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ON TURKEY'S PRECARIOUS ECONOMIC SITUATION

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Johns Hopkins Institute for Applied Economics, Global Health, and the Study of Business Enterprise

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About the Series

The *Studies in Applied Economics* series is under the general direction of Prof. Steve H. Hanke, Co-Director of The Johns Hopkins Institute for Applied Economics, Global Health, and the Study of Business Enterprise (hanke@jhu.edu).

About the Author

Steve H. Hanke is a Professor of Applied Economics and Co-Director of the Institute for Applied Economics, Global Health, and the Study of Business Enterprise at The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. He is a Senior Fellow and Director of the Troubled Currencies Project at the Cato Institute in Washington, D.C., a Senior Advisor at the Renmin University of China's International Monetary Research Institute in Beijing, a Special Counselor to the Center for Financial Stability in New York, a contributing editor at *Central Banking* in London, and a contributor at Forbes. Prof. Hanke is also a member of the Charter Council of the Society of Economic Measurement and of Euromoney Country Risk's Experts Panel.

In the past, Prof. Hanke taught economics at the Colorado School of Mines and at the University of California, Berkeley. He served as a Member of the Governor's Council of Economic Advisers in Maryland in 1976-77, as a Senior Economist on President Reagan's Council of Economic Advisers in 1981-82, and as a Senior Advisor to the Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress in 1984-88. Prof. Hanke served as a State Counselor to both the Republic of Lithuania in 1994-96 and the Republic of Montenegro in 1999-2003. He was also an Advisor to the Presidents of Bulgaria in 1997-2002, Venezuela in 1995-96, and Indonesia in 1998. He played an important role in establishing new currency regimes in Argentina, Estonia, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Ecuador, Lithuania, and Montenegro. Prof. Hanke has also advised the governments of many other countries, including Albania, Kazakhstan, and Yugoslavia.

Prof. Hanke has been awarded honorary doctorate degrees by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, the Universidad San Francisco de Quito, the Free University of Tbilisi, Istanbul Kültür University, and Varna Free University in honor of his scholarship on exchange-rate regimes. He is a Distinguished Associate of the International Atlantic Economic Society, a Distinguished Professor at the Universitas Pelita Harapan in Jakarta, Indonesia, a Professor Asociado (the highest honor awarded to international experts of acknowledged competence) at the Universidad del Azuay in Cuenca, Ecuador, and a Profesor Visitante at the Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas (the UPC's highest academic honor). In 1998, he was named one of the twenty-five most influential people in the world by *World Trade Magazine*.

Prof. Hanke is a well-known currency and commodity trader. Currently, he serves as a member of the Supervisory Board of Advanced Metallurgical Group N.V. in Amsterdam and Chairman Emeritus of the Friedberg Mercantile Group, Inc. in Toronto. During the 1990s, he served as President of Toronto Trust Argentina in Buenos Aires, the world's best-performing emerging market mutual fund in 1995.

Prof. Hanke's most recent books are *Zimbabwe: Hyperinflation to Growth* (2008) and *A Blueprint for a Safe, Sound Georgian Lari* (2010), *Juntas Monetarias para Paises en Desarollo* (2015), and *Currency Boards for Developing Countries: A Handbook* (2015).

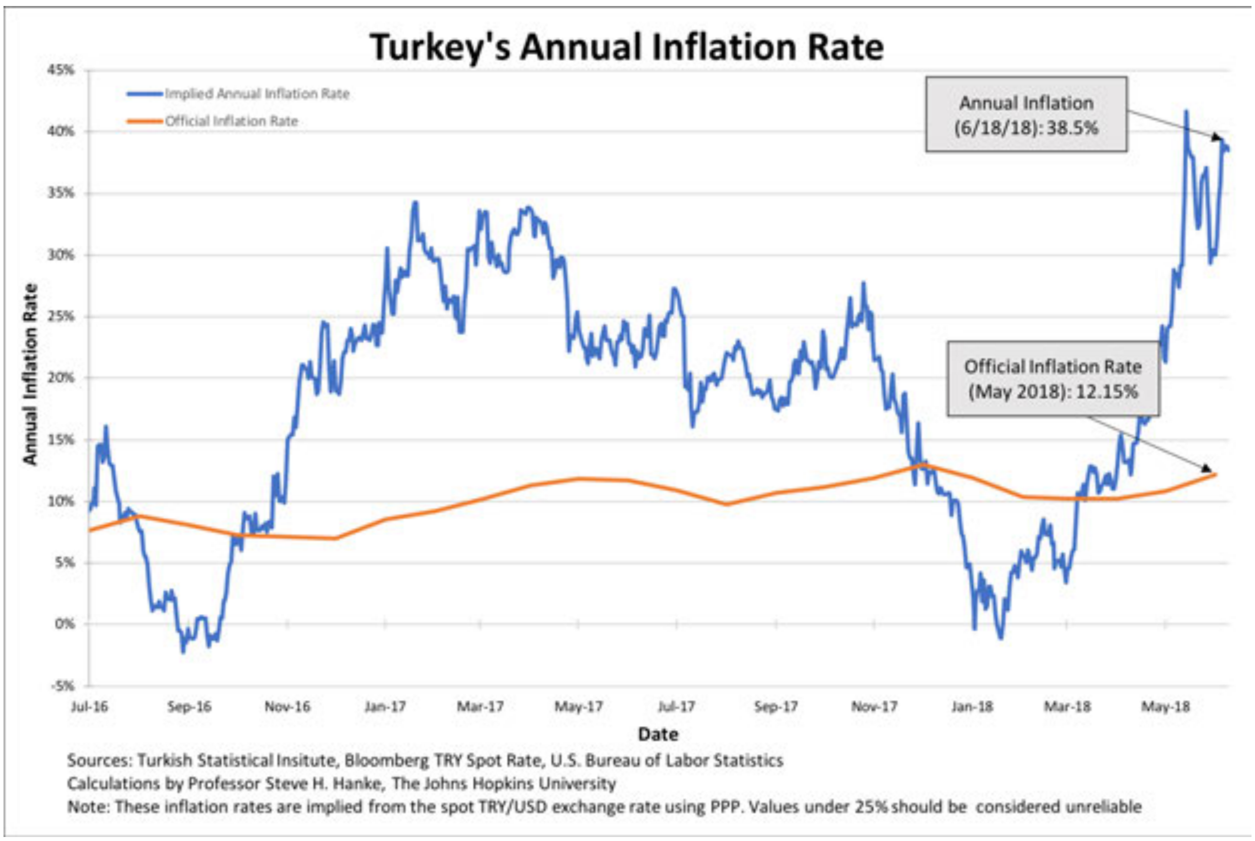
Prof. Hanke and his wife, Liliane, reside in Baltimore and Paris.

On Turkey's Precarious Economic Situation

By Prof. Dr. Steve H. Hanke

1. You remarked that Turkey's real inflation rate is 39.9%. This statement of yours was argued a lot in Turkey. How did you reach this conclusion?

Actually, at present, Turkey's annual inflation rate, according to my measurements, is 38.5% (see chart below). With the collapse of the lira, Turkey's inflation has surged. The most important price in an economy is the exchange rate between the local currency and the world's reserve currency – the U.S. dollar. Changes in the exchange rate can be reliably transformed into accurate estimates of countrywide inflation rates. The economic principle of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) allows for this transformation. I measure the implied annual inflation rate on a daily basis by using PPP to translate changes in the TRY/USD exchange rate into an annual inflation rate. The attached chart shows the path of that annual rate. At present, Turkey's annual inflation rate is 38.5%. So, my measured rate of inflation is 3.2 times higher than the official rate of 12.15%.



2. According to government agencies in Turkey, the annual inflation rate is 10.85%. Does Turkey government dissemble real numbers? If so, why do you think?

The government's numbers are misleading. They differ from mine for a number of reasons. First, my numbers represent a much broader aggregate than do the government's. My numbers include price changes for all goods, services, and assets. The government's measurements are based on a much narrower set of prices. Second, my data are of a much higher frequency than the government's. I measure every day. The government measures each month. So, the government's measures lag behind my measures. In short, we are measuring different things. As inflation surges above 25% per year, my measures give a much more accurate picture of what is going in with prices in reality than the government's inflation measurements.

3. Also according to government agencies, Turkey grew up 7.4% in 2017. Do you find it realistic? In your opinion, what was it that grew up in 2017?

The official 2017 GDP growth of 7.4% for Turkey is a bit on the high side. I think growth in 2017 was closer to 7.0%, or a bit less.

4. You also have been telling that if inflation was 39.9%, interest rate should be 40%. But Turkey's president Erdoğan says that interest is the reason and inflation is the result. What do you think about it?

To stabilize the lira and control inflation, real interest rates (adjusted for inflation) should be in the 5-10% range. If inflation is 38.5%, the nominal interest rates should be between 43.5% and 48.5%. As for President Erdogan's theories about interest rates, they remind me of the ideas of Rudolf Havenstein. He was the President of the Reichsbank when Germany hyperinflated in 1923.

5. What do you think about governments intervention to economy? For example, Turkey's president Erdoğan says that he can intervene with the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey. Erdogan's invitation of Central Bank governor to his party building and meeting there was strongly criticized. How do these declarations influence the economy? What should be said instead? What would market like to hear? How would other countries see the independency of institutions in Turkey?

The government's interventions have not helped. Moreover, they have set the economy up for a potential crash within the next two years. The Central Bank is not viewed as independent and has a very poor record of creating stability in Turkey. The policies of the Central Bank have caused one currency and/or banking crisis after another. The Central Bank's policies have validated my School Boys Theory of History: 'It's just one damn thing after another." The Central Bank should have been mothballed and put in a museum long ago.

6. Do you think the monetary policy in Turkey is under political pressure?

Yes.

7. You have been giving opinions about Turkish currency for a long time. How do you evaluate Turkish lira's structure? What are the reasons of swift devaluation of Turkish lira? What do you suggest about this?

Stability might not be everything, but everything is nothing without stability. That's why I prefer currency board systems in countries, like Turkey, that have had terrible currency histories. An orthodox currency board issues notes and coins convertible on demand into a foreign anchor currency at a fixed rate of exchange. As reserves, it holds low-risk, interest-bearing bonds denominated in the anchor currency and typically some gold. The reserve levels (both floors and ceilings) are set by law and are equal to 100%, or slightly more, of its monetary liabilities (notes, coins, and, if permitted, deposits). A currency board's convertibility and foreign reserve cover requirements do not extend to deposits at commercial banks or to any other financial assets. A currency board generates profits (seigniorage) from the difference between the interest it earns on its reserve assets and the expense of maintaining its liabilities.

With currency boards, the monetary authorities have no power to influence monetary policy. Therefore, the authorities are perfectly independent. You make central banks independent by making them operate under currency board laws. We adopted a currency board law in Bulgaria in 1997, and it works like a charm.

My book, Gelişmekte Olan Ülkeler İçin Para Kurullari El Kitabi, which was published in Turkey in 2001, explains all this.

8. President Erdogan thinks that all this devaluation occurrence is a plot designed by western countries. And he just told that Turkish nation will end this play with a new national and domestic currency and rate. What should we understand from this? Do you think it is a right statement for Turkish economy?

President Erdogan's statement about the lira's weakness is nonsense, but typical. When a nation's currency collapses, the leader always blames foreigners.

9. Do you think that Turkey is in an economic crisis?

No. But, Turkey is in trouble, and might experience a crisis within the next two years.

10. Do you think economic problems in Turkey can be solved in short term?

Yes. Install a currency board, and the biggest problem facing Turkey would be eliminated immediately.

11. Opposition parties point out that the main reason of this economic crisis is lack of democracy. How would you correlate the devaluation of Turkish lira and the political atmosphere? What do you think about emergency state in Turkey? How does it seem from the outside of Turkey?

The opposition parties have never figured out what Turkey's Achilles' heel is. It is the lira. Until that specific problem is fixed, Turkey will face economic problems.

As for the broader issue of economic and human freedoms, Turkey scores very poorly on the Cato Institute's Human Freedom Index, which measures 79 items. Out of the 159 countries covered, Turkey ranks 84th.

12. What do foreign investors think about Turkey? What do they want from (or for) Turkey?

Turkey has huge potential. If the lira became a clone of an anchor currency, such as gold or the U.S. dollar, via a currency board, investors would rush into Turkey. Foreign direct investment would soar to new record levels.

13. Do you think that Turkey will knock the IMF's door once again?

I have no idea. President Erdogan was wise to show the IMF the door in 2008. Back then the joke was that the IMF should be renamed as the TMF, or Turkish Monetary Fund. He would be wise not to knock on the IMF's door.

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