

## Turkey: Islam and Laicism between the interests of state, politics, and society

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Cemal Karakas

# Turkey: Islam and Laicism Between the Interests of State, Politics, and Society

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## Summary

This report has the following objectives: (a) to examine the defining factors that characterized Turkey's path of secularization and the process of Islamization that has been evident in state and society especially since the 1980s; (b) to analyze the phenomenon of the "politicization of Islam"; and (c) to examine the dynamic processes of transformation in the Turkish Islamist movement from the policies and activities of the Welfare Party (RP) to that of the current Justice and Development Party (AKP).

State, politics, and society in Turkey are largely secularized and have accepted the subordination of Islam to politics. The process of secularization that was launched by the Ottoman leadership in the first half of the 19th century took place under Islamic auspices and was an endogenous – and not an exogenous – one, which was a key factor in making the reforms acceptable to the Turkish population. These reforms made it easier for Turkey's founder Atatürk to transform the Ottoman monarchy into a nation-state modeled on the European example.

The Turkish Republic, however, transformed the multi-religious and multi-ethnic state solely along the lines of Turkish nationalism and Sunni Islam, which became the two sources of legitimacy for the Kemalist state. The hegemony of a Turkish ethnic identity in conjunction with religious homogeneity was designed to strengthen territorial integrity and the formation of a national identity – a dogma that is still applied today. At the same time, this political-religious ideology feeds the fear that remains greatest among Kemalists to this day, namely the social and territorial fragmentation of Turkey along the dividing lines of laicists vs. Islamists (the constitutional dimension), Turkish vs. Kurdish nationalists (the ethnic dimension), and Sunnis vs. Alevi (the religious dimension).

The Kemalist understanding of laicism is both authoritarian and undemocratic. The Turkish state's model of laicism is aimed at co-opting Sunni Islam, the religion of more than three quarters of the Turkish population. Turkey has pledged itself to finance and administer this faith exclusively – which means that Sunni Islam has *de facto* been nationalized. In doing so, the state has abandoned not only its obligation of religious neutrality but also created for itself a monopoly of interpretation of and control over this faith. The result has been a politicization of Islam "from above", i.e., by the state, with the goal of secularizing the entire Turkish society, homogenizing the different religious communities (especially in an effort to "Sunnify" Alevi Islam), and marginalizing Kurdish identity, thus securing the country's territorial unity against Kurdish nationalists. To this end, the state propagates a republican, laicist, and ethno-nationalist (i.e., "Turkifying") state Islam.

Democracies need not be neutral in their philosophy, i.e., a strict institutional separation of state and religion is not a prerequisite for a functioning democracy. A democratic constitutional state committed to human rights, however, must make sure not to discriminate against any religion or attempt to assimilate particular ethnic groups, as is the case in Turkey. To address these deficiencies, the European Union, as the largest supporter of democracy in Turkey, must use the political leverage of accession talks to demand an end to the discrimination of the non-Sunni and Kurdish parts of the population.

The Kemalist model of laicism unintentionally facilitates a politicization of Islam “from below”, i.e., by political parties and social groups. Their aim is less to transform Turkey back into an Islamic state than to weaken the Kemalist monopoly on the interpretation of religion, to exploit anti-Western resentments, to win electoral votes from the Kurdish population, and to end the restrictions on religious freedom.

The politicization of Islam “from below” began with Turkey’s transition to a democratic multi-party system. The election victory of the conservative religious Democratic Party (DP, Demokrat Partisi) of Adnan Menderes in 1950 represented an important turning point in Turkish history as political power was no longer viewed as an administrative tool for pushing through an elitist state-building project (Kemalism), but was seen instead as a participatory instrument for asserting its own (religious) interests. Prime Minister Menderes can be credited with having prevented the splintering-off or radicalization of religious groups and with expanding the state’s social legitimacy through his liberal stance vis-à-vis Islam. By integrating such groups, the Democratic Party was able to ensure that they did not become an “underground movement” but instead became part of the parliamentary system.

In the 1970s, the first Islamist parties in Turkey emerged from a democratic, parliamentary environment under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan. They not only represented the rights of people with religious interests in a pluralist process of political expression, but also marked out the terms under which parties with Islamist goals could operate and the terms under which they could participate in government.

The 1980 military coup triggered, under the auspices of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (TIS), a turning point in Turkish politics: the expansion of state-run religious services, the introduction of religious education as a compulsory subject in public schools, and the use of the Diyanet, the state agency for religious affairs, for the “promotion of national solidarity and integration”. These changes not only led to a nationalization of Islam, but also to an Islamization of the nation. The military granted Sunni Islam a discrete and important role in the country’s sociopolitical development; it was the “new” old source of legitimization for the Kemalist state.

Under the aegis of Prime Minister Turgut Özal an official reevaluation of Islam as part of Turkish identity took place. The state was no longer regarded as a mere collection of institutions and agencies, but as the champion of a collective identity. Özal’s liberal economic and social policies promoted religious interest groups; the development of an Islamic business world and of the religious but pro-democratic “Anatolian bourgeoisie” is one of Özal’s main achievements.

The rise of the Islamist Welfare Party (RP) is primarily owed to endogenous factors and would have been inconceivable without the ideological change at the highest level of the state under the influence of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis. The party operated – due to pressure from its coalition partner – within Turkey’s democratic and republican parameters. The RP’s era, however, did witness an Islamization of the public sphere and a politicization of religion. The “Process of February 28” led to a split in Necmettin Erbakan’s movement and triggered ideological change in Turkish Islamism that has deep-

ened its dynamic integration into parliamentary democracy. The reform-oriented wing of the Islamist movement succeeded in freeing itself from the ideology of the Welfare Party and in ushering in a post-Islamist phase. This wing became institutionalized in the conservative religious AKP. The AKP can be classified as a hybrid political group that represents a unique synthesis of reformism and conservatism that crosses class boundaries. Its spectacular victory in the 2002 parliamentary elections was not just a result of this ideological change but must also be regarded – just as in the case of the RP’s prior success – in the light of socioeconomic problems.

After the ban of the Welfare Party, the military’s toleration of the AKP victory represented an important milestone in Turkey’s process of democratization. The AKP’s impressive politics of reform paved the way to EU accession negotiations and furthered the democratization of Turkey. The intellectual evolution in the conservative religious camp since the end of the 1990s is exemplified in this turn toward the European Union, and the corresponding turn away from the strong nation-state and the Islamic world.

Despite its occasionally Islamist rhetoric, the AKP does not pose a threat to Turkish democracy. Above all, criticism of AKP policies by the Kemalist state elite reflects the fear that their own prerogative over the state’s resources will be called into question. This fear is exacerbated by the fact that the conservative religious AKP wants to curtail the Turkish military’s ability to act autonomously and as superordinate to the institutions of government in favor of the primacy of popular sovereignty.

My analyses in this paper lead to the conclusion that overall, the AKP’s policies are oriented toward the fundamental principles of democracy and the rule of law. This signifies an important milestone – not only for the democratization of the Islamist movement, but also for that of Turkey.



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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Object of Investigation

“The purpose of laicism is to protect religion.”  
Süleyman Demirel, former Turkish Prime Minister and President

The international media paid close attention when in April and May of 2007 hundreds of thousands of people in Turkey protested against the presidential aspirations of Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül of the conservative religious Justice and Development Party (AKP), which had held a majority in parliament since 2002, and the Turkish military in a memorandum openly threatened a coup against the AKP.<sup>1</sup> The demonstrators and the military feared that Gül’s election would result in a massive Islamization of state, politics, and society, and could spell the end of the country’s republican form of government. After the Turkish constitutional court determined in a controversial decision that the Turkish parliament did not meet the quorum required for Gül’s election, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called early parliamentary elections for July 22, 2007. The AKP was thus able to defuse the crisis for the short term; the following question, however, remains highly controversial: what role should Islam play in state, society, and politics?

Turkey is the only Muslim country in which Islam is not the state religion, while laicism is enshrined in the constitution. In fact, however, Turkey is noticeably more Islamic today than in the 1960s and 1970s. So how much is there to the allegation of an “Islamist peril” in a country that is 99 percent Muslim and is seen by many as a democratic, secular model for Muslim countries in the 21st century?<sup>2</sup>

Since the founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the Kemalist secular state elite have justified their authoritarian policies with the reason that more democracy would pave the way to power for ultra-religious parties which could then establish a totalitarian state. In doing so, the Kemalist state elite have to battle two structural problems: 1. Islam is an integral part of Turkish identity and is used by the Kemalist elite itself as a second source of legitimacy, next to nationalism. 2. In accordance with the dogma “Islam is

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- 1 Cf. “Grande manifestation contre le premier ministre turc à Ankara”, *Le Monde*, April 14, 2007; “Secularism v democracy: A military coup was avoided, but an early election looms. Turkey’s problems are postponed, not solved”, *The Economist*, May 3, 2007; “Der falsche Aufstand. Verkehrte Welt in der Türkei: Die muslimische Regierung ist nicht radikal, die Militärs müssen niemanden retten”, *Die Zeit*, May 3, 2007; “Turkey’s foreign minister withdraws Presidential candidacy”, *International Herald Tribune*, May 6, 2007; “Für Direktwahl des Präsidenten. Das türkische Volk soll künftig das Staatsoberhaupt bestimmen dürfen”, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, May 10, 2007.
- 2 On Turkey as a role model for other Muslim countries see Vali Nasr, *The Rise of Muslim Democracy*, in: *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2005, pp. 13-27; also see the interview with Abdelwahab Meddeb in *Die Zeit*, September 21, 2006.

religion and state”, Islam is in essence not only a religion of the private but also of the public sphere – a strict separation of the two is therefore difficult to achieve.

In Turkey, organizations and parties are banned whose goals are based on notions of an Islamist order, or which pursue anti-laicist objectives. Nevertheless, the Welfare Party (RP) in 1995 and the AKP in 2002 were able to win the parliamentary elections and through their actions and rhetoric contributed to an Islamization of state and society, even if their party platform was not Islamist *per se*. The toleration of the RP’s and AKP’s election victories and the parties’ actions serves well in highlighting the tensions that are inherent in the Turkish debate over state and religion: the integration of the democratically legitimized Islamist movement into Turkish politics and the simultaneous preservation of the strictly Kemalist laicist state policy.

This report has three objectives:

1. It examines the defining factors that characterized (a) Turkey’s path of secularization, and (b) the process of Islamization that can be observed in state and society in Turkey since the 1980s.
2. At the same time, I analyze the phenomenon of the “politicization of Islam” (where “politicization” is to be understood as the abuse and exploitation of Islam for political, social, and economic purposes). Islamization and the politicization of Islam are in a reciprocal relationship and promote each other. Interestingly, the politicization of religion in Turkey takes place on two levels and with partially contrary goals. On the one hand, there is a politicization “from above”, i.e., on the part of the state, and on the other hand “from below”, i.e., on the part of parties and social groups and their political interests. This politicization follows not only the actor-oriented tensions of laicists vs. Islamists, but also the conflicts between Turkish and Kurdish nationalists and the oppression of the Alevis by the Sunnis. This report does not consider such conflicts individually but rather embedded in the overall chronological context.
3. Finally, this study examines the policies and actions of the current governing party, the AKP. To what extent does the AKP pursue Islamist goals or politicize Islam? Has the AKP undergone honest programmatic change, turning it into an engine for reforms and democratization? Or does it engage in *Takkiye* – that is, “Islamic deception” – in order to achieve a certain (usually political) goal secretly and without conflict by concealing its actual beliefs? This, at least, is the allegation leveled by the Turkish military’s Chief of Staff, Yaşar Büyükanıt. Upon taking office in October 2006, Büyükanıt stated that Islamism and the AKP’s politicization of religion represent the greatest danger to Turkey’s republican, laicist order.<sup>3</sup>

This report begins with an analysis of diverging interpretations of secularism and laicism in Europe and Turkey. Europe serves as the comparative model due to the fact that there

3 Cf. “Troubles ahead”, *The Economist*, October 19, 2006; “Der General spricht”, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, October 4, 2006.

is no adequate laicist equivalent to Turkey in the Muslim world. This is followed by an analysis of the Turkish process of secularization, which began in the mid-19th century and was continued by Turkey's founder Atatürk in his cultural revolution of the 1920s. Next, I will examine the institutionalization of the Islamist movement and then focus on the political turning point subsequent to the military coup of 1980, which was followed by an expansive Islamization "from above" and facilitated the rise of the Islamist movement. In what changes in the structure of state and society have these developments resulted? Against this background, I will then examine the objectives and policies of the current governing party, the AKP.

I advance the following hypotheses in this study:

1. The majority of Turkish society has accepted the subordination of Islam to politics. The process of secularization was an endogenous process (and not an exogenous one) and took place under Islamic auspices – factors decisive for the success of secularization in Turkey. Nevertheless, Turkey has witnessed an increase in religious services and a strengthening of Islamic identity that is, however, not to be equated with Islamism as a political movement.
2. The Kemalist model of laicism is both authoritarian and undemocratic. The Turkish state politicizes Islam "from above", i.e., it has created a monopoly of interpretation and control over it. The goal is to secularize the population, homogenize differing confessional communities, and to ensure the country's territorial integrity by propagating a republican, laicist, and ethno-nationalist ("Turkifying") state Islam. However, the Kemalist model of laicism unintentionally also facilitates the politicization of Islam "from below", i.e., by parties and social groups. Their aim is less to transform Turkey into an Islamic state than to break the Kemalist monopoly on the interpretation and exegesis for Islam, to capitalize on anti-Western resentments, to win electoral votes from the Kurdish population, and to end the restrictions on religious freedom.
3. The conservative religious AKP is not a danger to Turkish democracy – despite its occasionally Islamist rhetoric. The Kemalist elite's criticism of AKP policies is above all a reflection of the fear that the Kemalist prerogative over state resources will be challenged. The AKP does not view the country's future in Turkey's deeper integration into the Muslim world (unlike the RP), but rather in the Western community of states and in the strengthening of democracy and the rule of law. The orientation of the AKP's principles toward fundamental democratic values is an important process for the integration of the Islamic political movement into the republican order, one that has also made the party attractive to non-religious voters.

## 1.2 Definition of Terms

A few terms should be defined to avoid any ambiguity:

The word *Muslim* is derived from the same root as the term "Islam" and means "one who surrenders". Since 99 percent of Turks adhere to Islam, Turkish society is dominated by Muslims. The term *Islamic* has primarily a socio-cultural and ritual dimension. It describes thought and action based on the Koranic system of values, as well as the reli-

gious duties of believers. Since the majority of Turks adhere to Islam, Turkish society can be described as *Islamic*. This report, however, makes the following distinction for the term's use in the context of constitutional law: a state is an *Islamic state* when its constitution declares Islam the official state religion and at least parts of Islamic law (the Sharia; Turkish: Şeriat) are used in jurisprudence. None of these criteria apply to the case of Turkey. Consequently, Turkey is not an *Islamic state*, but a secular state with an *Islamic society*.<sup>4</sup>

The terms *Islamism* and *Islamist* denote a political ideology in which Islam forms the core of a "revolutionary" identity. Claims for political and moral control are legitimized by invoking the "universal validity of the Koran". Islam serves as a public norm or constitution according to which politics must subordinate itself to religion in accordance with the dogma "Islam is religion and state" ("al-islam din wa daula"). All public life (society, culture, education, the economy) must adhere to religious standards in such a way that it is consistent with Islamic law. The ideological precursors of Islamism are the Iranian-Afghani philosopher Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1839-1897) and the Egyptian teacher Hasan al-Bana (1906-1949). Al-Afghani championed a global pan-Islamism and called for the Islamic world to unite against the Western colonial powers. The first classic Islamist organization is the Muslim Brotherhood, founded by al-Bana in Egypt in 1928. It began as a protest movement against the imperialist and oppressive policies of the British and French colonial rulers. Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) is generally recognized as the most important Islamist thinker of the recent past. Qutb located the reasons for Muslim self-alienation in the processes of secularization in the Muslim world and the global influence of non-Islamic civilizations.

Islamists have as their goal the creation of an Islamic state. This, however, needs to be considered apart from the actual political implementation of this dogma. In common English usage, relatively liberal Islamic countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, and Jordan are referred to as "Islamic countries" along with totalitarian regimes such as Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Afghanistan under the Taliban. The suggested distinction between "Islamic" and "Islamist" countries could perhaps provide greater clarity.

Islamists also need to be distinguished by the means whereby they strive to attain their goals. Some operate within a parliamentary, democratic context (e.g., in Turkey, Jordan, and Morocco), others as militant underground movements and terrorists (e.g., in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Egypt). In Turkey, Islamists make up approx. 10 percent of the country's population.<sup>5</sup>

4 For a definition also see Günter Seufert, *Staat und Islam in der Türkei*, Berlin (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Studie 29) 2004, p. 7.

5 Ziya Öniş, *Political Islam at the Crossroads. From Hegemony to Co-Existence*, in: *Contemporary Politics*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2001, pp. 281-298 (287).

Turkey is set apart by its heterogeneity, both in its population and in Islam. Around 55 million Turks and 15 million Kurds live in Turkey. There are two confessional groups within Turkish Islam, the Sunnis (approx. 80-85 percent) and the Alevis (approx. 15-20 percent). The Alevi community falls into two groups along ethnic lines: three quarters are Turks and one quarter are Kurds. Estimates of their number vary as the Turkish census does not distinguish between confessional groups within the category "Islam".<sup>6</sup>

The *Sunni* (Turkish: Suni) are members of the largest confessional group within Islam, accounting for around 85 percent of Muslims worldwide. *Shiites* only make up the majority of Muslims in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Yemen, Oman, and Lebanon. Sunni Islam recognizes five schools of legal thought (Madhhab), with Turkish Sunnis belonging to the Hanafi school. Sunnis live according to the "Five Pillars of Islam". The pillars represent the basic religious duties of a Muslim: reciting the creed, praying five times a day, almsgiving, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and a pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj). The main distinction from Shia Islam is the belief that the supreme leader, the calif, may be elected by his followers on the basis of his religious leadership and administrative skills. For Shiites, the calif cannot be elected but must be a legitimate successor of the Prophet Mohammed and of his son-in-law Ali.

The *Alevis* (Turkish: Alevi) originated from the mystical brotherhood of the Persian Safavis in eastern Anatolia during the 13th century. The Alevi faith is the result of a development in religious history that absorbed Christian and Gnostic elements and grew into an autonomous community. There are considerable differences between it and Sunni as well as Shiite Islam: Alevis do not adhere to the "Five Pillars of Islam" and do not pray in mosques but rather in their own community halls (Turkish: Cemevi). There is no separation of men and women during religious worship, and women are not required to veil themselves. Nevertheless, there are parallels to Shia Islam: Alevis venerate Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammed, and they recognize the twelve Shia imams. In the Ottoman Empire, Alevis were classified as heretics and persecuted by the Sunni government. The situation has improved little since the founding of the Turkish Republic (1923), with pogroms taking place in the 1970s and 1990s.

*Kemalism* (Turkish: Kemalizm or Atatürkçülük) refers to the principles of the doctrine on society and state formulated by Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) in 1931. His six "foundations" are republicanism ("Cumhuriyetçilik"), nationalism ("Milliyetçilik"), populism ("Halkçılık"), statism ("Devletçilik"), laicism ("Lâiklik") and revolutionism/reformism ("Devrimçilik").<sup>7</sup>

6 M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, London (Oxford University Press) 2003, p. 65.

7 *Republicanism* means that the Turkish Republic is based on the principle of popular sovereignty and no longer on the elitist Padişah system that characterized the Ottoman monarchy. *Nationalism* means that the republic was founded based on the idea of the nation-state and that the Turkish nation is the state's people. *Populism* describes the need of the people to participate in the state with its rights and obligations. *Statism* describes the dirigiste and statist Turkish economic policies that predominated until 1980. *Laicism*

The terms *Kemalist state elite* and *Kemalist state bureaucracy* denote institutions of the state that are by their very function duty bound to enforce the Kemalist principles. Among them are the Turkish military and the National Security Council (MGK, Milli Güvenlik Kurulu); the office of the President; the Council of State (Turkey's highest court) and the Chief Public Prosecutor; large parts of the state bureaucracy, especially the Turkish Foreign Ministry, the Ministry for National Education (MEB, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı), the Council of Higher Education (YÖK, Yükseköğretim Kurulu), as well as the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK, Radio ve Televizyon Üst Kurulu).

The term *Kemalists* originally referred to Turkey's founder Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) and his entourage. Today's usage is broader and includes – in addition to the Kemalist state bureaucracy – individuals, non-governmental organizations and institutions that declare their support for the ideals of Atatürk. This includes the Republican People's Party (CHP, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi); the large-business association TÜSIAD; parts of the media, especially the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* and those belonging to the Doğan group, including the high-circulation dailies *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet*; center-left unions and women's rights groups; as well as large parts of the Alevi community.

## 2. Diverging Interpretations of Secularism and Laicism in Europe and Turkey

### 2.1 Secularism and Laicism in Europe

Not many words produce associations as diverging as does the term “secularism”. Over the course of several centuries of cultural conflict, a dividing line emerged between progress and reaction, and – in analogous fashion – between the Enlightenment and Christian ethos. With the Renaissance, the Enlightenment and new scientific insights set off a relativization of Christian dogmas; these went hand in hand with a marginalization of aristocratic and clerical authority in favor of a new bourgeoisie and its demands for political power (popular sovereignty). This process of desacralization was accompanied by an increasing individualization of society. During the first half of the 20th century the Western idea of secularization took its cue from Max Weber's sociology of religion. Weber saw secularization as part of a sweeping process of modernization that encompassed both state and society.<sup>8</sup> Today's understanding of the idea is more nuanced. José

means the institutional separation of state and religion; however, a distinct Turkish definition has evolved that will be discussed in detail below. *Revolutionism/Reformism* denotes Turkey's continuous ability to adapt to Europe and the West. Cf. Udo Steinbach, *Die Türkei im 20. Jahrhundert. Schwieriger Partner Europas*, Bergisch-Gladbach (Lübbe) 1996, pp. 139-142.

8 Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie I*, Tübingen (J.C.B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck) 1920, pp. 536-573.

Casanova, for example, distinguishes three aspects of secularization: the divorcement of temporal domains from religious institutions and norms, and the former's emancipation from the latter; the decline of religious conviction and behavioral norms; and the confinement of religion to the private sphere.<sup>9</sup>

Secularism has been accepted as a normative model and integral part of the modern constitutional state. The concepts are, however, very heterogeneous with regard to the degree of separation between state and religion in Europe. They show that secularization is defined less as a process of desacralization and more as one of differentiation of religious and nonreligious spheres that need not exclude one another:<sup>10</sup>

- For example, Germany has a system of concord which provides among other things that the state's fiscal authorities levy a tax on behalf of the church and that Christian holidays enjoy legal protection. Religious education is a statutory school subject, and crucifixes can be found on the walls of schools and courtrooms in many of the traditionally Catholic regions in Germany. Moreover, in contrast to Turkey, political parties are permitted to base their programs on religious ideas (as in the case, for example, of the Christian-democratic parties CDU/CSU).
- In the Netherlands the process of secularization has produced the so-called pillarization model. Catholics, Protestants and other religious groups each form one "pillar" of society within which they maintain their own institutions, including parties, clubs and institutions in the health, education and media sectors. The cost of private educational institutions is borne by the state – this is not just the case for Christian but also for Muslim institutions.
- Also interesting is the idea of secularism in Great Britain, where the Anglican state church emerged in the 16th century. The head of the Anglican Church is not the Pope but rather the British head of state, i.e., currently Queen Elizabeth II. The state church enjoys certain privileges – for example, the bishops of the Anglican Church are members of the upper house of the British Parliament. At the same time, canon law is part of the temporal legal system, and bishops are appointed jointly by the Prime Minister and the head of state.

These three examples demonstrate that an apodictic separation of state and religion is not a prerequisite for a functioning democracy. While all three countries possess a secular system of law, none of them is laicist. The term "laicism" refers to an anticlerical worldview and ideology that are based on secular processes. It provides for a strict institutional

9 Cf. José Casanova, Chancen und Gefahren öffentlicher Religion. Ost- und Westeuropa im Vergleich, in: Otto Kallscheuer (ed.), *Das Europa der Religionen. Ein Kontinent zwischen Säkularisierung und Fundamentalismus*, Frankfurt a.M. (Fischer) 1996, pp. 181-210 (182).

10 Heiner Bielefeldt, Säkularisierung. Ein schwieriger Begriff: Versuch einer praktischen Orientierung, in: Mathias Hildebrandt/Manfred Brouck/Hartmut Behr (eds.), *Säkularisierung und Resakralisierung in weltlichen Gesellschaften. Ideengeschichtliche und theoretische Perspektiven*, Wiesbaden (Westdeutscher Verlag) 2001, pp. 29-42 (29-30).

separation of state and religion, i.e., of political and religious authority. Accordingly, unlike under secularism, the laicist state keeps completely out of all religious matters.

France and Portugal are the only constitutionally laicist states in Europe. Laicism is seen there as a necessary prerequisite for the protection of the freedoms of religion and conscience and the only way of ensuring equal status for all religious, political and philosophical views; but it is, therefore, bound to neutrality toward all religions. The French understanding of laicism is especially rigid: no crucifixes may be displayed in public buildings, e.g., courts, hospitals, and schools, as this would discriminate against non-Christians. Due to this obligation of neutrality, headscarves may no longer be worn in schools. Laicism is further distinguished from secularism by the fact that no state support is provided to religious groups.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2 The “Kemalist Tripod” of Religion, Nation, and Laicism

Although in Turkey the term laicism (Turkish: *Lâiklik*) is used, the practical political objective of Turkish laicism is secularization. The constitutional court defines laicism, which has been part of the constitution since 1937, as “a civilized way of life that forms the basis for an understanding of freedom and democracy, for independence, national sovereignty, and the humanist ideal, which have developed as a result of overcoming medieval dogmatism in favor of the primacy of reason and enlightened sciences.” Moreover, the court determined that “in a laicist order [...] religion is freed from politicization, is discarded as an instrument of power, and is assigned the proper and honorable place in the conscience of the citizens.”<sup>12</sup>

Turkish laicism thus has as its goal the secularization and modernization of state and society while at the same time freeing religion from politicization. But to what extent do constitutional aspiration and reality in Turkey coincide? Two central structural problems mark the Kemalist system: the fusing of religion and nation and the simultaneous co-optation of Islam. The specifically Turkish path of secularization is an amalgam of religion, nation, and laicism that is unique not just among Islamic societies but worldwide. This amalgam can be called the “Kemalist tripod”.

The fusing of nation and religion is a result of the Turkish War of Independence (1919-22) and the transformation of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire into a European-style nation-state. Turkey’s founder Atatürk was impressed by the unifying power of religion in building a nation, as in the cases of Serbia and Greece. He stressed the ideas of nation and popular movement but – since he was dependent on the loyalty of the Anatolian peoples – did not specify which interpretation of these ideas he intended. Conse-

11 Henri Pena-Ruiz, *Histoire de la laïcité. Genèse d'un idéal*, Paris (Gallimard) 2005.

12 Cited in Christian Rumpf, *Fundamentalismus und Religionsfreiheit in der Türkei in Verfassung, Recht und Praxis*, in: *Verfassung und Recht in Übersee (VRÜ)*, Vol. 32, 1999, pp. 164-190 (166).

quently, Atatürk enjoyed the support not only of the Sunnis but also of the Kurds and the Alevis. The Alevis, who had been persecuted in the Ottoman Empire, were expecting more rights in the new republic; the Kurds were hoping for legal recognition as a separate, autonomous ethnic group. After the Ottoman Empire's painful territorial losses in the Balkans and the Middle East, Atatürk's greatest fear was a further fragmentation of Turkey along ethnic and religious lines in its Anatolian heartland, and both groups' hopes therefore remained unfulfilled. Atatürk's fear has remained virulent even to this day among the Kemalist state elite.<sup>13</sup>

Immediately after the state's founding (1923) began the Kemalist cultural revolution and educational dictatorship with the goal of Westernization. No other Muslim state has experienced anything this radical: all Koranic schools, religious orders and religious educational institutions were closed; Islamic law was replaced by Swiss civil law, German trade and commercial law, and Italian criminal law; Arabic script was replaced by the Latin script, and the Gregorian calendar replaced the Islamic one; active and passive female suffrage was introduced, along with compulsory education; regulations promoting Western-style dress were passed and the display of religious symbols in enclosed public places (public schools, universities, hospitals, state buildings, etc.) banned – this is incidentally the only parallel to French laicism.<sup>14</sup>

Although these reforms were met with – sometimes significant – opposition, especially in the Kurdish southeastern areas of the country, no national mass protest movement developed that could have seriously endangered the Kemalist state-building project. The majority of the Turkish population had accepted the subordination of religion to the state. Atatürk was able to take advantage of the century-old process of secularization that had been embarked upon by Ottoman Sultans Mahmud II and Abdülmecid I in the first half of the 19th century and that was aimed at opening the Empire to transfers of knowledge and technology: they had proclaimed, for the first time, human and civil rights, abolished the feudal system, and carried out administrative reforms, including a reorganization of the state bureaucracy and the military modeled after Prussia's.<sup>15</sup>

To facilitate the implementation of the reforms and the introduction of a constitution (1876), which transformed the multi-ethnic empire into a constitutional democracy with a bicameral parliament based on Belgium's system, the Sultans had presented the adoption of European laws and reforms as the fulfillment of religious law and had legitimated this with verses from the Koran. These so-called "Tanzimat" reforms had initiated the end of the centuries-old dogma "Islam is religion and state" in Turkey and formed the basis

13 Günter Seufert/Christopher Kubaseck, *Die Türkei. Politik, Geschichte, Kultur*, München (C.H. Beck) 2004, pp. 148f.

14 For a critical analysis of the Kemalist cultural revolution also see Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey. A Modern History*, London (I.B. Tauris) 2004.

15 Cf. Brigitte Moser/Michael W. Weithmann, *Die Türkei. Nation zwischen Europa und dem Nahen Osten*, Regensburg (Friedrich Pustet) 2002, pp. 46f.

for the country's Europeanization. It was of pivotal importance for the success of the reforms that the modernization of the empire be an endogenous process and proceed under the auspices of Islam. Since the Ottoman Empire had never been colonized, the process of Europeanization was regarded by some parts of the population with astonishment. It was nevertheless accepted and was scarcely regarded as cultural imperialism or foreign rule.

The creation of the Turkish nation under the aegis of Islam forced the Kemalists to be considerate of religious sentiment – after all, (Sunni) Islam had been the foundation of the Ottoman Empire's social and cultural order for almost 1000 years. In order to secure religious support while at the same time imparting republican ideas, the Kemalists developed an impetus that propagated – in differentiating itself from the “regressive” *popular* Islam<sup>16</sup> preached by the religious orders and brotherhoods – a modern, pro-laicist *state* Islam. The Kemalist state had thus created for itself a monopoly of interpretation, i.e., sole exegetical authority for Sunni Islam and in doing so committed itself to supporting it.

One year after the proclamation of the republic, the Presidency for Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı; “Diyanet” for short) was founded in 1924 with the goal of permanently depoliticizing majority Sunni Islam through a state takeover of certain religious functions and integrating it into the Kemalist state-building project.

Initially, the Kemalists set out to reform Islam. In 1927 Atatürk founded a committee on religion under the leadership of Mehmet Fuad Köprülü, a historian and scholar of religion. The goal was to Europeanize (Turkish) Islam and make it compatible with Atatürk's own impetus for modernization. The *Çağdaş İslam* postulated by the Kemalists was “rational” and “enlightened”, and tailored toward republicanism and Turkish nationalism. *Çağdaş İslam* was not propagated as a dissociation from Islam but, interestingly, as an “Islamic Reformation”. This prompted the translation of the Koran from Arabic into Turkish, following the example of Luther's translation of the Bible into German (to replace the Latin version in use in the Roman Catholic Church). The committee also proposed that Muslim prayer times should no longer be aligned with the path of the sun but instead with the rhythm of the work day. In addition, calls to prayer and sermons were supposed to be no longer in Arabic but in Turkish, and prayers at the mosque were no longer to be performed while kneeling but instead – like in Christian churches – while sitting in pews. But the propagation of a “Kemalist Islam” was an affront to many believers, and protests ensued. Consequently, only the proposal to recite the call to prayer in Turkish (which happened from 1928 to 1950) was taken up.<sup>17</sup>

16 The Kemalists held especially the influence of popular Islam responsible for the technological backwardness of the Ottoman Empire, which is why the religious orders and brotherhoods were outlawed in the 1920s. Popular Islam is an amalgamation of local customs and traditions, the veneration of saints, mystic and folkloric elements, as well as Islamic behavioral codes. Islamic mysticism (Sufism) and popular Islam are often more popular in non-Arab societies such as the Turkish one. Cf. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystische Dimensionen des Islams. Die Geschichte des Sufismus*, München (Insel) 1985.

17 Yavuz, see above (footnote 6), pp. 46-50.

In order to avoid further provocations, the Kemalist state pulled back from its attempts at a reformation, although its educational impetus of propagating a pro-laicist *state* Islam remained virulent. Through the laicist interpretation of religion and by relaying this interpretation to the population, the Diyanet was supposed to prevent non-state and anti-Kemalist circles from using religion for political mobilization against the state. Out of this overarching objective evolved a laicist system *sui generis*. In pursuit of this goal, the Kemalists proceeded as follows:<sup>18</sup>

1. All legal matters that were connected to religious law and its prescriptions regarding state and society were from then on to be dealt with by the Turkish parliament.
2. All questions of theology, faith, and religious ritual were to be decided upon by the Diyanet. The new state institution was to be solely responsible for overseeing the mosques, for the organization of worship, and for the discussion of religious affairs that exclusively involved matters of faith. The Islamic law scholars (Ulema) and the traditionally non-organized clergy were made subordinate to the Diyanet, which thus functioned as a “substitute church”.

Over the years, the Diyanet’s responsibilities were extended further. Today it is one of the largest institutions in Turkey. It oversees the almost 78,000 state mosques and 5,000 state Koran schools (2006: 157,000 students). Other tasks are: preparing and distributing the Friday sermons centrally from Ankara to all mosques in the country; designing the content of broadcasts about Islam and of Koran recitations in the state media; translating religious texts; writing Islamic legal reports and opinions (Fatwa) on such topics as forced marriages, artificial insemination, environmental protection, compulsory education for girls, or “chatting” on the Internet; organizing and regulating pilgrimages to Mecca; and religious care for Turkish Muslims abroad (the Diyanet is also active in Europe, where it is known under the acronym DITIB).<sup>19</sup>

The Diyanet currently employs 80,000 people, many of them prayer leaders, preachers, and legal scholars. Most clergy are state employees and obliged to uphold the laicist principles of the republic; their right to political activity is limited by law. The Diyanet is the only state agency in which female employees may wear headscarves and where the president is permitted to work in his religious attire. The agency’s resources of approx. 1.3 billion YTL (about 700 million Euros) in 2006 represented the fourth-largest item in the state’s budget. The money is not only used to pay the preachers’ salaries but also for the maintenance of the mosques and the construction of new ones. The agency is led by a theology professor (currently Ali Bardakoğlu) who is appointed by and answers to the Turkish Prime Minister.

18 Christian Rumpf, *Das Präsidium für Religionsangelegenheiten*, in: *Zeitschrift für Türkeistudien*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1989, pp. 21-35.

19 See the homepage of the state agency for religious affair, also available in English, at [www.diyamet.gov.tr/](http://www.diyamet.gov.tr/)

Polls conducted annually since the mid-1990s by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) show that the republican reforms to modernize the country and the subordination of religion to politics or the placement of Islam under state control meet with broad popular approval. In the most recent survey from 2006, 77 percent of all respondents answered “Yes” to the question whether the republican reforms had been advantageous to Turkey. About three quarters of the Turkish population see no contradiction between the principle of laicism and the existence of a state agency for religion. An equally large number also believe that the agency has a moderating influence on religion and thus prevents it from becoming radicalized. These results have largely remained constant over the past decade.<sup>20</sup>

My analysis shows that the Turkish Republic has successfully accomplished the transformation from a multi-religious and multi-ethnic empire into a European nation-state. This was accomplished by utilizing Turkish nationalism and Sunni Islam. The hegemony of Turkishness and the religious homogeneity were designed to strengthen territorial integrity and the formation of a national identity. The state was founded on a paradox: the Kemalist republic itself had become a project for building the nation, not vice versa. The “Tanzimat” reforms, the Kemalist educational dictatorship and the promotion of a republican, laicist state Islam played a significant part in secularizing state and society. But the Kemalist understanding of laicism is a discriminatory one: although the state agency for religious affairs is also funded through the tax payments from Christians<sup>21</sup> and Alevis, who make up no less than 15 to 20 percent of the Turkish and Kurdish population, the Diyanet is only responsible for the promotion of majority Sunni Islam. The Kemalist state has thus not only abandoned its obligation of religious neutrality, but *de facto* promoted Sunni Islam to the status of a state religion.

### **3. Politicization of Religion “from below”: The Institutionalization of the Islamist Movement**

With the transition to democracy and a multi-party system (1946) also began the competition for votes and thus the exploitation and politicization of religion “from below”. Religion developed into an important tool for gaining and retaining power. Islam henceforth became an integral part of the program of all center-right parties, which in turn could count on the financial and electoral support of religious interest groups. The minoritarian Kemalist leadership and its party, the Republican People’s Party (CHP) – which had ruled for over two decades in a one-party regime – was now confronted with the religious,

20 Cf. TESEV survey on religion, society, and politics (2006) at [www.tesev.org.tr/etkinlik/Final%20Rapor-din\\_toplum.pdf](http://www.tesev.org.tr/etkinlik/Final%20Rapor-din_toplum.pdf)

21 There are an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 Christians in Turkey. The two largest groups are the Greek Orthodox and the Syrian Orthodox communities.

conservative and rural majority of the population, then at least 75 percent of the Turkish population. The CHP felt forced to widen its edict of religious toleration and to reverse many of Atatürk's provisions: (voluntary) religious education was added to the elementary school curriculum in 1948. Schools for the training of preachers (Imam Hatip schools) and in 1949 a college of theology at the University of Ankara were opened in order to meet the new demand for teachers of religion.

Already during the electoral campaign of 1950 seven of 24 parties advocated a greater role for religion. The victory of the conservative religious Democratic Party (DP, Demokrat Partisi) of Adnan Menderes signified a comprehensive return of Islam to the public sphere. This was followed by a boom in the construction of mosques; new state Koran classes and theological colleges were established. The DP had become an institutionalized "catch all" party for those who were weary of elitist Kemalism: peasants, small businessmen, members of religious orders and brotherhoods, and especially the inhabitants of the Anatolian periphery.<sup>22</sup>

In 1960, the Turkish Army carried out a coup in order to prevent a "civil war". The CHP, which persistently warned against the danger of the "religious reaction" (Turkish: *Irtica*), had successfully called for a Kemalist counter-movement. Prime Minister Menderes was sentenced to death for "high treason", and the DP was outlawed. Causes for the coup were not only the mass demonstrations against Menderes's politics of clientelism for owners of large estates but also his drastic crack-down on "leftist Kemalists" and communists, his ban on strikes, and press censorship.<sup>23</sup>

The coup of 1960 represented a turning point in Turkish politics. The Turkish constitution was amended to establish a National Security Council (MGK) dominated by the military, which henceforth acted as an "advisory controlling body" vis-à-vis the government and watched over the compatibility of domestic and foreign policy with Kemalism. This meant a distinction between the interests of the state and those of the people. Thus the primacy of the state's power over that of the people was established. Moreover the army pledged in articles 35 and 85.1 of the military's 1961 "Internal Rules of Conduct" ("*Iç Hizmet Kanunu*") "to protect and defend the principles of the Republic according to the Constitution" and "to defend the country against domestic and foreign threats, if necessary by force". The military thus granted itself license for future interventions.

The strict course of modernization and industrialization that followed in the 1960s resulted in unemployment, hyperinflation and migration to the cities. It increased anti-Western sentiment and raised questions of national identity for many Turks. Out of this mood developed in the late 1960s for the first time a political movement that saw its ideology rooted in Islamist principles. Leadership of this movement was assumed by Necmettin Erbakan, the "grand old man" of the Islamist movement in Turkey. Erbakan, a

22 Moser/Weithmann, see above (footnote 15), pp. 153f.

23 Ibid.

professor of mechanical engineering with a degree from the technical university at Aachen, Germany, was an adherent of the Naqshbandi Sheik Mehmed Zahid Kotku (1897-1980). Kotku was one of the first clergy to abandon the “cultural Islam” of the Turkish conservatives and had a large influence on the formation of “political Islam” in Turkey. Kotku’s discourses on Islam in the 1960s discussed texts by Pakistani and Egyptian Islamist ideologues, evoked the Ottoman past, made Westernization responsible for Turkey’s economic and moral decline, and debated the resounding defeat of the Arab alliance by Israel in the Six-Day War (1967). Islamism was posited as a new paradigm to take the place of declining pan-Arab nationalism and its original model, Kemalism.<sup>24</sup>

When Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel of the Justice Party (AP, Adalet Partisi) denied Erbakan a position on the party list that would ensure that he would be elected in the next parliamentary election, Erbakan left the AP and founded the National Order Party (MNP, Milli Nizam Partisi) in 1970. The MNP became the institutionalized branch of the Islamist movement. In addition to the protection of conservative moral values, the party’s platform focused on economic policy goals, such as state-led industrialization, the expansion of heavy industry, and the protection of small businesses. It also polemicized against Turkey’s association with the European Community (EC), which was established in 1964 and was decried by the MNP as commercially disadvantageous to Turkey.<sup>25</sup>

1971 saw Turkey’s second military coup. The student revolts of 1968 had also seized Turkey and intensified the violent conflict between the extreme left and right. After the coup, which had resulted in a far-reaching ban of political parties, Erbakan’s party reconstituted itself just one year later as the National Salvation Party (MSP, Milli Selamet Partisi). In order to be (re-)admitted, Erbakan had kept the party program on a pro-Kemalist line but had nevertheless emphasized new directions. *Milli Görüş* (“National Outlook”) emphasized the strengthening of moral and religious values in educational matters as well as fighting against exploitation, usury, and corruption. The MSP was the first party to demand a state investment program for the Kurdish southeastern part of the country, which had been neglected for decades. Moreover, although laicism was accepted, the program advocated revoking the state’s authority over religion.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1973 parliamentary elections the MSP unexpectedly became the third-strongest party with 11.8 percent of the vote, and it enjoyed the most support in the Kurdish periphery and the economically neglected areas of central Anatolia. It also became evident that Demirel’s AP had only absorbed the “Islam of the better-off”, but not that of the lower strata of society. Ironically, it was the Kemalist CHP under the leadership of Bülent Ecevit that would allow the Islamist MSP to come to power. In a coalition consisting of

24 Yavuz, see above (footnote 6), pp. 141f.

25 Steinbach, see above (footnote 7), p. 181.

26 Melih Yürüsen/Atilla Yayla, Die Türkische Wohlfahrtspartei, Sankt Augustin (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, Interne Studien No. 134) 1997, p. 30.

leftist nationalists and Islamists, a constellation that has remained unique to this day, the MSP assumed the responsibilities of government from January to November of 1974. The most consequential decision of this coalition was the deployment of Turkish troops to Cyprus. The government exacerbated the disagreements between the EC, the United States and Turkey to such an extent that Washington placed Turkey under an arms embargo that would last several years.

Prompted by the strong criticism of its Western allies, Turkey intensified its search for alternative alliances. Its accession to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) as a full member can be seen as a direct consequence of these efforts. Erbakan's MSP profited from the anti-Western sentiment that was then widespread. At that time several groups first emerged around it that not only demanded to expand the edict of religious toleration but, with an eye on publicity, shouted "Allahu ekber" ("God is great") at MSP party conferences and displayed Islamist symbols (such as green banners with Koranic verses) under the party symbol the "crescent with ear of grain". Erbakan's MSP publicly polemicized against the "Zionism" and the "Israel-friendly" policies of the United States and demanded that parts of Turkish law be "brought into line" with Islamic law.<sup>27</sup>

Due to smart coalitioneering, Erbakan was successful in joining two rightist national parties in the second half of the 1970s and was able to engage in clientelism. As a result, the number of mosques rose from 43,000 (1972) to 57,000 (1983), and that of schools for the training of preachers increased from 36 (1960) to 437 (1979).<sup>28</sup> However, this expansion was not only pushed by the center-right parties and the Islamists, but also by the Kemalist CHP. It was not a new piousness that had made this necessary, but rather the rapid population growth, which had seen the number of Turks triple from 15 million (1940) to 44 million (1980).

My analysis demonstrates that the electoral victory of Adnan Menderes in 1950 was an important turning point in Turkish history, especially from a psychological point of view: from then on, the religious strata of the population viewed political power no longer as an administrative tool for pushing through an elitist state-building project but instead as a participatory instrument for asserting its own interests. The liberal stance of Prime Minister Menderes's policies vis-à-vis Islam prevented the splintering off or radicalization of religious groups. Their integration into the parliamentary system expanded the social and political legitimacy of the state. Even if Menderes can be accused of exploiting religious sentiment, his rhetoric was not Islamist but anti-elitist and populist.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, my analysis shows that Islamism in Turkey did not begin its political role as a "revolutionary underground movement", but emerged from a democratic, parliamen-

27 Steinbach, see above (footnote 7), pp. 181f.

28 Yavuz, see above (footnote 6), p. 124.

29 Günter Seufert, *Neue pro-islamische Parteien in der Türkei*, Berlin (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Study 6), 2002, p. 14.

tarian environment. Erbakan's two parties represented not only the rights of people with religious interests in a pluralist process of political expression, but also marked out the terms under which parties with Islamist goals could operate and the circumstances under which they could participate in government.

#### **4. The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (TIS) and the Re-Politicization of Religion “from above”**

On September 12, 1980, the Turkish military carried out another coup d'état. It assumed political leadership until the 1983 parliamentary elections and triggered a turning point in state policy. The coup was preceded by a period of instability that wore out a total of thirteen different governments during the 1970s. The main reason for this instability in domestic politics was the enormous radicalization of parts of the political left as well as of the rightist nationalist and the Islamist camps, a development that brought Turkey to the brink of civil war. Acts of terrorism during this time, however, were not only perpetrated on the basis of political ideologies – confessional groups such as the Alevis and the Kurdish nationalists were used for factional political fights. There were 1,126 political assassinations in 1979, a number that climbed until the military coup to 1,500 for the period from January to September 1980 alone.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the domestic conflicts, there were also signs of trouble in Turkey's foreign affairs. The overthrow of the Shah and his regime in Iran by radical Islamists in February 1979 raised concerns in the United States that the “Islamic revolution”, which had many sympathizers among Turkish Islamists, would spill over into Turkey. Ayatollah Khomeini made clear his feeling that he saw the Turkish Republic as a threat to Islam greater than the United States, because Turkey's transformation into a laicist state had been carried out from “within”. In response, the U.S. ended its arms embargo against Ankara that had been in place since the Cyprus crisis and raised its military presence in the Turkish-Iranian border region.

In addition, enormous socioeconomic problems like mass unemployment and inflation exacerbated the domestic situation while strikes paralyzed public life for days on end. The situation worsened when, on September 6, 1980, at a rally in Konya organized by Erbakan's MSP, about 40,000 Islamists not only demonstrated against the welfare cut-backs but also declared the transformations in Iran a model for Turkey and chanted anti-Kemalist slogans. After this event, the military's “intervention” had not only been demanded by large parts of the Turkish population, but also by the West.<sup>31</sup>

30 Moser/Weithmann, see above (footnote 15), pp. 188-191.

31 Steinbach, see above (footnote 7), p. 112.

After the coup, the military imposed martial law. The government and parliament were dissolved; strikes and demonstrations were outlawed. The military implemented drastic measures to restore public order: it banned all parties and embarked on an extensive program of registering and “cleansing” individuals. Around 1.7 million people were registered as “politically suspect”, and 650,000 were arrested; 517 death sentences were imposed, 49 of which were carried out; 388,000 persons were barred from leaving the country; 30,000 political activists were expelled from Turkey; 14,000 Turks had their citizenship revoked. Tens of thousands of people were dismissed from the civil service for having violated their duty of political neutrality. More than 600 associations, clubs and foundations were banned. Compulsory voting was introduced, together with a new ten-percent electoral threshold for parliamentary elections. Through the unusually high threshold the military hoped to establish an American-style two-party system that was aimed at excluding Kurdish, communist, and Islamist parties and that seemed to promise greater political stability.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the economic transformation promoted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the military embarked on a process of political transformation that took place on an ideological and discursive level and was characterized by the Cold War and the conservatism of the Thatcher/Reagan era: under the auspices of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (TIS, *Türk-Islam Sentezi*), Kemalist state policy was given an Islamic “veneer” and was supplemented with a metaphysical component. At its core, the TIS glorifies a crude marriage of Turkishness and (Sunni) Islam, according to which only Islam leads to a “refinement of the steppe and nomad culture” of the Turks who had migrated to Asia Minor from central Asia. The Turks, in their hearts, felt closer to Islam than to Buddhism, Christianity or Judaism, despite of their pre-Islamic and central Asian culture. Only through the fusion of Turkishness and Islam could Islam become a world power and explain the “eminence” of the Ottoman Empire, thus the claim.<sup>33</sup>

This re-politicization of Islam by the military leadership, the most far-reaching since the founding of the republic, was aimed at a state-led Islamization “from above”. The following considerations played a role in this process:

1. The TIS, by employing a state-led religious, authoritarian ideology of education, was supposed to counter the process of political and social disintegration that had been ongoing since the end of the 1960s. The propagation of the fascistic tripod of barracks, mosque and family placed a renewed emphasis on religious principles such as the fear of God and obedience to state authority.<sup>34</sup> To the guardians of Kemalism, Islam seemed

32 Yavuz, see above (footnote 6), pp. 69f.

33 The term TIS was coined in 1972 by historian Ibrahim Kafesoğlu in the nationalist club for intellectuals *Aydınlar Ocağı* that had been formed as a counter-movement to the 1968 movement. Cf. Ibrahim Kafesoğlu, *Türk-Islam Sentezi*, Istanbul (Aydınlar Ocağı) 1985.

34 Cf. Binnaz Toprak, Religion als Staatsideologie in einem laizistischen Staat. Die Türkisch-Islamische Synthese, in: *Zeitschrift für Türkeistudien*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1989, pp. 55-63.

to be the only way of stemming the rising tides of individualization and political radicalization – especially that of the communists – through Islam’s socially integrating authority. To this end, one of the central authoritarian measures of the military regime was the introduction of religious education as a compulsory subject in the schools – it had been voluntary from 1948 until 1982. To this day, classes are tailored toward a Sunni and ethno-nationalist Islam and also have the objective of “Turkifying” Kurdish and “Sunnifying” Alevi children.

2. Through the nationalization of Islam and the emphasis on Turkishness in Islam envisioned by the TIS, the military tried to contain the influence of non-Turkish Islamist modes of thinking that had been gathering strength since the end of the 1960s, emanating especially from the Arab region and Pakistan. Moreover, it hoped to offer an ideological counterpart to offset the effects of the “Islamic Revolution” in Iran.
3. The process of socioeconomic transformation and liberalization initiated by the military leadership was aimed not only at opening markets but it also provided for massive cutbacks in welfare benefits paid by the state. The ideological reevaluation of religion and the expansion of state religious services were designed to create or “buy” a spiritual compensation for material losses: the number of mosques grew from 57,000 in 1983 to 72,000 in 1987. In the same vein, the number of state-run Koran classes rose from 2,160 in 1983 to 4,890 in 1990, and that of theological colleges from eight to 22 during the same period.<sup>35</sup>

The Diyanet, the Presidency for Religious Affairs, also attracted the attention of the TIS ideologues. Article 136 of the 1982 constitution drawn up by the military, in which incidentally the word “Islamic” does not occur a single time (just like in its predecessor) and which is in force to this day, stipulates that the Presidency for Religious Affairs is supposed to contribute to “national solidarity and integration”. Since then, the Diyanet “interfaces” its sermons, recitations and Koran classes with views on Turkish national pride, respect for state authority and the adherence to law and order. To meet this new responsibility, the Presidency increased its staff from 50,765 (1979) to 84,172 (1989).<sup>36</sup>

Up until the 1980 coup it was the Diyanet’s responsibility to train only “good, diligent, pro-laicist” Muslims. Since then, it is also supposed to educate the Kurdish population to be “loyal Turkish citizens”. For this purpose, the military founded an additional department within the Diyanet, the *Irsad Dairesi*. This department organized conferences and meetings in the Kurdish areas in order to warn against the “godless” Marxist ideology of the Kurdish separatists surrounding the Kurdistan Worker’s Party (PKK, Partiya Karkerên

35 Elisabeth Özdalga, Education in the Name of Order and Progress, in: *The Muslim World*, Vol. 89, No. 3-4, 1999, pp. 414-438 (430).

36 Erik Jan Zürcher/Heleen van der Linden, Searching for the Fault Line. A Survey of the Role of Turkish Islam in the Accession of Turkey to the European Union in the Light of the Clash of the Civilisations, in: *The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy* (ed.), *The European Union, Turkey and Islam*, Amsterdam (Amsterdam University Press) 2004, pp. 81-174 (110).

Kurdistan). In cooperation with the Diyanet and well into the 1990s, the military drew up leaflets and dropped them over the Kurdish areas. The leaflets called for a super-ethnic Islamic community and were supplemented with verses from the Koran. The Kurds were called upon to fight for their families, their faith and the indivisibility of their (Turkish) home country, and against the “enemy from within”, the PKK.<sup>37</sup>

My analysis shows that the 1980 military coup, initiated under the auspices of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, led to a turning point in Turkish politics: the expansion of state-run religious services, the introduction of religious education as a compulsory school subject and the use of the Diyanet for the “promotion of national solidarity and integration” not only led to a nationalization of Islam, but also to an Islamization of the nation. By propagating an ethno-nationalist Islam, the military acted to counter what had remained its greatest fear since the founding of the republic, namely the fragmentation of Turkey not only along the dividing line of laicists vs. Islamists (the constitutional dimension), but also along the line of Turkish vs. Kurdish nationalists (the ethnic dimension) and Sunnis vs. Alevis (the religious dimension). The military accepted the purposeful marginalization of Turkey’s Kurdish and Alevi identity. With the TIS, the issue was now no longer a “more or less” extensive expansion of the state’s edict of toleration vis-à-vis religion. Rather, Islam was granted an important role in the sociopolitical development; it was the “new” old source of legitimization. The sum total of these measures shows that laicist Turkey paradoxically has usurped more religious authority than the Sultans of the Ottoman Empire ever possessed.

## **5. The Era of Turgut Özal: New Dynamism and Self-Confidence for Islamic Interest Groups**

With the political turning point of 1980, the state assigned Islam an important role in the process of political and sociopolitical development. This new phase is exemplified especially in the person of the popular Prime Minister Turgut Özal. Özal was a politician with Kurdish ancestry who was rumored to be a member of the historical Naqshbandi order. Under his leadership, the newly founded Motherland Party (ANAP, *Anavatan Partisi*) won a surprisingly decisive victory in the parliamentary elections of fall 1983, attracting 45 percent of the vote. Özal was Prime Minister from 1983 to 1989 and Turkey’s President from 1989 until his death in 1993.

By fusing progress and pragmatism with a commitment to religion and tradition, Özal, a practicing Muslim, opened up new possibilities for the roles of Islam and the Ottoman heritage. Özal built new bridges between state, society, and religion. He introduced the

37 M. Hakan Yavuz, *Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey*, in: *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 1997, pp. 63-82 (68).

breaking of the daily fast (Turkish: Iftar) during Ramadan to his administration and was the first Turkish Prime Minister to embark on the pilgrimage to Mecca (1988) – he had himself filmed for maximum publicity in the ritual pilgrim's robe while circumambulating the Kaaba. Also under Özal's aegis, Adnan Menderes, who had been executed by the military government following the 1960 coup, was rehabilitated; today, many streets and public squares are named after him.

The core of Özal's administration was made up of prominent members of the Naqshbandi order. One of its first acts was the legalization of charitable donations to religious institutions. The administration also re-wrote the curriculum for elementary and secondary education under the impetus of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, placing heavier emphasis on national history and culture. In doing so, the word "milli" ("national") was used synonymously for "Islamic".<sup>38</sup>

The Özal era was also characterized by a policy of opening markets. It led to a massive influx of capital, especially from the Arab region. This "green" or "Islamic" capital was invested primarily in the banking and tourism sectors. This new inflow of capital also enabled the Islamists to reorganize politically and be more economically active. The religious orders and brotherhoods (Turkish: Tarikat) – which symbolized the Anatolian Islam shaped by Sufism that had been banned under Atatürk – also received new freedoms due to the state's new-found tolerance: they were now allowed to officially finance the construction of private schools and universities, and they established social services for the feeding of the poor and handed out scholarships to students in schools and universities. Today, there are an estimated 130 orders with a total of about 10 million members in Turkey. The three largest are the Naqshbandi order and the Nurculuk and Süleymanî movements that came out of it in the first half of the 20th century.<sup>39</sup>

Özal's economic policy also turned away from the import substitutions of the 1960s and 1970s and led to an increased promotion of small and mid-sized companies. Especially the more provincial Anatolian cities such as Kayseri, Sivas and Gaziantep witnessed an upturn that had until then seemed inconceivable. A large number of companies emerged that were able to establish themselves on the world market as producers of, and suppliers for, export goods in the textile, leather, produce, construction and engineering industries. The upswing created a new middle class, the so-called "Anatolian bourgeoisie", which is deeply grounded in Turkish Islamic culture. Although it is largely pro-democratic, it does advocate more religious freedom. The backbone of this new bourgeoisie – also referred to as the "Anatolian tigers" – is made up of Muslim academics, family businesses and small to medium-sized companies. They are a fast-growing class of entrepreneurs who profess Islam without simultaneously negating Western values or the im-

38 Yavuz, see above (footnote 6), p. 75.

39 On the Tarikats' political role in present-day Turkey see Richard Tapper (ed.), *Islam in Modern Turkey*, London (Tauris) 1991.

portance of a liberal economy. This group draws interesting parallels between Islam and the Protestant work ethic as well as Calvinism, claiming that these had played a crucial part not only in the Industrial Revolution but also in the rise of Europe and the United States to the status of economic world powers. According to this interpretation, religion is a motor for progress, i.e., the strengthening of Islamic identity can benefit the progress of the Turkish state and economy.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the growing influence of “Islamic capital”, Muslim companies were initially unsuccessful in building close connections to the state apparatus. To redress this fact, the “Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association”, or MÜSIAD (Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği), was founded in 1990. The MÜSIAD sees itself as a platform and interest group representing small and medium-sized Islamic businesses to state authorities. In everyday usage, the word “müstakil” (“independent”) in the MÜSIAD’s full title is often replaced by “müslüman” (“Muslim”), as Islam plays an important role in the business philosophy of the association and in its members’ business transactions as establishing trust and solidarity. 2,600 companies were members of the MÜSIAD in 2006, accounting for 12 percent of Turkey’s gross national product.<sup>41</sup> The association’s biggest achievement is having turned Islam into a strategic resource for strengthening its own identity, promoting networking among members, and lobbying for its own interests with state authorities.<sup>42</sup>

The Islamist movement got new impulses from a referendum held in September 1987. A narrow majority of the electorate voted in favor of revoking the ban on political activity for parties and politicians that had existed before the coup in 1980, including the former Prime Ministers Süleyman Demirel and Bülent Ecevit. However, Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan also returned to active politics. With the help of intermediaries, he had already founded the Islamist Welfare Party (RP, Refah Partisi) in 1983.

The ANAP, now under competitive pressure as it had to contend with the full spectrum of parties, distanced itself from the IMF’s Structural Adjustment Program for reasons of electoral expediency. The ANAP “purchased” its victorious 36 percent of the vote at the early parliamentary elections in November 1987 with populist pre-election promises such as an increase in wages and social benefits for the civil service as well as easier entry into the land registry. However, Özal’s abandonment of the IMF program led to a rise in inflation of around 70 percent in 1988 and 1989, which especially affected the low-income strata of the population.<sup>43</sup> In the 1989 local elections, the ANAP only received

40 Cf. European Stability Initiative (ESI), *Islamische Calvinisten. Umbruch und Konservatismus in Zentralanatolien*, in: *Zeitschrift für Türkeistudien*, Vol. 18, No. 1+2, 2005, pp. 35-78.

41 These numbers are based on the author’s research at the MÜSIAD in January 2007.

42 Cf. Judith Hoffmann, *Aufstieg und Wandel des politischen Islams in der Türkei*, Berlin (Hans Schiler) 2003, p. 90.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 92.

22 percent of the vote. Many voters had turned to Erbakan's Welfare Party in protest. Özal relinquished his post in the same year and had himself elected President of Turkey.

My analysis of the Özal era shows that the official reevaluation of Islam as part of Turkish identity combined with liberal economic policies led to increased self-confidence and new momentum for Islamic interest groups. The development of the Muslim business world and the "Anatolian bourgeoisie" is one of Özal's main achievements. Moreover, thanks to Özal the state was no longer regarded as a mere collection of institutions, but as a promoter of a collective identity. As such, the state took on a role that it had not played since the days of the Ottoman Empire.

## 6. The Rise and Fall of the Islamist Welfare Party (RP)

In the 1990s, Islamism in Turkey experienced an upswing that exceeded that of the 1970s. The impetus for this new (old) movement once again came from Necmettin Erbakan and had its source in the new self-confidence of religious groups that originated in the state's reevaluation of Islamic identity under the auspices of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis and Özal's policies, but also in support by the "Anatolian bourgeoisie". The Anatolian bourgeoisie had turned its back on the ANAP when Özal's successor, the economically liberal Mesut Yilmaz, was said to have no flair for religious topics. This new self-confidence was bolstered further by anti-European resentments that followed the denial of Turkey's membership application to the EC in 1989 and the EU's hesitant stance in the Bosnian War.<sup>44</sup> Militant Islamism had rapidly gained support as a global movement after the end of the Cold War and had reared its head at the beginning of the 1990s, e.g., in the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria, the armed conflict between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian government, and in the Caucasus; in Turkey, however, it played only a secondary role.<sup>45</sup>

### *Defining Factors for the Rise of the RP*

While the rhetoric practiced by Erbakan's parties in the 1970s was more provincial in its outlook, the RP now struck a modern, intellectual chord. The most important element of the RP's objectives was described by its slogan *Adil Düzen*, the "Just Order". The term neither described an Islamic political order nor did it question Turkey's republican founding principles. It did, however, criticize the *manner* in which the republic had been founded, which supposedly had been accompanied by "unjust" (i.e., unislamic) policies.

44 On the EU's controversial role in the Bosnian War see Cemal Karakas, *Die Balkankrise als Gegenstand der Gemeinsamen Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik (GASP). Die EU zwischen Integration und Kooperation*, Frankfurt a.M. (Peter Lang) 2004.

45 Binnaz Toprak, *Islam and Democracy in Turkey*, in: *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2005, pp. 167-186.

The RP thus launched an indirect attack on the Kemalist model of state, society, and economy, which it claimed had encouraged economic and social inequalities, corruption, and moral decline. The “Just Order”, the RP claimed, could create an “orderly” and “just” society by strengthening Islamic identity and moral values. In addition, it postulated a “Just Economic Order” as a “third way” between capitalism and socialism: the state was supposed to promote free entrepreneurship and at the same time build up its own heavy industry; the state’s social policy was supposed to benefit people with low incomes. In the long term, a common economic area was to be established between Turkey and Muslim countries, the so-called *D-8* (eight developing countries: Turkey, Iran, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, and Pakistan), and act as a counterpart to the *G7*.<sup>46</sup>

Turgut Özal’s unexpected death in 1993 had not only weakened the ANAP, but also created a vacuum in the conservative religious camp as well as worsened the economic situation. A huge budget deficit threw the Turkish economy into another serious economic crisis in early 1994. The shortfall had been caused by the governing parties’ abandonment of the IMF’s Stabilization Program in the 1980s and the conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdish PKK that had been intensifying since the beginning of the 1990s. Annual economic growth fell by thirteen percentage points to -5.5 percent in 1994. Real wages for employees fell by 30 percent between 1990 and 1994, while inflation grew to more than 100 percent.<sup>47</sup>

Several polls clearly showed the decline of confidence in the government of Prime Minister Tansu Çiller of the free-market conservative True Path Party (DYP, Doğru Yol Partisi). This displeasure was also reflected in the 1994 local elections, in which the RP was able to attract an astonishing 19.1 percent of the vote. Just one year later, it was also victorious in the parliamentary elections, receiving 21.4 percent of the vote and becoming the strongest party with 158 of 550 parliamentary seats. It was not only Islamists, however, who had voted for Erbakan’s party. “The ‘hard core’ of Islamists who voted for the RP in 1995 has been estimated at around 7 percent of the total electorate.”<sup>48</sup> The RP was able to benefit from the following circumstances:

- The Turkish-Kurdish conflict: The RP had promised in its party program to solve the “Kurdish problem” on the basis of “Muslim brotherliness”, to lift the state of emergency, and to grant state aid to displaced persons for returning to their forcibly evacuated villages. In the 1994 local elections, it received between 30 and 40 percent of the vote from voters with a Kurdish background, the highest among all parties – even

46 Yürüsen/Yayla, see above (footnote 26).

47 Hoffmann, see above (footnote 42), pp. 92f.

48 Uğur Akıncı, *The Welfare Party’s Municipal Track Record. Evaluating Islamist Municipal Activism in Turkey*, in: *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 1999, pp. 75-94 (91).

higher than that of the pro-Kurdish HADEP (Halkın Demokrasi Partisi), the political arm of the PKK.<sup>49</sup>

- Support from female voters: Women were mobilized through a special women’s commission that organized “tea afternoons” on topics such as “the dissolution of the traditional family structure” and “drug abuse”, and offered informal cooking and sewing classes open exclusively to women (with or without headscarf). The women’s commission became a hallmark of and public relations success for the RP: the Islamist RP, of all parties, was the very first to discover the sociopolitical importance of women in electoral politics in a patriarchal society, and in doing so it had raised the self-esteem of many women. Moreover, the commission attracted around one million women to the RP over the course of six years.<sup>50</sup>
- Support from the *Gecekondu*: In addition to the rapid population increase it was especially the war against the PKK that spurred the domestic migration of the 1980s. This in turn led to the growth of the cities and their slum-like suburbs, the *Gecekondu*. Around 13 million people called them their home in the mid-1990s, 80 percent of whom could be considered part of a conservative religious population. Within this milieu, Islam is an important cognitive means of communication and of community-building. In the 1990s, the RP was the only party to have built a social network in these areas. In addition to neighborly help, the RP also distributed relief goods, arranged jobs and gave out scholarships to school and college students:<sup>51</sup>

Year	Total Population	Rural Population	Urban Population
1950	20,947,188	15,702,851	5,244,337
1960	27,754,820	18,895,089	8,859,731
1970	35,605,176	21,914,075	13,691,101
1980	44,736,957	25,091,950	19,645,007
1990	56,473,035	23,146,684	33,326,351
2000	67,803,927	23,797,653	44,006,274

Source: Turkish Statistical Institute

49 Cf. Harald Schüler, Parlamentswahlen in der Türkei. Wohlfahrtspartei gewinnt Stimmen im Hinterland, in: *Orient*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1998, pp. 241-263 (249).

50 Yeşim Arat, *Political Islam in Turkey and Women’s Organizations*, Istanbul (TESEV) 1999.

51 Yavuz, see above (footnote 6), pp. 83-84.

Surveys show that the RP was able to establish its slogan “Just Order” well in the public conscience. Its voters spoke of social justice and of honesty in tackling problems. In the cities, such as in Istanbul and Ankara, where an RP member had been mayor since 1994, corruption had decreased – as promised during the electoral campaign; but more than that, the quality of municipal services, infrastructure, and environmental protection had improved. This bestowed a positive image on the RP. Only 16 percent of the RP’s voters regarded it as an Islamist organization. More than 70 percent said that the Welfare Party would introduce neither the Sharia nor an Islamic state.<sup>52</sup>

### *The RP in Power: Turkey’s Transformation into an Islamic Republic?*

After the ANAP-DYP minority government foundered, Erbakan accepted Tansu Çiller’s offer to form a coalition government – even though his electoral campaign had called for “honesty” and “morality” and had doubted Çiller’s integrity, as she had been implicated in several corruption scandals.

On June 28, 1996, the parliamentary majority of the new coalition elected Erbakan Prime Minister. This 54th government was a historic turning point, as for the first time in its history Turkey was ruled by an Islamist politician. The turning point was a predominantly psychological one, since it called into question Kemalist control of state resources. In the future, control of budget expenditures and audits, as well as the recruitment of new civil servants, would be in the hands of the Islamists. In order to refute his critics and to prevent possible intervention by the military, Erbakan emphasized in his inaugural speech that he would operate within the parameters of the democratic order and would respect Turkey’s laicist path. Previously, by contrast, he had praised the advantages of the Sharia at party congresses and had suggested that it also be introduced in Turkey. Erbakan’s later remarks were therefore denounced as *Takkiye*, or “Islamic deception”, by the Kemalist press and the opposition parties.

The RP’s election victory increased the self-confidence of its religious core supporters and led to a politicization of religion. The difficult separation of private and public religion discussed earlier in this paper manifested itself especially in the issue of headscarves. Erbakan’s party turned this ordinary piece of clothing into a political symbol and organized demonstrations with imams sympathetic to its cause and with female students wearing headscarves.<sup>53</sup> This period also witnessed an Islamization of the public sphere: alcoholic beverages were banned from state restaurants and cafeterias, several initiatives against prostitution were launched and “indecent” sculptures were removed from public places. These actions fueled the public discourse between Islamists and Kemalists and unleashed an ideological battle for the state-run Presidency for Religious Affairs. The

52 Ibid, p. 220.

53 Ece Göztepe, Die Kopftuchdebatte in der Türkei, in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte (B 33-34) 2004, pp. 32-38 (35f).

Kemalists accused the RP of filling the 6,000 open positions at the Diyanet with party members, thus attempting to bring about an Islamization “from above”.<sup>54</sup>

Erbakan also wanted to use foreign policy to demonstrate that Turkey had become more Islamic. Erbakan’s first official guests were the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and his first state visits led him to Iran and Libya. It must be noted, however, that Erbakan, in his role as Prime Minister, respected Turkey’s international obligations – not least due to pressure from his coalition partner, the DYP. Accordingly, he kept the terms of the customs union into which Turkey had entered with the EU in 1996, despite the fact that he had rejected it during the electoral campaign as financially disadvantageous.<sup>55</sup> In the same vein, he continued the logistical support for the U.S. military bases in Turkey as well as the strategic cooperation with Israel. He was unable, however, to realize his vision of an Islamic economic community, the *D-8*.

### *The Political Decline of the RP*

The RP’s political decline began just a few months after its ascent to power in the summer of 1996. The Welfare Party had attracted accusations of bigotry when it repeatedly used its parliamentary majority to block committees from investigating the accusations of corruption against Tansu Çiller. Moreover, Erbakan was criticized from within his own party, as he had failed to translate many of his promises into action: neither the alignment of official working hours with religious rules, nor a liberalization of the ban on headscarves had been realized. In order to placate the ultra-religious wing of his party, Erbakan presented a bill that would allow headscarves to be worn in enclosed public places and open the officer career to religious soldiers. This bill, however, did not go far enough for his party’s radical wing, which demanded at a party event in Sincan (near Ankara) on January 31, 1997, the introduction of the Sharia in Turkey and called the “Iranian Revolution” a model for Turkey.

In response, the military began a public campaign, the “secular front”. This anti-Islamist extra-parliamentary opposition organized weekly demonstrations in the cities and enjoyed the support of three important actors: the large-business association TÜSIAD, which was afraid that a negative image of Turkey could trigger a collapse of Turkey’s exports; the Turkish President, who warned against an unconstitutional “exploitation of religion”; and civil society, including parts of the media, unions and women’s organizations. Alevi organizations, too, participated in the demonstrations. There had been attacks by radical Sunnis on Alevis in the eastern Anatolian city of Sivas as

54 Yavuz, see above (footnote 6), p. 216.

55 On the financial disadvantages for Turkey resulting from the customs union with the European Union see Cemal Karakas, UE-Turquie: l’hypothèse de l’intégration graduelle, in: *Politique étrangère*, Vol. 70, No. 3, 2006, pp. 663-673 (666).

well as in Istanbul in 1993 and 1995. The Alevis held the RP responsible for the deteriorating atmosphere between them and the Sunnis.<sup>56</sup>

On February 28, 1997, the military's General Staff presented a memorandum that called Islamism the greatest threat to the laicist order, democracy, and domestic security. In an 18-point catalogue, the military leadership demanded among other things:<sup>57</sup>

- the closure of any Koran schools not under state control;
- a civil service hiring freeze for members of the Welfare Party;
- closer monitoring of financial institutions belonging to religious orders, brotherhoods, and organizations;
- the passing of binding limits on the wearing of religious attire in public institutions, especially universities – enforcement of the ban on headscarves had up to this point been at the universities' discretion.

Erbakan signed the "Resolutions of February 28", accompanied by vast but overall peaceful protests by supporters of the Welfare Party. The military, however, forced Erbakan's resignation by informing the public about militant groups that allegedly were closely associated with the RP and were planning terrorist attacks. The military threatened to take action against these organizations "by force of arms" unless Erbakan were either to intervene himself or to submit his resignation. After an increasing number of deputies from the junior coalition partner DYP resigned from their own party, thus withdrawing the coalition's parliamentary majority, Erbakan and his government resigned after just one year in office on June 30, 1997.

In January 1998, the RP was banned by the Turkish constitutional court for "contempt of the constitutional rule of separation of state and religion"; prior to this act, the Virtue Party (FP, Fazilet Partisi) had been founded as a political repository for former RP members. The RP's party assets were confiscated, and Erbakan and other party officials were banned from political activity for five years. Erbakan sued Turkey before the European Court of Human Rights. The court, however, ruled that the bans were legal, as they served the overriding need of protecting state and society. According to the court, the RP politicians had not clearly distanced themselves from the violence and had repeatedly demanded the introduction of the Sharia, a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights to which Turkey is also a signatory.<sup>58</sup>

The RP's political failure and its ban weakened the Islamist movement. In the parliamentary elections of April 1999, the FP only took third place, winning 15.4 percent of the

56 Moser/Weithmann, see above (footnote 15), pp. 330f.

57 Yavuz, see above (footnote 6), pp. 244f.

58 Cf. "Islamisten-Verbot rechtens - Europäischer Gerichtshof weist Antrag der Erbakan-Partei ab", *Der Tagesspiegel*, July 31, 2001.

vote, and joined the opposition. In June 2001 the FP, too, was banned on the grounds that it was a reconstituted RP.

My analysis of the Erbakan era shows that the RP's rule did not lead to a transformation of Turkey back into an Islamic state. The party moved – due to pressure from its coalition partner and the narrow framework allowed by the military – within the democratic parameters of Turkey. The era, however, did witness an Islamization of the public sphere and a politicization of religion, which led to heightened tensions in the domestic political climate. The RP's failure was not only caused by the military's prolonged tactic of attrition and the pressure of the "secular front", but was primarily political and self-inflicted. It neither succeeded in improving Turkey's economic situation nor in introducing a "Just Order", which remained an empty phrase. The exposure of contacts between parts of the RP and militant groups scared off the "Anatolian bourgeoisie" and its companies: they distanced themselves from the RP, which weakened the Islamist movement both politically and financially.

## **7. Post-Islamists or Islamists? Objectives and Actions of the Justice and Development Party (AKP)**

The era of the Islamist movement, which had always been closely linked to the name Erbakan, ended with the banning of the Virtue Party in the summer of 2001. This fresh party ban acted as a catalyst and for the first time caused a split in the Islamist movement, marginalizing it even further. The split had been preceded by a remarkably self-critical discourse about future objectives – it initiated a change in the way of thinking and in ideology among the Islamists. The reform wing had criticized Erbakan's authoritarian leadership style, as well as the Welfare Party's failures in government, and the Islamist rhetoric that they claimed to have provoked the ban. The RP, they alleged, had not just failed because of the military, but also because of its closed and antiquated vision of society.<sup>59</sup> The camps of Erbakan-followers and traditionalists combined to form the Felicity Party (SP, Saadet Partisi), whereas the reformers founded the Justice and Development Party (AKP, Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi). 48 of the FP's former deputies joined the SP, 53 the AKP. Erbakan's right-hand man Recai Kutan became chairman of the SP. The AKP's leader was Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who had made a name for himself in the 1990s as the successful mayor of Istanbul.

The ideological change is evident in the AKP's party program – it is completely in line with Turkey's republican rules. The AKP respects the principles of democracy and laicism. Laicism, however, is not interpreted as a form of state control, but instead as the state's

<sup>59</sup> Seufert, see above (footnote 25), pp. 18f.

neutrality vis-à-vis *all* religions. There are no longer any demands for the introduction of a “Just Order”. With regard to economic policy, there is no longer a call for a state-controlled heavy industry – unlike under Erbakan’s leadership. Instead, the party advocates free entrepreneurship and a market economy that also takes into account the interests of the middle class. The most important issue in the party program – and simultaneously the largest difference from Erbakan’s RP – is the clear endorsement of the Western community. Turkey’s accession to the European Union (EU) is mentioned as a priority, and NATO and the United States are called its most important partners after the EU. The Islamic world only plays a subordinate role.<sup>60</sup>

### *Defining Factors of the AKP’s Electoral Success*

In the early parliamentary elections of November 2002, the AKP won a stunning 34.3 percent of the vote. The second of two parties to win seats in the Turkish parliament was the republican CHP with 19.4 percent of the vote. Due to the ten-percent electoral threshold, the AKP received 363 out of the 550 seats with just a third of the electoral vote, barely missing a two-thirds majority. The SP, by contrast, only received 2.5 percent of the vote, making Erbakan the big loser of this election. He had been stigmatized as a failure ever since his political collapse.

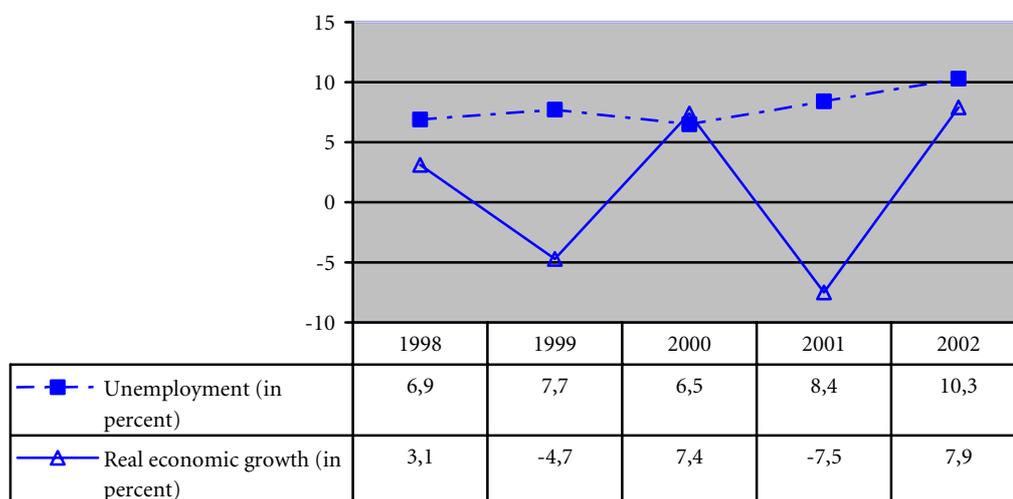
The rise of the AKP, however, was not only due to its new objectives but must also be considered in the context of the largest economic and financial crisis in the history of Turkey, which rocked the country in the spring of 2001 when both the state and the economy were still dealing with the consequences of the earthquake that had struck Istanbul in 1999. The crisis was triggered by a report on the Turkish banking system presented by the IMF in late 2000, which pointed out severe problems. The national banks alone had amassed uncovered liabilities in the amount of 20 billion USD. Around the same time, the media had revealed corruption, nepotism, and bribes between banks and members of major political parties.<sup>61</sup>

Ecevit’s administration, whose left-of-center DSP (Demokrat Sol Partisi) had been governing in a three-party coalition with the nationalist MHP (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi) and the ANAP, was unable to solve the problems and meet the demands of the IMF. This led Turkey to the brink of collapse: economic growth plummeted by fifteen percentage points compared to the previous year and was at -7.5 percent in 2001; the Turkish Lira lost 113 percent of its value against the U.S. Dollar; real income for employees fell by 20 percent; the statutory monthly minimum wage fell from 156 to 100 USD; 50,000 retail and small businesses had to file for bankruptcy; unemployment rose by 1.5 million people

60 The AKP’s party program can also be accessed online and in English at <http://eng.akparti.org.tr/english/partyprogramme.html>

61 Ziya Öniş, Globalization and Party Transformation. Turkey’s Justice and Development Party in Perspective, in: Peter Burnell (ed.), *Globalizing Democracy. Party Politics in Emerging Democracies*, London (Routledge) 2006, pp. 122-140.

in the month of February 2001. Between 2000 and 2002 the unemployment rate rose by four percentage points to 10.3 percent. The situation was so dire that the military's General Staff felt the need to point out the danger of looming social upheaval.<sup>62</sup>



My analyses in this paper show that the outcome of the 2002 elections was primarily the result of voters casting their ballots in protest of the dire economic problems and the quarrels within the government. The combined share of the coalition parties DSP, ANAP, and MHP fell from 53.4 percent of the vote (1999) to 14.6 percent. A full third of the electorate wanted to vote for a new party. Out of this group, 38 percent cast their ballot for the AKP. The AKP was also able to attract significant support from voters who either voted for the first time or were less than 30 years old. Moreover, the AKP was popular with the residents of the *Gecekondu* who were particularly badly hit by the economic crisis. As expected, support was also strong among the “Anatolian bourgeoisie”, the MÜSIAD, and in Kurdish areas.<sup>63</sup>

### *Successes in EU and Economic Policy*

In his first public speech as Prime Minister, Erdoğan presented himself as a “reformed” Islamist, quoting Atatürk multiple times. Critics accused him – as they had done with Erbakan – of *Takkiye*, i.e., the obscurement of his faith through deception. Erdoğan was confronted with some of his previous statements. In a speech in 1998, he had quoted a poem by Ziya Gökalp, the “father of Turkish nationalism”, which says among other things

62 Moser/Weithmann, see above (footnote 15), pp. 329f.

63 For an analysis of the AKP's election victory also see Soli Özel, Turkey at the Polls. After the Tsunami, in: Journal of Democracy, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2003, pp. 80-94.

that “the mosques are our barracks, the domes are our helmets, the minarets our bayonets, and the faithful our soldiers”. Even though this quote can be found in almost any history schoolbook, Erdoğan was sentenced to a ten-month term of imprisonment in September 1998 for “crimes against the state”, four of which he spent in jail. On the way to jail, Erdoğan had himself be celebrated like a martyr by thousands of supporters. In jail he then styled himself – without a hint of irony – as the “Nelson Mandela of Turkey”.

When taking over the government’s business, the AKP presented itself – in contrast to the RP – as a new force for reform and, thanks to its absolute parliamentary majority, was able to act assertively. During the period from December 2002 to March 2003 alone, the AKP was able to push through more than 54 constitutional and statutory amendments in the course of preparing for EU accession, thus putting an end – at least statutorily – among other things to the long-standing discrimination against the Kurdish and Christian minorities as well as against marginalized groups like disabled or homosexual persons – normally a taboo in Muslim societies. The AKP was able to pass additional reform packages and to achieve the beginning of EU accession negotiations on October 3, 2005.<sup>64</sup>

In addition to the reforms required by the EU, Turkey’s commitments to its allies were cause for discussion. While the AKP government continues the deployment of Turkish troops as part of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan, it came into open conflict with the United States in the run-up to the current Iraq War. 71 AKP deputies (together with the CHP opposition party) had voted against their own government in early March 2003, refusing to grant U.S. troops the right to launch attacks from Turkish soil. After fierce criticism by the United States, a partial settlement was achieved: Turkey granted the United States overflight rights for Turkish airspace, but denied the American request to use U.S. military bases in Turkey for air raids.

This cooperation, however, had severe repercussions for Turkey: on November 15 and 20, 2003, Istanbul became the target of Islamist terror attacks. Four suicide bombers detonated explosives outside two synagogues, the British consulate, and a British bank. The attacks claimed 62 lives and left 500 injured. All parties, including the SP of Islamist politician Erdoğan, condemned the attacks, which were the work of Kurdish Turks who were members of the terrorist organization “Great Eastern Islamic Raiders’ Front” (IBDA-C, İslami Büyük Doğu Akıncılar–Cephesi) and raised the possibility of organized structures of militant Islamists and their illegal networks. According to information from the Turkish domestic intelligence agency, Islamists are estimated to make up – as mentioned previously – 10 percent of the Turkish population, with 1-3 percent being sympathetic to militant groups.<sup>65</sup>

64 For a critical analysis of the Turkish EU reforms and their implementation see European Commission, Regular Report on Turkey’s Progress towards Accession, October 6, 2004.

65 Kirsty Hughes, *The Political Dynamics of Turkish Accession to the EU. A European Success Story or the EU’s Most Contested Enlargement?*, SIEPS Report, No. 9, 2004, pp. 35f.

In addition to the results yielded by the investigation of the terror attacks and to a strict democratic course, the AKP's political image also benefited from its successful economic policy. The Erdoğan government has been consistent in implementing the IMF stabilization program, which calls for the privatization of the banking and energy sectors, the reform of the welfare and tax systems, and greater access for foreign investors. The AKP government was able to achieve rapid economic growth and to more than double the average annual per-capita income from approx. 2,100 USD (2001) to approx. 5,100 USD (2005). Its course of consolidation allowed inflation to sink below 10 percent in 2004, the first time in more than 30 years.<sup>66</sup>

### *The AKP: Politicizing Religion?*

Emboldened by its successes in EU and economic policy, the AKP has developed new self-confidence. Since 2004, it has increasingly lent support to the interests of its religious constituency and has articulated more overtly religious moral standards. In doing so, it has also run into trouble in trying to separate private and public religious spheres. For example, just like the RP before it, the AKP gradually banned alcoholic beverages from the cafeterias of ministries and state agencies. Municipal governments controlled by the AKP restricted the consumption of alcohol in public places, providing the interesting reason that this was not done to adhere to the prescriptions of the Sharia, but rather – like in the United States – for the protection of the citizens' health and the reduction in public health expenses that would result from it. Moreover, AKP politicians have repeatedly made headlines for wanting to divide public parks and beaches into men's and women's areas according to Islamic criteria, or to introduce separate women-only days for public swimming pools – arguing that the latter are offered even in Christian Europe. Conversely, Kemalists have criticized the Islamization of the public sphere and polemicized, e.g., against the criminalization of alcohol consumption and against women in full-body bathing suits, barring their access to public beaches in some places.

The reason for analyzing the extent to which the AKP also politicizes Islam is to answer the basic question of how much visible religion a laicist constitutional state *may* accept and how much religious freedom a democracy *must* allow. It also raises the question of how sensible the Kemalist definition of laicism is. The following issues are at the center of this discourse:

1. the liberalization of the headscarf ban in public places;
2. the enhancement in status of the employees of the state agency for religion and its reform for greater autonomy;
3. the rights of the Alevis.

66 Cf. "Eindrückliche Reformerfolge der Türkei", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, October 19, 2006.

Turkey is the only country with a majority Muslim population that has instituted a general ban on headscarves in enclosed public places, e.g., public schools, universities, hospitals and state buildings – even including ministries and the Turkish parliament. This rigid ban has produced bizarre results: for example, the wives of Prime Minister Erdoğan, Foreign Minister Gül, and of other AKP ministers may not attend receptions held by the President or ones honoring foreign dignitaries, since many of them wear headscarves. On the other hand, the wives accompany politicians on their trips to foreign countries, where the headscarf is tolerated. In everyday life, the absurdity of this policy is reflected in the fact that many female Muslims studying or working in public institutions paradoxically cover up their headscarves with wigs.

Two fundamentally different views collide in the headscarf debate. The AKP argues that every woman should have the right to dress as she likes. The wearing of the headscarf is defended as a “basic right”. The Kemalist side points to Article 24 of the Turkish constitution, which says “Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction. [...] No one shall be compelled to worship, or to participate in religious ceremonies and rites, to reveal religious beliefs and convictions, or be blamed or accused because of his religious beliefs and convictions.” For Kemalists, this means above all that individuals have not only the right of religious freedom, but also a right to be free *from* religion. This is designed to protect the individual from a social dictatorship of the religious (e.g., protect people who do not fast during Ramadan but do not want to admit this for fear of defamation).

Three quarters of all Turks – including many Kemalists – advocate permitting female students to wear headscarves. Nevertheless, the Turkish constitutional court, the Council of State, upheld the headscarf ban in 2004. In the court’s view, the headscarf is a political symbol and no longer a mere expression of the freedom to choose one’s dress. The European Court of Human Rights upheld this ruling in November 2005. The Turkish Council of State made it clear that parties that advocate the wearing of headscarves in enclosed public places are liable to prosecution. This was understood as a warning to Erdoğan not to politicize the headscarf issue and risk a party ban. The AKP accepted the decision and passed a “headscarf amnesty” in February 2005. This allowed around 230,000 female students to continue their studies, albeit without headscarves.<sup>67</sup>

The headscarf debate was re-ignited in the spring of 2006 after a lawyer forced his way into the Council of State, shooting and killing one judge and injuring six more. A few weeks earlier, the court had barred a female school principal from wearing the headscarf even outside school property. It argued that teachers, especially, were role models and bound to uphold the laicist principles of the state. Their function as role models, the judges held, did not end with their work day. For that reason, the principal has to take off her headscarf already on the way to work. This ruling extended the definition of the

67 Cf. “Kopftuch-Amnestie für türkische Studentinnen in Kraft”, *Die Welt*, March 19, 2005.

headscarf ban – which prior to then had only applied to enclosed public places – to open public places, i.e., streets and public squares, creating an absurd precedent that should serve to further politicize religion.<sup>68</sup>

As in the days of the RP government, an ideological battle about the Diyanet has erupted between the Kemalists and the AKP. Since early 2000, around 17,000 state-run mosques have been lacking imams. Turkey's President repeatedly refused to approve an order to hire new imams, arguing that the AKP was only trying to place its sympathizers in the Diyanet in order to "Islamicize state and society from above".<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the AKP's plans for reforming the Diyanet – according to which it was no longer supposed to be under the control of the Prime Minister, but be self-governing – met with resistance from the Turkish President and the opposition CHP. The CHP argues that an autonomous Presidency for Religious Affairs that is no longer integrated into the governmental structures would gradually spell the end of the state's monopoly on controlling religion. Moreover, the CHP claims, the Diyanet could be more easily subverted by radical Islamists who could then agitate against the laicist state.<sup>70</sup>

The Alevis have also entered the debate about the Diyanet. They continue to be treated as a cultural minority and demand to be recognized as a religious community. The Alevis asked the Diyanet also to recognize differing forms of Islam. To this date, their places of worship – just like those of the Christian communities – only exist as private foundations and are not supported by the Turkish state. In line with its share of the population, the Alevis demand 15-20 percent of the Diyanet's jobs and of its financial support. The AKP rejects this demand, as it does the idea of reforming the compulsory religious education classes in the schools, which up until now are tailored exclusively to Sunni Islam. The Alevis demand that in the future, classes should also include their faith or that their children should have the same right of exemption from religious instruction that was granted to Christian students following international protests in 1991. In order to exert pressure on the AKP, Alevi organizations sued Turkey in the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg in the summer of 2006.

My analysis shows that in its resounding victory in the 2002 parliamentary elections the AKP not only benefited from the worst economic crisis in Turkish history, but that the victory was also based on a remarkable ideological change. Stephen Kinzer has called the AKP's transformation and programmatic change "the most astonishing political revolution in the Middle East".<sup>71</sup> This change has been commented on and influenced by many intellectuals through the media ever since the ban of the Welfare Party. For Ali Bulaç, one of the most influential Islamic authors in Turkey, the project of an Islamic state

68 Cf. "Judge shot dead in Turkish court over ban on headscarves", *The Guardian*, May 18, 2006.

69 Cf. "Çiçek says religious education insufficient", *Turkish Daily News*, October 2, 2006.

70 Seufert, see above (footnote 4), pp. 24f.

71 Stephen Kinzer, *The Quiet Revolution*, in: *The American Prospect*, Vol. 14, No. 11, 2003, pp. 11-13 (11).

is dead. He is critical of Iran, which had been seen as a model by some parts of the RP. Bulaç argues that Iran, with its ideological model of state and society, has lost its appeal for other Muslim countries and is globally isolated. Moreover he asserts that the secularization of Islam from within has already passed the point of no return, and that democracy is also accepted among Islamists – as illustrated by the revocation of the party ban in the case of the RP through the judicial system (rather than through acts of violence).<sup>72</sup>

Another reason why Turkish Islamism has not descended into terrorism is not only the endogenous context from which it emerged and its integration into the democratic process but, as M. Hakan Yavuz points out, possibly also the strong Sufi character of Turkish Islam. Compared to Arab-orthodox or Iranian Shiite Islam, Turkish Islam is less literalist, thus making it less vulnerable to political indoctrination and radicalization. This is evidenced by countries where Turkish Islam is dominant, e.g., in the Balkans and in the Turkic countries of central Asia. There, the post-Cold War transformation largely took place peacefully and with the involvement of religious groups in the political process, and without any calls for the establishment of an Islamic state modeled on Iran.<sup>73</sup>

For Muslim intellectuals such as Ömer Çelik and Ahmet Küskün, both of whom also advise the AKP, Islamism holds the same dangers as nationalism. They are critical of the nation-state's attempts at forcing the diversity found in its society into the straightjacket of a religiously and culturally uniform nation. In their opinion, such restriction results in some groups being privileged while others are marginalized. Similar processes of homogenization and authoritarian policies could also occur in an Islamic state: "Where the necessity to live together with others is abolished, the others are abolished. A model that fashions a society based on Islamic principles may result in oppression and cruelty, not only for others but also for Muslims." This, they declared, was unislamic.<sup>74</sup>

Defining factors for this ideological change are above all the strength of and resistance by secular groups in Turkey – not just inside the state apparatus, but especially in society. This development has been influenced by the moderating effect of the "Anatolian bourgeoisie" – which wants to expand the state's edict of toleration vis-à-vis religion, but within the parameters of the basic democratic order – and the growing export dependency of the Turkish economy (including Muslim entrepreneurs) on Western countries. The necessity for larger support from civil society and the (desired) acquisition of new sections of the middle-class electorate, i.e., outside of the traditional core of Muslim supporters, have prompted a learning process among the political leadership. As a result, the AKP program no longer calls for a "Just Order" or for Turkey's integration into the Islamic

72 Ali Bulaç, *Din, Devlet ve Demokrasi*, Istanbul (Zaman Kitap) 2001.

73 For an analysis of the significance of the metaphysical dimension of Turkish Islam cf. Yavuz, see above (footnote 6), pp. 133f.

74 Cited in Günter Seufert, "Keine Identität für alle. Die islamischen Intellektuellen der Türkei haben den säkularen Staat längst anerkannt", *Frankfurter Rundschau*, November 12, 2002; on the Islamic discourse also cf. "Republik contra Religion", *Die Zeit*, August 10, 2006.

world – this would be political suicide. Moreover, the party leadership has recognized that a lasting public confrontation with the Turkish military – for many Turks still the most trusted institution in the country – would find no popular support. In contrast to the Welfare Party, the AKP has adopted a positive stance vis-à-vis the West. Its clear endorsement of a strong relationship with the United States, NATO, and the EU has made the party palatable also to non-Muslim voters.<sup>75</sup>

My analysis shows moreover that there are also parts of the AKP that pursue policies that are strongly informed by a religious moral code. This is particularly evident in their struggle with the Kemalists for dominance in the public sphere, e.g., the religious moral standards, such as the stigmatization of alcohol consumption and the separation of public parks and beaches by sex, which the AKP contends do not mean – contrary to the frequent assertions of the Kemalist press and state elite – the introduction of the Sharia “through the back door”. Such rules may exist in Islamic countries, but because Turkey – as mentioned earlier – is constitutionally not an Islamic state, the ban on alcohol and the separation of sexes in public places constitutes discrimination against non-Muslim and non-religious parts of the population, as they limit personal freedom. Conversely, the Kemalists’ criticism of women who wear headscarves or full-body bathing suits is excessive. Although it may perhaps offend individual esthetic sensibilities, it certainly does not limit the personal, individual freedom of non-Muslims. The Kemalist side therefore must ask itself to what extent it is prepared to afford the same tolerance to Muslims that it demands from them.

Under the AKP government, the situation of the Alevis with regard to the practicing of their faith has improved, thanks to the EU’s reform policies. Places of worship have tripled in number since the 1970s to 900 in 2006.<sup>76</sup> However, despite its criticism of the homogenizing efforts of the nation-state, the AKP has not legally recognized the Alevis as a religious community and has refused to overhaul religious instruction in the schools. This suggests that it is doing so for populist reasons, not wanting to alienate the ultra-religious wing of its Sunni core supporters, and is hoping for votes from right-wing nationalist parts of the electorate in the 2007 parliamentary elections.

75 Gamze Çavdar, *Islamist New Thinking in Turkey. A Model for Political Learning?*, in: *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2006, pp. 477-497 (481).

76 Cf. “İbadethane zenginiyiz”, *Hürriyet*, January 11, 2007.

## 8. Conclusions

The Turkish model of laicism is discriminatory and undemocratic. It is a pivotal pillar of the Kemalist educational dictatorship, which was heavily influenced by the authoritarian political ideologies of early 20th-century Europe. At the same time, their interpretation of laicism reflects the Kemalists' greatest fear, namely the social and territorial fragmentation of Turkey along religious and ethnic lines. To prevent this, the Kemalist state politicizes Islam "from above" – with the actual goal of secularizing the entire Turkish society by propagating a republican, laicist state Islam. But since the ideological re-interpretation of Kemalism under the influence of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (TIS), the Presidency for Religious Affairs no longer has the "sole" task of propagating a pro-laicist version of Islam, but also that of contributing to "national solidarity and integration". This re-politicization of religion by the Kemalist state is aimed at homogenizing society: through the nationalization of Islam and the Islamization or "Sunnification" of the nation, Turkey's Alevi and Kurdish identity is supposed to be further marginalized, thus ensuring the country's social and territorial unity.

The Kemalist definition of laicism has unintended consequences: it facilitates the politicization of Islam "from below", i.e., by parties and social groups. Their objective is to weaken the Kemalist monopoly on the interpretation of religion, to exploit anti-Western sentiment, to win electoral votes from the Kurdish population, and especially to end the restrictions on religious freedom. The ban on wearing headscarves in enclosed public places, for example, has the effect of limiting the religious freedom not only of civil servants, who are duty bound to uphold the republican ideals, but also that of (non-political) private individuals such as physicians and students. The Turkish state should also have an interest in making the state's educational institutions accessible to all parts of the population. If the Kemalist logic dictates that the state offer Koran classes in order to prevent the use of illegal, non-state (and perhaps anti-Kemalist) classes, it should also have an interest in integrating those people into the state educational institutions. The headscarf ban plays into the hands of exactly those circles that are not interested in making state education accessible to women.<sup>77</sup>

Secularism has been accepted as the normative model of the modern constitutional state. The subordination of religion to politics is a fundamental part of a functioning democracy. The European examples of Germany, the Netherlands and Great Britain have shown, however, that democracies need not be neutral in their philosophy, i.e., a strict institutional separation of state and religion is not a prerequisite for a functioning democracy. A democratic constitutional state committed to human rights must ensure, by contrast, that it does not discriminate against any religion or ethnic minority. Exactly this, however, is the case with the authoritarian Kemalist model of laicism. As a result, the

<sup>77</sup> I am grateful to Zuhul Karakas for pointing out this valuable information.

Turkish understanding of laicism is problematic and it can hardly be reconciled with the democratic theorem of the 21st century. The extent to which it can serve as a model for other Muslim countries is therefore – as indicated at the beginning of this paper – limited.

The European Union is the greatest promoter of democracy in Turkey and for that reason must insist that Turkey end the discrimination against the Alevi and Kurdish populations, using the accession negotiations as political leverage to affect this process. This may result in the Kemalist state having to add to its two sources of legitimacy, Sunni Islam and Turkishness, and to bring them in line with today's political realities.

My analyses have revealed that Turkey is not threatened by an "Islamist peril". State, politics, and society are for the most part secularized. Moreover the Turkish Islamic movement constituted itself not as a "revolutionary militant underground movement", but emerged from a democratic, parliamentary environment. Since the 1980s there has not only been an expansion of state services for Sunni Islam (such as the expansion of Koran classes and the construction of new mosques) but also one of the Kemalist edict of toleration vis-à-vis religious groups not sponsored by the state, i.e., the Islamic orders, brotherhoods, and religious organizations. These have used their new freedoms to become economically, socially, and politically active and have played a major part in making Islam more publicly visible.

The Welfare Party came into government as the result of a development that unfolded over the course of many years. This development is attributable to endogenous factors and would have been inconceivable without the ideological change at the highest level of the state under the influence of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis. It also has also become clear that an Islamist Prime Minister is not synonymous with the introduction of an Islamic state. Due to the narrow constitutional framework in which Islamist parties can operate in Turkey, the power of secular social groups and the country's longstanding integration into the Western community of states (NATO, EU), Turkey has built obligations that even Erbakan's RP could not ignore. The "Process of February 28" led to a split in Necmettin Erbakan's movement and triggered ideological change in Turkish Islamism that has deepened its integration into democracy. The reform-oriented wing of this movement succeeded in freeing itself from the RP's ideology and in ushering in a post-Islamist phase that became institutionalized in the religious-conservative AKP.

The AKP can be classified as a hybrid political group that represents a unique synthesis of reformism and conservatism that crosses class boundaries. Its victory in the parliamentary elections of November 2002 was not just a result of this ideological change but must also be viewed – just as in the case of the RP – in the light of the country's socio-economic problems. The AKP's victory was facilitated significantly by the ten-percent electoral threshold, giving Erdoğan's party an almost two-thirds majority in parliament with just one third of the popular vote. The threshold had been introduced by the military government in 1983 in order to keep communist, Kurdish, and Islamist parties out of parliament. However, the targeted exclusion of certain social groups from the political process not only weakens the democratic legitimacy of the state, but it can also be counterproductive – as illustrated by the AKP's victory – by allowing non-Kemalist forces to

become disproportionately strong. Here, too, the EU should exert its influence and push Turkey to lower the ten-percent threshold.

After the fall of the RP, the military's toleration of the AKP election victory represents an important milestone in the Turkish process of democratization. Prime Minister Erdoğan has gone through a learning process and has learned from Erbakan's mistakes. He has realized that it is not a deeper integration of Turkey into the Islamic world but rather its grounding in the Western community of states that strengthens the AKP's democratic legitimacy while simultaneously promoting the de-legitimization of the Kemalist establishment. Through its course of democratization, the AKP has been able to achieve not only accession negotiations with the EU but also the support of the United States. The Bush administration went as far as hailing the AKP's transformation as a model for Islamist parties in the Middle East.<sup>78</sup>

The AKP's plans to hire new imams and to de-nationalize the Presidency for Religious Affairs illustrate – just like the ten-percent threshold – another structural problem in the Kemalist system, namely the fear that its own prerogative over the state's resources may be broken and turned against the Kemalist state elite. It is especially the Kemalist allegation that the RP and the AKP have subverted the Diyanet with Islamists that shows that this agency is subject to permanent exploitation by the governing parties – no matter of which persuasion. Just like it offers the Kemalist pro-laicists a forum for politicizing faith and for spreading their ideology, Islamists can in principle also abuse it for the dissemination of anti-democratic ideas.

As a result, the aforementioned claim by the Turkish military's Chief of Staff that the AKP's Islamization of the state and its politicization of Islam represent the greatest danger to Turkey's republican laicist order does not bear out.<sup>79</sup> The 2006 TESEV poll confirms this: 77 percent of those interviewed regarded democracy as the best form of government, while only 9 percent wanted to see Turkey turn into an Islamic state. In answering the question of whether laicism was in peril, 73 percent of respondents answered no. Should the military protect the laicist order? Only 24 percent supported this; 54 percent thought that it can also be protected by democratic means.<sup>80</sup>

This raises the question of whether the criticism of the AKP's policies of democratization is less a response to an "Islamist peril" and more to the military's fear that the EU accession negotiations could be used as political leverage in curtailing its ability to act autonomously and as superordinate to the institutions of government in favor of the primacy of popular sovereignty.

78 Cf. "US praises AKP role in Turkey's democratization", *Turkish Daily News*, November 11, 2005.

79 Sultan Tepe comes to the same conclusion in Turkey's AKP. A Model Muslim-Democratic Party?, in: *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 2005, pp. 69-82.

80 Cf. TESEV survey on religion, society, and politics (footnote 16).

Moreover, the military's criticism reflects the worry that an AKP candidate could win the 2007 presidential elections. The Turkish President has to be politically neutral and is elected by parliament; until now he has always acted as the "Kemalist conscience and corrective" in Turkish politics. In the military's opinion, however, a President with close ties to the AKP would not be able to fulfill his role as a "democratic monitor" of the Turkish government and would approve of the AKP's "Islamist politics". For this reason, the military leadership threatened a coup in a memorandum at the end of April 2007 if AKP politician and Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül did not abandon his presidential aspirations, triggering a political crisis.

Due to the absences of the opposition CHP and of some other non-AKP deputies, the parliament had no quorum to elect Gül as President in May 2007, according to a remarkable decision by the Council of State, the Turkish constitutional court. The court held that two thirds of the deputies, i.e., 367 of 550, must be present for presidential elections. The decision is all the more surprising if compared to the election of Turgut Özal to the office of President in 1989, when many deputies had also walked out, leaving the parliament with less than two thirds of its members. Özal was nevertheless elected President on the third ballot by simple majority. Despite this precedent, and to avoid further exacerbating the crisis, Gül withdrew his candidacy.

My analyses lead to the conclusion that the AKP's policies on the whole are oriented toward the fundamental principles of democracy and the rule of law, despite its occasional Islamist rhetoric. This represents an important milestone in the ongoing democratization of the pro-Islamic political movement.

Nevertheless, in the context of the dispute surrounding the presidential elections, the Kemalist state elite has once again spelled out more concretely the terms under which parties with an Islamist past are permitted to operate. An AKP Prime Minister is acceptable, as evidenced by the toleration of the AKP's victory of the 2002 parliamentary elections and its five-year term in government. A politician closely affiliated with the AKP is, however, unacceptable for the highest political office in the Turkish Republic. It will be interesting to see how the Kemalist elite will react if the AKP were once again to emerge as the strongest political force from the early parliamentary elections on July 22, 2007 as well as in later elections and use this democratic mandate to not only assume the responsibilities of government but also to exercise its prerogative to nominate a candidate for the office of President.

The current way of electing the President illustrates a further structural problem of the Kemalist political system: a party with just one third of the electoral votes can receive almost two thirds of the seats in parliament. Such a party is thus not only able to form the government but also to nominate, and possibly elect, a candidate for President. This system may be democratic under the letter of the law, but it is not representative. Turkey should therefore reform the way in which the President is elected. One alternative would be to elect the President by popular ballot. This would not only ensure that the state's highest office could no longer be used for partisan political gain but would also strengthen the President's democratic legitimacy.

## Appendix: Table: Matrix of Sunni Islam in Turkey

Of Turkey's population of 70 million people, around 55 million belong to Sunni and 12-15 million to Alevi Islam. Sunni Islam can be divided into the following categories:

	<b>State Islam</b>	<b>Popular Islam</b>	<b>Islamism</b>
<b>Objectives</b>	Modernization of state and society; preservation of the republican laicist order and of territorial integrity	Preservation of the faith and of Islamic identity	Introduction of an "Islamic state" that subjugates politics, economy and society to the norms of the Koran and the Sharia
<b>Source of Legitimacy</b>	Scriptures (Koran), supplemented by Kemalist ideology (especially nationalism)	Scriptures (Koran), supplemented by Anatolian customs and popular culture	Scriptures (Koran)
<b>Dogma</b>	Positivism/Rationalism	Mysticism/Sufism	Orthodoxy/Fundamentalism (in the sense of strict adherence to the Scriptures)
<b>Desired Image</b>	Modern/Progressive	Public-spirited/Integrating (in the sense of a supra-ethnic Islamic society)	Truthful/Just
<b>Relationship to Laicism</b>	Affirmative	Depending on the group either affirmative or rejecting. All groups, however, demand greater religious rights for the public sphere (e.g., liberalization of the headscarf ban)	Rejecting
<b>Mode of Organization</b>	Presidency for Religious Affairs (Diyanet); Imam Hatip schools; state mosques and Koran classes; public media	Private and state mosques and Koran classes; religious orders, brotherhoods and organizations (the largest are the Naqshbandi, the Süleymancı and the Nurcu)	Private mosques; religious orders and organizations, including Milli Görüş; radical groups operating clandestinely (such as IBDA-C and Turkish Hizbullah)
<b>Adherents</b>	Approx. 40 million Turks and Kurds	Approx. 10 million Turks and Kurds	Approx. 7 million Turks and Kurds
<b>Legal Status</b>	Legal	All brotherhoods and orders are officially banned. Since the expansion of the state's edict of religious toleration under Turgut Özal, they have become integrated into public life through Koran schools, social institutions and holdings in the media and financial and industrial sectors	All radical groups are banned. The more recent non-militant Islamic parties of Necmettin Erbakan were banned in 1998 and 2001. His movement Milli Görüş is nevertheless integrated into legal public life through Koran schools, social institutions and holdings in the media and industrial sectors