

**STATE, POLITICS, AND RELIGION: EFFECTS OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL  
CHANGE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STATE AND RELIGION IN  
TURKEY, 2002-2012**

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This study analyzes the rapidly changing nature of the relationship between state and religion in Turkey between 2002 and 2012. In the process, it examines the range of opinions on and the different representations of this relationship in the Turkish social milieu. The study deploys a framework based on the center-periphery cleavage to depict the changing patterns of polarization and conflict resolution during this period.

The study suggests that the social cleavages between the center and the periphery are prominent factors shaping discussions on the state's interaction with religion. The power struggle derives from the center's desire to extend its previous privileges and advantages, and the periphery's determination to share in the same benefits. That the periphery has gained more social capital since the 1980s has fueled these interactions. In the struggle, the Justice and Development Party government has represented the periphery, whereas the Republican People's Party, the military, the universities, and the higher judiciary have represented the center.

The study focuses on two main cases to explore the trend of this relationship: the teaching of religion by the state, and the rights of religious minorities, including non-Muslim communities and Alevi groups. In general, the Turkish state has taken a similar approach to all religious groups. At the beginning of the new century, the state was skeptical about religious

activities, perceiving them as a threat to its sovereignty, especially its secular structure. Thus demands of Islamic groups were perceived as a threat to secularism, while non-Muslims' demands were seen as a threat to Turkish nationalism. Responses to these demands, especially between 2007 and 2012, proved that these fears were exaggerated.

Overall, despite constant changes through the years, Turkey has never insisted on a complete separation of religion from the state, even in its most secular phase. The time period examined, 2002-2012, witnessed what might be called a “normalization” of the state/religion relationship – that is, religion is no longer viewed as a threat to the state, nor is the state seen as a threat to religion.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ADD	The Association of Kemalist Thought
AKP	Justice and Development Party
App.	Application
BDP	Peace and Democracy Party
CHP	Republican People's Party
D. no	Decision number
DP	Democrat Party
DRA	Department of Religious Affairs
DSP	Democratic Left Party
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
EU	European Union
HSYK	High Council of Judges and Prosecutors
IHL	Imam-hatip high school
KHK	Decree law
MEB	Ministry of National Education
MG	National View Movement
MGK	National Security Council
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party
MP	Member of Parliament
PM	Prime Minister
RP	Welfare Party
SP	Felicity Party
TBMM	Grand National Assembly of Turkey
TCK	Turkish Criminal Code
TSK	Turkish Army Forces
TUSIAD	Turkish Industry and Business Association
UN	United Nations
V	Volume
YOK	Higher Education Board

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## **I. INTRODUCTION: STATE, POLITICS, AND RELIGION**

This study analyzes the rapidly changing nature of the relationship between state and religion in Turkey between 2002 and 2012. In the process, it examines the range of opinions and the different representations of the relationship between religion and the state in the Turkish social milieu. To this end, the center-periphery cleavages framework, adopted by two prominent Turkish sociologists, Serif Mardin and Nilufer Gole, proves useful in understanding the changing patterns of polarization and conflict resolution during this time period.

Serif Mardin argues that, “until recently, the confrontation between center and periphery was the most important social cleavage underlying Turkish politics that seems to have survived more than a century of modernization” (Mardin 2006 [1973]: 299). He explains how this social cleavage has lasted since the late Ottoman period by examining economical and educational opportunities. According to him, the political elite benefited from state resources, since the state established tight control over the economy. In addition, some families with a history of service to the state continued to hold a privileged position. Finally, the restriction of educational opportunities has deepened this social cleavage.

During the late Ottoman period, modern educational institutions perpetuated the pre-modern cultural cleavage between the center and the periphery. While the children of families who were part of the bureaucracy more readily benefited from the modern sector of education, the great majority of the periphery was unable or unwilling to send their children to modern schools (Mardin 2006 [1973]: 307). Thus people on the periphery benefited only from religious education, with the result that religion became the border between the center and the periphery (Mardin, p. 301). During later phases of modernization, mostly implemented as Westernization, the cultural alienation of the masses from the rulers, of the periphery from the center, became apparent (p. 304). Although Sultan Abdulhamid II (r. 1876-1909) tried to integrate the periphery

under the banner of pan-Islamism for the sake of the state, he only partly succeeded in creating a true national unification (p. 305). The succeeding rulers of the Ottoman State did not continue his moves toward unification under the Islamic banner, but preferred to endorse secular nationalism. The modernization of cultural life increased the cultural gap between the center and the periphery, as the center showed an inability to integrate the periphery into this new cultural framework (pp. 307-308).

In the early years of the Republic, the Kemalist ideology presented a top-down social engineering project that failed to provide for social mobilization in a form that would bring a greater portion of the masses into meaningful relation with the center (Mardin, pp. 312-314). As a result, the Republican People's Party (CHP, 1923-1950) represented the "bureaucratic" center, whereas the Democrat Party (DP, 1950-1960) represented the "democratic" periphery in Turkish political life. The coup d'état against the democratically elected Democrat Party in 1960 underlined this cleavage: whereas the center represented the preservation of the static order, the periphery represented social mobility (p. 314). The 1960 Constitution legitimized the bureaucracy and the intellectuals as a source of sovereignty in addition to the Turkish people as a whole. The 1971 intervention of the military was another expression of the desire for a return to the rigidity of the old order (Mardin 2006 [1973]). Since Mardin's article was published in 1973, he did not evaluate the changes subsequent to that date. However, the postmodern military intervention in 1997; the emergence of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the 2000s with high popular support, mostly by the middle class; and, finally, the AKP government's clash with the secular establishment, the bureaucracy, and other ruling elite – including but not limited to the military and the judiciary – suggest that Serif Mardin's center-periphery thesis remains valid in Turkey. In my study, I will deploy the center-periphery framework to evaluate the changes between 2002 and 2012.

Recent literature in Turkey also acknowledges the center-periphery dichotomy in Turkish politics (see Bayramoglu 2006; Carkoglu 2007 and 2008; Ozbudun 2012; Onis 2013; Heper 2013). On the other hand, some components of the center-periphery cleavage have changed since Mardin's article. In the previous equation, factors such as socio-economic status, religious orientation and activity, and cultural affinity for Westernization all reinforced each other. However, Western-oriented politics have relatively less resonance now (Kubicek 2009).

Another prominent Turkish sociologist, Nilufer Gole, also investigates center-periphery cleavages in Turkey in her work (Gole 1997). She argues that, since the late Ottoman period and that of the early Republic, the Turkish elite, which owed its existence and power to the Republic, embraced French Jacobinism, which represented a highly centralized model of change by top-down reformism, secularism, and nationalism, rather than Anglo-Saxon liberalism, as a model of change. Hence secularization became a part of social engineering rather than an outcome of societal development (p. 48). Shifting from an Islamic to a Western culture created cultural distinctions and social stratifications in Turkish society. Gole uses Pierre Bourdieu's terms "symbolic capital" and "habitus" to emphasize stratification on the cultural level, rather than the concept of "social class" that emphasizes economic power. Accordingly, cultural codes and lifestyles are not a trivial matter of fashion and individual choices but, rather, reflect complex relations of inter-subjectivity, stratification, and power. Educational opportunities came to demarcate these cultural differences, once the central urban middle and upper-middle classes accessed education, while groups at the periphery lacked comparable opportunities for decades. This cultural gap between the elite of the center and the people of the periphery has become a prominent feature in Turkish society and politics (p. 52). From the 1950s on, especially after 1983, peripheral groups moved into urban centers where they accessed secular education and found opportunities for upward social mobility. According to Gole (1997: 54-55),

these new agents of change represented the move of Islam from the periphery of the system to its center, and yet were themselves a product of that center, of its educational institutions and its urban life. As these new agents of Islamism began to obtain the same cultural capital as the Republican elites, share the same university classes, occupy the ranks of parliament, and participate in public debates on television, they started to gain public visibility, social recognition, legitimacy, and prestige. The Republican secular elites, in turn, reacted primarily in political terms, and began to wage a battle against Islamic fundamentalism and in defense of secularism.

As expressed by Serif Mardin earlier, previous social mobilization attempts from the periphery to the center failed because of the 1960 and 1971 military interventions, which represented the hostility of the central bureaucratic and secular establishment toward this type of social mobilization (see Mardin 2006 [1973]: 314). According to Gole, peripheral groups found more opportunities to access this type of social mobilization after 1983. At this time, Turgut Ozal (1983-91) introduced a liberal market economy and the privatization of the mass media. As a consequence, civil society has expanded and non-governmental organizations have proliferated.

These developments were surrounded by lively public debate on issues of religious and ethnic identity, national unity, secularism, and democratic pluralism (Gole 1997: 47).

This grace period was interrupted by another military intervention in 1997. In this involvement, the military did not seize power but used other state bureaucracy, the judiciary, business associations, and media groups to push the Islamist Welfare Party's government (1996-1997) to resign. Observers among Turkish journalists coined the phrase "post-modern coup" to describe these developments (Turker Alkan, 13 June 1997, *Radikal*, and Cengiz Candar, 28 June 1997, *Sabah*). The conflict between the secularist center and the conservative periphery became more visible during this intervention. State pressure on religious organizations was definitely harsh during the following years. The AKP government came to power in 2002 when this pressure was still at its peak. Thus the time period 2002-2012 witnessed a constant struggle between the secular center and the conservative periphery. In this struggle, the Republican People's Party (CHP), the armed forces, and the higher judiciary have represented the centrist coalition, while the AKP has established itself as the main representative of the periphery (Ozbudun 2012: 48). In the center-periphery cleavages, both Turgut Ozal (1983-1993) and Recep Tayyip Erdogan (since 2002) have managed to move the periphery toward the center, to the point where the periphery has gradually begun to play a major role in the Turkish economy and polity (Heper 2013: 154). This analysis benefits from both Serif Mardin's and Nilufer Gole's center-periphery and cultural gap concepts to explore the relationship between religion and the state and the responses to these changes in 2002-2012.

In his more recent articles (Mardin 2005, 2007), Serif Mardin argues that the secular tendencies of the central elite since the Ottoman Empire have revealed a Turkish Islamic exceptionalism. He argues that, throughout its history, the Ottoman Empire was careful to distance religion from the state and give more importance to the latter than the former. The ubiquity of a peculiar mix of state and religious discourse promoted this exceptionalism. Therefore, political and social structures have not operated on a foundation of religiosity, but are considered to be made of the same stuff. According to Mardin, somehow this Turkish exceptionalism still continues to the present day – that is, the state continues to come before religion but only by "one millimeter" (Mardin 2005; 2007). Gunter Seufert formulates this as follows: "In Turkey, Islam does not determine politics, but politics determine Islam" (2011). Even though Serif Mardin's exceptionalism thesis does not suggest a hostile secularism on its

own, as indicated by Dietrich Jung (2006), having religion controlled by the state poses a kind of secularism that contradicts the conventional European reading, which suggests an overt expression of the separation of the religious and political spheres. Instead, Turkish secularism has served as means of rigid state control over the religious area (Jung 2006). Ahmet Kuru named this rigid state control *assertive secularism*, as it was practiced during Turkey's Kemalist past, while the politics of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) have embraced a more *passive secularism* since 2002 (Kuru 2013).

In positing social cleavages along with Turkish secularism, this study elaborates the changes in the relationship between state and religion in Turkey. It suggests that the social cleavages between the center and the periphery are still prominent factors shaping discussions on the state's interaction with religion. That the periphery has gained more social capital since the 1980s has fueled these discussions. In addition, acquisition of political power by the conservative AKP has helped the conservative periphery to raise its voice against the secular bureaucracy and the elites. While the AKP held more power following every election, the previous elites have lost more power on the state level, a development that can be read as the conservative periphery displacing the secular center to some extent.

In the first chapter of the study, I explore literature about religion and state relations in general and more specifically aspects of these relations in political Islam. This chapter concludes diversity of religious movements and offers a better understanding for political reasons behind religious movements.

The second chapter provides background information to understand the economic, political, and social environment before 2002 in Turkey and how this environment helped transformation of Islamic groups. Accordingly, transformation of Islamic groups started in 1980s and became visible in 1990s. However, the majority misinterpreted this visibility by assuming that it is early signs of Islamization, as we see its examples on discussions related to wearing of headscarf in universities and other public places. The state institutions, steered by the military, implemented a repressive secularism to erase these signs, especially in state organs in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In addition, the economic crisis in 2001 caused political instability. Eventually, all of these developments helped the emerging of the AKP ruling in 2002. Although the transformation of Islamic groups started long before the AKP government, this



transformation accelerated during its rule. The AKP experience of Turkey mostly depicts the transformation of Islamic groups in this chapter.

The following two chapters explore the trend of the state-religion interaction under the AKP government in the years 2002-2012 by examining two cases: the teaching of religion by the state and the rights of religious minorities. The state-taught religion includes developments vis-à-vis vocational imam-hatip school, Quran-based courses, and compulsory and elective religion courses in primary and secondary education. The chapter depicts that the Turkish state left its previous heavy-handed approach vis-à-vis religious education.

In regard to religious minority rights, I examine both non-Muslim communities and the Alevi groups. This chapter reveals that on the issue of non-Muslim rights, the pattern of the state's attitudes was similar to that concerning the religious rights of the Muslim majority, with the exception of the Alevis. In the early years of 2000s, the state was more skeptical regarding actions of non-Muslims, especially in the issue of missionary activities. While the Turkish economy gained strength under the AKP rule and converts to other religions stayed limited, these early fears diminished. Since non-Muslim communities do not have meaningful demographic, economic, and political power, the Turkish state became more generous regarding their rights. This lack of power diminished the perceived treats of the Turkish state concerning these communities and led being more openhanded vis-à-vis their demands. The Turkish state also responded some demands of Alevis but not as much as expected by them. This chapter explores possible reasons that cause this disconformity.

In the following chapter, I will explore literature about religion and state relations in general and more specifically aspects of these relations in political Islam. To understand political Islam, it is important to identify the relation between religion and the state in general. Therefore, first, I explore relationship between the state and religion in general by looking at how they interact with each other. As a part of this interaction, I will look at theories about "the end of history" and "the clash of civilization," and "civil religion" since they were the most argued theories about the state-religion nexus at the end of the twentieth century. I will look at how the state influences, impacts, and in turn regulates religious observance and education. I will also look discussions and possible solutions to problems of religion and the state interaction in literature. Finally, I will look at how processes of modernization alter patterns of religion and state interaction.

As following, I will explore how the interactions of the state and religion pertain in particular to Islam. This includes exploring the historical roots of political Islam, and why it became more important during the last century. I will also examine political Islam's opposition to colonialism and the role of the West as it sought to use political Islam against communism. In the second part of the chapter on political Islam, I will discuss how autocratic regimes used political Islam to legitimize their rule, and how that is related to the so-called Islamic resurgence. Since this discussion pertains to patterns of political participation, I will also discuss arguments relevant to Islam and democracy. Finally, I will explore how political Islam operates in selected Muslim countries, with a focus on Turkey.

## **A. STATE AND RELIGION**

### **1. Interaction**

We can compile the literature of the relationship between religion and the state under commonly used models: 1. Secular, 2. "State religion" or "established church," and 3. Cooperation (Gunn 2007: 3). 1. The first may be described as the "separationist" model. Even though there are huge differences between France, the U.S., and Turkey, they may be thought of as in this category. For instance, France has had a rigid separation—not a hostile one—of church and state since 1905. On the other hand, American secularism does not preclude religious-inspired discourses in politics on topics such as abortion, although much contention is focused on symbolic gestures such as the display of the Ten Commandments in public or prayer in public schools. Even though Turkey is often regarded as following the French model, *laïcité*, this is not completely true since Turkey is deeply involved in religious life; Turkey has state mosques, official imams, and mandatory religion courses in primary and secondary education. 2. The second type of relationship between the state and religion is "state religion" or "established church." Examples of this relationship include Great Britain and Norway, which both have an "established church." Also, Gunn includes some states such as Sudan and Iran under this category. However, Ahmet Kuru categorizes the second type under the name of "religious state" by looking at whether there exists

an official religion and whether the legislature and judiciary are controlled by religious institutions. If a country fulfills both criteria, it could be described as a “religious state”; if it fulfills the first but not the second, it could be described as having an “established religion” (2009: 247-254; also see it for state-religion regimes index of 197 countries). 3. In “the Cooperationist” model, states do not grant any special status to a dominant religion, but cooperate closely with churches in a variety of ways, such as providing funding for church-related activities or religious education. This model includes such countries as Spain, Germany, Italy, and Poland as well as several Latin countries (Durham 1996: 20-21). However, these categories are not strict. Countries can change their stand from one category to another, over time or use the arguments from other categories in different political environments.

These three categorical interactions between the state and religion may be described from the state’s perspective as 1. Hostile states, 2. Dominant states, and 3. Separate states (Gustafson and Moen 1992: 7-14). 1. In hostile states, religious ritual, or even individual acceptance of religious belief, is suspected as potentially subversive or a potential challenge to state sovereignty. 2. In dominant states, religion heavily depends upon the state. But the state often seeks legitimacy from religious affiliation. 3. In separate states, religion is a personal matter between the individual and God. Religion does not have any political influence or power. If religion has any political influence, it is very limited.

However, none of these categories are concrete. All of these terms, “secular state,” “separation of church and state,” “religious state,” seem to describe more the constitutional claims of the state rather than social processes or sociological realities. Therefore, the separation of religion and state is a political theory rather than a governing reality. Some argue that the complete separation of religion and politics is illusory (Lee 2010: 3-21). Others argue that the idea of a nonreligious state is very modern and doubtful (Bellah 1992 [1975]: 166). Robert D. Lee shows that even one of the most secular countries, France, is not very secular in terms of the separation of religion and politics since it is involved in religious organizations and education. On the other hand, although Iran claims to be an Islamic state, this is not completely true since its constitution depends on the dual foundations of religious credentials and popular sovereignty (Lee 2010: 3-19). Also, the constitution of Iran contains some important elements which have been borrowed from secular Western sources rather than from the Sharia, such as sovereignty of the people, nation, the rights of the nation, the legislature, the judiciary, parliament, republic,

consultation of the people, and elections (Schirazi 1998: 1-19, 161-172). Even though Iran enshrines the Sharia as the privileged source of all legislation, ninety percent of legislation is on matters irrelevant to the Sharia, such as administrative procedures, traffic regulations, and economic policies. Also, in his famous ruling of 1988, Khomeini allowed bypassing the Sharia in favor of the interests of the government by declaring that the Islamic government, as the heir of the authority of the Prophet, is empowered to suspend any provisions of the Sharia whenever it suits its interests (Zubaida 2000: 63-66).

James T. Richardson claims that separation of church and state in the modern world is an antiquated concept. All kinds of governments grapple with religiously motivated citizens who attempt to influence politics (2004: vii). However, Alfred Stepan names these kinds of separations as “friendly separations” in the modern world (2001: 222). For instance, while the 1905 separation of church and state was a hostile one in France, in 1959 the state started to support Catholic schools. Even by 1961, 20 percent of the total educational budget in France was used for private Catholic schools. So, even though there was a separation in political terms, it had become a “friendly” separation over time (ibid.) Also, such a situation might be described as passive secularism (see Kuru 2009).

The same arguments have been made about Islam. Abdullahi A. an-Naim looks at the relationship between state and religion in the Islamic world by defining 1. The state itself as an instrument of religion, 2. Religion as an instrument of the state, and 3. Separation of religion and the state (2008: 258). I discuss Naim’s ideas on religion and state relations later.

Naim’s categorization is a result of looking at religion as a dependent or independent variable. Most of the literature on religion and politics focuses on religion as an independent variable and politics as a dependent variable (Lee 2010: 41). For instance, when scholars look at the compatibility of Islam, Christianity, or any other religion with democracy, they look at religion as an independent variable or the only cause. However, as I will explore in the *Islam vs. secularism* section of this chapter, Islam (and other religions) may be viewed as just one societal context among others, such as economics, geography, social structure, in the experience of the democratization process. In some countries, the religious context may be more or less influential, but it is not the leading influence.

As expressed by Alfred Stepan, even though the relation between Islam and democracy has been questioned many times, democratization theory does not really help us understand this

particular relationship. Stepan's analysis of Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Turkey, and post-1997 Iran "demonstrates the analytic weakness of focusing only on Islam as the principal obstacle to democratization, while neglecting the overall sociopolitical, military, ethnic, economic, and international context" (2001: 246).

Robert D. Lee argues that, in the long run, religion appears to be a dependent variable. Regardless of societal factors, religion is a product of political influence and decisions. However, in a shorter time period, religion may be a variable independent of political systems. So, religion has the possibility to affect politics in short-term perspectives (2010: 9-76).

To help us understand this, Lee compiles an abundant literature on religion and politics under 24 hypotheses and puts them into three categories (2010: 44-76): 1. Those that regard religion as an obstacle to political development; 2. Those that embrace religion as helpful in promoting political development; and 3. Those that deny any importance to religion in explaining political development. He concludes, "The evidence collected from four case studies [Egypt, Israel, Turkey, and Iran] does not suffice to confirm any general hypothesis about religion and politics" (Lee 2010: 292). In other words, every hypothesis on religion and politics can be supported or rejected depending on when and where the research is done. For instance, Islam was a unifying element in the Ottoman Empire for several centuries. However, in the eyes of the political elites, Islam lost its power as a unifying element in the late Ottoman Empire and upon the founding of the Turkish state. As a result, it was abandoned for the sake of Turkish nationalism. On the other hand, during the same period, Muslim colonies had used Islam to solidify their national consciousness against colonizers.

Juan J. Linz refuses to treat religion as a negative factor in politics. On the other hand, he does not see religion solely as a dependent variable. Religious values and systems have their own unique capacities to influence politics. These capacities are not reducible to other social forces and are not replaceable (Smith 1995: 75). Hence, religious systems may provide critical support for human development; on the other hand, they may create serious obstacles (ibid. p.87).

Until now I have analyzed discussions about state and religion interaction in modern sociology. These discussions have roots in the earliest preoccupations of classical sociology. For instance, Max Weber collects the relations between secular and ecclesiastic power under the terms of *hierocracy*, *theocracy*, and *caesaropapism* (1978: 1159-1162). In hierocracy, either the ruler gets the legitimacy through religion or the religious leader is also a political ruler (also see

Murvar 1967; Swedberg and Agevall 2005: 112). In caesaropapism, the religion is dominated by secular powers. Theocracy refers to an extreme form of hierocracy, in which the religious leader is also a political leader. Also, some scholars add *erastianism* to Weber's typology. Theocracy refers to an extreme form of religious autonomy; conversely, erastianism refers to a relatively low degree of religious autonomy (Robertson 1987: 157-158). However, this system of classification of types, like most other classifications, does not tell us why religion or politics are connected in a particular way rather than another.

At the present time, new theories are being produced to unveil relationships between state and religion. Even though their focus is not the exploration of relationships between religion and the state, "the end of history" and "the clash of civilizations" theories are two of the most discussed theories about the interaction between state and religion during the last two decades. The end of history theory asserts that history leads us towards a modern liberal democracy which is quite the opposite of what we saw in the first section of the chapter, which shows that most states are either religious, or conversely hostile or abusive toward religion. In the case of the clash of civilizations theory, Huntington shows civilizations as necessarily in conflict with each other, associates world religions with civilizations, and sees religion as a central defining characteristic of civilizations. In this theory, religion is an important element which shapes the state. So, in the next section, these two theories will be discussed.

## **2. The End of History or Clash of Civilizations**

Fukuyama, basing his theory on Hegel, argues that a necessary unidirectional history of mankind will eventually lead the greater part of humanity to liberal democracy. There are two main reasons for this: economics and "the struggle for recognition." Human beings seek recognition of their own worth, or of the people, things, or principles that they associate with worth. For instance, a religious believer seeks recognition for his particular gods or sacred practices, while a nationalist demands recognition for his particular linguistic, cultural, or ethnic group. These are individual attitudes, but there are also universal recognitions such as that entailed by the liberal state, in which citizens are being recognized as equal, and as a result of this equal recognition the liberal state becomes a universal value (2006 [1992]).

Fukuyama claims that there would be no further progress in the development of underlying principles and institutions, because all of the really big questions had been settled. He supports his ideas with Hegel and Marx: both thinkers asserted an “end of history”: for Hegel this was the liberal state, while for Marx it was a communist society (ibid).

However, Huntington develops a counter thesis in response to Fukuyama. According to Huntington, in the new multi-polar world, “the most pervasive, important, and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural identities” and religions (2003 [1996]: 28).

Huntington asserts that: 1. The balance of power among civilizations is shifting from Western to non-Western states and cultures. 2. For the first time in history global politics is both multi-polar and multi-civilizational. 3. A civilization-based world order is emerging. 4. The West’s universalist pretensions increasingly cause conflicts with other civilizations, most seriously with Islam and China (2003: 20-21).

According to him, describing the world as West and East is not appropriate. There is not a unique East comparable to the West. Maybe we can see it as West and non-West. The cold war division of humanity is over. The new fundamental divisions of humanity in terms of ethnicity, religions, and civilizations remain and spawn new conflicts. These major contemporary civilizations are: Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, Latin American, and African (possibly). Four World religions—Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism—are associated with these major civilizations (2003: 45-48).<sup>1</sup> In other words, religion is a central defining characteristic of civilizations. Again, as expressed before, Huntington claims that the growing divisions between different cultural identities and religions are likely to fuel the most dangerous conflicts. In this instance, it is helpful to see how religious institutions and their constituents, which include politicians and political leaders, and the state try to control and manage each other. So, in the next section, I will look at state and religion interaction from the perspective of how religious institutions and their constituents impact the state.

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<sup>1</sup> Even though Huntington expanded civilizations from being bi-polar to multi-polar, he has been criticized heavily because of his division in assuming that civilizations are univocal in their own structure. He misses the differentiations in one civilization (see Stepan 2001).

### **3. Religion as missionary (religion as a mission)**

When we look at how religions interact with politics and state, we can identify three possibilities:

1. Religions are used for political agenda, 2. Religions are not used for political agendas, and 3. Religions are used to guide an individual's own sense of politics, but individuals don't perceive it as necessary for political behavior to have a religious mandate.

It is always assumed that religions with prophetic characteristics tend to be involved in politics. However, Theodore E. Long shows that this is not always true (1986: 3-16). According to him, this assumption is faulty on two accounts. First, it diminishes the religious characteristic of prophecy by reducing it solely to its political function and ignoring its rich yield in other spheres of life. Second, it disregards the multi-faceted nature of the interaction between religion and politics.

According to Long, two main sets of independent variables determine this relationship: societal conditions and the characteristics of prophecy itself. Societal conditions are a) the degree of institutional differentiation, particularly of religion, b) the degree of religious pluralism, c) the degree of religious liberty, d) the degree of rationalization, and e) the degree of societal crisis. Characteristics of prophecy are a) the level of organization and institutionalization, b) its social resources, c) its social location, and d) its type of religious orientation (ibid.). So, modernity or development of a society influences the degree of acceptance of the religious prophecy, but prophecy can also interact with other social, political, and individual interests to impact society.

As we have seen until now, religious institutions and their constituents, and the state have an influence on each other. Although the church has mastered the state at times in history, through much of history the state has dominated the church, as explained by Bellah (1992: 167). Therefore, I will look at how the state regulates religious institutions and their constituents.

### **4. Regulating Religion**

Law, school education, and official religious organizations are instruments by which the state may seek to control religious ideas and institutions. Also, covert state institutions such as secret intelligence services and indirect methods such as tax exemption help the state to regulate religion.



This regulation is also enshrined in international laws. For example Article 18 (1966) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the most accepted text about religious rights, adopted by 155 states, declares: “Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.” Article 9 (1950) of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) states the same principle.

Even though UN and ECHR articles seem generous toward religious freedoms, “public order” and “the fundamental rights and freedom of others” are open to a wide interpretation to restrict religious freedoms.<sup>2</sup>

As expressed by Finke and Harris, despite 83 percent of all nations promising religious freedoms in their constitutions, 64 percent of those nations have two or more laws restricting the practice, profession, or selection of religion (2009: 7). Even though they proclaim an explicit commitment to guaranteeing fundamental human rights, most nations violate even their own list of rights. So, there is a significant gap between constitutional words and political deeds (Markoff and Regan 1987: 164-165).

In short, constitutions or any other laws which generate religious freedoms are not sufficient by themselves to secure religious freedoms.

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, see the case of *Karaduman v. Turkey* (app. no. 18783/91, ECHR) and the case of the *Leyla Sahin v. Turkey* (app. no. 44774/98, ECHR). In the first case, a veiled female student completed her university degree with her headscarf, but was refused the degree certificate because of her identity photograph, which showed her in a headscarf. In the second case, a fifth-year veiled medicine student was expelled from university because of her headscarf.

In both cases, the ECHR was favorable to the headscarf ban. In the first case, “a student, who chooses to attend a secular university, should accept the regulations of the university. These regulations provide a system to allow for students from different beliefs to coexist. Particularly in countries where the vast majority of the population belongs to one particular religion, exhibition of the rituals and symbols of this religion without regard to any restrictions of place and form can cause pressure on students who do not practice this religion or instead, belong to other religions.” In the second case, “... when examining the question of the Islamic headscarf in the Turkish context, there had to be borne in mind the impact which wearing such a symbol, which was presented or perceived as a compulsory religious duty, may have on those who chose not to wear it” and “notion of secularism to be consistent with the values underpinning the Convention. Upholding that principle could be considered necessary to protect the democratic system in Turkey.”

See McGoldrick (2006) and Elver (2005) for more detailed information.

Moreover, sometimes changing laws does not guarantee religious rights. For instance, in Turkey, the parliament voted in 2008 to lift the ban on female students wearing the headscarf at universities and approved the constitutional amendment by 411 votes to 103 votes. In spite of this amendment, many academic institutions defied the law by forbidding female students to wear the headscarf. Eventually, the Constitutional Court made a very controversial decision by cancelling the constitutional amendment and annulling the law that lifted the headscarf ban.

Immediately thereafter, the Supreme Court of Appeals' chief prosecutor appealed to the Constitutional Court, demanding the disbanding of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), accusing it of "being a hotbed of anti-secular activities," and demanding a five-year ban from involvement in politics for senior AKP administrators, including Prime Minister Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul (*TodaysZaman*; July 31, 2008).

Therefore, as I discuss within this chapter, we may accept that religion is multiple in the ways people use it, but we are less used to the idea that the state can also be 'multiple,' in the sense of consisting of different organs that have different agendas and styles of control. As a result, when we talk about state and religion relations, we should not understand the "state" as synonymous with "government" and should not think that laws and their interpretation and implementation are the result of governments' actions alone. Too often people associate the government as the entire state. But a state's decisions should not be understood as the actions of a government alone. A government is not always the most powerful decision-making body in a country and does not act in a vacuum; a state's decisions can come from the influence of civil society, too, which consists of the entire ruling class and institutions. Even though differences are present from country to country, judicial bodies, universities, the military, the media, the high affluent class, large national and international companies, and sometimes religious leaders and artists help compose the state ideology and its actions along with the government.

One other way to regulate religious ideas and institutions is school education. Even though some states support religious education, they do not tolerate every religion or new religious movement (NRM). Allowing or not allowing state or private religious schools, compulsory or voluntary religious courses in public schools, religious or secular elements in curricula, and supporting religious schools are some ways that are used by the state to control religious education.

There are three basic reactions against religion in curricula. In the secularist model—e.g. China, the U.S., and France—religion does not enter curricula since it is perceived as being either against a plurality of traditions or used to change the state ideology. In the second model, religion is perceived as important to shaping national identity, such as Orthodox Christianity in Greece. In the third model, non-confessional multi-faith religious education is offered, such as in England, Wales, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, South Africa and Namibia, and in the upper secondary years (16+) in Denmark and Finland (Cush 2007: 219; see Table 1 for a different categorization).

An example which combines the first two reactions is Turkey, where private religious schools are not allowed. There is a type of public religious school (Imam-Hatip), but attending to these schools was discouraged—the students are prevented from entering the university through unfair entrance exams—for a long time.<sup>3</sup> Providing religious education for children below 12 years of age was strictly prohibited, even in state mosques. In 1997, eight years of elementary school education without interruption was made compulsory to stop children from going to Quran-based courses until 2012.<sup>4</sup> Although coeducation was considered essential and commonly practiced previously, it was strictly implemented after 1997 to diminish religiosity. Even though Religion and Ethics courses were made compulsory for Muslim students in elementary and high schools in the 1980s to stop extreme leftist and communist student movements, the curricula of these courses have been limited by their topics and tend to address ethical issues such as friendship, brotherhood, respect for senior citizens, national holidays, liberties, freedom of thought, and secularism as assurance of religious freedom rather than religious issues.

It seems that Egypt has gone through experiences similar to Turkey's. In Egypt, after achieving independence from colonial rule, the state took over many institutions of religious learning and training to use them for its own nationalist project (Mahmood 2005: 64). However, in the years 1987-91, the curriculum was revised and became more religious/Islamic oriented.

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<sup>3</sup> Imam-Hatip schools opened in 1924 to substitute *medrese* and provide imams; however, they were closed in 1930. Even though they were re-opened in 1950s, their graduates were not allowed to enter universities until the 1970s. From the 1970s to 1997, their graduates had been allowed to enter universities. Again, between 1998 and 2012, going to these schools has been discouraged by unfair university entrance exams.

<sup>4</sup> Before 1997, five years elementary school education was mandatory. After five years elementary school education, many families were sending their children to Quran-based courses for one or a few years. Then, these students continued their education in middle schools.

Once again, in 1991, the education policy was re-oriented away from religion and any form of Islamization, since education was perceived as an issue of national security (Herrera 2003: 171-172).

There is also some debate about religious education in public schools in the U.S. For instance, the Christian Right has been opposed to sex education and has been in favor of traditional gender roles, public prayer in schools, tax relief for independent faith schools, and teaching creationism. In one case in Alabama, it was argued that if promoting a religion is unconstitutional, then it should be unconstitutional to teach secular humanism in schools. However, this argument failed in the Appeals Court. In Kansas in 1999, Darwin's theory was removed from the science curriculum but then one year later, it was put back in the curriculum (Bruce 2003: 145-149).

These examples show that nationwide public education is used to produce a uniform culture and to create model citizens (Bruce 2003: 162). States use school education to control religious ideas and sometimes use religious education to control social movements, which are deemed harmful to the state.

In addition to educational institutions, official religious organizations help the state to control religious ideas. For instance, the Department of Religious Affairs represents the highest religious authority in Turkey. Mosque imams are state officials and are paid by the state and controlled by this institution. Friday and holiday prayer sermons are composed by this institution and sent to imams, so imams do not have chair immunity. These sermons represent opinions of the state rather than religious leaders or imams' interpretation of Islam.

This state control of religious institutions is the same in ex-Communist Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, all of which have muftiate (spiritual boards of Muslims) and a Committee on Religious Affairs. These countries support, in somewhat different ways, an official Islam that backs their governments (Gunn 2003: 404-405).

States' attitudes against NRMs<sup>5</sup> and religious rights of convicts are worth mentioning under this section. Even though states tend to be more tolerant toward the religion of the

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<sup>5</sup> "New Religious Movements (NRMs)" usually refers to innovative religious responses to the conditions of the modern world even though most of them are rooted in ancient traditions and reviving or restoring an ancient tradition (Chryssides 2006). Thus, most new religions can be seen as more recent versions or variations of an old religion, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism (Melton 2004: 23), even in countries where they are majority.

majority, they are not likely to welcome NRMs, which they cannot control or force to assimilate. States then may attempt to limit fundraising, proselytizing efforts, or activities such as the building of facilities by NRMs (Richardson 2004: 2) since these NRMs are perceived as a threat to religious and national identities (Rothstein 2004: 222), a political or cultural attack (Aires 2004: 108), or as brainwashing cults (Richardson 2004: 3).

Moreover, some states go so far as to try to control their citizens' religious autonomy in different countries. For instance, when Turkish officials discovered the religious autonomy of Turkish immigrants in Germany, they tried to stop them from founding mosque associations. However, Germany did not allow it and protected these Muslim immigrants from Muslim authorities outside of Germany. Eventually, Turkey founded its own representation, the DITIB, an unofficial branch of the Department of Religious Affairs in Germany (Aires 2004: 104-105).

In general, there is discretion and discrimination in the operation of the judicial system between the rights of NRMs and the religion of the majority. If a state has a strong and independent judiciary and constitutional provisions guaranteeing religious freedom, high degrees of religious freedom would be expected. However, even autonomous judiciary bodies do not guarantee equality between the majority religion and NRMs. The less judicial autonomy a state has, the more problematic this phenomenon becomes (Richardson 2004: 11). Wybraniec and Finke's study on 2,109 court decisions on religion from 1981 to 1996 in the U.S. reveals that "...sectarian religions are more likely to appeal to the courts for protection of their religious freedoms, despite receiving fewer favorable rulings than mainline religions..." (2004: 543). These decisions show that even though the U.S. has one of the most independent judiciary bodies, its courts do not guarantee equal treatment to its plaintiffs.

The terms NRM and minority religion can even be used to describe the world's great faiths. For instance, Islam is a minority religion or a kind of NRM in non-Islamic states. Also, as expressed by Madeley, inequalities of treatment and governments standing between religions are

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Sometimes, NRMs are referred to pejoratively as "cults and sects." The Unification Church, Hare Krishna, Scientology, the Children of God, and the Divine Light Mission are some of the most used examples of NRMs. Even these examples might be expanded to extreme cases such as the Madonna's Church of Orgasm. Even though Jehovah Witnesses, the Mormons, and Evangelical Protestants are now considered part of the religious landscape in the U.S., they are among NRMs. Also, as minority religions, universal religions might be a part of NRMs in different countries (see Richardson 2004).

almost universal (2006: 68). These situations make NRMs and attitudes against them by the state more important.

In general, the public is uninterested in the problems of new religions and minority religions (Rothstein 2004: 222). It makes new religions' problems less resolvable. Even though the public debate on Islam increases in Europe (ibid.), it is not widespread or potent enough to solve problems.

As we saw in this part, states try to control their citizens' religious autonomy by means of law, school education, official religious organizations, and indirect methods such as tax exemption. Also, we can imagine that this control is more severe on convicts. As a state agent, prisons do not show equal respect to all religions and have an arbitrary fashion to control new religious movements especially (Beckford 2004: 242).

As discussed until now, if the state tries to regulate religion in covert and overt ways and tries to separate itself from religion by means of secularism, how do we explain religious symbolism, especially, in secular states? In the following part, civil religion will be examined as a part of this state and religion interaction.

## **5. Civil Religion**

Even though, as expressed by Bellah, the phrase "civil religion" originated in the work of Rousseau, it made major effect on social science study after being used by Robert Bellah (Wimberley and Swatos 1998: 96; also see it for critiques of this term). Bellah states,

Considering the separation of church and state, how is a president justified in using the word "God" at all? The answer is that the separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension. Although matters of personal religious belief, worship, and association are considered to be strictly private affairs, there are, at the same time, certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling American civil religion (1991 [1970]: 171).

Therefore, Bellah claims that the majority of Americans share certain common elements of religious orientation in a framework of national symbols, rituals, traditions, and institutions. This "institutionalized civil religion in America" is distinct from the churches. However, this is

not unique for Americans, “every nation and every people come to some form or religious self-understanding” (ibid. p.168).

Bellah examines American presidents’ inaugurations, noting how often they include references to the concept of God, “a word that almost all Americans can accept but that means so many different things to so many different people that it is almost an empty sign” (ibid. p.170). Especially, founding fathers of America shaped the form and tone of the civil religion. This form derived from Christianity, but it is certainly not itself Christianity. All of these presidents mentioned God but not Christ. "God" is a central symbol in the civil religion. In this way, civil religion points to the religious dimension of politics and represents an essential middle term for resolving the debates about separation of church and state and the role of religion as integrator of society (Coleman 1970: 67-76).<sup>6</sup>

Civil religion has “its own prophets and its own martyrs, its own sacred events and sacred places, its own solemn rituals and symbols” (Bellah 1991: 186). Memorial Day, Thanksgiving Day, Fourth of July, and less significantly Veterans Day and the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln serve to integrate the family into this civil religion in America.

Civil religion was secular nationalism in France and Russia. Also in Turkey, political/secular nationalism replaced traditional Islam in serving as civil religion (Coleman 1970: 73; also see Bellah 1965). Nationalism here was a modern and secular ideology which served and performed as civil religion which substituted traditional religion (Smith 2003: 98). In Turkey, the ruling elite wished to use Islam to strengthen social harmony as long as it was kept under state control (Atasoy 2009: 179). Therefore, Turkish civil religion was not only shaped by a secular nationalism, but also by nominal Islam.

Until this point, we have seen a contradiction between state and religion to become dominant over each other. It seems that this conflict does not disappear as Fukuyama predicted almost twenty years ago by saying that a coherent and directional history of mankind will eventually lead the greater part of humanity to liberal democracy. Then, could there be a

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<sup>6</sup> Is the term “civil religion” still relevant today? Why did Bellah drop the term in the 1970s? See also Philip S. Gorski (2010), *Civil Religion Today*.

In his inauguration speech in 2009, Obama said “We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus -- and nonbelievers.” One of our personal conversations, Prof. Mohammed Bamyeh was questioning including atheists in this speech: “Are they [nonbelievers] now considered part of this civil religion?” We will see it in future.

resolution to the conflict between religion and state? In the next section, I will look at suggestions that try to solve this conflict.

## **6. Resolving State-Religion Conflict**

According to Robert D. Lee, resolution of the ideological dilemma cannot come from either complete separation of church and state or complete integration. Actually, complete separation of church and state is unattainable as we see in Turkey and the Soviet Union's hostile secularism on religion. In both countries, once coercion disappears or diminishes, religious activity springs back. For Lee, Turkey's (so-called pro-Islamic)<sup>7</sup> ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), won electoral victory because it abandoned ideological Islamism. This party has sought to soften the ideological secularism of the secularists without breaking with the general secularist idea that religion should not dictate government policy (2010: 31-32, 282-285). Hence, "stability comes when government recognizes it has no interest in promoting or damaging particular religious groups, and religious groups themselves feel secure in their relationship to the government." Also, "secularists must accept religious expression in the public sphere, and religious adherents must accept both secularist and other religious strains as legitimate and worthy of respect" (ibid. p.291).

Another resolution is "twin tolerations": freedom of religion from the state and freedom of the state from religion (Madeley 2006: 61; Stepan 2001: 217). According to Stepan, religious institutions should not be constitutionally privileged. On the other hand, as we expect from a democratic state, the state must establish religious freedom for individuals and religious communities. Besides allowing them to worship privately, they should be able to advance their values in civil society as long as their public advancement of these beliefs does not violate the liberties of other citizens, democracy, and the law by violence (Stepan 2001: 217).

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<sup>7</sup> Most literature portrays the AKP as an *Islamic* or at least *pro-Islamic* party in its early years in power. However, this trend has changed in recent years. I prefer *conservative* term to describe the AKP. If using an "Islamic" attachment would help the reader to analyze this part, this term might be "*post-Islamic*" instead of "*pro-Islamic*" to describe the AKP and many current Islamic movements in Turkey and in other Muslim countries. This brand new Islamism, post-Islamism, does not propose an alternative social and political order or Islamic state, but proposes pluralism, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law (see Dagi 2004).



Stepan examines this “twin tolerations” theory in specific democratic politics. Many scholars see the “separation of church and state” and “secularism” as core features of democracy. However, Stepan shows that it is not true. All Western democracies, including the most secular France, have a “friendly” separation rather than a “hostile” one. According to him, the lesson from Western European democracies lies *not* in church-state separation, but in the constant political construction and reconstruction of the “twin tolerations.” Therefore, the concept of secularism, in so far as it refers to state-religion separation, must be radically rethought (2001: 216-223).

In the case of Islam, Abdullahi A. an-Naim claims that resolution lies in a secular state in Muslim countries (2008). By a secular state, he means one that is neutral regarding religious doctrine. Since the ruling elites of Islamic countries use religion to legitimize their control and the fact that the state is a political institution not a religious one in the historical experience and current reality of Islamic societies, living under a secular state is a necessity to prevent these exploitations. Also, this neutrality is essential for a Muslim since religion depends on free choice. The state should not enforce a religious law precisely, “so that Muslims are able to live by their own belief in Islam as a matter of religious obligation, not as the outcome of coercion by the state” (ibid. p.2).

On the other hand, Naim is aware that being completely neutral is not possible since a state is a political institution that is supposed to be influenced by the interests and concerns of its citizens. So, how do we establish this neutrality? According to him, legislation and public policy may reflect the beliefs and values of citizens, including religious values; however, this should not be done in the name of any specific religion. Maintaining this neutrality is critically important since human beings tend to favor their own views over the views of others (ibid. p.3-85).

Also, he makes a separation between politics and the state and claims that the state should not be simply a complete reflection of daily politics. If we do not make this separation, the state becomes the immediate agent of the ruling party as we see from experience of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, Egypt under Nasser, Iraq under Saddam, and Syria under Hafiz al-Assad. Therefore, “failure to observe the distinction between the state and politics tends to severely undermine the peace, stability, and healthy development of the whole society” (ibid. p.6).

Naim legitimizes and builds his vision of the secular state on “civic reason.” By “civic reason,” he means that policy and legislation can be publicly debated and contested by any

citizen in accordance with norms of civility and mutual respect. This civic reason is based on human rights and citizenship and would be accepted by most citizens (ibid. p.7-85).

Also, he claims that the state should be secular, not society. So, his aim is not to secularize society. He uses the term “secular state,” instead of “secularism,” to avoid this negative perception. According to him, this “secular state” idea should be seen as achievement of shared visions of human dignity and social justice; not as an ideological imposition of the West (ibid. p.8-272).

According to Naim, one resolution for the problematic relationship between religion and the state is to balance this relationship in societies’ own historical contexts. For instance, each Western society negotiated the relationship in the triangle of religion, politics, and the state in its own historical context (2008: 45). Most political regimes in Islamic history showed that they fell in between two polar models, complete separation and complete conflation, of the relationship between religion and the state. Thus, it is better for Muslim societies to recognize the impossibility of achieving complete separation or conflation (ibid. p.53).

If Naim is right about Western societies’ resolution for the problematic relationship between religion and the state, how did Western societies solve this problem? If Western societies had produced these resolutions through a modernization process, we should examine modernization theory to understand how this might have happened.

## **7. Modernization**

Almost all the founding figures of modern social science—Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, Ferdinand Toennies, Georg Simmel, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud—believed that modernization—the process of industrialization, urbanization, and raising levels of education and wealth—greatly weakens the influence of religious institutions in modernizing societies and erodes the role of religion in society and in the minds of individuals (Norris and Inglehart 2004: 3-25; Berger 1999: 2; Casanova 1994: 17; Inglehart 1997: 73). Hence, secularization was seen as a necessary part of modernization; when the world modernized, it was expected to automatically secularize (Davie 1999: 76).

When Western societies’ economic and cultural hegemony had become dominant during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, other countries’ political and intellectual

leaders responded in four different ways: 1. Rejecting both modernization and Westernization like Japan before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. 2. Embracing both modernization and Westernization like Turkey after the founding of the Republic. 3. Embracing modernization but rejecting Westernization like Japan after the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. A fourth possibility—Westernization without modernization—has been argued to characterize most African countries, and it has brought a “painful process of cultural Westernization without technical modernization” as presumably happened in Egypt (Huntington 2003: 72-78).<sup>8</sup>

Turkey has embraced both modernization and westernization. This embracing, based on modernization, was perceived as necessary because the ruling elite was thinking modernization was not possible without westernization. So, indigenous Islamic culture was not seen to be compatible with either modernization or westernization and had to be abandoned. It followed that if society did not abandon it by itself, that culture had to be combated by the state. Thus, this kind of secularization was a state-engineered *project* rather than a social *process* in Turkey, and also in China and Iran (Madeley 2006: 63). Sometimes the process of westernization in Turkey was proceeding faster than in the West itself, such as in the case of women’s suffrage (Esmer 2006: 224).

However, years have shown us modernization is not necessarily associated with secularization. Moreover, modernization has helped religious revivalism in some countries since “modernization meant education, literacy, communication, global awareness, individuality, and choice, all of which powered religious resurgence and undermined state-controlled religion” (Lee 2010: 281). In the following part, how modernization energizes religion will be examined.

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<sup>8</sup> Although often used synonymously, modernization and Westernization are distinct concepts. Also, neither has a single meaning. So, it is better to restrict the meaning of modernization with the process of industrialization, urbanization, and raising levels of education and wealth; and restrict the meaning of Westernization with the imitation of Western customs that are unrelated to economic development (see Pipes 2002: 196).

Even though these narrow definitions, these terms might refer to adverse poles as expressed by Prof. John Markoff in one of our personal conversations. According to him, some aspects of western societies could be imitated and others rejected. This would mean that depending on which aspects we looked at, we could say westernization was happening or that it wasn’t happening. For instance, we could claim that Japan is westernizing because they have McDonald’s; on the other hand, we could claim that Japan reject westernization because those McDonalds serve different food or some Japanese food than they do in Western countries. Thus, it is inevitable to have some variation of Huntington’s typology (see Huntington 2003: 330).

### *The Role of Literacy and the Media*

In Turkey, Islamic movements have shifted their formative ground from religious lodges first to printed texts including magazines and newspapers and later alongside texts to radio, television, and internet to promote their ideas since sermons in mosques have a limited audience. They have adopted media to ensure their survivability and to consolidate a modern religious identity. Islamic media has played a crucial role in producing and disseminating religious concepts (Yavuz 2003: 103-132).

If we look more specifically at one of these Islamic movements, the Gulen movement, resource mobilization theory provides a lens to explain why it is (Ebaugh 2010: 6-8) or other Islamic movements are thriving. This theory emphasizes the importance of resources, such as access to media or material resources for the development and future of a social movement (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Further, new Islamic movements owe their growth to their ability to retrieve and use new opportunities and resources effectively. For instance, we can identify a major leap in its history at the moment when Fethullah Gulen began to publish a monthly magazine, *Sızıntı*, in Turkey in 1979 (Yavuz 2003: 183). Gulen's followers were growing in number then, and Gulen found it effective to deliver his messages through this particular magazine.

In the early 1980s, liberal economic and political reforms created opportunities for the Gulen movement (Hendrick 2006: 21). After 1983, an important change took place in the field of education. The state encouraged the privatization of the education system (Yavuz 2003: 183). Gulen utilized this opportunity and encouraged and led his followers to open private schools. During this time, with the help of the community's journal, *Sızıntı*, Gulen expressed his views to a broader public since the journal did not remain limited to the Gulen movement, but attracted a large popular readership. Gulen urged people to participate in the economy, media, and cultural activities to create a new and confident Turkish nation.

In the early 1990s, Gulen expanded his goal. Besides Turkey he wished to reach states in Central Asia. For this reason, the first group of this movement went to Georgia to establish transnational contact (Akoz and Atal 2005). The collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991 has been a trigger for the expansion of this movement in Central Asia (Turam 2004: 359; Park 2007: 51). Gulen's group opened its first school in Central Asia in 1992,

and eventually founded some 200 educational institutions outside of Turkey, the majority of which are in Central Asia, in 35 countries outside of Turkey during the following 5 years (Turgut 1997). At the end of the 1990s, these numbers expanded to 54 countries and some 300 educational institutions including 6 universities, 236 high schools, 2 elementary schools, 21 dormitories, 8 languages and computer learning centers, and 6 preparation courses for central university exams (Birand 1998). In 2005, this community had reached 100,000 students with 500 educational institutions in 91 countries (Yuksel 2005) as well as their 1000 educational institutions inside Turkey. The Gulen movement has organized Turkish Olympics for foreign students since 2003 in Turkey. In 2012, students from 135 countries participated in this organization. When we look at the participants of the tenth International Turkish Language Olympics in 2012, it can be assumed that this movement has activities over a hundred countries.

In Egypt, as happened in Turkey, tape-recorded sermons, radio and television programs have helped to spread Islamic discourses among illiterate Muslims and those who lack the time or ability to consult printed literature. Also, supporters of the Islamic movements have established a number of “Islamic schools” to counter secular education and create an Islamic awareness within existing institutions (Mahmood 2005: 48, 79-80).

Modernization as an energizing factor for religion is not only endemic to Islamic countries. For instance, radio, television, religious magazine, more adequately trained priests, students, and returning emigrants had helped religious mobilization in Spain in the 1960s (Christian 1989: 80, 181-182).

In the U.S., Evangelical and other conservative organizations exposed the power of broadcasting as a proselytizing tool (Hoover 1988: 49). Religious broadcasting goes back to the early days of radio. When the first professional radio broadcast in December 1920 in Pittsburgh, only a month later Calvary Episcopal Church broadcast its regular worship service in the same city (Bruce 1990: 25). Radio became a God given miraculous gift to spread the gospel and reach every person in the world (Stout and Buddenbaum 1996: 74-75). It was the same for television. The first national religious series broadcast in T.V. in 1949 (Alexander 1994: 59). In 1960, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) changed its rules about fulfilling public service obligations and ruled a station could fulfill this public service with free-sustaining time or paid time. Although this new regulation dropped mainline Protestant programs, it created a new market environment with more paid-time available for religious programs (Alexander 1994: 60;

Bruce 1990: 29-31; Frankl 1987: 69-70; Hoover 1988: 53-55; Stout and Buddenbaum 1996: 81-82). In 1961, the first religious television station was established. Their number reached 30 by 1978. Evangelicals used television broadcasting effectively; so that this trend began to be named Televangelism.

Televangelists also owed their success to use other modern technologies including telephones and computers for solicitation and proselytization (Bruce 1990: 58-62; Cardwell 1984: 52-54). They behaved like salesmen. They encouraged audiences to contact their show by mail or toll-free phones by offering some free gifts or prayers for their families. Once they got contact information of audiences and their personal requests, they used computers to code the contents and personal information and prepare more personalized replies that were more effective than a general reply and ensured the loyalties of their audiences.

We can find Islamic versions of Televangelism in the Muslim world also. Abdullah Gymnastiar in Indonesia and Amr Khaled in Egypt are most famous among others using television broadcasting for religious purposes (Micklethwait and Wooldridge 2009: 239-241). In short, modernization was not as troublesome as expected for religion. When religious people encountered new technologies, they found some ways to use it for religious purposes.

Until now, I examined state and religion relations in general. In the next part, I will focus on this relation's reflections on Islam.

## **B. POLITICAL ISLAM**

Islam is a religion to which more than one of every five people belongs. It is the world's fastest growing and expanding religion. Islam is not only the predominant religion in some fifty-six countries but also the second or third largest religion in Europe and America (Esposito 2005: ix). However, this does not mean the world's knowledge about Islam is sufficient. Even though there is growing interest about Islam in the West, especially during the last decade, this interest had not filled the lack of getting correct information yet. For instance, many non-Muslims still believe that Islamist political activists and organizations are exceptionally prone to violence to further their ends (Anderson 1997: 17). Moreover, we can find similar thinking in the writings of

some people who are coming from Islamic regions (see Samir Amin 2008). Why is our knowledge about Islam and the Islamic region so biased?

According to Edward Said, our knowledge about the Orient is a political knowledge; not a pure one. It has been contaminated by Western Orientalists beginning from the 16<sup>th</sup> century to today. Three things have contributed to the contamination of the simple perceptions of the Arabs and Islam: 1. The history of popular anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the West, which is reflected in the history of Orientalism. 2. The struggle between the Arabs and Israeli Zionism, and its effects on the liberal culture and population at large. 3. The almost total absence of any cultural position making it possible either to identify with or dispassionately to discuss the Arabs or Islam (1994 [1979]: 26).

The result of this long-term Orientalism has been a sort of consensus that has led to certain types of statements and misinformation such as the West is rational, developed, humane, and superior, and the Orient is aberrant, undeveloped, and inferior. It is therefore correct that “every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric” (ibid. p.202-204, 300). Even though Said is talking about 19<sup>th</sup> century Orientalism above, according to him, “the principal dogmas of Orientalism exist in their purest form today in studies of the Arabs and Islam” (ibid. p.300). For instance, a survey titled *The Arabs in American Textbooks* reveals the most astonishing misinformation, or rather the most wrong representations of an ethnic-religious group (ibid. p.287). If we extend this study to the whole Islamic world, we will probably find the same results: bias, misinformation, and stereotype (Ahmida 2009: 1230-1231; Phelps 2010: 190).

However, this does not mean that all Muslims have a single ideology about their own religion. They have many different interpretations and implementations of Islam (Bamyeh 2004: 222). As Olivier Roy described, “if there is still a debate about what the Koran really says, it means that nobody really knows, or at least that the people who think they know disagree among themselves—thus we find ourselves back at square one” (Roy 2004: 10).

In the larger picture, the link between “Islamist” movements and the political context within which they take root reveals that the nature of these movements has little to do with religion. Rather, it points to a politicization of religion as I discuss within the chapter. If that is the case, Islamist movements oppose a status quo which adherents believe is inherently unjust (Teti and Mura 2009: 92). Thus, using a term of “political Islam” is actually not appropriate to

describe these movements and their adherents. There is not an “Islamic answer” to all political questions (Anderson 2009: 199-200). Every group may understand and interpret the sacred texts according to their own agenda and/or Islamic knowledge. Many Islamic groups choose not to be involved in politics and do not have a political agenda. Some groups use politics to expand their ideas without violence. A few groups can use violence. So, there is not a monolithic “political Islam” just as we do not talk about political Christianity. It depends on adherents’ understanding, interpretation, and geographical and political environment. Thus, I prefer *political aspects of Islam* or *Islam in politics* instead of *political Islam* to describe these movements. When I talk about political Islam, generally I refer to these aspects.

The following discussion, by following an examination of its roots, will focus on how this so-called political Islam is shaped in modern times.

## **1. Roots of Political Islam**

The Prophet Mohammed is often seen as both a political leader as well as a religious one. However, he died (d. 632) without designating his replacement or establishing a system for the selection of his successor. After his death, tension increased among Arab communities. After a brief tense period of indecision, the leading companions of the Prophet selected (*bi’at*) one of their own as their leader. We can view this selection as a democratic decision. Even though this election was not democratic in today’s sense, it required the assent of notable Muslims and community/tribe leaders and in a more general sense, it was assumed that the assent of the *umma* as a whole was necessary for the legitimacy of the leader. From 632 to 661, the first four successors of the Prophet—called “the Rightly Guided Caliphs” in the Islamic tradition—were chosen in similar ways. This first period is particularly important, both because it is the origin and inspiration of the formation and development of Islamic ideology and institutions, and because it is a reference point for Muslims (Esposito 1998: 7). In the eyes of Muslims, this “golden age” is not a utopia; it existed in time and place. Therefore, it endows a sense of mythical continuity with the past (Gole 2000: 97). However, after that early period, Islamic states became—according to certain interpretations—more secular. It would be wrong to think of them as only being strictly Islamic states in the first place. Even though religion remained



organically related to state and society, Islam, both in theory and in practice, may not have been the guiding force in the life of its rulers (Esposito 1998: 320).

The debate on whether a state was at the intentional roots of Islam is quite old. The Quran or the Prophet never spelled out any direct proposals on how a state was to be governed. Thus, neither a state nor any of the structural foundations of an empire were thought of as being necessary consequences of an Islamic system (Bamyeh 1999: 259-260). Even though, until the colonial period, most Muslims—despite differences in time and place—could very well believe and maintain that they lived in an Islamic state and society officially guided by the Sharia (Islamic law) (Esposito 1998: 320), it seems that it is not appropriate to name those states as Islamic.

My arguments do not mean that Islam does not involve political life. Even though Islam does not require a special governing system, its emphasis on divine guidance influences socio-political institutions. It means that Islam is not only a belief system in the religious sense but also that it could be a political doctrine at the same time. However, this does not cause a political Islam by itself because Islam does not specify a particular system of governance, sanctified by text, to manage human affairs (Baker 2003: 176).

Now that I have reviewed the roots of political Islam, I will, in the next part, concentrate on a part of current discussions on political Islam by looking at widely used Islamic revival and secularism terms.

## **2. The Islamic Revival vs. Secularism**

There is a tradition among scholars that they explain every Islamic religious movement that happened around the 1960s and '70s by the general terms “the Islamic Revival” and “the Islamic Resurgence.”

Nowadays, “the return of the divine” and “the religious revival” are becoming widely used as terms for any religious movement. However, has religion ever left the societies where these movements occur? According to the secularization thesis, in a modern society, religion will regress and lose its position, and once-accepted religious symbols, doctrines, and institutions will lose their prestige, and eventually religion will lose its followers (Swatos and Christiano 1999: 213). Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, many social scientists and Western

intellectuals believed that “the end” of religion was near (Stark 1999: 249). People who foresaw the end of religion had taken the idea from being an assumption to a sanctified way of thinking. This is why, in modern societies, secularism is far from being a theory; as expressed by Hadden (1987: 588), it has become an ideology for its advocates.

Secularization was not assumed to require force, as modern society would accept it willingly. As Freud asserted “secular motives would proceed unobtrusively” (1961 [1927]: 39). This secularization process would eventually happen. “[People] break away as soon as they are allowed to give up their belief in the reality-value of religion.” (Freud 1961 [1927]: 47). As we can see here, Freud didn’t give an exact time for this transformation.

Rodney Stark explains the need for this vague. According to Stark, for nearly three centuries many social scientists and intellectuals of the West have been promising the end of religion. Each generation confidently believed that “within another few decades” people would cease believing in supernatural forces. This “prophecy” was so strong at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that it was being argued that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, religion would be extinct after losing ground to modernity. Many people went even further, arguing that religion would be so weak that its end would come “within the next 50 years” and all of the youngsters of the time would die as non-believers (1999: 249).

As time passed, the “prophets of secularism” were less precise about giving an exact date for the end of religion in a war against modernity. As if competing with each other, intellectuals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century declared that the days of religion were over and described religion as a hallucination or as a childhood disease, among other negative descriptions. The only difference between these intellectuals and intellectuals of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was that newer generation of intellectuals were content with saying the end is “soon,” but they didn’t give a definite time for “the end” (Stark 1999: 250).

Since “the end of religion” did not arrive at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the wording changed towards the middle of the century—language such as “underway” or “ongoing decline of religion had started” became popular. Some intellectuals believed that “the evolutionary future of religion is extinction,” but it might require “several hundred years” (Stark 1999: 250). But even at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was observed that religion was important and widespread in society and as a result, some serious criticism was directed toward the theory of secularism itself, and questions were raised.

After these questions about increasing secularism were raised, currently, a new saying is becoming widely used to characterize the religious attitude in Turkey and the Islamic world in general: “the return of the divine” and “the religious revival” or “the Islamic Resurgence.” However, it is currently said that religion never ceased being part of society and has been influencing the life of society in general and individual people in particular (Kose, 2002) and that secularist theories did not develop into anything real since they are still only theories and are not based on experimental and practical experience (Swatos and Christiano 1999: 210); indeed, the “Holy” has always been in society. Those who said that God was dead were exaggerating (Wolffe 1993: 1).

For instance, Finke and Stark’s study on American churching shows that religious adherence in the U.S. has been stable for last fifty years and, before that, it had a gradual increase during the last two centuries (2005: 23). George Gallup, founder of the Gallup Organization, stated the same for American religiosity in 1985: “[P]erhaps the most appropriate word to use to describe the religious character of the nation as a whole over the last half century is *stability*: Basic religious beliefs, and even religious practice, today differ relatively little from the levels recorded 50 years ago” (quoted in Hadden 1987: 600). Seymour Martin Lipset’s questioning of the secularization thesis also could be based on the stability of religious life: “[B]y far the most striking aspect of religious life in America is not the changes which have occurred in it—but the basic continuities it retains” (quoted in Hadden 1987: 596). Hence, one can concede that religion is far less influential than it was; however, it is far from being extinct, even though it has gone through an evolutionary process and adapted to the modern world (Giddens 1993: 488).

My criticism about the term “Islamic Revival” is that it brings to mind the secularist theories that I mentioned above. When many scholars saw that religion was still dominant in Islamic countries, they interpreted it as resurgence because they were under the influence of secularist theories. However, it is very difficult to find the evidence of a deep religious decline<sup>9</sup> as described by the secularist theories in Turkey and in other Muslim countries (I do not mean that there has not been any religious decline). So, as expressed by Madeley “secularization

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, see Norris and Inglehart (2004). Norris and Inglehart claim that religiosity decreases in post-industrial societies and also in industrial societies in some way. Even though there is not any religious decline in agrarian societies, the upper strata lives a secular life in those societies. However, they accept the worldwide of religious revivalism at the same time, especially for Islamic countries.

represented a state-[engineered] *project* rather than a [social] *process*” (2006: 63) in many countries.

I would like to explain the increase in Islamic movements and political Islam in Islamic countries by referring to religiosity, which is always there in some way, going underground or becoming muted in expression due to heavy-handed repression by military-backed regimes, rather than simply to an “Islamic revival.” Beginning in the 1920s, while a minority elite and ruling class have accepted and implemented a Western secular world-view along with its ideologies and values, the majority of the Muslim population has not truly accepted and internalized a secular outlook (Esposito 1998: 311). In a sense, what has occurred after the 1950s is that devout Muslims found their political voice and representation and became more visible. To understand this phenomenon, we need to look at the military and the multi-party systems in the Islamic countries.

For instance, if I talk specifically about Turkey, I argue that there is no real Islamic revival, but instead the society is being increasingly influenced by democracy and modernity. Islamic political activity seems like a revival because religious people are more visible in public life than in the past, but their visibility is a result of a growing modernization and democratization of the country. For instance, you might see many women wearing headscarves in public life. This is the result of changing times, changing women’s social status, and women being more able to attend schools and work, and not being limited to the role of housewives. It does not necessarily represent a growing trend of Islamic life. Moreover, Ali Carkoglu and Binnaz Toprak’s recent research (2007: 63) shows that women’s use of headscarves has decreased during the last decade in Turkey even though general opinion seems to oppose it.

On the other hand, in political life, the growth of Islamic political parties cannot be explained only in terms of the Islamic revival. For instance, the ruling conservative AKP (Justice and Development Party), received 47 percent of the vote in the Turkish general elections in 2007, but in 2009, the percentage decreased to 40 in municipal elections. To have such a significant drop in votes shows that people are concerned not only about religious factors, but also about the economy and other issues. If they were concerned only about issues of faith and ideology, the AKP would not have shown such a loss over two years.

Up to this point, I have shown only one side of secularization theory, secularization as religious decline, since most literature focuses on this aspect. However, secularization theory is

made up of three different propositions: secularization as religious decline, secularization as differentiation, and secularization as privatization (Casanova 1994: 7).

The decline of religion thesis postulates that the process of secularization would bring about a decline in religion and, in some extreme versions, until it eventually disappears. The differentiation thesis postulates that the secular spheres would differentiate from religious institutions and norms. The privatization thesis postulates that secularization would lead to privatization and marginalization in religion in the modern world (ibid. p.19-20).

Norris and Inglehart believe that secularization theory is still valid but needs only to be re-formulated and updated since “it is obvious that religion has not disappeared from the world, nor does it seem likely to do so” (2004: 4). They have two premises to explain today’s secularization instead of *demand-side* and *supply-side* theories (ibid.): Existential Security and Cultural Traditions.

Existential Security: Even though there are some differences, every state provides its people with a sense of existential security, depending on its economic and human development and socioeconomic equality. When people do not feel this security, they are inclined to adopt religion, as happened in non-developed countries. Also, Norris and Inglehart explain the U.S.’s religious level by this premise. Even though the U.S. is a developed country with a high-income level, the wealth is not equally distributed as happened in Europe. Even people with a high-income have fears because of the weak social insurance system. Therefore, according to this theory, the U.S.’s religiosity is a deviant case.

Cultural Traditions: The predominant religious beliefs, values, and practices in any society are rooted in long-standing cultural traditions and histories. Even though Norris and Inglehart do not use the term “popular religion,” I think we can interpret the premise of cultural traditions as referring to religion living in popular culture in society.

In addition, some scholars interpret secularization as state neutrality, in which the state remains neutral on issues of religion and does not impose its conception of good upon its citizens (Madeley 2006: 64-65). In this approach, “there is room in a secular society for many different types of voices” (Naim 2008: 221). However, Naim identifies *authoritarian secularism* as the imposition of secularism by the state. Some examples of authoritarian secularism are Turkey, the Baath Party dictatorship in Iraq and Syria, Arab nationalism in Egypt under Nasser, the French model of Tunisia, socialist Algeria (ibid. p.182-183), current Uzbekistan (Hanks 2004: 319),

Russia after the Bolshevik takeover in 1917 and Soviet-installed Communist regimes, Albania under Enver Hoxha (especially after 1967 to his death in 1985 and after him until 1991), and Iran before the Islamic revolution in 1979. Additionally, Vietnam, Cuba, China, and North Korea practice authoritarian secularism via “hostility” or “inadvertent insensitivity” to religion (Madeley 2009: 183-187; Fox 2006).

In this part, I explained the so-called Islamic revival in terms of processes of democratization, liberalization, and modernization, rather than as a traditional retreat to religion. What seems new is the existence of a visible radical wing to this new religiosity, which seems to respond most directly to non-religious factors, notably Western political—rather than cultural— influences and projects concerning Muslim countries. These factors will be discussed in the next part.

### **3. Contribution of the West to Political (Radical) Islam**

One of the most important reasons for the radicalization of the Islamic movements is the Afghanistan experience. During the Cold War period, the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan legitimized armed conflict. Mujahidin (holy warriors) in Afghanistan demonstrated they could be successful against a modern army. International support for Afghan resistance led by the U.S. contributed to this legitimization. During the anti-Soviet jihad, little attention was given to the kind of Islamic regime that would follow in Afghanistan. When the Afghan war ended, some CIA-trained mujahidin began to use their U.S. supplied weapons and training against the West and Muslim governments (Noyon 2003: 34; Rubin 1997; Moghadam 2009: 37-61). When these mujahidin, coming from different Muslim countries, returned home after the war, they became dissatisfied with their un-Islamic governments (Haynes 2009: 166; Moghadam 2009: 46).

Therefore, political Islam was not only the spontaneous result of religious revivalism by the peoples concerned but also a result of systematic support by outside imperial powers (Amin 2008: 92). Along these lines, Samir Amin argues that even Hamas, at the beginning, was supported by Israel in order to weaken the secular and democratic currents of the Palestinian resistance (ibid p.91).

The other contribution of the West to the politicization and radicalization of Islam is colonialism, to be discussed in the following section.

#### **4. Global Jihad vs. Colonialism**

According to Esposito, many Muslims and Christians each saw the other group as determined to conquer, convert, or eradicate them. For many Westerners, Islam is the religion of the sword, of holy war or jihad. For many Muslims, Christianity is the religion of the Crusades and hegemonic ambitions. Hence, colonialism and post-colonialism have been perceived to be “the final Crusade” by both sides (2002: 75).

As Edward Said (1994) pointed out, much of the West saw itself as advanced and progressive, and saw their colonies as backward. This perception of European superiority caused less embedment of the ruling class and Western colonizers in the local population of colonies (Freston 2009: 34).

The continued presence of colonialism helped to radicalize political ideologies and practices across the political spectrum (Teti and Mura 2009: 96). In Egypt, Hasan al-Banna experienced both the British political and cultural presence and occupation in the 1920s. The threat of Westernization came both from the British and from the Westernized Egyptian ruling elites. Thus, Hasan al-Banna concluded that Westernization was the source of the most of Egypt’s political, social, and economic problems, so it was a major obstacle for Egypt and Islam. Thereby, he established the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 to struggle against these problems (Esposito 1998: 137).

All of the North African Muslim colonial countries—Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Sudan—went through similar experiences in resisting Western colonialism. These struggles for independence all were led by Sufi brotherhoods and Sufi sheiks during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These groups used Islam to build a nationwide movement and to form a resistance tradition, which was alive as late as the 1940s and 1950s. Islam was a basic component and provided the ideological framework and symbols for mass politicization (Esposito 1998; Slisli 2008: 99-100). These struggles were led by Hadj el-Mokrani, Sheikh el-Haddad, Sheikh Bouamama, and Abd al-Qadir against the French in Algeria; Abdullah Hassan against the British and the Italians in Somalia; el-Hadj Umar Tall in Guinea, Senegal and Mali; Mohammad as-

Senussi against the Italians in Libya; Usman dan Fodio in Nigeria; and Ma' al-'Aynayn in Morocco (Slisli 2008: 100; Marrouchi 2003: 46).<sup>10</sup>

In short, from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, much of European military history was formed in conflict with Muslim populations—by the British in India, the French in North Africa, Russians in the Caucasus, the Dutch in the East Indies, the Spanish in Morocco, and Italians in Libya. Often, what we see today is directly related to these radical movements, which emerged in opposition to colonialism decades ago (Jenkins 2009: 9-11).

Religion was/is not only used to legitimize Islamic leaders' struggle against Western colonizers, but also it was/is used to legitimize and ensure the leaders' sovereignty in their own countries against their citizens—as discussed in the following section.

## **5. Religion as Legitimizing Force**

Religion is one of the most prominent legitimizers of the state. Until a few centuries ago, religion was the basis for the legitimacy of the state. However, Mohammed Bamyeh argues that religion was the only one among several sources of legitimate authority in Islamic societies (2004: 218). If we look at the Christian world, the Church, as God's agent, was perceived to grant rulers the right to rule. Even though in modern times, religious institutions lost some of their power to other types of institutions, a strong residual element of religion continues to exist and continues to perform basic legitimizing functions (Fox 2009: 277-278).

For example, at the inauguration of U.S. President Barack Obama, he placed his right hand on a Bible and swore to honor his country. Also, Obama invited a diversity of clergy to speak and pray for America at his swearing-in ceremony.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim states use religious discourse to legitimize their governances and their specific policies. For instance, history shows us that most American presidents used religious imagery to justify their domestic and foreign agendas. Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire." In the build up to the Iraqi war, George W. Bush repeatedly used religious imagery in order to make the case for both that war and the war

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<sup>10</sup> Even though religious ideas played a significant role in forming the rebellion against colonizers, economic factors should not be ignored in order to understand these movements. See Bruce B. Lawrence (2000: 40-44); Hamid (2007: 374-375).



on terrorism (Fox 2009: 277). Even Bush's use of the word "crusade" in a speech about the war against terrorism can be interpreted in this sense, even though he dropped the term later to enlist the support of Islamic governments.

If we look at Muslim countries, although several Middle Eastern regimes from Algeria to Iraq are known as "secular," there is actually no truly secular regime in the region. Governments desire to control powerful religious symbols and institutions in order to benefit from their prestige and to limit potential religious opposition. All governments in Muslim countries continue to retain aspects of religion in the state (Noyon 2003:22).

As expressed by Esposito, rulers as diverse as Libya's Colonel Muammar Gaddafi (1969-2011), Egypt's Anwar Sadat (1970-81), Sudan's Colonel Jafar al-Numayri (1969-85) and General Omar al-Bashir (1989- ), and Pakistan's General Zia ul-Haq (1977-88) have used Islam to enhance their legitimacy and policies (2005: 167).

In the name of Islam, nationalist ideologies such as the Arab nationalism/socialism of Egypt's Gamal Abd al-Nassar and Libya's Muammar Qaddafi, and Algeria's Islamic socialism were initially legitimized by *ulama* (religious authorities). Governments obtained *fatwas* to justify new policies related to political, social, and economic life (Esposito 1998: 59, 134).

Moroccan and Jordanian kings have used their lineage—which they trace back to the Prophet Mohammed's family—to legitimize their rule. Also, the Saudis and other ruling Gulf families have attempted to appropriate religious symbolism and combined traditional and religious symbols to legitimize their rule (Teti and Mura 2009: 103-104).

Even the most secular state of this region, Turkey, has used religion to legitimize some political activity. There is an official institution, the Department of Religious Affairs, established in 1924, which represents the highest religious authority in Turkey.

In short, religion is used to legitimize or de-legitimize actions and policies and helps legitimize what from a Western perspective may appear to be purely "political" decisions (Teti and Mura 2009: 105). Political leaders or institutions use existing religious symbols for their own purposes in many instances, such as a crusade or jihad (Wessels 2009: 334). Thus, incorporating more religious symbols into government causes the politicizing of religion.

If religion is a source of legitimate authority for some leaders and states, how does religion impact democratic claims, since those constitute another source of legitimization? Do

different legitimization sources conflict with each other under the same political form of government? Possible answers will be explored in the next section.

## **6. Islam vs. Democracy or Democracy vs. Islam**

Religious systems' compatibility with democracy is one of the most important and intensely debated questions of our times (Stepan 2001: 213). Today, both Muslims and non-Muslims question whether Islam and democracy are compatible. Some Muslims suspect that democracy is a "foreign construct" and against God's sovereignty. In contrast, others tend to see Islam as inherently democratic (Bayat 2007: 4). In the same way, some non-Muslims believe that Islam and democracy are compatible; while others believe that they are not compatible.

As I mentioned before, Islam does not specify a particular system of governance. The Quran advises *shura* (consultation) to make community decisions. The first four Rightly Guided Caliphs were chosen by this form of consultation. However, even though historically Islam can be demonstrated to have democratic aspects, some suspect that Islam and democracy are not compatible. This view tends to assume that Islamists have a hidden agenda and that when political Islam comes to power, Islamists will use violence and liquidate other groups (Amin 2008: 85).

But there is no hard evidence to support the view that Islamists, once elected to parliamentary office, would overturn the system (Noyon 2003: 48). Many analyses have concluded that Islam is not the cause of the lack of democracy in predominantly Muslim countries, and there is little evidence that Islam and democracy are incompatible (Pettersson 2009: 250). Some other potential reasons for the lack of democracy include the mixed legacies of recent colonial rule, anti-colonial struggle, poverty in some countries, and oil-based wealth in others. All these factors should be considered in order to understand the persistence of authoritarian regimes in Islamic regions (Markoff 2009: 69). Also, the international community frequently provides authoritarian regimes both legitimacy and material resources (Cavatorta 2009: 330).

If we look at Islamic countries that have parliamentary systems, we see that it was the regime that overturned pluralism, not the Islamists, as happened in Algeria. Also, in Tunisia,

Islamic parties were outlawed. In Turkey, Islamist parties have always been under pressure of sanction and were outlawed several times (Noyon 2003).

In short, Middle Eastern regimes use the “Islamist threat” as an excuse to limit democratization and ban religious parties along with other kinds of parties (Schwedler 1998 quoted in Mohseni and Wilcox 2009: 223; Lee 2000: 18).

On the other hand, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Jamaat-i Islami in Pakistan were permitted to participate in elections. When they were allowed to participate in political life, the process diminished their radicalism and contributed to their normalization as political actors (Esposito 1997: 27). In Turkey, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has experienced the same transition. The political party out of which the AKP developed, the Welfare Party (RP), was more conservative before coming to power. The RP softened its ideas during its government administration in 1996. When the RP was outlawed in 1998, one of its successors, the AKP, became more liberal and won the elections in 2002, 2007, and 2011 to become the ruling party until now.

One of the most important problems regarding democracy in the Middle East is that it has almost always seemed a secondary goal. The ruling elites see democracy as an instrument for serving higher values: secularism for Turkey, nationalism for many Arab countries, and religion for Iran. Many of the ruling class have argued that their citizens are not mature enough to exercise democratic rights and that their countries require a more limited system, a “guided democracy” (Noyon 2003: 76).

However, the only way to truly test the behavior of Islamists in political systems is by allowing them to participate in the political life under the same rules and standards as other groups (Noyon 2003: 49). And when Islamists are allowed to participate in democratic political life, it seems that they adapt to it.

Since the late 1980s, Islamic groups have won a significant number of seats in parliaments in countries as diverse as Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait, and Pakistan. The varieties of Islamic activist groups and experiences are a testimony to the flexibility of political Islam (Esposito 1997: 4). Therefore, the next step is to examine some of these Islamic activists and their movements.

## 7. Islamic Movements

Islamic movements are a part of the political, social, and cultural environments of their societies. Therefore, they are very diverse. Islam does not have a central authority or clergy class.<sup>11</sup> Islamic movements are not directed from a specific group or place. Even though some Islamic movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jamaat-i Islami have expanded into different Muslim countries, they do not have a central authority. When these movements expand into other countries, they gain different forms and meanings. Also, as time passes, they change group identities, framing, aims, targets, and enemies. For instance, the Muslim Brotherhood was established in 1928 to re-Islamize society against Westernization and colonialism; however, by and by, it became a movement against secular autocratic (or democratic) regimes.

Also, many non-religious movements employ Islamic symbols, slogans, parties and actors to legitimate their struggle and mobilize popular support (Esposito 2009: 2-3). These movements increase especially in moments of crisis, threats, popular discontent, foreign occupation, or even of natural disasters. Their leaders, who were previously politicians, diplomats, or members of the military, are being legitimized during crises (Slisli 2008: 101-102).

Contrary to popular stereotypes, most activists of Islamic organizations and movements are young products of the modern educational system. They come from the recently urbanized middle or lower middle classes. They are a product of the modern world. Although they would like to capture the original intentions of religion, they do not intend to recreate the conditions of 7<sup>th</sup> century Arabia. Most of them are university graduates from different disciplines: Hasan Turabi of the Sudan is a lawyer trained in Khartoum, London, and Paris; Necmettin Erbakan of Turkey studied mechanical engineering in West Germany; Hasan al-Banna of Egypt, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, was a teacher educated and employed in secular schools; Sayyid Qutb, the intellectual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1950s and 60s, also was a teacher and also studied in the U.S. Most Islamic activists received their political education not in religious

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<sup>11</sup> Because of its centralized and unitary form, it might be thought that the Iranian Shia has a central authority similar to the Catholic Church. However, in Iran, "...every Mujtahid has judicial and spiritual authority for his own followers, and while there is a hierarchy of status, this does not translate into a hierarchy of authority" (Zubaida 2000: 63).

schools but on university campuses. Many are serious, pious, highly motivated people who have become dissatisfied by the socioeconomic realities of their societies. Unlike some of their peers or parents, their experience of modernization has not led them to embrace it, but to criticize and reject its domination that is created and maintained by Western states. Hence, their goal is to “Islamicize modernity”—to compose an alternative modernity that combines basic elements of modernity alongside with Islamic tradition (Esposito 2005: 167-168; Roy 1994: 3; Kurzman 2002: 13-14, 17).

Islamic movements generally fall under two categories: movements that involve politics and have a political agenda and movements without a political agenda. These movements can be violent or non-violent. However, generally, non-political movements are non-violent.

Most Islamic movements are non-violent (Teti and Mura 2009: 103-104) and non-political; that is why we do not know about many of them. Political and violent movements receive more attention and more coverage in media and academia.

A movement being non-political does not always mean that it or its members never engage in politics or that its members do not have any political ideas. Members may support different political parties. Also, non-political movements do not imply that participants do not use other collective challenge strategies, such as media and petitions to influence political parties and their political decisions.

As I mentioned in the previous section, authoritarian governments use secularist doctrine as a weapon against Islamists by equating Islam with fundamentalism and extremism, and setting secularism as a prerequisite to democracy (Ghannouchi 2000 quoted in Esposito 2009: 14).

Governments use varied types of coercion to control real or perceived Islamic threats (Haynes 2009: 166). These restrictions have both direct and indirect effects on religiously motivated violence (Finke 2009: 9). As expressed by Finke, despite 83 percent of all nations promising religious freedoms in their constitutions, 64 percent of the nations have two or more laws restricting the practice, profession, or selection of religion. Societal restrictions on religion and religious social movements have strong, positive, and direct effects on religiously motivated violence. Even though government restrictions on religion have no direct influence on religious violence, they are a strong predictor of the societal restrictions on and the isolation of religious groups (2009: 7, 25).

As a result, autocratic and despotic governments help to radicalize religious groups and to channel their energy into violent directions. That one of these violent directions is fundamentalism—as perceived by many people—will be argued next.

## **8. Fundamentalism**

Many equate (Islamic) religious violence with fundamentalism. As a term fundamentalism is used primarily to describe religious protest movements and militant groups. Islamic fundamentalism has also been interpreted as populism, a Third World anti-imperialist movement, and as a backward movement (Riesebrodt 1993: 1-3). Fundamentalist movements exist in all religions and do not exclusively belong to Islam. They are to be found worldwide (ibid p.2).

If we look at why religious movements are interpreted as symptoms of social backwardness, we see the same sentiment in secularist theories, which I mentioned before. Secularists equate progress with secularization and underestimate the significance of religious phenomena. As a result, religion is regarded as the relic of a past era. So, every movement that tries to spread the religious phenomena seems to be a backward movement (Riesebrodt 1993: 3).

However, fundamentalism literally means “a movement or attitude stressing strict and literal adherence to a set of basic principles.” Before fundamentalism gained its current political meaning, this strict adherence to basic principles did not imply backwardness. For instance, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-97) and his followers called themselves *salafis*, which would mean fundamentalist today, because they wanted to go back to the religious sources to challenge existing traditions. While al-Afghani struggled to return to original Islam as he saw it, his purpose was not to return to the past, but to formulate new Islamic responses to the changing conditions of Muslim countries in the light of Islamic principles. Thus, Islam can serve as a cultural and political identity reference in modern Muslim societies (Esposito 2005: 127-130).

In short, all kinds of political Islamic movements must be seen as products of their cultural and political environment and the result of certain political and social conditions.

## C. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I show how the literature portrays Islamic groups as diverse and without a single Islamic ideology. Almost every group understands and interprets the Islamic agenda in its own way. Even non-Islamic groups, governments, and states use religious discourse to legitimize their actions and politics. So, “the point about ‘Political Islam’ is not that it is ‘Islamic,’ but that it is political” (Teti and Mura 2009: 109). That is why I think “political Islam” is not an appropriate term to describe these movements; the terms *Islam in politics* or *political aspects of Islam* are more appropriate to describe Islamic movements and the relationship between Islam and the state.

When we look at the roots of political Islam, Islam does not specify any particular system of governance that all Muslims would agree with; Islam advises *shura* (consultation) to make community decisions, and Muslims generally regard the period following the first three decades of Islam to entail some deviation from an idealized image in which the *umma* had more of a say in its affairs. After this time period, as one would expect with any popular idea, Islam began to be politicized by the ruling class to legitimize their own governance.

When there were more democratizing pressures in society during the last century, autocratic regimes changed their tactics. Previously they had used religious discourse to legitimize their rule, but in the past 50 years, they began to use mostly an illusive fundamentalist or Islamist threat to consolidate their rule. Therefore, in many cases, it is not the Islamists or Islam that opposes democracy and the pluralist system, but secular autocratic regimes that want to maintain power. They simply want to continue their governance and use an Islamic threat as a weapon to legitimize and secure their existence.

As we see with examples of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Jamaat-i Islami in Pakistan, the Welfare Party (RP) and Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey, when Islamic groups were allowed to participate in political life, the process diminished their radicalism and contributed to their normalization as political actors. As expressed by Carrie R. Wickham, “although the Brotherhood entered the political system in order to change it, it ended up being changed by the system” (2011 para. 6).

My explanations do not mean that radical Islam does not exist. Every religious or non-religious group can have radical branches. Islam is not an exception to this rule. However, we

should not forget that even though some groups can be seen as Islamist, when we investigate them closely, we see that their motivation is not always religious, and moreover, some have never had a religious agenda.

Theories and anxieties about the future of secularism can help to exaggerate the phobia of an Islamic threat. Secularists often assume that religion will be extinct one day and are threatened when they see it does not happen. After the 1950s, the proportion of religious people did not increase in general (see Finke and Stark 2005: 23; Hadden 1987: 596-600; Carkoglu and Toprak 2007: 63), but due to liberalization and democratization in state and public life, there was an increase in devout acts in public and political life, as we see in examples of Turkey and other Muslim countries. Secularist elites mostly are not pleased to see more devout acts in public and especially in political life. In one instance in 2004, the former chairman of Turkey's Union of Bar Associations, Ozdemir Ozok, said that he could not accept having a Prime Minister who had graduated from an Imam-Hatip high school (vocational schools that train government employed imams).

Since coming to power in 2002, Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party has been in heated debates because of their leaders' Islamic roots. Issues include the following: the wearing of headscarves by the wives of Prime Minister Erdogan and President Gul; the attempt to allow students to wear headscarves in universities; the attempt to allow Imam-Hatip school graduates to be considered for entrance to universities on an equal basis with other students; the enactment of a "zero problem" approach with Turkey's neighboring countries—Iraq, Iran, and Syria—and an increasing relationship with Middle Eastern countries instead of European countries. All of these are interpreted, especially by opposition parties and other secularist/Kemalist groups, as an axis shift in Turkish policy, a policy that almost caused the disbanding of the AKP by the Constitutional Court in 2008.

I argue for further examination of the conflict between the AKP on one side and the secularists/Kemalists on the other as a power struggle among socio-economic classes. Together with the military, some other secular institutions, such as the judiciary and the universities, which make up a powerful elite class, do not want to lose their power against the newly emerging middle-class.

Turkish politics offers an example of how authoritarian regimes, as I described earlier, often first use religious propaganda and later religious threats to continue their rule. The elite



class uses so-called religious threats to continue their reign of power. Current uprisings—Arab Spring—in Egypt and other Middle Eastern nations exemplify the unhappiness of the people with this status quo. The new generation wants a change to a democracy, and while some of these young people have religious concerns, their agenda is not necessarily religious.

The class-related nature of this conflict in Turkey can be seen in the terms used. The so-called elite class condemns supporters of the AKP for their ignorance, illiteracy, and poverty. The elite, who argue that the lower class sells its votes for a bag of coal, question why their votes are equal to the votes of shepherds on a mountain. To support their position, the elite cite and praise Aziz Nesin, the famous atheist writer, who claims that 60 percent of the Turkish nation is dumb, referring to the referendum on the AKP's proposed constitutional amendments, which gained 58 percent of the voters' support on the ballot in September 2010. These accusations show that the elite do not want to lose their power to the middle class.

The biases of the elite class shape the existing scholarly literature that comes from inside Turkey today. Even though this literature shows an awareness of the power struggle in Turkey, this awareness is not spontaneous; instead, it represents a process towards education and modernity. Even devout people in Turkey now have more access to the media, especially the Internet, and more opportunity to express their views. These religious individuals, as well as the more liberal and conservative classes of Turkey, now contribute to the native literature. However, such literature should focus on facts, not a repetition of the fears or “red lines” of the so-called elite.

The stabilization of the relationship between religion and the state in Turkey, as well as in other Islamic countries, depends on diminishing the fear of religious rulers' changing the ruling system and destroying democracy through the rule of Islamic law. Such stabilization and elimination of fear are only possible if we look at other societal, economic, and political factors along with religion. Such an examination will show that, while the people of Turkey value the spiritual and traditional aspects of religion, they are most concerned about their economic situation and lack of employment, not their religious rights. However, I do not ignore importance of religious discourse in Turkish politics; some people understand Islam in the same way that some French and Iranian revolutionaries understood democracy (see Kurzman 2008): as a means to better living conditions.

## **II. INTRODUCING THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

To an unexpected degree, religion and state relations have rapidly changed during the last two decades in Turkey. At the end of the 1990s, the Turkish state saw the increasing presentation of Islam in public life as a threat to its secular identity and became harsh on religious issues such as religious education and wearing headscarves in public institutions. However, when the conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002, the Turkish state's attitude against religion gradually changed and finally the state renounced its negative attitude. In this study, I examine how this relationship between religion and the state has changed in regards to religious rights in Turkey in year 2002-2012.

Since coming to power in 2002, Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) has engaged in heated debates because of its leaders' Islamic roots. Symptomatic of the resulting transformations was the attention paid to such issues as the wearing of headscarves by the wives of Prime Minister Erdogan and President Gul; the wearing of headscarves by women in universities; the ability of Imam-Hatip school (vocational schools that train government-employed imams) graduates to be considered for entrance to universities on an equal basis with other students. Significant also was the new "zero problems" approach with Turkey's neighboring countries—Iraq, Iran, and Syria—as well as an increasing relationship with Middle Eastern countries instead of European countries, which became more popular especially after 2005 when public opinion in Turkey seemed tired of the stalemate produced by the country's rejection to be full member of the EU, and the AKP government found more reason to start exploring alternative politics in the region. Opposition parties and other secularist/Kemalist groups interpret all these ongoing issues as signs of a basic departure from the basic project of

building a modern Turkey, and fought these initiatives to the point of almost causing the disbanding of the AKP by the Constitutional Court in 2008.

The debates became more heated during the general election times of 2002, 2007, and 2011; during the referendums of 2007 and 2010; and during the local elections of 2004 and 2009. These major events and debates surrounding the elections and referendums show that the question of state-religion relations in Turkey was and still is very lively, and that a part of Turkish society does not welcome the ongoing transformation in that relationship.

Studying this relationship during the last decade is important since it has consequences on both national and international levels. On the national level, the AKP's ongoing support of religious issues, as seen in examples of allowing headscarf wearing in universities and supporting education of religion, caused criticism and increased the fears of some seculars and Kemalists about the future of Turkish democracy. Since 2002, the same issues on religious rights have been discussed in Turkish politics repeatedly. On the other hand, the experience of governing challenged the AKP leaders' Islamic ideology. They "took the [Islamic] National View's shirt off" as expressed by P.M. Erdogan. This new governing experience would channel Islamic politics in new directions.

On the international level, studying the relationship between religion and the state in Turkey presents a unique study due to Turkey's geopolitical position: providing a bridge between Europe and Asia; functioning as a secular state with a Muslim majority population; continuing to desire membership in the European Union (EU); and—especially in the aftermath of the Arab spring—being perceived elsewhere as a possible democratic Muslim model. Turkey being a possible democratic Muslim model for other Muslim majority countries is an issue that has been discussed in the literature before the Erdogan government. However, the increasing soft power of Turkey, the popularity of Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party among Arab nations, the Arab spring, and the rise of Islamic parties in the Arab world increased the possibility that the Turkish experiment would be a possible model to follow.

## **B. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS**

### **1. Islam in Politics or Political Islam**

In the larger picture, Islamist movements are those that provide religion with an explicit political purpose. Islamist movements oppose a status quo that their adherents believe is inherently unjust (Teti and Mura 2009: 92). In Turkey, most secular people think that political Islam means the adherents of this movement will take over the state and enforce religious rules and establish Islamic law. However, what must be considered is that the term “political Islam” should not be thought of as having only negative connotations when describing the Islamic movement or its adherents. It must be thought of as having a broader, more fluid connotation since there is not a single “Islamic answer” to all political questions (Anderson 2009: 199-200). Every group may understand and interpret the sacred texts according to their own agenda and Islamic knowledge. Many Islamic groups choose not to be involved in politics and do not have a political agenda. Some groups use politics to expand their ideas without violence. A few groups can use violence. Therefore, there is not a monolithic “political Islam” just as we do not talk about a monolithic political Christianity. It depends on adherents’ understanding, interpretation, and geographical and political environment.

### **2. The State**

People frequently talk about the state as a monolithic entity but in fact the state consists of different organs that have different agendas and styles of control. As a result, when we talk about state and religion relations, we should not understand the “state” as synonymous with “government” and should not think that laws and their interpretation and implementation are the result of governments’ actions alone. Too often people associate the government as the entire state. But a state’s decisions should not be understood as the actions of a government alone. A government is not always the most powerful decision-making body in a country and does not act in a vacuum; a state’s decisions can come from the influence of civil society, too, which consists of the entire ruling class and institutions. Even though differences are present from country to country, judicial bodies, universities, the military, the media, the high affluent class, large

national and international companies, and sometimes religious leaders and artists help compose the state ideology and its actions along with the government.

### **3. Conservative, Conservative Democracy**

For my study, it is also important to consider the terms conservative and conservative democracy, because they both help to define the ruling government, which has been in power since 2002 and has had influence over many segments of the Turkish politics. The leaders of the AKP described themselves as a conservative party that follows conservative democracy. In a 2005 handbook of the government performance, P.M. Erdogan explains conservative democracy as “a political-intelligent project in which, in simple terms, heads towards building a libertarian political order by leaning for support of the nation and their values as well as in accordance with the universal norms of democracy... the idea of conservative democracy corresponds to the healthy synthesis of ‘tradition’ and ‘newness.’ In this case, new values will not clash with traditions but will gain a dynamism which completes one another.”

This term was a foreign term for Turkish politics. It was meant to show that the AKP was not a party along the lines of the National View movement and did not have any Islamist ideology. Since conservatism is associated with religious reactionism in Turkey, the founders of the AKP have preferred not to define the party only as conservative (Cagliyan-Icener 2009: 600) and they coined conservative democracy as a result. Since Erdogan claimed that he abandoned his Islamist ideas, he needed to show it with his party's politics. His first aim was being pragmatic rather than what the term actually means. Therefore, the term “conservative democracy” has served a broad function in Turkish politics. In this sense, conservative democracy means being open to embracing new ideas without abandoning traditional values in Turkish politics.

### **4. Post-Modern Coup/Intervention in 1997, February 28 Process**

While pro-Islamic Welfare Party and its leader Prof. Necmettin Erbakan was in power, on February 28, 1997, the military controlled National Security Council (MGK) presented the cabinet with a long list of demands—18 in total (so-called “official advice”). The aim of these

demands was to restrain the influence of Islamists in the economy, in education and inside the state apparatus. To summarize: schools controlled by religious groups should be inspected and transferred to the Ministry of Education; a transition should be made to eight-year obligatory elementary education (its aim to close middle-level section of imam-hatip schools and preventing to attend year-run Quran-based courses); Quran-based courses should be inspected and supervised; media outlets supporting military personnel who have been fired because of involvement in fundamentalist activities should be placed under scrutiny; codes on attire should be observed; acts and statements insulting Atatürk should be punished. In addition, a committee was set up to effectively implement the MGK's decisions. In the meantime, the military pressured Prime Minister Erbakan to step down. In this involvement, the military did not seize power but used other state bureaucracy, the judiciary, business associations, and media groups to push the Islamist Welfare Party's government (1996-1997) to resign. Observers among Turkish journalists coined the phrase "*post-modern coup*" to describe these developments (Turker Alkan, 13 June 1997, *Radikal*, and Cengiz Candar, 28 June 1997, *Sabah*). Implementation of the MGK decisions (regarding persecution of Islamic groups and their institutions, religious education, and strict implementation of headscarf ban) was named *February 28 process* by referring the meeting day of the MGK on February 28, 1997.

## **5. Quran Courses**

Quran/Quran-based courses are the general name of particular courses that were outside of school education. These courses are mostly focused teaching of reading of Quran from Arabic scripts and memorizing Quran instead of giving a general religious education since the Ottoman State. Teaching the reading of Quran from Arabic scripts might take a few weeks to a few months. Meanwhile, memorizing Quran might take one to three years. In recent years, these courses started to include more options in religious education. They also added some classes similar to public school education; however, they are not an alternative to school education at all and their diplomas do not have equivalence to even an elementary school diploma. These Quran-based courses should not be confused with elective Quran classes in the primary and secondary education, which entered the school curricula in 2012.

### **C. BACKGROUND**

When the Ottoman State collapsed in 1923, modernists and Islamists struggled together to re-establish the country of Turkey. After the formation of the Republic of Turkey (1923), many Islamists withdrew from politics because of the new state's attitude against religion. These discriminatory attitudes forced Islamists within Turkey to lead their lives "underground" (Narli, 2003: 125). Furthermore, due to the secular input from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a leader during Turkey's War of Independence and one of the founders of Turkey, many other religious individuals withdrew their support from the secular factions of the nation.

Berna Turam, a scholar of political sociology, acknowledges the dissatisfaction of the religious population within Turkey when he writes, "A large group of founding fathers regarded religion as 'an important force in establishing the larger Turkish nation'" (2004: 353). Many devout citizens, including Said Nursi, who was the founder of the Nur movement and the ancestor of the Gülen movement, believed that unity could only exist if religion and the teaching of it became an integral part of the country. Without a strong religious foundation, the non-Turkish Muslims of the region (i.e. cities with a majority of Kurdish people) "would not feel true brotherhood for the Turks." These diverse groups needed to find a way to co-exist because the success of Turkey depended upon cooperation and solidarity among the different nations living within Turkey (Nursi 1958 [2004]).

Despite the recognition that the acceptance of Islam would lead to brotherhood, Turkey initially moved towards secularization by reducing the power of Islam within the state and even eradicating it from Turkish life. When modern Turkey achieved independence in 1923, the leaders did the following to minimize or reduce the role of religion in the country: abolished the caliph (a ruler of the Muslim community similar to the Pope within the Catholic community) in 1924; closed dervish lodges and Islamic monasteries in 1925; revoked the second section of the Constitution that mentioned "the official religion of Turkey is Islam" in 1928; banned the veil and fez in 1934; and constitutionalized that "Turkey is a secular state" in 1937. All of these actions, especially the abolishment of the caliph, increased the concerns of devout people about this new government. As the people grew more anxious about the government's lack of a

religious ideology, they organized a rebellion in early 1925 in eastern Turkey. The secular establishment of Turkey exemplifies this rebellion as how religious movements tend to struggle with the government to return to Islamic laws and an Islamic state within Turkey.

Hence, Kemalists/secularists have seen religion as a threat for their power and have interpreted all demands for greater religious freedom as an attack on secularism and on the Republic itself. As a result, the secular groups perceive the expression of religious interests through religious organizations or political parties as alarming, rather than as a natural outcome of electoral politics or democratic rights (Toprak 1981: 3). Therefore, religion itself has not led to the disproportionate impact of fragmentation on Turkish politics. Instead, it is the perceived threat of religion to Kemalist secularism that has been responsible for religion's politicization (Toprak 1981: 123).

As the above paragraphs indicate, religious movements functioned under pressure during the first three decades of modern Turkey; because of this tense situation, religious groups often went underground. After 20 years of one-party rule, the establishment of new parties was again allowed in 1946. Four years later, one of these new parties, the Democrat Party, which was more tolerant of religion, won election by a significant majority; religious people and groups then began to reappear. Many scholars interpret this religious emergence as the Islamic revival; however, it seems that this reappearance is more related to the end of the one-party rule and the subsequent growth of freedom and democracy.

After the establishment of the multi-party system, parties were forced to compete for power, and Islam became an important factor in attracting votes. The pious rural periphery, which had largely been excluded from politics since the foundation of the republic in 1923, now became an important political constituency whose interests had to be taken into consideration by conservative political parties (Rabasa and Larrabee 2008: 35).

Despite the multi-party system, Turkey's democratization process has not been easy. Since the 1950s, tensions have marked the relations between the civilian government and the military in Turkey. The country has experienced three military interventions (coups) since the establishment of multi-party democracy: 1960 (between 1960-61), 1971 (between 1971-73), and



1980 (between 1980-83), and one “post-modern intervention”<sup>12</sup> in 1997. After these interventions, the military returned power back to the politicians in a few years.

According to Dagi, the Turkish military embodies two conflicting political traditions. First, there is a deep-rooted tradition of intervention in politics, which is largely brought about by the military’s self-perception as “the guardian of the state” and its distrust of politicians. This self-perception legitimized and raised the military’s intervention. Second, there is the legacy of the military as a “modernizer” (1996: 124). This second reason for intervention has similarities with the intellectual class described by Kurzman (2008). The military, as a part of the enlightened-intellectual class, had and continues to have the mission to modernize the state and people. The intellectual class feared that any attempts towards democratization prior to the establishment of mass education would have dire consequences. When this part of the intellectual class did not like the democratic results, it did not hold back from intervention to enlighten society to benefit the masses. It is not surprising to see the same thoughts among today’s intellectual class in Turkey. According to this class, ordinary people are *cahil* (ignorant/incapable)—they lack the ability to make a wise decision.

The military’s interactions with political Islam have varied. The 1960 and 1971 interventions were conducted basically because the political elites had drifted from Kemalism and had, therefore, lost their legitimacy in the eyes of the intellectuals and military elites (Heper 1994: 19).

After the 1960 intervention, the military turned power back over to the politicians in 1961 and returned to the barracks, but only after instituting a number of reforms that strengthened its political role. One of the most important reforms was the creation of the National Security Council (MGK), a body dominated by the military and entrusted with ensuring that the government’s domestic and foreign policies were in line with the basic tenets of the Kemalist revolution, particularly secularism. While technically an advisory body, the MGK institutionalized the role of the military in the political process and provided a mechanism by which the military could transmit its views directly to the civilian leadership (Rabasa and Larrabee 2008: 36). Therefore, the 1960 Constitution legitimized the bureaucracy and the

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<sup>12</sup> The 1997 intervention was different than the previous ones. This time the military never came to power. Instead of dissolving the parliament or withdrawing the constitution, the Turkish military pressured pro-Islamic Prime Minister Erbakan to step down. The military used politicians to implement their requests by pressure.

intellectuals as one source of sovereignty in addition to the Turkish people (Mardin 2006 [1973]).

Even though secularist thinking catalyzed the 1960 intervention, Islamic groups increased their voice again in a few years. When the military thought that the Islamists' voice had increased too much, the 1971 intervention attempted to stop raising Islamic ideology again.

After the 1971 intervention, left and communist movements increased in the 1970s. The 1980 intervention's first aim was to stop these extremist left and communist groups. As expressed by the first communiqué the goal was "to preserve the integrity of the country, to restore national union and togetherness, to avert a possible civil war, to re-establish the authority of the state and to eliminate all the factors that prevent the normal functioning of the democratic order" (Dagi 1996: 125). Hence, the military used Islam and Islamic values against these groups to create balance. Great emphasis was given to religion in the national education system: *Religion and Ethics* courses were made mandatory in elementary schools and high schools and many Quran-based schools/courses were opened. However, after a decade, the military and other secular groups realized that this balance broke down to favor Islamic groups.

The 1997 intervention tried to stop the increasing power of political Islam. This intervention was named "the post-modern intervention/coup" because this time the military never came to power. They used politicians to implement their requests by pressure. Many Quran-based courses closed, middle-level section of imam-hatip schools were closed, and women's headscarves were banned in universities and public places.

The short democratic life of Turkey shows that it swings between secular/military intellectualism and Islamic values. After the Justice and Development's (AKP) success in general elections in 2002, 2007, and 2011, it seems this pendulum again is swinging toward the Islamic side.

According to one of the prominent Turkish sociologists, Nilufer Gole, in the post-1980 period, a dialogue was established among the proponents of different ideologies. For the first time, Islamists and secularists debated around the same table. These debates assured pluralism (1994: 214).

Actually, we can see this optimism in the writings of many scholars, journalists, and writers at the beginning of the 1990s. In 1995, Ustun Erguder wrote in his article on *the Turkish Party System and the Future of the Turkish Democracy* that:

Turkey seems to be completing its first ten-year cycle without a military intervention. No matter which date you take as your milestone... Turks appear to have broken the pendulum between take-overs and transitions. The question facing an analyst is not the probability or the timing of another military intervention. I believe Turkey has buried military interventions, for the foreseeable future, in the depths of her history.

When we think that after two years from these statements Turkish democracy lived through a post-modern intervention, we can suggest that political scientists' foreseeable future was very limited about Turkish democracy and its relationship with the religion.

Actually, the 1997 intervention was different than the previous ones. Instead of dissolving the parliament or withdrawing the constitution, the Turkish military pressured pro-Islamic Prime Minister Erbakan to step down. For this reason, the events were labeled a "post-modern intervention/coup."

In 1997, the military used the National Security Council to implement their requests instead of intervening directly. The Islamist Welfare Party gained 21.4 percentages of votes in 1995 elections and its party leader Prof. Necmettin Erbakan became Prime Minister in a coalition government. The secular establishment of Turkey did not welcome this incident but did not intervene directly. However, in the last days of January 1997 something happened that we could call "the beginning of the end." The Sincan Municipality in Ankara held an event about Jerusalem, attended by the mayor and the Iranian Ambassador. A play staged that night changed the entire milieu in Turkey. It was claimed that the Iranian ambassador made a call for the implementation of Sharia. The newspapers argued that the Mayor said: "We will achieve our goals by remaining patient. The headscarf is our flag." (*Sundays Zaman*; March 01, 2009).

After this event, the military urgently called on civilians to take immediate action. A few days later, in February 4, tanks traveled down the streets of this city. The General Staff announced that this was a normal activity, recalling that this was a routine repeated every six months. However, this time, reporters were called to record the scene. It was obvious that this action was not a routine. It was a warning to the government. Consequently, the February 28 process began at the end of this month.

The General Staff invited members of the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court of Appeals, the Council of State, public prosecutors and judges, university rectors and journalists to its headquarters where they were briefed about recent developments and fundamentalism. It was argued at the meeting that Turkey was transforming into a different country like Algeria. The

military representatives stressed that they would rely on coercive measures if needed. (*Sundays Zaman*; March 01, 2009).

On February 28, 1997, the MGK presented the cabinet with a long list of demands—18 in total (so-called “official advice”). The aim of these demands was to restrain the influence of Islamists in the economy, in education and inside the state apparatus (Zurcher 2004: 300). To summarize: schools controlled by religious sects should be inspected and transferred to the Ministry of Education; a transition should be made to eight-year obligatory elementary education (its aim to close middle-level section of imam-hatip schools and preventing to attend year-run Quran-based courses); Quran courses should be inspected and supervised; media outlets supporting military personnel who have been fired because of involvement in fundamentalist activities should be placed under scrutiny; codes on attire should be observed; acts and statements insulting Ataturk should be punished. In addition, a committee was set up to effectively implement the MGK's decisions.

Eventually, on June 18, 1997, the Welfare Party (RP) leader and Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan resigned from his post. Afterwards, the Constitutional Court closed the party for "acting against the secular principle of the republic" on January 1998. The court, whose decisions are irreversible, also banned Erbakan from politics for several years (revoked in 2009), along with some other RP politicians.

After 1997, the military changed its defense concept. At this time, priority was given to combating internal threats coming from Islamic fundamentalism rather than guarding against external dangers. Nevertheless, the military was aware that previous interventions had failed to provide a lasting solution. For this reason, the military did not want to intervene without trying all other methods such as pressuring media and civil society organizations; and they succeeded.

During the decade following this intervention, an atmosphere of fear seems to have maintained its effects on Turkey. Almost all decisions made by the National Security Council (MGK) were still in effect in the country until mid-2000s.

#### **D. IMPORTANCE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The mosques are our barracks,  
the minarets our bayonets,  
the domes our helmets,  
and the faithful our soldiers.

What did you feel when you read these lines? Did they sound to you like a jihad call against unbelievers? Or did they sound to you like the expression of a devout Muslim's wish to protect his religion and stand up for it? Or did you feel religious hatred? Would you feel different if you heard them fifteen years ago? Readers may have different responses; so does the Turkish state. The reaction of the state against the poem has differed during the last fourteen years in Turkey. The change of the Turkish state's behavior against these lines illuminates the fact that the Turkish state has becoming more tolerant of religion.

These verses are from a textbook that was recommended to students and teachers in elementary and high schools in Turkey by the Ministry of National Education. The verses were a part of a poem that is believed to belong to a famous Turkish-Islamic poet, Ziya Gokalp, and were written during Turkey's Independence War at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When then-Istanbul Mayor Recep Tayyip Erdogan read the poem in a rally in late 1997, the Turkish court sentenced him to ten months in prison for inciting religious hatred. The Supreme Court of Appeals also approved the sentence. Erdogan was forced to give up his mayoral position and served four months in prison in 1999. The conviction included a political ban that prevented him from even claiming the head of a local government in a village. However, Erdogan is Prime Minister of Turkey now (as year of 2013). He has held this position since 2003 and he won the last three general elections. He was not even supposed to be a mayor in a small town again, but he rules Turkey now. After his third electoral victory, Erdogan read the same poem again in July of 2011, fourteen years later since 1997. He read the poem in front of Parliament and received a standing ovation from most Parliament members. This time no prosecutors accused him of religious hatred. No state apparatus became alarmed. The media did not claim any religious hatred and only reported it as Erdogan reading the same poem again. Did the meaning of the poem change during the last fourteen years? How is it possible that the same verses recommended in textbooks in the 1990s incited religious hatred and brought imprisonment at the

end of the 1990s, but did not cause any problem in the 2010s even though they were read by the same person, P.M. Erdogan?

This one instance suggests that Turkish politics and the state apparatus' reaction against religion significantly changed during the last decade. Also this instance represents a change in Islamic groups' ideas. The Turkish state and Turkish politics became more tolerant of religion, especially Islam. One of the most prominent reasons for this change is the conservative Justice and Development Party (AKP), primarily headed by religiously devout leaders who came to power in 2002. Hence, the AKP helped to transformation of political Islam as well as Turkish politics (Gole 2013: 336). The AKP is still in power and will hold it at least until the next elections in 2015. The latest opinion polls conducted by six different research centers, MetroPOLL, ANAR, GENAR, A&G, INFO, and ANDY-AR, in 2012 show that the AKP is the most likely party to continue in power after 2015. Therefore, it is important to examine the time period between 2002 and 2012 when the AKP came to power. By examining the AKP government era, we can begin to understand the changes that took place between politics and religion during the last decade. This investigation must begin with an understanding of the political forces that brought the AKP to power in 2002.

Even though the AKP was established in 2001, in this study, this party mostly represents ongoing changes in Islamic groups. Almost all the literature agrees that the AKP and Turkish politics have undergone a transformation on religious issues during the last decade. However, there is no agreement on the time period of this transformation or reasons for it, even though *the February 28 process* was an important cause of this change and a reference point for most scholars. In that time period, the Constitutional Court disbanded the Welfare Party (RP) and its chairman Erbakan from politics for "acting against the secular principle of the republic" in January 1998.

When the Welfare Party was disbanded, its former deputies founded the Virtue Party (FP). In the 1999 elections, as the first elections after the intervention of 1997, there were concerns to see if there would be an Islamist backlash. Even then-President Demirel declared that if this party won elections, "the state would act" because the FP was essentially the same as the RP but operating under a different name (Zurcher 2004: 302). However there was no backlash. FP received 15.4 percent of the total votes and finished as the third party.

The Virtue Party was also charged with inciting protests against a headscarf ban in universities, and orchestrating a failed bid in 1999 by one of its legislators, Merve Kavakci, to take an oath in Parliament wearing a headscarf. Her stand was regarded as a political challenge to the secular principles upon which the Turkish Republic was founded. The headscarf issue became a symbol of the simmering confrontation between secularist and pro-Islamic forces.

The Virtue Party was accused of being a direct continuation of the Welfare Party and eventually the Constitutional Court closed the party in 2001 for the same reason: “acting against the secular principle of the republic.” After the Virtue Party was closed, the movement formally split. The traditionalists established the Felicity Party (SP) with Erbakan exerting leadership behind the scenes. The modernists founded a new party, the Justice and Development (AKP), with Erdogan as party leader.

The founders of the AKP were open to cooperation with the secular establishment. The AKP defined itself not as an Islamic party but as a conservative democratic party similar to Christian democratic parties in Western Europe (Rabasa and Larrabee 2008: 46-47).

Some argue that the February 28 process helped to create the attitudes that would eventually take shape in the AKP. Some argue even if this process helped, it was not the determining reason for the formation of the AKP. Fuat Keyman sees the AKP’s rise as part of a general transformation of Turkey rather than a single outcome of the February 28 process. According to him, Turkey has been undergoing a complex process of transformation since 1923, and this transformation in recent years has been widening, deepening, and accelerating. The AKP has achieved its electoral victory by responding to Turkey’s recent transformation process much more successfully than its competitors (2010: 317). On the other hand, Zeyneb Caglayan-Icener, without mentioning any early transformation, sees the February 28 process as having a transformative impact on the Islamist groups to make them realize that radical Islam would find no place in the political arena any longer (2009: 596).

Sebnem Gumuscu and Deniz Sert (2009) state that the socio-structural transformation of the Islamist constituency since the 1980s is the primary factor behind the transformation of Islamic political identity. The AKP represented the rising devout bourgeoisie by investing in economic liberalism, democratic politics, and social conservatism. According to Gumuscu and Sert, the February 28 process and its psychological effects cannot be the determining reason for this shifting identity because neither military intervention nor party closure was a new

experience for Islamists. Islamist parties were closed in both 1971 and 1980. Disbanding these parties did not result in a change in their ideology nor moderation. Gumuscu and Sert argue persuasively that after the disbanding of RP and FP, the Islamist National View (MG) movement split into two branches: the moderate conservative AKP, and the SP, which continued the disbanded Islamic parties. According to Gumuscu and Sert, abolishing the RP and the FP during the February 28 process cannot be the only explanation for why the MG movement split since the parties of this movement had been abolished twice before (2009: 958-961). Even though Gumuscu and Sert have a strong argument, they do not mention that when Islamist parties were closed in 1971 and 1980, the military came to power and closed other parties and disbanded their leaders from politics. However, during the February 28 process only the Islamist RP was closed. This action put more pressure on Islamists. When they established their new party, it was also closed in two years, in 2001. In short, the transformation of Islamists began in the 1990s but was accelerated by the events of the February 28 process, disbanding two parties in two years, and banning Necmettin Erbakan from politics, which lowered his ability to steer his party from behind the scenes. These events triggered the division of political Islam into the reformist and traditionalist factors (Cinar 2006: 473).

According to Sultan Tepe at the time of the 2002 election, both the AKP's party organization and its ideology were far from complete. Tepe sees the change of the AKP as a transformation rather than evasion by examining attitude of the AKP against the question of public wearing of the female headscarf (2005: 71, 78).

From Dagi's perspective (2008), the AKP represents a shift from "political" to "social" Islam. Although the party's leaders continued their individual commitment to Islam as a religion, they did not develop an Islamist agenda. Their not doing so also demonstrated a realistic political strategy, given the social, political, and institutional limits facing an Islamist endeavor in Turkey. Not only did the February 28 process end fantasies about Islamizing society, but it also resulted in some Islamists declaring the failure of the idea of an Islamic state. Islamic groups recognized that the social and economic networks of Islam had been most damaged when "political Islam" reached its peak in the late 1990s; therefore, these groups began to remove their support from Islamist political movements. Instead, many in Islamic circles endorsed a conservative-centrist approach that they hoped would enable them to preserve Islamic social and economic networks. The idea of a "social" rather than "political" Islam gained momentum. Having experience in



mayoral positions also helped the Islamist groups replace their utopian endeavors to transform society with more pragmatic efforts that would address such public service concerns as inefficient roads, unreliable trash collection, insufficient water supply, and weather pollution. This pragmatism resulted in the transformation of political Islam and the emergence of the AKP. Even the language of emotionally charged issues changed. In the 1980s, Islamic groups had confidently argued that women had an “Islamic obligation” to wear the headscarf. By the late 1990s, however, these same groups spoke not of Muslim duties but of human rights as a way to object to the ban on headscarf wearing in universities. Evolving situations and weakening self-confidence had given “universal” norms and values a new status among defenders of Islamic symbols and identity.

However, this rapid transformation in ideology and practice raised suspicion within some secular groups. With the threat of constitutional banning looming for decades, Turkish Islamist movements had to acquire ways to function with a more limited political environment. The possibility that their political parties could be banned complicated the efforts of the Islamist political parties from identifying and understanding themselves. According to this approach, the practice of *takiyye*, hiding the true ideas of an Islamic party to escape constitutional prosecution, was deployed at the expense of clarity of political argumentation. To avoid prosecution, Islamic parties and groups communicate to the public through symbolic words and deeds. By doing this, they did not openly violate the constitutional principle of secularism in the public (Dagi 2008). As a result, many secular groups did not believe the sincerity of the AKP and accused it having a hidden agenda. However, according to Dagi (2008), the AKP split not only from the leadership but also from the ideology of the old pro-Islamic circles. So, these accusations do not stand on a strong argument; rather they represent baseless fears.

Some issues, such as action or even non-action for the headscarf ban, increased fears and suspicions of secular groups. The headscarf issue became silent even though it was debated freely before. The AKP did not take any step to solve the headscarf issue in its early years. Islamic groups also stayed silent (Tepe 2005: 79). This inaction caused more suspicions among seculars that Islamic groups would use the headscarf issue for a hidden agenda in the future, and some literature at the time expressed these concerns also. As expressed by Menderes Cinar, the maxim “once an Islamist always an Islamist” helps assertive secularists to maintain their fears about the AKP (2006: 469). Kemalist/secular elites believe that the AKP has a hidden agenda.

Since they mostly couldn't find any supporting evidence to find out this hidden agenda, they use "mind reading." So according to secular groups, the AKP should be checked, guided, and balanced (Cinar 2006: 480). However, as expressed by David Ghanim the AKP proved that it does not have any hidden agenda in any rate (2009: 79).

According to Cinar, the AKP reflects the transformation of Islamism in Turkey (2006: 470). Therefore, when we examine the AKP, we can understand the reasons of Islamic transformation in Turkey. During the RP, Islam was a solution to all issues from social problems to economic development (Cinar 2006: 474), but the slogan of "Islam is the solution" failed to prove viable and also Islamist parties with this kind of thinking brought crisis rather than a solution (Ghanim 2009: 75-76). However, it was different in the AKP. For the AKP the choice is not between Islam and the West or between alienated elite and its pious contenders but the choice is between old and new understandings of modernization (Cinar 2006: 476).

Cihan Z. Tugal explains the transformation of radical Islamic movements in Turkey by their defeat and learning their lessons from this defeat. According to him, moderate Islam is not a self-promoted concept that explains the change of radicals but a strategic outcome after the defeat of radicalism and radicals' strategic response to this defeat. Tugal explains this process of absorption by the Gramscian concept of passive revolution and claims that without the defeated mobilization of Islamists, moderate Islam would not exist (2009: 3-4).

As the literature demonstrates until this phase, transformation of Islamic groups and the AKP is a result of social change that is combined with modernization, globalization, and economic, historical, and political conditions. However, the same socio-political conditions did not moderate ideas of secular groups in Turkey, and even the opposite. Esra Ozyurek's study (2006) suggests that secularist groups are more radicalized recently. Berna Turam's study also suggests a backlash in secularist groups, particularly women's groups, especially during the presidential elections in 2007. These groups radicalized their statements and expressed that they do not favor a democratic system if it helps Islamic groups. This sentiment was expressed in the interviews with statements such as "We do not want democracy anymore, as is used and abused by the Islamists." The increasing success of Islamic politics and the accompanying visibility of pious women have radicalized Kemalist women's activism, encouraging a militant secularist backlash. (Turam 2008b: 40; 2008a: 477-492).

Therefore, social change because of global values cannot be the only explanation to explain moderation in strict politics or values. How can one group moderate its politics, and the other becomes stricter under the same social environment? Maybe we should consider also class struggle and losing privileges. According to Ayla Gol (2009: 807) “The real struggle is not between pious and secular Turks. The fundamental problem that underlies the conflict is the power struggle between the AKP and the secular establishment during the consolidation of democracy in Turkey.”

If most literature states that the AKP does not transform Turkey into an Islamic state and if those claims were correct, why the same literature feel the need to put a disclaimer in their writing? For instance, Ayla Gol states that “is Turkey in transition from a secular to an Islamic state under the policies of the AKP government? This article’s findings indicate a resounding no. The article has sought to demonstrate that the rise of political Islam in Turkey in the context of the AKP’s tenure in power needs to be understood within a complexity of social, economic, historical and ideational factors.” However, in the same article, she feels a necessity to make a disclaimer by saying “Under these circumstances the ruling AKP has no option but to protect the basic principles of secular democracy and, thus, to prove that the allegedly hidden Islamic agenda of the government is an exaggeration” (2009: 807-808). In an article written in 2009, after the AKP has been in power for seven years, why does a scholar expresses a disclaimer even though her findings say the opposite? Isn’t it a violation of the assumption that everybody is innocent until proven guilty? So we return the beginning “once an Islamist, always Islamist” assumption and the academia represents a bias here.

In this case, learning why and when the transformation of Islamic groups occurred becomes more important. If the February 28 process were the only cause, this transformation would seem to be a strategic outcome that hides the real intention of Islamists. As a result, fears for the future of democracy would be more likely to arise. On the other hand, if this transformation were a result of a longer time period in which social patterns played an essential role, then the intention of Islamic groups would not be a concern. Understanding this change is only possible by examining the programs implemented by the AKP government during its last decade of rule in Turkey. This examination will also provide a trajectory for the future of Turkey’s relationship with religion.

As expected from any social change, the transformation of the interaction between religion and the state has its own limits. One of these limitations is that secular groups did not offer Islamic groups enough support during this transformation. Due to their suspicions of Islam, secular groups continued to accuse Islamic groups of having hidden agendas. The EU process of dealing with Turkey also disappointed Islamic groups. The European Court of Human Rights' (ECHR) endorsement of the headscarf ban in Turkey was a breaking point that slowed down the process of transformation. Also, secular groups becoming more inflexible about their ideas during the presidential elections in 2007 caused a counter reaction among Islamic groups. Furthermore, some Islamic groups interpreted this transformation as a weakening of religious affiliation and an embracing of the capitalist market. Such criticism of their religious ties caused some Islamic groups to question their values. Finally, when Islamic groups gained power and started to emerge as the new elites who steered the state, they became more resistant to change.

In summary, the literature acknowledges a transformation within Islamic groups but does not agree on the reasons or timing. This transformation, along with other socio-economic factors, helped the AKP to come to power in 2002 and to currently maintain its power. The AKP's ideology resulted from the transformation of Islamic ideology in politics. Moreover, while in the power, the AKP contributed to this transformation. The AKP not only helped to transform the identity of Islamic groups, but it also helped to change the state's attitude to one that opposed religious identity. Therefore, an examination of the relationship between religion and the state in Turkey necessitates a look at both political and social changes within Turkey.

## **E. METHODOLOGY**

In this study, I examine how religion and state relations have changed between 2002 and 2012 in Turkey. In understanding how this relationship changed over this 10-year period and making a comparison between issues, I focus on two main cases: the teaching of religion by the Turkish state and the rights of religious minorities. I use these two cases to help me answer my research question: How do people in different social locations experience, understand, and evaluate what happened in state-religion relations between 2002 and 2012?

As my first case, I will examine the teaching of religion by the Turkish state in order to understand the nature of the relationship between these two entities in the years 2002-2012, along with responses to this nature in different social situations. Discussions about the state teaching religion, Islam in particular, go back to the early Republic; indeed, Turkey has lived through many political changes on this issue in succeeding years. Since its foundation, Turkey, which has always wanted to have a state-controlled religion, has used state-taught religion for this purpose. However, its aim was to control religion, not to make people devout.

Recently, this policy seems to be shifting. In February 2012, Prime Minister (PM) Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared that raising devout generations is part of his party's mission (*Hurriyet Daily News* 02 February 2012). Examining changes in state-taught religion as my first case will help me explore if there is a new direction for this issue. The status of vocational imam-hatip schools, theology faculties in public universities, obligatory religion and ethics courses and elective religion courses in primary and secondary education, Quran-based courses run by the Department of Religious Affairs, and teaching Quran script in mosques have been part of the discussion about state-taught religion since 2002. I will examine the political changes in these issues.

In addition, the religious education system of Turkey has an influence in the international arena. Pakistan and Afghanistan have examined the imam-hatip schools of Turkey since 2009, along with those in Bulgaria and Russia. In 2009, Pakistani PM Yousuf Raza Gilani told Turkish PM Erdogan how imam-hatip schools might offer a model for Pakistan in order to prevent religious fundamentalism. In that meeting, Erdogan recommended these schools by emphasizing that the imam-hatip schools in Turkey offered an education along the lines of a normal high school curriculum; in addition, they offered classes on religion. Erdogan noted that he himself was an imam-hatip graduate (*Today's Zaman* 27 October 2009). Even though Pakistan's intent was to use the imam-hatip school system to reduce religious fundamentalism, there was an opposing view. Prof. Hakan Yavuz of the University of Utah has criticized imam-hatip education, asserting that "many of the problems we are seeing in Turkey today are very much a product of the imam-hatip schools ... you see this new moral code being formed; those who drink are bad, those who date women are bad, if you are gay you should be excluded, if not killed" (*Global Post* 12 August 2010).

As my second case, I will examine rights of religious minorities. This issue has not been discussed much in Turkish politics, since these minorities are less than one percent of the Turkish population and do not have meaningful political power. In addition to non-Muslim religious minorities, the Alevi group, which constitutes over ten percent of the population in Turkey, has been a part of the discussion of religious minority rights. Although the overwhelming majority of Alevis consider themselves Muslim, they have some distinct and different practices compared to Sunnis. The Sunni majority has mostly ignored these differences along with the right of Alevis to implement these practices freely. In addition, some Alevis interpret Alevism as a separate religion outside Islam as well as a separate culture. Because of these different interpretations, it is worth examining Alevi rights in the context of religious minority rights in Turkey.

Indeed, examining changes in religious minority rights allows us to interpret the main reasons behind the changes on the issues of headscarf and state-taught religion during 2002-12, and whether these changes were a part of a general amendment based on civil, human, and religious rights or the promotion of one religion, namely, Sunni Islam.

The aim of this research is to explore the range of opinions and the different representations of relationship between religion and the state in the Turkish social milieu via an interview survey (see Appendix A) along with examining legal and political changes, including failed bills. As a qualitative study, this research maximizes the opportunity to understand the different positions taken by members of the interview groups (Gaskell: 2010 [2000]: 41). The success of the study depends upon the range of opinions garnered. This study employs a comparative-historical methodology of institutional and ideological practices, especially in legal and social reforms. “Comparative-historical analysis is a field of research characterized by the use of systematic comparison and the analysis of process over time to explain large-scale outcomes such as revolutions, political regimes, and welfare states” (Mahoney 2004: 81).

## **1. Sampling and Validity**

For the research, I interviewed thirty people (see Appendix B) from different groups including people who are members of Parliament, spokesmen of political parties, high-level officials and muftis in the Department of Religious Affairs, presidents or spokesmen of Alevi associations,

religious leaders or press agents of religious minorities, organized institutions or groups that promoting the legacy of Ataturk, journalists, and academicians.

To increase validity of the sampling, I interviewed Parliament members or administrators of five major political parties: Justice and Development Part (AKP; it is a conservative party and got 50% of votes in 2011 elections), Republican People's Party (CHP; a secularist party, 26%), Nationalist Movement Party (MHP, a nationalist party, 13%), Peace and Democracy Party (BDP; a Kurdish nationalist party, 7%), Felicity Party (SP; an Islamic party, 1%). All of them represented 97% of population in 2011 elections.

To have a variety of different opinions among religious minorities, I interviewed persons from different Christian churches including Orthodox and Catholic. I also interviewed members of the Jewish community.

## **2. Limitations**

A limited sample size and the unknown degree of sincerity of the respondents are general limitations in qualitative research. Another is the sensitivity of the research area. Even though all of the interview groups have expressed their ideas about the research topic explicitly in public (as in press conferences, newspaper interviews, radio and TV programs, and writings in newspapers and journals), politicians especially have to reckon with the possibility of losing votes or popularity if they express their ideas openly.

However, the range of interviews in the study should restrict this limitation. For instance, it can be assumed that members of the ruling party would abstain from criticizing actions of the government. On the other hand, members of opposition parties are likely to severely criticize actions of the ruling party. In addition, the interviewees for this study include opinions of different groups such as secularists, conservatives, Islamists, religious-nationalists, secular-nationalists, and religious minorities. Even if interviewees deliberately fail to mention some facts related to an interview question in order not to harm their group's interests, it can be assumed that representatives of other groups would mention these facts. Having this level of variety helps minimize the limitations of this qualitative research.

### 3. Interviews

The interviews ranged from one to three hours. They were mostly conducted in Istanbul, Ankara, Duzce, and Edirne provinces in Turkey in 2011-2012.

I chose interviewees by looking at their interests in the topics covered by this study. To this end, I contacted parliament members from different political parties who are serving on education committees in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM). Most parliament members responded positively to my interview request. The most challenging part was finding a mutual time for interviews. I was in Turkey for a certain time period only and wanted to complete the interviews then, since my aim was to have interviews face-to-face rather than by telephone or Skype. I did not choose to send my questions to participants in order to avoid written responses—I felt that this procedure would have limited my follow-up questions and brought into question the sincerity of the responses. In some cases, I had to reschedule interviews several times, since the availability of interviewees changed at the last minute. Some interviews were interrupted dozens of times by important phone calls that parliament members felt obligated to answer. Some interviewees asked to see the interview questions beforehand. Some of them also requested a copy of the voice recordings and transcripts.

Since I saw and felt the visual and auditory expressions of interviewees, I am confident in saying that they seemed to me sincere in their responses. When I asked about particular political decisions and bills, a change in voice level was a common way to show disapproval of some changes. In some replies, I could feel interviewees' anger, surprise, and disapproval. All these signs can be interpreted as attesting to the reliability of the responses.

In addition, during the interviews, I realized that most interviewees assumed that my political views were similar to theirs. They completed some answers with "Is it not so?" or similar sentences showing that they expected a confirmation from me. I avoided providing any confirming or rejecting responses to these questions in order not to lead interviewees on. Mostly, I replied by saying, "I see," which did not indicate either confirmation or rejection of the opinions of the interviewee in order to lead the conversation. Furthermore, some interviewees presumed that we shared similar religious beliefs. For example, it is a common practice to offer a beverage, usually Turkish tea, to guests in Turkey. In some cases hosts bring tea to their visitors without asking, as a symbol of Turkish hospitality. Thus, when I arrived at the office of one



person to conduct an interview in the month of Ramadan, he called his secretary and asked for two Turkish teas without consulting me. The secretary hesitated momentarily, asking, “Maybe your visitor is fasting?” He replied in surprise, “You must be kidding! Who would fast?” According to the PEW Research Center, 84 percent of the Turkish population fasts during the month of Ramadan in Turkey (PEW 2012: 16). Even though fasting is a common religious practice during this time, the interviewee did not think it possible that the researcher would be participating. When interviewees think that they share similar political and religious beliefs with the researcher, they feel more comfortable in their responses. In cases when interviewees thought that I did not share similar political and religious beliefs, I realized that they appreciated my endeavor to contact them, include them in my research, listen to their opinions, and possibly express these opinions in my dissertation or other platforms later. They found this research an opportunity to spread their beliefs, especially in literature in English.

I encountered a few negative experiences also. Since I was a graduate student in the U.S., some interviewees questioned my intentions for doing this study, such as why would Americans want to learn about these topics? Why do Americans do research on Turkey? Do not these studies benefit American interests? These kinds of suspicions are more common among groups on the far left and those on the far right committed to Turkish nationalism and/or political Islam. So I emphasized that I chose this topic personally. Neither my advisor nor any other committee members forced me to do so. Moreover, I decided who would be on my committee. Since I had my own fellowship, the department had no input in deciding my research topic. After I took a class in political sociology, I realized that my interest lay in this area. After these explanations, interviewees seemed convinced that this was indeed my research project, not that of some American interest group.

Questioning the intention of research is not only common for people outside Turkey as well. When I did an empirical study on the perception of religion among elementary school teachers during my M.A. thesis project, I encountered similar questions. At that time, I was a graduate student at Marmara University in Turkey. Some people questioned whether that project was a way to report to the Turkish state about teachers’ beliefs. Some teachers, who knew me personally, since I was a teacher in the same region, did not question my sincerity, but they were skeptical about the intentions of my M.A. advisor. He could possibly work for the government, and even I would not know that. In that study, I explained this skepticism by the negative

experiences of interviewees during the period of military coups in Turkey. The same bases of skepticism are valid for foreign researchers. Many people believe that foreign research has not only academic purposes but other bases when doing a study on Turkey. Since I was not a foreigner, this form of skepticism was not high and mostly disappeared after my explanations.

In addition, the great variety of interviewees led to some difficulties in posing questions. When I prepared the questions in advance, I did so in an objective way, such as by using the official names and abbreviations of the political parties. However, in the case of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), even the official abbreviation causes tension in different groups. For example, the official abbreviation of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) is *AK Party* (*AK Parti*). Supporters of the Justice and Development Party use the official abbreviation *AK Party*, whereas opponents prefer to use *AKP*, since *ak* means white and clean in Turkish and has many positive connotations. The party's opponents do not want to use a term that has such positive connotations. Deliberately choosing one abbreviation rather than another gives a sign as to whether the person supports this party or not. Using the actual name of the party instead of its abbreviation would seem to solve this problem, but it does not. Since everybody uses an abbreviated form, using the long form would attract more attention and lead to questioning the reasons for the decision. During the writing of this study, I preferred using the *AKP* abbreviation, since it has no positive or negative connotations for the English reader and is reader-friendly. However, since I conducted my interviews in Turkish, in the questionnaire I used the official abbreviation, *AK Party*. During the interviews, I mostly adjusted to how the interviewees referred to it. In one case, when an interviewee saw that the questionnaire used *AK Party*, he protested. I simply explained that I had to use the official abbreviation in order not to show any bias against the party. For the most part, this took care of the problem.

My interview group included politicians, state officials, journalists, members of the Alevi and Kemalist associations, and religious minorities. I did not expect to receive rigid or straightforward responses from every group. I anticipated that contacting religious minorities would be hard. To my surprise, they welcomed my interview requests. Among all the groups, journalists and members of the Alevi and Kemalist associations provided the most straightforward responses. Since they did not have any political affiliation, they were not under any political pressure. I would say that interviewees from political parties expressed their opinions clearly, but they were more careful not to cause political harm. In one case, one of the

vice presidents of a political party did not want the interview to be recorded. He said that we would talk for more than an hour but I could not write up the whole interview, only a few paragraphs that would be misunderstood out of context. In another instance, a politician asked to turn off the recorder during the interview when he made a few more explanations about a related question. However, all these examples are among the general limitations of any qualitative study. They do not affect the general reliability of the responses.

Since I am a Turkish national myself, I cannot say that I had no political opinions before I undertook this research. But I sought to include interviewees from across the political and religious spectrum and inserted opinions of different groups on the same issues. The interviews took, on average, over one hour each. Since I could not include every opinion of the interviewees, I chose particular passages that represented diversity on a specific issue as well as selected paragraphs that helped explain the social cleavages framework of the study. In addition, instead of relying on vague interpretations, I focused on tangible political changes by examining laws and court decisions in order to end up with a more objective view.

#### **4. Other sources**

This study gathered its data from three main sources: first, primary sources such as legal documents including laws, court decisions, and records of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM); second, from elite interviews; and third, from secondary data such as books, articles, and the media.

This study comprises the years 2002-2012. During data collection for this study, there were ongoing changes. An accurate representation of these recent changes in literature would take a few months to a few years. Therefore, media coverage became an important source for this study in order to follow current changes. I mostly read the secularist *Hurriyet*, the conservative *Zaman*, and the liberal *Radikal* newspapers for a variety of views. *Hurriyet* and *Zaman* have English versions, namely, the *Hurriyet Daily News* and *Today's Zaman*. Whenever I found the same news in the more limited English versions, I referenced them to help the English-language reader in accessing it. Both *Hurriyet* and *Zaman* are top-selling newspapers in Turkey. Indeed, all the newspapers that I referenced during the dissertation are highly respected, with a history lasting decades. I mostly used newspapers to access the speeches of party leaders and politicians.

Since they did not feature commentary or interpretations from newspaper staff, their reliability should be of the highest order.

I used newspapers' internet search engines to access their archives via key words such as *imam hatip*, *Quran courses*, and *missionary activities* in the years 2002-2012. After receiving the search results, I skimmed all related news. In cases when there was a proposed bill, a newer legislation, a higher court verdict, or a party leader's polemical speech, the news showed a cluster covering a certain time period that helped in identifying what I needed.

In addition, coverage of newspapers is a good resource to outline the political and social environment in a certain time period. I used frequency of news related to missionary activities as well as sharia and secularism to depict the political environment between 2002 and 2012. Again, I used these newspapers' internet search engines to find related news. When I used the frequency tables, I did not elaborate the content of the news but just looked how many times the key words appeared. At first sight, using a frequency table without looking at the content of news would seem to be unreliable, since it would surely include unrelated news. For instance, I looked how many times the word *sharia* appeared in newspapers, to help me understand the political environment in Turkey. Some of this news, however, had nothing to do with Turkey but was in the form of news coverage of other countries such as Iran. However, a closer look revealed that even these unrelated news articles increased in certain time periods, thereby suggesting their relationship with domestic politics. For instance, some newspapers started to have more coverage on how adultery was punished in Iran and Saudi Arabia. This increase suggested that even this unrelated news was intended to influence domestic politics. In addition, when I examined the frequency of news, I did not attribute any importance to the number of news items but rather to their fluctuation in the years of 2002-2012. In a way, the number of news items on particular topics should be distributed nearly equally over the years in the same newspaper, assuming that every newspaper has a news policy that ordinarily lasts for years. Therefore, it is a significant change in the number of particular news items over the years that calls for a closer examination.

In the case of following changes in legislation, including failed bills, on related issues, I examined the archives of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) and the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Turkey*, where the new legislation and other official announcements are published. Both sources are open to internet access. Their archives can be examined online, respectively, since the years of 1908 and 1921. I used their search engines to access related data

by looking for key words such as *imam hatip*, *Quran courses*, *Alevi*, and *non-Muslim*. I did not use any specific sources to interpret newer legislation, but mostly benefited from parliamentary discussions on proposed bills just before they were voted on. In these speeches, the benefits and deficiencies of proposed bills were generally revealed. However, it is possible that at times the implementation of newer legislation would differ from the original intentions of lawmakers. I mention some relevant incidents in the course of this paper.

Finally, I examined related court decisions. It was not practical to look at local court decisions, but I did examine higher court decisions including those of the Constitutional Court, the Council of State, the Supreme Court, and the European Court of Human Rights. I included only decisions that set binding precedents in order to avoid unnecessary repetition.

### **III. THE TEACHING OF RELIGION BY THE TURKISH STATE**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

A state's attitude toward religious education may be divided into four categories: supporting religious education in both public and private schools, supporting religious education only in private schools, opposing religious education, and not interfering with religious education (see Table 1). Every state has different reasons to choose one of these approaches. Even though democratic countries and pluralistic societies are more likely not to interfere in religious education and leave it to individuals or non-governmental organizations, they are not free from discussions about religious education, which has many dimensions. Most of these discussions are shaped around the following topics (Thomas 2006: ix; Glenn 2000).

- Teaching a particular religion in public schools.
- Making religious courses compulsory.
- Funding private religious schools.
- Allowing students or teachers to wear religious attire or adornments.
- Teaching the big-bang theory, evolution, and/or creation.
- Portraying one religion as superior to others.
- Promoting religious beliefs in textbooks.
- Offering prayers at school functions.
- Having prayer rooms in schools.
- Scheduling school hours according to prayer times and religious holidays.
- Celebrating religious holidays in schools.

**Table 1:** Religious Education by Countries

Supporting both public and private	Supporting private	Not interfering	Opposing
<b>A) Compulsory:</b> Finland Greece Norway Sweden Turkey  <b>B) Exempted-Comp.</b> Austria* Denmark Ireland Malta United Kingdom	Argentina France USA	Japan	China Cuba
<b>C) Optional-Compulsory:</b> Australia Belgium* Germany** Netherlands* Switzerland			
<b>D) Optional:</b> Azerbaijan Bulgaria Italy* Russia Spain*			

\* Denominational teaching of religion.

\*\* Possibility of paying special attention to Christianity.

Source: see the Routledge International Handbook of Religious Education (2013); Religious Education in Public Schools: Study of Comparative Law (2006).

The attitude of states swings between supporting and opposing religious education. Even if a state supports religious education, this support does not cover all religions. Sometimes laws prohibit religious education in some way, even though these laws may be ignored at the public level. If a state should feel a threat against its sovereignty from a religion, it would most likely prohibit its teaching in schools or try to control religious education by instituting its own curriculum. Even though autocratic regimes are more apt to feel this type of threat, democratic regimes experience similar fears from time to time.

These fears mostly justify not teaching religion in public schools at all, which means leaving students ignorant of an important social aspect and fact of public life. Warren A. Nord explains this ignorance in the American education system with the following map story:

Once, when St. Petersburg was still Leningrad, the economist E. F. Schumacher was lost there. Although he was standing near several enormous churches, they didn't appear on his tourist map. When his interpreter showed him where he was, Schumacher asked why the churches were not on the map. He was told: 'We don't show churches on our maps.' Schumacher protested that one nearby church was on the map. But that is not a church, he was told. 'That is a museum.... It is only the 'living churches' we don't show.' 'It then occurred to me,' Schumacher wrote, 'that this was not the first time I had been given a map which failed to show many things I could see right in front of my eyes. All through school and university I had been given maps of life and knowledge on which there was hardly a trace of many of the things that I most cared about and that seemed to me to be of the greatest possible importance to the conduct of my life.' Just as churches did not appear on his tourist map, so religions had been left off the conceptual maps his education had provided him. Or if they did show up, they did so in ancient times and faraway places, more or less as a museum piece. In the last few years, the maps of St. Petersburg have changed. The conceptual maps we provide students in our public schools and universities continue to chart a world without religion (Nord 1995: 1).

Nord's map story suggests that although a living religion would be perceived a threat and would be prohibited; in fact, prohibiting something that is living is more dangerous.

Since every power group has a tendency to control perceived threats, International legal mandates help controlling the state, the biggest power group, and its attitudes for certain rights. If a state abstains signing and implementing some human rights agreements, it would risk its relations in the international arena. Even if a state signs the international covenants, it would have some reservations or not implement all requirements. The state might restrain implementing these covenants because of the state ideology or domestic pressure. However, the state's attitude to these rights is not straightforward. The state can comply with some aspects of a norm but not



others or it can violate a norm but engage in lip service. When norms conflict, compliance is not an all-or-nothing but occurs in varying degrees. This multifaceted nature of compliance poses a challenge to interpret the state responses to international pressure (Cardenas 2007: 1). In the following, I will examine the Turkish state's attitude to the religious education rights in the international law.

Having a religious education is secured by international law. Article 18 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) states that

The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

Article 13, in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), is even more generous in terms of parental rights. It states that

The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

Thus Article 13 not only secures parental rights to teach children according to their convictions, but goes one more step by giving the right to have an education outside public education.

One hundred sixty-seven countries ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, while 160 ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Turkey signed both covenants on 15 August 2000, ratifying them on 18 June 2003 to align its legislation with that of the European Union (EU) to qualify for membership negotiations.

At first glance, it could seem surprising to see Turkey signing a document that allows for a religious education not under state supervision. However, Turkey expressed some reservations for this document, namely: "The Republic of Turkey reserves the right to interpret and apply the provisions of the paragraphs (3) and (4) of the Article 13 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in accordance to the provisions under the Articles 3, 14 and 42 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey." In other words, Turkey would not allow a religious education that was not under its surveillance.

Since my analysis covers the years between 2002 and 2012, it would be helpful to look at discussions in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) when this covenant was accepted to understand the political changes in Turkey during this ten-year period.

In 2003, a Member of Parliament (MP) from the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), Ms. Nur Dogan Topaloglu, gave a brief speech before the legislation was voted upon. Topaloglu explained the significance of this covenant and its acceptance by almost all the countries in the world, including all the member countries of the EU. She explained the reasoning behind the reservations by saying:

The General Staff showed its concerns (*hassasiyet*) about Articles 13 and 15 [of this Covenant], which are related to economic and social rights. Article 13 is about the religious education of children. Article 24 of our Constitution states that religious and moral education and the teaching of religion are under the governance and surveillance of the state. Article 15 [of the Covenant] is about participating in cultural life. That is why [the General Staff] showed this concern (TBMM records 06/04/2003).

This brief speech reveals the political environment of Turkey in 2003. A ruling party's parliament member explains the reasons behind the reservations appended to a widely accepted covenant by referring to the General Staff's concerns, even though it is not a military-related issue. The MP talks about religious education, but she does not reference any scholarly study, the Ministry of National Education, or the Department of Religious Affairs. She refers to an article in the Constitution, but does not support her argument with input from the juridical body, the law schools, or a bar association. She expresses only the reported concerns of the General Staff.

That is why it is important to look at the power of the military and the political environment to understand the changes in religious education since the foundation of the Republic.

## **B. HISTORY**

The religious education issue had been discussed abundantly from the 1920s to 2002. However, the center of these discussions was mostly political and ideological (Ayhan 2004: 527). The Turkish National Assembly was founded on 20 April 1920, even while the War for Turkish

Independence was still going on. Official records show that, even in the early weeks of the Assembly, the education issue in general and, more specifically, religious education came to the attention of the parliament members and were discussed in the Assembly. This shows the importance of this topic in the context of that period's political, economical, and social environment (Ayhan 2004: 28-35). In these early years, the National Assembly opened madrasas and improved their programs to cover both religious and science education (Ayhan 2004: 37-38).

After this new state won its war of independence and secured its sovereignty, it legislated the unification of education (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat*) on 3 March 1924 and placed all educational institutions, including madrasas, under the aegis of the Ministry of Education<sup>13</sup>. Halis Ayhan (2004) and Mustafa Ocal (2011) stated that this law did not suggest closing any educational institutions; rather, its primary intention was to improve the curriculum by putting them under the direction of the Ministry. Most of the parliament members were not thinking that madrasas would be closed. However, then-MP Vasif Cinar, who suggested this legislation, was immediately appointed the new Minister of Education. He closed all the madrasas with an official notice (*genelge*), following his appointment (Ayhan 2004: 55, Ocal 2011: 86-93; also see Armagan, *Zaman* 04/13/2008, and TBMM records 04/17/1924, noting that MPs at the time objected to the minister by shouting NO! NO! when he claimed he was implementing the law by closing the madrasas).

Even though the Unification of Education Law did not specify closing madrasas, it did have some initial signs. Article 4 of this law said, "The Ministry of Education will found a school of theology under Istanbul University to train experts and open public schools to train official imams to serve on behalf of religious affairs." These public schools were later named *imam-hatip* schools. The intention was clearly to establish a government-controlled school of theology along with imam-hatip schools to substitute for madrasa education.

In 1949, the Minister of National Education, Tahsin Banguoglu, explained the intention of the legislation on the unification of education in one of his speeches in the Assembly. He said that "the spirit and meaning of the Unification of Education Law are to create only one general educational system, only one school system, and only one upbringing, in order to raise people who have only one mentality, and then create only one real nation in Turkey" (TBMM records 01/03/1949).

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<sup>13</sup> This ministry was named the Ministry of National Education later.

As we see in the explanations of the then-Minister of National Education, the aim of the Republic was to raise a single-minded generation. The only obstacle in the way of this aim was religion, which should be dealt with accordingly. The early Republicans never saw any problem in expressing these ideas. There was only one correct way to repeat the success of the countries of the West, and that was to offer a modern, science-centered, education.

Following the Unification of Education Law, 29 imam-hatip schools were opened in 1924. In two years, all of them had closed except two, which finally closed in 1931. During the transition to multi-party democracy, there was a new attempt to re-open imam-hatip schools. However, this attempt also failed, so the Ministry offered ten-month imam-hatip courses in 1949. Re-opening imam-hatip schools became a possibility only after the first free elections and the ascension to power of the Democrat Party (DP) in 1950. Indeed, this party opened imam-hatip schools immediately in 1951. Their number increased gradually, from seven in 1951, to 19 in 1960, 71 in 1970, 339 in 1980, 382 in 1990, and over 500 in 1997.

There were many changes to the status of imam-hatip schools and their graduates' entrance to universities. These students could not enter universities until 1973, including the school of theology except for the Higher Islamic Institutes. Between 1973 and 1983, they were admitted to social science-related universities. Between 1983 and 1998, they had equal rights with all other high school graduates (Ayhan 2004: 546). After the post-modern intervention of the military in 1997, the middle-level sections of the imam-hatip schools—that is, grades 6, 7, and 8—were closed. The scores of their graduates on the national university entrance exam decreased compared to those from other general high schools, if they applied to other than a school of theology (decree passed on 07/30/1998 and implemented for university entrance exams in 1999) (YOK no. 98.8.90). Moreover, the students were not allowed to transfer to a general high school in order to have a fair chance at the entrance exam. The Board of Education and Discipline (*Talim Terbiye Kurulu Başkanlığı*) released an official notice (*karar*), No. 186, on 09/09/1998, that restricted imam-hatip high school (IHL) students' transfer to general high schools, when the Turkish state realized that these students were looking for other ways to have an equal chance at the exam. When transfers to general high schools were prevented, parents naturally wanted to withdraw their children from IHLs and register them for distance education high schools; however, this avenue was also blocked shortly by the state: transferring to distance

education was restricted three weeks later, on 09/30/1998, with the approval of the Ministry of National Education (Article 4229).

The first reason for opening imam-hatip schools was to provide vocational school training for future official state imams. However, many parents did not send their children to these schools for that purpose, but mostly to learn Islam outside of general public education (see Ayhan 2004: 194, Ocal 2011: 310-314, Unsur 2005: 247-281). After the February 28 process in 1997, the Turkish government wished to restrict these graduates and limit their ability to go to universities.

Even today, current debates question why imam-hatip schools enroll so many students, given that Turkey does not need so many imams. As noted above, the intent of parents or students was not always for the students to become imams. Especially in the later years of the imam-hatip schools, this intention was clear. A female, for instance, cannot become an imam in a state mosque, but the enrollment of girls in these schools reached 50% at one time. If their intention was not to become an imam, it was to have a regular religious education outside of a formal public school.

This intention was even clear to foreign observers as far back as sixty years ago. Howard A. Reed shared his survey of imam-hatip schools during the 1954-55 academic year in his article titled *Turkey's New Imam-Hatip Schools*:

“On the basis of interviews with a considerable number of these seniors in all of the seven original schools during the academic year 1954-55, it is clear that the great majority want to continue their education, even beyond the *lise* [high school] stage” (Reed 1955: 151). Even a foreign observer, who was in Turkey for only a few months to investigate the newly established imam-hatip school system, saw that these students wanted to continue their education in universities, and not only in the field of religion.

The same observations and statistics about imam-hatip school graduates not choosing to become imams as a profession found a place in the preparation of a report by the Turkish Education National Commission in 1958-1959. The Ford Foundation also supported preparation of this report, which was published in 1960. In the section titled *Education about Religion*, it mentioned, “Even though they opened as vocational schools, Imam-Hatip Schools are functioning as any secondary school instead of being a vocational school since the majority of their graduates do not work as imams” (MEB 1960: 112-113).

Therefore, it can be concluded that imam-hatip schools respond to a public demand for teaching religion to students. The demand was not mainly for training Islamic clergy. There is a similar situation with regard to other kinds of religious teaching by the state, as happens in Religion and Ethics courses in primary and secondary education, as well as Quran-based courses.

The real question is not why Turkey trains so many students to become imams, even though most do not follow that profession. Indeed, the answer to this question was clear even sixty years ago, in that these parents/students wanted a formal high school education along with a religious education. The real question is how the Turkish state can ever provide an education apart from the unified approach, given that its fundamental intent is what sociologists call *cultural reproduction*. According to Bourdieu,

The educational system acts like Maxwell's demon: at the cost of the energy which is necessary for carrying out the sorting operation, it maintains the preexisting order, that is, the gap between pupils endowed with unequal amounts of cultural capital. More precisely, by a series of selection operations, the system separates the holders of inherited cultural capital from those who lack it. Differences of aptitude being inseparable from social differences according to inherited capital, the system thus tends to maintain preexisting social differences (Bourdieu 1998 [1994]: 20).

Imam-hatip schools were intended to break this cultural capital. Even though the Turkish state wanted to restrict them to a profession related to religion that had little voice or power in the new secular state, the schools themselves would like to carry their education into other professions. In 1974, 77% of their graduates continued their religion-related studies. In 1992, the proportion was 50% (Ocal 2011: 310-313). These numbers were more striking when one looks into the university preferences of the imam-hatip school graduates. Even in the 1988 university entrance exam, the majority of IHL graduates indicated their interest in other than theology faculties. This situation caught the intention of Turkey's biggest business association, Turkish Industry and Business Association (TUSIAD). TUSIAD prepared a report to Zekai Baloglu in 1990, which concluded that IHL graduates preferred law and public administration programs to theology. This, however, was not the intention of the Unification of Education Law. The number of enrolled students was to be limited according to the employment needs in their fields (TESEV 2004: 82-84). (See Tables 2 and 3.)

**Table 2:** IHL Graduates' University Acceptance in 1988

<b>Academic program</b>	<b>Accepted students</b>
Theology	988
Other programs	4,885
Open (distance) education	4,058
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9,931</b>

Source: TESEV 2004: 82

**Table 3:** Freshmen Number of IHL Graduates in University Departments

<b>Years</b>	<b>Law</b>	<b>Political Science</b>	<b>Teacher Training Programs</b>	<b>Teacher for Religious Instructor</b>	<b>Theology</b>
<b>1999*</b>	232	277	3,285	322	1,420
<b>1999</b>	54	97	315	669	1,324
<b>2000</b>	96	149	639	778	1,254
<b>2001</b>	82	93	541	785	917
<b>2002</b>	91	70	374	603	685

Source: TESEV 2004: 47

\* There was no differentiated implementation of the coefficient factor, which reducing IHL students' scores.

Again, when we look at imam-hatip school graduates' university preferences in 1998, it seems that most of them were not interested in theology programs. The Higher Education Board (YOK) designated these different university preferences as an irregularity (*carpiklik*), when it justified its different coefficient for vocational schools in its 27 April 2004 report:

The irregularity in the above figure is that the natural way of further education for graduates from teacher high schools are educational programs, and for imam-hatip high school graduates the natural way is entering theology or Religion and Ethics Teacher programs. However, there was an opposite situation, where even though graduates of imam-hatip high schools were supposed to enter theology and Religion and Ethics Teacher programs, they entered other educational programs even more than teacher high school graduates.... This irregularity was partly turned toward its natural way with [the coefficient factor in] the university entrance system in 1999. If vocational schools use the same coefficient factor as other general high schools, as happened before, similar irregularities would recur (from TESEV 2004: 24).

Going outside religious education for an imam-hatip graduate was seen as an irregularity. These graduates not only went to other faculties, but also further along in the state apparatus; finally, one of them became the first imam-hatip school graduate to become prime minister of Turkey in 2003, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. This was not acceptable by some elites. In one instance in 2004, the then-chairman of Turkey's Union of Bar Associations, Ozdemir Ozok, said that he could not accept having a prime minister who had graduated from an imam-hatip high school, obviously referring to Turkish PM Erdogan (*Hurriyet* 05/15/2004).

In sum, imam-hatip schools did not serve to continue cultural capital but quite the opposite: they helped lower-class religious families to enter the state apparatus. Again Bourdieu states how the educational system justifies continuing class differences:

...the educational system helps to provide the dominant class with a 'theodicy of its own privilege' not so much through the ideologies it produces or inculcates, but rather through the practical justification of the established order that it supplies by masking – under the covert connection that it guarantees, between qualifications and jobs – the relationship, which it surreptitiously records, under cover of formal equality, between the qualifications obtained and inherited cultural capital.” (Bourdieu 1999 [1980]: 133).

This established order was so internalized that, when the new executive board in the YOK wanted to remove the coefficient factor in 2009, the Council of State annulled the decree. Then the YOK reduced the impact of the coefficient factor by 0.15 to 0.13, but the Council of State also annulled that attempt. This time, the YOK increased the coefficient factor a little by 0.15 to 0.12. The YOK was taken to court in several lawsuits. In one of these lawsuits, a teacher high school senior plaintiff demanded to return to the old system by stating, “... his rivals increased [for university entrance] because of reducing the coefficient factor [from 0.3/0.8 to 0.12/0.15]...” (Council of State, 8. Chamber, App. No. 2010/1).



Again, the correct issue here is not the appropriate number of imam-hatip schools, but who should teach religion to children? Or should a religion be taught in public schools? Does the law permit the teaching of religion to children by their parents or any other non-governmental organization?

Examination of the debates in the National Assembly, along with education meetings of the Ministry of National Education since the proclamation of the Republic in 1923, indicates that the same issues about religious education have been discussed over and over. Halis Ayhan observed that the same issues came up nearly every session until 1982, especially during the military coups in 1960, 1971, and 1980 (Ayhan 2004: 528).

After the post-modern military intervention in 1997, the Turkish state wanted to restrict imam-hatip school graduates to their religious profession. In 1998, for example, the Council on Higher Education (YOK) decreased the scores of imam-hatip school graduates on the national university entrance exam by multiplying their grade point average (GPA) by 0.2, while general high school graduates' GPA was multiplied by 0.5. A recently revealed secret document sent by the General Staff to the YOK before this change shows how the military was involved in every matter related to religion, especially during that time period. The document was signed by the second President of the General Staff and read as follows: "GPA issue abused by reactionary [Islamic] groups" and should be dealt with accordingly (*Zaman* 01/14/2009). Furthermore, just before the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in October 2002, the YOK increased the differences for estimating GPA scores. In this new estimation, the scores of imam-hatip graduates were multiplied by 0.3, while those of general high school graduates were multiplied by 0.8. This change became effective in the 2003 national university entrance exam. In the Turkish system, universities admitted students based only on their success in the national exam, with the exception of fine arts schools, which looked for skills other than scores on the national exam. In this case, an imam-hatip school graduate's entrance to a university became almost impossible; even when these graduates received exceptionally high scores on the national university exam, they could attend only low-ranking universities. Since imam-hatip schools were classified as vocational schools, all other vocational schools were affected by these changes as well, even though the only reason for them was to prevent imam-hatip students from entering universities.

Between 1998 and 2002, 53 imam-hatip schools closed (Ocal 2011: 344-354). Because of the difficulty their graduates encountered in entering universities, most students and parents did not want to enroll in an imam-hatip school (see Appendix C).

In the 1970-1971 academic year, imam-hatip schools had around 50 thousand students. When their graduates were allowed to enter universities, these numbers increased. Thus in 1981-1982, there were over 200 thousand; in 1990-1991, over 300 thousand; and in 1996-1997, when they had the highest student population in their history, over 500 thousand students were being educated in these schools. The total student numbers represent students in both middle-level and high school sections of the imam-hatip schools. At first glance, these numbers would be seen as enormous, but even in their highest populated year of 1996-1997, students enrolled in imam-hatip schools constituted only 9.3% of all students at the secondary education level. This proportion never passed 10.88%, which occurred in 1995-1996 (TESEV 2004: 103).

After the prospect of entering a university was diminished because of an unfair examination system, and the middle-level sections (6th, 7th, and 8th grades) were closed, the number of students enrolled in imam-hatip schools dropped to around 65 thousand in the 2002-2003 academic year. This number has increased somewhat since the AKP came to power in late 2002; indeed, at the beginning of the AKP's second term in 2007-2008, the number of students in imam-hatip schools reached nearly 130 thousand. In the third term of 2011-2012, this figure became nearly 270 thousand.

Even though there were no legal changes in the situation of imam-hatip schools in the early years of the AKP government, the reason for the increasing number of students in these schools was that parents thought that this new government would soon solve the university entrance system issue. Since PM Erdogan and his children were graduates of imam-hatip schools, which meant that his children also would be "victims" of the coefficient factor (*Hurriyet* 04/04/2004), parents felt encouraged to enroll their children in these schools. Clearly, they believed that the problems of the imam-hatip schools would be solved in a short time period before their children graduated.

## **C. 1. CHANGES RELATED TO THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL EDUCATION, MEB**

### **C. 1.1. Imam-Hatip High Schools, IHLs**

*2002-2012*

The AKP came to power in November 2002. During the early months of that government, the first priority was to lift the political ban on Recep Tayyip Erdogan to allow him to be elected to Parliament. During the short term, therefore, the AKP avoided dealing with hot topics, spending most of its energy on starting negotiations for European Union membership. Then the AKP, with support of the CHP, changed the necessary laws to allow Erdogan to be eligible to participate in future elections. Indeed, in the next local elections in March 2003, Erdogan won a seat in Parliament and became Prime Minister (PM).

In September 2003, in his monthly public TV speech, Erdogan mentioned that his government would change the YOK law and revoke the unfavorable coefficient factor in time for the 2004 university entrance exam. After this speech, Erdogan started to take the necessary steps to change the law. There were two main purposes for the suggested bill: increasing the power of the government over the executive board of the YOK, and reducing the effect of the coefficient factor for vocational school graduates. This legislation suggested dividing all high school programs into three categories: science, social science, and equal weight—which includes both science and social science in balance. If a student chose a university program related to his/her high school field, the coefficient factor would be 0.8; if not, then it would be 0.45. Thus all imam-hatip school students were considered to have had an education related to social science; if they chose a university program also related to social science, they would have equal opportunity with general high school graduates. Even though this legislation was still restricting them to certain fields, it was a lot better than the old system.

However, even this small amendment met with an enormous reaction from the secular establishment of Turkey. Then-President of the Higher Education Board (YOK) Kemal Guruz declared, the YOK was “definitely against any amendments in the current higher education system in Turkey” (*Hurriyet Daily News* 10/25/2003). On 25 October 2003, some university presidents, their academic staff and students, along with Kemal Guruz and other stubborn secularists participated in a public demonstration called “Respect to the Republic March” by

visiting Atatürk's tomb in Anıtkabir, Ankara. They marched under a banner calling for a direct military coup, "Military, move in." At the end of the march, Guruz declared, "Turkish universities are rigid against [Islamic] reactionism, ethnic division, and religious fundamentalism and would be that forever" (*Hurriyet* 10/26/2003). Almost nine years after this march, in February 2012, instead of the General Staff or the Turkish army, Turkish prosecutors "moved in" and took the "Military, Move in" banner to Guruz, when he was alleged to be part of a clandestine Ergenekon network accused of being nested within the state bureaucracy and working to overthrow democratically elected governments—or, more precisely, the AKP government. Guruz claimed that he never saw this banner during the march and did not know any network named Ergenekon (*Milliyet* 02/22/2012). While his trial continued, Guruz was arrested on the basis of another allegation of helping bring about the 1997 post-modern coup, which helped taking down of the cabinet of the PM Necmettin Erbakan (*Today's Zaman* 07/25/2012).

The universities themselves opposed changing the rules to allow imam-hatip school graduates to attend under conditions equal to those of other high school graduates. Just before he AKP government finally passed this law in the National Assembly on 13 May 2004, the YOK, under its new president Erdogan Tezic, who was appointed by President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, released a public statement insisting that only the YOK was permitted to arrange the coefficient factor; thus imam-hatip school graduates should not apply to any university programs other than theology (*Hurriyet* 04/27/2004).

### *Military*

The General Staff also released a public statement days before the bill was voted upon in Parliament. The statement, signed by the Office of the Chief of the General Staff, denounced the pending bill as follows:

This bill undermines both the Unification of Education Law and secular education itself. Current laws define imam-hatip schools as preparing students only for religious service-related jobs. The aforementioned bill is not aligned with the letter or the spirit of these laws.... The opinions and attitudes of the Turkish Armed Forces related to democracy, laicism, and constitutional status of the Republic are the same as in the past and will be the same in the future. Nobody should mistake or doubt the position and attitude of the Turkish Army Forces (*Hurriyet* 05/06/2004).

The practice of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) to involve themselves in almost every political issue by releasing public statements, and holding news conferences is well-known in Turkey. However, Hilmi Ozkok, the Commander of TAF from 28 August 2002 until 30 August 2006, tried to modify this tradition. He made an effort to stop discussing political issues in front of the media. Ardent secularists nonetheless criticized Ozkok's compliance and silence with regard to AKP politics. The army itself mostly did not make statements about military or geopolitical issues. For example, on 1 March 2003, the Turkish Parliament voted a resolution, publicly known as the March 1<sup>st</sup> Resolution, to allow the deployment of US troops for the purpose of opening a northern front against Iraq before the US initiated the 2003-2011 Iraq War. The US promised a credit of eight billion dollars and assistance in eliminating the PKK terrorist organization located in northern Iraq. The AKP government waited for an explanation from the army to support the government's decision. The National Security Council (MGK) met on 28 February 2003, just one day before this resolution was voted on in Parliament, but it made no recommendation on this issue of military and foreign policy. The only sentence related to this resolution was the following: "The negotiations with the US have been evaluated with regard to the probable US military intervention in Iraq" (*Hurriyet* 02/28/2003), a total of 13 words in Turkish. For another very important geopolitical issue, the Annan Plan for Cyprus, Hilmi Ozkok stated, "Don't expect us [the army] to say 'yes' or 'no' to the Annan Plan. I cannot say 'yes' or 'no.' The decision is up to the Turkish Cypriots" (*Hurriyet* 04/14/2004).

At first glance, the relatively silence of the military to the March 1<sup>st</sup> and the Annan Plan would be interpreted as a change in the military; however, this was not an issue in the early years of 2000s. The military did not show a similar tendency for religious education issue. In addition, the above-mentioned Ergenekon trial and the Sledgehammer coup trial suggest that dozens of high-ranking military personnel would make plans to overthrow the AKP government in its early years in the power. Hundreds of military personnel have been on trial in both cases respectively since 2008 and 2010. The Sledgehammer coup trial ended in September 2012. The court found guilty most defendants for planning a coup against the AKP government in 2003. Former 1<sup>st</sup> Army Commander Gen. Cetin Dogan, former Air Forces Commander Gen. Halil Ibrahim Firtina, and former Naval Forces Commander Adm. Ozden Ornek were initially given life imprisonment. The court ruled serving 20-year prison sentences because they were unsuccessful in overthrowing the government. Other over 200 serving and retired military officers were

sentenced 16-year imprisonment. The defendants appealed the case to the higher court (*Today's Zaman* 09/21/2012). The trail has not ended by 2013 yet. Therefore, the Commander of TAF (2002-2006), Hilmi Ozkok's mild reactions to the AKP politics can be interpreted as a personal choice instead of a general change in the military at that time. In addition, staying silent during the March 1<sup>st</sup> Resolution might be interpreted as a political stand against the AKP government. It was known that the military wanted to pass the resolution, which opens the northern front to the US troops in 2003. Despite to this wish, the military did not publically announce it. Opposition parties and the majority of NGOs were also against this resolution. In that case, the AKP government was left the only component that received all public reactions. As a result of this public reaction, surprisingly, the AKP government couldn't pass the resolution although it has an overwhelming majority in Parliament. In either case, it was a personal choice of the Commander of TAF Hilmi Ozkok or a strategic plan of other high-ranking military officials for leaving the AKP government alone to receive all public reactions, it seems to have weakened the secular camp politically.

In comparison to the Turkish army's mild reactions to the March 1<sup>st</sup> Resolution and the Annan Plan, it was harsh indeed with regard to the university education of the graduates of imam-hatip schools. Nobody at that time expected to see a change in the army's attitude toward IHL students in the foreseeable future. However, eight years later, even the Turkish army changed unexpectedly. The TBMM Petition Commission prepared a report suggesting that imam-hatip school graduates might be able to apply to the Military College as of June 2012. The Commission stated that this report had been sent to several related branches of the state, including the General Staff, which had not objected to it (*Sabah* 09/17/2012). When the media covered this news, the General Staff made a short public statement to the effect that "the General Staff does not have a legal right to object to TBMM Commission reports" (*Hurriyet* 09/20/2012). And yet, when PM Erdogan announced his government's intention, in September 2003, to allow imam-hatip school students to sit for the university entrance examination on an equal footing with other graduates, the most prominent objector was the Turkish army. Even in those days, this amendment did not cover the Military College. However, in 2012, the General Staff released no negative comments related to the Military College issue. This would be another noticeable example of how the relations between religion and the state evolved between 2002 and 2012.

### *Business Associations*

YOK and the army were not the only prominent actors opposed to the 2004 IHL bill. The Turkish Industry and Business Association (TUSIAD) observed that there were almost 65 thousand students in IHLs and only 10 thousand available imam posts in the country's mosques. Thus, it argued, many IHLs should be closed and their buildings converted to general high schools (*Hurriyet* 05/04/2004). In that political environment, the then-chairman of Turkey's Union of Bar Associations, Ozdemir Ozok<sup>14</sup>, said that he could not accept a Prime Minister who had graduated from an imam-hatip high school, referring to Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan (*Hurriyet* 05/15/2004).

Mentioned above was that the positions of YOK and the military against IHLs had changed. However, some institutions, TUSIAD among them, never changed their attitude against IHLs. When the new administration of YOK wanted to resolve the IHL issue in 2007, TUSIAD released a public statement almost identical with its 2004 stand, suggesting that IHL graduates be limited to the religious field and a large number of IHLs closed and converted to general high schools (*Hurriyet* 07/23/2009). In February 2012, when the AKP government wanted to pass a bill, known as 4+4+4, to reopen the middle-level school sections of imam-hatip schools, TUSIAD's attitude was the same. However, this time it issued a milder statement that never mentioned imam-hatip schools or religious education as such, but only expressed its concerns related to vocational schools and the rate of schooling of female children (02/23/2012). PM Erdogan harshly replied to TUSIAD's concerns, asserting that imam-hatip schools' middle-level sections were closed during the 1997 post-modern intervention because of TUSIAD's 1990 report, mentioned above. He added, "Sorry, TUSIAD! Your wish will not come true, because it is not what the people want. I said to TUSIAD before that you mind your own business and let us mind our own business. Talk about whatever you want related to industry and trade. But don't raise barriers for the education system of the country and of Anatolian children" (*Hurriyet* 02/28/2012). TUSIAD replied to PM Erdogan's criticism with the statement, "as a civil society organization, it had the democratic right to share its views on a proposed law. In a participatory democracy, sharing one's views should not be seen as an 'attack'.... We never mentioned the

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<sup>14</sup> Ozok was appointed as being the Constitutional Court member by President Sezer in 2003; however, after news of his being registered party member of the Republican People's Party (CHP), he declined the post even though legally had the right to accept it.

issue of religious education in our statement on the proposed law and see the issue in light of an integrated approach to vocational education” (*Today’s Zaman* 03/04/2012). As can be seen, in contradiction to its previous statements in the early years of the AKP government, TUSIAD did not ground its position solely on the IHL issue and even deliberately retreated from this controversy. Indeed, contrary to the AKP’s early years, there was new criticism that the AKP had become so powerful that even NGOs feared to express their opinions against government actions.

### *The Presidency*

The reader might wonder what happened to the 2004 IHL bill. Despite significant objections from members of the secular establishment, the AKP government passed the bill based on its majority in Parliament. However, then-President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, 2000-2007, vetoed the bill and returned it to the legislature, even though, if Parliament were to pass the same bill a second time, the President would lack the power to veto it again. In that event, he could either let it go or refer it to the Constitutional Court for annulment after approving it. In this case, the annual National University Entrance Exam was coming in two weeks and there was no way to pass the bill before the exam. Therefore, the AKP did not resubmit the bill in order to calm the uncomfortable political situation; instead, it postponed the IHL issue for unforeseeable future.

President Sezer wrote 18 pages (almost 6000 words) of explanation for his veto. It was read in Parliament on 1 June 2004 (TBMM records 06/01/2004). He summarized his reasons for vetoing use of the coefficient factor under five categories. From this long explanation, I have quoted short passages under each of the five headings:

A) “It is clear that the intention of this law is that IHL graduates would be able to benefit from the same coefficient factor as graduates of other general high schools if they choose to apply to university programs outside their field [theology]. Therefore, attending IHLs is being encouraged.... In addition, having an equal coefficient factor generates injustice for general high school graduates who have no vocational training and whose only opportunity is entering university.”

B) “In addition, vocational secondary education is much more expensive than general secondary education. For every vocational school student, six times more resources are being used compared to a general high school student. Vocational schools were founded to provide blue-collar workers for the industry sector. Encouraging their graduates to apply to universities instead of fulfilling the mission of their schools [being a blue-collar worker for industries, for example]



wastes resources and reduces the educational quality of the universities. For these reasons, this bill does not carry out the principle of ‘being appropriate for the common good’ that should be the general purpose of every law.”

C) “The examined bill’s real intentions are to facilitate the entrance of IHL graduates into university programs outside their field, and by making IHLs desirable again, increase the numbers of IHL students. However, it is known that even today there are more than enough students in these schools. Ministry of National Education statistics show that in 2003 there are 536 IHLs in Turkey, serving 105,000 students. Even though 5,000 imam-hatips are needed, almost 25,000 students graduate from these high schools yearly. Research shows that as of 2003 more than 511,000 students have graduated from IHLs [since their establishment]. These figures show, without needing further explanation, a distortion in our education system and an important waste of our country’s resources.”

D) “As a matter of fact, Article 131<sup>15</sup> of the Constitution gives the task and authorization of ‘planning, organizing, administering, and supervising institutions of higher education’ to YOK. Therefore, controlling which secondary education graduates may enter which [university] programs under which criteria is granted to YOK.... For these reasons, the examined bill’s fifth article [about the coefficient] is against Articles 130 and 131 of the Constitution.”

E) In his fifth reason for vetoing the education bill, President Sezer mentions the word secular(ism) 52 times. It may be assumed from his emphasis on secularism that his main objection to this bill was its violation of the secularism principle. Sezer emphasized,

The bill that enables IHL graduates to enter university programs other than those in their field should be examined according to the secularism principle of the Constitution.... Article 13<sup>16</sup> of the Constitution states that fundamental rights and

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<sup>15</sup> Superior Bodies of Higher Education (as amended on May 22, 2004).

ARTICLE 131. “The Higher Education Council shall be established to plan, organize, administer, and supervise education provided by institutions of higher education, to orient teaching activities, education and scientific research, to ensure the establishment and development of these institutions in conformity with the objectives and principles set forth by law, to ensure the effective use of the resources allotted to the universities, and to plan the training of the teaching staff. The Higher Education Council is composed of members appointed by the President of the Republic from among candidates who are nominated by the Council of Ministers and universities, and in accordance with the numbers, qualifications and procedures prescribed by law, priority being given to those who have served successfully as members or rectors, and of members directly appointed by the President of the Republic. The organization, functions, authority, responsibilities and operating principles of the Council shall be regulated by law.” Before the 22 May 2004 amendment, the General Staff was also sending a member to YOK.

<sup>16</sup> II. Restriction of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms (as amended on 17 October 2001).

ARTICLE 13. “Fundamental rights and freedoms may be restricted only by law and in conformity with the reasons mentioned in the relevant articles of the Constitution without infringing upon their essence.

freedoms may be restricted according to necessity of a secular republic. Also Article 14<sup>17</sup> states that constitutional rights and freedoms cannot be used as to remove the establishment of a secular republic. Therefore, abusing fundamental rights and freedoms to endanger the secular republic is prohibited... Article 174<sup>18</sup> of the Constitution covers the reform laws, aiming to protect the secular essence of the Republic of Turkey, under constitutional protection by counting these laws one by one.... Maintaining secular education in Turkey is implemented by the Unification of Education Law, Act No. 430, on 3 March 1924, secured by Article 174 of the Constitution.... These schools [IHLs] were founded for male students only to train religious clergy and enable them to continue in their fields in higher education at the end of their secondary education. Investigations show that later regulations and practices have distorted the aim of the IHLs. In time, the IHLs have become an alternative institution, creating a dual education system, wherein important practices have been implemented against the principles of unification of

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These restrictions shall not be in conflict with the letter and spirit of the Constitution and the requirements of the democratic order of the society and the secular Republic and the principle of proportionality.”

<sup>17</sup> III. Prohibition of Abuse of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms (as amended on 17 October 2001).

ARTICLE 14. “None of the rights and freedoms embodied in the Constitution shall be exercised with the aim of violating the indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation, and endangering the existence of the democratic and secular order of the Turkish Republic based upon human rights. No provision of this Constitution shall be interpreted in a manner that enables the State or individuals to destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms embodied in the Constitution or to stage an activity with the aim of restricting them more extensively than stated in the Constitution. The sanctions to be applied against those who perpetrate these activities in conflict with these provisions shall be determined by law.”

<sup>18</sup> I. Preservation of Reform Laws

ARTICLE 174. “No provision of the Constitution shall be construed or interpreted as rendering unconstitutional the Reform Laws indicated below, which aim to raise Turkish society above the level of contemporary civilization and to safeguard the secular character of the Republic, and which were in force on the date of the adoption by referendum of the Constitution of Turkey.

1. Act No. 430 of 3 March 1340 (1924) on the Unification of the Educational System;
2. Act No. 671 of 25 November 1341 (1925) on the Wearing of Hats;
3. Act No. 677 of 30 November 1341 (1925) on the Closure of Dervish Monasteries and Tombs, the Abolition of the Office of Keeper of Tombs and the Abolition and Prohibition of Certain Titles;
4. The principle of civil marriage according to which the marriage act shall be concluded in the presence of the competent official, adopted with the Turkish Civil Code No. 743 of 17 February 1926, and Article 110 of the Code;
5. Act No. 1288 of 20 May 1928 on the Adoption of International Numerals;
6. Act No. 1353 of 1 November 1928 on the Adoption and Application of the Turkish Alphabet;
7. Act No 2590 of 26 November 1934 on the Abolition of Titles and Appellations such as Efendi, Bey or Pasa;
8. Act No. 2596 of 3 December 1934 on the Prohibition of the Wearing of Certain Garments.”

education and secularism. Since the IHLs were founded in order to train the religious clergy necessary for the country, keeping the number of high schools and their students in line with the country's needs is appropriate to the concept of the unification of education and secularism.... Abiding by the principle of the unification of education is imperative if education is to direct political and social consciousness. In the reverse situation, new schools would be opened in place of closed schools [such as madrasas] according to the unification of education principle [a law passed in 1924]. As a result, escalating IHLs to the general high school level or offering the same university education rights to their graduates is not compatible with the unification of education law that is designed to secularize education; nor is it compatible with the secularism principle; with an educational approach that stands on a democratic, secular, egalitarian, fair, functional, and scientific foundation; nor it is compatible with the spirit of the Constitution's foundation on the Ataturk tenets and revolutions.

TBMM records end with the notation, "applause from the CHP rows." Other secularists were also satisfied with the veto and Sezer's explanations. On the other hand, these explanations did not make the conservative side of Turkey happy.

In the foreign press, the *New York Times* interpreted the veto as a setback for democracy:

The veto is a setback to religious freedom and equal opportunity in Turkey, preconditions for a flourishing democracy.... When the education reform was passed in May, Turkish financial markets dropped on fears that the military might intervene to defend the secular order. The worst didn't happen. The president vetoed the bill on legalistic grounds and the ruling party plans to redraft the proposal. The issue needs addressing. Turkey's 536 religious schools are coeducational and, with the exception of Koran study, teach the same curriculum as nonreligious schools. Their 64,500 students are as much Turkey's future as are the sons and daughters of the secular elite (*New York Times*, 06/06/2004).

If we examine President Sezer's reasons for his veto, in his second argument he stated that educating a student in a vocational school costs six times more to the state than a general high school student does. This would indeed be the case for other vocational schools, since they have workshops and special tools, but in the case of imam-hatip schools there is no special equipment. Furthermore, statistics show that "the majority of Imam-hatip high schools and their dormitories were constructed and furnished through donations from conservative segments of society. Sixty-five percent of Imam-hatip high schools and approximately half of the dormitories have been built without state assistance" (TESEV 2004: 43). Even in their highest populated year, with around a half of million students, the budget of the IHLs was 4% of the budget of the Ministry of National Education. This figure surpassed 4% only twice, in 1986 and 1988, by 6.2 and 6.3% respectively (Ozcan 2010: 124. See Appendix D).

President Sezer mentions the Unification of Education Law and how it is important to shape the new ideology of the Republic and raise Turkish society above the level of contemporary civilizations. As the first of eight Reform Laws, which were implemented by Atatürk, it is protected by Article 174 of the Constitution. However, President Sezer violated the second of the Reform Laws under the same Article in the Constitution—Act No. 671 of 25 November 1341 (1925) on the Wearing of Hats. According to this law, every state official should wear a hat. Indeed, the Wearing of Hats law has the same aim as the Unification of Education Law, namely, “to raise Turkish society above the level of contemporary civilization and to safeguard the secular character of the Republic” as expressed in Constitution. However, President Sezer did not see any objection to not implementing it himself.

As we see in the hat law, there are some issues in Turkish politics that continue under the principle of “Don’t ask, don’t tell.” There are always some restrictions on human rights because of Turkey’s “special conditions,” which are so subjective that they change from person to person. Religious education is one of these special conditions of Turkey. It cannot be left to individuals; therefore, it should be controlled by the state.

#### *Higher Education Board, YOK*

In one of his other reasons, President Sezer found the IHL bill unconstitutional because deciding on the coefficient factor is a duty of YOK, not the government, as he asserted in his fourth category. Previous court decisions also leaned this way. When YOK implemented the coefficient factor in 1999, many students filed lawsuits against YOK, but all of them failed, since the courts decided that YOK was the only institution that could decide on the effect of the coefficient factor.

The Council of State, the highest administrative court in Turkey, confirmed YOK’s authority on the size of the coefficient factor several times. In the first lawsuit against the use of a coefficient factor in 1998, the Council of State initially rejected the demand for a stay of implementation, later judging that the “No.1739 Basic Law of National Education ... states that how graduates of secondary education enter higher education institutions is decided by YOK in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education” on 04/04/2000 (Council of State. 8. Chamber, App. No. 1998/4807, D. No. 2000/2522).

On another occasion, in 2000, an IHL graduate, Sinan KAYNAR, filed a lawsuit against YOK. The outcome was the same. The Council of State denied a stay of implementation, later finding on 02/11/2002 that YOK was within its rights (Council of State, 8. Chamber, App. No. 2000/4819, D. No. 2002/893). The student also lost the appeal in a plenary session of the same court on 12/09/2004 (Council of State, Plenary Session of the Chambers for Administrative Case, App. No. 2002/556, D. No. 2004/1966).

Once more, another vocational high school student who took the university exam in 2001 lost a lawsuit on 12/23/2002 (Council of State, 8. Chamber, App. No. 2001/3391, D. No. 2002/6267), as well as an appeal on 12/09/2004 (Council of State, Plenary Session of the Chambers for Administrative Case, App. No. 2003/869, D. No. 2004/1969) for the same reasons.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) also found no violation of educational rights because of the implementation of a different coefficient factor for vocational high school graduates in its partial decision on 05/12/2009 related to the applications of two Turkish students. ECHR, joining the two applications, ruled on 02/15/2011 that the only violation of Article 6.1 was that the Turkish trials took more than a reasonable time to rule on the issue (ECHR, *Akat and Kaynar vs. Turkey*, App. No 3470/04 and App. No. 2399/06).

#### *Ministry of National Education, MEB*

In the early years of its governance, the AKP looked for other legal ways to allow IHL graduates to have an equal chance on the university entrance exams. First, IHL graduates failed in the judicial system regarding the injustice of the differing coefficient factors. Second, President Sezer vetoed the YOK bill, and the AKP did not bring the bill to Parliament again in 2004.

At the end of 2005, eighteen months after the education bill veto, the AKP government tried a third way to eliminate the coefficient factor. The Ministry of National Education released an official notice (*yonetmelik*) on 12/14/2005 for distance high school education. As mentioned above, a similar notice in 1999 prevented IHL students from transferring to general high schools or distance high school education programs. With this new notice, however, IHL students gained the right to transfer to a distance education high school program even if they had already graduated. They were to be able to transfer all course credits that were comparable to courses offered by a general high school. Since IHL curriculum covered all general high school curricula, by transferring their credits, these students would need to take few, if any, more additional

credits; thus they would earn distance education high school diplomas with little more effort and would be able to take the university entrance exam with the same coefficient factor as other general high school students.

However, the happiness of IHL students did not last long. YOK immediately sued the MEB, demanding a stay of implementation and annulment of the notice, alleging that “this notice tries to eliminate the coefficient factor that has been implemented since 1999.” The Council of State then ordered a stay of implementation on 02/07/2006 (Council of State, 8. Chamber, App. No. 2005/6384, D. No. 2005/6384).

After this court order, the Ministry decided, nonetheless, to accept applications sent prior to the court’s order date, since they were considered as vested rights. Nevertheless, YOK protested this decision also. On 06/07/2006, the Council of State stayed implementation of the new regulation, stating that these applicants did not have any vested rights, since the court’s order covered the publication and implementation of this notice (Council of State, 8. Chamber, App. No. 2006/1249, D. No. 2006/1249). The MEB objected to this decision, but lost its case to YOK (Council of State, Plenary Session of the Chambers for Administrative Case, App. No. 2006/979) and later (06/05/2007) the entire lawsuit (Council of State, 8. Chamber, App. No. 2006/1249, D. No. 2007/3449).

On 07 March 2007, the court finalized the decision on the first case, finding for YOK and annulling MEB’s notice allowing IHL students to acquire distance education diplomas (Council of State, 8. Chamber, App. No. 2005/6384, Dec. No. 2007/1259).

### *Judicial System*

The AKP government did not pass the YOK limitations until the end of 2007. However, when Abdullah Gul became president in 2007 and appointed a new president, Yusuf Ziya Ozcan, of YOK on 12/11/2007, along with some new executive board members one by one, the new administration clearly wanted to make the coefficient factor equal for every student.

Then the same court decided that this was not solely a decision for YOK to make. YOK had initiated the different coefficient factors in 1999 on its own, but it did not have the power to revoke its own decision. When YOK stopped requiring different coefficient factors on 21 July 2009, the Council of State on 11/20/2009 ordered a stay of implementation of the new ruling for one plaintiff and on 12/01/2010 for another plaintiff (Council of State, 8. Chamber, App. No.

2009/8626; and App. No. 2009/6890. For final decision D. No. 2011/1288 on 03/04/2011; and D. No. 2011/4384 on 10/05/2011. The court decided that “there is no ground for a decision,” since YOK already changed the challenged grounds). YOK also lost its challenge on 12/10/2009 (Council of State, Plenary Session of the Chambers for Administrative Case, App. No. 2009/1005; and App. No. 2010/160).

A secret General Staff Intelligence Department report on 21 August 2009 shows that the military did not lose interest in the imam-hatip issue; it was, indeed, closely following the coefficient decisions of the new YOK at that time. The report stated, “The coefficient obstacle before IHL graduates is being removed by the new regulation, so that their entrance into higher education institutions has become more just. Therefore, it is likely that conservative people will have more places in the public sector” (*Zaman* 12/03/2009).

After failing to win the initial lawsuits, then-YOK President Yusuf Ziya Ozcan stated in his press release in December 2009, “We have contingency plans already drawn up, including options B, C, D, and E on the table” (*Todays Zaman* 12/12/2009). As a part of its “Plan B,” YOK reduced the effect of the coefficient factor significantly by 0.13 for vocational schools to 0.15 for general high schools on 17 December 2009. Immediately thereafter, two lawsuits were opened against YOK. The Council of State on 10/27/2010 ordered a stay of implementation for these new coefficient factors, since they were “aiming to make the previous stay of implementation ineffective” (Council of State, 8. Chamber, App. No. 2010/1 and App. No. 2010/2. The final decision D. No. 2011/942 came on 02/16/2011. The court decided that “there is no ground for a decision” since YOK had already changed the challenged grounds). YOK also lost its protest on 02/18/2010 (Council of State, Plenary Session of the Chambers for Administrative Cases, App. No. 2010/148).

Afterwards, YOK moved on to its Plan C on 17 March 2010, when it increased the effect of the coefficient factor a little more than in its previous decision, to 0.12 for vocational high school graduates and 0.15 for all other high school graduates. This time the Council of State did not order a stay of implementation, finding YOK’s decision correct on 16 April 2010 (Council of State, 8. Chamber, App. No. 2010/2304).

Since its first implementation in 1999, in the twelfth university entrance exam, IHL students along with other vocational high school students would have the opportunity to take a fairer exam, although the effect of the coefficient factor was still not completely eliminated,

since over one and half million students were taking this exam and even very late decimals were important to estimate students' entrance scores to universities.

Finally, on 30 November 2011, just ten days before YOK President Yusuf Ziya Ozcan's term ended, YOK removed all differences based on the coefficient factor. Two CHP members of Parliament brought this decision to the court also (*Hurriyet* 20/01/2012). However, in contrast to the previous cases, this time CHP preferred to stay silent and did not make this lawsuit an official party matter. As of 1 January 2013, there was no final decision, but it seemed likely that the court would accept YOK's decision this time.

In the 2012 university entrance exam, the fourteenth since its first implementation in 1999, IHL students had an equal chance with general high school students for entrance into a university.

This summary highlights the difficulty in explaining the development of the relationship between religion and the state between 2002 and 2012 based on consideration of religious education. The same state institutions behaved in a totally erratic and inconsistent way in a relatively short time period; although it appears that the policy was relatively consistent before that period as I mentioned in its historical process concerning state-taught religion. In the early years of the Republic between 1923 and 1950, the Turkish state had a negative view for the religion. The early rulers of the Turkish state deduced that Islam was the main reason for the regression of the Ottomans. They wanted to erase the religion to catch the level of contemporary civilizations. After the transition to multi-party democracy, this negative tendency was broken to secure conservative votes. The state-religion relations had gradually consolidated between 1950 and 1997 with few exceptions. The 28 February 1997 MGK recommendations almost totally ruined this consolidation between 1997 and 2002. Once again, between 2002 and 2012, this relationship has gradually consolidated. However, this period was different than the previous periods on that the state institutions was not agree on the same state policy. They were a constant struggle. Hence it is important to understand the notion of the state in Turkey.

#### *The State: What is it?*

Since the time of the Ottomans, Turkish people have referred to the state as a source of power; they have even coined the word "father-state," (*devlet-baba*), a term emphasizing that the state protects and feeds its people as would the father in a family. Even today the Turkish news



organizations use this term as in “The father-state helps flood victims,” “The father-state offers communication skills for new couples,” “Traffic victim waits for help from the father-state,” “The father-state protects rape victim’s unwanted child.” In politics, when then-PM Turgut Ozal specified, “The state is not a father,” he lost voters to his rivals (Taha Akyol, *Hurriyet*, 04/10/2012). Even female students who are not accepted on university campuses because they are wearing headscarves have carried banners reading “Father-state send me to school.”

In sociology, *state* is defined as a political entity using legitimate power through certain established institutions on a defined territory. Max Weber defined *state* in his *Politics as a Vocation* as an entity having the right to use physical force in a particular territory. According to him,

A state is human community that [successfully] claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory. Note that ‘territory’ is one of the characteristics of the state. Specifically, at the present time, the right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it. The state is considered the sole source of the ‘right’ to use violence. Hence, ‘politics’ for us means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state (Weber 1991 [1948]: 78, and see Weber ? : 156).

Weber also offers the example of a father's power over his children for his definition of the state:

The modern state possesses the following primary formal characteristics: an administrative and judicial authority subject to statutory change, and to which the organized corporate activity of the administrative staff, also subject to statutory change, is oriented. This system of authority claims validity not only for the members of the state, most of whom have obtained membership by birth, but also to a large extent for all conduct occurring within the area of its jurisdiction; it is thus a compulsory association with a territorial basis. In addition, the use of force today is regarded as legitimate only insofar as it is either permitted by the state or prescribed by it. Thus, it leaves to the father the right to punish his children, which is a survival of the once independent authority of the head of the household to use force even to the extent of exercising the power of life and death over children and slaves. This claim of the modern state to monopolize the use of force is a distinguished mark as essential to it as its aspect of compulsory jurisdiction and of continuous organization (Weber 1978 [1962]: 122).

Michael Mann derives his definition of *state* from Weber in his enormous series titled *The Sources of Social Power*. According to him, “The state is a differentiated set of institutions and personnel embodying centrality, in the sense that political relations radiate outward to cover a territorially demarcated area, over which it claims a monopoly of abiding and permanent rule-

making, backed up by physical violence” (Mann 2003 [1986]: 37). In Erik Olin Wright’s definition, “the state is the cluster of institutions, more or less coherently organized, which imposes binding rules and regulations over a territory” (Wright ? : 118-119).

In other words, a state should have a territory, established and differentiated institutions, and legitimate power. However, using the power to establish binding rules brings the interests of different groups to the attention of the state. As Weber notes, in this power struggle politicians are “never the sole determining figures in the mechanism of the political power struggle” (Weber 1991: p. 158). Michael Mann defines *power* as “the capacity to get others to do things that they would otherwise not do”; he categorizes four modalities of power to define involved endeavors: ideological power, economic power, military power, and political power. In political power, he refers to state power, excluding it from all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), social movements, and corporations, since state power is geographically bounded within its jurisdiction, while other elements do not have this boundary. In this sense, states cover smaller areas than ideologies, economies, or military striking power.

However, exercise of political power can be carried out in different ways. A state could have despotic or infrastructural powers. In *despotic power*, state elites are enabled to make arbitrary decisions without consulting civic society, or they may keep civic society’s concerns outside the decision mechanism. In *infrastructural power*, a state, whether despotic or democratic, can penetrate society and implement political decisions according to its concerns. In this policy-making process, a modern state would take different forms according to the political issues of interest and those lobbying for them (Mann 2003: 5-14).

In summary, people frequently talk about the state as a monolithic entity; in fact, the state consists of different organs with different agendas and styles of control. As a result, when we talk about the relationship between the state and religion, we should not understand *state* as synonymous with *government*; at the same time, we should not think that laws and their interpretation and implementation are the result of governmental actions alone. Too often people associate the government with the entire state. But a government is not always the most powerful decision-making body in a country, nor does it act in a vacuum; a state’s decisions can also arise from the influence of civil society, which consists of the entire ruling class and its institutions. Even though differences are present from country to country, judicial bodies, universities, the military, the media, the affluent class, large national and international companies, and sometimes

religious leaders and artists help compose the state ideology and affect its actions along with the government.

Then another question arises: What is the limit of this influence in a democratic system? Moreover, what is democracy and how is it to be achieved? Linz and Stepan define the transition to democracy in the following passage (Linz and Stepan 1996: 3):

A democratic transition is complete when sufficient agreement has been reached about political procedures to produce an elected government, when a government comes to power that is the direct result of a free and popular vote, when this government *de facto* has the authority to generate new policies, and when the executive, legislative and judicial power generated by the new democracy does not have to share power with other bodies *de jure*.

According to Linz and Stepan, a country is democratically consolidated when democracy becomes “the only game in town.” When this happens, it means that no significant political groups seriously attempt to overthrow the democratic regime; all the actors in the polity become habituated to the fact that political conflict will be resolved according to established norms; even in crises, most people believe that any further political change must emerge from the parameters of democratic formulas (Linz and Stepan 1996: 5).

In this formula, there is no way for an undemocratic approach to change a policy. But Turkish politics have not been beyond concern, as we saw in the fears expressed by the financial markets in the 2004 education bill. As the *New York Times* reported, “When the education reform was passed in May, Turkish financial markets dropped on fears that the military might intervene to defend the secular order” (*New York Times*, 06/06/2004).

Turkish politics lived the same fears during 2007 presidential elections. In the first night of the president elections voted in Parliament on 27 April 2007, the General Staff released a statement about presidential elections saying, “it should not be forgotten that the Turkish armed forces are a side in this debate and are a staunch defender of secularism ... the Turkish armed forces are against those debates ... and will display its position and attitudes when it becomes necessary. No one should doubt that.” Because this statement was published on Turkish General Staff’s official webpage, it was called the e-memorandum (*Todays Zaman* 04/28/2007).

This e-memorandum mostly did not find expected public or even elite support; on the contrary, it might have helped to increase the AKP’s public support for incoming elections that summer. Regardless of its effects, this e-memorandum tried to interfere in Turkish democracy

and stayed on the Turkish Army Forces' webpage until August 2011 (see *Today's Zaman* 12/29/2011).

Even though they were under democratic system, some high court decisions could be examined according to this consolidated democracy principle since some of them sound more like political decisions during the examined time period, 2002-2012. The Council of State's early decisions were highlighting YOK's autonomy on coefficient factor; however, when YOK, under its new administration, wanted to remove it, the Council of State ruled against its previous decisions. Afterwards, PM Erdogan criticized, "This decision shows the inner contradiction of the court. This is totally an ideological decision. I personally have difficulty understanding it" (*Hurriyet Daily News* 11/27/2009).

The imam-hatip issue was one of the prominent issues that almost caused the disbanding of the AKP in 2008. The Chief Public Prosecutor opened a case against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) demanding dissolving the party and disbanding its party leaders from politics with an allegation that this party became a hotbed of activities against the principle of secularism. The Chief Public Prosecutor mentioned the imam-hatip issue dozens of times in his lawsuit petition. The Constitutional Court was only one vote short to dissolve the AKP. Six of eleven judges of the court were in favor of dissolving the party; four of them demanded financial sanctions; only one judge, the president of the court Hasim Kilic, was in favor of rejecting the case. A very recent change under the EU amendments in the Constitution before this lawsuit, that increased vote number from six to seven for closing a political party, saved AKP's life unintentionally. In this change on 17 October 2001, Article 149 of the Constitution was amended as:

The Constitutional Court shall convene with its president and ten members, and shall take decisions by absolute majority. Decision of annulment of Constitutional amendments and closure in the cases of the political parties shall be taken by three-fifths majority.

The Constitutional Court ruled financial sanctions by stripping half of annual state assistance of the AKP in 2008. The Constitutional Court's decision was based on secularism principle;

Having assessed the evidence put forward, the Court found that activities contravening Article 68.4<sup>19</sup> of the Constitution had been carried out intensely and in a determined manner by the leader and members of the defendant party and it had become a center for such activities. Although the Court accepted that there was social demand for the removal of the headscarf ban in universities, the age restrictions concerning the Quran courses, and the coefficient limitation applied to Religious Vocational High Schools [IHL], it found that the defendant party did not carry out its political struggle on these issues in line with the choice crystallized in the concrete rules of the Constitution. These problems were transformed into the basic problems of politics, to a degree that would create tensions and divisions within society. The religious sensitivities of the society were being exploited for the blatant pursuit of political gain, and it had become harder for the fundamental economic, social, and cultural problems of the society to rise to the forefront of the political agenda. The President, Mr H. Kiliç expressed a dissenting opinion on this point” (Constitutional Court App. No. 2008/1 D. N. 2008/2).

With this ruling the Constitutional Court officially declared that the AKP leaders participated in intense and determined activities that were undermining democratic and secular principles of the Republic of Turkey and this party became a center for these activities. In its official English summary section, while expressing there is a social demand, the Constitutional Court counts these harmful activities one by one, “the removal of the headscarf ban in universities, the age restrictions concerning the Quran courses, and the coefficient limitation applied to Religious Vocational High Schools [IHLs].”

All of the harmful activities mentioned about the AKP were related to education, especially religious education. The Constitutional Court was accepting that there was a social demand for religious education related to Quran courses and IHLs; however, responding to these public demands as a ruling party could not be acceptable. When the President of the Constitutional Court Hasim Kiliç read the decision of the AKP case on 30 July 2008 he said, "There is no verdict on closure because the seven votes required by the Constitution for closure were not reached." Even though he was the only judge dissenting the verdict, by mentioning financial sanctions ruled by all other court members, he emphasized "However, in this ruling, a

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<sup>19</sup> III. Provisions Relating to Political Parties. A. Forming Parties, Membership and Withdrawal From Membership in a Party

ARTICLE 68. Fourth paragraph. “The statutes and programs, as well as the activities of political parties shall not be in conflict with the independence of the state, its indivisible integrity with its territory and nation, human rights, the principles of equality and rule of law, sovereignty of the nation, the principles of the democratic and secular republic; they shall not aim to protect or establish class or group dictatorship or dictatorship of any kind, nor shall they incite citizens to crime.”

warning, *a serious warning*, has been issued to the party, and I hope this conclusion will be evaluated and actions will be taken accordingly" (*BBC News* 07/31/2008. *Hurriyet* 07/31/2008. Most English translations lost the repeating of the word “warning” two times, and so, judge Kilic’s emphasis on it).

In other words, the Constitutional Court was seriously warning the ruling AKP (which won national elections in 2002 by 34%, municipal elections in 2004 by 42%, and national elections in 2007 by 47%) to ignore elector and more generally public demands on religion; otherwise, suffer its consequences, including dissolving the party.

In its early years of the government, the AKP learned a new political theory. Even if there was a public demand, and moreover if this demand was so strong and widespread that would be interpreted as a social consensus, making totally legal changes needs approval of another consensus: institutional consensus.

#### *Social Consensus vs. Institutional Consensus*

*To live, like a tree, single and free,  
And like a forest, in brotherhood.*  
(Nazim Hikmet Ran)

Whenever problems related to headscarf banning in universities and religious education were discussed in politics, there was a magic word to solve these problems: *social consensus*. For instance, one of the former PMs and then-deputy of PM, Mesut Yilmaz, in 2002, was saying the headscarf issue would be solved legally only after a broad social consensus, months before the AKP came to rule (*Hurriyet* 04/29/2002). Seventy percent of Turkish women were wearing headscarves but, for some reason, Turkish politics did not find a social consensus to lift headscarf banning in universities and was still demanding a broad social consensus.

The AKP leaders referred to social consensus countless times to solve headscarf banning and religious education issues (see such as, *Hurriyet Daily News* 3/10/2002; 6/25/2002; 10/21/2002; 11/08/2002; 11/24/2002; 10/15/2003). When the AKP got majority in the Parliament in 2002, it interpreted it as one of the signs of social consensus.

The first legal attempt to solve one of these problems was the education bill that would reduce the effects of the coefficient factor in favor of IHLs. As I mentioned previously, this bill first came to intention in September and October 2003 and later between April and June in 2004.

In that time, just before this bill was voted in the Parliament, the General Staff stated that the military is against this bill in May 2004. PM Erdogan criticized that the General Staff has no business becoming involved in political decision-making and clarified, “A social consensus is not a consensus between institutions but of the nation” (*Hurriyet Daily News* 05/11/2004; 05/16/2004).

In his next day’s column, Mehmet Barlas from Sabah newspaper was reminding PM Erdogan of the importance of institutional consensus in Turkish politics “‘Nation’ brings to power, but ‘Institutions’ end power!..” (Barlas, *Sabah*, 05/12/2004).

Actually, two weeks before YOK and the General Staff expressed their concerns about the coefficient factor, the President of the Constitutional Court, Mustafa Bumin, stated that removing headscarf banning in universities is unconstitutional and any attempt to remove it by changing laws or the constitution would return from the Constitutional Court in his speech for the 42<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the court. PM Erdogan was listening to the speech before him. After the speech, PM Erdogan stated to press when it was asked his opinions about the speech:

I was claiming a theory before 2002 elections; it was social consensus. Today, I am more clearly state that there is a social consensus and also consensus of the Parliament and other institutions. It seems that social consensus and institutional consensus are not running together (*Hurriyet* 04/25/2005; see for more details Ergul 2005; Hale and Ozbudun 2010: 72).

The AKP learned the importance of institutional consensus in a hard way. Even its first week in the Parliament, Turkish politicians and the media were talking about how “being in power and being able to implementing this power are totally different” by referring the AKP government (see *Hurriyet* 11/14/2002). This difference showed its results during the early attempts on religious education. The AKP was in power and had all legal rights but this power was not enough to reduce effects on the coefficient factor in IHLs.

Discussions on institutional consensus had gone on for a long time but gradually faded while power of institutions shrunk against the government. The concept of social consensus has not lost its popularity but proved that it was an ambiguous and vague term. Every side of discussants referred to his/her opinions as representing the society.

The AKP believed that it represented a social demand on religious education. On the other hand, its opponents accused the AKP of behaving in majoritarianism instead of pluralistic democracy. In the early years of the AKP, there was a strong argument that participation in 2002 elections was limited; turnout was just over 79%. Because of 10% threshold in elections, only

two parties entered the Parliament. Therefore, the AKP's 34% vote did not represent the whole society although the AKP had overwhelming majority in the Parliament. Making legal changes on headscarf banning in universities and religious education while relying upon the majority in the Parliament would miss social consensus.

In 2007 elections, the turnout was over 85%. The AKP raised its votes to 47% but its seats retreated to 341 since a third party passed 10% national threshold. Secularist CHP got 112 seats with 21%. Nationalist MHP got 71 seats with 14%. Independent candidates won 26 seats with 5%. Even though 10% national threshold was still high and could have some critics, nobody could question that this Parliament did not represent the society since over 85% of voters participated in the elections and around 87% of votes were presented in the Parliament, among 550 parliament members.

Even this kind of high representation did not stop arguments on majoritarianism, majoritarian imposition, tyranny of the majority, pluralistic democracy, social consensus, and giving some elected leader examples such as Hitler, Milosevic, and Ahmadinejad.

In February 2008, the AKP with help of the MHP and some independent parliament members (MP) decided to lift headscarf banning in universities by making a constitutional amendment. Article 1 of Law no. 5735 added the phrase "in using all forms of public service" following the phrase "in all their procedures" in Article 10.4 of the Constitution which would have become "State organs and administrative authorities shall act in compliance with the principle of equality before the law in all their procedures and in using all forms of public service." Article 2 of Law no. 5735 added the following paragraph as the seventh paragraph to Article 42 of the Constitution "No one shall be deprived of the right to higher education for any reason not explicitly written in the law. Limitations on the exercise of this right shall be determined by the law."

411 MPs voted 'yes' versus 103 'no' out of 550 MPs on 09 February 2008. The next day, the headline of a top-selling newspaper, *Hurriyet* (Liberty), was "411 HANDS RAISED TO CHAOS" (*Hurriyet* 02/10/2008). The chief editor of the newspaper was expressing his fears on "tyranny of the majority" in his column (Ozkok, *Hurriyet*, 02/13/2008). The next month, in her live TV program, a famous movie star questioned how vulgar people brought the AKP to power and how her vote would be considered equal to the vote of shepherd on a mountain (*Hurriyet* 03/28/2008).



In that environment, the Constitutional Court was an assurance for secularists and the court annulled the constitutional amendment to lift the headscarf ban in universities on June 5, 2008. The Court stated,

Under Article 148 of the Constitution, constitutional amendments can be examined and reviewed only as to their form. The review of constitutional amendments is restricted to assessment of whether the requisite majorities were obtained for the proposal and in the ballot, and whether the prohibition on debates under urgent procedure was observed. This provision bestows no competence on the Constitutional Court to review the constitutionality of constitutional amendments as regards their substance.

In other words, the court officially accepted that it had no legal right to examine this bill's substance. However, for the sake of secularism the court ruled beyond its power,

Article 4 of the Constitution prohibits the proposal of amendments to the first three. Parliament therefore had no power to propose such an amendment. The Court accordingly decided that it was within its jurisdiction to examine whether a constitutional amendment directly or indirectly changed the irrevocable provisions of the Constitution. President Mr H. Kiliç and Justice Mr S. Adali expressed dissenting opinions on this point, on the ground that the Constitution did not allow the Constitutional Court to review constitutional amendments with regard to their substance and such a decision can not be made without substantive review.

In summary,

The Court gave a ruling as to substance, stating that the aim of the legislation was revealed both in the reasoning of the law and during parliamentary debate on the lifting of the ban on wearing the headscarf at universities. The Court reiterated that the prohibition on the wearing of the headscarf at universities was found legitimate by the European Court of Human Rights in *Leyla Sahin* in order to protect the rights of others in a Muslim majority country. The Court therefore ruled that lifting the ban on wearing the headscarf at universities is contrary to principle of secularism, and that the amendments in Articles 10 and 42 of the Constitution indirectly amended Article 2<sup>20</sup>, which is irrevocable. Therefore, Law no. 5735 is out of line with Articles 4 and 148 of the Constitution. The Constitutional Court overturned the contested provisions of Law no. 5735. President Mr. H. Kiliç and Justice Mr. S. Adali expressed dissenting opinions on this point, to the effect that the amendments were not contrary to the principle of secularism (Constitutional Court, App. No. 2008/16 D. No. 2008/116).

The next month, as I mentioned before, after the headscarf amendment in Parliament, the Chief Public Prosecutor opened a case against the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP),

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<sup>20</sup> ARTICLE 2. "The Republic of Turkey is a democratic, secular and social state governed by the rule of law; bearing in mind the concepts of public peace, national solidarity and justice; respecting human rights; loyal to the nationalism of Atatürk, and based on the fundamental tenets set forth in the Preamble."

demanding the dissolution of the party and disbandment of its party leaders from politics in 2008. The Constitutional Court ruled financial sanctions because of violating the secularism principle on the issues of “the headscarf ban in universities, the age restrictions concerning the Quran courses, and the coefficient limitation applied to IHLs.”

The AKP government always condemned the Council of State’s decisions on the coefficient factor and the Constitutional Court’s decisions on the headscarf amendment and presidential elections in 2007. However, these condemnations did not change anything since the AKP did not have any power on the judiciary, especially on the higher courts.

From time to time, independence of courts is among debated issues in Turkey. However, neutrality of courts has not found the same interest as much as independence of the court system. One columnist in *Milliyet* newspaper, Taha Akyol brought attention to this issue by comparing *Milliyet* newspaper’s coverage on independence and neutrality of courts. News related to independence of courts appeared 333 times while neutrality of courts appeared only twenty times between 1997 and 1999. This gap has been reducing lately: ten years later, between 2007 and 2009, these numbers changed to 113 and 68 respectively. Mr. Akyol continued this examination on inauguration speeches of the presidents of the Supreme Court of Appeals at the beginning of legal years between 1969 and 2007 by omitting the term of judge Sami Selcuk between 1999 and 2002. This nearly forty years term revealed that these presidents used independence of courts 436 times but neutrality of courts only 49 times. Judge Sami Selcuk was an exception and mentioned neutrality of courts 83 times in his three years term, 1999-2002 (Akyol, *Milliyet*, 01/13/2010).

In 2010, the AKP brought several constitutional amendments to Parliament including an increase for members of the Constitutional Court and the High Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK), which oversees judicial appointments. In this amendment, the members of the Constitutional Court increased from eleven to seventeen and Parliament had a right to elect three of them; the rest were appointed by the President as happened before.

Although judges have tenure in the Turkish judicial system, HSYK controls the careers of judges and prosecutors through appointments, transfers, promotions, and discipline penalties. The amendments increased members of HSYK from seven to twenty two. Ten members of HSYK were chosen by votes of all judges and prosecutors, approximately 12,000, at the national level. The other ten members are appointed by the President, the Court of Appeals, the Council

of State, and the Justice Academy. The remaining two members were the minister and the under secretary of justice.

Supporters of the bill welcomed the changes since in the previous system the Council of State and the Supreme Court of Appeals were choosing five members of HSYK. In the meantime, HSYK was appointing all members of the Supreme Court of Appeals and three out of every four members of the Council of the State. That was causing an unbroken cycle in the higher court system where diverse ideas could not find a place in higher judicial system. Therefore, the bill was suggesting a more diverse and neutral ground.

Opponents of the bill were arguing in opposition that the government increases its influence on the judiciary system. Other parties in Parliament did not support these amendments and highly criticized the intention of the AKP.

Parliament passed the amendments package with only the AKP's support in 2010. The package got 336 votes, below the two-thirds majority to pass directly but enough to send to a public vote after the President's sign. The amendment package went to public vote on September 12, 2010, in the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the September 12, 1980 military coup. The government had a few more selling points for the amendment package that included removing judicial immunity for the leaders and top officials of the September 12, 1980 coup as well as those civil and military bureaucrats serving under the military regime: removing "the decisions of the Supreme Military Council are outside the scope of judicial review," limiting military courts' scope to military related issues, and opening other cases to civil courts including coup attempts.

The amendment package got 58% of the vote with 74% participation threshold and it was constitutionalized. In result, the composition, powers, and structure of higher courts were changed considerably by the constitutional amendments in 2010. After that point, the AKP would be both "in power" and "able to use this power." In 2011 elections, the AKP increased its votes to almost 50% and solidified its power by being the first party that increased its votes during three consecutive elections in Turkey. After these developments, the YOK removed the negative effect of coefficient factor for IHLs on November 30, 2011. The Council of State did not rule stay of implementation of the decree for plaintiffs and was still examining the changes as January 01, 2013. In 2012, the government re-opened closed middle-level sections of IHLs (known as 4+4+4) that were closed during the February 28 process. Enrolled students to IHLs started to increase again which gave the first impressions that IHLs would return to their old days

as before 1997. The government did not make any legal changes for the headscarf ban in universities, but the headscarf ban in universities disappeared de facto.

As a consequence, some scholars and commentators interpreted these changes as the erosion of the secularism principle. However, these changes indicate more friendly interpretation and implementation of the secularism principle rather than an alarming future. Since the early Republic, the Turkish state embraced an assertive, Jacobin, authoritarian, and French type of secularism; however, this secularism has evolved to libertarian and American types of passive secularism under the AKP government since 2002 (see Kuru 2013). Perception of religion as a threat for the state is diminishing and religion is being accepted as a part of social reality that is also a part of the state. In that way, the state is relieved from seeing a component of its entity as a threat to other components.

As with every social change, this change was also slow and unpleasant. In a general rule, upper classes are open to new ideas and lead social changes. On the other hand, lower classes are more inclined to resist the change. However, in the Turkish case, this was the opposite for changes in the secularism principle. There was a social pressure to change the understanding of secularism, but upper classes were resisting it. This resistance made the change harder than other social changes. I mentioned Bourdieu's cultural capital as a possible reason for resisting this change previously. Georg Simmel's upper class taste would give some insight for this resistance also. Simmel noted that fashion is a product of class distinction and a way emphasizing separation of classes.

Social forms, apparel, aesthetic judgment, the whole style of human expression, are constantly transformed by fashion, in such a way, however, that fashion-i.e., the latest fashion-in all these things affects only the upper classes. Just as soon as the lower classes begin to copy their style, thereby crossing the line of demarcation the upper classes have drawn and destroying the uniformity of their coherence, the upper classes turn away from this style and adopt a new one, which in its turn differentiates them from the masses; and thus the game goes merrily on. Naturally the lower classes look and strive towards the upper, and they encounter the least resistance in those fields which are subject to the whims of fashion; for it is here that mere external imitation is most readily applied. The same process is at work as between the different sets within the upper classes, although it is not always as visible here as it is, for example, between mistress and maid. Indeed, we may often observe that the more nearly one set has approached another, the more frantic becomes the desire for imitation from below and the seeking for the new from above (Simmel 1957: 545).

Even in fashion, this class distinction is rigid and imitation by lower classes is unacceptable. When demarcation of this line disappears, the upper class looks for new styles. This is an easy way to draw a demarcation line in fashion; change fashion every year and become free from the lower classes. However, what is there to do about other things that the upper class cannot change as easily as fashion and should share the same taste with the lower classes? Or more painfully, what is there to do if the lower classes start to earn the same income as the upper classes and become new upper classes; and then, the previous upper classes should share everything without any demarcation with these new upper classes? These definitely cannot be acceptable to the upper classes. As a quick conclusion, IHLs helped to break this demarcation; then, the graduates of these schools are not welcomed by the upper class.

TESEV reports shows that IHLs increased schooling of female children. Especially before the 1990s, conservative families have an inclination to not send their female children to school after elementary schools. There were several sociological reasons for these decisions including raising them as future housewives, wearing headscarves in adolescence, and so on. IHLs broke this tendency. Most female students would be able to wear their headscarves during their high school education until 1997 without much incident. However, these female students did not want to stop their education after high school while seeing their male peers continue to a university education. Conservative families became more tolerant to their female children's higher education since they became used to it during children's high school education. When the number of veiled students started to increase in universities, it increased reactions of secularists. Veiled students' demands never ended. First, they demanded high school but it did not stop there. Later, they asked for universities, jobs, and participating in leisure activities such as driving expensive cars, eating in expensive places, and shopping in famous brands. Their visibility increased enormously in the upper class lifestyle.

Also one more thing changed; conservative families left their old moderate life style. Naturally, there were conservative families that had high income as much as the upper class previously. However, these families did not participate in the lifestyle of the upper class so they were invisible to the upper class. Their children, especially after university education, did not want to stay inside of their circle but instead have entered the secular upper class's lifestyle circle: in malls, coffee shops, beaches, five star hotels, on planes, visiting European states, having the best education, and going to better schools. This list never stopped. The secular upper

class wanted to treat them as they used to because they still saw them as people from the lower classes, but this treatment started to fail since they were not shepherds on mountains; they knew their civil rights. Also AKP government's power accelerated appearance of conservative life style in the public sphere along with modernization, globalization, and economic, historical, and political conditions. However, this appearance in the secular public sphere does not indicate an increase in religiosity of the Turkish public, just that old housewives' daughters refused to sit at home.

Changing fashion was an easy way to put boundaries between classes but it was not easy to put a boundary between the same income level people. You can upgrade from an economy seat to a business on a plane but still might find a veiled woman next to you. In a capitalist market, every customer has the same value before a clerk. While you try your new season Chanel high-heels, you realize that a veiled woman buys the same pair next to you in the Istinye Park Mall. Fashion changes and these veiled women follow the fashion. A veiled woman likes a cup of Starbucks coffee at Bosphorus while looking at two continents as much as a secular person in the same coffee shops. The beautiful sights of Bosphorus and Istanbul would not be only available for old elites anymore. I gave veiled women examples since they are easier to identify but the same is valid for conservative males.

One of my interviewees, Retired Colonel Ertugrul Oner mentioned how he was feeling when he saw a veiled woman in these sights before, "In the past, when a veiled woman entered a coffee shop while we were sitting there, we were leaving the place if we cannot say anything. Sitting in a public transportation with them [veiled women] was hard for me. However, it seems we are used it now." He mentioned a similar story when he talked about neighborhood pressure in both devout and seculars, "[in the issue of neighborhood pressure] it is not necessary to touch physically or being arrested by police. You can make it with a glance or an attitude. We did it to veiled women once. I said 'they are permitting everybody to enter in here!' [by bullying in a coffee shop] (*onune geleni de buraya aliyorlar*). Girls left the place. If I saw them now, I apologize. It was anger of that time..." (Oner, *personal interview*).

The demarcation intention was one reason among several for secular reactions. Power struggle between center and periphery groups seems a more prominent reason among them. Simmel explains the upper classes' resistance to change with their fear of losing their privileges;

The upper classes, however, were most intensely affected and transformed by new influences, just as the upper branches of a tree are most responsive to the movements of the air. The highest classes, as everyone knows, are the most conservative, and frequently enough they are even archaic. They dread every motion and change, not because they have an antipathy for the contents or because the latter are injurious to them, but simply because it is change and because they regard every modification of the whole, as suspicious and dangerous. No change can bring them additional power, and every change can give them something to fear, but nothing to hope for (Simmel 1957: 555).

The upper classes had a fear of losing their power in the state. This power included both administrative power in the state and economical power by exploiting state opportunities and facilities. Incentive funds of the state would not be available to only a few particular groups anymore. Taking advantage of state funds is ending and those state funds should be shared with new incoming conservatives. It might be wondered how IHLs cause these outcomes. Certainly, simple high school graduates would not cause these outcomes, but IHLs were the first step to these outcomes. The wealthy secular regime wanted to nip these perceived threats in the bud.

If IHL students never pursued their careers in universities and state apparatuses, there would be no harsh precautions on these schools. If the reader remembers one of then-President Sezer's veto reasons for the IHL bill, President Sezer said,

Vocational schools were founded to provide blue-collar workers for the industry sector. Encouraging their graduates to apply to universities instead of fulfilling the mission of their schools [being a blue-collar worker for industries, for example] wastes resources and reduces the educational quality of the universities. For these reasons, this bill does not carry out the principle of 'being appropriate for the common good' that should be the general purpose of every law (TBMM records 06/01/2004).

Sezer was saying as long as you stayed as blue-collar worker, there is no problem but please do not pursue more. Don't try to share administrative and economical power of the state.

During my interviews I felt the tenseness of power struggle sometimes. Several interviewees questioned if I was an IHL graduate. Most of this questioning might be considered a part of general conversation. When IHLs or religious education related questions came up, it would be natural to ask if I was a graduate from one of these schools. However, in one instance, I could not pass without mentioning one of my experiences.

I demanded an interview from one of the city representatives of the Association of Kemalist Thought (ADD) in Istanbul. I talked with the person on the phone and explained that I am doing research on changes between state and religion relations during the last decade. He

accepted my interview demand and I went to his office at the scheduled time. After a few greeting words, just before the interview started, he asked to get to know me more. He already knew my research subject and the university where I am doing my Ph.D. He took a notepad and pencil and started to write down this information and, while writing, he repeated loudly to confirm it. I confirmed that he was right. His second question to get to know me more and in more detail was surprising. He asked me which high school I went to. I replied I went to high school in Istanbul. He repeated the question “*which school?*” He never asked me my undergraduate education or M.A. thesis before or after this question; only about high school. A high school was more than enough to know a person. There was no need for further query. He later demanded to see the interview questions. Long story short, eventually he did not want to participate in the study. I thanked him for his time and left.

When I went outside of the office, I recorded a voice memo of myself posing questions about the reasons of asking a Ph.D. student about his high school without asking any more questions about his education or research. One of the interviewees, Oktay Eksi, MP from CHP, even asked me my elementary school. However, I did not find it strange since he asked my complete educational history without omitting any step.

Why is questioning high school education important? What has been taught in these schools? IHLs are state-run schools. The state decides their curriculum and appoints their teachers. 60% of their curriculum is similar to general high schools while 40% of the curriculum is related to vocational courses such as Quran and Hadith. In other vocational high schools this ratio is the opposite, where courses related to the vocation almost get 70% of the curriculum while 30% of the curriculum is related to general course work (TESEV 2004: 99). That means that IHLs have the least vocational training among all vocational schools. This is also another sign that these students mostly do not have any intention to continue in this field but would like to have a few extra elective courses related to religion.

Secularist people are against IHLs on two bases. First, as was mentioned among President Sezer’s veto and court decisions, it is assumed that IHLs would harm the unification of education reform. Educating children under two types of education, where one is related to religion and the other is totally secular, would cause a clash between these individuals. The other most common argument is that IHLs cause most of the problems related to religion in Turkey



today and form a background for Islamists or, at the least, a background for conservative parties and other Islamist movements.

These fears have some validity but are not a hundred percent correct and include some exaggerations. For instance, an interviewee was relating PM Erdogan's rhetoric talent to his IHL education by saying there is a rhetoric course in these schools. This example suggests that some people have a fear that every graduate of an IHL has a potential for being another Erdogan.

IHLs cause most problems is also a vague argument. IHL graduates' tendency for supporting Islamist and conservative parties would be correct. However, is this a problem by itself? Since mostly conservative families send their children to IHLs, it is likely that these students have conservative tendencies. This tendency is not because of school education but because of family values. In Turkish politics, secular parties have a 20-25% vote capacity. Where do the other 80% of voters get their high school education? Not in IHLs and they are still voting for moderate and conservative parties. Then-President Ahmet Necdet Sezer mentioned IHLs have around 500,000 graduates since their establishment in 1924. Let's assume none of them died and all of them voted for the conservative AKP. The AKP got almost 21,500,000 votes in the 2011 elections. Where did these other 21 million voters graduate?

Other problem allegations are vague also. Nobody has shown a scientific study that IHLs by themselves cause problems. For instance, only one interviewee, Prof. Umit Ozdag, gave a concrete example for IHL related problems:

We, a few social scientists and a psychiatrist, did research on violence in schools, including IHLs. A school is in a wealthy neighborhood; there is no problem. A school is in a poor neighborhood; again there is no serious problem in the issue of violence. A school is between these economical neighborhoods; it is like dynamite waiting to explode. You see these kinds of profiles. A student has a potential for violence if his/her parents were divorced and [the student] failed the class for one year. When we almost completed the study, psychiatry Prof. Erol Goka, who is an important intellectual, suggested to look at IHLs also. We looked at IHLs and saw an enormous violence tendency. We could not believe it. We asked teachers and they confirmed the results. Later, we saw another study on Catholic (rahip) schools. These schools also have this violence tendency. The reason for this violence is that 14, 15, 16 years olds form their sexuality just like how in science-fiction movies a thing changes its shell; this is a similar era for them. While they are forming their sexuality, it has been continuously said that this is a sin, this is immoral, don't do something. These wear them out psychologically without any doubt. This causes the potential for violence. This is not related to Islam. This is that a biological process and a spiritual process come across (Ozdag, *personal interview*)

I couldn't confirm Prof. Umit Ozat's surprise about violence in IHLs in the literature. Prof. Erol Goka and others had a research about violence in the family and in public on behalf of the Prime Ministry Institution of Family Research in 1997 by using a violence scale that was improved by Prof. Goka et al on violence in secondary education. This study was looking at middle schools and showed that violence in imam hatip schools (2,32 units in total) are lower than all other state schools (2,42) including vocational schools (2,50) and girls' schools (2,40). The violence in imam hatip schools was only above private schools (2,20) (GOKA et al. 1998: 169). Later studies also show that violence in IHLs is significantly lower than all other high schools (see Efilci 2008: 219-224).

It would be possible that, when Prof. Ozdag referred to his surprise in finding more violence in IHLs than he expected, he might not have meant this violence was more than in other schools. My point is not questioning Prof. Ozdag's statement's validity but I would like to draw attention to the fact that he was the only person giving a concrete example without any ambiguity that IHLs are sources of some problems.

While class-related power struggle between new and old power groups continued, almost always old power groups continued to lose their strength. In this power game, prominent actors were the government, presidency, military, judiciary, media, universities, and prominent business associations. Before the 2002 elections, all of these actors were composing one group against religious education and headscarf banning.

This group lost its first prominent actor in the 2002 elections. The AKP won elections with an overwhelming majority. The national ten percent threshold helped this victory. The AKP did not need any coalition to build its government. In a coalition government, other coalition members would restrict actions of the government. Being in governmental power alone brought discussions about tyranny.

Indeed, it is hard to claim that there was a tyranny of the majority in the issue of religious education and lifting headscarf banning in Turkey. First of all, the AKP has been in power since 2002 but had not been able to implement its power mostly until the 2010 constitutional amendments that passed by the public vote. Second, Tocqueville (1997 [1899]) was suggesting implementing justice for the sake of the majority of mankind instead of the majority of people to prevent the despotism of the majority. It would be very hard to claim that the majority of mankind is against admitting veiled students in universities or the majority of mankind supports

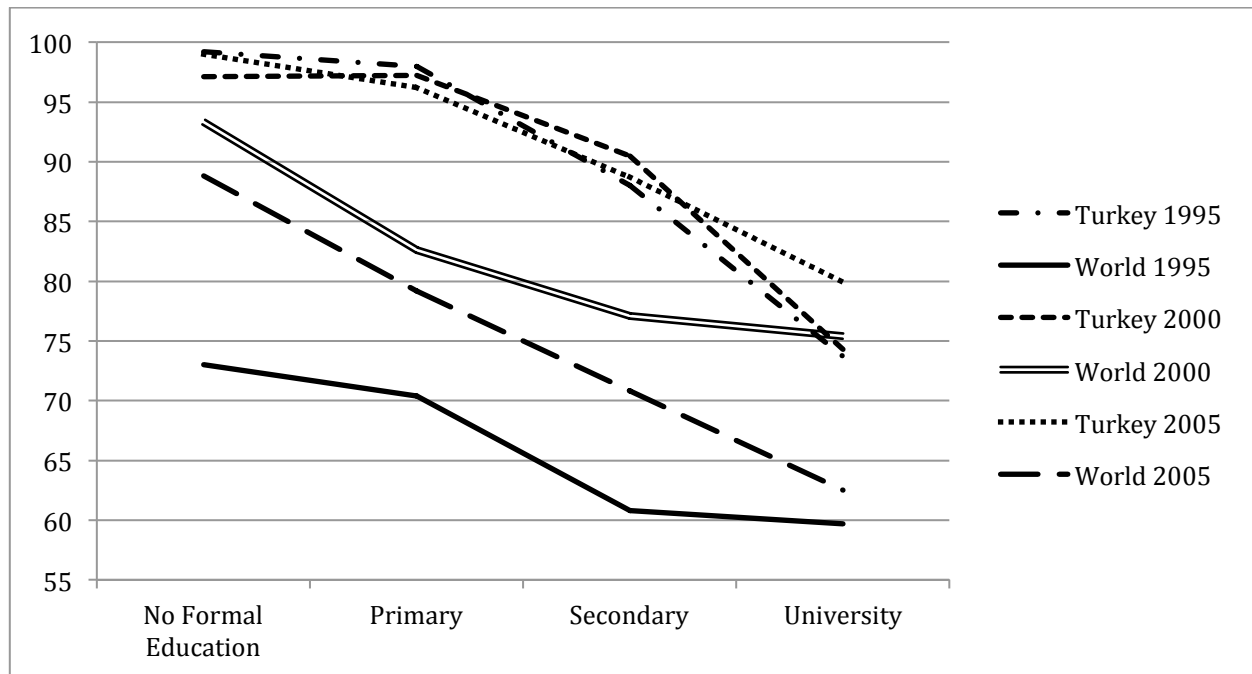
discriminating high school students based on their few elected religious courses during their university application. Third, establishing a tyranny of the majority is very hard in Turkey since Turkey has a multiparty democracy and most governments came to power in coalitions. Coalition partners should share the power of the government. Most coalitions end by deciding to go for early elections. Turkish voters' loyalty to one party is also questionable. For instance, the Democratic Left Party (DSP) got 22% of the votes in the 1999 elections with the highest vote percentage in that election and became the ruling party with the support of two other parties in a coalition government. Just three and half years later in the 2002 elections, DSP's vote was 1%. The majority made a ruling party disappear from Turkish politics in three years. How is it possible to talk about a tyranny of the majority for an electoral vote with constantly changing voter tendency? Ali Carkoglu's study on profiling ideological and economical pragmatism of the Turkish voters in the 2007 Parliament elections reveals that economic pragmatism appears more significant than ideological predispositions, especially for the AKP constituency. According to him, if the AKP government continues its economical success, it would be continuously rewarded at the polls. However, if it fails, then it would be swiftly punished by voters (Carkoglu 2008). Ersin Kalaycioglu also has a similar conclusion for the 2007 elections. Accordingly, voters chose the AKP as a reward for its past economic performance as well as expected economic stability. The AKP voters do not support the AKP on religious grounds any more than supporters of another right-wing party. The economy has played a more important role in the 2007 elections than cultural, primordial, and ideological factors (Kalaycioglu 2010). Fourth, changes in IHLs' coefficient factor or lifting headscarf banning in universities do not mean that every student should go to IHLs and should wear a headscarf. If the majority wanted to implement going to IHLs or wearing headscarves compulsory, these would be considered a tyranny of the majority. Giving options to people who would freely choose is not totalitarianism but a requirement of the democracy.

Supporters of IHLs' coefficient factor and headscarf ban assert that allowing headscarf in universities would cause peer pressure on non-veiled students to being veiled. One of my interview questions was on "neighborhood pressure" a term that was coined by Serif Mardin to express social pressure.

During adolescence, peer groups help socialization of young people and influence their decisions by creating a sub-culture. Young people might feel pressure to adjust their behavior to

align with youth culture. This can be called peer pressure. Secularists argued that since the majority of Turkey is Muslim, allowing the wearing of headscarves would cause this peer pressure among students and they would feel obligated to be veiled. This is a possibility. However, the opposite has the same possibility that veiled female students would feel peer pressure to take off their headscarves. If there is no physical pressure to wear or not to wear a headscarf, this peer pressure should be considered under democratic diversity. Also, secularist arguments missed two other facts of peer pressure in adolescence. First, youth culture challenges adult and social values of society and creates a distinct taste in music and clothes. In this case, the peer pressure does not influence students to wear headscarves but opposite, since it is the practice of the majority. Second, peer pressure does not influence all adolescent segments in society. Peer groups are divided by class and education, and their influence is limited inside of their groups. Also, any peer pressure does not clear away free will—or agency—completely. If a person follows a particular behavior only because of peer pressure, the person leaves it after the group has dissolved or she/he has changed the group.

Last but not least, the opponents of IHL and wearing headscarf in universities are missing another social reality that education and religiosity are inversely correlated. Many studies support that when education increases, religiosity decreases (see Figure 1; Inglehart 1997: 151-159; Norris and Inglehart 2007: 25). If IHL students and veiled students had a tendency for religious fundamentalism or any kind of religiosity that the Turkish state would not welcome, impeding them from entering universities would not solve problems but increase them because of lived disappointments. If the state has a fear of their religiosity, allowing them in higher education is the best way for reducing that religiosity. Through these educations most students leave behind the dogmas that they held at the beginning.



**Figure 1:** Relationship Between Education Level and Importance of Religion

Source: World Values Survey (1995, 2000, 2005).

### C. 1. 2. Religion and Ethics Courses

Teaching of religion in primary and secondary education in public schools has been another prominent issue in the teaching of religion by the state. Private schools have been limited with the same rules as the public schools, except religious minority schools. All changes have affected them the same as public schools.

As we saw in the IHLs issue, the early Republic had a similar attitude against teaching of religion in public schools. When the Republic was proclaimed in 1923, there were courses related to religion in every level of education.

After the acceptance of the Unification of Education Law in 1924, that year all religion related courses were left out from high school curriculums. One-hour religion courses in the middle schools continued for a while but were left out in 1927. In elementary schools, religion courses gradually decreased and eventually disappeared. In 1924 they were two-hours; in 1927 one-hour; in 1929 still one-hour but without any credit; in 1930 half-hour, elective, and only

available for fifth grades. This elective course was left out later, except in village elementary schools until 1939 (See Yucel 1994 [1938]: 139-227; Ocal 2011: 449-456; Ayhan 2004: Akin 2011: 198-204).

Former Education Ministry, 1938-1946, Hasan Ali Yucel published a detailed history of education in the late Ottomans and the early Republic in 1938. In his book, Yucel showed every program change in curriculums and their reasoning. However, he did not explain changes in religion courses. His only explanation for changes in religion courses was that “after proclamation of secularism [in the constitution], religion courses had not been under responsibility of the state anymore.” In fact, secularism was constitutionalized in 1937; but still, there was no explanation for previous changes before secularism was constitutionalized. At the end of the chapter about program changes he gave a clue for changes in the teaching of religion:

Although curriculums might give an impression that they are only a list of courses, in reality, they are an expression of educational understanding in letters. By examining them, you can understand those times’ cultural understanding and how it was wanted to raise young and [future] elites (Yucel 1994 [1938]: 226-227).

In other words, the early Republic did not want to raise a religious generation. Eighty-four years later after former ministry of education Yucel’s writing, PM Erdogan said raising devout generations is a part of his party’s mission, in February 2012 (*Hurriyet Daily News* 02/02/2012).

In the early Republic, the state was not only against the teaching of religion in schools but also in public life. In 1943, an official document from the Ministry of Internal Affairs prohibited distribution of a book which was named *Prophet Muhammad*, “anyway, we are not in favor of creating a religious atmosphere and blooming a religious identity for the young by religious publications” (from Ayhan 2004: 111-112).

Teaching of religion returned back to public schools in 1949 and increased gradually. In 1949, the Ministry of National Education permitted voluntary religious instruction in the fourth and fifth grades of elementary schools two hours weekly. These courses were out of curriculum without any academic credits and outside of regular school hours, which means very early or late hours. Parents or guardians of students should sign a petition to send their children to these classes. In that way, the state was assuming that very few students would participate in these classes. However, the participation was over 99% (see Reed 1955: 152; Ocal 2011: 459-460; Ayhan 2004: 144; Akin 2011: 210-222).

Howard Reed pictured the response of the public to these changes in his ethnographic study:

These classes met with a quick and enthusiastic support from the public, especially in many villages where lots of children, particularly girls, had previously simply stayed away from school in spite of the law requiring their attendance, and the efforts of local teachers, sometimes even supported by the gendarmerie, to encourage or even force them to come to school. By 1953 teachers were able to report that the reintroduction of religious education classes in the primary schools had been a very potent factor in stimulating increased attendance throughout the country in the villages (Reed 1955: 152).

As this quote explains, even a simple elective religious introduction course found an enthusiastic support among the public. Similarly to IHLs, as I mentioned before, religion related courses helped conservative families to send their children to schools, especially female children.

In 1950, religion courses in elementary schools became part of curriculum. In 1956, religion courses returned back to sixth and seventh grades, as elective courses. This time parents or legal guardians should authorize if they did not want their children to participate in these courses. In 1967, religion courses returned to high schools as elective courses again (Ocal 2011: 465-470).

After the 1980 military coup, the 1983 Constitution (which had 91% of the public vote) made religion and ethics courses compulsory for primary and secondary education students, except religious minorities. Teaching a school course entered into the Constitution once and for all in Turkey. Left, right, and communist fights before the coup were an important reason for making religion courses compulsory. The courses have become compulsory starting from the fourth grade. If these courses were not constitutionalized, seeing some changes for their status would be possible again, especially during and after the February 28 process in 1997. The related article of the Constitution states,

Education and instruction in religion and ethics shall be conducted under state supervision and control. Instruction in religious culture and moral education shall be compulsory in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Other religious education and instruction shall be subject to the individual's own desire, and in the case of minors, to the request of their legal representatives (Article 24 of Turkish Constitution).

Between 2002 and 2012, there was no change in the status of these courses. The only change happened in the issue of teaching of religion in public schools in 2012. Two more

elective courses, Quran and life of the Prophet (Muhammad) were added to primary and secondary school curriculums by law.

Although there were no legal changes for the status and hours of religion and ethics courses, the government made some adjustments according to demands in their syllabi.

In the issue of religion and ethics courses, the biggest critiques were that syllabi of these courses mostly concentrate on Islam, especially Sunni Islam, instead of having a balance between all religions and teaching different understandings of Islam, as happens in Alevism, which has some similar views with Shia. Also memorizing of a few surah of Quran for prayer has been among these critiques. In this view, religion and ethics courses should be based only on teaching without any practicing. If these demands find a response in syllabi, most critiques would disappear.

On the other hand, some groups are totally against the teaching of religion by the state in any way. Some groups only support elective courses but against compulsory religion and ethics courses. The most prominent group against religion and ethics courses was Alevis since their Islamic understanding did not find any place in these courses. However, Alevi opposition to compulsory religion and ethics courses has reduced in some way since Alevi beliefs found a bigger place in these courses' syllabi in 2011.

In the case of religious minorities, religion and ethics courses had not been required in the curricula of religious minority schools since these courses were constitutionalized in 1983. For students of minority religions in public schools, exempting them from these courses had been a general rule, with rare exceptions.

Actually, Article 24 of the Constitution states "Instruction in religious culture and moral education shall be compulsory in the curricula of primary and secondary schools" and does not make any exemption for religious minorities in public schools. In that case, compulsory religious education in public schools is an obligation for every student in public schools. However, nobody, with few exceptions, has tried to implement a compulsory religion and ethics course for religious minorities in public schools. When their parents or legal guardians applied to schools to be exempt, they have been welcomed.

In one incident on the news in 2004, a private school required a later converted Presbyterian Turgay Ucal's child in fifth grade to enter religion and ethics courses. When Mr. Ucal objected and wanted to be exempted as it happened during the previous year in his child's



fourth grade, the school did not grant this permission. Mr. Ucal mentioned that other schools were not requiring the same and brought a Ministry of National Education notice from 1990 that said Christian and Jewish students are not required to attend religion and ethics courses. In the case that they are willing, they have to sign a petition. In return, the school presented Article 24 in the Constitution that required every student to participate in these classes and one later notice by the Ministry of National Education in 1992 mentioning a change in syllabi that gave a fair place for Christianity, Judaism, and other religions. The notice mentioned that Islam had more place in syllabi since 99% of the public were Muslim. The notice also detailed that Christian and Jewish students were not required to memorize Quran chapters or learn about Islamic practices such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage (*Radikal* 10/24/2004).

Although the school administrators brought up these arguments, they did not hold back from raising the issue with a higher authority in the ministry organization. The family's lawyer, Erol Dora, also submitted a petition to the Ministry of National Education and explained, "many Christian families are having unjust treatments and being forced to discuss with school administrators" because of arbitrary school decisions (*Radikal* 10/24/2004). The ministry solved the issue in two months and ruled that religious minorities are not required to take religion and ethics courses (*Hurriyet* 12/24/2004).

The family's lawyer Erol Dora was elected as being the first Syrian Christian parliament member in the 2011 elections. In my interview with Mr. Dora, I asked his opinions about compulsory religious education. He expressed "having a compulsory religious education in the Constitution is not acceptable" while also referring to some Alevi groups' demands. According to him, since there are different orders in the same religions, religious education should be dependent on parents' decisions. When I asked his opinion about syllabi of religion and ethics courses, he stated, "you know that Christians are exempt from religion [and ethics] courses. They are not required to attend these classes. However, Alevis have some complaints about this issue and even went to the European Court of Human Rights." Following, I asked Mr. Dora if he ever followed any case as a lawyer about these issues. He recalled the incident in 2004 without mentioning it specifically:

For instance, some [religious minority] students were entering religion [and ethics] courses. I encountered this situation a few times. You know that religion courses are a constitutional requirement. A school principle was saying these courses are a constitutional requirement. [On the other hand], there was a

[Ministry] notice that religious minorities are exempt from these courses but since the Constitution is the highest law, [some principles] were resisting the exemption by referring to the Constitution. This happened a few times. However, when we applied to the Ministry of National Education, these problems were solved (Dora, *personal interview*).

The other religious minorities among my interviewees did not mention any negative experience to follow religion and ethics courses in public schools, although some of them are against compulsory religious education and think religious education should be optional (Sag; Yakan, *personal interviews*). Even the spokesperson of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Father Dositheos Anagnostopoulos supports a compulsory religious education as long as it is related to students' religion instead of letting them be fed from wrong sources. Also he mentioned a part about Christianity in one of the books from these courses and confirmed that he found it useful,

I have never seen books of religion [and ethics] courses. I do not know what they are teaching. The only thing I know is that there is a section about Christianity in the latest books. Somebody sent this section to me by email and I read it. I found it useful since it explains Christianity to a Muslim student in an objective way (Anagnostopoulos, *personal interview*).

Yusuf Altintas from the Jewish community confirmed that they are not required to take these classes: "Religion and ethics courses are not a constitutional requirement for religious minorities... in the places where we do not have a [minority] school, when Jewish children went to public schools, if they do not want to take religion [and ethics] courses, they do not take them." Since this statement suggested that some Jewish students take these courses, I asked if there is social pressure to take these classes. Mr. Altintas denied social pressure in this issue, "No. I went to a [public] elementary school. I got these classes. However, if we do not want to take them, we do not take them." He added that this was almost 62 years ago (Altintas, *personal interview*). In that case, he got these classes at the beginning of the 1950s, when they were reintroduced after a long time as elective courses. The Parliament reports in the 1950s also confirmed that religious introduction courses found support even among religious minorities. Most of them sent their children to these classes (see *1953 MEB 5<sup>th</sup> Education Meeting* 1991: 408).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> MEB statistics show that in the 1949-1950 academic year 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students numbered 414,777. Only 2797 Muslim and 3002 non-Muslim, in total 5799 students that consist around 1% of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, did not participate in religion courses. In the 1950-1951 academic year, 1437 Muslim and 1598 non-Muslim, in total 3035 students that consist 0.7% of students, did not participate in religion courses. (1953 MEB 5<sup>th</sup> Education Meeting 1991: 408).

Even today some religious minorities request to send their children to these classes. When I was a teacher in public schools, I witnessed it. In elementary schools, families' fear that their children would be excluded by their classmates would be one possible explanation among others for this request. However, in high schools, requesting to attend religion and ethics courses is more related to students' interest. Some students also would prefer religion and ethics courses while completing their required course credits since these courses have a reputation of being easy. If one of a student's parents is Muslim and the other is non-Muslim, students would have an adjustment problem. Some prefer to take the class; some not. Some take it but drop it later. Also some religious minority students drop it later because they find it hard to understand some topics if they take it in a high school for the first time.

Religious minorities had been granted exemption from religion and ethics courses but not any other groups. Alevi groups have been the most prominent group against these classes. The Erdogan government initiated a seven-step workshop, "Alevi opening," to understand and deal with Alevi problems. Once a month between June 2009 and January 2010, under the organization of the Ministry of the State, seven workshops discussed Alevi problems. The workshops incorporated the following: 1) Representatives of Alevi associations and foundations, 2) Academics, 3) The Department of Religious Affairs and theology professors, 4) Syndicates, business associations, civil society organizations, and human rights organizations, 6) Politicians, and 7) Presentation of the findings to the government. The Ministry of the State published all discussions in these workshops and prepared a final report (see *Alevi Calistaylari Nihai Raporu* 2010).

As the report showed, compulsory religion and ethics courses were among one of the most prominent issues that Alevis objected to. There were three different types of responses to this issue. Some Alevis defended that the state should not teach religion. Some declared, if the state would like to involve religious education, it should be elective. In the third opinion, if there is no way to remove it or make it optional, then, as being a mutual Alevi agreement, this course should represent every religion and different understandings in the same religion equally, and it especially should not sound like it is protecting Sunni Islam (*Alevi Calistaylari Nihai Raporu* 2010: 141).

The report mostly supported Alevi opinions on making religion and ethics courses elective and arranging their syllabi with an inclusive approach to every religion and sect. On the

other hand, the report was not totally against teaching of religion by the state. The report mentioned that 43 states in the Council of Europe among 47, as of 2010, teach religion in public schools. 25 of these states required a compulsory religion course. 10 states would give an exemption from these classes under some circumstances. The report also pointed out that giving exempt status for Alevis under compulsory religion and ethics courses would harm their constitutional rights by forcing them to reveal their Alevi identities (*Alevi Calistaylari Nihai Raporu* 2010: 133-139).

In the issue of teaching Sunni Islam, the report also reminded that even Sunni Muslims criticize these classes based on their syllabi being superficial and some Sunni Muslims demand the teaching of practical issues and performance of them (*Alevi Calistaylari Nihai Raporu* 2010: 141). Then these classes are not Sunni as much as Alevis claim. At the very beginning of this chapter I mentioned that the state has an intention to teach religion but this intention has never been to increase religiosity, but rather to create a moderate religion for itself. This moderate religion was not Sunni Islam but was a “national Islam” that leaves most practices out and keeps the religion only for cultural purposes to build a national identity.

Teaching of a superficial religion issue came up during my interviews also. Mehmet Akif Cec from the Felicity Party (SP) stated,

Religion and ethics courses might not be compulsory courses. Even if they were, there is no harm since the majority is Muslim in this country. However, religious minorities or people who are not defining themselves as Muslim would be exempted from these classes. We do not have any objection to this... However, is the content of the books of religion and ethics courses positive?... under the name of EU amendments or globalization, all religions are being combined and standardized as equal. For instance, some statements are being removed such as Islam being the right religion and other Abrahamic religions were distorted. In fact, this is Muslims’ belief. This belief should be presented in these books in some way (Cec, *personal interview*).

After the Alevi workshops, the government established another commission, including Alevis, to prepare content for Alevis to use in religion and ethics course programs. Beginning in the Fall of 2011, Alevi beliefs and practices entered syllabi of religion and ethics courses in all grades from fourth to twelfth. Also two other small groups’ beliefs, Jaafari and Nusayri, entered the books.

Although there are still some complaints, Alevis expressed that they found these developments encouraging. Two Alevi group representatives among my interviewees

participated in these workshops: Dogan Bermek as representing the Cem Foundation and Metin Tarhan as representing the Alevi Associations Federation. Both of them expressed that they found the workshops useful especially on the issue of entering Alevism in books as a result of these workshops (Bermek; Tarhan, *personal interviews*).

The Judiciary response to compulsory religion and ethics courses had changed several times between 2002 and 2012 but eventually the verdict was that there could be compulsory religion and ethics courses by considering the 2011 (and a previous change in 2008) changes in the contents of these courses. Several Alevis filed lawsuits against the state to be exempted from religion and ethics courses.

In one instance in 2001, an Alevi father requested an exemption from religion and ethics courses for his daughter in seventh grade. The Provincial Directorate of National Education refuted the application, stating it is impossible because of the constitution. The father pursued the case in a district court, alleging that the compulsory classes in religion and ethics were essentially based on Sunni Islam and that no teaching was given on his own Alevi faith. In 2001, the district court dismissed the case, referring to compulsory religion and ethics courses in the Constitution. The applicant furthered the case to higher court, the Council of the State. The Council of the State also dismissed his appeal in 2003. The plaintiff applied to the European Courts of Human Rights (ECHR). In its October 2007 decision, the ECHR ruled against Turkey (ECHR, *Hasan and Eylem Zengin vs. Turkey*, App. No. 1448/04).

In the decision, the ECHR accepted diversities about religious education among states and showed that 43 of the 46 Council of Europe member states have religious education and 25 of them required this education:

In Europe, religious education is closely tied in with secular education. Of the 46 Council of Europe member States, which were examined, 43 provide religious education classes in state schools. Only Albania, France (with the exception of the Alsace and Moselle regions) and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are the exceptions to this rule. In Slovenia, non-confessional teaching is offered in the last years of state education.

In 25 of the 46 member States (including Turkey), religious education is a compulsory subject. However, the scope of this obligation varies depending on the State. In five countries, namely Finland, Greece, Norway, Sweden, and Turkey, the obligation to attend classes in religious education is absolute. All pupils who belong to the religious faith taught in the classes are obliged to follow them, partially or fully. However, ten States allow for exemptions under certain conditions. This is the case in Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Ireland, Iceland,

Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco, San Marino, and the United Kingdom. In the majority of these countries, religious education is denominational.

Ten other countries give pupils the opportunity to choose a substitute lesson in place of compulsory religious education. This is the case in Germany, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Serbia, Slovakia and Switzerland. In those countries, denominational education is included in the curriculum drawn up by the relevant ministries and pupils are obliged to attend unless they have opted for the substitute lesson proposed.

In contrast, 21 member States do not oblige pupils to follow classes in religious education. Religious education is generally authorized in the school system but pupils only attend if they have made a request to that effect. This is what happens in the largest group of States: Andorra, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Croatia, Spain, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Moldova, Poland, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Ukraine.

Finally, in a third group of States, pupils are obliged to attend a religious education or substitute class, but always have the option of attending a secular lesson.

This general overview of religious education in Europe shows that, in spite of the variety of teaching methods, almost all of the member States offer at least one route by which pupils can opt out of religious education classes (by providing an exemption mechanism or the option of attending a lesson in a substitute subject, or by giving pupils the choice of whether or not to sign up to a religious studies class) (ECHR, *Hasan and Eylem Zengin vs. Turkey*, App. No. 1448/04).

After mentioning different practices for religious education in public schools of member states of the European Council, the ECHR convicted Turkey not because of compulsory education but because of the content of the classes. The ECHR pointed out the contradiction of implementing the compulsory religious education to Muslims but not religious minorities. This difference suggested that even the Turkish state implicitly accepts that these courses teach a particular religion and they do not have an equal standing for every religion, “if this is indeed a course on the different religious cultures, there is no reason to make it compulsory for Muslim children alone. Conversely, if the course is essentially designed to teach the Muslim religion, it is a course on a specific religion and should not be compulsory, in order to preserve children's and their parents' religious freedoms.” The ECHR examined the contents of religion and ethics course books and concluded that they are not representing a pluralist manner, “the religious diversity which prevails in Turkish society is not taken into account. In particular, pupils receive no teaching on the confessional or ritual specificities of the Alevi faith” (ECHR, *Hasan and Eylem Zengin vs. Turkey*, App. No. 1448/04).

After the ECHR's 2007 rules, in 2007 and 2008 verdicts, the Council of the State in Turkey confirmed that contents of religion and ethics courses did not present different beliefs in a neutral way. In its verdict in December 2007, the Council of the State found an Alevi plaintiff's reasons acceptable to exempt his seventh grade child from compulsory religion and ethics courses. While the court accepted that religion and ethics courses are compulsory courses bounded by the Constitution, it ruled this compulsory education should be limited to instruction of religion. In the case of forming syllabi according to a particular religious understanding, these courses go beyond their introductory intention and transform to religious education and training. These courses should neutrally present all religious beliefs (The Council of the State App. No. 2006/4107, D. No. 2007/7481). The Council of the State found another plaintiff right who objected to the compulsory religion courses with a claim that these courses are not suitable for his religious and philosophical beliefs and demanded an exemption for his child in fourth grade without looking at which religion he believes. The court ruled in favor of him for similar reasons as in the previous court decision in 2008 (The Council of the State App. No. 2007/679, D. No. 2008/1461).

The problem of these court decisions was that they only bounded the plaintiffs and granted exemption status for only their children. Every individual who had similar reasoning would have to file a lawsuit. The nature of the problem was mostly coming from the Turkish state identification (ID) cards. The state ID cards show a person's religious affiliation. When parents demand an exemption from religion and ethics courses for their children, the school administration checks the student's ID card. If the card states the religious affiliation is Islam, then the school cannot grant this permission. In the case of Alevis, Alevis cannot write this Alevi affiliation since Alevism is considered under Islam but not another religion. In fact, everybody has a right to leave the religious affiliation section empty but this is not a common practice and would not be known by some people. According to schools, while their ID cards showed these students were Muslim, giving permission to exempt them from these classes would be abused.

In one case when an Alevi person wanted to replace the inscription of 'Islam' with 'Alevism' in his ID card by claiming Alevism is another religion, not a part of Islam, the Turkish courts denied this request. The plaintiff's demand was on the way of deleting 'Islam' from his ID card and writing 'Alevi.' The court deleted the 'Islam' inscription but did not grant inscription of 'Alevi.' As a quick note, the majority of Alevis see Alevism as an interpretation of Islam but not

a belief outside of Islam. The district court asked about the issue to the Department of Religious Affairs as a legal expert. In its legal opinion, the Department of Religious Affairs argued that the word ‘Alevi’ designates a sub-group within Islam that was influenced by Sufism and has specific cultural features but could not be considered a separate religion or a sect (*mezhep*) of Islam. As a result, indicating religious interpretations and subcultures in the religion box of ID cards is not appropriate. The district court dismissed the case based on the legal opinion of the Department of Religious Affairs, giving an example from Christianity. For Christians, the religion boxes in ID cards do not show their sub-groups, such as Catholics or Protestants, but only as Christian. The court ruled indicating sub-groups or interpretation of religions is not appropriate in religion boxes in 2004. Since the plaintiff also demanded removing of the word ‘Islam’ from his religious affiliation box, this was granted. The person carried the case to the Supreme Court of Appeals. The higher court also rejected the case for the same reasons in 2004.

Until 2006, when a person had wanted to remove or change religious affiliation in an ID card, the person has to apply to courts. The AKP government changed it in 2006. The Civil Registry Services Act was changed to say, “Any information concerning an individual’s religion shall be entered, amended, deleted or omitted in accordance with that individual’s written statements” (Law No. 5490, Article 35). Requests for amendment or deletion of data relating to religion shall be subject to no restrictions whatsoever. Since then anybody could make these changes in a few minutes without showing any reason in any civil registry services.

In the meantime, the Alevi plaintiff brought his case to the ECHR. Although he merely applied to Turkish courts to replace the word ‘Islam’ with ‘Alevi,’ he added an objection to have a religious affiliations section in ID cards. The ECHR ruled against Turkey that indicating a citizen’s religion in ID cards is incompatible with the freedom not to disclose one’s religion. Although the court was aware that Turkish citizens had a right to leave the religious affiliation section empty, the Court observed that deleting this information based on application would disclose information concerning an aspect of the individual’s attitude to religion and leaving that section blank inevitably has a specific connotation. Since ID cards have frequent use in everyday life, the person discloses his religious beliefs against his will every time he uses it. Therefore, “the Court observes that the breach in question arises not from the refusal to indicate the applicant’s faith (Alevi) on his identity card but from the problem of the indication – whether



obligatory or optional – of religion on the identity card” in February 2010 (ECHR, *Sinan Isik vs. Turkey*, App. No. 21924/05).

When PM Erdogan commented the ECHR’s verdict, he said, “I do not see the ECHR’s decision as abnormal. This [religion box] would be removed from there. It is not so important” (*Sabah* 02/04/2010). Turkish newspapers interpreted PM Erdogan’s statement to mean religion boxes are being left off of ID cards. However, there has been no change since then as of January 2013. Turkish government will replace all ID cards with new smart ID cards in the summer of 2013. Therefore, there is still a change to remove these religion sections from incoming ID cards. However, the AKP does not want to be called a government that removed religion information from ID cards by itself. Removal of the religion section from ID cards has to be with a consensus with other parties in Parliament.

If we remember the Council of the State’s evolving decisions on compulsory religious education, the court dismissed an exemption application in 2003. A few years later, the court gave this permission for an Alevi applicant in 2007 and another applicant in 2008. In the meantime, the AKP government carried out an “Alevi opening” with several workshops in 2009 and 2010. As a result of these workshops, the content of religion and ethics course books was changed and Alevi belief and practices found a place in these books in 2011. There was a previous change that has been effective since 2008. In that change, syllabi had more inclusive approaches. Despite these changes, lawsuits against compulsory religious education did not stop. However, after the changes in content of books, the attitude of the Council of the State changed against these courses. In its decision in August of 2012, the Council of the State ruled that since changes in 2008, these courses are not considered as giving a religious training anymore but only an introduction to religion (*Hurriyet* 08/31/2012).

These discussions would be seen as important but they were never regarded as similar in importance to the imam-hatip issue. These discussions could be grouped as follows: 1) Totally against all kind of religious education, compulsory or not, in a secular state; 2) Religious education would be but the content should be neutral to all religions; 3) No compulsory religious courses, but there should be optional religious education; and 4) Religious education may be compulsory or optional, but the content should be intensified. In these discussions, it seems that the majority of the Turkish public supports compulsory religious education in public schools by 86% (Carkoglu and Toprak 2006: 54).

Among these options, leaving religious education to individuals and removing the state from involvement in kind of religious education would be seen as the most appropriate way to diminish religious education disputes. One of the interviewees, Prof. Ahmet Turan Alkan, supports this idea:

Compulsory religion courses are against the definition of secularism in my mind. But, but, but [sic], the state should give a right of choice for students' religious education. In other words, it is required that removing compulsory religious education and giving a right of choice and allowing people to found their own religious education institutions (Ahmet Turan Alkan, *personal interview*).

Ahmet Turan Alkan's suggestion to leave religious education to individuals is reasonable but not enforceable in Turkey. First, the state does not want to allow a religious education that is not under its surveillance. Second, the secular establishment fears uncontrolled religious education by religious groups. I will examine Quran-based courses, including state-run and private, later. The most rigid critics observed private Quran-based courses among all religious education models. In the issue of IHLs, even the strictest opponents would overlook a few IHLs as long as their numbers are limited. However, this was not the case for private Quran-based courses.

Adjusting the syllabi of religion and ethics courses and adding Alevi beliefs might be seen as important, especially by the Alevi; but the impact of these changes on society was limited. The most prominent change in the teaching of religion in public schools came in 2012. The AKP government reopened the middle-level section of IHLs that was closed during the February 28 process. Before 1998, primary and secondary education systems had three steps: five-years of elementary school, three-years of middle school, and three-years of high school. After the five-year elementary school education, students were able to attend to IHLs' middle-level sections. Also an important number of students were attending Quran-based courses after five-year elementary school education. After having one to three years of education in these Quran-based courses, most students proceeded to IHLs or other public schools. In 1998, elementary and middle school education programs were combined and renamed as elementary school. Eight-year compulsory education was mandated without any break. At that time, the middle-level sections of IHLs were closed. The establishment of eight-year compulsory education significantly reduced attendance in Quran-based courses.

In March 2012, the AKP government, with support of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), changed the related articles of education law to reopen middle-level sections of IHLs. This law, publicly known 4+4+4, raised compulsory education to twelve years and included a right to break this education, such as allowing attendance to Quran-based courses between any two of the three steps. After the first four-years education, students are qualified to attend middle-level sections of IHLs.

The bill also suggested opening several elective religion courses in the middle and high schools, initially without mentioning their names. During the discussions of this new system in Parliament, before the bill passed, MHP members, especially parliament member (MP) Prof. Ozcan Yeniceri, who was among my interviewees, suggested naming three of these courses explicitly instead of leaving them to the discretion of the current or future Ministry of National Education. Courses suggested were: elective Quran, the prophet Muhammad's life, and principles of Islam (*ilmihal*) courses (TBMM records 03/28/2012).

This suggestion found a support among the AKP. The names of two elective courses entered the law: Quran and the Prophet's life. The bill was legislated as Law no. 1739 the article 25 "...elective courses are being constituted. Quran and our Prophet's (*peygamberimizin*) life courses are elective courses in the middle schools and high schools. All other elective courses are decided by the Ministry" (Law no. 1739). The bill passed Parliament with support of MHP, by 306 to 85 votes in March in 2012.

One of the discussions in this bill was that using "our prophet" term instead of Muhammad. It was argued that using a possessive determiner, which has a sense of belonging, for the prophet inside of a law would harm non-Muslim citizens' rights. However, the bill passed without any change and used our prophet term.

Both of the Republican People's Party (CHP) MPs, Oktay Eksi and Recep Gurkan, among my interviewees expressed their concerns about these elective courses. Since both of them were in the commission where this bill first shaped, they followed discussions on this bill from very beginning. They recalled that adding elective religious course names were suggested by the MHP even though the AKP did not have a similar idea in its mind, at least at the level of expressing them explicitly in the bill. According to them, immediately, the AKP embraced this idea and offered almost the same proposal by rejecting the MHP's offer. Oktay Eksi named this "political smartness (*siyaset cakalligi*)" and interpreted it as "exploiting religion for political

gain” and by referring the Constitutional Court’s financial sanctions on the AKP in 2008, he added this is how the AKP exploits the religion for its political gain (Oktay Eksi, *personal interview*). They also expressed how it was wrong to add a course named our prophet in the law. For instance, Recep Gurkan articulated the wrong in using “our prophet” term in a secular country’s law,

Dear Selman, let me ask you. I am a citizen of the Republic of Turkey. I am doing all my citizen duties. However, [hypothetically] I am a Christian. What do I understand from ‘our prophet’ term in this law? Do I understand Jesus? Don’t I suppose to understand like that? Or I am a Jewish citizen. Don’t I suppose to understand Moses? (Recep Gurkan, *personal interview*).

In 2012 elective course list, published by the Ministry of National Education, dropped this value-laden term and used Muhammad’s life instead of our prophet’s life as dictated in the law (*MEB notice 08/31/2012*).

If the reader remember discussions about unfair coefficient factor for IHLs that was mentioned previously, adjusting a simple coefficient factor got more than nine years between 2002 and 2011 during the AKP government. Opening middle-level sections of IHLs and adding elective Quran and the life of Muhammad courses took only several weeks and they were implemented following Fall 2012 semester. This is the biggest sign that how state and religion relations evolved during this ten years on the issue of teaching of religion by the state. There is no doubt that there were objections against these changes but they were not even close to compare to the previous discussions and far away to cause any state crisis. Furthermore, even conservative side was surprised to see these rapid changes. For instance, former Istanbul Mufti Prof. Mustafa Cagrici criticized the AKP government for the hasty changes in the issues on opening middle-level section of IHLs and adding elective religious courses to primary and secondary education levels without discussing widely and receiving opinions of professors in theology faculties who educate teachers related to this field (Cagrici, *personal interview*).

Another speculated issue was how many students would choose these elective religion courses. Since it was the first year of the new system, it was exercised for the first year students of middle and high schools, fifth and ninth grades. MEB did not release any statistics for high schools but only fifth grades in the middle schools. According to Fall 2012 statistics, the MEB offered fifteen courses for fifth grades. Two of them were Quran and the life of Muhammad. MEB also offered one more course related to religion, Basics of Religion. Students were required to choose four classes to complete their credits. Changes were not only about elected religion

courses, but also the government added an elective Kurdish class that was the first time in the Turkish history (see *MEB notice* 08/31/2012).

**Table 4:** Fifth Grade Elective Courses and Enrolled Students in 2012

Elective course name	Enrollment*	Elective course name	Enrollment*
Applied Mathematics	593	Applied Science	161
Foreign Language	495	Mind Games	138
Quran	480	Fine Arts	101
The Life of Muhammad	305	Music	72
Sports and Physical Activities	300	Writing Skills	68
Reading Skills	259	Drama	57
Information Technologies and Programming	221	Kurdish	25
Basics of Religion	180		

Source: *Milliyet* 10/02/2012.

\* Multiply by 1000.

Statistics (Table 4) showed that elective Quran and the Life of Muhammad courses found popularity but their popularity was lower than Applied Mathematics and Foreign Language courses. Elective Basics of Religion course was coming late but still had an important number of enrolled students with 180 thousand.

The statistics for the popularity of elective religion courses would be interpreted as a public support for this change. But still, learning mathematics and a foreign language were more important than learning the religion. On the other hand, if there were only one elective course related to religion, its popularity would be more than all other elective courses. Some students'

interests would be divided among these three elective religion courses while there was only one elective course related to mathematics and one elective course related to a foreign language. There was another issue should be considered when interpreting these statistics that even though there were fifteen elective courses (*MEB notice* 08/31/2012) and the school should offer any of these courses if there is ten or more application in theory; yet, the practice was not like that. The average student number per class is over thirty in all education levels in Turkey (*MEB Statistics* 2011-2012: 20). Most schools did not have a physical capacity to offer all of elective courses that had more than ten applications. Also most schools would have lack of a specialized teacher for some courses. Because of these reasons, school administrators were kindly asking parents to choose among classes that the school would offer. When interpreting popularity of elective courses, these obstacles should be regarded also.

As a summary of changes in teaching of religion under the Ministry of National Education, there were two important elements: imam hatip high schools and teaching religion in public schools. In the case of IHLs, most discussions were on their university entrance. IHL graduates had a lack to enter university entrance exams under the same rights with other high school graduates until the 2012 university entrance exam. Their graduates also gain the right to apply Police Academy as happened before the February 28 process. In 2012, also IHLs middle-level sections, which closed during the February 28 process, were opened back. The other important changes under the Ministry of National Education were adjusting Religion and Ethics' courses syllabi by adding Alevi beliefs and practices along with an inclusive approach to all religions. Also, two elective courses, Quran and the Life of Muhammad, entered middle and high school curriculums as specified in the law. In Fall 2012 elective course list, one more elective course related to religion, Basics of Religion, also found a place. High registration for IHLs and elective religion courses would be read as public support to these changes. Although there were complaints mostly from secular establishment, these complaints were not strict as they were before. There were two important reasons for reducing the strict complaints. The first one, the AKP government consolidated its rule during three consecutive elections by increasing its votes and showed it's the only power in executive branch of the state and did not have any intention to share this power with other state institutions by all means. The second one, the content of strict secular state institutions has changed gradually since 2002.

In the next section, I will examine the changes related to the Department of Religious Affairs.

## **C. 2. THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**

In the first part of my study, I examined the changes in religious education under the Ministry of National Education. Another prominent actor in the area of the state teaching religion is the Department of Religious Affairs. This department was founded on March 3, 1924, by the Unification of Education Law, when the Ministry of Sharia and Foundations was replaced by the Department of Religious Affairs (TBMM records 03/03/1924). This department's duties and venue have evolved over time, but in general it runs mosques and their imams, controls what is preached in mosques especially in Friday prayers, and directs Quran-based courses. According to Article 136 in the Constitution, "The Department of Religious Affairs, which is within the general administration, shall exercise its duties prescribed in its particular law, in accordance with the principles of secularism, removed from all political views and ideas, and aiming at national solidarity and integrity" (Turkish Constitution, Article 136).

Teaching religion happens in several ways under this department's control. The most common practices are year-long Quran-based courses, summer Quran-based courses for students, and preachings.

### **C. 2. 1. Quran-Based Courses**

There are two types of Quran-based courses in Turkey: state-controlled legal Quran-based courses, and non-legal private Quran-based courses run by individuals and NGOs. Although there have been some recent changes, Quran-based courses are mostly focused on teaching the reading of the Quran from Arabic scripts and memorizing the Quran, rather than offering a general religious education. Therefore, they have been harshly criticized. In distinction to IHLs (religious vocational high schools) or religion courses in public schools, Quran-based courses never been officially closed; at least one of them has always been open (see Ocal 2011: 513-518

for various statistics and sources on this issue). In the 1930s their number was around ten. This figure increased gradually, to around 50 in the 1940s, over 100 in the 1950s, and over 400 in the 1960s. There was a dramatic increase in their number in 1970s, with over 2000 in 1980, around 5000 in 1990, and a peak in the 1990s of over 5200 courses, with nearly 200 thousand enrolled students just before the February 28 process. At that time, their number decreased dramatically to about half of what it was at the peak, retreating to around 3000 courses with some 100 thousand students at the beginning of the 2000s. During the AKP government, the number of Quran courses and students enrolled in them increased gradually. In the first year of the AKP regime in 2002, there were 3664 Quran courses, with over 100 thousand students. In the second term of the AKP in 2007, this figure was around 6000 courses with approximately 200 thousand students. In the third term of the AKP in 2011, there were nearly 9000 courses with over 300 thousand students. The numbers of students in summer Quran-based courses were a few times more than those of the regular students (Ocal 2011: 514-528).

These figures apply to legal Quran courses that were controlled by the Department of Religious Affairs. Besides these, there have been non-legal Quran courses since the time of the early Republic. Official state reports show that the state developed a negative attitude towards these courses. Thus, an official report prepared by the Ministry of National Education in 1980 stated that they trained students to be reactionary in religion, to become enemies of the Republic in politics, and to serve as a human source for religious orders. In 1981, a report by the Department of Religious Affairs also questioned the intent of the non-legal Quran-based courses, arguing that there were abundant legal religious education offerings, including legal Quran-based courses: so why was there a need for non-legal Quran-based courses? The report concluded that illegal Quran courses aimed to exploit political, ideological, and economic powers (Ayhan 2004: 495-507).

The most prominent change in the legal status of Quran-based courses was implemented during the February 28 process along with other changes related to religion. Compulsory primary education increased to eight years without any break. In 1997 students were required to complete eight years of primary school before being admitted to Quran-based courses. This policy decreased the number of students in Quran-based courses dramatically. Also, in terms of summer and weekend Quran-based courses, students were not allowed to enroll before completing fifth grade (Official Gazette No. 23086 08/20/1997). Moreover, in 1998 the Council of State forbade



all students from attending weekend or summer Quran-based courses before completing their primary school education (*Hurriyet* 02/03/1998). In that way, since state-controlled Quran-based courses were the only legal offerings of religious education, having a formal and legal religious education before completing primary school education – in other words, until fifteen years of age – became impossible. Parents had to wait until then for their children to receive a religious education outside the family, at least legally. The state outlawed illegal Quran courses, but did not provide a legal alternative.

At the end of August of 1999, Parliament allowed summer Quran-based courses to resume for students who had completed the fifth grade (TBMM records 07/22/1999; Official Gazette No. 23777 08/05/1999). These courses were restricted to two months duration per summer, three days per week. Daily course work could last three “hours,” or 120 minutes: two hours (80 min.) for the Quran and its meaning, and one hour (40 min.) for all other religious topics (Official Gazette No. 23982 03/03/2000). The following year, in August 2000, the three-days-a-week restriction was replaced by five days a week (Official Gazette No. 24153 08/27/2000).

The first legal attempt after 2002 to rearrange Quran-based courses happened at the end of 2003. In November 2003, a new notice was released designed to remove some restrictions on Quran-based courses. The two-months limit for the summer Quran-based courses was left in, but these courses might now be open from one week after the closing of the public schools to the beginning of the fall semester. The notice also removed the limit of three hours of education per day. The use of dormitories was allowed during the summer, which meant that summer Quran-based courses could be offered in boarding schools. Another important change in this notice was the opening of evening Quran-based courses for working people (Official Gazette No. 25299 11/24/2003). However, the life of this notice was little more than a few weeks. The secular establishment showed an enormous reaction to these changes, especially in terms of boarding students (offering boarding to students of school age was prohibited during the February 28 process in the late 1990s). Because of these reactions, the notice was never implemented, and a new notice revoked it the following month (Official Gazette No. 25325 12/23/2003).

The next heated debates about Quran-based courses occurred in 2005. Although current laws prohibited offering the Quran or any other kind of religious education, there were plenty of non-legal Quran-based courses for students, especially during the summer before they completed

the fifth grade. The relevant section of the Turkish Criminal Code (TCK) listed six months to two years of prison time for administrators of any illegal educational institutions, including Quran-based courses (TCK Article 261). The AKP and the CHP adjusted the Turkish Criminal Code by consensus in 2005, when a new bill passed the TBMM commissions and came to the Assembly for voting. The new penalty listed a prison term from six months to *three* years for administrators, plus workers and teachers, in illegal educational institutions. Thus both prison time and types of responsible people were increased. Also, according to TCK, a sentence of more than two years of prison time could not be postponed or converted to a monetary penalty. In that case, any teacher, worker, or administrator working in an illegal Quran course would serve up to three years of prison time. After lobbying by conservatives, the AKP adjusted the bill just before voting in Parliament. The newest version stated that any person who opened or administered an illegal educational institute would serve from three months to one year of jail time or would receive a judicial fine (TCK Article 263; TBMM records 05/26/2005).

As might be guessed, this change led to an enormous reaction from the secular elements in Turkey. Opponents interpreted the bill as encouraging the establishment of illegal Quran-based courses. Then-President Sezer returned the bill to Parliament. However, the AKP passed the same bill and the President could not veto it a second time (TBMM records 06/29/2005). The case went to the Constitutional Court, which refused to annul the change in its verdict delivered in 2009 (*Hurriyet* 03/05/2009).

Deputy of CHP Oktay Eksi recalled this incident during our interview. He noted that he had no objection to the Department of Religious Affairs running legal Quran-based courses, since they were responding to a social demand and their existence was reasonable, legitimate, healthy, and necessary. However, according to him, the balance has been lost on this issue, especially by the reduction in criminal penalties for illegal Quran-based courses. Particularly in Anatolia, these illegal Quran-based courses were being run under different names, such as a “charity association,” by religious orders. These orders trained students for their own purposes. There were at least two thousand such illegal institutions. MP Eksi added, “These have been designed to undermine the secular state. They have been set up to prepare an infrastructure to bring the Iranian mullah system to Turkey” (Eksi, *personal interview*).

The early intention to reduce the age restrictions for attending Quran-based courses found a place in a 2008 lawsuit aimed at removing the AKP from politics. The Constitutional Court

regarded this issue as evidence against the secularism principle in its verdict, which implemented financial sanctions for the AKP:

Although the Court accepted that there was social demand for the removal of the headscarf ban in universities, the age restrictions concerning the Quran courses, and the coefficient limitation applied to Religious Vocational High Schools [IHL], it found that the defendant party did not carry out its political struggle on these issues in line with the choice crystallized in the concrete rules of the Constitution (Constitutional Court App. No. 2008/1 D. N. 2008/2).

The last important issue related to removing the age restriction on enrolling in Quran-based courses. Two legal changes in September 2011 (KHK no. 653 in Official Gazette No. 28057, 09/17/2011) and April 2012 (Official Gazette No. 28257, 04/07/2012) removed that restriction. In contrast to previous changes, reactions to this change were limited. As mentioned above, when the AKP government made a similar change in 2003, it had to withdraw it within a month because of opposition from the secular establishment. Eight years later, the AKP government was able to pass a similar change and remove the age restriction on attending Quran-based courses. This is another important example showing how state-religion relations developed in the years 2002-2012.

### **C. 2. 2. Other issues related to the Department of Religious Affairs**

A similar tendency for objections related to the Department of Religious Affairs to be reduced may be seen in the issue of increasing the number of staff. Although the then-President of the Department of Religious Affairs, Prof. Ali Bardakoglu, in the context of the department's problems with staffing, stated that "staffing problems and all other problems regarding the Department of Religious Affairs are outside any political discussion and are solved by consensus [of all political parties]" and "We find all kinds of support from all political parties" in one of his press releases in 2007 (*Hurriyet* 05/13/2007), if we remember the discussions above, it is clear that the statement of consensus on department-related issues was not true – at least, not always. Bardakoglu's explanations would be considered more as an expression of his intention to keep the department outside politics. Re the issue of staff increases, in 2003 the AKP government wanted to provide fifteen thousand new staff positions in the Department of Religious Affairs. The CHP's response to this plan was firm. The CHP MPs declared that filling these positions would cause "tension in the country" and "the exploiting of religion" for political purposes. They

interpreted it as “an election campaign” and “setting up public offices in a war against secularism” (*Hurriyet* 06/24-26/2003). A similar bill came to the parliament in 2010; in this instance, the bill called for almost eighteen thousand new staff members in the Department of Religious Affairs. This time, the CHP, as party policy, did not object and supported the bill. One of the CHP MPs said in his Parliament speech, “We, the CHP, consider that any staff demand of the Department of Religious Affairs should be filled. If there is a shortage of staff, then religious orders can meet this demand instead of the Department of Religious Affairs. That is why we think that this staff shortage should be corrected” (TBMM records 07/01/2010).

The interviewees from the Department of Religious Affairs, noting that there were additional issues to consider, mentioned the consensus among political parties in Parliament on this recent change and the passage of the Department of Religious Affairs Organization Law, which had been waiting for adjustments for decades. They expressed their delight in seeing support from all four political parties in Parliament to change the bill (Uzum, *personal interview*), adding, “This consensus showed that the Department of Religious Affairs is supported by all parties in Turkey” (Aksoy, *personal interview*).

Officials in the Department of Religious Affairs (DRA) were excited to see a consensus among political parties across the spectrum in dealing with their staff-related and institutional problems. However, my previous example suggests that this consensus was not developed spontaneously. The secularist Republican People’s Party (CHP) was totally opposed to a similar staff increase in 2003, even seeing it as a source of “tension in the country” and a form of “exploitation of religion.” Seven years later, the same political party welcomed the new staff demands of the DRA, although this time the proposed staff number was three thousand more than previously. How was that possible?

In an earlier section, I outlined how the reactions of state institutions have evolved since 2002 regarding state/religion interaction. The AKP government was the leading instigator of the changes in this relationship. Such changes became possible when the AKP increased its influence on the military, the judiciary, the universities, and other state institutions. In addition, new appointments in the upper levels of the bureaucracy made this move more likely. On the other hand, some people criticized this change by alleging that it was a sign of governmental pressure on other state institutions. The increasing power of the AKP government is not deniable. Some people even named this power as authoritarianism. However, if we try to explain changes

in state/religion relations solely by the AKP government's authoritarianism, we cannot explain the dramatic changes in politics of the main opposition party, the CHP. Then how do we interpret changes in the CHP? The simplest explanation seems the most reasonable one, namely, that the CHP aligned its politics according to public demand.

The time period under review, 2002-2012, shows a constant struggle between the secular center and the conservative periphery. In this struggle, the Republican People's Party (the CHP), the armed forces, and the higher judiciary have represented the centrist coalition, while the AKP has established itself as the main representative of the periphery (Ozbudun 2012: 48). In the centrist coalition, secular state institutions have significantly shifted from assertive toward passive secularism, especially after 2007. The CHP has remained the only representative of the secular center during this shift.

Public reaction against the implementation of assertive secularism spread among members of the centrist coalition before. Since other state institutions have stopped defending strict secularist politics, the CHP has been the only target left facing public reaction. These developments have provided a political foundation for the CHP to rearrange its policies regarding its interpretation of secularism.

In the meantime, a political opportunity came up for the CHP to adjust its politics according to this new political environment. The long-standing leader of the CHP, Deniz Baykal (1992-1999 and 2000-2010), had to resign from his post because of a video on the internet, which allegedly documented a relationship between Baykal and a female member of parliament from the CHP. Following Baykal's resignation in 2010, Kemal Kilicdaroglu was elected party chairman. He was regarded as a symbol of change in the CHP (Uysal 2011: 132).

The new chairman adopted softer politics regarding secularism. It would be hard to claim an ideological change in the CHP, but under the new administration, this party has experienced clear changes relating to its previous secular and elitist attitudes. In earlier years, other secular state institutions and the media backed up the strict secularist politics of the CHP. However, during the second half of the AKP rule, the CHP has widely lost this institutional support as well as media support. In this new era, the CHP has had to rely only on public support. Therefore, the CHP rearranged its policies regarding the understanding and implementation of secularism. This was a sign that state/religion relations have not only improved on the institutional level but also

on the public level. Even secularist parties have to compete against the AKP to gain conservative votes.

How much the CHP really changed can be argued. However, at least on the theoretical level, the 2011 election manifestos of the new CHP emphasized personal liberties rather than secularism, which had always been emphasized during earlier elections. This was a major discursive shift for the CHP (Uysal 2011: 135). Public response to the change was welcoming: the CHP increased its proportion of the votes to 26% in the 2011 elections – 5% higher than in both the 2002 and 2007 elections.

In short, improving relations between the state and religion on the institutional level under the AKP government made the CHP and other staunch secularists reconsider their assertive secularist policies. The CHP's support in 2010 for an increase in staff in the Department of Religious Affairs was one of the earliest signs of this change.

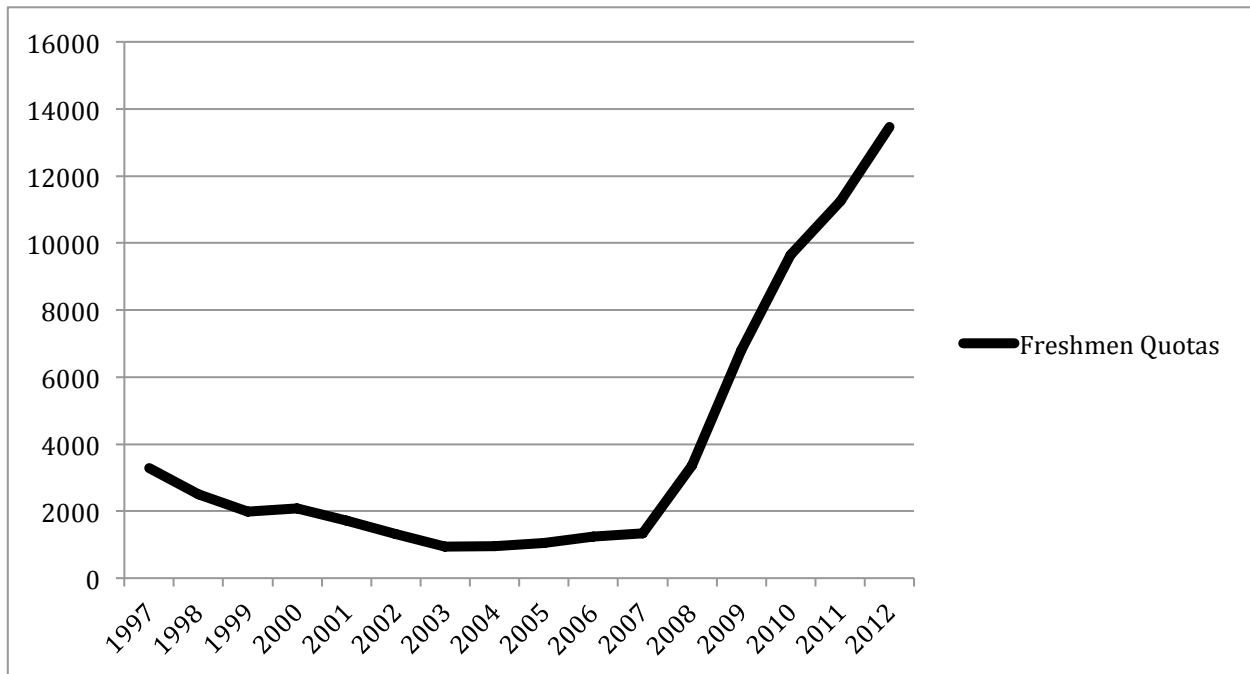
### **C. 3. THEOLOGY PROGRAMS IN UNIVERSITIES**

Theology programs in universities are another way for the state to teach religion. The Unification of Education Law in 1924 declared, “The Ministry of Education will found a school of theology under Istanbul University to train experts on religious affairs.” This program was opened in 1924, but, like all other state-taught religions, its life was not long. The program was replaced by the Islamic Research Institute under the Literature Department in 1933. However, this institute did not enroll any students and closed de facto in 1936. The only course related to religion, “Islam and Philosophy,” was taught in the Literature Department until 1941. (See TBMM records 01/03/1949. In that document, the date of closing of the theology school was shown as 1941, but it referred to the course named “Islam and Philosophy” not actual theology school in fact that meaning the date of closing of the theology school was earlier. Also see Ayhan 2004: 65-77, and Ocal 2011: 370-385.)

Theology education returned to the universities with a program in Ankara University in 1949 (Ayhan 2004: 244; Ocal 2011: 390), and the number of courses increased gradually. The early negative stance of the state against these programs might be explained by its inclination to

consider them as a kind of higher IHL education rather than seeing them as academic centers. The first incidents protesting the headscarf ban occurred in this school in 1966 and 1967. In recalling these incidents, it is important to realize that the discussions between 2002 and 2012 were not new to Turkish politics, nor were they a product of the advent of a particular government in 2002.

Examining quotas for incoming students might offer insights into the state's attitude regarding theology programs between 2002 and 2012 (see Figure 1). The statistics show that incoming student quotas for theology programs reached a high in 1997, with over three thousand students. Effects of the February 28 process can be seen on theology programs also. The quotas for incoming students had been in constant decline until 2003, when they dropped to under one thousand students. There was no important change in attitudes between 2003 and 2007, although the number of theology students increased a little. However, these quotas have increased dramatically since 2008. The most important reason for this change was an administrative change in the Higher Education Board (YOK) in 2007.



**Figure 2:** Freshmen Quotas in Theology\* Programs

Source: OSYM

\* Before 1999, there was only one type of theology program. Religion and Ethics Course Teacher programs opened in 1999 and might be considered to be offering a theology

education. Also since 2010, five private universities opened theology-related programs under different names. These numbers include all different kinds of theology- related programs.

Until December 2010, only state universities had theology programs. Since that date, five private universities have opened theology-related programs. The quota increase between 2002 and 2012 seems enormous, but it did not solely depend on the interest of the state in these programs. In that time period, university numbers doubled overall. By 2012, total state university numbers in Turkey reached 103 and total private university numbers reached 65 from respectively 53 and 23. The quotas for incoming undergraduate students doubled also. In 1998, all universities together were accepting 160 thousand incoming students in total. This figure was 188 thousand in 2002, came to 205 thousand in 2007, and – almost doubling in five years – reached 406 thousand in 2012. If there had been no negative attitudes toward theology programs by the YOK between 1997 and 2007, and their quotas had been increased according to a proportion of the increase in all university program quotas, their numbers would again be similar to those of 2010 and 2011. Opening middle-level sections of IHLs and elective religion courses caused an extra demand for these programs, as accounted for in the 2012 quotas.

YOK's negative attitude was not only regarding quotas for these programs. YOK canceled compulsory one-year-long Arabic preparation classes in theology programs in fall 1998. It also reduced the required course load for students to around 150 credits from nearly 200 credits. In 2006, Religion and Ethics teacher programs were removed from the responsibility of theology schools and given to schools of education. These changes might be interpreted as signs of fear on the issue of religious education, especially an intensive one. Under the new YOK administration, these practices have mostly returned to their old situations. Compulsory one-year-long Arabic preparation education came back in 2009. Religion and Ethics Teacher programs were returned to the responsibility of theology schools in 2012.

There was no negative stance toward theology programs among my interviewees. I cannot say the same for the Turkish media. Some media represented the recent quota increases as overwhelming in their news coverage by comparing only the recent few years, without mentioning the facts during the February 28 process.



## **D. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I examined three ways in which the Turkish state has taught religion. The first was under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education through imam-hatip schools, compulsory religion and ethics courses in primary and secondary schools, and newly established elective religion courses, more precisely on the Quran and the life of Muhammad. The second was under the supervision of the Department of Religious Affairs through year-long Quran-based courses, summer Quran-based courses, and sermons in mosques. The third was under the rubric of higher education in theology schools through programs for teachers of courses in religion and ethics.

Examining the period between 2002 and 2012 reveals enormous changes in these three ways used by the state to teach religion. For example, there was no middle-level of imam hatip schools in 2002, but this began in 2012. There were no elective courses related to religion besides the compulsory religion and ethics courses in primary and secondary education, but two elective religion courses, on the Quran and the Life of Muhammad, were later added to school curricula by law. In addition, a third elective religion course, the Basics of Religion, found a place in the 2012-2013 curricula. In 2002, attending summer Quran courses was illegal before completing the fifth grade, and attending year-long Quran courses was not allowed before completing the eighth grade. In 2012, these restrictions were discontinued for summer Quran courses, and attending year-long Quran courses was allowed after completing fourth grade. There was similar support for theology programs: incoming student quotas were less than one thousand students in 2002, but reached almost fourteen thousand students by 2012. However, all these figures are misleading if the fact of the post-modern coup in 1997 and its effects are omitted. Most of these changes indicate a return to the situation before the February 28 process and reflect normalization of relations between the state and religion. The only exception to this rule is the offer of additional elective religion courses in primary and secondary school, which was a new experience in Turkey.

One of my interviewees, Prof. Ahmet Turan Alkan, explained this normalization by the example of a tight shoe:

Actions of the government [on the issue of religious affairs] are in the direction of amending previous mistakes, so it is not appropriate to see them as reforms. In other words, you are exchanging a tight shoe for a properly fitted shoe for your foot. You are not replacing it with a more luxury shoe.... We had problems that came from the past. When they were removed, we settled down. In short, if there is a tight shoe, we can relax when we remove it (Alkan, *personal interview*).

On the other hand, secular elites have tended not to see these changes as moving to a shoe that fits but to a luxury shoe. For instance, when he was talking about illegal Quran courses, Oktay Eksi, the MP from CHP whom I interviewed, mentioned that the balance is gone in this issue, especially since the reduction in the criminal penalty for offering illegal Quran courses. According to him, these changes have undermined the secular state and brought the Iranian mullah system to Turkey, although these allegations mostly lack concrete examples.

Two terms have been coined to express these fears: *neighborhood pressure*, which refers to peer pressure or social pressure on religious issues, and *anxious moderns*, which refers to people who think Turkey is becoming an Islamic state, thereby intervening with the prior state commitment to the secular lifestyle.

My interview group represented diverse elements from different strata of Turkish society. This diversity was reflected in the interviews. I found very different arguments that had been discussed in Turkish politics and academia between 2002 and 2012. On one thing, however, the interviewees agreed: none of them said that he or she was among the “anxious moderns.”

Regarding the concept of neighborhood pressure, the majority of interviewees referred to it in terms of religious issues. Others explained it more by using “social/peer pressure” as a sociological term rather than a religious one. For instance, one of the interviewees, Emre Akoz from the *Sabah* newspaper, expressed this sense of peer pressure on different occasions by observing: “There is a fundraising campaign for Somalia right now in Turkey, and more specifically in our newspaper. Do you think that I can say ‘no’ to this fundraising campaign?” Akoz also complained that *neighborhood pressure* was an inappropriate term for social pressure, because urbanization, city life, and multi-story apartments meant mostly living without knowing one’s neighbors: “Is there any neighborhood left?” (Akoz, *personal interview*)

The discussions of neighborhood pressure showed that some elites, as well as some academics, tried to explain the Turkey of the 2000s with the social realities of the 1900s. Supporters of banning the headscarf in universities and prohibiting religious education have justified their reasoning by referring to neighborhood pressure. These arguments have mostly

missed the social changes in Turkish society and their effect on conservative Muslims during the last few decades. The most appropriate term used to describe recent changes in Islamic ideology was coined by conservatives themselves as a self-criticism that “ex-Islamists have become businessmen” (*eski mucahitler muteahhit oldu!*). Increasing education and participating in business life have accelerated these changes. The first step on the way was education. During the early years of the Republic, conservatives tended not to send their children, especially female children, to public schools. Elective religion courses and imam-hatip schools have reduced this tendency since the 1950s. When these children had a high school and later a university education, their religious understanding became different from that of their parents. After they began to participate in business life and an upper-class lifestyle, these differences became even more visible.

The participation of observant Muslims in business and the upper class has led to an enormous reaction among secular elites, who were not used to seeing conservatives in their neighborhood. The most striking example is the headscarf issue pushing into secular neighborhoods. Secular elites argued that there was no headscarf issue when they were young by referring to the 1960s and 1970s. According to them, the increase of veiled students in universities in the 1990s was a sign of the Islamization of the society. They accused the imam-hatip schools of being responsible for young women wearing headscarves to justify their opposition to these schools. In reality, there is no indication that the imam-hatip schools helped to increase the number of veiled women. In Turkey, seventy percent of women wear headscarves, and there are no statistics showing that this figure has increased since the 1950s. If secular elites seldom saw any veiled women, it was basically because of their previously isolated lifestyle. Indeed, they were seeing veiled women in public life as housewives and blue-collar workers; they were just not used to seeing them as university students or white-collar workers. Therefore, it is more appropriate to explain this discontent among the secular elites in terms of a power struggle between the center and the periphery, and the access of conservatives to an upper-class lifestyle.

İsmet Berkan, from the *Hurriyet* newspaper, noted this power struggle during our interview. He mentioned how secular elites were not used to see a female headscarf in their neighborhoods. Mr. Berkan named them as second—or third-generation secularists who saw headscarves only on their grandmothers or on family servants. He noted that wearing a headscarf

is not a requirement for a job qualification. On the other hand, he was opposed to the idea of leaving people out of the job market because of their headscarves. He mentioned that there are 1500-2000 workers at the headquarters of *Hurriyet* newspapers, where his office also is located, but “there is no single woman who wears a headscarf! Actually, there are some but they come in after office hours to clean offices or work in the kitchen.” He defined this situation not only by economic class but also by cultural class. According to him, it is not possible to explain this class struggle by Marxist economic class theory. Emphasizing that it is a “cultural class” struggle is more appropriate. He explained his position by using a metaphor:

When you make a class analysis with a Marxist terminology, you cannot explain this [having no veiled women in the *Hurriyet* newspaper building] in terms of income or productive forces. There is a cultural difference. I want to explain this with a metaphor. There was a doorman in our apartment building. His wife and daughter were wearing headscarves. You know, only a doorman. In a while, let’s say in twenty years, we, residents of the building, have gradually retired and our income has decreased or we have become lazy in our business. However, at the same time, the doorman and his family have been working hard. In the meantime, they have bought a few apartments in the building. They have become the administrators of the building. We, old residents of the building, were thinking that the building belonged to us. However, now, we have been obliged to share the building with the doorman; moreover, we have to consent to his administration. This metaphor explains the lack of conformity and the disturbances related to the AKP in Turkey (Berkan, *personal interview*).

Ismet Berkan’s explanations of cultural differences and possible reasons for the disturbances related to the AKP politics help clarify the center-periphery framework of this study. Accordingly, subtle and long-term socio-historical differences based on cultural divisions in Turkish society are still valid.

Examining discussions on state-taught religion helps to show how people in different social situations experience, understand, and evaluate what has happened in state/religion relations between 2002 and 2012. As a general conclusion, there is widespread satisfaction with this change, as indicated by election results. The AKP government was the leading instigator of the change in state/religion relations. If there were a strong disagreement with AKP politics, the public vote would show it in some way during elections. But the AKP got 34% of the vote in 2002, 47% in 2007, and 50% in the 2011 elections. It was the first party in Turkish history to increase its votes during three consecutive elections. Surveys in 2012 showed that it continues to have the same public popularity. Although the AKP’s success was more related to economic issues (see Carkoglu 2007; Kalaycioglu 2010) and its capacities as a professional party (see

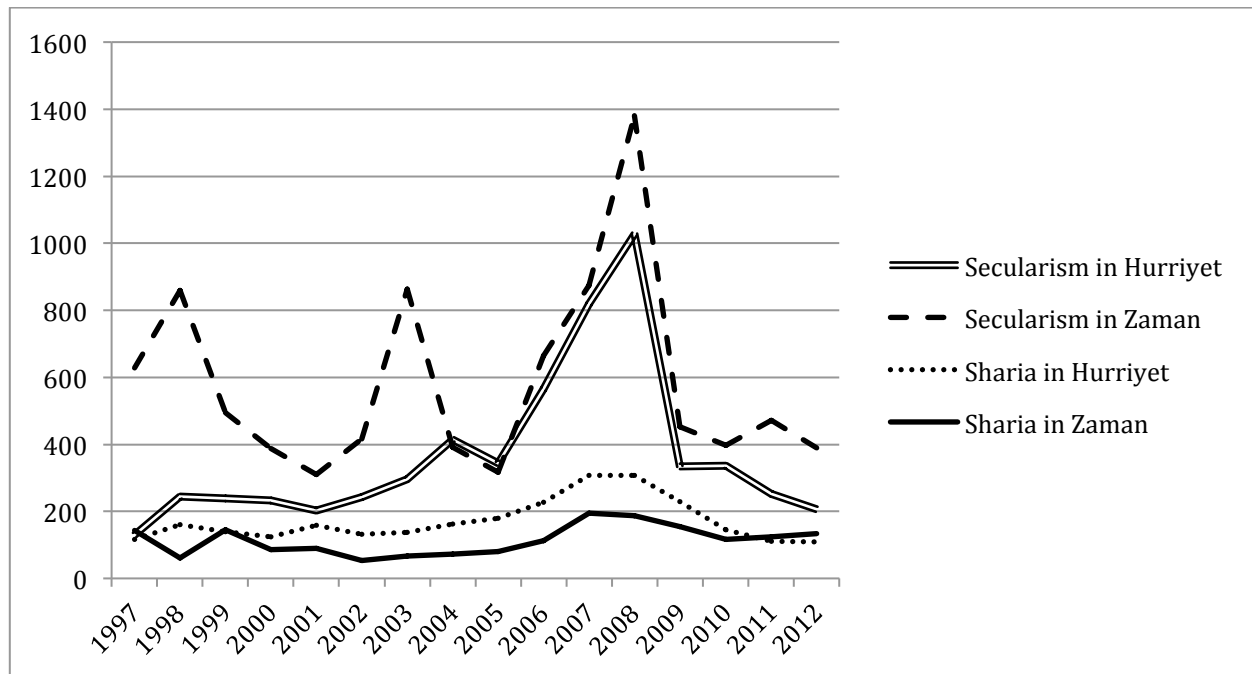
Kumbaracibasi 2009), if there were a strong disagreement with its politics on state-taught religion, this would elicit reactions in the elections or during the latest surveys. The second indicator of this support can be seen in the popularity of the imam-hatip schools, after the effect of the unfair coefficient factor was removed and middle-level sections of these schools were reopened. The popularity of elective religion courses is another sign of public support for these changes.

It is hard to claim that the secular establishment has been satisfied with these changes. However, this secular establishment has clearly changed its standpoint and softened its reactions. Before the February 28 process, in all discussions related to religious affairs, conservatives were supporting their standpoint with religion, while secularists were supporting theirs with secularism. During the February 28 process, conservatives learned that they should base their arguments on universal values. They added new points to these discussions such as human rights, education rights, and different understandings and implementations of secularism by the state. The secular elites did not need to make a change in their standpoint, since they held the power. When the secular elites started to lose this power, their early reactions were rigid until 2008, but they have relaxed since then.

There are three possible explanations for this change. The first one can be described by the psychological term, “learned helplessness.” The secular elites had lost elements of their power one by one between 2002 and 2012. In just ten years, their power in the government, the universities, the media, the judiciary, and the military had diminished. They learned—as in “learned helplessness”—that their strict opposition based on secularism did not change anything but only hurt their feelings, shook their authority, and diminished the rest of their power. One of my interviewees, retired Colonel Ertugrul Oner, was showing this desperation when he talked about the future of the AKP, saying, “The AKP will be the ruling party for one thousand years” (Oner, *personal interview*). The second approach was for the bureaucrats to identify with the group that had the power. When I asked my interviewees if religiosity was increasing among bureaucrats, in one voice they said that was indeed true. However, they generally added that this religiosity was not sincere, but was a way to secure their positions by representing themselves as having ideas similar to those of the ruling party. The third reason for reducing their strict opposition was that some of the secular elites realized that they had gone too far on issues related to religious rights in the name of secularism.

Examining the frequency of news related to the most discussed issues in Turkish politics would provide another opportunity to depict the political and social environment. Newspaper coverage is a good resource to picture the political and social environment in a certain time period. I used the frequency of news related to sharia and secularism to depict the political environment between 2002 and 2012, culled from these newspapers' internet search engines. When I used the frequency tables, I did not elaborate the content of the news but only looked at how many times the key words appeared.

Examining media coverage between 2002 and 2012 reveals the intensity of these discussions. I looked at the coverage of two top-selling newspapers on issues of secularism (*laicism*) and sharia, since they were the most used words in discussions on religion/state relations. *Hurriyet* is a mainstream secular newspaper, while *Zaman* is a mainstream conservative newspaper. The results showed that there had been almost a constant increase in this news until 2008, the year when the lawsuit disbanding the AKP occurred. Since that date, there has been an opposite tendency (Figure 3). I also examined news related to headscarves, especially the frequency of the word *türban* in the *Hurriyet* and *Zaman* newspapers, since it has political connotations. News related to the headscarf has a similar tendency, increasing until 2008 and declining since then. This news coverage is another sign of normalization on the issue of state/religion relations.



**Figure 3:** News Coverage on Sharia and Secularism, 1997-2012

Source: *Hurriyet, Zaman*.

The current literature acknowledges the polarization in Turkish politics during the 2000s, depicted in Figure 3 above (see Bayramoglu 2006; Carkoglu 2007; Yavuz and Ozcan 2007; Baran 2008; Cook 2009; Kalaycioglu 2010; Keyman 2010; Warhola and Bezci 2010). The electoral success of the AKP has polarized secular discourses since 2002, although the AKP has employed a right-based paradigm when defining the place of Islam in a secular society and softened the divide between Islamic and secular discourses in Turkey (Kanra and Ercan 2012). During the 2007 and following elections, the AKP utilized institutional polarization, which I covered widely earlier, and adopted a populist strategy to keep alive polarization on the public level in order to gain binary opposition that would divide society into the people and the elite (Dincsahein 2012; Tombus 2013). In this division, not only the AKP benefited by keeping its grass roots alive, but also the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP). Both parties profited from the binary politics. Although this situation did not help the CHP come to power, it helped to keep it as the main opposition party, secure its votes, and gain more support from opponents of the AKP. However, since binary politics did not bring the secularist CHP much electoral success, it has softened its policies on secularism under its new administration since 2010.

In the early 2000s, the movement of the periphery towards the center of society produced tensions and polarization. As the level of cohabitation increased, so did the intensity of conflict. Increasing direct and indirect contact of the secular segment with the Islamic segment or its actors intensified this conflict (Bayramoglu 2006). However, the 2000s center-periphery cleavage is different from that of the 1950s, which Serif Mardin described. In the previous cleavage, cultural, educational, religious, and economic differences were profound. However, the current movement of the periphery is represented by the middle class AKP constituency that shares more views with the center on issues such as democracy, freedom, and human rights (see Bayramoglu 2006: 145). Cultural and educational gaps have closed during the last two decades between secular and conservative segments, especially for the younger generation. Religion has maintained its importance in this cleavage. However, new definitions and the implementation of secularism on the state level have helped limit the influence of religion in this cleavage. State/religion relations have significantly shifted in the direction of passive secularism. This moderation has helped provide a political foundation for coping with the deepening polarization within Turkish society (see Warhola and Bezci 2010: 453; Kuru 2013).

The intensity of news coverage on secularism and sharia supports my argument on this issue also. The words *secularism* and *sharia* were the most used words in this investigation of polarization. There is a constant increase between 2002 and 2008 in news highlighting these words. This can be read as a sign of polarization in both politics and society. Since 2008, this figure has decreased, eventually retreating to its 2002 level by 2012.

Examining rights of religious minorities might give another opportunity to understand the nature of the relationship between religion and the state in the examined time period 2002-2012. In the next chapter, I will examine rights of religious minorities.



## **IV. RIGHTS OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN TURKEY, 2002-2012**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

In this study, I examine the nature of the relationship between religion and the state in Turkey in the years 2002-2012 and how people in different social locations experience, understand, and evaluate this relationship. I focus on two main cases to explore and follow the trend of this relationship: the teaching of religion by the state and the rights of religious minorities.

In the previous chapter, I examined the state-taught religion. This chapter revealed that the AKP government was constantly trying to amend problems of the vocational imam-hatip schools (IHL) and Quran-based courses, while other state apparatuses were strictly against these amendments. The attempts to remove the age restrictions concerning Quran-based courses and the coefficient limitation applied to the imam-hatip schools almost caused the disbanding of the AKP from politics by the Constitutional Court in 2008. The Court, which was one vote short for dissolving the party, ruled for financial sanctions. During the following years, the AKP government increased its power on the other state apparatus. Eventually, the Turkish state's negative stance regarding religious education was significantly reduced, especially since 2010. As a result, the problems of the imam-hatip schools and Quran-based courses were mostly solved by 2012. Surprisingly, new elective courses related to religion entered the curricula of primary and secondary education. Public support, which can be measured by enrollment in these elective religion courses and the imam-hatip schools in the 2012-2013 school year, suggests that the majority of the population welcomed these amendments.

Examining only the state-taught religion is not sufficient to lead to a general conclusion on the nature of the state/religion relationship. Removing obstacles in front of religious education might be interpreted as a necessity of civil rights; on the other hand, supporting only one religion, Islam in the Turkish case, might be a sign of an oppressive relationship between the Turkish state and the religious minorities.

The time period examined, 2002-2012, reveals two different patterns for the state vis-à-vis religious education. In the early years, the state had wanted to restrain religious education. In the later years, this restraint has evaporated, especially towards the end. The amendments brought some new questions to mind: Does the state have the same approach to the religious education of religious minorities? Were these changes a part of a general amendment based on civil, human, and religious rights, or the promoting of one religion, especially Sunni Islam? Are religious minority rights going along a positive or a negative path? How do religious minorities interpret the changes? This section will help answer these questions.

As a general thesis, I expected to see a positive change on the issue of religious minority rights, based on my interpretation of the recent changes in Turkish politics as a transformation of Turkish society. In this transformation, previously marginalized or excluded groups from politics have become more capable of representing its values in the state administration. Since these groups have been oppressed for decades, it would be likely, once they came to power, to show more respect for other disadvantaged groups, including the religious minorities. Since the AKP government mostly represented these groups in the state, it would be expected that it would be more tolerant vis-à-vis minority rights. On the other hand, I expected to see skepticism toward the AKP among religious minorities because the AKP leaders are strong adherents of Islam.

In fact, religious minority rights have not been discussed much in Turkish politics, since these minorities are less than one percent of the Turkish population and do not have meaningful political power. Current unofficial estimates show the non-Muslim population standing at 60,000 Armenian Orthodox; 20,000 Jews; 20,000 Catholics; 20,000 Syrian Orthodox; 3,000 Greek Orthodox; 2,500 Protestants; 2,000 Syrian Catholics; 2,000 Armenian Catholics; 500 Armenian Protestants; and 300 Chaldean Catholics (EU Progress Report, 2004: 35). My religious minority interviewees confirmed these numbers to some extent by their estimates of the populations of their communities.

In addition to non-Muslim communities, the Alevi group, which constitutes over ten percent of the population in Turkey, has been a part of the discussion of religious minority rights. Although the overwhelming majority of Alevis consider themselves Muslim, they have some distinct and different practices compared to Sunnis. The Sunni majority has mostly ignored these along with the right of Alevis to implement these practices freely. In addition, some Alevis interpret Alevis as a separate religion outside Islam as well as a separate culture. Because of

these different interpretations, it is worth examining Alevi rights in the context of religious minority rights in Turkey.

Indeed, examining changes in religious minority rights allows us to interpret the main reasons behind the changes on the issues of headscarf and state-taught religion during 2002-12, and whether these changes were a part of a general amendment based on civil, human, and religious rights versus the promotion of one religion, namely, Sunni Islam. Therefore, as my second case, I will examine the rights of religious minorities. Before looking its historical and current processes, it would be helpful to explore *minority* and *rights* concepts.

From a sociological perspective, a minority is a group of people who have unequal and inferior treatment or at least they believe so because of their different sense of belonging including but not limited to race, gender, ethnic, or religious background from the dominant majority of a population. In addition, a minority group should present minority consciousness. Without awareness of the minority consciousness, a minority group cannot build an identity and exist (Oran 2004: 17; Akgonul 2013: 4).

On the issue of religious minority rights, the “minority rights” concept refers both equal natural/negative/positive rights and positive discrimination. In the first step, this concept aims prevention of discrimination and providing an equal treatment for every group. In the next step on positive discrimination, it exercises a differential treatment in order to preserve basic characteristics of the minority group that distinguishing them from the majority of the population. The UN and the UNESCO Declarations provide a legal base for both equal and positive discriminatory rights (see Thornberry 1993: 18-19). Providing equal rights for every group in a democratic country might be out of question. However, providing positive discriminatory rights does not have a similar welcome. Most discussions on religious minority rights are related providing them more favorable treatment than the majority. In that case, the concept of minority rights does not necessarily mean a positive connotation by itself or refusing these rights are not always bad as it sounds. They are part of social discourse on politics. Therefore, beginning with the historical process of these rights would provide a better understanding of the current changes.

## B. NON-MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

### 1. History

When the Turkish Republic was established in 1923, it inherited a legacy of tradition from its Ottoman past, a tradition which for centuries was molded by Islamic culture (Toprak 1981: 1). In Ottoman times, religion was the center of life and identity issues. The Ottoman political system considered the religious communities of Christians, Jews, and Muslims as legitimate social entities deserving of respect and status. Calling such communities *millet*, they respected and treated them as legal and social entities. Each religious community (*millet*) was permitted to preserve its own peculiar institutions, to continue practicing its own style of religious and social rites, to preserve its educational and vocational practices, and to practice its own standards of conflict resolution through its own legal systems (Carkoglu and Kalaycioglu 2007: 6). The Ottomans brought their highly varied populations through this organized *millet* system—a kind of citizenship. The millets were the major religious groups that were allowed to establish their own communities under Ottoman rule.

The Ottoman State had established its legal, social, and political structure on this notion of millet, not on ethnic identity. For this reason, depending on their religion, a Turk or an Arab or a person of a different ethnic background could belong to the millet of Muslims, or the millet of Jews, or the millet of Rums (Christians).

The rise of nationalism in Europe under the influence of the French Revolution extended to the Ottoman State during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This new trend influenced nations that were under the rule of the Ottomans. These nations wanted some privileges and eventually to leave the Ottoman Empire. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, nationalism increased among the Turks to inspire them to hold the state together.

Because of this background, Islam and Turkishness become two major identity references in Turkey. To understand the gravity of these factors on political life, we can look at the 1923 Turkish-Greek exchange of populations:

As from the 1st May, 1923, there shall take place a compulsory exchange of Turkish nationals of the Greek Orthodox religion established in Turkish territory, and of Greek nationals of the Moslem religion established in Greek territory. These persons shall not return to live in Turkey or Greece respectively without the

authorization of the Turkish Government or of the Greek Government respectively (Lausanne Peace Treaty).

Under the terms of the treaty, a compulsory exchange of the approximately 150,000 remaining (after the war of independence) Turkish nationals of Greek Orthodox religion in Turkey and approximately 350,000 Greek nationals of the Muslim religion remaining in Greece would commence immediately (bringing the total to around 3 million refugees from both sides, including those from WWI). The treaty excluded the Greek inhabitants in Istanbul and the Muslim inhabitants in Western Thrace. Many of the refugees on the Turkish side had little or no consciousness of being Greek, and those on the Greek side had little or no consciousness of being Turkish. Turks' expulsion generally was based on their adherence to Islam rather than ethnicity, and Greeks' expulsion generally was based on their adherence to Orthodox Christianity rather than ethnicity as such (Triadafilopoulos 1998).

The Lausanne Peace Treaty of 1923 also aimed to protect the rights of religious minorities staying in Turkish territory. The treaty recognized only non-Muslim communities as minorities and granted them equal civic and political rights—to freedom of religion, travel, and migration, to use their own language, and to establish religious and social institutions, including schools (see Appendix E for related articles of the treaty).

This treaty is still a binding law in the Turkish legislation system and is often referenced during discussions on religious minorities. Article 37 of the treaty states:

Turkey undertakes that the stipulations contained in Article 38 to 44 shall be recognized as fundamental laws, and that no law, no regulation, nor official action shall conflict or interfere with these stipulations, nor shall any law, regulation, nor official action prevail over them.

Some of my interviewees addressed this treaty when they talked about religious minority rights. In Turkish politics, it has sometimes been argued that the Turkish state has not implemented all the requirements of the treaty. Another important discussion about the rights given in the treaty is that the Turkish state has not granted the same rights to all religious minorities. Articles 37 through 44 of the treaty mention the word “non-Muslim” to refer to religious minorities without mentioning any specific minority names. However, the Turkish state has restricted these specific religious minority rights only to Greek, Armenian, and Jewish religious communities since signing the treaty. Other religious minorities have not had the same rights such as establishing schools. It could be claimed that the Turkish state had a negative stance against Greek and Armenian minorities in the early years of the Republic, on account of

the allegations that the Greek and Armenian minorities helped the enemies of Turkey during WWI and Turkey's War of Independence. On the other hand, the Jewish communities did not experience this negative stance and were even welcomed. In the 1930s and 1940s Turkey readily accepted Jewish immigrants. Indeed, when compared to other countries in Europe, Turkey treated local and foreign Jews favorably. Before WWII, at a time when almost no country in Europe offered Jews a safe place, Turkey allowed Jewish immigrants to come to Turkey, since there was relatively no anti-Semitism (Cagaptay 2006: 155).

The importance of the rights granted by the Lausanne Peace Treaty might be better understood if we compare the rights of the ethnic groups and the Muslim population on the issue of teaching Islam. While religious minorities enjoyed teaching their language to their children in their schools, ethnic minorities, such as the Kurdish population, did not have this right. The only available elective Kurdish course entered the curricula of public schools in 2012. There was a similar situation concerning the teaching Islam in schools. While religious minorities have the right to teach their religion in their schools, Islam could not be taught in public schools, as I explained the history of teaching religion in the Turkish state part of this study.

For instance, when the issue of elective religion courses in public schools was discussed at the fifth National Education Meeting in 1953, a Jewish high school principal noted that religious minorities taught their religion in their private schools,

I am participating the [National Education] Meeting as the principal of a Jewish high school and a member of the committee. I am greeting everybody with all my respect.

While the issue of religion is being debated, I would like to add that religion courses have been taught in our high school for a long time. There is no complaint on this issue. Students regularly take these classes.... Also, I have classes in public schools. I teach mathematics. I have been asked sometimes “Do you have religion courses in your school?” I reply, Yes, we have. That is all I would like to say (The 5<sup>th</sup> National Education Meeting, 1953 1991: 426).

Indeed, religious minorities had the freedom to teach religion in their schools, but the Muslim majority lacked this right. Howard Reed noted this contradiction in his ethnographic study in the 1950s: “Some Turkish writers have even complained that non-Muslim Turkish citizens enjoy greater religious freedom than the Muslim majority” (Reed 1954: 278).

In the chapter on state-taught religion, I explained that, if a state should feel a threat against its sovereignty from a religion, it would most likely prohibit its teaching in schools or try to control religious education by instituting its own curriculum. Even though autocratic regimes

are more apt to feel this type of threat, democratic regimes experience similar fears from time to time. In the case of minorities, in the early years of the Republic, the Turkish state had fears related to religious minorities because of the incidents in WWI and the War of Turkish Independence. However, these fears have faded in time, as religious minorities have lost political and economic power as well as experiencing a diminution in their population compared to the Muslim population. The only exception to this gradually thawing relationship came in the form of allegations of missionary activities in the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s.

## **2. Missionary Activities**

There were allegations that missionary activities by Christians increased in the late 1990s, especially after the 1999 earthquake in Turkey, which devastated the lives of thousands of people. Missionaries worked to spread their beliefs during human relief efforts. It was also argued that the 2001 economic crisis in Turkey opened new opportunities for missionary activities and those missionaries abused the economic situation of Muslim families in that vulnerable time. In addition, the 9/11 terrorist attacks were regarded as another opportunity to spread Christianity in this time period.

There was, indeed, an increase in missionary activities in Turkey. Increasing pressure on Islamic teaching and activities during the February 28 processes increased fears of conservatives in that time period. It was perceived that the state utilized missionary activities by closing middle-level sections of imam-hatip schools and discouraging enrollment in these schools, at the same time it was making it more difficult to attend Quran-based courses during the compulsory eight-year elementary school education and also persecuting illegal Quran-based courses. These fears continued in the early years of the AKP government, because it gave more rights to religious minorities under the name of legal reforms necessary for EU membership; however, the fears have gradually faded. Even some secularists, such as Rahsan Ecevit, the founder of the Democratic Left Party (DSP) and the wife of the former PM Bulent Ecevit, condemned these reforms by claiming that Turkey was “losing religion” (*Hurriyet* 01/02/2005).

It would seem surprising to see support for Islam among these secularists. Actually, most secularists confirm their Islamic identity by stating, “We are Muslim too!” in their public speeches. On the other hand, according to them, religion should be a matter of private life and

not involve the public sphere. For instance, a Muslim female can wear a headscarf in her private life, but cannot do the same when she attends school, since the school is a public sphere. In other words, these secularists prefer an Islamic understanding that is distinct from its practices, or seen as living as a culture in the wider society. In that sense, Islamic identity, deprived of its practices in public, is to be enjoyed as a cultural building block in society.

On the other hand, negative reactions of secularists to missionary activities would be interpreted as a part of the political opposition to the ruling AKP government. Depicting the AKP government as allowing missionary activities and leading Turkey to become a Christian country would cause the AKP to lose conservative political support. The AKP government, therefore, perceived the reactions of secularists as political opportunism. For instance, when then-Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul was asked to comment about Rahsan Ecevit's concerns related to missionary activities, Gul stated, "I just remembered that when her party DSP was in power [1997-2002], how imam-hatip schools and Quran-based courses were closed, and how all institutions and centers which represent Islam were weakened" (*Milliyet* 01/04/2005). Indeed, Abdullah Gul was right that Islamic teaching was strictly restricted during 1997-2002. In other words, the AKP government did not find the reactions of the secularists to be sincere.

In that environment, several Christian figures in Turkey were killed. A Catholic priest, Andrea Santoro, and an Armenian-Turkish journalist, Hrant Dink, were killed respectively in 2006 and 2007. Both of their murderers were younger than 18 years old. Furthermore, three Christian missionaries were killed in 2007 (*Hurriyet Daily News* 03/05/2011). Most AKP supporters alleged that these murders were part of a plot to reduce the support of Western countries for the AKP government.

An investigation of the clandestine Ergenekon network, a shadowy organization whose suspected members were accused of being nested within the state bureaucracy and working to overthrow the democratically elected AKP government, revealed some connections between the priest murders and this network (*Today's Zaman* 09/19/2011). The Ergenekon trial still continues in 2013.

Surprisingly, the spokesperson of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Father Dositheos Anagnostopoulos, mentioned the Ergenekon network when I asked him about negative experiences encountered by his community since 2002.



There were some negative experiences at the beginning [of the 2000s]. I came to Turkey in 2003. Once or twice a year, there were some protests against the Patriarchate in front of the Patriarchate until this Ergenekon network was revealed.... The protestors were chanting old-fashioned slogans such as “Go to Greece, this is our land.” Even some groups were collecting signatures to expel the Patriarchate from Turkey.... After the Ergenekon [case], all of these stopped. Furthermore, even some journalists who had a negative stance against us or were shy to contact us previously, made an opening by asking questions.... After the Ergenekon case and Hrant Dink’s murder, something happened that had never happened before: approximately 500 students from the universities came in front of the Patriarchate and revealed their support. These [supporting demonstrations] were unusual for Turkey (Anagnostopoulos, *personal interview*).

On the other hand, explaining the reactions of secularists to missionary activities as based only on political opportunism would be unfair. The secularist reaction to the missionaries did not start after the AKP came to power in 2002. Even before this date, in 2001, missionary activities came to the attention of the Turkish state. For instance, the military, which was purely a secularist institution, showed its concern about missionary activities, defined in 2001 by the military dominating the National Security Council (MGK) as a threat to the Republican regime (Cinar 2010: 117).<sup>22</sup> As a personal experience, I attended one of the military seminars about the harmful activities of missionaries in 2005, when I served in the army.<sup>23</sup>

Some MPs brought the missionary issue to the Parliament, requesting an official explanation from the government. Indeed, in terms of Turkish law, there was no difference between spreading Islam and any other religion. When reading statistics against missionary activities, it should be kept in mind that there were similar persecutions against Islamic groups, especially after the 1997 post-modern coup. Statistics showed that 104 people in 1998, 137 people in 1999, 46 people in 2000, and 5 people in 2001 were detained on allegations of missionary activities. More than half of these people were not Turkish citizens and came to Turkey only for missionary activities (TBMM records 02/12/2002).

Foreign missionaries elicited a reaction from my interviewees. For instance, Mehmet Akif Cec from the Felicity Party (SP) made a distinction between missionary activities and religious minority activities:

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<sup>22</sup> Cinar did not reference any source for the decision about missionary activities in the NSC meeting in 2001. The NSC did not publically announce its decision on missionary activities. The Turkish press covered this news, and the NSC did not deny it. See *Radikal* 04/20/2007.

<sup>23</sup> Every male Turkish citizen has to perform mandatory military service in Turkey.

The difference between missionaries and religious minorities should be regarded. Religious minorities have been living in this country for centuries and they belong here. However, missionaries are coming from outside of the country. They have abused the weakness of people with immoral ways such as offering money. Especially, missionaries utilized the political situation of Turkey during the February 28 process when [Islamic] religious education was restricted and prohibited. For instance, attending a Quran-based course or a summer Quran-based course in mosques is still illegal<sup>24</sup> in Turkey. These kinds of people, who are utilizing this political environment and doing missionary activities with immoral ways, should be considered [when talking about religious minority rights] (Cec, *personal interview*).

Also, the spokesperson of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Father Dositheos Anagnostopoulos, expressed that foreigners, especially Protestant Americans, have carried out missionary activities in Turkey,

Christian churches, including Armenian and Greek, or Catholics in Turkey, do not have a missionary duty. The persons who distribute free Bibles on streets are foreigners coming from the U.S. They are Protestants. We do not do a similar activity. We do not do it because we have a Christian community and our duty is making missionary activities among our community, especially for teaching the religion to Christian children. However, we do not make a missionary activity for converting a Muslim or a Catholic or a Jew to another religion [Orthodox Christianity], but Americans do (Anagnostopoulos, *personal interview*).

Just before the AKP came to power, the previous government in May 2002 requested the Department of Religious Affairs to inform Muslim citizens about missionary activities (TBMM records 7/7517). Imparting this type of information by the Department of Religious Affairs continued in the early years of the AKP as well. This department organized several public seminars and conferences, issued related publications, and mentioned these activities in sermons (see TBMM records 03/24/2004 and 03/10/2005). The Department of Religious Affairs approved a statewide Friday sermon about missionary activities in March 2005. The EU harshly criticized the 2005 sermon and interpreted it as a sign of hostility against missionary activities (EU Progress Report 2005: 31).

In 2004, another official response regarding the missionary activities showed that the state was tolerating endeavors that aided in the spreading of a religion by its members, while at the same time continuing to make a distinction regarding “proselytizing.” Proselytizing was

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<sup>24</sup> This interview was conducted before the 2012 changes related to Quran-based courses. Since that date, elementary school students may attend summer Quran-based courses.

regarded as abusing the weakness of people for political and economical gain (TBMM records 01/20/2004). In reality, *proselytizing* was a vague term.

In 2004, while the issue was still hot, Prof. Ali Kose was explaining conversion in terms of sociological reasons rather than solely examining theological explanations. According to him, if a young person chooses to be a Christian, he/she chooses being “western,” not Christian. If Christian missionaries in Turkey came from African countries, they would never catch the attention of Turkish youth (Kose 2004: 407). While the Turkish economy gained strength and the state’s hostile attitude against Islamic endeavors diminished under the AKP government, fears of missionary activities faded also. Official records showed that 338 people converted from Islam to Christianity and 6 people converted to Judaism between 1997 and 2004. In the same period, 232 people converted to Islam (TBMM records 03/08/2005). Turkish ID cards have a section for religious affiliation, so these numbers show only official changes. Unofficial changes would be more. For instance, a dissertation on Muslim converts to Christianity between 1990 and 2010 estimated approximately 5000 converts in 20 years. However, the researcher, Sinan Zavalsiz, concluded that the majority of converts already had Christian parents. In other words, he did not see them as Christian converts (Zavalsiz 2011).<sup>25</sup>

Official reports showed that there were 69 illegal churches in 2003 (TBMM records 03/24/2004) and 88 in 2004—including different places of worship (TBMM records 03/08/2005). This increase would be a sign of tolerating missionary activities by the state in some way.

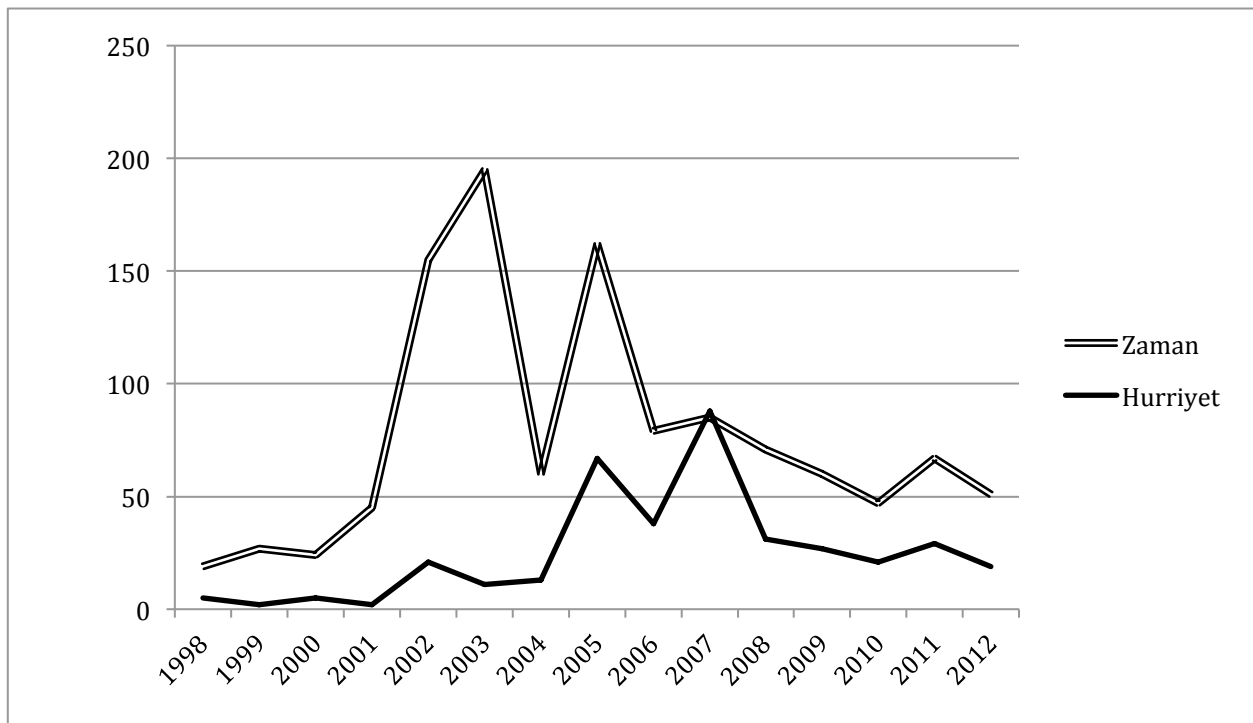
One of my interviewees, Oktay Eksi, was complaining about how the AKP government tolerated illegal Quran-based courses. According to him, there were at least two thousand such illegal institutions in Turkey. So it is important to note that the AKP government was tolerating not only illegal Quran-based courses but also illegal churches, even when criticisms were at their peak about missionary activities.

Examining frequency of news related to missionary activities in the national media would give us another opportunity to depict political and social environment in that days. I used frequency of news related to missionary activities to depict the political environment between 2002-2012. I used these newspapers’ internet search engines to find related news. When I used

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<sup>25</sup> The reader can check *Dinler Tarihçilerinin Gözüyle Türkiye’de Misyonerlik* (2005) for detailed information about missionary activities in different regions of Turkey.

the frequency tables, I did not elaborate the content of the news but just looked how many times these key words appeared in news. This examination revealed that news coverage about missionary activities in the national media reached its peak around 2005 but faded gradually since then. I examined coverage of two top-selling newspapers on this issue: *Hurriyet* is a mainstream secular newspaper, while *Zaman* is a mainstream conservative newspaper. Both of them are the top-selling newspapers in Turkey. Since *Zaman* is a conservative newspaper, it was likely to have more coverage about missionary activities than *Hurriyet*. The results showed that news related to missionary activities reached its peak in 2005 and had been declining since then (Figure 4). This was also another sign that fears about missionary activities have diminished in society.



**Figure 4:** News Coverage on Missionary Activities, 1998-2012

Source: *Hurriyet; Zaman*.

### 3. Changes Related to Rights of Religious Minorities

In the examined time period between 2002 and 2012, the problems of non-Muslim religious communities might be subsumed under the categories of legal personality, property rights, the training of clergy, and the management of their foundations (EU Progress Report 2005: 109).

One of the prominent legal changes related to religious minorities was ratification of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) in June 2003. This covenant, which was signed in August 2000, had been waiting in front of the Parliament since then. Although Turkey ratified the document, she expressed some reservations related to Article 27, which stated religious minority rights as follows:

In those States in which ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language.

In its reservations, Turkey stated,

The Republic of Turkey reserves the right to interpret and apply the provisions of Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in accordance with the related provisions and rules of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey and the Treaty of Lausanne of 24 July 1923 and its Appendixes.

In other words, at the beginning of the 2000s, the Turkish state did not intend to provide religious freedom to religious minorities beyond the boundaries of the Treaty of Lausanne. Some people interpret the amendments related to religious minorities between 2002 and 2012 as only giving rights to these groups that were already provided by the Treaty of Lausanne. In this opinion, religious minority rights had been confiscated unjustly during the early years of the Republic. They argued that what is happening in Turkey now is only fixing the old mistakes. Some others, while accepting the early mistakes, are more generous in their appreciation of the current amendments.

For instance, one of the interviewees, Prof. Ahmet Turan Alkan, while criticizing the Nationalist Movement Party's (MHP) attitude against religious minority rights, expressed that the Turkish state has not provided new rights to them but only given their previous rights back:

It is not possible to accept the attitude of the MHP against [religious] minorities. Why is it not possible?... [Because] we are not providing new rights to [religious] minorities but only returning their previous rights that were stated in the 1923

Lausanne Treaty. The Turkish state is implementing necessities of an international treaty merely now (Alkan, *personal interview*).

In contrast, some groups saw the demands of non-Muslim communities as abundant and unacceptable, beyond the terms of the Lausanne. According to them, the minorities already had every right. These demands were an imposition of Western countries, including the U.S. For instance, one of the interviewees, Dr. Ahmet Metin, representing the Association of Kemalist Thought in Istanbul and the Thrace region, expressed his concerns on this issue, especially regarding the non-Muslim community demands on Ecumenism and the Greek Orthodox schools. According to him, the minority issue was resolved in the Treaty of Lausanne: “Dealing with Ecumenism is scratching the wound. Who did not accept and sign the Lausanne Treaty among countries? The U.S. It still does not recognize it. These [demands] are a part of its game” (Metin, *personal interview*).

Another interviewee, Dogan Bermek from the Federation of the Alevi Foundations, stated there has been no change in reality but in name only. Mr. Bermek referenced a report prepared by the Federation about problems of religious minorities, *Türkiye’de İnanç Grupları: Sorunlar ve Taleplere Yönelik Yeni bir Çerçeve*. He stated there is no change by giving an example regarding the issue of legal personality:

On the issue of religious minorities, you can read from this report how much religious minorities have problems. They [the AKP government] are smiling upon you now. They do not have the state’s despotic—I do not give!—attitude. Even this smiling makes religious minorities happy. However, there are no rights given to them. For instance, you are the Armenian Patriarch. You are one of two people who have a legal right to wear religious attire. However, you cannot ask the Patriarchate to buy an official car for your service, because the Patriarchate does not exist [legally]. It does not have a legal personality. The only way is for one Armenian to buy a car and give it to the service of the Patriarch. The Treaty of Lausanne gave this right to the Patriarch, but you do not implement any requirements of the treaty. It is the same for the Orthodox Patriarch. First, the world accepts that he is the Ecumenical Patriarch. But we do not accept ecumenism. Who cares if you [the Turkish state] accept it or not? Second, without regarding whether or not you accept his ecumenism, he is the Patriarch! The Patriarchate, which has existed since [Sultan] Fatih [year of 1453], does not exist [legally], does not have a legal personality. The Patriarchy pays utility bills, but when it buys a book, it cannot write its name on the receipt. It was the same before 2002 and the same after 2002. In other words, nothing changed (Bermek, *personal interview*).

Religious minorities also stated the legal personality problem as an important issue during the interviews. For instance, the spokesman of the Orthodox Church, Father Anagnostopoulos Dositheos, stated:

Currently, neither the Orthodox Church, nor the Catholic Church, nor the Armenian Church, nor the Jewish community has a legal personality. We [Orthodox Church] do not have a legal personality. Turkish politicians and newspapers say the Patriarchate is a Turkish institution, but it is not [as it does not have a legal personality]. This is our main and the first problem—that of not having a legal personality, vis-à-vis the Ottoman Empire. If we were recognized as having a legal personality, our bureaucratic relations would be easier. For instance, you cannot send an official letter to the prime ministry or the president in the name of the Patriarchate. If you write, it does not have any official recognition. However, the Patriarch, the head of the Orthodox Church, has been recognized as a person. Isn't this weird? The Patriarch is recognized, but the Patriarchate is not recognized. Everybody knows that the Patriarchy is here. Everybody comes here to give us a notice.... If you do not have a legal personality, you have many problems. For instance, you, [as a person], can hire an assistant for your housework. You pay his/her salary. However, the Patriarchate cannot do it because the Patriarchate does not exist legally. Since it does not exist legally, it cannot appoint anybody [to work here]. You can ask how we solve this problem. It is solved, but it is not the solution. Inside this area there are the Patriarchate and its church. The church is a foundation, but the Patriarchate is not. We are hiring workers [including religious clergy] in the name of the [church] foundation. This is not a suitable way (Anagnostopoulos, *personal interview*).

The Jewish community expressed similar problems related to legal personality and mentioned it among its primary problems. Yusuf Altintas, the secretary general of the Chief Rabbi of Turkish Jews, stated the Turkish Jewish community does not have a legal personality. The Turkish state recognizes only the Chief Rabbi of Turkish Jews. This is their primary problem:

Regretfully, we do not have a legal personality. This is our entire problem. We, a community that has twenty thousand people, do not have a legal personality. Only the Chief Rabbi has official recognition.

[For instance], when I go to a state office and introduce myself as Yusuf Altintas, the secretary general of the Chief Rabbi, and request something in the name of the Chief Rabbi, they do not say “No” and may even buy me a coffee. However, this situation totally depends on official people's understanding. In other words, I do not have a legal right to request something in the name of the secretary general of the Chief Rabbi. I cannot demand my legal rights but have to solicit a favor. I do not have any more priority than any other Turkish citizen. Even if the official people show more respect and kindness [than they do to others], the request does not have any [legal] difference from other Turkish citizens' requests (Altintas, *personal interview*).

Also, the Latin Catholic community leader, Istanbul's Vicar Apostolic Monsignor Louis Pelatre, mentioned the legal personality issue. He noted that the Catholic community has more problems with this issue, since the Turkish state recognizes only Greeks, Armenians, and Jews as minorities according to the Treaty of Lausanne (Pelatre, *personal interview*). Although Greek, Armenian, and Jewish communities do not have official recognition either, at least their community leaders, the Orthodox Patriarch, the Armenian Patriarch, and the Chief Rabbi of the Turkish Jewish community have official recognition. In the case of the Catholic Church, even their church leader has no official recognition.

As can be seen above, there were practical solutions. The demands of the religious minorities were not denied just because they did not have legal personalities. However, these attitudes were not solidified by legal changes. The religious minorities fear that, if one day a person who has a negative stance toward religious minorities comes to lead some related departments of the state or the government, they would not experience similar treatment. Thus it is important to have these rights under the legal system instead of leaving them to the decisions of individuals. In short, rights should not be based on arbitrary decisions but should be protected by laws. In addition, protecting rights by laws prevents or at least makes unlikely negative changes in the future.

It should be noted here that, while religious minorities are having some problems, the Sunni majority was not free of them either. It has not enjoyed total religious freedom, as I explained in the chapter on state-taught religion. Some religious minorities were aware of it and noted it while mentioning their problems. For instance, Yusuf Sag, the Turkish Syrian Catholic Deputy Patriarch Chorepiscopus, mentioned several problems of religious minorities in our interview. He noted they were aware that not only did religious minorities have problems, but the Sunnis did too. That is why he found recent changes useful and appreciated the endeavors even with their shortcomings:

I cannot say all problems of Christians were a hundred percent solved. We still have problems. You have to be cruel to be kind (*dost aci soylar*). When I say I love Turkey more than you, I am not exaggerating. That is why I have to say it. I am not living off the fat of the land (*bir elim yagda bir elim balda degil*). However, this should be respected because everybody has problems including Sunnis and Alevis. Their problems have not been solved either. It is not like the Sunnis have solved their problems, or that the Kurds or the Alevis have solved theirs and that it is only a small number of Christian minorities that have not solved their problems. However, there have been endeavors to solve these



problems. We are saying the same thing to Europe: Don't you have any problems? [For instance], you have problems in Germany.... The important thing is intention. If we have goodwill for each other, these problems will be solved in time. There is nothing falling into someone's lap (*bir gunde pis, agzima dus*) in just one moment. The problems are being solved in time (Sag, *personal interview*).

As was clearly stated, the legal personality issue was not solved between 2002 and 2012. There was no legal solution in the issue of the training of clergy either. Then how is it possible to explain the good faith of some religious minorities in the AKP government?

Before conducting my interviews with members of religious minorities, I had a hypothesis that I would find no support for the AKP government among them. While I was defining the AKP as a conservative party, I was aware that there were plenty of people who were asserting that the AKP was an Islamic or at least a pro-Islamic party. These kinds of comments were causing me to question my conclusion about the AKP. I had a simple idea that, if religious minorities thought the AKP was an Islamist party, they would show no support for its politics. Sixty years ago, Seymour Martin Lipset was stating, "many ethnic and religious minorities suffering social or economical discrimination support the more left parties in different countries" (Lipset 1963 [1959]: 261). This political inclination has not changed since Lipset's time. Therefore, seeing support among religious minorities for the AKP government surprised me.

One of these surprises was that I saw photos of PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul, along with the Pope's picture, on the wall of the office of the Syrian Catholic church leader Yusuf Sag where we conducted the interview. I asked about the pictures near the end of the interview. Chorepiscopus Sag explained them to me. There was a picture of the Pope in the middle, where Sag was bowing and holding the hand of the Pope to show his respect. On the right of this picture was the one of President Abdullah Gul. Gul was in the middle of the picture, with Yusuf Sag on his one side and the Armenian Catholic church leader on his other. In the third picture, PM Erdogan was posing with several religious minorities after a luncheon gathering in August 2009. Yusuf Sag added that he has a few more pictures with President Gul,<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> At the time of writing this chapter, another church leader, Yusuf Cetin, the Patriarchal Vicar of the Turkish Syrian Orthodox Church, accompanied President Abdullah Gul during an official visit to Sweden in March 2013. This was the first time that a representative of a Turkish religious minority group was invited to join a presidential visit abroad (*Hurriyet Daily News* 03/11/2013).

which his family members keep in their homes and offices. He also noted that it is the first time that a prime minister's picture has been hanging on his wall.

Although there was no question about religious minorities' party preferences among my interview questions, I asked the spokesperson of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Father Dositheos Anagnostopoulos, about party preferences of the Christian minorities while he was talking about attitudes of political parties towards religious minorities. He explicitly said that Christian minorities support the AKP. He recalled the Armenian Patriarch's statement by adding that the Greek Orthodox Patriarch never made a statement like that (Anagnostopoulos *personal interview*).

The Armenian Patriarch II Mutafyan lent his community's support to the AKP just before the 2007 elections, when he talked to the German weekly *Der Spiegel*. He said the Armenian community would prefer the AKP to the social democrat Republican People's Party (CHP). He noted that the approach of the AKP to minorities is coherent and less nationalist. He concluded, "Our choice for the upcoming elections is Erdogan" (*Hurriyet Turkish Daily News* 06/05/2007. See, in German, *Der Spiegel* 06/01/2007). It can be argued that a religious minority group leader did not want to conflict with the ruling party. However, this could not have been the case during the 2007 elections. Only one month before the Patriarch Mutafyan's statement to *Der Spiegel*, the Turkish military released a statement against the AKP government, later termed an e-memorandum. In the political environment of those days, the AKP was prevented from selecting its presidential candidate in Parliament and pushed to announce early elections. The secular establishment was organizing marches against the AKP. No research center's opinion polls were predicting enormous support for the AKP in the 2007 elections. Only one research center, KONDA, estimated 48% for the AKP just a few days before the elections (*Radikal* 07/19/2007). This guess was harshly criticized in the Turkish media (see *Radikal* 07/24/2007). The AKP did get 47% in that election, but it was not likely that Patriarch Mutafyan would have predicted it.

In the interview, Father Anagnostopoulos confirmed the reason behind the Armenian Patriarch's support that the AKP was dealing with the problems of religious minorities. He also added that religious minorities do not vote for the Republican People's Party (CHP). They thought that all the problems of minorities began when the CHP was the ruling party or when Ismet Inonu [CHP leader] was a part of the coalition government. That is why religious minorities hesitated to vote for the CHP (Anagnostopoulos, *personal interview*).

After seeing the support of some Christian minorities for the AKP, I could not resist asking the same question to the Jewish community, even though I added that this was not among my original questions and respondents should feel free not to respond. Yusuf Altintas, the secretary general of the Chief Rabbi of Turkish Jews, said the Jewish community is not homogenous in the issue of politics. However, he added that Islamism is not the most important factor in the AKP's fifty percent vote. Economic progress and other factors should be regarded as more significant. He also compared his previous experience with the 2002-2012 period, noting, "When I go to Ankara now, I feel relieved by comparing previous experiences [in bureaucracy]. It is said that [PM] Menderes [in the 1950s] and [PM] Turgul Ozal [in the 1980s] opened this way. However, I am seeing it now" (Altintas, *personal interview*).

How has the AKP secured the support of the religious minorities? Most legal reforms related to them occurred under the name of adjusting to EU norms. There was both public and state support for EU membership in the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. Public support for the EU membership increased after the 2001 economic crisis in Turkey. Most people saw the EU as a way of economic relief. Most conservative people did not show support for EU membership until the February 28 process. It was assumed that participating in the EU would harm Muslim religious identity. However, the 1997 post-modern coup changed Islamic groups' perspective against the EU. When the state harshly suppressed Islamic groups, they saw EU membership as a road toward religious freedom. In that environment most people were supporting EU membership for different reasons and supporting the necessary legal reforms by 2002. The AKP was strongly in favor of EU participation before it came to power in 2002. In its early years in power, the AKP showed its commitment on the matter by utilizing steps toward EU membership to legitimize its power in the eyes of the secular establishment. The AKP was aiming to show that it was not a successor of the previously banned Islamic parties, all of which opposed EU membership. Supporting EU membership and doing substantive actions in this direction were drawing a line between the AKP and the Islamist parties. The commitment of the AKP to EU membership was supported in the international arena. Recep Tayyip Erdogan personally needed this support as well. He was under a political ban that prevented him from being elected to Parliament in the 2002 elections. When the ban was lifted few months later, he won a seat in Parliament in local elections and then became the prime minister in 2003. Also, the AKP reformed laws to reduce the power of the military in the state, such as reducing the

influence of the National Security Council (MGK) and annulling some military appointments in the Higher Education Board (YOK) and judiciary. Therefore, the early amendments related to religious minorities might be linked to the desire for EU membership, especially between 2002 and 2007. While the AKP secured its power, the Turkish economy gained strength and the EU stalled in providing membership; as a result, both public and state demand for EU membership has faded since 2007. Thus EU pressure alone cannot explain amendments related to religious minorities, especially after 2007.

A few constitutional amendments since October 2001 and several “reform packages” since 2002 have passed Parliament to align with EU standards. In their articles related to religious minorities, Article 33 of the Constitution facilitated establishing foundations in the 2001 amendment. Legal personalities gained a right to establish foundations or be members of them (see TBMM records 09/26/2001). In the framework of constitutional amendments in 2004, the superiority of international treaties was added to the Constitution. Article 90 stated:

International agreements duly put into effect bear the force of law. No appeal to the Constitutional Court shall be made with regard to these agreements, on the ground that they are unconstitutional. In the case of a conflict between international agreements in the area of fundamental rights and freedoms duly put into effect and the domestic laws due to differences in provisions on the same matter, the provisions of international agreements shall prevail.

The reform packages came to be a term of reference for a collection of amendments to different laws or codes designed since February 2002 to align with EU standards. The third reform package, which entered into force in August 2002, addressed the legal conditions pertaining to real estate held by non-Muslim community foundations. Non-Muslim communities were allowed to acquire and dispose of property regardless of whether or not they had the status of foundations. Furthermore, these communities were entitled to register the property they actually used as long as they could prove ownership. The implementation of this amendment was subject to a number of conditions, including that permission had to be obtained from the Council of Ministers for the purpose of acquisition and disposal of new property (*Official Gazette* no.24841 08/09/2002; EU Regular Report 2002: 38; Oran 2004: 117; *Political Reforms in Turkey* 2007: 8).

Regarding the property rights of non-Muslim communities, the fourth reform package, in January 2003, simplified bureaucratic procedures by removing the need for obtaining permission

from the Council of Ministers. The Department of Foundations was put in charge of this procedure instead (*Official Gazette* no.24990 01/11/2003).

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (dating from 1966) was ratified with some reservations in June 2003. In the meantime, the sixth reform package, in July 2003, extended the deadline for registration of religious minority foundations from six to eighteen months. In this package, the Law on Public Works was amended to replace the word “mosque” with the phrase “places of worship,” meaning that churches and synagogues would be covered in public works and benefit from the same rights to build their places of worship. The Civil Registry Law was amended to remove some restrictions on the registration of names given to children by their parents. The reference to “politically” offensive names was removed from the law (*Official Gazette* no.25173 07/19/2003).

The seventh reform package reduced the penalty for insulting Turkishness and the state organs from one year to six months at the lower limit, and clarified in August 2003 that criticizing without intending to insult did not call for any penalty (*Official Gazette* no.25192 08/07/2003). The upper limit of the penalty was reduced from three years to two years in the 2004 amendments (*Official Gazette* no.25611 10/12/2004). The vague term of “Turkishness” was also replaced by “Turkish nation.” This amendment introduced a requirement in 2008 for permission to be obtained from the Justice Minister in order to launch a criminal investigation (*Official Gazette* no.26870 05/08/2008). These repetitive changes show that the judiciary has not aligned with the same speed as the rest of the government to promote rights in some cases, as the government now requires its permission to follow a legal case on the issue of insulting the Turkish nation or the state.

I did not reference all the changes in the aforementioned reform packages but only prominent changes. Other reform packages have brought about additional changes related to religious minority rights. Passing laws in Parliament happened in a relatively short time; however, implementing these amendments would take longer in practice.

The most comprehensive law related to foundations and properties of non-Muslim communities passed Parliament in November 2006. However, former President Ahmed Necdet Sezer vetoed it (*Hurriyet Daily News* 11/30/2006). The AKP government brought the same law back to the Parliament after President Sezer’s term ended. The Law on Foundations then passed Parliament in February 2008 despite the strong opposition of the CHP and the MHP. One of the

Parliamentary sessions happened in a closed session at the demand of the MHP. Both the CHP and MHP argued that the principle of reciprocity in the Treaty of Lausanne was being harmed. Before making these amendments, Turkey should have demanded equal rights for the Turkish minority in Western Thrace. Turkey risked paying staggering amounts of compensation to minority foundations (TBMM records 02/13-14/2008). President Abdullah Gul approved the law without incident. Then, the CHP applied to the Constitutional Court to annul the Law on Foundations, but that court did not do so in its verdict of June 2010 (Constitutional Court App. No 2008/22, D. No. 2010/82).

The Law on Foundations addressed a large number of issues faced by religious minority groups in the management and acquisition of property. In particular, with the new law, property previously seized from non-Muslim foundations was to be returned according to the 1936 declaration if they appealed within eighteen months. Foreigners could form new religious foundations with the principle of reciprocity. Non-Muslim community foundations could own property and manage it without prior permission; become partners of companies; engage in international activities; receive financial aid from organizations outside Turkey; register previous donations and purchases to the Land Registry that were not registered because of prior restrictions; transfer, lease, or change the use of properties that are no longer used; and benefit from tax incentives for donations, repair, restoration, and landscaping of cultural properties that belong to them. Furthermore, the law established the Foundations Council as the highest decision-making body for foundations. Non-Muslim foundations were to send representatives to this new body.

In August 2011, the AKP government published a decree to consolidate the changes. This decree stated that the market value of foundation properties currently registered with third parties would be paid if they were seized and sold to other third parties by the state, since the 1936 property declaration (*Official Gazette* no.28038 08/27/2011). A later official notice arranged these regulations in October 2011 (*Official Gazette* no.28071 10/01/2011).

I conducted most of my interviews with religious minorities just after these legal changes, which clearly had a positive effect on the thinking of those with whom I spoke. Even though there had been some amendments related to property rights since 2002, religious minorities had not been allowed to carry several cases related to their properties to domestic courts. When they lost these cases in Turkey, they took them to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR),

where several verdicts were issued in favor of religious minorities. These verdicts encouraged the government to take some forward steps in property rights. Otherwise, the Turkish government would have to deal with every case taken to the ECHR. Yet the effects of the ECHR verdicts on property rights seemed limited in the Turkish state, so they cannot be the only explanation of the policy changes there.

To my surprise, I heard about a few incidents from religious minorities indicating that, although they had not requested the return of some of their previous properties since they did not have a record of them and were not aware that they had more properties a few decades ago, the Turkish state had offered them back to these communities after examining official state records.

By August 2012, the application deadline ended for the return of properties. According to official information, 108 community foundations applied for the return of 1,568 properties. By September 2012, only the return of 58 properties had been completed. The Turkish state offered compensations for eight properties that were in the hands of third parties. Applications for 53 properties were not found eligible. Investigation of the remaining 1,449 applications has been continued (EU Progress Report 2012: 30).

As I said, the ECHR decisions on the property rights of religious minorities cannot be the only explanation of the policy change of the Turkish state. In the case of the ECHR verdicts, the AKP government never held back to explain its opinions if they did not agree with the court's. For instance, the ECHR ruled in November 2005—on upholding the headscarf ban in Turkish universities—that the ban on wearing headscarves in universities does not violate freedom of religion and conscience (ECHR *Leyla Sahin vs. Turkey*). The AKP government harshly criticized this decision. Even PM Erdogan said, “On this [headscarf] issue, the court has no right to speak. That right belongs to the scholars of Islam” (*Hurriyet Daily News* 11/17/2005).

Whereas the EU pressure to expand religious minority rights cannot fully explain the Turkish state's policy changes, that pressure has covered all problems related to legal personality, the training of clergy, property rights, and the management of foundations. On the issues of legal personality and training of clergy, however, there has been only a little progress. On the issues of property rights and the management of foundations, the most prominent legal changes happened in the February 2008 Law on Foundations, which was initially vetoed in 2006 by former President Sezer, and in the August 2011 decree. The AKP government has a commitment toward EU membership, but this commitment was at its lowest level between 2005

and 2008. Even the Chief Prosecutor noted this situation in 2008 in the dissolving lawsuit against the AKP. In its reply to the court, the AKP government implicitly accepted that there was a slowdown on the path to EU membership by stating that this happened because of the deadlock on the Cyprus issue in 2006 and 2007 (Constitutional Court App. No 2008/1 D. No 2008/2). Even though there has been a gradual increase in the level of this commitment since 2008, it is not back to its height in the early 2002-2005 period. Therefore, EU pressure alone cannot explain the prominent legal changes in 2008 and 2011.

A third explanation would be that of gaining the electoral support of religious minorities. However, the electoral power of religious minorities is very limited in Turkey. They have a population of about 100,000 who are eligible to vote. In the 2011 elections, the number of registered voters was over fifty million in Turkey, which means that the electoral power of religious minorities was 0.02% among all voters. This percentage is not high enough to persuade a mainstream party to shape its politics accordingly. Any changes intended merely to gain the support of religious minorities would cause a greater decline in the nationalist vote.

So how can this policy change in the state be explained? First of all, the Turkish state has stopped seeing religious minorities as a threat to its unity. Turkey was no longer in a condition of political instability as it was in the aftermath of WWI. In addition, religious minorities lacked much of their previous political, economic, and demographic power.

Any previous changes would have stumbled in confrontation with Turkey's reciprocity principle. Article 45 of the Treaty of Lausanne stated, "The rights conferred by the provisions of the present Section on the non-Moslem minorities of Turkey will be similarly conferred by Greece on the Moslem minority in her territory." As I mentioned above, opposition parties brought this reciprocity argument to Parliament during discussions on the bill relating to foundations. The Turkish state practically halted seeking reciprocity for the rights of religious minorities. This was another sign that Turkey no longer feared Greece or saw that country as a serious competitor in the international arena. Also, this was an important step in Turkey's beginning to see religious minorities as equal citizens of the nation, rather than as citizens of foreign states who happened to be living in Turkey. The only concern was the issue of Christian missionary activities that occurred in the beginning of the 2000s. Because the Turkish economy has gained strength since 2002, these concerns have diminished also.



In this policy change, there were two components: the government on one side, and other state apparatuses on the other side. The AKP was claiming to be the party of all Turkey, boasting an inclusive approach that also found a response in religious minority rights. In addition, the AKP was arguing for religious freedom for everybody by reminding the country of universal values. Its early intention was to provide religious freedom for the wearing of headscarves in universities and remove obstacles in front of the imam-hatip schools (IHL). While claiming universal values for Islam, it acknowledged that it would not be fair to exclude other living religions in Turkey. These reasons helped the AKP government to initiate some amendments related to religious minority rights. Other state apparatuses did not show a strong reaction to these changes, as had happened on the issue of Muslim rights, including issues around headscarves, IHLs, and Quran-based courses. This silence could be interpreted as reflecting the readiness of the state to make these changes. In fact, former President Sezer vetoed the first foundation law in 2006, although his reaction would be interpreted as personal rather than representing the state.

On the other issues, outside property rights, some amendments were offered between 2002 and 2012. A common problem for religious minorities was how to train clergy, both in terms of providing an adequate number of priests or pastors to lead religious services for the community and teach the religion to younger generations, and in terms of having an adequate number of spiritual leaders for the Patriarchate to continue its work. The Orthodox Church, especially, was worrying about the future of the Patriarchate. CNN covered news that Patriarch Bartholomew, the 270<sup>th</sup> patriarch of Istanbul, could turn out to be the last patriarch of Istanbul for pointing out the problems of the Patriarchate (CNN 08/27/2010). The Patriarchate was run by a synod of 13 archbishops, of whom the Patriarch was one—"first among equals." Since the Greek community had a small population in Turkey and did not have a school to train future religious leaders, this community had difficulties in provide the necessary number of spiritual leaders.

According to spokesman Father Anagnostopoulos, the Orthodox Church closed this gap by bringing in priests from Greece:

Heybeliada (Halki) Seminary has been closed for forty years. The official language of the Church is Greek. Therefore, the Church needs people who went to a Greek theology school or seminary. Since we do not have any other option, we bring them from Greece (Anagnostopoulos, *personal interview*).

However, importing spiritual leaders from a foreign country has legal obstacles. The Patriarchate does not have a legal personality; therefore, legally the Patriarchate cannot bring in any priests. These people were coming with tourist visas and had to exit from Turkey every few months and then come back. In fact, tolerating these priests to work under the Patriarchate with tourist visas might be interpreted to be against the spirit of the exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece called for by the Treaty of Lausanne. According to this treaty, even these immigrants “shall not return to live in Turkey or Greece respectively without the authorization of the Turkish Government or of the Greek Government respectively” (Lausanne Peace Treaty 1923). For instance, the exchange of populations committee, controlled by the League of Nations, ruled that an archbishop, Konstantin Araboglu, of the Greek Orthodox Church, should leave Turkey according to the treaty. He was not an inhabitant of Istanbul before 1918 and should have left according to the exchange of populations. In the meantime, the synod of the Church appointed him as Patriarch in December 1924. Although he was officially chosen by the synod, the Turkish state deported him in January 1925. (According to Turkish laws, the Patriarch should be a Turkish citizen and a newly elected patriarch should be recognized by the state before he claims the post). After the deportation, Greece sent a diplomatic note to Turkey. This shows just how tense the political environment was during those days. Turkish Parliament records showed how much the Turkish state committed to this issue (TBMM records 02/04/1925; also see Erdal 2004 for reflections in the press at this period). Eventually, Patriarch Konstantin Araboglu resigned from his post after a few months and later died in Greece in 1930. Eighty-six years after the death of Patriarch Araboglu, the Turkish government allowed the return of his body to Turkey. It was brought back from Greece in 2011 and reburied near the tombs of other patriarchs in Istanbul (*Hurriyet* 03/07/2011).

Accepting Greek nationals who worked in the Patriarchate with tourist visas was another sign of the consolidation of the relationship between non-Muslim religious communities and the Turkish state. In 2008, the Turkish government took the additional step of providing work permits for foreign clergy who wished to work in Turkey. Spokesman Father Anagnostopoulos said that these working permits were for one year but could be extended every year without obstacle. During our interview, he said there were 17 fathers in the Patriarchate, 11 of them Greece citizens. Before obtaining these work permits, they were staying in Turkey with tourist visas. In other words, their presence was illegal. As a further step, the Turkish government

started to offer citizenship to Orthodox Church members. The Patriarchate is being run by the synod, which has 13 archbishops, all of whom are required to have Turkish citizenship. Father Anagnostopoulos said that they currently have 17 members in the synod, but most of them are over 75 years old and are not in the best condition physically to work. Therefore, the church needs to bring in some metropolitans from abroad. He added that, when the Church explained the situation to PM Erdogan, Erdogan said that, if the Church wanted to bring these metropolitans to Turkey, the government would provide them with Turkish citizenship if they applied for it. Anagnostopoulos added that it was the first time that a Turkish PM had promised such a transaction; moreover, he eventually kept this promise. At the time of the interview, 27 priests had applied for Turkish citizenship, and the Turkish authorities had granted citizenship to 14 of them. For others, the examination of their applications was continuing. Anagnostopoulos also noted that all the applications had not been completed at the same time (Anagnostopoulos, *personal interview*; also see EU Progress Report 2009: 20; EU Progress Report 2010: 22).

All of these are signs of progress in the relationship between the Turkish state and non-Muslim communities. Anagnostopoulos also recalled PM Erdogan's speech in Athens in 2010, when he said he did not object to the use of the ecumenical title of Patriarchate. The Turkish state had been strictly against using the ecclesiastical title "Ecumenical" since 1923. The Orthodox Church had been recognized by the Turkish state only as a local church. For instance, when the US Embassy in Turkey used the title "Ecumenical" in an invitation to a reception in 2004, over a hundred MPs wrote protest messages to the Embassy. Following these protests, the Prime Ministry banned the attendance of representatives of public institutions at the reception. Even the Patriarch did not participate, in order not to cause a further crisis (*Today's Zaman* 12/02/2004). Surprisingly, during his visit to Athens in 2010, PM Erdogan replied to a question about ecumenical titles by saying that these titles do not annoy him: "[These titles] do not bother me. They did not bother my forefathers [referring to Ottomans]; they do not bother me. However, they would bother some people in my country." Erdogan said the same when he returned to Turkey (*Radikal* 05/16/2010). The 2012 EU Progress Report stated that the Patriarch is free to use the title of "Ecumenical," referring to statements by Turkish authorities. However, since the Patriarchate has never received any official indication of this policy, it is still using the name of the local church in its Turkish letterhead (EU Progress Report 2012: 24).

The other problems of the non-Muslim communities also were widely discussed over the period, 2002-2012, especially near the end. On the issue of training clergy, the most discussed aspect was reopening the Heybeliada (Halki) Greek Orthodox Seminary on the shores of Istanbul. This seminary was closed in 1971 in accordance with a law combining all education under state control. At that time, the Greek Church did not want to open the seminary to state control, so it was closed. Currently, the government remains wary of reopening the seminary, but discussions continue on its legal status. Other non-Muslim communities are waiting to see progress regarding the Orthodox seminary before they decide to follow the same path.

There has been also some progress on issues that have symbolic values for religious minorities. The most prominent among them is allowing religious services once a year since 2010 in the Orthodox Sumela Monastery in the Black Sea province of Trabzon and in the Armenian Holy Cross (Akdamar) Church on the Akdamar island in Lake Van. They had not had religious services there for around 90 years. Both buildings have museum status currently. The religious services are being held by special permits (EU Progress Report 2012: 24).

In short, there was prominent legal progress related to some problems of religious minorities between 2002 and 2012. Although other problems of non-Muslim communities had still not been addressed, the goodwill of the government encouraged them about the future of this relationship. At the same time, religious minorities also would like to secure their rights with legal changes.

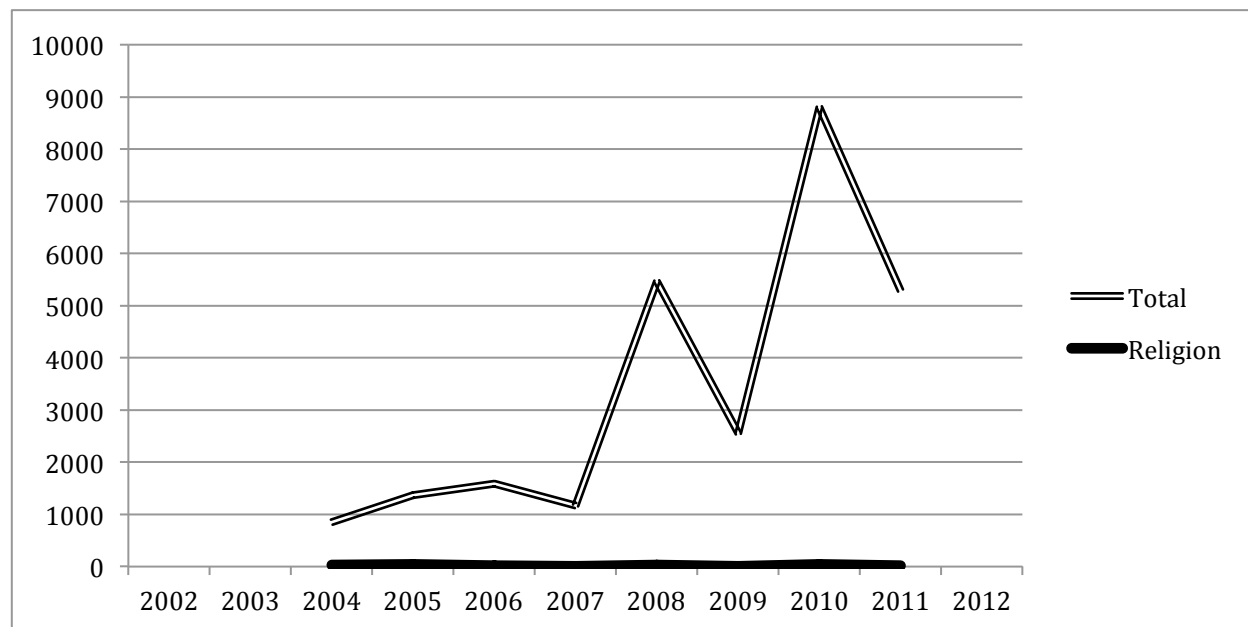
At the beginning of the chapter, I mentioned the assertion by the President of the Federation of the Alevi Foundations, Dogan Bermek, that there had been no change on the issue of religious minority rights. It is not possible to share Bermek's opinion on this matter after considering the changes examined above. Bermek did point out an important difference between the current government and prior governments, in that it did not have the state's despotic—I do not give in!—attitude. According to him, this attitude made religious minorities happy. On this issue, Bermek is definitely correct. High-level state officials now visit non-Muslim communities, listen to their problems, try to find solutions for these problems, and invite them to dinners, especially during Ramadan. This interaction is at the highest level since the foundation of the Republic. Non-Muslim communities see this and become hopeful for future amendments, even if there has been no visible progress on some issues.

I can explain this position of some non-Muslim groups by an example of the headscarf issue. Before the AKP came to power, the headscarf ban was being enforced in all state organs including universities. There were protests against the ban, especially in universities. When the AKP came to power in 2002, the protests stopped immediately, even though there was no legal attempt to solve the problem. The ban was enforced as before. Some people interpreted the disappearance of protests to mean that Islamist parties were utilizing the ban to gain political support. Since the AKP came to power, as an Islamist party, there was no need to continue the protests. According to this opinion, since there was no relief for the ban, there was no explanation to interpret the disappearance of protests. However, these comments missed that the halt of protests was related to goodwill for the AKP government. Even though there was no real relief concerning the ban for years, these people continued this goodwill, hoping that, when the AKP had more power in the state, it would solve the problem. They believed in the sincerity of PM Erdogan, since his wife and daughters were wearing headscarves; therefore, surely he would be the most likely person to end this ban. It seems to me that the AKP government received similar trust from non-Muslim communities.

There has been an increasing demand for religious rights from both Muslim and non-Muslim communities since 2010. This increase can be interpreted as one whereby the AKP government solidified its power and became the most prominent decision-making body in the state; therefore, it does not have the previous excuses of earlier governments at its disposal. Previous governments excused some demands by pointing to other state apparatuses. Currently, the AKP government does not have this excuse. This situation encourages all religious or ethnic groups to demand more rights.

The number of applications to state human rights bodies has increased substantially over the examined time period. This supports my argument that Turkish citizens have learned to seek their civil rights, including religious rights. One of the state-controlled bodies, which has been investigating human rights violations, is the Prime Ministry Human Rights Presidency. This body was founded in 2001. According to its data, applications related to the violation of human rights have increased substantially since 2007 (Figure 5). This growth does not reflect more violations in human rights, but rather more awareness in seeking civil rights, including religious rights. The number of applications related to freedom of thought and faith between 2004 and 2011 has fluctuated, but their ratio has diminished against total applications. They had the

highest number of applications in 2005, 45 in all, consisting of 3.3 percent of total applications. There might be a few additional applications under the discrimination category, which I omitted because of the small application sample.



**Figure 5:** Applications for Human Rights Violations

Source: The Prime Ministry Human Rights Presidency statistics 2004-2011.

Last but not least, some non-Muslim communities have said that they do not like the term “minority” to identify themselves. For instance, when I asked Yusuf Sag, the Turkish Syrian Catholic Deputy Patriarch Chorepiscopus, if Syrian Catholics feel themselves as strangers or a minority in Turkish society, he refused to use the term *minority* to describe his community:

I hate the word “minority.” I love this country as much as you. Loving the country is not a kindness but an honor.... I have a history in this land for 5500 years.... If I see myself as a Turkish citizen and proud of it, then you cannot call me “minority.” For instance, a person is a non-religious Turk, an atheist. Is he called “minority”? (Sag, *personal interview*).

I asked the Chaldean Catholic Church leader Monsignor Francois Yakan what their problems are as a minority. Before mentioning any problems, he also refused the “minority” word,

I would like to be frank that I do not want to use the “minority” word. I do not like it. I am not a minority where I live and I am a child of that region. Chaldean folk are one of the oldest peoples of Turkey. The Chaldean Church is the earliest

church of Christianity.

When I asked him if other church members think the same about using the word “minority,” he replied,

I did not ask them, but if they think the same, it would be more appropriate, I think. If you learn [by asking them], let me know. Indeed, I believe that it should be thought like that.... The Eastern folk and church, including Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, are very different from the Western church in both mundane and spiritual issues. We do not think the same things. We do not think like Europeans or Americans. We [Chaldeans] are the primary folk of here [Turkey] (Yakan, *personal interview*).

Yusuf Altintas, the secretary general of the Chief Rabbi of Turkish Jews, refuted the minority term, too. I asked him, “Do you see yourself as a minority in Turkish society?” He said “No!” with surprise in his voice,

Me? No! My name is Yusuf Altintas. My status is Turkish citizenship with Jewish religion. My status is that, according to both Lausanne and the Turkish state. I am similar to any other Turkish citizen—if it is nationalism in question, knowing the Turkish history, art, or language. Personally, I give thanks to God that I am Jewish and thanks to God that I am a Turk. If I were in France, probably I would say the same for France. However, I am from here. My family has lived here for seven or eight centuries. I am a Jewish Turk; that is all.

I asked if other members of the Jewish community felt the same. Actually, when I asked Mr. Altintas a few more times to make generalizations in response to different questions, he abstained from doing so, but spoke with reference to a majority. With regard to this question, he did the same, saying, “It is not correct to make a generalization on behalf of the Jewish community, but the dominant majority thinks like that” (Altintas, *personal interview*).

The response of the spokesperson of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, Father Dositheos Anagnostopoulos, to the minority question was also interesting. Before taking up this question, he compared his experiences in the 1960s to the years after 2003. He was born and stayed in Turkey until 1968. He mentioned some negative experiences that he had in the 1960s when he was in his 20s. In one instance, while he was talking with his fiancée in the Greek language on a ferry, a few people warned them in the summer of 1964. He left Turkey for Germany in 1968 and said to himself at that time, “I will never return.” He noted that he returned in 2003, adding, “I am sitting here now.” Then I asked him if he still feels like a minority:

If I compare it to when I was young, before I emigrated to Germany for 30-35 years, I do not feel it as much as I felt it before. You ask me now when I feel like a minority. Actually, I

have been here for eight years and in that time period I have not felt like a member of a minority group who was in a difficult situation (Anagnostopoulos, *personal interview*).

My original interview question about this issue was, “Do you think of yourself as a stranger or a minority in Turkey, or as a part of Turkish society?” Interviewees’ responses to this question should not be understood in the legal sense of the term minority but in terms of their sense of belonging to Turkish society. Greek, Armenian, and Jewish communities enjoy positive discrimination in legal terms due to their minority status. They do not have any intention to give up these rights. Other non-Muslim communities do not have positive discriminatory rights, but they would enjoy them as much as the above-named communities if the Turkish state provided them with the same legal rights.

As I explained at the beginning of this chapter, a minority group should present minority consciousness. Otherwise, legal definitions and social realities do not overlap. We can see the most striking example of this in the 2004 European Union’s Turkey Progress Report, as I will note in the following section. This report tended to define both Alevis and Kurds in Turkey as minorities; however, this designation did not find any public support from these communities. The following EU progress reports had to drop the term *minority* by adding “... there are other communities in Turkey, which, in the light of the relevant international and European standards, could qualify as minorities” (EU Progress Report 2006: 20). In that case, it would be more appropriate to use the term *non-Muslim* rather than *minority* to describe the religious communities with small populations in Turkey. I have used both of them interchangeably.

When religious minority rights are being talked about, the Alevi issue also comes up. Although Alevis are Muslim, they have some different beliefs and practices from those of the Sunni majority. Because of these differences, they sometimes encounter problems.

In the previous chapter, I concluded that the relationship between religion and the state has consolidated in some ways. However, the religion part of this relationship mostly refers to Sunni Islam. In this chapter, I examined the rights of non-Muslim communities, which revealed some progress on this issue also. Although the progress in non-Muslim rights is important, since they have a small population, this progress might not be considered significant at the state level. Concerning the issue of Alevis, they make up more than ten percent of the Turkish population. Examining Alevi rights might give more clues about the intention behind the changes between 2002 and 2012—that is, if these changes were part of a general amendment based on civil,



human, and religious rights or intended more for the promotion of Islam, especially Sunni beliefs.

### C. THE ALEVI ISSUE

Alevism, which developed in Anatolia between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, is based on a different understanding of Islam from that of the Sunni majority. Companion Ali, who was the nephew and son-in-law of the prophet Muhammad, has an important place in Alevi beliefs. That is why the adherents of this community are called Alevis, referring to Companion Ali. In this way, they have some similarities with Shias. However, because of distinct and different practices, they are not considered to be under Shia. Since they had a closed society during the Ottoman period, their interaction with Sunnis was limited (see, for Oguz/Turkmen tribe dichotomy, Turkdogan 1995: 528; 2004: 359; 2009: 199-227; for center/periphery dichotomy, Mardin 1969: 101; 1990: 30-66). Periodic migrations after the 1950s have opened new opportunities for interaction (Uzum 1997: 193).

Being a closed community mostly led to ignorance of Alevism by others. Even with the interactions during the last few decades, it is still difficult to find a mutual definition for Alevis and their demands. For instance, an empirical research with over 1600 Alevis revealed that 10% of them stated Alevism is a belief system that is outside of Islam; 43% described it as a sect under Islam; 17% described it as a lifestyle; 16% saw it as a culture; 10% defined it as a religious order; and 3% had other definitions (Aktas 1999: 462; see the footnote for additional research<sup>27</sup>).

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<sup>27</sup> Ozdemir and Arici's (2011) study with 600 Alevis showed that 36% felt that Alevism was essentially part of Islam, with 29% describing it as a culture, 18% a sect, 12% a way of thinking, and 7% a particular interpretation of Islam (Ozdemir and Arici 2011: 65).

Ucar's (2006) study with 400 Alevis stated that 10% of them depicted Alevism outside of the Islamic circle and interpretation (Ucar 2006: 125).

Another study of over 250 Alevis showed only around two percent of respondents depicting Alevism as a culture or a philosophy (Unal 2001: 42).

Cengiz's (2000) study with 300 Alevis stated that 42% saw Alevism as a religious order, 23% as an essential part of Islam, 23% as a way of thinking, and 12% as a sect (Cengiz 2000: 106).

P.S. The studies above show very different results mostly because their sampling does not cover the entire Alevi population but rather Alevis living in just a few cities.

These numbers suggest that there is a confusion over exactly what Alevism is even among Alevis. A similar confusion occurs among the teachers of courses in Religion and Ethics. A study of over 750 Religion and Ethics course teachers showed that around 88% of them supported teaching about Alevism in the public schools. When they were asked how to describe Alevism, however, 24% called it a lifestyle, 22% a political formation, 19% a branch of Shia, 15% a sect, 11% a religious order, 1% had no idea, and 1% a religion (Kaymakcan 2009: 58). In other words, even religion and ethics course teachers have not a common idea of how to describe Alevism when they teach it to students. These differences make it difficult to respond to Alevi demands.

Alevi interviewees in my group denied that there was an essential theological difference among Alevis, when I asked them to explain the different opinions of Alevism among different Alevi groups. They stated that the different Alevi groups, even those claiming that Alevism was outside of Islam, were marginal, even if the voices of these groups were highly respected in the media. For instance, Dogan Bermek, president of the Federation of the Alevi Foundations, attributed the claim that Alevism was outside of Islam to two sources: Western misunderstanding and political opportunism. According to him, when some Alevis immigrated to Europe as blue-collar workers in the 1960s, they did not represent Alevism well. Misinterpreting these outcomes, Western scholars deduced that Alevism was outside of Islam. In addition, Alevi support for liberal politics encouraged spreading these comments, which some political opportunists wanted to use to discredit Alevis. Mr. Bermek added, “Alevism is univocal, not opposite. However, Alevists [political opportunists] would have multiple voices.... I can name you dozens of fraudulent (*canta dernek*) Alevi associations” (Bermek, *personal interview*).

Other Alevi interviewees Hidir Akbay, general director of the Cem Foundation, and Metin Tarhan, president of the Federation of the Alevi Associations, stated that there was only one form of Alevism. They described Alevism with mutual agreement on the doctrine of a trinity in the form of “Allah, Muhammad, and Ali.”

On the other hand, some other Alevis describe it as a secular lifestyle, supported by folkloristic features, not as a religious understanding that is attached to Islam. For instance, one

of them, Fuat Bozkurt, defines Alevism as a life style rather than a belief (Bozkurt 1990: 10). According to him, attaching Alevism to Islam causes erosion and assimilation of Alevism:

For four hundred years, the Alevis have endeavored to prove to the state and their Sunni neighbors that they are indeed Muslims, but all to no avail. Now the tables are turned. Since 1990 it has been the state and the Sunni theologians who have been trying to prove the Muslim credentials of the Alevis, while the opposite opinion is being put forward by Alevi writers of the younger generation (Bozkurt 2003 [1998]: 93).

Defining Alevism as being outside of Islam, along with disagreement on a mutually acceptable definition, are unwelcome to some people. For instance, one of my interviewees asked me to turn off the recorder while he was talking about Alevis. He mentioned a story to express his discomfort on the issue of defining Alevism outside of Islam:

There was a man who thought he was a kernel of corn. He was afraid of every chicken. He was thinking that chickens would eat him, since he was a kernel of corn. After a long treatment, he finally believed that he was not a kernel of corn but human. Just before he left the hospital, he told the doctor, "OK. I know I am a human, not a kernel of corn, but do the chickens know that?"

As it can be understood from this story, this interviewee, although he was not an Alevi, was against interpretations that define Alevism outside of Islam. He saw this definition unhealthy and expressed his discomfort by this story.

In addition, the interviewees from the Department of Religious Affairs expressed their concerns about the ambiguity of the definition of Alevism. For instance, the former Istanbul Mufti (2003-2011), Prof. Mustafa Cagrici, said:

Some Alevis describe Alevism as a religion outside of Islam. Some see it under Islam.... I cannot call Alevism a sect because the majority of them say "No, we are not a sect." I cannot call it a religious order, because some of them are annoyed by this term. If I say it is a religion, you do not agree. If I say it is a sect, you do not agree; and so on. I use every definition in religious terminology, but still I receive a [negative] reaction.... When I had meetings with Alevis, I told them that, when we make a definition, you [Alevis] do not accept it and say, "Don't make our definition." I said, "You are right. If so, please define what Alevism is." However, they do not make a definition (Cagrici, *personal interview*).

Agreement on a mutual definition is important to respond to Alevi demands, which resemble non-Muslim community demands for legal personality, property rights, the training of clergy, and the management of their foundations. In addition to these demands, Alevis have demands related to religion and ethics courses and having state funding. If Alevism were

accepted as a religion, Alevis would be considered a religious minority group. Their demands would be compared to other non-Muslim communities. If they were a sect or religious order under Islam, the Turkey's response would be totally different. For instance, Alevis demand that their places of worship, *cemevi*, be recognized officially. If Alevism were a separate religion, nobody would object to official recognition of the *cemevi*. However, if Alevism is under Islam, the non-Alevi majority says Islam has only one place of worship and that is a mosque. These majority people see the *cemevi* as a dervish lodge instead of the equivalent of a mosque. If *cemevis* are equivalent to dervish lodges, the state does not have to provide any financial aid or a place in the land registry.

The EU progress reports between 2002 and 2012 reflect a similar confusion in describing what Alevism is. The 2002 report stated that *Alevi* refers to Muslim religious communities. The 2003 report detached them from the Sunni majority by adding that they were a “non-Sunni Muslim community.” The 2004 report went one more step and described them as a minority, as in “Alevis are still not recognized as a Muslim minority.” This report also tended to describe Kurds among the minorities. Describing Alevis and Kurds as a minority did not find any public support, even among these communities. After the negative feedback, the following year's report dropped the minority term for these two communities, returning in 2005 to the previous definition of “non-Sunni Muslim Alevi community.” This report still appeared to mention the term *minority* without specifically attaching it to Alevis and Kurds, as in: “The minorities usually associated by the authorities with the Treaty of Lausanne are Jews, Armenians, and Greeks. However, there are other communities in Turkey, which, in the light of the relevant international and European standards, could qualify as minorities.” The 2006 report dropped the “non-Sunni” emphasis and mentioned the “large Muslim Alevi community.” Since that year, the EU reports have dropped all adjectives and stopped trying to define the Alevis. The 2007 report referred to them only as “Alevis,” without any explanation. The 2008-2012 reports referred to them as the “Alevi community” without any specific religious connotation (EU Progress Reports 2002-2012).

The size of the Alevi population is another conjectured issue in Alevi discussions. The 2004 and 2005 EU reports estimated 12-20 million; Alevi interviewees in my study group mentioned around 20 million, especially by referring to the Alevi population in the early years of the Republic. Then-State Minister Said Yazicioglu estimated the Alevi population as

approximately 7 million in 2008 (*Radikal* 12/01/2008). Estimations in Alevi studies fluctuate between 5 and 20 million. One of the interviewees, Hidir Akbay, the general director of the Cem Foundation, recalled that the demography of Alevis is not important to providing civil rights whether they were 25 million, 5 million, 1 million, or just one person (Akbay, *personal interview*). He is right that providing a civil right should not be based on the population of a group. On the other hand, if there were 20 million Alevis in all, it would be fair to ask if an Alevi association with a few hundred members could represent all Alevis. Do all 20 million Alevis have the same demands, such as removing mosques and replacing them with cemevi? It seems to me that Alevi associations have a motive to represent the Alevi population as high as possible. They assume that, if Alevis were more numerous, their influence would expand. However, they miss the point that an association's influence is inversely correlated to the general population of the group represented by the association. For instance, let us assume that all Alevi associations were to unite under a federation and reached a million members. This would be considered an enormous number to represent the Alevi community at first glance. However, if there were an Alevi population of 20 million, one million members represents only five percent of Alevis. Their demands might well be regarded as deviant in the general Alevi population.

Claiming 20 million Alevi population out of 70 million also contradicts the literature on the Alevi electoral tradition. The literature portrays a leftist inclination among Alevi voters (see Carkoglu 2005). The left parties have 20-25% of the vote capacity in Turkey. In that case, these figures suggest the awkward result that all left voters are Alevis. Asserting a higher Alevi population also contradicts with fasting worship in Ramadan, as the majority of Alevis do not fast then (Uzum 1997: 99-100). According to the PEW Research Center's poll in 2012, 84% of the population of Turkey fasts during Ramadan (PEW 2012).

Another problem of the studies that insist on a more numerous Alevi population is that they were not supported by field researches. It seems that everybody references each other instead of a field study. Based on a field research project with 1500 people, TESEV's report stated in 2006 that 6.1% of the participants said, "I am an Alevi" (Carkoglu and Toprak 2006). It seems this figure was found to be low by the researchers Ali Carkoglu and Binnaz Toprak; therefore, they looked for other signs of Alevism and estimated Alevis as 11.4% of the Turkish

population.<sup>28</sup> Another field study, conducted by KONDA in 2007 with 48 thousand participants, stated that 5.7% of the population was Alevi (*Milliyet* 03/21/2007).

Regardless of their numbers, let us look at what changed for Alevis between 2002 and 2012. The Alevi community has more secular tendencies compared to Sunni groups. These secular tendencies have kept them out of the state's pressure during the February 28 process. The Turkish state was hard on Sunni religious groups by all means between 1997 and 2002. The state's unwelcoming reaction to Christian missionary activities in the early 2000s suggests that Christian groups were not totally free even by 2002. In that environment, it would not be wrong to suggest that the Alevi community was the freest religious community, as at least they were not subject to the persecution of the state. While I am saying that Alevis were the freest religious community by 2002, I do not mean they were problem-free. This freedom was only relative. Their remaining problems could be gathered under legal personality, property rights, the training of clergy, the management of their foundations, teaching of Alevism in religion and ethics courses, and receiving state funds.

Among these discussions the most debated problems were teaching Alevism in religion and ethics courses, official recognition of cemevi as Alevi places of worship, and receiving state funds or abolishing the Department of Religious Affairs, thereby impeding the funding of Sunni beliefs.

Alevis agree that the Turkish state financially supports Sunni beliefs through the Department of Religious Affairs. This department has a higher budget than even some ministries. In addition, the state supports and spreads Sunni beliefs by compulsory religion and ethics courses in the primary and secondary schools.

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<sup>28</sup> This estimation has many problems. The researchers said they looked for other signs of Alevism to reach 11% from 6%. These signs are including having pictures of 12 imams and/or the picture of Companion Ali in the home. Pictures of 12 imams would be strong prediction for Alevism, but one cannot say the same for the picture of Ali. Companion Ali is an important figure for Sunnis also. In addition, the research does not investigate all family members, but only the individual who participated in the survey. Parents, children, siblings, or spouses might have a picture of Ali in the home, which does not necessarily mean that the surveyed person welcomed this picture. According to research, 1.6% of participants explicitly say they "do not adhere to any religion," 87.4% says they are "Sunni Muslim," and 1.9% explicitly say, "I am not Alevi." In total, they represent 90.9% of participants. In that case, the highest Alevi membership rate would be 9.1%. However, the researchers do not trust participants' own words and look for vague hints such as a picture of Ali in order to conclude that 11.4% of the participants are Alevis.

I mentioned Alevi demands, court decisions, and related changes on religion and ethics courses in the previous state-taught religion chapter. As a reminder, compulsory religion and ethics courses were one of the most prominent laws to which Alevis objected. There were three different types of responses to this issue. Some Alevis insisted that the state should not teach religion. Some declared, if the state would like to be involved in religious education, this should be elective. In the third opinion, if there was no way to remove it or make it optional, then, by mutual Alevi agreement, these courses should provide in equal measure for the study of all religions and different understandings in the same religion, in order not to sound as if they were protecting Sunni Islam alone (Alevi Calistaylari Nihai Raporu 2010: 141).

Verdicts of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in 2007, and later the Council of the State in Turkey in 2007 and 2008, confirmed that the contents of religion and ethics courses did not neutrally present different beliefs.

In the meanwhile, in 2009 the AKP government initiated a seven-step workshop titled “Alevi opening” to promote understanding of Alevi problems and measures to deal with them. As a result of this workshop, Alevi beliefs and practices found more place in the curriculum of religion and ethics courses by the 2011-2012 academic year.

In general, representing Alevi beliefs and practices in education found support in the Alevi community despite its possible shortcomings. For other problems of the Alevis, it is hard to claim a prominent policy change between 2002 and 2012. Making the Alevi opening first suggested that the state would solve Alevi problems. This interpretation increased the hopes of Alevis. However, since there have been no legal changes except with regard to the curriculum of religion and ethics courses, the hope has turned into a total disappointment. For instance, Recep Gurkan, MP of CHP, named the Alevi opening as a disaster: “The PM [Erdogan] said that the AKP will make an Alevi opening. However, they have messed up it.... They brought people to conferences and made beautiful speeches. However, that is all. The result is a disaster” (Gurkan, *personal interview*).

Indeed, Alevis were unhappy with the unchanged state policies. However, examining their demands reveals that, because of disagreement among Alevi groups themselves, they would still be unhappy even if there were some changes such as in the issue of the Department of Religious Affairs (DRA). For instance, some Alevis seek legal recognition of their beliefs through the provision of official cadres within the DRA, integration of Alevis into the DRA,

financial support from the budget of the DRA, and covering utility bills of the cemevi as is done for mosques, churches, and synagogues. Others assert that attaching Alevis to the DRA would mean losing their independence; a secular state should not be involved in religious affairs; and civil society should run its own communities (Carkoglu and Bilgili 2011: 355-356).

Alevi arguments on these issues are not yet consolidated. Alevi interviewees in my group harshly criticized the DRA, its enormous budget, and its Sunni background. They argued that Alevis should have financial support from this department according to their population. On the other hand, they do not want to lose their privilege to choose their religious leaders, *dede zakir*, who run religious ceremonies. Indeed, the state financially supports mosques by paying the salaries of imams; however, these imams do not have chair-immunity. Even Friday sermons, the *khutba*, are sent by the DRA to imams. Imams simply read these sermons from paper. Alevis would like to benefit from the state's financial support, but, on the other hand, they ignore the fact that this support would bind them to state control. If the state allows the Alevi community to choose their religious leaders for the cemevi, the same right should be granted to every religious order or sect. The Turkish state, which is so eager to control religion, does not provide this kind of independence to any religious group. In addition, while Alevis want to choose their own religious leaders for their places of worship, they do not support the same for other religious orders. They are among the most prominent groups opposed to private Quran-based courses, even there is no state financial support for them. Giving the right to every religious order to appoint its own leaders to mosques and providing them a state salary are not acceptable to Alevis. These mosques will run like private Quran-based courses in a while. The other option is that of totally halting financial support for any religion and letting civil society run its own religious communities. Indeed, there is almost a mutual agreement by all segments in Turkish society that a secular state should not have an institution like the DRA. Secularists are against the DRA because it provides financial support for religion. Conservatives are against the DRA because it controls religion. However, abolishing the DRA is not an option, since both the state and many groups do not want to see religion uncontrolled. Continuation of the DRA seems the best practical solution.

The Cem Foundation, acting in the name of 2000 Alevi applicants, informed the Prime Ministry in 2005 that the DRA neglects the demands of non-Sunni groups, acts like there is no Alevi community, does not recognize the Alevi places of worship called cemevis, and does not



provide sufficient financial support for the religious needs of the Alevi community; it demanded that these problems be fixed. The Prime Ministry rejected the application. The Cem Foundation then took the case to court. Both the local court and the Council of the State ruled against the Cem Foundation in 2010 (Council of State 10<sup>th</sup> Chamber App. no. 2008/3098 D. no. 2010/475). The courts accepted the Prime Ministry's reasoning that the DRA works above any sect and represents all Muslims. The mosque is the only common place for Islamic practices. Recognition of cemevis is not legally possible. For these reasons, no portion of the budget of the DRA could be allocated to cemevis.

On another occasion, the Alevi community asked the DRA for to give the cemevis the status of a legal place of worship. In that way, the cemevis could apply directly to the DRA for funds to cover the electric bill and to the local municipalities for exemption from paying the water bill. The DRA rejected this application for similar reasons. The applicants carried the case to court where both the local court and the Council of State confirmed the DRA's decision by 2010. The court ruled that only a new law would create an opportunity for recognition of the cemevis as places of worship (Council of State 10<sup>th</sup> Chamber App. no. 2006/5564 D. no. 2010/476; see Karahanogullari 2010 for details).

While most decisions went against official recognition of the cemevis, there were some isolated cases that supported the Alevi demands. The most important of these is a local court's decision. In this case, an Alevi cemevi building association described the cemevi in 2004 as a place of worship according to its regulations. The local authorities applied to the court for annulment of the association because it described the cemevi as a place of worship. The local court favored the Alevi association and accepted using the term of worship for the cemevis. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court of Appeals. This higher court ruled that only mosques and masjids are places of worship in Islam; therefore, the cemevi is not acceptable as a place of worship. Then the case was returned to the local court, which insisted that its decision had been based on the fact that Alevis had considered the cemevi as a place of worship for centuries. Consequently, the case went to the plenary session of the Supreme Court of Appeals for the last time in November 2012 (*Sabah* 11/21/2012). The plenary session's decision will be the binding rule for the official status of the cemevi.

In other isolated events, a few municipalities have officially recognized cemevis as places of worship. They allocated land for construction of new cemevis and exempted cemevis from utility costs in the time period examined (Carkoglu and Bilgili 2011: 356-357).

The state made some symbolic gestures such as having high officials and ministers visit cemevis. On one occasion in 2009, President Abdullah Gul visited a cemevi, burned a candle, and watched a ceremony there. It was said that Gul was the first president to make such a visit since Ataturk. President Gul took off his shoes before entering the cemevi in contrast to most bureaucrats accompanying him, who preferred to use shoe covers. Taking off the shoes was interpreted as a sign that President Gul respected the cemevi as an Islamic place of worship (*Radikal* 11/07/2009).

In addition, PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited a cemevi in 2007. One of my interviewees, Metin Tarhan, president of the Federation of the Alevi Associations, recalled this visit. Tarhan, being the president of the Erikli Baba Cultural Association and Cemevi, talked during that visit with PM Erdogan about the status of cemevis. Tarhan expressed to me that he found useful this kind of visit by state officials (Tarhan, *personal interview*). As a note, PM Erdogan does not see cemevis as places of worship but only as cultural gathering places. In 2013, one MP of the AKP, Haluk Ozdalga, offered PM Erdogan to recognize cemevis as places of worship. Erdogan refused this offer by stating that mosques and masjids are the only places of worship in Islam. He added that the cemevi is a cultural gathering place (*Milliyet* 02/21/2013).

Although some government and DRA officials expressed their wish to provide a legal status to cemevis, they did not mean to provide one equivalent to a mosque but only to a cultural place (see TBMM records no.B.02.0.004/1633 12/27/2012). On many occasions, both the government and the DRA repeated that Islam has only one place of worship, and that is named mosque or masjid. For instance, an MP from CHP, Huseyin Aygun, applied in 2012 to the National Assembly (TBMM) to open a cemevi inside of the TBMM. The Presidency of TBMM refused the application for the same reason, namely, that a cemevi is not a place of worship (*Radikal* 07/09/2012; see *Radikal* 12/10/2012 for more details).

The Turkish state does not officially recognize cemevis but allows opening and running them, as I mentioned in the case of illegal Quran-based courses and churches. There were approximately 600 cemevis in service by 2012. Half of these cemevis were opened in the

examined time period, 2002-2012. 106 cemevis were built before 1990, 163 between 1990 and 2000, and 329 between 2000 and 2012 (TBMM records no.B.02.0.004/934 07/16/2012).<sup>29</sup>

The place where I conducted the interview with Hidir Akbay, the general director of the Cem Foundation, was a cemevi, named the *Pir Koca Ahmed Yesevi Cem Cultural Center*, in Istanbul. It is a four-story building and everybody in the neighborhood knows that it is a cemevi. I asked Akbay, “If cemevis are not recognized officially as a place of worship, how do you have permission for use of the building? Do you encounter any difficulties in getting construction permits?” He replied:

We do not have permission under the name of cemevi. This is only a building, not a cemevi. It is known [that this building is a cemevi]. However, the authorities do not make any trouble. Of course, they do not give legal permission under the title of cemevi. We open new cemevis. They also are known. Even governors and ministers come to groundbreaking ceremonies. We open these places with the participation of state officials. On the other hand, these places do not have an official recognition [as cemevi]. These are strange situations! (Akbay, *personal interview*).

If the reader remembers the statement above by the spokesman for the Orthodox Church Anagnostopoulos on the legal personality issue of the Patriarchate, he mentioned, “The Patriarch is recognized, but the Patriarchy is not recognized. Isn’t this weird?”<sup>30</sup> Also, Akbay finds the dichotomy of the state against the cemevis weird. The state shows every sign with its actions of accepting cemevis, but does not recognize them to the letter, as happens for the Patriarchate. The state’s action vis-à-vis the Patriarchate is more understandable. Not recognizing the Patriarchate was a matter of honor for the new Republic, which wanted to prove its sovereignty to the Allies of World War I since the Treaty of Lausanne. Turkey wanted to consider the Patriarchate as a local church. Even though the Turkish state is no longer bound by the political environment when the Lausanne Treaty was signed, there is a habit which has developed over 90 years. The state resists breaking this habit.

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<sup>29</sup> Carkoglu and Bilgili (2011) stated that Alevis face obstacles when attempting to build new cemevis, adding that approximately 100 cemevis exist in Turkey by referencing the U.S. Department of State’s International Religious Freedom Report 2008. My reference from the TBMM showed detailed information about how many new cemevis were built every year. The details also include information for every province. These suggest that the aforementioned sources have the wrong information regarding the number of cemevis.

<sup>30</sup> Anagnostopoulos used the word *tuhaf*, and Akbay used the word *garip*, Turkish terms to describe this dichotomy. Both of them can be translated into English as *weird*.

On the issue of cemevis, providing them a legal status encounters two obstacles. The state may provide a legal status for cemevis as a place of worship that is equivalent to the mosque, or a status that is equivalent to that of dervish lodges. The first option is not acceptable by the majority, especially by conservatives, since it would mean that Alevism is another religion. The second option is not implemented, because it violates the Reform Laws that were instituted by Ataturk. The dervish lodges were closed and banned by Ataturk in 1925. Secularists do not tolerate abolishing any Reform Laws. They do not want to open a way for even Reform Laws to be changed, since if one of them were changed, all of them might be changed in time. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the Constitution protects the Reform Laws by stating, “No provision of the Constitution shall be construed or interpreted as rendering unconstitutional the Reform Laws.” One of these Reform Laws is “Act No. 677 of 30 November 1341 (1925) on the Closure of Dervish Lodges and Tombs, the Abolition of the Office of Keeper of Tombs, and the Abolition and Prohibition of Certain Titles.” Changing a Reform Law also is totally against the Turkish state’s official teaching for almost nine decades. These laws have been introduced as a way “to raise Turkish society above the level of contemporary civilization and to safeguard the secular character of the Republic,” as stated in the Constitution. Any change in these laws would harm this legend.

In that case, the most practical path for the state was not to recognize them formally but to overlook the opening of cemevis under the name of different associations or gathering places.

One more incident worth mentioning as a good gesture of the state is that of confiscating the infamous Madimak Hotel in Sivas province and transforming it to a cultural center in 2011. In this hotel, 37 people, mostly Alevis, died in an arson attack in 1993. Alevis demanded that the state make this place into a museum. After the Alevi opening in 2009-2010, the Turkish government confiscated the building and converted it to a cultural center after a massive renovation costing several million dollars. A part of the center was designed as a memorial to those who lost their lives in the fire (*Hurriyet Daily News* 5/24/2011).

Last but not least, I asked Alevi interviewees if they encountered any negative reactions because of being an Alevi in Turkish society. Although they mentioned some negative instances during the interviews, their general response to this question was that the problem is between the state and Alevi citizens, not between Alevis and society. Alevi interviewees mentioned a lack of Alevi governors or high-level state officials in the state to prove their point that the state,

including the AKP government, has a negative stance against them. According to them, the AKP government initiated an opening but did not carry out the requirements for it to be meaningful. They criticized the fact that the AKP has no Alevi MP, which makes Alevis feel insecure about this party. According to Metin Tarhan, the president of the Federation of the Alevi Associations, if the AKP claims to be the party of all segments of Turkey, it should nominate Alevi people even if they bring no vote to the party (Tarhan, *personal interview*).

In summary, regarding the issue of Alevi rights, there was some progress between 2002 and 2012. Alevi beliefs and practices found more place in the compulsory religion and ethics courses. In the case of Alevis who do not consider themselves Muslim, omitting data related to religious affiliation on the national ID cards has become easier since 2006. People would delete the data indicating their Islamic affiliation in a few minutes without showing any reason in civil registry services. After deleting these data, their children would be exempted from compulsory religion and ethic courses if they demanded it. The state has not provided a legal status to Alevi cemevis yet, although tolerating their existence and the opening of new cemevis. Even some Alevis appreciate these changes that occurred between 2002 and 2012, while not totally satisfied.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I examined the rights of non-Muslim and Alevi communities to help explore the nature of the relationship between religion and the state in Turkey in the years 2002-2012. The previous chapter on state-taught religion suggested that the state had two patterns against religion, specifically Islam. In the early years, the state was harsh on religious education but gradually changed this attitude near the end. In this chapter, I examined whether the state had the same pattern for non-Muslim and Alevi communities. In addition, I had a hypothesis that, since the AKP government has represented oppressed Islamic groups in the state, it would provide the same relief for other disadvantaged groups, including non-Muslims and Alevis. Also, I was assuming I would not find much support for the AKP government among non-Muslim communities because of the AKP's conservative approach. My hypothesis was only partly confirmed.

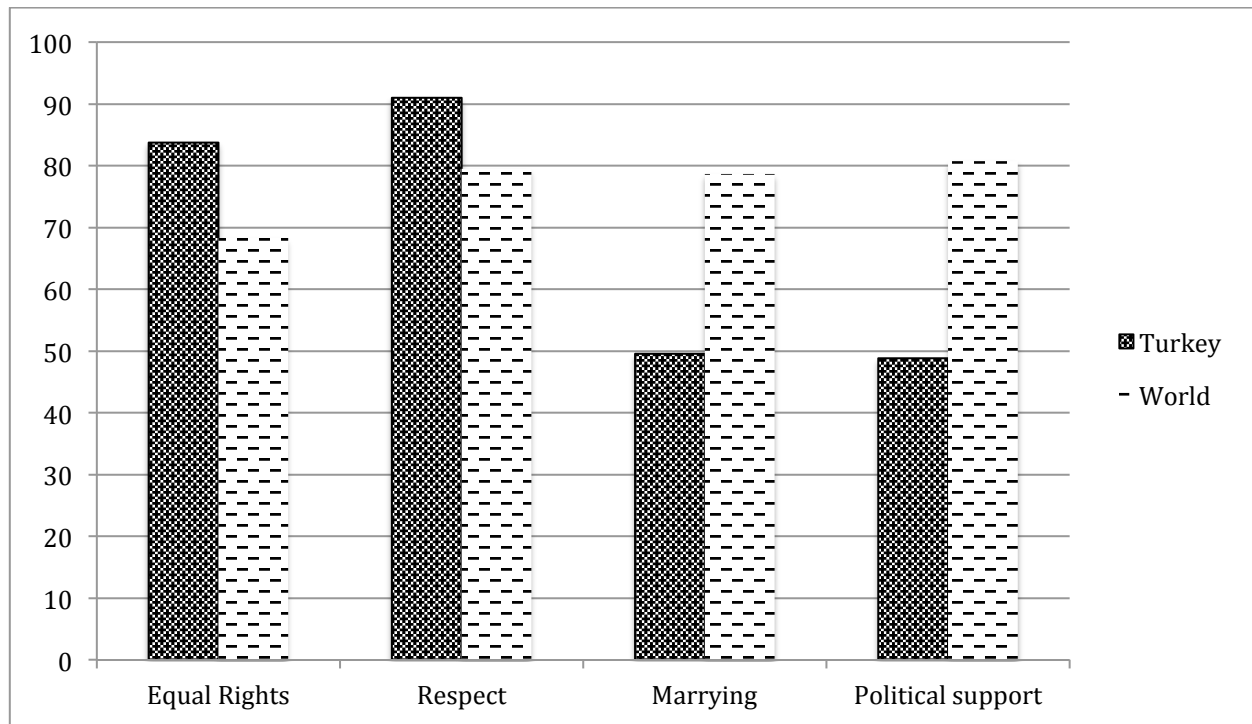
On the issue of non-Muslim rights, the pattern of the state's attitudes was similar to that concerning the religious rights of the Muslim majority, with the exception of the Alevis. In the early years of the 2000s, the state was still seeing the non-Muslim community as a threat to its sovereignty, resting on its experiences in WWI and the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. During the last few decades, these fears have been declining, since non-Muslims did not have much political or economic power. However, reactions to the missionary activities in the 2000s proved that the Turkish state was not totally free from these fears. These activities even came to the attention of the National Security Council (MGK) in 2001. Governments requested that the Department of Religious Affairs (DRA) inform citizens of the missionary activities. The DRA issued a statewide Friday sermon in 2005 to warn about them. However, the number of converts suggested that these fears were exaggerated. Only a few hundred people officially converted to Christianity. Even unofficial numbers did not suggest more than a few thousand converts. In addition, the Ergenekon trial suggested that some groups abused some issues related to non-Muslim communities to gain political power against the AKP government.

Since the fears regarding the missionaries have declined, the state has become more generous on the issue of non-Muslim rights in the second half of the examined period. There was much progress on property rights and the management of non-Muslim foundations. The issue of training clergy via a non-Muslim school education has not yet been solved, but the state provided working permits and granted Turkish citizenship if non-Muslim communities wanted to import clergy from abroad. On the issue of legal personality, there was not much progress either. However, the state showed its goodwill on this issue by listening to their problems, inviting religious leaders to official dinners and travels, and allowing special permits for religious ceremonies on the religious sites that currently have museum status.

All the above-mentioned changes have pleased non-Muslim communities. Some of them have even explicitly lent their support to the AKP in politics, since the AKP led the push for these amendments. On the other hand, some groups have criticized them. CHP and MHP harshly condemned the Law on Foundations, which provided many rights for non-Muslim properties. There were still some fears regarding missionary activities on the conservative side. Nationalists, neo-nationalists, and Kemalists were leery of reviving the Ecumenical title. They also thought that the government went beyond the boundaries of the Treaty of Lausanne without considering the principle of reciprocity. Among all groups, Alevis were the most open in mentioning non-

Muslim community problems sincerely. Alevis demanded solving problems of non-Muslim communities as much as their own problems. This solidarity can be explained by two disadvantaged groups supporting each other. In addition, the Alevi community has problems similar to those of non-Muslims such as the lack of a legal personality. Having similar problems has helped these groups to have sympathy for and a better understanding of each other.

The examination of a public survey reveals that the overwhelming majority of the Turkish population supports equal rights (84%) and showing respect (91%) to all religions (see Figure 6). The International Social Survey Program (ISSP) conducted this survey in 43 countries in 2009. The ISSP did not involve Turkey in its previous surveys in 1991 and 1998, so I am not able to compare results over time. Another shortcoming of the survey is that Turkey is the only country with a Muslim majority population. This also made it impossible to make a comparison between Turkey and other Muslim majority countries. However, comparing Turkey with the other 42 countries surveyed revealed that the Turkish people are statistically significantly more generous toward minority rights than the world average (one-way Anova test,  $p < 0.1$ ). On the other hand, the percentages supporting a relative who marries a person from another religion or granting political support to people from different religions are considerably below the world averages. In these cases, less than 50% of respondents said they would support them. Some restrictions on marriage with non-Muslims in Islam would be a possible explanation for the lack of support for a marriage outside Islam. The issue of lack of support in the political arena for non-Muslims should be examined in more detail, which is not the scope of this study.



**Figure 6:** Religious Minority Rights

Source: International Social Survey Program 2008: Religion III (ISSP 2008).

On the issue of the Alevi community, even there was some progress, it did not reach a level of satisfaction for the Alevis. Yet by 2002, the Alevi groups were not under state pressure as much as other Islamic groups or non-Muslim communities. The effects of the February 28 process were on stage for Islamic groups by that time. The secularist tendencies among Alevi groups kept them away from the persecution of the state in that time period.

The AKP government in 2009 initiated a seven-step workshop, “Alevi opening” to understand and deal with Alevi problems. As a result of this workshop, Alevi beliefs and practices found more place in the curriculum of religion and ethics courses by the 2011-2012 academic year. In 2011, the government also showed a good gesture by buying and transforming the Madimak Hotel into a cultural center for the memory of Alevis who died in an arson attack in 1993. When Alevis demanded a legal status equivalent to that of mosques for their cemevis, the government did not respond positively; instead, it stated that Islam had only one place of worship, but at the same time it implicitly allowed the building of cemevis. There were approximately 600 cemevis in service by 2012. One half of these were opened in the examined time period, 2002-2012.



Even these amendments and good gestures have not uniformly satisfied all Alevi groups. Alevis mostly agree on their problems but differ on solutions, which makes finding a mutual way unlikely. The government and the Department of Religious Affairs consider Alevism under Islam. In this official view, Islam has only one place of worship and that is the mosque. Considering cemevis as an Islamic place of worship is, therefore, not acceptable. On the other hand, the majority of Alevis consider themselves Muslim even while pointing out that Alevis have prayed in cemevis, not mosques, for centuries. A deadlock continues on the issue. In these discussions, mostly the CHP, Associations of Kemalist Thought, and non-Muslim communities have supported the Alevi demands.

In general, the Turkish state has a similar approach to all religious groups. At the beginning of the 2000s, the state was skeptical about religious activities, perceiving them as a threat to its sovereignty, especially against its secular structure. Increasing visibility of devout people and especially veiled women in public sphere and raising power of pro-Islamic parties in 1990s ignited these fears. In addition, sharing the state power with the conservative AKP government increased disconformity among the previous state elites in the early 2000s. In these years, every public demand on religious rights met with suspicion: demands of Islamic groups were perceived as a threat to secularism as well as non-Muslims' demands were perceived as a threat to the Turkish nationalism. Responding these demands, especially during the second half of the examined time period 2002-2012, proved that these fears were exaggerated: As of 2012, Turkey is not a more religious country or a less nationalist country than 2002.

## **V. SUMMARY**

State/religion relations can be combined into different categories of secular state and religious state. In the first option, state and religion are separate. This separation might be hostile/assertive or cooperative/passive/friendly. In the case of a religious state, a state has an official religion; nevertheless, this religion might or might not shape the legislature and the judiciary. In any case, all these categories mostly refer to constitutional claims rather than to social realities. For instance, Turkey is a secular country as explicitly stated in her Constitution. In mutual agreement, everybody defines the secular identity of Turkey in the Constitution as the separation of religion and the state. However, there is no agreement on how to implement this separation. Indeed, every state has similar discussions on the implementation of the separation of religion and the state.

The principle that “Turkey is a secular state” entered the Turkish Constitution in 1937. However, the state has never held interfering in religious affairs. Since its establishment, Turkey has aimed to control religion through its national institution, the Department of Religious Affairs, and through school curricula. In the early years of the Republic, the state elite considered Islam a sign of backwardness. They eroded evidence of it in the state apparatus. However, the religion continued to live on public level as well as a private one. Repression of religion during the period of one-party rule was harsh indeed. However, this repression partly relieved after the transition to a multi-party system in 1950 as long as religion stayed in its place and did not interfere in state business.

Before the multi-party system, it was easy to ignore public demands on religion. In this time period, the imam-hatip schools and theology faculties were closed, and teaching religion was removed from all education levels. This negative stance cost the then-ruling Republican

People's Party (CHP) to lose power in the first free elections in 1950 and in consecutive elections. After the ascension to power of the Democrat Party (DP) in 1950, the Turkish state became more tolerant of public requests for religious rights. Imam-hatip schools were re-opened, and elective religion courses returned to the public schools, where they met with strong public support. Many devout families, especially in the villages, were wary of the state-run secular education system because of the state's negative attitude to religion. The reintroduction of religious education in the schools convinced these families to send their children, particularly their daughters, to school. In addition, the imam-hatip schools increased their schooling of girls.

Children of conservative families continued their education in universities. This helped them enter state institutions. In addition, after the 1980s, the Turkish state left state-centered economic politics and embraced more liberal economic programs. This helped the formation of a new middle class in Anatolia. Wealth and education were the two important components that helped transform Islamic groups since the 1980s. It was not easy to realize this transformation in the early years until the emergence of the AKP. If Turkey had not had an AKP government experience, today it would still be hard to prove this transformation. For instance, in the early 2000s, when Recep Tayyip Erdogan said he had removed his Islamic National View shirt, this statement met with suspicion. For years, Erdogan and his AKP were accused of having a hidden agenda, since most people did not believe in this transformation.

Other such signs were misinterpreted also. For instance, the schooling of female children was another sign of this change. It represented a change among conservative families on the issues of co-education, women working, and traditional roles that limited females to being housewives. In contrast, the secular side misinterpreted the visibility of headscarves in schools as a clear sign of Islamization of public education.

The headscarf issue became the most discussed issue in the state/religion interaction, since it was the most visible one. All discussions related to religion went through the headscarf. The secular elite who ran the state at the time strictly enforced a ban on wearing headscarves in universities and public institutions. They saw the imam-hatip schools and Quran-based courses as the sources of this problem. The middle-level sections of the imam-hatip schools were closed. Attending high school section was discouraged by the unfair university entrance exams, which gave a lower score to imam-hatip school (IHL) graduates. Legal and non-legal Quran-based courses or any other programs of religious groups were prosecuted. As noted above, even

attending a legal Quran-based course during the summer was prohibited before completing fifth grade. Attending such courses during the school year was prohibited before completing the eighth grade. All these started after the military pressure on the Necmettin Erbakan government and the Welfare Party (RP) during a National Security Council (MGK) meeting on February 28, 1997. Since then this course of action was named *the February 28 process*.

Implementations of this process continued strictly until 2002. In that time period, the military insisted that the February 28 process would continue for a thousand years. Even optimists were not expecting an early resolution between religion and the state. In that environment, the Constitutional Court disbanded the Welfare Party (RP) in 1998 and its successor, the Virtue Party (FP), in 2001. These two parties were representing the National View (MG) movement of Erbakan. After the dissolution of the FP in 2001, the movement split. The traditionalists established the Felicity Party (SP), with Erbakan exerting leadership behind the scenes. The modernists founded a new party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), with Erdogan as party leader. In that way, the Constitutional Court unintentionally assisted in the emergence of the AKP. In the meantime, the 2001 economic crisis brought political instability in its wake. In that environment, the AKP, just one year after its establishment, won the election in 2002. Economic instability, the corruption of state officials, the embezzlement of state resources, and widespread poverty destroyed the trust of voters in the then-ruling party. In this economic and political atmosphere, the charismatic leadership of Erdogan helped the AKP to come to power.

The effects of the February 28 process continued in the early years of the AKP government. All other state apparatuses gradually lost their power vis-à-vis that government. In the early years, the tension between the AKP and the secular establishment was high. This tension can be explained not only by the negative attitude of secularists toward religion, but also by a power struggle, in which the AKP represented entrance into the national government and an upper-class lifestyle by the middle class. This was not welcomed by previous elites.

I have explained the power struggle in Turkey in terms of Serif Mardin's center-periphery concept. Accordingly, the confrontation between the center and the periphery has been the most important social cleavage underlying Turkish politics since the late Ottoman Empire. In this cleavage, the center represents the elite who possess economic and political power, while the periphery represents the rest of the people, who are mostly religious. Educational opportunities

have deepened this social stratification over time. In that context, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social capital – along with economic, cultural, and symbolic capital – becomes useful to understand the power struggle between these two entities. To Bourdieu, social capital is a force that helps to create and sustain pre-existing social advantages. The center wants to extend its previous privileges and advantages, while the periphery wants to share in the same benefits. This is the origin of the power struggle between the AKP government and other secular state institutions in the time period, 2002-2012. In that struggle, the AKP has represented the periphery, whereas the Republican People's Party (CHP), the military, the universities, and the higher judiciary have represented the center. The current literature also acknowledges the center-periphery dichotomy in Turkish politics that has become apparent during the rule of the AKP since 2002.

I examined state-taught religion and religious minority rights to reveal the changing relationship between the state and religion in the period 2002-2012 and the public response to this change. At first sight, this examination suggests an enormous change in both issues. However, a closer look suggests that most changes, far from being new experiences in Turkish society, essentially represented the effects of the February 28 process. On both issues, the AKP government made a constant endeavor to respond to public demand. The AKP's early attempts at solving problems of religious education elicited strict opposition among the centrist coalition, including the military, the higher judiciary, the universities, the Higher Education Board (YOK), the presidency, the secularist opposition parties, the media, and business associations. The Constitutional Court almost dissolved the party in 2008 because of its endeavors related to religious education. In the following years, the negative stance of the state institutions regarding religious education diminished. In this change, the AKP government was the leading factor, since it won three consecutive elections in 2002, 2007, and 2011. The AKP's then-Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah Gul won the Presidency in 2007. Before Gul's presidency, the AKP government had almost no influence with the above-mentioned opposition groups with regard to religious education. President Gul's appointments of higher officials have begun to change this, as can be seen with regard to the presidents of universities, members of the Higher Education Board (YOK), and members of the higher courts. The 2010 Constitutional amendments, which passed by public vote, increased the party's influence on the judiciary. Secularist business

associations and media groups have decreased their previous strict opposition, since the AKP has won three consecutive elections and proved that it will hold the power for a long time.

Furthermore, in Turkey, the state is the biggest employer of businessmen. For this reason, it was hard for business associations and media groups to maintain a strict opposition to the AKP government. Indeed, the governmental pressure on business associations and media groups raised concerns about authoritarianism. In these discussions, the AKP government brought forward its electoral success, while opposition groups urged that democracy is not only evident in the ballot box. Even though these discussions seemed to become more prominent during the second and third terms of the AKP government, they were actually a factor in politics since the first day of the AKP regime. I mentioned them in connection with the social and institutional consensuses in politics. In the early conflicts, by representing the secular establishment, the secular state institutions confronted the AKP government. In most cases, the AKP had to step back. Since these state institutions gradually lost power vis-à-vis the AKP, secular opposition groups have felt they were being totally excluded from politics.

The widespread summer 2013 public protests against the AKP government were an expression of this disappointment. The opposition groups could not find any institutional platform to raise their voices against the AKP government in its third term (2011- ). Public protests became a way to express feelings of these groups, but since they lacked sufficient institutional support in Turkey, they looked at international institutions. Paying full-page advertisements against the AKP government on *The New York Times* and *The Times* suggest that these opponents wanted to cover lack of the Turkish institutional support by seeking support on international level to force the AKP government for their demands. In this case, the issue is not so much the AKP government's authoritarianism, but the need for other political parties to adjust to the new political environment. Exclusion of the secular opposition groups from power might be interpreted as a reversal of the previous center-periphery cleavage, but it is still too early to reach such a conclusion. The center-periphery cleavage relates not only to political power but also to the cultural and economic superiority of the center. During the AKP government, the lower and middle classes have found a way to achieve some social mobility in the direction of an upper-class lifestyle; however, this does not mean that the previous elites have lost their economic advantages. This is evident from the economic profile of some supporters of the protestors, who participated the 2013 summer anti-government demonstrations. According to a

survey on the 2013 protests, which surveyed the members of the CEO Club, an organization has more than 500 CEOs in Turkey, nearly half, 48 percent, of the 137 CEO's in Turkey who participated the study expressed that they had visited the Gezi Park where the protests occurred to support them (*Hurriyet Daily News* 06/18/2013). While the Turkish economy has grown significantly under AKP rule, the previous elites, who held the most economic capital, have benefited from it more than other economic classes. That is why it is difficult to claim that the periphery replaced the center during that time period.

Among all state institutions, the AKP has less influence, however, on the military. Since the military has strict rules in the choosing of personnel and advancing them to high-ranking positions, it is still adhering to its secularist ideology. However, the opposition of the military has also diminished for two reasons. In the first instance, the General Staff published a notice against the AKP government in the 2007 Presidential elections. This warning was named *e-memorandum*, since it was published on the army's official website. However, this *e-memorandum* did not find the expected public support. In fact, it caused a negative reaction against the military's interference in politics and helped the AKP government increase its votes in the following elections. The military learned from this experience that it should keep its voice in balance. The second instance was the arrest of hundreds of military personnel since 2008 on the ground that they had been planning a coup against the democratically elected AKP government in its early years. These arrests seriously diminished the military resistance to the AKP's religion-related politics. When there was no longer any state institution that stood firmly against political changes related to religious education, in late 2011 the YOK eliminated the unfair procedures regarding the entrance of IHL graduates to universities, and a few months later, in 2012, the AKP government reopened the middle-level sections of the IHLs. The AKP removed restrictions on Quran-based courses in the same year. While these changes might have been seen as enormous, again as noted above, they actually reflected only a return to the policies in place before the February 28 process. Eliminating the effects of this process concerning religious education took almost 15 years. The only extra change regarding religious education was that of introducing new religious elective courses to primary and secondary school curricula.

With regard to the public response to these changes, it can be said that the majority welcomed them. In the early years of the AKP government, reactions of secularists regarding the proposed changes were harsh indeed, but they faded in time. These reactions were not only

related to AKP policies, but also reflected the power struggle between the center and the periphery. As regards the majority, the electoral success of the AKP can be interpreted as a sign of their support. In addition, increasing registration in IHLs and enrollment in elective religious courses are other signs of the public support for these changes. One might ask why the centrist secular establishment has remained so strictly opposed to the provision of a simple vocational imam-hatip high-school education. It turns out that the imam-hatip schools did not serve to extend the previous social system, in which the upper class continued to enjoy its privileges, but quite the opposite: they helped lower-class religious families to enter the state apparatus. As an imam-hatip graduate, Recep Tayyip Erdogan became the prime minister of Turkey, thereby confirming the fears of the elites.

Regarding religious minority rights between 2002 and 2012, the Turkish state showed a pattern similar to its response to religious education. Until the early 2000s, the state was suspicious of demands coming from non-Muslim communities since it was still seeing the non-Muslim community as a threat to its sovereignty, resting on its experiences in WWI and the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. During the last few decades, these fears have been declining, since non-Muslims did not have much political, economic, or demographic power. Although missionary activities in the late 1990s and the early 2000s triggered previous distrust, because of non-Muslims' lack of power, these suspicions never came close to the worries about the actions of Islamic groups during the February 28 process. When the AKP government improved the rights of non-Muslim communities, it did not encounter resistance from other state institutions similar to what happened on the issues of the IHLs and Quran-based courses. This silence was a sign of implicit approval of these changes by the Turkish state.

On the public level, public reactions vis-à-vis non-Muslim demands are very similar to the Turkish state's approach. In that way, it differs from religious education. Regarding religious education, public demand and the state's response have confronted at times. In contrast, public and the state's responses concerning non-Muslims' demands have overlapped since the early Republic. In these early years, both the Turkish state and the majority of public saw the non-Muslim communities, especially Greeks and Armenians, as a threat to sovereignty of Turkey. In that way, these reactions were not mostly against their religious affiliations but national identities. In these early years, non-Muslim communities experienced several negative practices from both sources. For instance, in 1942, the Turkish state used WWII as an excuse to receive a



wealth tax that mostly affected non-Muslims. In September 1955, during a tension regarding Cyprus issue, non-Muslim properties were vandalized. Although the Turkish state compensated victims of vandalism, this compensation did not erase worries of non-Muslims in that time. It can be argued that any negative reaction against non-Muslims have some connection to international politics in Turkey as examples can be seen in relationship with states including Greece, Armenia, and Israel.

In 2000s, the Turkish public did not have the previous fears regarding non-Muslims anymore since this community had no meaningful power any longer. Missionary activities in the early 2000s were the only exception in this rule. Conservatives perceived these activities as a threat to Islamic religious identity of Turkey while for secularists it was a threat on nationalist identity. However, these fears diminished after 2005 since conversion to Christianity was limited. Official estimations suggest only a few hundred converts while non-official estimations do not calculate more than a few thousand converts. While the AKP government handed demands of non-Muslim communities largely after 2005, the majority of the Turkish public did not reject these changes.

Overall, the Turkish state has never left religion alone even in its most secular phases. Even though this relationship has experienced constant changes, there was never a complete separation of religion and the state. The time period examined, 2002-2012, witnessed what might be called a “normalization” of the state/religion relationship: religion is no longer seen to be a threat to the state, and neither is the state seen as a threat to religion.

However, this normalization was not an easy process and should not be taken for granted. Its development has taken almost a century and is still a working process, in which both the center and the periphery have moved a long way toward reshaping their ideologies, especially regarding secularism. In the early years of the Republic, the center, characterized by the Kemalist ideology, presented a top-down social engineering project that failed to provide upward social mobility. Assertive secularism became an inseparable part of this ideology. The transition to free elections and a multiparty system brought new opportunities for members of the periphery to increase their voices. The Democrat Party (DP, 1950-1960) became the first party that represented the periphery in politics. In that time period, the social cleavage was carried into political life. The 1960 and 1971 military interventions were a way for the centrist groups to return to the previous strict social cleavage in politics. The following years also did not bring

much opportunity for interaction between the center and the periphery until the 1980s. At that time, Turgut Ozal (1983-1993) introduced a liberal market economy and created more opportunities for the periphery for social mobility toward the center. Wealth and education became two important components that have helped transform Islamic groups since the 1980s. The center did not realize this transformation at first and misinterpreted its early signs, as we saw in examples of its attitudes toward the issues of headscarves and the imam-hatip schools.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) was both a result of this Islamic transformation and its accelerator. In that way, the AKP represents the *normalization of Islamic groups'* attitudes in opposition to the secular state. This normalization also suggests a change of Islamic ideology in politics. It proves that, when Islamists are allowed to participate in democratic political life, they do not necessarily temper it but may become a part of it. This brings a new breadth to democracy under the name of traditional conservatism that is becoming acceptable to a larger public, which suggests a pragmatic model in the wake of the Arab Spring for other Islamic countries. On the other hand, the AKP caused the state to reduce its assertive secularist policies in a way that can be termed the normalization of secular ideology. None of these processes was easy. They have shown a constant struggle between the AKP and the secular establishment, in which both sides have learned the limits and possibilities of each other. This development has helped bring about a mutual transformation and a moving away from the parties' prior static propositions. The 2013 anti-government protests may be seen contradict to my *normalization* thesis but they did not. During the first and second terms of the AKP government, secular groups had expressed their discomfort by talking about neighborhood pressure, which suggests that these groups feel social pressure for their secular lifestyle. In the third term of the AKP government, propositions about neighborhood pressure were replaced by allegations about the AKP authoritarianism. In previous years, religion was the base of arguments while the 2013 anti-government protests did not base their arguments solely on religious discourses. This discourse shift supports my argument on normalization of secular ideology.

The normalization of state/religion relations was accomplished not only by the AKP's success. International powers, especially the European Union (EU), supported democratic improvements in Turkey. Turkey's eagerness to achieve EU membership made a military intervention during the early years of the AKP unlikely. This provided the AKP government with

a wider space in which to carry out its policies, in what can be called the *normalization of democracy*. Especially since 2010, democracy has become the only game in town. It is now clear that the AKP came in with elections and can go out only by elections. Secular opposition parties have stopped seeking the help of military or other state institutions, and have merely appealed to the public for their votes. Its first effects showed during the 2011 elections. The CHP's election manifestos emphasized secularism as usual, but preferred stressing personal liberties to seek public support. In addition, the conservative periphery's trust in democracy has consolidated since 2002. Since this group was excluded from politics for a long time, it had previously developed strong suspicions of democracy.

Finally, the examined time period suggests a *normalization of secularism*. The Turkish state had implemented a strict secularism since the beginning of the Republic while the AKP government has embraced a friendly secularism since 2002. This transition provided normalization vis-à-vis state and religion relations.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Researcher: Selman Yilmaz, Ph.D. student of sociology at the University of Pittsburgh

#### **State, Politics, and Religion: Effects of Political and Social Change on the Relationship between State and Religion in Turkey, 2002-2012**

##### **Introduction**

Q1. It is claimed that “politically Turkey has changed more in the last ten years than it did in the previous eighty.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

Q2. What are the major issues confronting Turkey today?

Is religion one of them?

##### **1. Socio-economic, political, and religious conditions before 2002**

Q3. How would you compare the relationship between religion and the state before 2002 to the relationship since then? Is it on the right track or wrong track?

##### **2. Conditions that helped the emergence of the AKP government**

Q4. What were the three most important conditions that helped the AKP to become the ruling party in 2002? Were the same conditions relevant in the 2007 and 2011 elections?

### **3. AKP's discourses about religion and religious rights**

Q5. When we look at the AKP's discourses, policies, and actions on religious issues, what is right, wrong, or insufficient?

Q6. When we look at opposition parties' discourses, policies, and promises on religious issues, what is right, wrong, or insufficient?

Q7. Is the AKP sincere in its discourses about religious issues and does it express the expectations of the general population? Or does the AKP abuse religion to increase its votes?

Q8. Do the AKP's discourses on religion conflict with the secular Turkish state's official ideology?

### **4. The EU-related reforms**

Q9. What role do you think EU accession concerns play in changing relations between religion and politics in Turkey?

### **5. Opinions of opposition groups for the AKP's religious discourses, politics, and practices**

Q10. Do you think that the AKP has (or has ever had) a secret agenda (to change the secular establishment of Turkey)?

Q11. Is there neighborhood (social) pressure in Turkey concerning religious issues (from religious groups or persons, family members, and friends)? Do secular neighborhoods have a similar pressure to become less religious?

Q12. What do you think about "anxious moderns" (who think Turkey is becoming more conservative and religious)? Are you one of them?

Q13. There are many people who are worried about the AKP's politics on religion as we see from neighborhood pressure and anxious moderns. What are the reasons for these concerns? How can we eliminate them?

### **6. Attitudes against congregations and Islamic groups since 2002**

### **7. Attitudes against minority religious groups since 2002**

Q14. The AKP government has a liberty-oriented language for religious issues. Does this language include every religion, religious group, and minority religions?

## **8. Religious institutions since 2002**

Q15. Are you satisfied with the position of religious institutions and operations such as the Presidency of Religious Affairs, Koran courses, Imam-Hatip schools, and theology faculties?

Q16. Are you satisfied with the curriculum of religion and ethics courses and with these courses being obligatory in the Constitution?

## **9. Unsatisfied religious expectations since 2002**

Q17. Which religious expectations have not been met since 2002? What are reasons of this failure? How do we solve these problems?

## **10. Satisfied and unsatisfied implementations since 2002**

## **11. Change in opposition parties' language and promises about religious issues since 2002**

Q18. Opposition parties from both left and right have used a less assertive language on religious issues recently. What are reasons for this change? If the AKP was not in power, would the change still occur?

## **12. Effects of AKP politics on socio-religious change**

Q19. Has political Islam gained or lost strength since 2002? Please, give some examples.

Q20. How would you describe the AKP, for example would you use phrases such as Islamic or conservative?

Q21. Has understanding/interpretation of Islam changed during the last decade in issues such as women's rights (including covering women, coeducation, working women); rights of minority religions; and human rights? If there is a change, is it positive or negative?

Q22. Has bureaucracy become more religious during the AKP rule? If so, is this a positive or negative tendency?

Q23. Has Turkish society become more religious during the AKP rule? If so, is this a positive or negative tendency?

Q24. What is the importance and place of the media in the relationship between religion and the state during the last decade?

Q25. What is the importance and place of the military in the relationship between religion and the state during the last decade?

### **13. Effects of changing relationship between religion and state in international arena since 2002**

Q26. How do other countries interpret the changing relationship between religion and state in Turkey?

Q27. Does Turkey have a role model for Islamic movements in the Arab world as they ponder their post-revolution role?

Q28. Do you want to add any comments?

—

#### **Specific Questions for Religious Minorities:**

1. Could you give general information about your community? How many members do you have?
2. What kind of problems does your community encounter in Turkey? What are your expectations or suggestions for solving these problems in the short and long terms?
3. What are the positive developments in your religious rights during the last decade?
4. How do you interpret the Turkish state's attitude towards religious minorities?
5. Do you feel yourself as a stranger or a minority in Turkey, or as a part of the Turkish society? Is there any harassment against you? Do you feel uncomfortable in society?

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEWEE LIST

Akbay, Hıdır. The General director of the Cem Foundation  
Aköz, Emre. *Sabah* Newspaper  
Alkan, Ahmet Turan, Prof. *Zaman* Newspaper  
Altıntaş, Yusuf. The secretary general of the Chief Rabbi of Turkish Jews  
Anagnostopoulos, Dositheos. The spokesperson of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate  
Bardakoğlu, Ali, Prof. the President of Department of Religious Affairs, 2003-2011  
Baluken, İdris. Member of Parliament, BDP  
Berkan, İsmet. *Hürriyet* Newspaper  
Bermek, Doğan. The President of the Federation of the Alevi Foundations  
Bozkurt, Nebi. Member of Parliament, AKP  
Çakır, Osman. Member of Parliament. AKP  
Çağrı, Mustafa, Prof. Mufti of Istanbul, 2003-2011  
Çeç, Mehmet Akif. SP  
Dora, Erol. Member of Parliament, BDP  
Ekşi, Oktay. Member of Parliament, CHP  
Esmerer, Selman. SP  
Gürkan, Recep. Member of Parliament, CHP  
Metin, Ahmet. Dr. President of ADD in Istanbul and Thrace regions  
Öner, Ertuğrul, ret. Colonel. President of ADD in Kadikoy city in Istanbul  
Özdağ, Ümit, Prof. MHP  
Pelatre, Louis. Istanbul's Vicar Apostolic Monsignor of the Latin Catholic  
Sağ, Yusuf. The Turkish Syrian Catholic Deputy Patriarch Chorepiscopus  
Tarhan, Metin. The president of the Federation of the Alevi Associations  
Üzüm, Emrullah. Mufti of Fatih city in Istanbul, current  
Yakan, Francois. Monsignor, the Chaldean Catholic Church  
Yeniçeri, Özcan, Prof. Member of Parliament, MHP



## APPENDIX C

**TABLE 5: IHL SCHOOL AND STUDENT NUMBERS**

	<b>IHL school numbers</b>	<b>IHL student Numbers</b>	<b>% of IHLs among vocational schools</b>	<b>% of IHLs among general high schools</b>	<b>Prop. of IHL budget to total student budget of MEB</b>
<b>1970-1971</b>	72	48,475	21.8		0.9 (in 1973)
<b>1981-1982</b>	374	216,864	43.0		2.5
<b>1990-1991</b>	382	309,553	35.9	7.03	3.2
<b>1996-1997</b>	*601 (500)	511,502	39.5	9.30	4.0
<b>2002-2003</b>	450	64,534	7.4	2.65	1.7
<b>2003-2004</b>	452	84,898	8.7	2.37	1.7
<b>2004-2005</b>			9.4		1.7
<b>2005-2006</b>			9.7		1.8
<b>2006-2007</b>	455	120,668			
<b>2007-2008</b>	456	129,274			
<b>2008-2009</b>	458	143,637			
<b>2009-2010</b>	465	198,581			
<b>2010-2011</b>	493	235,639			
<b>2011-2012</b>	537	268,245			
<b>2012-2013</b>					

Source: National Education Statistics: Formal Education, 2006-2012. TESEV 2004: 64-68, 103. Ozcan 2010: 122-141.

\* Official numbers seems high because some school branches were estimated as separate schools.

## APPENDIX D

**TABLE 6: IMPORTANT DATES IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

	<b>Regarding IHL</b>
1924	Unification of Education Law and opening of IHLs
1931	All imam-hatip schools were closed
1951	IHLs were opened back
Feb. 1997	Post modern coup: MGK recommendations
1998	Middle-level sections of IHLs were closed
July 1998	Coefficient factor: 0.2 to 0.5
Sept. 1998	IHL students were restricted to transfer other schools
Sept. 1998	IHL students were restricted to transfer distance education
2002	YOK increased coefficient factor: 0.3 to 0.8
Nov. 2002	AKP won elections by 34%
2004	IHL bill was vetoed by President
2004	Court decided YOK is the only authority in issue of coefficient
2005	MEB allowed IHL student to transfer distance education but was annulled by the court
April 2007	E-memorandum of the military
July 2007	AKP won elections by 47%
August 2007	Abdullah Gul became president
June 2008	Constitutional Court annulled headscarf amendment
July 2008	Constitutional Court ruled financial sanctions for AKP
May 2009	ECHR ruled unfair coefficient is fair
July 2009	YOK removed coefficient factor but it was annulled by the court
Dec. 2009	YOK reduced effect of coefficient factor 0.13 to 0.15 but this was also annulled
March 2010	YOK's new coefficient 0.12 to 0.15, court did not cancel it
Sept. 2010	Constitutional amendments passed by public vote, changed substance of higher courts
June 2011	AKP won elections by 50%
Nov. 2011	YOK removed different coefficient
March 2012	IHL middle-level sections were opened back

## **APPENDIX E**

### **LAUSANNE PEACE TREATY 1923: PROTECTION OF MINORITIES**

#### Protection of Minorities

##### Article 37

Turkey undertakes that the stipulations contained in Article 38 to 44 shall be recognized as fundamental laws, and that no law, no regulation, nor official action shall conflict or interfere with these stipulations, nor shall any law, regulation, nor official action prevail over them.

##### Article 38

The Turkish Government undertakes to assure full and complete protection of life and liberty to all inhabitants of Turkey without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion.

All inhabitants of Turkey shall be entitled to free exercise whether in public or private, of any creed, religion or belief, the observance of which shall not be incompatible with public order and good morals.

Non-Moslem minorities will enjoy full freedom of movement and of emigration, subject to the measures applied, on the whole or on part of the territory, to all Turkish nationals, and which may be taken by the Turkish Government for national defense, or for the maintenance of public order.

##### Article 39

Turkish nationals belonging to non-Moslem minorities will enjoy the same civil and political rights as Moslems.

All the inhabitants of Turkey, without distinction of religion, shall be equal before the law.

Differences of religion, creed or confession shall not prejudice any Turkish national in matters relating to the enjoyment of civil or political rights, as, for instance, admission to public employment's, functions and honors, or the exarchate of professions and industries.

No restrictions shall be imposed on the free use by any Turkish national of any language in private intercourse, in commerce, religion, in the press, or in publications of any kind or at public meetings.

Notwithstanding the existence of the official language, adequate facilities shall be given to Turkish nationals of non-Turkish speech for the oral use of their own language before the Courts.

#### Article 40

Turkish nationals belonging to non-Moslem minorities shall enjoy the same treatment and security in law and in fact as other Turkish nationals. In particular, they shall have an equal right to establish, manage and control at their own expense, any charitable, religious and social institutions, any schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and to exercise their own religion freely therein.

#### Article 41

As regards public instruction, the Turkish Government will grant in those towns and districts, where a considerable proportion of non-Moslem nationals are resident, adequate facilities for ensuring that in the primary schools the instruction shall be given to the children of such Turkish nationals through the medium of their own language. This provision will not prevent the Turkish Government from making the teaching of the Turkish language obligatory in the said schools.

In towns and districts where there is a considerable proportion of Turkish nationals belonging to non-Moslem minorities, these minorities shall be assured an equitable share in the enjoyment and application of the sums which may be provided out of public funds under the State, municipal or other budgets for educational, religious, or charitable purposes.

The sums in question shall be paid to the qualified representatives of the establishments and institutions concerned.

#### Article 42

The Turkish Government undertakes to take, as regards non-Moslem minorities, in so far as concerns their family law or personal status, measures permitting the settlement of these questions in accordance with the customs of those minorities.

These measures will be elaborated by special Commissions composed of representatives of the Turkish Government and of representatives of each of the minorities concerned in equal number. In case of divergence, the Turkish Government and the Council of the League of Nations will appoint in agreement an umpire chosen from amongst European lawyers.

The Turkish Government undertakes to grant full protection to the churches, synagogues, cemeteries, and other religious establishments of the above-mentioned minorities. All facilities and authorization will be granted to the pious foundations, and to the religious and charitable institutions of the said minorities at present existing in Turkey, and the Turkish Government will not refuse, for the formation of new religious and charitable institutions, any of the necessary facilities which are granted to other private institutions of that nature.

#### Article 43

Turkish nationals belonging to non-Moslem minorities shall not be compelled to perform any act which constitutes a violation of their faith or religions observances, and shall not be placed under any disability by reason of their refusal to attend Courts of Law or to perform any legal business on their weekly day of rest.

This provision, however, shall not exempt such Turkish nationals from such obligations as shall be imposed upon all other Turkish nationals for the preservation of public order.

#### Article 44

Turkey agrees that, in so far as the preceding Articles of this Section affect non-Moslem nationals of Turkey, these provisions constitute obligations of international concern and shall be placed under the guarantee of the League of Nations. They shall not be modified without the assent of the majority of the Council of the League of Nations. The British Empire, France, Italy and Japan hereby agree not to withhold their assent to any modification in these Articles which is in due form assented to by a majority of the Council of the League of Nations.

Turkey agrees that any Member of the Council of the League of Nations shall have the right to bring to the attention of the Council any infraction or danger of infraction of any of these obligations, and that the Council may thereupon take such action and give such directions as it may deem proper and effective in the circumstances.

Turkey further agrees that any difference of opinion as to questions of law or of fact arising out of these Articles between the Turkish Government and any one of the other Signatory Powers or any other Power, a member of the Council of the League of Nations, shall be held to be a dispute of an international character under Article 14 of the Covenant of the League of Nations. The Turkish Government hereby consents that any such dispute shall, if the other party thereto demands, be referred to the Permanent Court of International Justice. The decision of the Permanent Court shall be final and shall have the same force and effect as an award under Article 13 of the Covenant.

#### Article 45

The rights conferred by the provisions of the present Section on the non-Moslem minorities of Turkey will be similarly conferred by Greece on the Moslem minority in her territory.

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