

## An Historical Analysis Of Secularism And Military Impact In Turkey With Reference To The Turkey- Eu Relations During The AKP

DOI: 10.26466/opus.720695

\*

Hakkı Göker Önen\*

\* Dr, İstanbul Gelişim Üniversitesi

E-Mail: [goker.onen\\_fb@hotmail.com](mailto:goker.onen_fb@hotmail.com)

ORCID: [0000-0001-7927-0238](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7927-0238)

### Abstract

*This paper argues that the European Union authorities could have misread the military's role in Turkish modernisation, and this misreading perhaps opened the path for the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi's (AKP) growing authoritarianism. To test this argument, the paper first outlines a theoretical framework by discussing the influence of secularisation theory in the modernist literature. Then it compares the secularisation theory with its postsecular critics. Through this, the paper aims to understand how a non-governmental institution such as the military may lead to a secular transformation in a nation such as Turkey. Second, the paper makes a brief observation of secularist implementations in Turkey by taking into account the military's increasing supervision over politics and its influence on secularisation. Then, in light of the findings in the first and second sections, the paper finally discusses the potential relationship between the demilitarisation of politics and the rising AKP authoritarianism by considering the secularist and postsecularist approaches.*

**Keywords:** AKP, Secularism, EU, Turkey

## Sekülerizm ve Ordu Etkisinin AKP Döneminde Türkiye-AB İlişkilerine Etkisine Yönelik Tarihsel Bir Değerlendirme

\*

### Öz

*Bu makale, ordunun Türk modernleşmesindeki rolünün AB otoritelerince yanlış değerlendirilmiş olabileceğini öngörmektedir. Bu olası yanlış değerlendirme sonucu, AKP otoriterleşmesi önündeki son engel belki de kaldırılmış oldu. Bu iddiayı desteklemek üzere, bu makale ilk önce modernist literatürde sekülerleşme teorisinin nasıl yorumlandığını ele alacak ve böylece makalenin teorik alt yapısını hazırlayacaktır. Ardından buradan çıkan bulgular postseküler eleştiri ile karşılaştırılacaktır. Bu sayede, nasıl olupta, ordu gibi hükümet üstü bir kurumun Türkiye gibi bir ülkenin seküler dönüşümünü gerçekleştirdiği masaya yatırılacaktır. İkincil olarak, makale, Türkiye'deki seküler uygulamaları incelemek için ordunun siyaset üzerinde artan denetimini ve sekülerleşme üzerindeki etkisini tartışacaktır. Son olarak, bir ve ikinci bölümden çıkan bulguların ışığında, seküler ve post-seküler teorileri de dikkate almak kaydıyla, makale, ordunun siyasetten yalıtılmasıyla paralel olarak AKP'nin tırmanan olası otoriter politikalarını inceleyecektir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** AKP, Sekülerizm, AB, Türkiye

## Introduction

Secularisation theory proposed that the world had entered an irrevocable secularisation process in which religious beliefs would gradually be replaced by rationalism and worldly interests. According to this view, growing individual liberalism and economic welfare during the age of modernisation caused an increase in people's living standards and decreased their expectations of religious promises. However, by the second half of the twentieth century, humanity saw an increase in religious influence. Some of the most passionate defenders of secularisation theory changed their view by accepting that religion was not disappearing from social life. As a result, effective alternative suggestions to secularisation theory have been developed. At this point, Turkey is a good case for discussing the consistency of secularisation theory. As the successor of the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey rapidly designed itself as a secular, Western-oriented state. The secular principles embedded in the military culture at the beginning of the twentieth century became the main inspirational forces behind the Turkish Revolution. The chief commander of the Turkish armies, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and some of his comrades in arms became both the founders and designers of the new state. Although the secular revolutions were carried out by the National Assembly in Ankara, Atatürk's charismatic personality and the military's loyalty to him were highly effective and sometimes coercive over the deputies during secularisation. Therefore, after Atatürk, the military continued to become a deterrent force in Turkish politics, carrying out four coup d'états by claiming responsibility for protecting the regime's secular pillars.

After the 1960 coup d'état, the military strengthened its political status by creating legal privileges for itself to supervise politics. This supervision continued until the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi's* (AKP) ostensible efforts to make Turkey a member of the European Union (EU). The EU has always been critical of the military's strong secularist discourse, considering it an exaggerated excuse to maintain the military's political position. Therefore, the EU membership required an extended reform programme to subordinate the military. The AKP became the first party to successfully implement that level of reform by restricting most of the military's political rights. During the restriction process, the AKP also had strong civilian support from liberal intel-

lectuals, businesspeople, leading media institutions and even Kemalist seculars. Therefore, regarding democratisation, the AKP's first term was considered highly successful both by liberal intellectuals and EU authorities. Interestingly, after the military widely lost its political influence, there was a growing authoritarian tendency in AKP policies, which became more repressive toward opponents, including seculars, non-religious, non-Sunnis and minorities. The level of this repression and intolerance was observed globally during the Gezi Park protests in 2013. Furthermore, by obtaining a presidential system, the AKP founder and current president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, increased his supervisory powers by collecting most of the parliamentary rights. As a result, the current case proves that the military's sensitivities against political Islam in the past could not have been as exaggerated as the EU assumed. This assumption created suitable cards for the AKP to restrict military powers, so the EU naively facilitated the emergence of the current case. There are also optimistic views that believe this could be a good opportunity to break the military's influence over politics.

The main purpose of this paper is to test whether or not the EU misread the military's relationship with Turkish modernisation. To illustrate the reasons behind this possible misreading, the article first analyses the literature on secularisation by defining the kinds of relationships scholars find between secularism and modernism. Then, the article analyses the link between secularism and the military during the Turkish modernisation. Last, by considering the results of the previous sections and by taking into account alternative views on this matter, the article discusses whether or not there is a relationship between the decreasing military influence and increasing AKP authoritarianism and whether or not the EU misread the AKP phenomenon and military influence.

### **Method: What Is Secularisation?**

Before discussing the relationship between Turkish secularisation and military culture, this paper explains two opposite views in the literature, one of which considers a direct relationship between secularism and modernism and another that objects to it. This process serves two purposes: first, drawing a general framework of secularism concept and second, discussing the possible relationships between secularism and modernisation. Through this, I aim

to clarify why the EU might have wrongly evaluated Turkish secularisation and the military effect. Principally, the Turkish interpretation of secularism became the main tool that opened the path for modernisation. Hence, before elaborating the reasons for this fact, it may be helpful to observe what secularism means.

Although secularism does not have a universally accepted definition, it is understood as creating a distance between religious and worldly matters (Hürd, 2004). The main thing preventing researchers from making a universal definition might be that each religion has several regulations for social and individual life. Hence, 'worldly' may have different meanings for each religion. Islam, in particular, is a quite worldly religion; its holy resources, the Quran and Sunnah (the prophet's interpretations), bring many different practices for social life, such as marriage and divorce, death and inheritance, crime and punishment and economics. Hence, it can be challenging to separate worldly and religious in a Muslim country. Therefore, the Turkish version of secularism has differed from other implementations by considering the sensitivities of a Muslim community.

Although it has been challenging to develop a unique definition, several coherent definitions have been employed by scholars to describe secularism. For instance, the leading contributor Berger (1967) explained secularisation as a process by which sectors of human life are liberated from the influence of religion. According to Berger, there is, inevitably, a negative relationship between secularism and religion because it divorces the supernatural and non-observable from human conscience and behaviour for a more scientific, realistic and empirical look on the universe. In the same way, Tamimi and Esposito (2000) defined secularism as a philosophy of life that is not designed according to a future expectation of the afterlife. Keane (2000) defined secularists as the people who believe that religion and science entered into a type of struggle in which science gradually and irrevocably replaced religion. Relevant to these approaches, Berger suggested secularisation theory by considering a positive relationship between secularisation and modernisation. According to this suggestion, while people progress in worldly matters, including science, art and philosophy, religion will slowly disappear from social and individual spheres (Berger, 1967). Since the Age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, most thinkers have found an inevitable connection

between secularisation and modernisation, which has naturally led to a very negative consideration of religion and pious people.

Nevertheless, through the last decades of the twentieth century, the secularisation theory began to receive strong criticisms regarding its relationship with modernisation. The critics of secularisation theory are categorised under the title of postseculars. Postsecular scholars have challenged the secularisation theory by arguing that it is not always possible to find a direct relationship between secularism and modernisation. Recent global developments have led to a global resurgence of religion, which can be observed both in Eastern and Western societies. Hence, the postseculars brought an alternative suggestion, arguing that in the modern world, humanity should find a way for the religious and scientific to coexist through dialogue, without excluding each other (Habermas, 2008). Interestingly, one of these critical scholars was the principal builder of the secularisation theory: Berger. Berger (1999) changed his ideas, declaring that he was wrong because, although there had been an improvement in science, philosophy and the arts, religion had preserved its influence. Moreover, and most importantly for this paper, some authors see secularisation as an invented and abused myth that promotes Western states as rational, superior and civilised, in contrast to the 'developing' world, which is inferior, irrational and uncivilised. According to this view, the only way to escape this inferiority is imitating the secular West to attain a civilised world. The supporters of this view also argue that this type of categorisation between developed and undeveloped gives the former an excuse to exploit the latter by using modernisation and secularisation myths (Thomas, 2004).

## **Findings: Secularisation In Turkey And Its Influence On Military Culture**

### ***Background Literature***

As elaborated above, there are two different views, one of which suggests a positive relationship with secularism and modernism and the other that opposes it. During the Turkish secularisation, the first view became influential; both the civil and military elite saw secularism as a vital tool for modernisation (Sandal, 2013). Most Turkish experts have seen Turkish modernisation as a 'top-down' movement in which the enlightened civil and military elite guided the nation through a universal process similar to the modern, secular

Western states. This case is formulated as 'against people but for the people', which means an educated group imposes secular revolutions on the ignorant masses, sometimes by force, but for their own benefit (Ahmad, 1993; Aydemir, 1968; Hale, 1994; Karabelias, 2009; Karpat, 2010; Kazancıgil & Erbudun, 1981; Landau, 1984; Lewis, 1961; Misrahi, 2004; Tachau & Heper, 1983; Üzgel, 2003). Although the modernist approaches to the Turkish case later received strong criticism, they preserved their popularity among the relevant studies.

On the other hand, critical approaches became helpful for seeing the deficiencies of the modernist approach. These deficiencies can be listed in three groups. First, the parliamentary experience gained after the 1908 Revolution and its relationship to the foundation of the Republic have mostly been omitted. Second, the contribution of the ordinary masses is completely excluded, and the creation of the Republic is explained with an elitist approach. Last, the support of some particular civilian groups during the creation of modern Turkey is generally forgotten, including some intellectuals, merchants, politicians, religious people, Kurdish people, non-Muslims and non-Sunnis, and everything is shown as the success of the military (Arslan, 2016; Aydemir, 1963; Kansu, 1997; Mellon, 2006; Zürcher, 2010). This line of thinking gave Turkey a strong, militaristic character, and Atatürk's main intention of creating a civilian democracy was overlooked. Hence, it is more inclusive to explain Turkish modernisation as a combination of modernist and critical approaches. In other words, Turkish secularisation was promoted by the elite who mostly came from military backgrounds. Ultimately, the elite received important support after the participation of the aforementioned civil groups and a remarkable part of Turkish citizens. Atatürk's charismatic leadership and the military's coercive and deterrent image were necessary while carrying out and preserving these revolutions.

### ***Ulama (Religious Class) as an Obstacle Against Modernisation***

As the inheritor of the 600-year-old theocratic Ottoman monarchy, Turkish political culture has always remained vulnerable to Islamic propaganda and manipulation. Hence, the absorbance of democratic principles, such as freedom of opinion, equality, the rule of law and pluralism, has been highly challenging. In the Ottoman times, the sensitive nature of the political culture was

frequently manipulated by the dominant groups (ulama, rulers, military elite) with the slogans 'religion is disappearing', 'Western innovations are infidel gadgets' and 'science and technology means interfering in God's will'. These types of manipulation continued after the creation of the Republic, this time by the politicians concerned about votes. Furthermore, these propagandas many times triggered violent mass protests against modernist attempts. As a result, the Ottoman modernists saw that the only way to remove obstacles against progress was to secularise the social and political order (Lewis, 1961). Naturally, this kind of attempt could not have been done without a deterrent and coercive force. At this point, the military elite, who had been educated in the modern military schools, emerged as the major convincing force and guardian of secularism.

### *The Secularisation of Military Culture*

Military culture refers to the combination of specific ethos that shape the military's institutional behaviour toward inside and outside stimulants, including politics. These ethoi can include norms, values, beliefs, ideals and political ideologies that are shaped by historical experiences, geopolitical vulnerabilities and religious and national concerns that show themselves through marital rituals, symbols, discourse and formal statements (Snider, 1999). In this regard, after being redesigned as a modern, Western-oriented army in the nineteenth century, the Turkish military culture was rapidly influenced by the modernist ideas of the age, including secularism, nationalism, liberty, equality and rationalism (Turfan, 2000). The most significant period that demonstrated that mental change in the military culture was the Young Turks movement. By combining their powers with liberal intellectuals, the officers implemented the 1908 Revolution, restricting the sultan's powers against the National Assembly and the constitution. After the Revolution, the military became the official guardian of the parliamentary regime by suppressing several monarchist attempts, such as the religious 31 March 1909 counter-revolutionary rebellion. Although there had been attempts to secularise the system, these attempts were not effective until the creation of the Turkish Republic in 1923.

### *The Secularisation of Turkey and the Military's Role*

The end of World War I marked the end of the Ottoman Empire. The remaining lands of the nation were divided between the victorious states. In 1919–1923, the Turkish military organised a national resistance under Atatürk's commandership and founded the Republic of Turkey by dissolving the monarch and caliphate positions. Atatürk became the first president of the new Republic. In 1923–1938, Turkey's image rapidly changed to a modern, Western-oriented state by implementing a series of secular reforms. These reforms can be shortlisted as equality of women and men before the law, adoption of Western dresses and the Latin alphabet, legalising the 'secularism' principle in the constitution, and secularising the education system along with the law and state departments (Aydemir, 1963).

There are different views about the implementation of Turkish secularism (laicism) (Karpat, 2010). First, although there had been efforts to secularise the system before Atatürk, none of them released the social and political systems from religious impact. Hence, the Turkish version of secularism was mostly defined by Atatürk, and this definition became the main inspiration behind the Turkish Revolution. As a young officer in the military academy, Atatürk was deeply influenced by the aforementioned secularist ideals that influenced the military culture. For a soldier, Atatürk had a very intellectual background, having read about four thousand books on history, philosophy, religion, linguistics, the law, positive sciences, literature and contemporary ideas of his time, including secularism, nationalism, liberalism, Marxism and humanism. The knowledge and synthesis that Atatürk obtained from these books became highly inspirational while he was developing his interpretation of secularism. Atatürk defined secularism similarly to Berger, considering it a process of liberating social and political orders from the influence of religion (İnan, 1930). While achieving this, Atatürk's reforms sometimes appeared to intervene too much in the individual sphere. However, this top-down secularisation should not be equated with the authoritarian practices of junta regimes. Instead, it should be seen as the natural result of a sincere but sometimes impatient effort to adopt citizens into a secular social and political order by breaking the influence of the ulama. This is evidenced by both Atatürk's efforts to civilise the regime and the military's willingness to turn

the rule back to the civilians as soon as possible after the military interventions (Daver, 1969; Davison, 2003; Kuru, 2012; Satana, 2008). Given the changeable borders of spiritual and worldly in each religion, Turkish secularism has some similarities and differences compared to other cases. The secular implementations had to be made by taking into account the sensitivities of Islam to prevent counter-revolutionary moves. Perhaps because of this fact, the Turkish political system was not completely separated from institutional Islam, but it was taken under the control of the state by creating the Directorate of Religious Affairs. In this way, all religious leaders became employees of the state, and all independent religious institutions were closed (Davison, 2003). Also, Atatürk frequently stressed his respect and admiration for real Islam as long as it remained at an individual level, believing that it should be liberated from the manipulation of the ulama and regain its pure nature from the prophet's time (Başkan, 2010; Daver, 1969; Davison, 2003; Mellon, 2006; Zürcher, 2010).

On the other hand, the military's strong commitment to Atatürk was the main force that facilitated the implementation of the secular revolutions because these revolutions sometimes faced strict resistance. It is largely argued that most of the deputies in the Assembly, even Atatürk's closest friends, were not ready for the dissolving of the monarchy and caliphate. As a result, Atatürk's charismatic personality and his military's threatening image enabled the implementation of secularisation, by force if necessary (Özdağ, 2006). Most deputies could not challenge Atatürk's leadership and appeared to be in compromise reluctantly (Aydemir, 1968). For instance, during the removal of the monarchy in 1922, a group of religious leaders objected, claiming that the decision was against religion. Atatürk threatened this group by stating, 'the monarchy shall certainly be removed, but perhaps some heads shall be beheaded' (Atatürk, 1927). Naturally, Atatürk could not make this threat without military support. Eventually, the opponents stepped back, and the monarchy was removed.

### *Military as the Guardian of the Regime*

The military carried out the first intervention in the history of the Republic in 1960 by claiming responsibility for protecting the secular dynamics of the re-

gime. Until 1945, Turkey remained under the single-party rule of the founding Republican Party (RP). In 1946, the opponents within the RP resigned and founded the Democrat Party (DP). In 1950, the DP won the general elections by receiving major support from villages, rural areas and pious voters. The early years of the DP saw a rising economic success. The rapid increase in national welfare led the DP to increase its votes in the 1954 elections (Oran, 2004). Nevertheless, increasing public support made the DP government less careful in terms of preserving the regime's secular character. Principally, secularisation had been successfully achieved in the developed city centres, but the rural areas, small cities and villages were still highly vulnerable to religious propaganda. The DP took advantage of this structure by strengthening the Islamic tone in its discourse (Reed, 1954). They began to establish close relationships with the religious brotherhoods and put religious lessons into the education curriculum. The numbers of İmam Hatips (religious schools) and Quran courses were increased. Even Adnan Menderes once said to his party members in the parliament, 'you are so powerful, and you can bring the caliphate back if you want'. The DP also severely oppressed opponents from the media, universities and parliament by implementing several sanctions (Pelt, 2014; Satana, 2008).

Ultimately, the increasing threat against the secular democracy led the military to take over by a coup d'état in 1960. They closed down the DP and sentenced Menderes and two leading members of the DP to death (Pope & Pope, 1997). In 1961, the junta leaders created a new constitution with a more pluralist system and strong control mechanisms to prevent one-party dictatorships (Pope and Pope, 1997). Also, the military stabilised its political position as 'the protector of the regime against internal and external enemies' by regulating Article 35 of its Internal Service Act. By referring to this protection duty in the following decades, the military carried out two more coup d'états in 1971 and 1980.

### *Rise of Political Islam*

The 1961 Constitution brought extended political liberties. This time, however, the liberal political atmosphere led universities and civil institutions to become rapidly politicised. The years between 1967 and 1980 saw violent con-

flicts between rightist and leftist students. Given the civil government's inability to solve the anarchy in the streets, the military intervened in 1971 and 1980. The chaotic order convinced generals that some regulations of the 1961 Constitution should be restricted. Hence, after implementing the 1980 coup d'état, the military authorities prepared a new constitution to strengthen the central authority. Most of the political freedoms given by the 1961 Constitution were removed to prevent the recurrence of radical ideologies. Furthermore, by creating the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis for the first time in history, the military gave concessions for its secular sensitivities. The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis was created by mixing Turkish nationalism with Islam to counterbalance the leftist movement. This synthesis was ambitiously promoted by the junta leader, General Kenan Evren. Evren came to public speeches holding the Quran in his hand, declaring that the Turkish people should learn their religion from its true sources. In this way, Evren assumed, young people would not be cheated by political Islam. For this purpose, the course books in the schools were redesigned, and compulsory religious lessons were put into the education curriculums (Demirel, 1997).

As one may consider from the example above, during the Cold War, the strict secular discourse of the military weakened. However, this change should be seen as the natural result of being a NATO army. The military authorities made every effort to remain in NATO to counterbalance the Soviet threat on the borders. To maintain this membership, they had to tolerate rightist ideologies, including political Islam, to prevent a possible communist revolution. Despite this shift, the military preserved its deterrent image as the ultimate guardian of secularism in the eyes of political Islamists. The junta leaders could not have predicted that political Islam would be a major risk again in the future. Hence, it was not a big deal for the generals to tolerate Islam for the sake of suppressing the communist threat. However, the following decades disproved the military assumptions; the tolerance toward religious brotherhoods, the rise of Imam Hatips, the opening of Quran courses and the tolerance of the following governments (ANAP, DYP-SHP, DYP-RP) toward Islamic groups created a rapid increase in political Islam (Heper and Evin, 1988; Jenkins, 2008).

The rise of political Islam began to be explicit in the early 1990s. A number of secular intellectuals, including Uğur Mumcu, Bahriye Üçok and Turan Dursun, were the victims of political assassinations. More tragically, in 1993,

a group of secular intellectuals gathered in the Madımak Hotel in Sivas to attend a traditional festival. One of the secular hosts, Aziz Nesin, was known for his activist atheism and severe criticism against Islam. A couple of days after their arrival, a large Islamist group gathered around the Madımak Hotel and began to protest the secular intellectuals by shouting slogans in favour of Sharia. Finally, the Islamist demonstrators burned the hotel, leaving 30 people to die (Birand, 2012).

In accordance with this, the Welfare Party (WP), which was established by Necmeddin Erbakan to replace the previously closed Islamist parties, emerged as the new representative of political Islam. Unlike its predecessors, the WP showed increasing success in the elections. In 1995, the WP came first in the general elections and became the coalition partner. Erbakan became the prime minister (Karabelias, 2009). The WP and Erbakan did not hide their anti-secular tendencies and rejection of Atatürk's reforms. The party members often repeated their nostalgic feelings for the successful age of the Ottoman Empire as the leader of the Muslim world. Accordingly, the WP was highly critical of the EU membership and NATO. Conversely, they wanted to create close relationships with the Islamic world (Birand, 2012). In accordance with this purpose, Erbakan arranged visits to Islamic countries and showed his demand for partnership. During Erbakan's visit to Libya, Gaddafi's humiliating speech against Turkey's NATO membership received harsh criticisms from the secular media. More seriously, there were several speeches from RP members such as Erbakan, who stated, '[People] will decide whether the change [in political order] becomes bloody or not' (Birand, 2012). The promotion of jihad by a leading RP member in Kayseri encouraged Islamists to arrange demonstrations in favour of Sharia (*Hürriyet*, 1997). These events led to another military intervention in 1997; the generals dictated several implementations to the government to stop the rise of political Islam. The government had no right to refuse these implementations. This event was later referred to as a post-modern coup, which was made indirectly with the support of leading civilian groups and the secular media. Shortly after the memorandum, the government had no choice but to retire, given the increasing protest from the military, secular media and citizens (Güney and Karatekelioğlu, 2005).

## **Discussion: The Akp, Eu And Military Subordination**

### *The AKP-EU Relations*

The AKP came to rule in 2002 without needing a coalition partner by gaining 32 per cent of the votes. This result made AKP the most successful Islamist party in history. There were several reasons for this success. The AKP discourse had major differences from its predecessor, the RP. First, the party and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated their commitment to secularism and presented themselves as a democratic, conservative, right-wing party. Second, they showed the EU membership as their first and most important foreign policy goal. This line of approach led the AKP to have considerable support not only from the Islamist electors but also from businesspeople, conservative democrats and liberal intellectuals (Grigoriadis, 2009; Heper, 2007; Hermann, 2003; Karagiannis, 2016; Nugent, 2007; Özbudun, 2006; Somer, 2007; Toktaş & Kurt, 2010). In this regard, the AKP strengthened its efforts for the EU membership. The political privilege of the Turkish military was one major obstacle against membership (Burak, 2011; EU Regular Report, 2000, 2004; Güney & Karatekelioğlu, 2005; Heper, 2005; Hurd, 2007; Kuru, 2012; Sakallioğlu, 2004).

As mentioned, the EU had always remained sceptical of the military influence, considering it a violation of the Turkish democracy and an excuse for maintaining its privileged position. Interestingly, in the beginning, the optimistic statements from EU authorities were highly similar to the postsecular critics of secularisation theory. Given their liberal party programme, the EU considered the AKP a major opportunity to compromise with seculars and Islamists under the democratisation flag by releasing politics from military interruptions (Atasoy, 2011; Bilgiç, 2009; Coate & Thiel, 2010; European Commission, 2004; Haynes, 2010; Hürd, 2007; Karabelias, 2009; Karasomanoğlu, 2001; Kuru, 2012; Mellon, 2006; Satana, 2008; Somer, 2007; Ulusoy, 2008; Üzgel, 2003; Ziya & Korkut, 2010; Tuncer, 2016). Moreover, the EU naively found the AKP sincere in its willingness to be a part of Europe and, therefore, agreed to accept Turkey as an official candidate (Dursun 2006; Somer 2007). Accordingly, the AKP's ideology of moderate Islam was seen as future guidance for other Muslim states to prove that democracy and Islam can coexist (Somer,

2007). However, the following events could disprove the relevant EU assumptions. The removal of military privileges, in accordance with the EU's demands, perhaps came with an increasing AKP authoritarianism.

### *Civil–Military Relations*

During the first term of the AKP, the military authorities generally remained silent against the removal of their legal rights, stating that they were too fancy for the EU and did not want to be in a position to block Turkey's membership (Rosen, 2005). Several important leading commanders considered the EU as the most effective way for democratisation. Through this, the military would not have to leave the barracks anymore because the Turkish people would be conscious enough to guard the fundamental dynamics of democracy (Kıvrıkoğlu, 2001).

Nevertheless, despite most of the military privileges being removed, the military was still powerful enough to interfere in politics. Also, the Kemalist officers occasionally implied disagreement with the government's implementations. Wearing turbans during formal protocols and the opening of the Imam Hatip schools were still sensitive issues for the military (Jenkins, 2007). Accordingly, during Yaşar Büyükanıt's chief commandship (2006–2008), the military increased its emphasis on secularism and guardianship. At the climax of this resurgence in 2007, the military gave an ultimatum to the government, stating their objection to the presidential candidate Abdullah Gül from the AKP and implicitly warning the government about potential military intervention. However, the government did not step back, and Gül became the next president (BBC, 2007).

Under these conditions, therefore, the ultimate subordination of the military became possible only after the Ergenekon–Balyoz indictments (2008–2010). According to these prosecutions, several head commanders, including the chief military commander, İlker Başbuğ; top commanders of the Navy, Air and First Army; and some retired commanders, prepared plans to overthrow the AKP government (Milliyet, 2008). The process created a sudden shock effect in the media while seriously undermining the people's trust in the military. Most of the leading commanders were arrested or charged. A significant number of academics and media members reacted harshly by blaming the military for undermining democracy through creating 'deep

states' (Aydınlı, 2001; Kavakçı, 2009; Kaya, 2009; Park, 2008; Söyler, 2013). Also, within the process, there had been a remarkable increase in the AKP's popularity as a symbol of public will against the junta. However, in the following years, the evidence showed that the prosecutions were false, and it was an operation organised by the Islamist Gülen Brotherhood to replace secularist officers with its own members and decrease its image (Avcı, 2015; Başbuğ, 2016; Çağatay, 2010, 2011; Coate & Thiel, 2010; Demirağ, 2015; Mütercimler, 2014; Öztürk, 2016; Yalçın, 2016). Between 2010 and 2016, almost all Ergenekon suspects, including İlker Başbuğ, were proven innocent and released. Tragically, some of the new officers who replaced the suspected ones were later involved in an unsuccessful coup on 15 July 2016 to overthrow Erdoğan and the AKP government. The AKP's tolerance to the Ergenekon investigations and its close relationship with the Gülen Brotherhood during the process created a suitable place for arrests and the Gülenist penetration into the military. Moreover, the Ergenekon-Balyoz accusations were not only limited to the military but turned into a big operation involving media members, academics, politicians and writers. The most interesting point was that almost all of the people charged were known for their opposition to the AKP government (Gürsoy, 2012).

### *Depoliticisation*

Following Ergenekon and Balyoz, the military gave an ostensible depoliticisation message by ending political declarations and obeying government instructions without showing remarkable objections (*Milliyet*, 2011). During the so-called depoliticisation process, the AKP government and Prime Minister Erdoğan remarkably increased the authoritarian tone in their statements and practices (Başkan, 2010; Heper, 2011). In the meantime, the AKP began to apply religious references more frequently than before, depicting Islam as a non-detachable part of the Turkish identity. The process was similar to the DP's increasing authoritarianism in its latest term. Just as the DP, the AKP suppressed opponents, controlled education and the media, and brought its members to key positions in state departments. The AKP's increasing Islamic populism, such as banning alcohol and the Internet, arranging expensive Ramadan dinners, and building mosques and Imam Hatips and Quran courses more than needed caused a strong reaction from opponents, as did

Erdoğan's speeches that included phrases such as, 'we will raise a religious generation' (Akyol, 2015; *Al Monitor*, 2015; *BBC*, 2013; *Daily Sabah Turkey*, 2015; Ezikoğlu, 2016; *HaberTürk*, 2012; *Independent*, 2016; *The Atlantic*, 2016). In the event known as the Gezi Parkı in June 2013, millions of people in different cities gathered to protest the AKP's authoritarian implementations. As a response, the police applied very strict methods for disbanding the protestors, killing seven (*BBC*, 2013; *Hürriyet Daily News*, 2014). The AKP implementations during the Gezi Parkı were strictly protested by the EU (*BBC*, 2013; *The Economist*, 2013). Additionally, the Gezi Parkı and surrounding events led many previous AKP supporters to change their opinions and position themselves against the government (Akyol, 2015; Altan, 2015; *BBC*, 2016; Belge, 2016). Ironically, the optimistic view in the beginning that the AKP would compromise seculars and Islamists under a stable democratic rule has been replaced by a strong scepticism of the AKP and Erdoğan by EU authorities (Akkoc, 2016; Cook, 2016; *Euronews*, 2016). Last, the so-called depoliticisation of the military ended with the Gülen Brotherhood's coup attempt on 15 July 2016, indicating a serious decline in the secular sensitivities of the military since the Ergenekon-Balyoz arrests.

## Conclusion

According to the secularisation theory, there is a positive relationship between secularisation and modernisation in societies. This theory suggests that when people improve in worldly matters, including science, technology, politics and the arts, the influence of religion will automatically disappear. This theory became very dominant during the earlier stages of modernisation, especially in the West. However, at the end of the Cold War, the theory began to receive strong criticisms in that, although human life is becoming modernised, religion is still influential in most parts of the world. Unsurprisingly, some postsecularist thinkers have criticised secularisation theory by considering it a modernisation myth created by the Western states to exploit developing nations. Instead of completely secularising the system, postseculars have suggested that, through dialogue, the modern world should find a way for the scientific and traditional to coexist without excluding each other. At this point, Turkey is an excellent case to employ the suggestions of both theories. Starting in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish nation

entered into a gradual secularisation in the social and political spheres. After the foundation of the modern Turkish Republic in 1923, Turkey became the first 'official' Muslim state that adopted a completely secular regime. Nevertheless, the strong Islamic sensitivities of the Turkish people always made them vulnerable to religious abuse. Even in Atatürk's time, pious groups showed strict resistance by making propaganda about secular reforms being against Islam. With this circumstance, the military emerged as the ultimate guardian of the secular regime and maintained its deterrent image against political Islam for more than half a century.

On the other hand, the European authorities could not completely discern the importance of the military's deterrent image for maintaining the main pillars of democracy. Perhaps they perceived the military's secularist discourse as an excuse to maintain power. However, the events analysed in the previous sections show that Turkish democracy is still far from working coherently. The strong religious influence in Turkish political culture makes Turkey a vulnerable place for suppressing opponents through Islamic populism. However, without freedom of opinion and expression, it is almost impossible for a pluralist democratic regime to grow and create its own protective mechanisms. Therefore, in a nation deeply influenced by Islamic culture such as Turkey, secularism becomes a vital tool to remove obstacles against democratisation by liberating social and political orders from the influence of Sharia. Normally, military influence in a democratic nation could be seen highly paradoxical, but the situation in Turkey should have been tolerated as a temporary transition process until the democracy was stabilised. The examples in this article show that the generals evaluated the case according to this consideration. The European democracy fought a long and strict battle to break the negative influence of the church against liberties before taking its current shape (Davies, 1996), but in the Muslim countries, this struggle can be harder. The 1400-year-old Sharia rules demand strict supervision over social life. Without separating the impact of these rules from the social system and an individual's mentality, progress becomes much slower.

Finally, the latest developments in Turkey signal the vitality of the secularism principle for the development of Turkish democracy. The EU's optimistic views that the AKP could be a good opportunity to have Islamists and seculars coexist through dialogue, as the postseculars offered, could be proven wrong through the rapid increase of the AKP's alleged authoritarian

behaviour. To elaborate on whether this assumption is true or not, one may take two different views regarding this matter. The negative view considers that the current presidential system with highly enlarged powers has restricted the supervisory mechanisms (balance of power) of the Turkish democracy and put its efficiency at serious risk. If one considers this view as consistent, due to the mentioned realities, there is a close link between the decreasing military influence and the increasing AKP authoritarianism. The difference between the AKP's earlier terms and its current term supports this argument. According to this perspective, unlike the AKP's liberal rhetoric and support for EU membership in its earlier terms, they have become more authoritarian and Eurosceptic. As a consequence, the EU's previous assumptions about the military's influence, perhaps affected by the critics of secularisation theory, have been proven wrong.

On the other hand, there are also optimistic views that consider that the increasing presidential powers of Erdoğan have given him the necessary tools to break the military's long-running supervision over politics and thereby strengthen the democracy. The owners of this view welcomed new regulations in civil-military relations, such as the subordination of the chief of general staff to the Ministry of Defense and the creation of the National Defense University. By these tools, civilian control of the military has been completed in step with the purpose of the EU. To understand which of these opposite views is more consistent, one should wait to see the impacts of the new civil-military reforms.

### **Kaynakça / References**

- Ahmad, F. (1993). *The making of modern Turkey*. Routledge.
- Akkoç, R. (2016, March 17). Where did it all go wrong for Turkey? *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/12195534/EU-Turkey-deal-Recep-Tayyip-Erdogan-Where-did-it-all-go-wrong-for-Turkey.html>
- Mustafa, A. (2015, November 10). Turkey's authoritarian drift. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/11/opinion/turkeys-authoritarian-drift-election-erdogan.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/11/opinion/turkeys-authoritarian-drift-election-erdogan.html?_r=0)

- Al-Monitor*. (2015, February 13). *Turkey's mosque building diplomacy*. Retrieved from: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2015/02/turkey-mosque-building-soft-power.html>
- Ahmet, A. (2015, February 2). AKP artık siyasi parti değil: Karşımızda bir gangster çetesi var. *Diken*. Retrieved from: <http://www.diken.com.tr/ahmet-altan-akp-artik-siyasi-parti-degil-ciddi-bir-gangster-cetesiyle-karsi-karsiyayiz/>
- Arslan, B. (2016). *II. Meşrutiyet'ten Cumhuriyet'e iki devrim: İki süreç*. Işık.
- Seymen, A. (2011). The Turkish example: A model for change in the Middle East? *Middle East Policy*, 18(3).
- Atatürk, M. K. (1927). *Nutuk*.
- Avcı, H. (2015). *Cemmatın iflası*. Tekin Yayınları.
- Aydemir, Ş. S. (1963). *Tek Adam - Cilt 1*. Remzi Kitabevi.
- Aydemir, Ş. S. (1968). *İkinci Adam, Book: 1-3*. Remzi Kitabevi.
- Aydınlı, E. (2001). Ergenekon, new pacts, and the decline of the Turkish inner state. *Turkish Studies*, 12(2).
- Başbuğ, İ. (2016). *15 Temmuz öncesi ve sonrası*. Doğan Kitap.
- Başkan, B. (2010). What made Atatürk's reforms possible? *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 21(2).
- Başkan, F. (2010). Religious versus secular groups in the age of globalisation in Turkey. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 11(2).
- Excerpts of Turkish army statement. (2007, 28 April). *BBC News*. Retrieved from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/6602775.stm>
- Turkey to ban late night sales of alcohol. (2013, May 24). *BBC News*. Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22653173>
- Turkey protests: Unrest rages in Istanbul and Ankara. (2013, June 1). *BBC News*. Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22739423>
- Turkey protests: Erdoğan rejects EU criticism. (2013, June 8). *BBC News*. Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22817460>
- Hollandalı Türkolog, Erdoğan'ı Protesto İçin Ödülünü İfade Ediyor. (2016, May 9). *BBC Türkçe*. Retrieved from: [http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/05/160509\\_hollanda\\_odul\\_erdogan](http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/05/160509_hollanda_odul_erdogan)
- Belge, M. (2016, February 15). AKP içi muhalefet. *Birikim*. Retrieved from: <http://www.birikimdergisi.com/haftalik/7522/akp-ici-muhalefet#.Wjsl8ZkjFdh>
- Berger, P. (1999). *The desecularisation of the world: Resurgent religion and world politics*. The Ethics and Public Policy Center.
- Berger, P. (1967). *The sacred canopy*. Anchor Books.

- Bilgiç, T. Ü. (2009). The military and Europeanization reforms in Turkey. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 45(5).
- Birand, M. A. (2012). *Son Darbe 28 Şubat*. Doğan Kitap.
- Burak, B. (2011). The role of military in Turkish politics: To guard whom and from what? *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies*, 4(1), 143–166.
- Çağatay, S. (2011). Behind Turkey's witch hunt. *Newsweek*. May 16, 2009. Retrieved from: <http://www.newsweek.com/2009/05/15/behind-turkey-s-witch-hunt.html>
- Çağatay, S. (2010). What's really behind Turkey's coup arrests? *Foreign Policy*, 25.
- Coate, R. A., Thiel, M. (2010). *Identity politics in the age of globalization*. First Forum Press.
- Cook, S. A. (2016, July 21). How Erdoğan made Turkey authoritarian again. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/07/how-erdogan-made-turkey-authoritarian-again/492374/>
- Turkey to open Imam Hatip schools in Turkey. (2015, December 14).. *Daily Sabah Turkey*. Retrieved from: <http://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/2014/12/15/turkey-to-open-imamhatip-schools-abroad>
- Davies, N. (1996). *Europe: A history*. Oxford University Press.
- Davison, A. (2003). Turkey, a 'secular' state?: The challenge of description. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 102(2/3).
- Demirağ, Y. S. (2015). *İmamların Öcü. Kırmızı Kedi*.
- Demirel, T. (2004). Soldiers and civilians: The dilemma of Turkish democracy. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40(1).
- Dursun, Ç. (2006). The struggle goes on: The discursive strategies of the Islamist press in Turkey. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 14(2), 161–182.
- Esposito, J. L., and Tamimi, A. (2000). *Islam and secularism in the Middle East*. New York University Press.
- Europe protests against Turkish arrests. (2016, November 5). *Euronews*. Retrieved from: <http://www.euronews.com/2016/11/05/europe-protests-against-turkish-arrests>
- European Commission. (2000, November 8). *Regular report on Turkey's progress towards accession*.
- European Commission. (2004, May 10). *Statement by Commissioner Günter Verheugen following the New Package of Reforms in Turkey*.
- Ezikoğlu, Ç. (2016, August 23). *Conservative authoritarianism in Turkey. E-International Relations*. Retrieved from: <http://www.e-ir.info/2016/08/23/conservative-authoritarianism-in-turkey/>

- Grigoriadis, I. N. (2009). Islam and democratization in Tukey: Secularism and trust in a divided society. *Democratization*, 16(6), 1194–1213.
- Güney, A., and Karatekelioğlu, P. (2005). Turkey's EU candidacy and civil-military relations: Challenges and prospects. *Armed Forces & Society*, 31.
- Gürsoy, Y. (2012). The final curtain for the Turkish armed forces? Civil-military relations in view of the 2011 general elections. *Turkish Studies*, 13(2).
- Habermas, J. (2008, September 16). *A post-secular society-What does that mean?* Retrieved from: <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/0000000926>
- Dindar Bir Gençlik Yetiştirmek İstiyoruz. (2012, February 1). *Haber Türk*. Retrieved from: <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/711672-dindar-bir-genclik-yetistirmek-istiyoruz->
- Haynes, J. (2010). Politics, identity and religious nationalism in Turkey: From Atatürk to the AKP. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*.
- Heper, M., and Evin, A. (1988). *State, democracy and the military: Turkey in the 1980s*. Walter de Gruyter.
- Heper, M. (2011). Civil-military relations in Turkey: Toward a more liberal model? *Turkish Studies*, 12(2).
- Heper, M. (2005). The European Union, the Turkish military and democracy. *South European Society and Politics*, 10(1).
- Heper, M. (2005). The Justice and Development Party government and the military in Turkey. *Turkish Studies*, 6(2).
- Hermann, R. (2003). Political Islam in secular Turkey. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 14(3).
- Hurd, E. S. (2004). The political authority of secularism in international relations. *European Journal of International Relations*, 10(2).
- Hurd, E. S. (2007). *The politics of secularism in international relations*. Princeton Studies in International Relations and Politics.
- Police violence during Gezi Park protests unpunished, Amnesty report says. (2014, June 10). *Hürriyet Daily News*. Retrieved from: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/police-violence-during-gezi-park-protests-unpunished-amnesty-report-says.aspx?pageID=238&nID=67611&NewsCatID=339>
- RP'li baskana hapis (1997). *Hürriyet*. October 10. Retrieved from: <http://webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/1997/10/10/13261.asp>
- İnan, A. (1930). *Vatandaş için medeni bilgiler*. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı.

- Turkish government 'blocks Twitter and Facebook' as part of alleged media ban following Ankara blast (2016, March 13). *Independent..* Retrieved from: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ankara-explosion-turkey-twitter-facebook-ban-a6929136.html>
- Jenkins, G. (2007). Continuity and change: Prospects for civil-military relations in Turkey. *International Affairs*, 83(2).
- Jenkins, G. (2008). The Turkish military's impact on policy. *The Adelphi Papers*, 2.
- Kansu, A. (1997). *The Revolution of 1908 in Turkey*. İletişim.
- Karabelias, G. (2009). The military institution, Atatürk's principles, and Turkey's Sisyphean quest for democracy. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 45(1).
- Karagiannis, E. (2016). The new face of political Islam in Central Asia: The rise of Islamo-democrats. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 36.
- Karaosmanoğlu, A. L. (2001). Transformations of Turkey's civil-military relations culture and international environment. *Turkish Studies*, 12.
- Karpat, K. (2010). *Asker ve Siyaset*. Timaş Yayınları.
- Kaya, S. (2009). The rise and decline of the Turkey's 'deep state': The Ergenekon case. *Insight Turkey*, 11(4).
- Kazancıgil, A., and Özbudun, E. (1981). *Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State*. C. Hurst.
- Kuru, A. (2012). The rise and fall of military tutelage in Turkey: Fears of Islamism, Kurdistan, and communism. *Insight Turkey*, 14(2).
- Landau, J. M. (1984). *Atatürk and the modernisation of Turkey*. West-view Press/Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- Lewis, B. (1961). *The emergence of modern Turkey*. Oxford University Press.
- Mellon, J. M. (2006). Islamism, Kemalism and the future of democracy. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 7.
- Hale, W. (1994). *Turkish politics and the military*. Psychology Press.
- Büyük Operasyon. (2008, January 1). *Milliyet*.
- Asker Artık Kısa Cevap Veriyor. (2011, May 30). *Milliyet*.
- Mütercimler, E. (2014). *Büyük Kumpas Ergenekon*. Alfa Basım.
- Nugent, N. (2007). The EU's response to Turkey's membership application: Not just a weighing of costs and benefits. *Journal of European Integration*, 29(4).
- Oran, B. (2004). *Türk Dış Politikası I*. İletişim.
- Özbudun, E. (2006). From political Islam to conservative democracy: The case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey. *South European Society and Politics*, 11(3-4).
- Özdağ, Ü. (2006). *Atatürk ve İnönü döneminde ordu-siyaset ilişkileri*. Bilgeoğuz.
- Park, B. (2008). Turkey's deep state. *Rusi Journal*, 153.

- Pelt, M. (2014). *Military intervention and a crisis democracy in Turkey: The Menderes era and its demise*. I. B. Tauris.
- Pope, N., and Pope, H. (1997). *Turkey unveiled, Atatürk and after*. London.
- Reed, H. A. (1954). Revival of Islam in secular Turkey. *Middle East Journal*, 8(3).
- Brussels: Commission of the European Community. (2004). *Regular report 2004 on Turkey's progress towards accession*.
- Rosen, S. (2005, June 26). Reforms curb Turkey's armed forces. *Washington Times*.
- Sakallıoğlu, Ü. C. (2004). Problems of democratic governance of civil-military relations in Turkey and the European Union enlargement zone. *European Journal of Political Research*, 43(1).
- Sandal, N. (2013). Public theologies of human rights and citizenship: The case of Turkey's Christians. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 35(3).
- Satana, N. (2008). Transformation of the Turkish military and the path to democracy. *Armed Forces & Society*, 34(3).
- Snider, D. M. (2000). An uninformed debate on military culture. *Orbis*, 43(1).
- Somer, M. (2007). Moderate Islam and secularist opposition in Turkey: Implications for the world, Muslims and secular democracy. *Third World Quarterly*, 28.
- Söyler, M. (2013). Informal institutions, forms of state and democracy: The Turkish deep state. *Democratization*, 20(2).
- Tachau, F., and Heper, M. (1983). The state, politics, and the military in Turkey. *Comparative Politics*, 16(1).
- How Erdoğan made Turkey authoritarian again.. (2016, July 21). *The Atlantic* Retrieved from: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/07/how-erdogan-made-turkey-authoritarian-again/492374/>
- The Economist*. (2013, June 8–14). Democrat or sultan.
- Toktaş, Ş., and Kurt, Ü. (2010). The Turkish military's autonomy, JDP rule and the EU reform process in the 2000s: An assessment of the Turkish version of democratic control of armed forces (DECAF). *Turkish Studies*, 11(3).
- Tuncer, F. F. (2016). Avrupa Algısı ve Türkiye tartışmaları. 21. *Yüzyılda Avrupa*. Seçkin.
- Turfan, N. (2000). *Rise of the Young Turks: Politics, the military and Ottoman collapse*. I. B. Tauris.
- Ulusoy, K. (2008). Turkey and the EU: Democratization, civil-military relations, and the Cyprus issue. *Insight Turkey*, 10(4).
- Yalçın, S. (2016, July 26). AKP Artık Ezberini Bozmalı. *Sözcü*. Retrieved from: <http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/yazarlar/soner-yalcin/akp-artik-ezberini-boz-mali-1329575/>

- Ziya, H. E., and Korkut, U. (2010). Political religion and politicised women in Turkey: Hegemonic republicanism revisited. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 11.
- Zürcher, E. J. (2010). *The Young Turk legacy and nation building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey*. I. B. Tauris.

**Kaynakça Bilgisi / Citation Information**

Önen, H. G. (2020). An historical analysis of secularism and military impact in Turkey with reference to the Turkey– Eu relations during the Akp. *OPUS–International Journal of Society Researches*, 16(Eğitim ve Toplum Özel Sayısı), 6293-6317. DOI: 10.26466/opus.720695