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THE REFLECTIONS OF THE DISASTER OF THE CENTURY IN THE GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF TÜRKİYE

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the debates held in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) following the earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş on February 6, 2023. To this end, all parliamentary sessions held between the date of the earthquake (February 6, 2023) and the general parliamentary elections (May 14, 2023) were obtained from the official website of the TBMM and systematically archived. During this period, the Assembly convened a total of 24 sessions. The official transcripts of these sessions constituted the dataset for the study. The data were analyzed using the content analysis method, a widely employed technique in qualitative research, with the assistance of the NVIVO 14 software package. Within this framework, the most frequently discussed topics in the TBMM regarding disaster management in the post-earthquake period were identified as follows: the declaration of a state of emergency (OHAL), allegations concerning the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) and the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay), the deployment of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) in search-and-rescue efforts, the continuity of education, and issues related to refugees.

KEYWORDS: Political Parties, Disaster Management, Political Institutions and Disaster Governance, February 6 Earthquakes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Earthquakes are natural disasters that occur worldwide and cannot be predicted with complete certainty. These natural phenomena have the potential to cause severe loss of life and property across large geographic regions, deeply affecting human life. In recent years, the increasing frequency of natural disasters has had substantial societal consequences, shaking individuals' lives in multifaceted ways. Moreover, earthquakes are not the only natural disasters that impact human life. Millions of people are affected by various types of disasters each year, and these experiences can negatively influence their physical, psychological, and social development [1]. The destructive effects of earthquakes are not limited to physical devastation and casualties; they also leave deep scars on the social fabric and economic structures. Economic activities such as construction, agriculture, and trade are significantly disrupted, and the financial stability of ongoing businesses is put at risk. Damage to infrastructure interrupts transportation and communication, leading to breaks in supply chains and complicating the delivery of urgent needs. Post-disaster healthcare systems become overwhelmed with the treatment of the injured and the provision of psychological support. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of social services declines, and psychological issues such as anxiety, trauma, and uncertainty increase within society. Children and young people are particularly vulnerable in such situations, often struggling to continue their education. All of these factors have a negative impact on individuals' daily lives. Such events leave lasting marks on the structures of societies, both at the individual and institutional levels [2], [3], [4], [5], [6].

On February 6, 2023, a powerful earthquake with a magnitude of 7.7 struck Pazarcık, a district in the province of Kahramanmaraş, impacting more than ten provinces across Türkiye. Approximately nine hours later, a second earthquake with a magnitude of 7.6 occurred in Elbistan, further devastating the region [7]. The provinces of Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Gaziantep, Adıyaman, Malatya, Kilis, Şanlıurfa, Adana, Osmaniye, Diyarbakır, and Elazığ were among the most severely affected areas. According to official statements, 50,783 people lost their lives, and 107,204 individuals were injured as a result of the disaster. The magnitude of destruction triggered immediate and intense reactions from both administrative and political actors. In the aftermath of the earthquake, a state of emergency (OHAL) was declared across the ten most affected provinces.

Tent cities were established to address the urgent shelter needs of displaced populations. The government and its affiliated agencies took a series of sweeping and unprecedented measures, including the transition to online education for all universities nationwide [8]. Dormitories managed by the Credit and Dormitories Institution (KYK) were evacuated and repurposed to house earthquake victims in various provinces. Based on cellphone signal tracking and evacuation data, the number of displaced individuals who took refuge in KYK dormitories or with relatives and friends in other cities is estimated to have reached five million [9].

In addition to official governmental institutions operating in the earthquake-affected region, various voluntary organizations – particularly non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – also mobilized to provide both institutional and voluntary support in an effort to meet the urgent needs of individuals impacted by the disaster [10]. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, these efforts were primarily focused on search and rescue operations. However, as the emergency phase transitioned into recovery, the focus of these activities gradually shifted toward providing psychological and emotional support to the affected population.

This exceptionally difficult and painful period dominated the national political agenda for a considerable time. The decisions taken by the executive branch, the government's overall posture, and the aftermath of the disaster became the principal subject of debate in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM). This political focus forms the core motivation behind the present study. Accordingly, this research is to analyze how one of the most devastating disasters in Türkiye's history – the February 6 earthquakes – was reflected and debated in the TBMM. The data for this study were sourced from the official website of the TBMM, specifically the "TBMM Tutanak Dergisi" (TBMMTD) [11]. The scope of analysis is limited to the 24 parliamentary sessions held between the 59th Session on February 7, 2023 – one day after the earthquakes – and the 82nd Session on March 30, 2023, which marked the final session of the 27th legislative term. These session transcripts, comprising a total of 5,234 pages, were compiled and examined. The research employed content analysis, a widely used method in qualitative studies, to evaluate the data. Content analysis involves identifying recurring themes and patterns across the dataset, organizing them under

conceptual categories, and interpreting the findings in a manner accessible to readers [12]. With the support of NVIVO 14 software, post-earthquake parliamentary discussions were coded and systematically classified. The analysis revealed that the most frequently debated topics included: the President's declaration of a state of emergency (OHAL) across ten provinces; the pre- and post-disaster performance of the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) and the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay); the involvement of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) in search and rescue operations; educational policies in the wake of the disaster; and issues related to refugees. In this study, how these issues were discussed in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) are examined through a qualitative lens. Particular attention is paid to the specific problems emphasized, the nature of the criticisms voiced, and the proposed solutions articulated by members of parliament. These discussions are evaluated with direct quotations drawn from parliamentary speeches, enabling a contextual and evidence-based assessment of the political discourse surrounding the disaster.

1.1. "The Disaster of The Century" In the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye

On February 7, 2023—just one day after the earthquake—the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) convened for its 59th session. At the very outset of the session, the Speaker of the Parliament, Mustafa Şentop, delivered an opening address specifically concerning the disaster. During this address, he read aloud a joint declaration signed collectively by all political parties represented in the Parliament. The text of the declaration expressed condolences to those who had lost their lives and extended wishes for a swift recovery to the injured. It also emphasized that both state institutions and the Parliament were actively engaged in response efforts across the affected regions. In addition, the declaration acknowledged and expressed gratitude to foreign parliaments and international authorities who had conveyed their condolences, messages of solidarity, and material aid to support the Turkish people in their time of need. The statement concluded with a strong affirmation of national unity and solidarity, underscoring the belief that the nation would overcome these difficult days through collective resilience [13]. Given the gravity of the incident, the Advisory Council recommended that no other legislative matters be addressed during this session.

This proposal was accepted, and the session was adjourned shortly thereafter.

In the subsequent 60th session, held on February 8, 2023, the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM) addressed the Presidential Decree No. 6785, dated February 8, 2023, concerning the declaration of a state of emergency for three months in the provinces of Adana, Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Malatya, Osmaniye, and Şanlıurfa. This decree was formally submitted to the Parliamentary Presidency and was placed on the legislative agenda for deliberation [14].

National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM), held on February 9, 2023. The session was initiated by the Speaker of the Parliament, who first yielded the floor to Vice President Fuat Oktay. Oktay's address holds particular significance as it represented the executive branch's first official statement delivered before Parliament regarding the earthquake. In his remarks, Oktay emphasized the unprecedented scale of the destruction and referred to the event as "the most severe earthquake of the last century." This specific phrasing marked the first public use of such terminology, which has since gained widespread traction. From that point forward, both the press and broader public discourse—including colloquial language—have consistently referred to the disaster as "*the catastrophe of the century*" [15].

In the continuation of his address, Vice President Fuat Oktay elaborated on the geographic scope of the earthquake's impact, the frequency and severity of aftershocks, as well as the harsh winter conditions prevailing in the affected region. He emphasized that the government, in coordination with all relevant institutions, had initiated immediate response efforts without delay. Highlighting that the President himself was personally overseeing search and rescue operations in real time and had visited the disaster zones to monitor developments on the ground, Oktay proceeded to share a series of detailed statistics with the Parliament. These included the number of confirmed fatalities—14,351 individuals whose identities had been verified at that point—as well as figures related to the injured, the number of collapsed buildings, the personnel deployed in rescue missions, and the total number of heavy machinery and equipment utilized in the operations. Oktay also provided information regarding the distribution of emergency supplies such as food, blankets, and tents. Furthermore, he noted that the government had actively encouraged survivors to temporarily relocate to other provinces [16].

Vice President Fuat Oktay also outlined the

immediate measures undertaken by the government in the aftermath of the earthquake. He asserted that there were no significant disruptions in traffic or logistical operations on access routes to the disaster zones. He further noted that damaged base stations were promptly repaired to restore communication, and issues related to power supply and the disruption of natural gas services—specifically referencing nine major fractures in the gas transmission lines—were resolved in a timely manner. In addition, Mr. Oktay highlighted the psychosocial support initiatives launched by the Ministry of Family and Social Services, as well as the provision of spiritual guidance and counseling coordinated by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyamet). Regarding healthcare services, he stated that field hospitals had been established to replace medical facilities that were rendered inoperative due to structural damage. Finally, Oktay informed the Parliament that a dedicated emergency fund amounting to 100 billion Turkish Lira had been allocated to support ongoing relief and recovery efforts [17].

1.2. Debates On the State of Emergency

During the 61st session of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM), held on February 9, 2023, Vice President Fuat Oktay was the first to take the floor. Following his comprehensive briefing on the devastating consequences of the earthquake and the government's activities within the first 48 hours, Oktay shifted the focus of his address to the declaration of a state of emergency (SoE). He presented the official justification for this decision and formally requested the support of all political parties represented in Parliament for the Presidential Decree No. 6785, dated February 8, 2023, concerning the declaration of a three-month state of emergency in the provinces of Adana, Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Kilis, Malatya, Osmaniye, and Şanlıurfa.

In articulating the rationale behind the SoE, Oktay stated the following:

“...Extraordinary circumstances necessitate extraordinary measures. In situations where an extraordinary administrative framework becomes essential – such as natural disasters, hazardous epidemics, or widespread acts of violence that pose a threat to public order – the implementation of a state of emergency (SoE) is intended to ensure the swift alleviation of suffering and restoration of normalcy. Through the SoE framework, it becomes significantly more feasible to address essential and urgent needs, such as the provision of critical supplies, the restriction of access to areas with structurally compromised buildings, the demolition of

hazardous structures, and the systematic distribution of indispensable resources. Given the scale of the crisis, the severe winter conditions, and the number of provinces and population directly affected, a three-month period has been deemed appropriate. It is important to underscore that in democratic states governed by the rule of law, emergency situations are managed within legal boundaries through exceptional governance procedures sanctioned by law. As is well known, many other countries – including the United States, Canada, and the Philippines – have declared states of emergency in response to natural disasters. Similarly, in our country, the SoE has been geographically restricted to the affected provinces and has been presented to the Parliament for approval. The sole objective is to ensure that assistance reaches disaster victims in the most effective and expeditious manner possible across all domains of need...” [18].

Following Vice President Oktay's address, representatives of other political party groups were granted the floor. Speaking on behalf of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), a member of the ruling coalition, Yılmaz Tunç emphasized the unprecedented scale of the disaster and asserted that the government had mobilized all available resources to respond effectively. Similarly, Muhammed Levent Bülbül, representing the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), echoed these sentiments, underscoring the magnitude of the catastrophe and affirming the government's commitment to alleviating its impact. Both parties explicitly stated their support for the declaration of the state of emergency, arguing that such a measure was necessary to ensure an efficient and coordinated disaster response. In a comparable manner, speaking in his individual capacity, the leader of the Great Unity Party (BBP), Mustafa Destici, also endorsed the state of emergency decision. While conveying messages of national unity and solidarity, Destici underlined the imperative of collective action in overcoming the crisis and confirmed his alignment with the proposed emergency measures [18].

In contrast, other political party groups in the Parliament voiced strong opposition to the decision to declare a state of emergency. The Republican People's Party (CHP), the İYİ Party, and the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) all issued harsh criticisms regarding the implementation of the measure. The objections raised by the CHP and İYİ Party centered primarily on the assertion that, under the current presidential system of governance, the President already holds extensive executive powers. These parties argued that the system had been justified on the grounds that it would ensure rapid and efficient

executive action, and thus, under such circumstances, the declaration of a state of emergency was deemed unnecessary. The following excerpts reflect the critical stance taken by MPs who spoke on behalf of the İYİ Party and the CHP:

Speaking on behalf of the İYİ Party Group, Member of Parliament for İzmir, Dursun Müsavat Dervişoğlu, stated:

"...As you are aware, the sole advantage the Presidential Government System claims to offer – despite undermining the legislative process and the independence of the judiciary – is the ability to make swift and effective decisions. Yet today, all constitutional and legal arrangements already grant full authority to the executive and the public institutions under its command. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the government to explain, here in the Grand Assembly – the embodiment of the national will – why it seeks to declare a state of emergency. What specific power does the state of emergency grant that is not already included in the broad executive authority provided by the Presidential system...?" [19].

A similar statement to that of the İYİ Party group was delivered by Bülent Tezcan, the Member of Parliament for Aydın, speaking on behalf of the Republican People's Party (CHP) group.

"... we experienced the disaster around 4 a.m. on Monday morning. On Tuesday – if I'm not mistaken, around midday, nearly thirty hours later – the President declared ten provinces disaster zones. I wonder: what prevented the declaration of a disaster zone immediately, say at 8 or 9 a.m. on Monday, once the scale of the catastrophe became clear? Under the Presidential Government System – so frequently praised for its efficiency – everything can be done with a single signature. There was no need to convene others or collect additional signatures; the President alone could have declared a disaster zone that very morning. But it did not happen. Instead, the declaration came on Tuesday, followed by a request to declare a state of emergency. I ask again: if the state of emergency could not save the lives we lost, what exactly will it save now? The only additional power granted by a state of emergency is the ability to restrict fundamental rights and freedoms. Why is that necessary? Why is it so troubling that people are able to express their grievances? You must explain to this nation how fundamental rights and freedoms have posed any obstacle to relief and rescue efforts..." [20].

Emphasizing that the earthquake had effectively "announced its arrival" and that the government had failed to take the necessary precautions, Hakkı Saruhan Oluç, a representative of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), made the following remarks regarding the state of emergency:

"...Honorable Members, let us now turn to the matter

of the state of emergency. Does this government not already possess sufficient authority? It does. A disaster zone has been declared. Are there not ample powers to take the necessary actions in those areas? There are. Then why is a state of emergency being requested? One naturally asks: Why is there a need for OHAL? And why do we ask this question? Because of what happened under the previous state of emergency declared after 2016. The state of emergency regime expands the powers of the executive. If we look at the government's past practice with OHAL, it is highly likely that this will not be used for effective disaster management, but rather to suppress the public, silence the press, and obstruct the opposition – this is what the post-2016 period clearly demonstrated. Moreover, a prudent administration does not need a state of emergency to manage a disaster. Let us recall – not so long ago – the events following 2016: a series of unlawful practices were introduced. Unfortunately, the Constitutional Court ruled that it would not review decree-laws enacted under OHAL. For all these reasons, let us try to outline what the declared state of emergency may turn into in the hands of the ruling power: 1) A series of unlawful practices could be implemented under the pretext of OHAL. 2) Restrictions may be introduced that have no relation to the actual justification for declaring OHAL. 3) Decree-laws may be issued on matters unrelated to OHAL – issues that should be addressed under ordinary legislation – thus effectively transferring legislative power to the executive. 4) Decree-laws may be issued that contain personalized punitive measures rather than general, abstract, and impersonal rules – thus amounting to a de facto transfer of judicial power. 5) Decree-laws that do not meet the necessary criteria for an OHAL measure could be turned into permanent legislation. Besides, there is nothing that cannot be done with the already absolute and extraordinary powers held by the executive..." [21].

As evident from the statements delivered on behalf of the parliamentary groups, the declaration of a state of emergency did not receive unanimous support in the Assembly. On the contrary, it was met with strong criticism from opposition parties. In addition to the speeches made by group representatives, several members of the Republican People's Party (CHP) also voiced objections, criticizing the OHAL decision within the broader context of the Presidential system of governance.

As is well known, Türkiye transitioned from a parliamentary system to a presidential system of governance following the constitutional referendum held on 16 April 2017. One of the primary arguments advanced by the ruling party and proponents of the new system was that it would establish a strong and efficient executive branch, eliminating the political instability caused by

coalition governments [22]. During the parliamentary debates on the state of emergency motion, opposition parties frequently referenced these claims. They argued that the President – who holds extensive powers under the new system – was already fully equipped to manage such a large-scale disaster, thereby rendering the declaration of a state of emergency unnecessary. Taking their criticism even further, some opposition figures contended that the decision was not about managing the disaster, but rather aimed at restricting fundamental rights and freedoms, silencing the media, and paving the way for arbitrary executive decrees.

An analysis of the statements delivered by opposition party groups concerning the state of emergency reveals that their criticisms extended beyond objections to the Presidential system of governance. These criticisms can be categorized as follows:

- *Duration of the State of Emergency:* Opposition parties found the three-month period declared for the earthquake disaster to be excessive. They argued that such a long duration was disproportionate to the needs of disaster management and called for a shorter timeframe. In fact, members of parliament from the CHP and the İYİ Party submitted a motion proposing that the state of emergency be limited to one month; however, the proposal was rejected.
- *Possibility of Extension:* Drawing on past practices, opposition parties warned that the three-month state of emergency could be extended for an additional three months, characterizing such an extension as an arbitrary and discretionary use of power.
- *Restriction of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms:* Opposition parties contended that the government's primary motive for declaring a state of emergency was not to manage the disaster more effectively, but rather to impose restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms.
- *Scope of the State of Emergency:* Some members of parliament criticized the limited geographical scope of the state of emergency. According to the Presidential decree, OHAL applied to ten provinces. However, several MPs argued that the number of provinces affected by the earthquake was in fact greater, and that if a state of emergency were to be declared, it should also include other disaster-stricken regions.

Despite these criticisms, the state of emergency

decree issued by the President was ultimately approved by the Parliament following a vote.

1.3. Criticism Directed at AFAD And the Turkish Red Crescent

One of the most prominent issues raised in parliamentary debates immediately following the earthquake concerned the allegations directed at the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) and the Turkish Red Crescent, as well as the controversies that ensued in response.

In the initial sessions held after the earthquake, opposition parties frequently criticized AFAD for its insufficient response during the disaster, attributing this to factors such as inadequate staffing, limited budget, and poor management in recent years. By contrast, members of the ruling People's Alliance (AKP and MHP) praised AFAD in their speeches, along with other state institutions. Nevertheless, opposition parties directed intense and multifaceted criticism at AFAD. Some of these criticisms, which reflect direct quotations from parliamentary speeches, are presented below;

Burhanettin Bulut (CHP): “...In some areas, it took twenty-four hours; in others, forty-eight hours; and in some places, even four days passed without the Red Crescent or AFAD reaching the disaster zones. The root cause of all this is the partisan Presidential system that we have consistently criticized – particularly since 2018...” [23].

İmam Hüseyin Filiz (İYİ Party): “...AFAD and the Turkish Red Crescent. The General Director of Search and Rescue at AFAD has no background in emergency management or search-and-rescue operations. He is a graduate of a faculty of theology, previously worked at the Presidency of Religious Affairs, and holds a master's degree in Sufism. I fail to see how any of this relates to the responsibilities of his current position – do any of you? Moreover, AFAD has repeatedly been found inadequate in disaster risk reduction reports, citing deficiencies in budgeting, the availability of technical rescue teams, and the distribution of responsibilities. Yet it appears that no meaningful steps have been taken to address these shortcomings...” [24].

Feridun Bahşi (İYİ Party): “I contacted all levels of AFAD, including its General Directorate, requesting assistance. For three days, I tried to reach both AFAD and the Turkish Red Crescent – but I was unsuccessful...” [25].

(TB Hakkı Saruhan Oluç (HDP): “...What urgently needs to happen is the establishment of a dedicated Ministry of Disaster, to replace an institution like AFAD, which is currently, unfortunately, paralyzed and inadequate in terms of its budget, personnel, and equipment. Moreover, both the Turkish Red Crescent and

AFAD must be reorganized, and a legal prohibition against any construction along fault lines must be enacted..." [26].

Ali Kenanoğlu (HDP): "...We were in Maraş on the second day – we even went to the city center and walked around. At the sites of the collapsed buildings, there were still only civilians and volunteers present. There was no sign of AFAD or any of its equipment..." [27].

Gülizar Biçer Karaca (CHP): "...For example, colleagues, AFAD distributes earthquake relief packages. But why are there no feminine hygiene products in these aid packages? Why is the presence of women in those households being ignored? And don't dismiss this by saying 'gender discourse' – this is about positive discrimination. In fact, this is a clear example of gender inequality: AFAD's earthquake relief packages do not include hygiene products for women..." [28].

Aylin Cesur (İYİ Party): "...For instance, why was AFAD's budget reduced from 12 billion in 2022 to 8 billion in 2023? And this despite AFAD's own report issued on 23 November 2022, following the Gölyaka earthquake, stating: 'We are full of deficiencies.' Never mind the past twenty-one years – tell us what you have done since November 2022, inform us, answer that..." [29].

Özgür Özel (CHP): "...If they appoint a civil engineer to the Adıyaman Mufti's Office, I would object. You cannot assign an architect to the Şanlıurfa Mufti's Office. The Mufti of Malatya cannot be a city planner. Just as these roles are not appropriate, it is equally unacceptable for those holding the most critical positions in AFAD to have no other qualification than a theology degree..." [30].

Necdet İpekyüz (HDP): "...Wherever you go across the 11 affected provinces, the mere mention of 'AFAD' evokes cries of desperation, mistrust, objections, reactions, and anger. So, what exactly is this institution doing? When you visit its official website, the very first sentence is: 'Make a donation.' But in today's Türkiye, there is no longer an environment in which people feel comfortable donating to either the Turkish Red Crescent or AFAD. Why is there such suspicion? Because when you fail to intervene in a crisis, when you evade responsibility, suspicion inevitably arises. So today, does AFAD truly inspire public confidence?..." [31].

An examination of the parliamentary debates on AFAD following the February 6 earthquake reveals a number of key issues and corresponding policy recommendations, which may be outlined as follows:

- **Inadequate Service Delivery:** Many members of parliament criticized AFAD for its failure to reach affected regions during the critical first days following the earthquake. Lawmakers emphasized shortcomings in crisis

management and a general lack of preparedness.

- **Shortage of Equipment and Personnel:** AFAD's lack of necessary equipment and qualified personnel for search-and-rescue operations became a central point of criticism. Some MPs argued that these deficiencies significantly contributed to the loss of life during the emergency.
- **Issues of Merit and Administrative Competence:** The qualifications, experience, and merit of AFAD officials were frequently questioned. Several parliamentarians claimed that individuals holding key positions within the organization lacked the requisite knowledge and expertise.
- **Budgetary Savings:** Lawmakers asserted that the reduction in AFAD's budget led to a limitation in services. They stressed that this financial constraint negatively impacted the effectiveness of disaster management efforts.
- **Gender Inequality:** AFAD faced criticism for overlooking gender-specific needs in its emergency aid. In particular, the absence of feminine hygiene products in relief packages was cited as an example of persistent gender insensitivity in disaster response planning.

In response to these criticisms, several members of parliament also proposed concrete solutions. The suggestions concerning AFAD can be categorized as follows:

- **Institutional Autonomy:** It was proposed that AFAD should be restructured as an autonomous institution, independent from political influence.
- **Establishment of a Ministry of Disaster:** Some lawmakers advocated for the creation of a more competent and specialized "Ministry of Disaster" to replace AFAD.
- **Need for Organizational Reform:** There was a strong emphasis on the necessity of reorganizing AFAD and implementing structural reforms to improve the agency's operational effectiveness.
- **Additional Legal Regulations:** Proposals were made to introduce strict legal prohibitions on construction in earthquake-prone fault zones.

Following the February 6 earthquake, the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) emerged as one of the most criticized institutions in the Grand National Assembly, second only to AFAD. In addition to allegations that the Red Crescent failed to respond effectively to the disaster, claims that tents and food supplies were sold rather than

distributed freely kept Parliament occupied for a considerable period. Motions calling for the investigation of these claims were submitted during various parliamentary sessions (nos. 67, 74, 77, 79, etc.). A selection of parliamentary statements concerning the Red Crescent is presented below in the form of direct quotations;

Tülay Hatimoğulları Oruç (HDP): *"...Let no one come here and tell stories – just spare us the narratives, Kızılay... it's a disgrace. Anyone with a sense of dignity would be ashamed! Kızılay sold tents, sold blood, sold canned food..."* [32].

Erhan Usta (İYİ Party): *"...While people – having lost their loved ones under the rubble and their homes to destruction – were waiting in the freezing cold for shelter, the unqualified administrators you appointed to our esteemed institution, the Turkish Red Crescent, with its proud history, chose to keep tents in storage instead of delivering them to the affected region, prioritizing profit over humanitarian duty..."* [33].

Aytun Çıray (İYİ Party): *"...Look, we once had a Kızılay – an institution of aid and solidarity that held a special place in our nation's heart. Sadly, it has now been turned into a front organization serving the interests of what can only be described as a regime of wrongdoing. For instance, an \$8 million donation made by BAŞKENTGAZ to Kızılay was transferred to the Ensar Foundation and, according to allegations, was then funneled to TÜGVA. This clearly shows that Kızılay has been turned into a vehicle for money laundering..."* [34].

Burcu Köksal (CHP): *"...You have attempted to transform even Kızılay – a humanitarian organization once known as a friend in times of hardship – into a corporate holding. In 2020, you had Kızılay donate \$8 million toward the construction of a skyscraper in Manhattan, New York, while leaving our citizens without tents in the earthquake. Had Kızılay purchased two-person tents from producers at \$20 each that day, it could have acquired 400,000 tents – enough to shelter 800,000 people from the cold in the disaster zone. But of course, that didn't happen. Nowhere to be found..."* [35].

Bülent Kuşoğlu (CHP): *"...Due to Kızılay and AFAD's failure to adequately respond within the first twenty-four, forty-eight, and seventy-two hours – periods that are absolutely critical – we suffered immense losses, and we are still enduring the consequences today..."* [36].

Gülizar Biçer Karaca (CHP): *"...Once again, AFAD and Kızılay were mentioned. In these institutions, because no mindset has been developed to ensure positive discrimination toward women and to address their specific needs, gender inequality has not only persisted during the earthquake response but has in fact been exacerbated..."* [37].

Hüseyin Örs (İYİ Party): *"...Kızılay, which has*

recently come under fire for selling tents and canned goods – losing the public's trust – must urgently be restored to its historic mission under competent leadership. I want back the Kızılay we supported as children, placing our pocket money into envelopes at school – not a commercialized version acting like a trader..." [38].

Ali Haydar Hakverdi (CHP): *"...For example, what role could Binali Yıldırım's daughter, son, or son-in-law possibly have in the administration of Kızılay? What business do they have being there? The President of Kızılay reportedly receives salaries from multiple sources – is that justifiable? Shouldn't this institution speak up about such matters, Mr. Speaker? Isn't it obligated to? And who else is on Kızılay's board? Yener Tanık, it turns out, was a mayoral candidate for the AKP in Siirt; Murat Ellialtı is a CHP municipal council member in Beykoz; and Yasin Yılmaz was an AKP mayoral candidate in Kütahya..."* [39].

Although opposition parties voiced a wide range of criticisms against Kızılay, members of the ruling AKP consistently defended the institution during each parliamentary debate. Some such statements are presented below as a direct quotation.

İlyas Şeker (AKP): *"...Esteemed Members of Parliament, in 2022, Kızılay became a global humanitarian actor, delivering aid to more than 45 million people around the world. I do not support this motion for investigation, which I view as an attempt to discredit Kızılay – an institution that serves with dedication, powered by the generous donations of our people. I respectfully greet the General Assembly..."* [40].

Mustafa Yel (AKP): *"...Given the changing conditions of the global economy, Kızılay had to adapt to today's financial realities in order to strengthen itself and expand its income streams. To this end, it has established a group, through its subsidiaries, to meet the needs related to tents and shelter provision. In addition, Kızılay has a dedicated logistics group, as well as a company called Sistem Yapı. Therefore, when Kızılay delivers tents, it procures them from its own production units in order to avoid the higher costs of purchasing externally, and pays its own logistics company for this service..."* [41].

Within the scope of the parliamentary debates on Kızılay, members of the AKP and its People's Alliance partners defended the organization. Their main arguments in support of Kızılay can be summarized as follows:

- *Kızılay's Institutional Independence:* It is emphasized that Kızılay, like other humanitarian aid organizations, is an association established solely for the purpose of delivering aid, and that it has no organic or legal affiliation with the government.

- *Revenue Generation and Financial Sustainability:* It was stated that Kızılay was granted special privileges to generate income even during the Atatürk era, and that successive governments also supported its ability to secure funding. It was emphasized that Kızılay established an investment group to ensure financial sustainability, and that the revenues it generates are used to fund humanitarian aid activities.
- *Disaster Response and Public Services:* Kızılay's role within the framework of the Türkiye Disaster Response Plan was emphasized, particularly its provision of free services—such as food distribution, blood supply, healthcare, and psychosocial support—at 834 locations across the country.
- *Global Humanitarian Assistance:* It was highlighted that in 2022, Kızılay became a global humanitarian actor, reaching more than 45 million people worldwide. This was presented as evidence of the organization's growing international significance.
- *Tent Production and Logistics Operations:* Supporters noted that Kızılay established a specialized unit to meet the demand for tents and shelter. By producing its own tents and utilizing its internal logistics company, the organization was able to avoid the higher costs associated with external procurement.
- Although members of the People's Alliance offered statements defending and praising Kızılay—relying on the arguments outlined above—opposition parties maintained a far more critical stance. As previously discussed, their claims and accusations against Kızılay were severe, and they submitted multiple motions requesting parliamentary investigations to uncover the truth behind these allegations. Based on the direct quotations presented above, the criticisms and accusations directed at Kızılay can be categorized as follows:
- *Inadequate Emergency Relief and Coordination:* Kızılay and AFAD were frequently criticized for their insufficient organization and response during the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. Numerous members of parliament stated that Kızılay failed to reach the affected areas in a timely manner and struggled to meet the urgent needs of local communities. Kızılay's broader shortcomings in disaster management were also repeatedly highlighted.
- *Commercial Activities and Ethical Concerns:* Kızılay faced intense criticism for selling tents, food, and even blood—items that were expected to be distributed free of charge to earthquake victims. These actions were seen as a violation of its charitable mission and caused significant damage to public trust and conscience.
- *Lack of Meritocracy and Administrative Weaknesses:* The lack of merit-based appointments within Kızılay's senior management has been a recurring point of criticism. Lawmakers argued that unqualified leadership has led to internal institutional decay. Many emphasized that Kızılay should be managed by experienced professionals, particularly individuals with expertise in disaster management.
- *Public Relations and Trust Deficit:* Another major concern was Kızılay's deteriorating relationship with the public and the erosion of its credibility. The organization was accused of commodifying earthquake victims rather than aiding them, which, according to several parliamentarians, has severely damaged public trust in the institution.
- *Lack of Transparency:* Kızılay was also criticized for its lack of transparency regarding its financial operations and the use of donations. MPs expressed concern that the organization failed to provide sufficient public disclosures about how aid was being used, calling for greater accountability and clearer reporting on the allocation of donated resources.
- *Allegations of Mission Drift:* Kızılay has been heavily criticized for deviating from its original mission of delivering humanitarian aid and social services, and for increasingly taking on the character of a commercial entity. Some members of parliament even went so far as to claim that Kızılay had become a "front organization," describing its operations as a "money laundering scheme."
- *Social media and Public Communications:* Kızılay's communication efforts—particularly on social media—have also come under scrutiny. Criticism focused on the institution's failure to adequately inform the public and the ineffectiveness of its statements. Many argued that Kızılay's public announcements have been superficial and that the public deserves transparent and accurate

information regarding the organization's current situation.

1.4. The Role of the Turkish Armed Forces in Post-Disaster Response

Another major topic of heated debate in Parliament following the February 6 earthquakes concerned the involvement of the Turkish Armed Forces in post-disaster rescue efforts. While members of the People's Alliance (AKP and MHP) claimed that the military was deployed immediately and actively participated in the response efforts, opposition parties strongly contested this narrative. They argued that the deployment was delayed, that the armed forces were mobilized far too late, and that this delay contributed to a higher death toll. Members of parliament from the AKP and MHP defended the military's presence on the ground with the following statements:

Yılmaz Tunç (AKP): "...Given the scale of the earthquake, the extent of the area it affected, and the destruction across ten provinces, instructions were immediately issued for all specialized personnel – from our soldiers to our miners – located throughout the country to mobilize to the disaster zone with the equipment at their disposal..." [42].

Mehmet Ali Çelebi (AKP): "...The earthquake struck at 04:17. Thirteen minutes later, at 04:30, the Ministry of National Defense's Operations Centers – including those of the General Staff, and the Land, Naval, and Air Forces – received situation reports from the units, as they should have. We lost 117 of our personnel in the units. Also, at 04:30, the Turkish Armed Forces' Humanitarian Assistance Brigade was placed on standby; this is the unit within the Armed Forces responsible for search-and-rescue operations. By 04:50, Lieutenant General Metin Gürak, Commander of the 2nd Army in the region, was already at his post and had received a report from his own units. At 05:00, the Ministry of National Defense established its Disaster and Emergency Crisis Center, and at the same time, the General Staff and Force Commanders began operations." [43].

Mustafa Kalaycı (MHP): "...Our official and civilian search-and-rescue teams, miners, firefighters, heavy machinery operators, soldiers, police officers, watchmen, healthcare workers, volunteers, and teams from around the world have carried out – and continue to carry out – tremendous work. Despite freezing cold, harsh conditions, sleepless nights, and many other challenges, they risked their own lives to save thousands of our citizens trapped under the rubble. May God bless all those who have contributed to these heroic efforts..." [44].

Mehmet Sait Kirazoğlu (AKP): "We were in

Nurdağı around ten o'clock... Nearly 500,000 volunteers, approximately 250,000 public officials, around 70,000 members of our police force, 65,000 gendarmerie personnel, 40,000 soldiers, and professional search-and-rescue teams – around 35,000 strong – as well as teams from 90 countries participated directly in the operations. Our state, hand in hand with our noble nation, worked tirelessly to heal the wounds caused by this earthquake, and we were there on the ground as part of that effort." [45].

Mehmet Celal Fendoğlu (MHP): "...From the very first hours following the earthquake, all available military units in Malatya were mobilized. At 5:45 a.m., our Turkish Armed Forces were conducting search-and-rescue operations at the ruins of the Hakimbey Apartment, located across from the army headquarters, and by 6:00 a.m., they had begun operations at the Hayat Complex, situated across from the former Sigorta Hospital, as well as in other locations. Security camera footage clearly shows that units of the 2nd Army departed from army headquarters at exactly 5:45 a.m. – I can even send the video to anyone who wishes to see it. Furthermore, one can observe our soldiers engaged in search-and-rescue operations at the first collapsed structure, the Hakimbey Apartment, as well as military vehicles involved in the rescue efforts at the Hayat Complex, where residents were trapped following the initial earthquake..." [46]

In contrast to the statements made by members of the People's Alliance, opposition parties argued that the military was deployed far too late, and that this delay significantly exacerbated the scale of the disaster. Selected excerpts from parliamentary speeches reflecting these concerns are presented below as direct quotations:

Erkan Aydın (CHP): "...As you know, nearly 50,000 of our citizens lost their lives in the earthquake. The Turkish Armed Forces announced that our soldiers rescued 327 people from the rubble – may God bless them. However, when we look back at the 1999 earthquake, our military rescued 10,525 people from the debris. Naturally, this comparison raises a question: Could more lives have been saved if our soldiers – our Mehmetçik – had intervened earlier and been actively involved in the immediate aftermath of the disaster?..." [47].

Özgür Özel (CHP): "...For the first three days in the earthquake zone, one cry continued to echo in all our ears: 'Where is the army? Where is the army?' I read the statement from the Ministry of National Defense: 'They were placed on standby, they were prepared, they were made ready...' But there was no statement saying, 'They deployed here, they did this or that...' On the third day, Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar stated: 'We have 7,200 soldiers in the field – 3,000 assigned to rescue, 3,000 to security.' In that 1999 earthquake, which they

now seem to dismiss, the military had deployed and rescued 10,528 people. This year—according to the Turkish Armed Forces and the Ministry of National Defense themselves—they managed to rescue only 327 people alive. That means, in 1999, the military was fast, agile, effective, and numerous enough to save over 10,500 lives. This year, it was slow, delayed, disorganized—and that's why the number is just 327..." [48].

Bülent Tezcan (CHP): "...If I'm not mistaken, it was the Ministry of National Defense that shared a statement fifty-eight hours after the earthquake, saying: 'We have sent 3,500 soldiers to the disaster zone.' Why after fifty-eight hours? Why not that very morning? Why only 3,500 soldiers? Why not more?..." [49].

Ahmet Ünal Çeviköz (CHP): "... At least, we know that the 2nd, 5th, and 20th Armored Brigades—located in the region—were among our most experienced units, capable of reaching the earthquake zone quickly. These brigades had engineering battalions equipped with cranes and vehicles suitable for field operations, as well as trained personnel. We must share this with the public, because the failure to mobilize the Turkish Armed Forces in a timely manner may have contributed to the increase in the number of casualties. This deployment occurred only at the end of the second day; I feel obligated to say this..." [50].

Zeynel Emre (CHP): "...Let me add one more point: We witnessed firsthand the consequences of not deploying enough soldiers to the field. I visited the entire region—I went everywhere from the very beginning—and it was the limited number of soldiers who carried out the most successful rescue operations. Why? Because there were young, strong, physically trained commandos on the ground—but, dear colleagues, they were far too few in number..." [51].

Tülay Hatimoğulları Oruç (HDP): "...—and I say this particularly with regard to the Minister of National Defense—he himself does not even believe what he is saying. He claims, 'We mobilized the brigade command in Serinyol, Hatay, at 10 a.m.' But there was no one there. It wasn't until the third day that the gendarmerie showed up; the soldiers didn't appear until the third day..." [52].

Arslan Kabukcuoğlu (İYİ Party): "...There is one question that gnaws at everyone like a wolf from within: The people of Malatya are asking, 'The 2nd Army was stationed here—why didn't we see it by our side?' The military is a vital force; it has prepared units such as engineering corps and is made up of the sons of this nation. While people were trapped under rubble, fighting for their lives, while they were slipping into hypothermia in the cold, and when every minute mattered—why didn't the military participate in the rescue efforts? Esteemed colleagues, Mexico came to help from 10,000 kilometers away, yet the people of Malatya could not receive help from the military stationed right next to them..." [53].

As reflected in several of the examples above, opposition parties in Parliament argued that the military was deployed to search-and-rescue operations only after a significant delay following the earthquake. Referring to the 1999 earthquake, many members of parliament emphasized that the armed forces had been immediately mobilized at that time, and that this rapid intervention had helped prevent further loss of life. Some MPs attributed the failure to deploy the military promptly in the 2023 earthquakes to political hesitation, even suggesting—similar to the debates on the state of emergency—that this was a structural consequence of the Presidential system of governance. Opposition parties also submitted formal parliamentary questions to the Ministry of National Defense regarding the timing of the military's deployment (see Sessions 69 and 72). In contrast, members of the People's Alliance maintained that the armed forces had been present on the ground from the very beginning and were actively engaged in rescue operations with full capacity.

1.5. Education And Universities

Educational activities were significantly affected by the devastating earthquake of February 6. The disaster, which caused widespread destruction across 11 provinces, also inflicted substantial physical damage on educational institutions. In response to the resulting housing crisis faced by displaced citizens, the government utilized the capacity of the dormitories under the Credit and Dormitories Institution (KYK) in host provinces. To make this possible, a nationwide shift to online university education was implemented. This decision was announced by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) on February 17, 2023, stating that the spring term of the 2022–2023 academic year would commence via remote instruction starting from February 20 [8]. The decision by YÖK became a central topic of debate in Parliament. In addition, concerns were raised regarding the disadvantages faced by students preparing for university entrance exams in earthquake-affected regions, the question of where students would vote in the upcoming elections, and changes in residence registrations—all of which were discussed extensively in parliamentary sessions. Selected statements regarding post-earthquake education policies are presented below as direct quotations;

Ayhan Altıntaş (İYİ Party): "...Dear colleagues, as an academic, I would like to briefly address the closure of our universities. Following the devastating earthquake,

the idea emerged to allocate KYK dormitories – where university students reside – to disaster victims. The Council of Higher Education (YÖK) effectively began this process by expelling students from their dorms. Yet these dormitories are far from ideal for families, and there were other, more appropriate housing alternatives available. Subsequently, YÖK announced a transition to remote learning... In fact, YÖK does not even have the authority to make such a decision. The Constitution states that administrative decisions of this nature must be based in law. Many universities do not even have KYK dormitories – so why weren't they offered the option of in-person education? Why are you afraid of bringing young people together? YÖK's responsibility should be to restore normalcy to education. We demand the immediate reopening of universities..." [54].

Utku Çakırözer (CHP): "... A comprehensive support package must be immediately announced for university students affected by the earthquake. Assistance should include mobile phones, computers, and free internet access. Unconditional scholarship support must be provided to these students, and their KYK loan repayments should be postponed without interest. In addition, the voices of millions of students demanding a return to in-person education must be heard, and universities should be reopened accordingly..." [55].

Orhan Sümer (CHP): "... Following the recent earthquakes, social, economic, and educational life has been severely disrupted in 11 provinces and their affiliated districts. Academics working at universities in the affected regions are experiencing significant material and emotional losses. In the aftermath of this disaster, these provinces have become less attractive for academic professionals. In order to restore the appeal of universities in disaster-affected areas and to prevent the ongoing academic migration, timely improvements and support measures must be implemented without delay..." [56].

Sibel Özdemir (CHP – Istanbul): "... No one even questioned whether university students – especially those in the earthquake zone – had access to the necessary tools such as computers, phones, and internet to attend their classes. Moreover, the critical role of university campuses in fostering social interaction, sharing, and solidarity was completely ignored. A new decision must be made, together with university administrations, to urgently resume face-to-face education..." [57].

Müzeyyen Şevkin (CHP): "... Students in the 11 earthquake-affected provinces who are preparing to take national exams are experiencing serious psychological distress. Those sitting for university and high school entrance exams are not under the same conditions as students in other regions; therefore, additional exam points should be granted. Unfortunately, some have taken advantage of the disaster, leading to excessive price increases in rent, food, relocation services, and similar areas. I call on the relevant authorities to take immediate

action..." [58].

Ayhan Altıntaş (İYİ Party): "... Education is a collective, social, and interactive process. True learning is completed in environments where young people and academics from national and international backgrounds come together – to discuss, use libraries, engage in team sports, attend conferences and seminars, and participate in student clubs as well as social and civic activities. Entrusting the construction of future buildings to engineers who earned their diplomas through remote education is a recipe for future disasters. It also means putting our health in the hands of doctors who have not received sufficient practical training..." [59].

İmam Hüseyin Filiz (İYİ Party): "... The 2023 university entrance exam (YKS) is scheduled to take place on June 17–18. Students in the earthquake-affected regions – numbering around 310,000 – have less than three months to prepare, unless changes are made. It is clear that, following such a severe trauma, these students will not be able to prepare adequately for the exam. In addition to financial and emotional support, they should receive psychological assistance through positive discrimination. Options such as additional university quotas and bonus exam points should be considered through a detailed plan – but while supporting those impacted, care must be taken not to create new forms of injustice..." [60].

Sibel Özdemir (CHP): "... On the other hand, the Ministry has stated that 85% of dormitory capacity remains vacant. So, under these circumstances, why are universities still unable to return to in-person education? The political administration must now make a clear and decisive decision. Let me also issue an important warning: yes, the earthquake and online education are valid concerns – but we are also in an election period. The electoral calendar has begun, and April 2 is the final day for voter address changes. Therefore, a prompt decision must be made regarding in-person education, particularly to clarify the residence status of university students who will be voting. Students are anxious – worried that they may not be able to vote or be recognized as registered voters..." [61].

In view of the statements cited above, the debates held in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye following the February 6 earthquakes concerning education and teaching activities may be classified under the following headings:

- *Criticism of the Online Education Decision and the Importance of In-Person Instruction:* Members of parliament emphasized that in-person education is indispensable, particularly for courses requiring practical application. They highlighted the importance of students having access to environments such as laboratories and studios in fields that

demand hands-on training. Concerns were raised that remote learning undermines the quality of education and may negatively impact students' future professional competence.

- *Implementation Challenges of Remote Education:* Many members of parliament opposed the shift to remote education, citing the practical difficulties associated with its implementation. It was emphasized that a large number of students lack the necessary internet infrastructure as well as access to essential devices such as phones, computers, or tablets for online learning.
- *The Legal Basis of the Remote Learning Decision:* Another issue raised by members of parliament concerned the legal validity of the Council of Higher Education's (YÖK) decision to implement remote learning. Some MPs argued that YÖK does not possess the legal authority to make such a decision independently and that such a move would require formal legislation.
- *Accommodation and Dormitory Issues:* The evacuation of student dormitories to house earthquake survivors was criticized for negatively affecting students' access to education, while also being considered unsuitable accommodations for displaced families. According to opposition members of parliament, the government sacrificed education due to administrative shortcomings.
- *Need for Psychological Support:* In parliamentary discussions, the psychological well-being of students in the earthquake-affected regions was closely linked to their educational experiences. It was emphasized that the challenges these students face in continuing their education have negatively impacted their mental health, and that additional support measures must be provided. In summary, many members of parliament believe that the decision to implement remote learning has had a detrimental effect on students' psychological well-being.
- *University Entrance Exam Candidates and Equal Opportunity:* Several members of parliament pointed out that the short time span between the earthquake and the scheduled university entrance exams on June 17–18 poses a significant disadvantage for students affected by the disaster. They argued that these students should be granted positive

discrimination measures to ensure fairness and equal opportunity.

- *Post-Earthquake Sustainable Education in Affected Regions:* Emphasizing the severe damage caused by the earthquake in the affected regions, some members of parliament called for increased development funding to ensure the continuation of high-quality education in these areas. They also stressed the need to make regional universities more attractive to academic staff and scholars in order to prevent long-term educational decline.
- *Proposed Solutions:* Members of parliament put forward various proposals to improve earthquake-affected students' access to education. They emphasized the urgent need to implement measures such as additional university quotas, scholarship opportunities, and technical support. Ensuring equal access to education and establishing rapid response mechanisms were highlighted as essential for addressing similar crises in the future.

1.6. The Refugee Issue

An examination of the parliamentary sessions held after the February 6 earthquake reveals that some members of parliament made notable remarks concerning the demographic composition of the affected regions. Selected statements reflecting these concerns are presented below as direct quotations:

Behiç Çelik (İYİ Party): "... Due to the government's negligent, irresponsible, and incompetent policies, millions of our citizens residing in the affected regions have been forced to migrate to other provinces. In this context, Mersin has been burdened far beyond its capacity. As of 2022, the city had a population of 1.916 million, including an estimated 400,000 undocumented Syrians. Following the earthquake, an additional 400,000 earthquake survivors have reportedly relocated to Mersin. This nearly 40% increase in population has led to significant disruptions in public and municipal services, strained infrastructure, and triggered serious challenges in economic, social, sociological, and demographic terms..." [62].

Filiz Kerestecioğlu Demir (HDP): "... Refugee women say, 'We could have stood together, but once again we were divided, and hostility between us has deepened.' These women, who noted that the earthquake reminded them of war, reported that in the first days following the disaster they had to go from one agency or coordination center to another in search of tents. Although they registered their names, they never received a response. Many now say they will return to the disaster zones from the places they had migrated to, due to the

discrimination they have faced..." [63].

Orhan Sümer (CHP): "... Unfortunately, our city of Adana is increasingly turning into a ghost town. While our citizens are leaving for other provinces, Syrians have begun migrating into Adana; the demographic structure is rapidly deteriorating..." (TBMMTD, [64].

Radiye Sezer Katircioğlu (AKP): "... Regarding security, a total of 73,447 police officers, 61,597 gendarmerie personnel, and 1,046 coast guard staff are working around the clock in the disaster-affected provinces to help heal the wounds caused by the earthquake. In line with our thousand-year-old state tradition, the Turkish government is making every effort – through all its institutions – to assist all of our citizens and earthquake victims without making distinctions based on religion, language, ethnicity, gender, or even refugee or asylum status, aiming to restore them to a state of well-being..." [65].

Hüda Kaya (HDP): "... There have been numerous reports and images indicating that some non-citizen migrants in the earthquake zones have been subjected to discrimination and publicly targeted. Yet these relief and solidarity efforts are humanitarian in nature. Regardless of who they are – whether they are our citizens or not – it is our moral and human duty to ensure that aid reaches all earthquake victims equally..." [66].

Statements made concerning refugees highlight the serious challenges that emerged in the aftermath of the earthquake within the context of Türkiye's current social and political dynamics. According to some members of parliament, the influx of migrants under temporary protection status into disaster-stricken areas has placed a substantial burden on the local population, leading to various social, economic, and infrastructural problems. In particular, the rapid population increase in the affected provinces has disrupted public services, thereby underscoring the responsibilities of both local administrations and the central government.

Many members of parliament argued that this growing demographic burden is a consequence of poor governance and the government's lack of preparedness. The strain on public services and inadequacies in infrastructure negatively affect not only Syrian migrants but also the local population. This demographic shift within society has also contributed to rising social tensions and conflict. As the number of migrants increases, local communities are facing heightened economic hardship, while migrants themselves become increasingly vulnerable to social exclusion. The tension between these groups is further exacerbated by discriminatory rhetoric that fuels hatred. In this context, the discrimination and marginalization experienced by Syrian migrants go beyond a mere

issue of humanitarian aid. Such discriminatory practices risk undermining solidarity and collective relief efforts in the disaster zones, threatening to fracture the social fabric. Difficulties in accessing basic needs are seen as one of the greatest obstacles to social cohesion.

2. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The earthquakes that struck Kahramanmaraş on February 6, 2023, caused massive destruction across southern Türkiye. This disaster had a profound impact on the agenda of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (TBMM), prompting intense debates on urgent response efforts, disaster management, legal regulations, and the allocation of public resources. In this context, the present study aimed to examine in depth the parliamentary reflections of the February 6 earthquakes. To this end, parliamentary sessions convened immediately after the disaster were analyzed, and the most frequently debated issues related to the post-earthquake period were identified and compiled into this report.

Following the earthquakes, the issue of declaring a state of emergency (OHAL) in ten provinces was brought to the agenda of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye. While members of the ruling People's Alliance considered the declaration of OHAL a necessary precautionary measure, opposition parties argued that the decision was aimed at restricting fundamental rights and freedoms. The opposition's criticism centered on the Presidential system of governance, which they referred to as a "one-man regime." They contended that the President already holds extensive powers under this system, and therefore, an OHAL was unnecessary. Debates over the duration of the state of emergency were at the heart of parliamentary conflict, revealing clear differences in political parties' approaches to disaster management. Notably, opposition parties found the three-month duration excessive and expressed concern that it could be extended further. The number of provinces included under OHAL was also criticized. Although the motion for the state of emergency passed in the parliamentary vote, no consensus was reached between the government and the opposition.

The post-disaster activities of the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) and the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) constituted another major topic on the parliamentary agenda. Members of parliament frequently criticized these institutions for a lack of coordination, insufficient resources, the appointment of unqualified administrators, and

alleged misconduct. Claims that AFAD's delayed response and lack of equipment in the early days of the earthquake led to significant loss of life were prominently raised. Kızılay, meanwhile, faced criticism over delays in aid distribution and concerns about financial transparency. Allegations that tent and food supplies were sold, and that the institution was being run like a commercial corporation, occupied parliamentary discussions. As a result, it was widely debated that the public trust in both organizations had been seriously undermined.

Another significant topic of debate in the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye concerned the radical decisions made regarding the continuity of education. The post-earthquake shift to remote learning in universities was criticized by many members of parliament. It was particularly emphasized that remote education could compromise the quality of certain courses and negatively affect students' psychological well-being. In light of the challenges posed by the earthquake, the protection of students' rights to housing and education was underlined. The need for affirmative measures for students residing in disaster-affected regions and preparing for university entrance exams was also discussed. Within this framework, ensuring equal opportunities in education and developing rapid intervention strategies were highlighted as essential to avoid similar disruptions in future crises.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, opposition parties in Parliament argued that the military participated in search and rescue operations with a delay and with insufficient personnel. Referring to the 1999 earthquake, several members of parliament noted that the rapid deployment of the armed forces at that time had significantly reduced the number of casualties. Some MPs attributed the failure to promptly deploy the military to a climate of fear, claiming that the Presidential system of governance was responsible for this delay. The opposition also submitted parliamentary questions to the Ministry of National

Defense regarding the deployment of military personnel. In contrast, members of the People's Alliance maintained that the armed forces were actively engaged in rescue efforts from the very beginning of the disaster.

The refugee issue, which has long been part of the national agenda, once again became a subject of parliamentary debate in the aftermath of the February 6 earthquakes—this time from different perspectives. The influx of migrants into disaster-affected regions following the earthquakes posed significant challenges for local administrations in the delivery of services and brought demographic shifts into focus. Some members of parliament emphasized that the social tensions between local residents and migrants, fueled by a perceived injustice in the distribution of economic resources, have weakened social solidarity. In this context, it was argued that the issue has the potential to evolve into a long-term structural problem affecting both refugees and the host communities.

In conclusion, the earthquakes of February 6 served not only as a focal point of political debate within the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, but also as a critical test for the country's disaster management system. The need to develop effective public policies for post-disaster intervention, and to strengthen the principles of social solidarity and transparency, has become evident. To prevent similar catastrophes in the future, it is essential to restructure public institutions and to ensure the employment of qualified, professional personnel in disaster management. In this context, enhancing the role of the Grand National Assembly in disaster governance and ensuring that political leaders fulfill their responsibilities are of vital importance for safeguarding public welfare. At the same time, improving the efficiency and transparency of relevant institutions should be seen as a key step toward rebuilding public trust. A thorough analysis of the post-earthquake response process offers an important opportunity for Türkiye to learn from this experience and to be better prepared for future crises.

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