Recep Tayyip Erdogan: Not Mr.
Warm and Fuzzy

Well, not really. But in some circumstances it might have helped.

Consider the civil unrest now roiling Turkey. It began over protests against the government's plan to turn a much-beloved, historic urban park into a mosque and shopping mall. But as many news reports have indicated, the point was not simply the plan, but the high-handed and authoritarian way in which the government, and particularly Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, simply decreed that it was going to happen. Erdogan is democratically-elected, but democracy means far more than mere majoritariansm — a point that the Prime Minister has yet to learn. As Harvard's Dani Rodrik comments:

> Mr Erdogan's reaction stoked the fire. He was at his polarising best, threatening to turn his supporters loose on the streets, calling the protesters "bums" and Twitter "the greatest menace to society"....
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> Despite Mr Erdogan's attempt to tar them as extremists, it seems clear that the bulk of the protesters are asking for basic rights: the right to assemble and protest peacefully, have a say against excessive commercialisation of public spaces, and be treated with respect and without police brutality. This is not a struggle between secularists and Islamists, as much of the western media is wont to portray it. It is abuse of power by Mr Erdogan's government, straight and simple, that unites the protesters.

Similarly, the editorial board of the *Financial Times* observes that:

> Mr Erdogan is no dictator – but his reign feels like that for a minority. At the last election his AK party won almost half the vote – another Turkey of nationalist, secularist and Kurdish votes split the rest. But Mr Erdogan has been behaving as if he has the right to define Turkishness. When he travels, he travels with a court-like retinue. When his daughter, an actress, was insulted on stage he threatened to cut all state funding to theatres.

> The protesters do not just want to stop this man bulldozing a park – they want to stop him wrecking their city. Mr Erdogan has visions for Istanbul as gargantuan as his ambitions. He wants a vast mosque overlooking the Bosphorus, a third bridge to cross it named after a martial Ottoman Sultan and a huge canal that will carve through European Istanbul – not to mention the 2020 Olympic Games and the world's biggest airport.

Hmmm…government with a gargantuan ambition to develop, unwilling to listen to communities, rejecting participatory processes. Sounds like Turkey is really in need of an environmental review statute!

It's not so simple, of course: if you've got an authoritarian Prime Minister, who himself is following a history of military dictatorship, it's hard to just graft a "TEPA" (Turkish Environmental Policy Act) onto a country. After all, one crucial way that environmental review enhances (or purports to enhance) democratic values is that citizens can challenge illegal review in court, and Turkish courts lack the popular legitimacy to make them an effective bulwark against illegal government action. In any event, Erodgan seems committed to going in the opposite direction, pushing "environmental" legislation that may well end up degrading the nation's ecological resources and further limiting public participation.

Still, the Turkish situation points to something of an irony: although we normally associate environmental statutes with more developed countries, NEPA-style review could play a role in fostering the sort of political participation and transparent process that a truly advanced democracy requires. How to get there? The Pelosi Amendment already prohibits American support for World Bank projects that do not undergo enviuronmental review, but as far as I can tell, it focuses on the substantive aspects of such review rather than the procedural facets such as public participation and judicial review . (It is also relatively weak because the US can abstain from World Bank proposals, allowing them to move forward.) Perhaps a tightening of the Amendment, requiring American opposition to World Bank funding without the sorts of participation-enhancers characteristic of US environmental review, might be worth exploring.