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TRADE UNION DEFENSE OF PUBLIC SPACE: THE CASE OF HAYDARPAŞA RAILWAY STATION

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Acronyms

AKP: The Justice and Development Party

BTS: United Transport Employees' Union

Büro - Sen: Office Workers' Union

DİSK: Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions

Eğitim - Sen: Education, Science and Culture Employees Union

Genel - İş: Public Services Employees Union of Turkey

KESK: The Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions

Liman - İş: Dock, Maritime, Shipyard and Warehouse Workers Union of Turkey

PPP: Public-private partnership projects

SES: Health and Social Service Workers' Union

TCDD: The Turkish State Railways

TOBB: Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey

TÜSİAD: The Turkish Industrialists' and Business People's Association

Yapı - Yol - Sen: Construction and Road Workers' Union

1. Introduction¹

Since the beginnings of the 2000s, but especially in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis in Turkey, many policy texts as well as publications expressing the expectations of the business community began to emphasise the importance of the transport sector for the Turkish economy, based on the claim that the country's transport infrastructure should be built in such a way as to connect production centres with the market at the highest possible speed and at the lowest possible cost. During this period, many infrastructure investments in the form of public-private partnership projects (PPP) in many areas of the transport sector, especially motorways and airports, came to the fore in Turkey, and some strategically important ports, roads or railway institutions began to be subjected to privatisation, commercialisation and deregulation. Another dimension of the process mentioned above is the projects that aim not only to make large investments in transport, called “megaprojects”, but also to articulate public urban spaces to these megaprojects by commodifying these spaces through the creation of new rental areas, as in the case of the Haydarpaşa Railway Station, which was opened in 1872 in İstanbul's Asian-side district of Kadıköy beside the Bosphorus with the idea that the freight carried by trains reaching the station could be transferred to the ships in the Bosphorus (Fuhrmann, 2022; Middleton, 2011; Wikipedia, 2023a).

In 2004, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government included the station and a million square metre area of the port next to the station in the urban transformation project, which included many examples of gentrification, such as turning the area into a gallery of shopping malls, luxury hotels, luxury apartments and marinas. The project had a complementary relationship with another project, the Marmaray Tube, which connects the Anatolian and European sides of İstanbul with a tube under the Marmara Sea. This means that the Marmaray Tube allows passengers travelling to İstanbul by train from Anatolian cities, or by suburban train from districts on the Anatolian side of İstanbul, to bypass the Haydarpaşa station and travel to the European side through a tunnel under the Marmara Sea. Once the Marmaray Tube is launched, passengers using rail transport would be able to cross to the European side through the Marmaray Tube instead of the ferries that leave Haydarpaşa and reach the opposite shore in about 15 minutes (Fuhrmann, 2022). Therefore, the restructuring of Haydarpaşa station and its surroundings as a rent-seeking area and the Marmaray Tube project were closely linked. In fact, Haydarpaşa station was closed to train traffic after the Marmaray Tube was inaugurated in 2013.

Since the announcement of Haydarpaşa project, there has been a great resistance to protect the Haydarpaşa station and the surrounding area, which is extremely important not only for Turkey's transport but also for the collective memory. The umbrella of this resistance is the Haydarpaşa Solidarity Platform (hereinafter referred to as “the Solidarity”), which was founded on 13 May 2005 with the participation of more than 70 organisations, including trade unions, under the leading role of the

¹ I would like to thank Tugay Kartal, Gül Köksal and Ayça Yüksel for their contribution to the case study through interviews.

United Transport Employees' Union (BTS), the union of public employees working in the railways, ports, the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and the Ministry of Transport, which is affiliated to the Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions (KESK).² The Chamber of Architects has also been one of the leading organisations within the Solidarity. Since the day it was founded, the Solidarity has been waging an important struggle under the slogan "Haydarpaşa is a railway station, it will remain a railway station" by realising various forms of collective action, ranging from demonstrations, petitions, legal cases to organising public events such as concerts, picnics, etc. This study focuses in general on the struggle of Solidarity from its foundation until the end of 2022, and in particular on the role of the BTS within Solidarity.

As a result of nearly 20 years of Solidarity's struggle, the historic Haydarpaşa Railway Station has not only remained on the public agenda, but also many gains have been achieved. One of them is that Haydarpaşa Railway Station and the surrounding one million square metres of the port area has remained a public space. This is undoubtedly a very important achievement in terms of public use of an urban space. The second achievement is that the historical station building will be used in accordance with the purpose and historical mission for which it was built, namely for railway transport purposes, as demanded by the members of the struggle. Within this framework, the study aims to add knowledge of this experience to the relevant literature relying on the question of "what is the role of organised labour in general and the BTS in particular in the struggle waged by the Solidarity as a coalition of struggle and the gains it has achieved?"

The work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter discusses the AKP government's "megaprojects" in the transport sector in general and in the railway sector in particular, as well as the government's plans for privatisation, commercialisation and deregulation in the railway sector in Turkey, mainly based on the theoretical concepts of "spatial fix" and "time-space compression" formulated by David Harvey. Two factors played role in grounding the theoretical framework on the transport sector. Firstly, the importance of Haydarpaşa station for the public transport policy of İstanbul and Turkey although the realisation of the Haydarpaşa project has important consequences for the public urban space and has an important connection with urban literature. Secondly, the Haydarpaşa project has a close complementary relationship with the Marmaray Tube project, a major transport megaproject. In the second chapter, the inclusion of Haydarpaşa station in the process of "mega-projects" is briefly explained. The third chapter deals with the campaign not only against the closure of Haydarpaşa station, but also against the commodification of urban space by the Solidarity, based on open access resources and interviews with people involved in the struggle. The first interview was conducted on 15 August 2023 with Associate Professor Gül Köksal, a former faculty member at Kocaeli University's Faculty of Architecture and Design, a member of the İstanbul Chamber of Architects, and an activist in many urban movements, including the Solidarity. The second interview was conducted on 18 August 2023 with Tugay Kartal, an experienced trade unionist in BTS, an author for the website City and Railway

² See BTS (2009).

(“Kent ve Demiryolu”³ in Turkish) and one of the founders of Solidarity. The third interview was conducted on 21 August 2023 with Ayça Yüksel, an activist of Solidarity and the author of a comprehensive master’s thesis on the Haydarpaşa struggle at the Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts, Department of Sociology, as well as the editor of a book on the subject.⁴ The answers to the above-mentioned research questions and other findings of the study are discussed in the conclusion section.

2. Megaprojects in Turkey in early 2000s: Theoretical Framework

In his book *Globalised Authoritarianism*, Koenraad Bogaert (2018) stresses that neoliberal projects to restructure cities, national economies, sectors and states that emerge in different geographies are not “local” and not being isolated from each other (Bogaert, 2018: 46). Another point that Bogaert draws attention to, with reference to David Harvey, is that such projects, to the extent that they articulate public urban space to the processes of capital circulation and accumulation, shape the process of capital accumulation in time and space and serve the ‘global restoration of class power’ (Bogaert, 2018: 47 - 48). The Haydarpaşa project can also be discussed within this framework. Indeed, as seen below, the Turkish government has made a special effort to market the project to international financial circles, in other words, to articulate public urban space to the accumulation and circulation processes of global capital. This means restoring the power of global capital by creating new areas of profit.

On the other hand, the realisation of Haydarpaşa project would not only mean the transformation of a public space, which is important for the collective memory of Turkey, into a rent-seeking area, but would also mean the expulsion of the workers who work there, and who generally live in the nearby workers’ quarters, from the centre of the city to its periphery. Given that the project is based on the construction of luxury hotels, residences and shopping centres, it can also be argued that not only those who work at the Haydarpaşa station, but also some of the wage-earning segments of İstanbul’s population who spend their weekends or leisure time relatively cheaply by the sea in this area would be exposed to the same situation. While all of this is another indicator of the restoration of the global class power of the Haydarpaşa project at the expense of the working class, it also highlights the importance of Bogaert’s definition of gentrification as “a state-promoted process to attract a wealthier consumer and tax-paying class to the city centre” (Bogaert, 2018: 158). The reaction of trade unions and professional organisations to the project, and their efforts to protect the historic station and its surroundings, stem from this situation, as well as from the role both spaces play in terms of public transport.

As stated at the beginning of the study and discussed in more detail below, historically, Haydarpaşa railway station has a very important role for the transport

³ See Kent ve Demiryolu (2003).

⁴ See Yüksel (2021a).

sector of Turkey and İstanbul.⁵ Secondly, the inclusion of Haydarpaşa train station and the surrounding one million square metres port area in the gentrification project has a complementary relationship with the Marmaray Tube project⁶, which is a major transport megaproject. In other words, the policies towards the dismantling of the transport functions of the historical railway station and its inclusion in gentrification policies are closely related to the recent developments in the transport sector, which is a key sector in terms of the circulation and turnover of capital in Turkey as well as globally. Therefore, by bearing in mind Bogaert's emphasis on the class relations revealed by neoliberal projects in urban space, the study discusses the Haydarpaşa project with a focus on the transport sector and in the light of the conceptual and theoretical framework of David Harvey, who critically analyses the role of this sector in capitalist relations of production within the dynamics of capital accumulation.

In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, David Harvey (1990: 232) draws attention to the importance of diminishing spatial barriers to relations of production, consumption and circulation through the “annihilation of space by time” in relation to the creation of the world market. In the same work and in *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, Harvey adds that spatial barriers can only be diminished through the production of certain specific spaces: Railways, highways, airports, teleports (Harvey, 1990: 232; 2014: 138). According to Harvey (2003: 88), while geographical expansion requires infrastructural investments in transport, communication networks, education and research, the production and reconfiguration of spatial relations create a possibility to avert the crisis tendency of capitalist relations of production. Harvey (2003: 99 - 100) also points to some unique aspects of investments in railways, roads, airports, port facilities, cable networks and similar investments, which he defines as “fixed capital embedded in the land”. While such investments in physical infrastructure are used in order to gain the opportunity to be valued, the ultimate effect of “fixed capital embedded in the land” will be the geographical transformation and relocation of capitalist relations.

How can the above be related to the process in Turkey since the beginning of the 2000s, but in particular after the financial crisis of 2008? Although the Turkish economy was hit hard by the 2008 financial crisis, the country experienced a relatively rapid recovery as regards economic growth. The average economic growth of the Turkish economy between 2012 and 2015 was 6.1 per cent. However, the high economic growth did not lead to increased employment and improved living standards for the wage-earning segments of society (OECD, 2017; Tören, 2018). With regard to the foundations of Turkey's rapid recovery in terms of economic growth while the effects of the crisis in the global economy continue, Harvey (2017) provides an explanatory framework with reference to economic policies in China and the US in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crises. In his *Marx, Capital and the Madness of Economic Reason*, Harvey (2017) compares the effects of the US policy of ‘financial expansion’ and

⁵ For the historical importance of the station, please see Middleton (2011: 41), (Fuhrmann, 2022), Wikipedia (2023a).

⁶ Wikipedia (2023b) describes Marmaray as follows: “Marmaray is a 76.6-kilometre-long commuter rail line located in İstanbul, Turkey. (...) Mostly using the right-of-way of two existing commuter rail lines, the Marmaray line linked the two lines via a tunnel under the Bosphorus strait, becoming the first standard gauge rail connection between Europe and Asia”.

China's policy of expanding infrastructure investment to recover from the 2008 crisis. He then points out that China was able to overcome the crisis more quickly than the US through the space economy it created, including urban projects and transport investments. According to Harvey (2017: 189), Turkey followed a similar policy after the 2008 crisis. The most important indicators for Harvey's statement on Turkey are the 'megaprojects' for new roads, railway lines, new airports, the construction boom in cities, etc.⁷

The following data verify the above-mentioned judgement. The number of public-private partnership (PPP) projects in Turkey, known as "megaprojects", increased from 16 between 1986 and 2002 to 158 between 2003 and 2017. A significant part of this number was in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis (ISPA, 2018). Also, as pointed out by Emek (2015), PPPs in Turkey between 2008 and 2013 consisted of 47 per cent in terms of share of number of contracts and 46 per cent in terms of value of contracts in Europe and Central Asia.⁸ Considering the investments in the transport sector between 2003 and 2022, 60.2 per cent is allocated to road investments, railway investments come second with 21 per cent (Investment Office, 2023a; Investment Office, 2023b). The conventional railway network, which amounted to 10.959 kilometres in 2003, reached 13.128 kilometres in 2023, while 1.460 kilometres of high-speed rail were added (ISPA, 2018; Investment Office, 2023b). It should also be noted that 4.262 kilometres of railways are under construction, the project phase has been completed for 3.567 kilometres of railways, and preliminary surveys and studies have been completed for 6.682 kilometres of railway network, as pointed out by the Investment Office (Investment Office, 2023b). In addition, the railways sector's share of the investment budget, which was 38 per cent in 2017, increased to 52 per cent by 2022. In 2023 and 2024, this share is planned to be 63.9 per cent and in 2025 63.7 per cent (Investment Office, 2023b). All these show that the railway sector will play a crucial role in Turkish capitalism in the coming periods.

The AKP government considers the above-mentioned investments critical for maintaining the continuity of the accumulation of capital in Turkey. The first indicator of this argument is that there are many PPPs among the mentioned investments, which play a very important role in opening up space for the private sector. Second, in recent years, besides some official reports, many business organisations published reports stressing the importance and necessity of infrastructure projects in general and investment in the transport sector in particular.⁹ Another point worth mentioning in this context is that the Turkish State Railways (TCDD), a public monopoly that operates all railways, has undergone significant liberalisation through various reforms, especially after 2013 (Investment Office, 2023b). As Levent Demirelli (2014: 45) points out, while the first wave of railway privatisation carried out by the AKP in Turkey consisted of the closure, sale and transfer of TCDD assets and institutions which were not directly related to railway services, the main feature of the second wave, which began with various regulations enacted in 2011 and 2013, was the

⁷ See the Ministry of Development (2014: 107 - 108, 125 - 126) and Serdaroğlu (2016: 16).

⁸ For the composition of the PPPs, please also see ISPA (2018).

⁹ Please see TÜSİAD (2012: 69); Ministry of Development (2014: 184 - 185); Ministry of Development (2018); Presidency of Strategy and Budget (2019: 127 - 131), TOBB, (2014); Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure (2022); Pehlivan (2022).

preparation of TCDD for privatisation through its fragmentation. In other words, as Demirelli (2014: 45) points out, railway services were directly targeted in the second period.

At this point, a question is important: what do these mega-projects in general¹⁰, and those in the transport sector in particular¹¹, which create a space for both the long-term interests of the private sector and its current tendering needs, mean for the working class? Focusing particularly on the transport sector, two points should be emphasised. The first is that all processes related to the sector are accompanied by practices such as flexible working conditions, de-unionisation, repression of trade union members, subcontracting of some parts of TCDD. For example, on 24 April 2013, the Law on the Liberalisation of the Türkiye's Railway Transport was enacted. The law restructured TCDD as an infrastructure operator. Through the law, a company, Turkish State Railways Joint Stock Company was established and authorised to operate trains. In other words, the corporate logic was validated in the operation of trains (Mevzuat, 2013; Demirelli, 2014: 45). The enactment of the law and the establishment of such a company prove the accuracy of Fuat Ercan's statement (2021: 122) that "the transformation in the railways is manifested in the fact that the political powers representing the state behave like corporations". The law, however, also paves the way for private companies to operate railway infrastructure and railway services (Mevzuat, 2013; Demirelli, 2014: 45).

The BTS has carried out an effective struggle against all these through press releases, marches etc... The press statement of BTS in front of the General Directorate of TCDD on 18 June 2014 against the liberalisation of the railways (BTS, 2014c), the march against the privatisation of the railways in different cities of Turkey on 17 - 18 November 2014 (BTS, 2014d, BTS, 2014e) are some examples in this regard. Other examples are the marches that started on 2 June 2014 in various cities and ended on 4 June in front of the General Directorate of TCDD in response to the expulsion of 15 BTS members and the resistance of some union members (BTS, 2020a, BTS, 2020b). The union also organised various ways of struggle against work accidents, subcontracting etc. Another point to mention in the railway sector is the train accidents caused by the lack of sufficient personnel, the operation of high speed trains on inappropriate tracks and despite the lack of technical and scientific audit of the tracks. One of the most known examples of such accidents is the train crash in Pamukova, a northwestern district of Turkey, in 2004, at which 41 people lost their lives and more than 80 people were injured as a result of the workload of the workers, insufficient technical staff employment and various deregulation practices. Because of the same reasons, in 2018, another train crash occurred in Çorlu, in the northwestern of Turkey. In the crash, 25 people, including 7 children, lost their lives while more than 300 were injured (BTS, 2014f; MMO, 2019: 59; Wikipedia, 2022; BTS, 2022a).

¹⁰ Regarding the mega-projects in general, please see ITUC (2019); DW (2018).

¹¹ Suat Aksoy (2016: 438) deals with the Marmaray Tunnel project as a key point for Turkey's uninterrupted connection to the Trans-European Network while Foreign Policy's Hannah Lucinda Smith (2023) notes that "Turkish President Erdogan's mega-infrastructure projects are enriching construction companies..."

3. Inclusion of Haydarpaşa Station in the Process of “Mega Projects”

In the beginning of 2000s, the Haydarpaşa station and its surroundings became more visible in the national mainstream media. Accordingly, the station and the surrounding one million square metre of port area were to be transformed into a trade and tourism centre through the construction of seven 70-storey skyscrapers, luxury hotels, congress and business centres, etc. (Yüksel, 2019: 116 - 117; Yüksel, 2021b).¹² It was also reported in the media that the necessary regulations for the project were prepared by the government with the expectation of a privatisation revenue of between 5 and 10 billion dollars. Another aspect of the project, called “small Manhattan”, was the transformation of the historic railway station building into a luxury hotel and the closure of the historic station and its surroundings to the public. Although the İstanbul Municipality rejected the project in the face of public outcry from progressive public opinion, it was clear that the government was working on some projects to gentrify the historic railway station and its surroundings (Yüksel, 2019: 116 - 117; Yüksel, 2021b).¹³

One of the first indicators of the government’s plans for Haydarpaşa was a regulation allowing the transformation of all ports into commercial facilities, including five-star luxury hotels, shopping malls and business centres (Yüksel, 2019: 117). Another regulation of 17 September 2004, known as the “Haydarpaşa Law”, authorised the Ministry of Finance to transfer the treasury assets around Haydarpaşa railway station free of charge to the TCDD, the state railway monopoly that would be subject to privatisation attempts a few years later (Demirelli, 2014). With the same regulation, the Ministry of Public Works and Settlement was authorised for construction plans and projects in Haydarpaşa, which meant that the İstanbul Municipality decision-making authority over the Haydarpaşa area was restricted. In 2005, the General Directorate of TCDD was given the authority to sell, transfer, make plans and projects. In 2008, an omnibus law approved the transfer of all immovables belonging to TCDD to the Privatisation Administration of Turkey (TÖİ) (Yüksel, 2019: 119 - 120).

On 28 November 2010, a large fire of suspicious origin broke out in the building of Haydarpaşa station. The fire and the water used to extinguish it caused significant damage to the roof of the main building and the outbuildings of the station (Fuhrmann, 2022: 241; BTS, 2010c). Following the fire, the BTS issued a press release stating that the response to the fire had been inadequate (BTS, 2017a). The Solidarity also issued a press statement on the tenth anniversary of the fire, stating that the fire was the beginning of Haydarpaşa being left without people, ferries and trains. In fact, in 2014, a renovation project, which aimed to open some parts of the station to commercial functions, was on the agenda. However, thanks to the Solidarity’s initiatives, this project was not approved by the Kadıköy Municipality, where the

¹² For other megaprojects in the same period, see Dogan & Stupar (2016) and Yüksel (2019).

¹³ After this year, the government initiated a series of different projects for the Haydarpaşa Train Station and the surrounding port area. All of these projects were based on the commodification of the station building and the surrounding area. For more information on this, see Yüksel (2019).

Haydarpaşa station is located, and the actual renovation of the station could only begin in 2016 (BTS, 2020c).

Haydarpaşa station was closed to long-distance trains on 31 January 2012. The reason given by the government was the construction of a new high-speed train line, the last stop of which was planned to be in another neighbourhood on the Anatolian side of İstanbul. The suspension of long-distance trains was one of the important steps in the dysfunctionalization of Haydarpaşa (BTS, 2013a; BTS, 2015a). On 19 June 2013, suburban trains from Haydarpaşa station to the districts on the Anatolian side of İstanbul and nearby cities every 20 minutes were also suspended for two years. The government announced that the railway lines would be renewed. In fact, train services had been drastically reduced by that date (Fuhrmann, 2022: 243; BTS, 2015a; BTS, 2013a). On the second anniversary of the suspension of suburban trains, the Solidarity organised a mass press statement in front of Haydarpaşa station, criticising the government's failure to fulfil its commitment to open the station within two years. However, the closure of the station meant that a total of 36 million passengers, 7 million on long-distance trains and 29 million on suburban trains, were deprived of train services in one year (BTS, 2015a; BTS, 2013a). Considering the fact that suburban trains are mostly used by workers, public employees or students, and that the difference between those who could not benefit from long-distance trains and those who could not benefit from suburban trains, it is clear that the closure of the station was a significant obstacle for the working class to benefit from public services.

4. The Campaign Against the Closure of Haydarpaşa Station

The resistance against the above-mentioned process has been led by Haydarpaşa Solidarity for Society, City and Environment, which was founded on 13 May 2005 under the leadership of the BTS and the İstanbul Metropolitan Branch of the Chamber of Architects of the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (hereafter “the Chamber of Architects”). Tugay Kartal, one of the founders of Solidarity and a leading member of BTS, explains establishment of Solidarity and BTS' role in its formation as follows:

...the use of Haydarpaşa outside of its function would mean the expulsion of the workers working there to the periphery. As soon as we were informed about the projects on Haydarpaşa, we, as BTS İstanbul Branch No. 1, contacted the İstanbul Branch of the Chamber of Architects to find out what could be done against it. In the following period, we decided to form a platform to struggle against the urban transformation project that was to be carried out through Haydarpaşa...(the interview with Tugay Kartal).¹⁴

Ayça Yüksel, researcher on the collective actions by the Solidarity, Haydarpaşa activist, and editor and author of many works on the Solidarity, also notes the driving role of BTS within Solidarity:

¹⁴ Also see Kartal (2021)

Haydarpaşa is a place of labour. It is not only a place where railway workers work, but also a public transportation space used by city dwellers... When the Haydarpaşa projects emerged, railway workers were the first to realise this and they pioneered the establishment of Solidarity (the interview with Ayça Yüksel).¹⁵

As seen from the explanations by Kartal and Yüksel, BTS played a special role in the foundation of Solidarity, which is one of the key points in terms of the research question of the paper.

As Yüksel (2019) points out in her comprehensive study, one of the most important characteristics of the Solidarity is that it was founded with a leading role of a trade union and with the participation of many trade unions despite being based in the field of urban struggle. In other words, although it has the characteristics of a “social movement”, it goes beyond the tendency of “new” social movements, which exclude the notion of class from the field of social opposition.¹⁶ Therefore, it is fair to argue that Solidarity is an important example of the success of maintaining social struggle together with class organisations and other forms of oppositional bodies, which cannot be covered by the conventional trade union movement (Yüksel, 2019: 159; Kartal, 2020). Gül Köksal, a member of the İstanbul Chamber of Architects and an activist in many urban movements, including the Solidarity, discusses this situation and the role of organised labour in general and BTS in particular within the Solidarity with the following sentences:

...The BTS has played a very important role in looking at the issue from the point of view of production relations and in addressing the issue within its social context. In mobilising or pushing forward the professional organisations that are part of the Solidarity and keeping the struggle going, members of the trade union movement, especially the BTS, played an important role. A significant number of the prominent figures in Haydarpaşa Solidarity are station workers, railway workers... In addition, trade unionists played an important role in getting “inside information” or directly intervening in the developments, as they work in the station building (the interview with Gül Köksal).

Kartal and Yüksel also emphasise that the information the union received from the inside, i.e. through administrative mechanisms or informal channels, played an important role in determining the direction of the struggle, both when the projects on the Haydarpaşa station building and the surrounding port area first came on the agenda and in the following periods. As Kartal points out, “importantly, the decision-making processes of Solidarity are based on horizontal relations rather than the bureaucratic processes of traditional trade unions (the interviews with Kartal and Yüksel; Kartal, 2020). Yüksel (2019) also notes that since its foundation, the Solidarity has used a variety of highly creative forms of collective action such as signature campaigns, press statements with the participation of its members, leaflet distribution, marches, press statements accompanied by festivals, torchlight marches, demonstrations accompanied by artistic activities, including dance and humour, and occupations in different parts of İstanbul. Through all these activities,

¹⁵ Also see Yüksel (2021a); Kartal (2021); Kartal, Yüksel & Durgut (2022).

¹⁶ For such a discussion, see Bamyeh (2012); Burawoy (2017); Cox & Nielsen (2014); Hetland & Goodwin (2013); Wilde (1990).

the Solidarity succeeded in forming an important public opinion against the projects on Haydarpaşa station and the surrounding port area the BTS always played a central role in these activities (Yüksel, 2019: 179 - 246).

The establishment of Solidarity was announced to the public through a press release: One of the actions taken immediately after its establishment was a petition campaign initiated on 16-17 June 2005 with the text entitled “For Society, City and Environment We Will Not Allow Turkey to be Looted and Occupied in Haydarpaşa”. The campaign, which was carried out through collecting of signatures in different centres of İstanbul, aimed, on the one hand, to raise public awareness and, on the other, to invite the public to a press statement with a festival to be held on 21 June 2005. The petition had also another concrete aim: to have Haydarpaşa station and its surroundings declared an ‘urban and historical site’. During the campaign, 20.000 signatures were collected in a short period of time (Yüksel, 2019: 180 - 182). A legal battle was also waged to have Haydarpaşa station and its surroundings recognised as a ‘protected area’. As a result of the campaign and the legal battle, on 26 April 2006, the Haydarpaşa station and its surroundings were approved as an ‘urban and historical site’ by İstanbul Regional Board for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets No. V (Yüksel, 2019: 180 - 182; BTS, 2021). As Tugay Kartal pointed out, the government has taken steps to circumvent this decision with some modifications to the project (the interview with Tugay Kartal; Kartal, 2021: 503 - 504).

The Solidarity has also held numerous innovative press releases, which were also organised in the form of breakfast meetings or festivals with activities such as theatre, dance, concerts and poetry readings in order to ensure visibility (Yüksel, 2019). Some of these events, often attended by artists, lasted for several days (Yüksel, 2019: 188). The mass press statement organised in the Kadıköy district, where Haydarpaşa is located, with the participation of 70 member organisations after the suspicious fire mentioned above was a good example in this regard. In the activity, the participants, including BTS executives and members, carried banners and placards such as “Don’t touch Haydarpaşa” and “No to the monster of looting”. After a short march, the text of the press statement was read by one of the most important singers of Turkish rock music. The press statement, entitled “Haydarpaşa Station, Port and Coastal Area; All Attempts of those who Want to Offer Haydarpaşa Station, Port and Coastal Area to the Service of Global Real Estate Merchants as ‘Goods to be Marketed’ Will Be Extinguished!”, demanded that the renovation process should not be used to dispose of the station. Furthermore, the process of transforming the railway station into a rent seeking area was explained in detail, and a number of questions were raised regarding both the suspicious fire and the ongoing projects in Haydarpaşa (BTS, 2010a). In the following periods, the Solidarity continued to organise actions such as breakfast meetings with columnists and mass press releases (BTS, 2010a; BTS, 2010b; BTS, 2010c; BTS, 2010d).

As mentioned above, on 31 January 2012, long-distance trains departing from Haydarpaşa and on 18 June 2013, trains commuting between the suburbs on the Anatolian side of İstanbul and Haydarpaşa were stopped on the ground that the rails would be renewed within the scope of the Marmaray Tube project. According to the Mayor of the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality and the Minister of Transport,

Maritime Affairs and Communications, Haydarpaşa station had lost its function and therefore there was no longer a need for it. Undoubtedly, the closure of these suburban trains, which are very important for the transport of the working class in the city, has created significant problems both in terms of transport and the declining share of railways in transport (Kartal, 2020; Yüksel, 2019).

The importance of Haydarpaşa and its surroundings in terms of public services is not limited to the above point. For example, Fuat Ercan (2021: 115) refers to the difficulty of reaching the new railway station built as an alternative to Haydarpaşa, stating “you have to try everything except the plane”. While Gül Köksal (2021: 85) points out that Haydarpaşa station is the central point of the entire Anatolian Railways, Tugay Kartal (2021: 514) emphasises that it was not possible to operate the railways without the central station. According to Kartal, İstanbul’s need and demand for trains are also not met by the number of newly introduced high-speed trains. On the other hand, Ergun Gedizlioğlu, a professor of civil engineering, underlines the problem that the alternative plans that have been made after the closure of the station do not create a base in the sense that railway services could be carried out in a qualified way (2021). According to Gedizlioğlu (2021), Haydarpaşa Station has all the necessary infrastructure to maintain railway services. Regarding the surrounding port area, Haydarpaşa Port is the largest port in the Marmara region and the third largest in the country with a 50 per cent share of the country’s exports, in addition to the port’s importance in terms of freight services in northwestern Turkey (Kartal, 2021: 513 - 514). Both the liberalisation of the railways and the attempts to close Haydarpaşa led to the dismissal of a large number of skilled workers, deunionisation and outsourcing (ibid.), which were a critical factor in the above-mentioned train crashes in Pamukova and Çorlu.¹⁷ All these reveal the working class dimension of the Haydarpaşa struggle.

Following the closure of Haydarpaşa station to long-distance trains in 2012, the BTS and Solidarity organised many protests and activities. These included a petition that reached 15.000 signatures in a short period of time and the submission of the signatures to the relevant ministry with a press release, the 63-week vigil that Solidarity members and their families held on the steps of the station every Sunday between 1 pm and 2 pm, and the events that were organised on Thursdays between 8 pm and 9pm for the following 44 weeks. A lawsuit was also filed due to the violation of the right to transport and the victimisation of passengers (Kartal, 2020; Yüksel, 2019).

On the first anniversary of the end of the long-distance trains, a torchlit march was held in İstanbul’s Kadıköy, where Haydarpaşa is located, with the participation of democratic mass organisations, politicians, trade unionists, civil society organisations

¹⁷ Can Atalay, the lawyer of both the Chamber of Architects, one of the most important constituents of the Haydarpaşa Solidarity, and the victims of the Çorlu train accident, architect Múcella Yapıcı, a prominent member of the Chamber of Architects (İstanbul) and one of the founders of the Haydarpaşa Solidarity, and Tayfun Kahraman scholar, urban planner and from the Chamber of Urban Planners were sentenced to 18 years in prison on 25 April in a case filed over the Gezi resistance in 2013. While Múcella Yapıcı was released after 17 months in prison, Kahraman and Atalay remain in prison together with other Gezi prisoners. Atalay, who was elected as a deputy from the Workers’ Party of Turkey (TİP) in the 14 May elections and was granted parliamentary immunity, is still being held in prison despite the Constitutional Court’s “violation of rights” decision.

etc. (BTS, 2013b). The Solidarity's activities on the same issue continued in the following years. For example, on the fifth anniversary of the end of the long-distance trains departing from Haydarpaşa, BTS held an open-air press conference with the participation of the İstanbul Chamber of Architects and various democratic mass organisations. In the press statement, the importance of Haydarpaşa Railway Station in terms of collective memory and transport was underlined, and the commodification projects associated with Haydarpaşa were called for an end (BTS, 2017b). From time to time, the Solidarity's creative actions resonated beyond Turkey. Following the 'Sunday and Thursday vigils' and torchlight marches, which were launched in response to the discontinuation of the long-distance trains from Haydarpaşa in 2012 due to the opening of the Marmaray Tunnel, demonstrations in support of Haydarpaşa Solidarity were organised in front of the European Parliament in Brussels, supported by some Turkish and European politicians in Europe, as well as in various cities in Germany and Bucharest (Yüksel, 2019: 205; BTS, 2013b).

On 19 June 2013, suburban trains departing from Haydarpaşa station were stopped due to the opening of the Marmaray Tube on 29 October 2013, the 73rd anniversary of the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. The Solidarity called for a demonstration on the evening of 18 June 2013 to farewell the trains, which became the most massive action organised by the Solidarity since its foundation (Yüksel, 2019: 221). Around a thousand İstanbul residents gathered in front of Haydarpaşa station to protest against the closure of the station by singing songs or chanting slogans, as the last suburban service was to take place (BTS, 2013a). Also, just a few days before the opening of the Marmaray Tube, a press statement was made by the Solidarity on the Marmaray Project after the march from Kadıköy to Haydarpaşa station. The statement criticised the technical shortcomings of the Marmaray Tube, which not only paved the way for the bypassing of Haydarpaşa station, but was also promoted by the government with the statement "We have connected Beijing and London" (BTS, 2013c).

Although the Solidarity's struggle continued relentlessly, the government continued to market its projects on the station and on its surrounding area. For example, on 13 June 2013, a meeting entitled "Mega Cities and Commercial Capitals - From New York to İstanbul" was organised at Haydarpaşa station, with international investors among the participants (BTS, 2014b). Shortly before this meeting, on April 2014, the Minister of Treasury and Finance Mehmet Şimşek had stated that "we will reach the privatisation target of 7 billion dollars this year. The Haydarpaşa Railway Station and the Port Transformation Project will be included in the programme after reconstruction. There will be a lot of interest", referring to the potential investors. The Solidarity's Tuesday and Thursday vigils had entered their 116th week when these statements were made, showing that the government had not changed its plans for Haydarpaşa despite the reactions led by BTS and the Chamber of Architects. Meanwhile, the Solidarity issued a press statement condemning the statements despite the public outcry, stating that Haydarpaşa has been serving as a railway station for 104 years, and has become a symbol of İstanbul and is on UNESCO's World Industrial Heritage list (BTS, 2014a).

Despite the government's promise that the suburban trains would only be suspended for two years, the trains were not allowed to run two years after their closure, demonstrating the government's disregard for public reaction and its commitment to the commodification of Haydarpaşa and the surrounding port area. This was protested by the Solidarity with a demonstration at the station building on 18 June 2015 (BTS, 2015a). Moreover, the plan, which opened Haydarpaşa station and its surroundings to the use of capital, was eventually cancelled by the İstanbul 5th Administrative Court in August 2015 on the grounds that it did not comply with the principles of urbanism, planning and public interest. Following this decision, which legally prevented the transformation of Haydarpaşa station and its surroundings into a tourism and commercial area, the Solidarity called on the government to withdraw the plans for Haydarpaşa and make the station functional again (BTS, 2015b). However, instead of implementing the court's decision, the government tried to implement it through the Privatisation Administration (ÖİB), relying on the State of Emergency declared after the coup attempt on 15 July 2016. On 13 August 2016, this situation was announced to the public through a press release by the BTS and the Solidarity, the demonstrations at the station, which continue every Sunday between 13.00 and 14.00, reached their 238th week (BTS, 2016). In the 300th (1 October 2017) and 400th (15 September 2019) weeks after the last train left Haydarpaşa, the Solidarity organised events in front of Haydarpaşa station, including concerts, press statements and film screenings. The 400th week's event, especially, attracted intense participation of political parties, trade unions, democratic mass organisations and İstanbul residents. Following the press statement calling on the government to abandon its plans to commercialise Haydarpaşa, a film screening was held in the parking area in front of the station (BTS, 2017a; BTS, 2019a; BTS, 2019b).

After a long struggle, finally, the Solidarity announced in a press statement on 4 December 2022 that the first official signals had been given that Haydarpaşa Station would retain its station character and transport function. According to the statement, high-speed trains would once again arrive at Haydarpaşa station, although not with the same capacity as before. On the other hand, some archaeological findings had been discovered during the ongoing construction activities and the station would be reopened to the public as a public transport space with an area where these finds would be exhibited (BTS, 2021; BTS, 2022b). In a press statement held in front of Haydarpaşa Station on 9 July 2023, the 600th week of the Sunday Vigils, the Solidarity stated that due to the new archaeological findings uncovered during the archaeological excavations at the station site and some technical delays, the aim of the railway station to meet with the trains could not be realised until April 2023. On the other hand, the statement called for the construction of the station with all its functions in addition to its archaeological potential, i.e. not only high-speed trains, but also long-distance trains and Marmaray trains to arrive at Haydarpaşa Station (BTS, 2023).

5. Conclusion

This case study deals with the struggle of the Haydarpaşa Solidarity Platform since 2005 against the gentrification project of the historic Haydarpaşa train station building and the surrounding one million square metres of port area in İstanbul, fighting for the preservation of the building and the area as a public space used for transport services as well as for better public transport services. The study begins from the point of view that the project regarding the historic Haydarpaşa railway station and the surrounding port area is consistent with the dynamics of the capital accumulation process in Turkey throughout the 2000s, but especially after the 2008 crisis. For this reason, the study firstly discusses the “megaprojects” that the AKP government has put on the agenda in many areas, including the transport sector, in order to create profit areas for capital by commodifying public spaces and services. The conceptual framework of this discussion is based on the concepts of “annihilation of time through space” and “spatial fix” formulated by David Harvey.

As discussed in the study, the process of liberalisation and privatisation of railway transport in Turkey has a complementary relationship with the commodification of Haydarpaşa railway station and the surrounding port area. One of the leading organisations in the struggle against both processes has been the BTS organised in the railway transport sector. BTS has waged an active struggle not only against the ongoing processes of liberalisation, privatisation, flexible working conditions and suppression of trade unions in the railways, but also for the Haydarpaşa train station and the surrounding area to remain as a public space used for railway transportation. For this reason, the study pays special attention to BTS’s struggle against the above processes and its role in Haydarpaşa Solidarity.

The Haydarpaşa project, which constitutes the main subject of the study, had the potential to cause problems such as the commodification of public urban space, the exclusion of the working class from the city centre, the priorities of capital rather than social benefits in transportation, environmental damages and disruptions in the provision of public services, especially transportation. For all these reasons, the first reaction against the commodification process of Haydarpaşa train station and the surrounding port area came from BTS. After the aforementioned project regarding Haydarpaşa train station came to the agenda, Haydarpaşa Solidarity, which was established in 2005 with the leading role of the BTS (and the Chamber of Architects) by bringing 70 organisations together, including trade unions, non-governmental organisations, professional organisations and various citizen initiatives, has been waging an effective struggle ever since. As a result of this struggle, which rely upon varying types of collective action and has a continuity of nearly twenty years, not only has the project for the Haydarpaşa Train Station remained on the public agenda, but the project has also been stopped. This means, first and foremost, the prevention of the transformation of the historic Haydarpaşa train station and the surrounding one million square metres of port area into an area where seven 70-storey skyscrapers are rising, luxury residences and shopping malls are located. This result also means preventing the use of public resources in a way to create rent, as well as keeping the historical building and the surrounding area as a public space. In addition,

Haydarpaşa station building, which plays an important role in the internal transport of İstanbul and its connection with the neighbouring provinces as well as being the connection point of Anatolian Railways, will continue to be used for public transport purposes. For all these reasons, it can be argued that Haydarpaşa Solidarity waged a successful struggle relying on the role played by the BTS.

The first factor that played a role in the success of Haydarpaşa Solidarity's struggle is the broad coalition that the solidarity managed to build. Founded in 2005, Haydarpaşa Solidarity, with the leading role of BTS (and the Chamber of Architects), created a broad coalition ranging from trade unions to citizen initiatives, political parties to local associations. Secondly, this coalition, from the early days of the struggle, reached out to a wide range of society segments through creative forms of action that functionalised various arts in addition to traditional forms of action such as signature campaigns, press releases and marches. This series of actions, ranging from torch-lit Sunday vigils to exhibitions, from breakfast press conferences to concerts, festivals and poetry events, played an important role in keeping Haydarpaşa on the public agenda. At this point, it is necessary to underline a detail: Haydarpaşa Railway Station is an important part of Turkey's collective memory. In many films about workers migrating from Anatolia to İstanbul in the 1970s, Haydarpaşa train station is often depicted not only as the last stop of the trains, but also as the place where migrant workers encounter the sea for the first time. In light of this, it should be noted that the above-mentioned actions of Haydarpaşa Solidarity also played an important role in keeping Haydarpaşa alive in collective memory, which also played a significant role in the success of the struggle.

Another factor that played a role in the success of the struggle was the fact that Haydarpaşa Solidarity fought alongside many professional organisations, especially the Chamber of Architects, and was able to bring together activists, the press, academics and experts from various fields. All of these, on the one hand, helped the government's Haydarpaşa project to be met with more scientifically and intellectually grounded criticisms on labour rights, better public transport, environment, urbanism and similar issues, and on the other hand, helped to make these criticisms more visible to the public. Finally, it should be noted that, although Haydarpaşa Solidarity was founded with the leading role of a traditional trade union, BTS, its structure, which includes trade unions, professional organisations and citizen initiatives, enabled it to go beyond the sphere of influence of traditional trade unions and to gain the appearance of a social movement. In this sense, Haydarpaşa Solidarity has created a distinctive experience that transcends the dichotomy between trade union movements focused on the workplace and production processes and social movements focused on distribution and commodification processes. Regarding the role played by the organised labour, particularly BTS within the solidarity, the struggle led by the BTS, the locomotive organisation of Solidarity, is a successful trade union experience in terms of building coalitions with non-union organisations, popularising the struggle and achieving a public gain.¹⁸

¹⁸ The Costa Carras European Citizens' Silver Award for the Protection of Endangered Heritage was awarded to Solidarity together with an association from Greece.

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Tugay Kartal, unionist in BTS, founder of the Haydarpaşa Solidarity, author in the website “City and Railway”, 18 August 2023.

Ayça Yüksel, researcher on the Haydarpaşa Railway Station and the Haydarpaşa Solidarity, activist in the Haydarpaşa Solidarity, 21 August 2023.

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