is a focus on carrying out **economic** development and reconstruction activities to meet the basic needs of the **Iraqi** people within the framework of mentioned agreement. **(Exterior +)**. Second is the April 28 Meeting. In addition to Iraqi developments, there is a focus on escalation of social events in **Syria** emphasizing the reforms announced to meet the legal demands and expectations of the public in political, social and **economic** areas and the steps taken so far in that direction. **(Exterior +)** Third one is the June 28 Meeting emphasizing two critical points. The First is about comprehensive **economic**, social and cultural efforts to resolve interregional differences. **(Interior +)** The second is about the evaluation of developments in the Middle East and North Africa particularly in **Syria** and **Libya**. The Council highlighted the importance of implementing comprehensive political, social and **economic** reforms in accordance with demands and expectations of the people of the region. **(Exterior +)** The Fourth is the August 18 Meeting emphasizing all dimensions of counterterrorism including security, diplomacy, **economy**, social, and psychology. **(Interior + Exterior +)** The last one is the October 27 Meeting highlighting comprehensive efforts including social, economic, psychological and diplomatic dimensions to eliminate the sources of abuse of the terrorist organization PKK. **(Interior + Exterior +)** **5/6! Bingo Year.** If remembered, there was a serious global banking crises in 2011 and President Erdogan had told opposition : “The crisis will not pass even tangentially”¹²

⁸ Economy: Politics plays big part in reply to crisis, Delphine Straus, June 8, 2009, Financial Times, <https://www.ft.com/content/04881032-53c6-11de-be08-00144feabdc0> February 6, 2022

⁹ Press Releases 2009, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2009-yili-basin-aciklamalari> February 6, 2022

¹⁰ Press Releases 2010, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2010-yili-basin-aciklamalari> February 6, 2022

¹¹ Press Releases 2011, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2011-yili-basin-aciklamalari> February 7, 2022

¹² Erdoğan: Kriz Teğet Bile Geçmez, NTV, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/erdogan-kriz-teget-bile-gecmez,MpGDOKw3VUCNtxtg7nCiKQ> February 7 2022

6 Releases of 2012¹³ There is not any economic focus throughout the year.(Nothing) 0/6

6 Releases of 2013¹⁴ There is no word “economy” except the December 26 Meeting emphasizing the negotiation with Iraq political and **economic** relations (**Exterior +**) 1/6

6 Releases of 2014¹⁵ There is not any economic focus throughout the year.(Nothing) 0/6

6 Releases of 2015¹⁶ There is no word “economy” except the June 2 Meeting emphasizing on the fight against Parallel State Structure (PDY in Turkish acronym) including its illegal **economic** dimension. (Interior -)1/6

6 Releases of 2016¹⁷ There is not even a single word focusing economy throughout a critical year. Parallel State Structure (PDY) took the name of FETÖ PDY in the meetings after a coup attempt which was orchestrated on 15th of July.(Nothing) 0/6

8 Releases of 2017¹⁸ do not contain the word “economy” despite a determined struggle against FETÖ and the critical referandum of held in Northern Iraq. (Nothing)0/6

7 Releases of 2018¹⁹ interestingly don’t have any single word about the economy. If remembered, Turkey was going through a serious currency fluctuation during the last two quarters of the year and Erdoğan had said: “This crisis is not our crisis. This is the production of fake fluctuations.”²⁰(Nothing) 0/6

6 Releases of 2019²¹ There is not any economic focus throughout the year despite the highly critical cross border operations “Claw and Eagle”(Nothing) 0/6

¹³ Press Releases 2012, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2012-yili-basin-aciklamalari> , February 7, 2022

¹⁴ Press Releases 2013, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2013-yili-basin-aciklamalari> , February 7, 2022

¹⁵ Press Releases 2014, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2014-yili-basin-aciklamalari> , February 7, 2022

¹⁶ Press Releases 2015, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2015-yili-basin-aciklamalari> , February 7, 2022

¹⁷ Press Releases 2016, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2016-yili-basin-aciklamalari> , February 7, 2022

¹⁸ Press Releases 2017, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2017-yili-basin-aciklamalari> , February 7, 2022

¹⁹ Press Releases 2018, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2018-yili-basin-aciklamalari> , February 7, 2022

²⁰ Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Kurdaki Dalgalanmaya Karşı Yeni Adımlarımız Olacak, TRT Haber, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-kurdaki-dalgalanmaya-karsi-yeni-adimlarimiz-olacak-384471.html> February 7, 2022

²¹ Press Releases 2019, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2019-yili-basin-aciklamalari> , February 7, 2022

5 Releases of 2020²² have two economic focuses. The First is the June 2 Meeting emphasizing the country's relevant fight against global epidemic and her success in every field including health, food, technology, **economy**, public order and safety. **(Interior +)** The second is the July 22 Meeting underlining the restructure in the world order regarding **economic** and political power. **(Exterior +) 2/6**

6 Releases of 2021²³ There is no economic focus throughout the year until the latest meeting held on 25th of December underlining the determination of a **strong economy** as in every field. **(Interior +) 1/6**

We have only 1 Release²⁴ up to now that emphasizes political, military, **economic** developments which are important to Turkish national security. **(Exterior +)**

Findings

1- In the last 20 years there are only 21 releases containing economic emphasis out of 125 total. **The ratio of economic focus in the releases stuck at 16%**

2- 7 of 21 releases are related with internal affairs while the remaining is about external issues. **The relative ratio of internal economic focus to external ones is 1/3**

3- MGK doesn't seem to have achieved any improvement in its economic view particularly in its working areas. **There is no specific statement on the relation between security and economy throughout the years.** For example, it is impossible to see any reporting or release item about relation between military spending and economic security.

4- Economic dimension of security is seen as **“economic tools”** or **“economic dimension of terror.”** Both of these are **outward-oriented**. There might be some highlighting on possible economic benefits of **“The Solution Process”** carried out between 2013 and 2015 in case of success. However, no statement throughout 2012-2015, the years of **“releases without economy.”** So, there is no **inward-oriented** look or any comprehensive “in and outward” review.

²² Press Releases 2020, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2020-yili-basin-aciklamalari> , February 7, 2022.

²³ Press Releases 2021, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2021-yili-basin-aciklamalari> , February 7, 2022

²⁴ Press Releases 2022, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/2022-yili-basin-aciklamalari> , February 7, 2022

5- Outward-oriented economic focus on **Iraq looked intense enough** while for the other Middle Eastern countries like Syria and Libya do not. Turkey-Iraq trade volume seems to have influenced the meetings.

5- There is an **interesting praise about the Turkish Economy** in the recent MGK release. It seems a little alarming to me.

Conclusion

Did that interesting emphasis on the economy come up under a panicking atmosphere of Turkey's latest currency crisis or was it a serious perception of economic threat like never seen before? Let us not exaggerate the meaning of the release but neither should we underestimate it. For the first time in 20 years, an economic focus seems to have been discussed as a security issue in the meeting. Let me put it this way: Despite insufficiency we can see economic focuses and points in the MGK releases. Yet, "for the first time". an external issue is being evaluated by MGK as a thing directed toward himself. I don't think it is because of the latest currency crisis but of more comprehensive expectations from his western allies. It looks like a preparation for forthcoming challenges.

Beyond the specific issues, Turkey should have a more economy-oriented, comparative and relative security analysis. Like most of the developing countries, Turkey also needs more analytical decision making processes and serious structural reforms in her institutions. Coordination between ministries still seems to be bound by bureaucratic tradition. MGK releases in the middle and long term may be seen as a reflection of the need for reforms. President Erdogan doesn't talk about economic tangents (2008,2011) or cotangents (2018) anymore. Perhaps he is getting ready to talk about hypotenuses for his future speeches. Who knows?

Muhammet Ali Zurnaci

February 7, 2022 Istanbul