BEYOND SECULARISM: FAITH, IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE: THE TURKISH CASE

Dr. Gönül OĞUZ*

Abstract

The aim of this article is to explore the boundaries of Turkish secularism. There are regular complaints about the extent of the stifling secularism, although it is well established in constitutional practice and supported by the majority of the Turkish intellectuals. Much of scholarly debate about Turkish secularism has focused on the predictions of the fading relevance or at least of religious activities that have ever been boosted. A growing concern is that Turkish Islam may prove a useful weapon of opposition to secular authority and become much more effective in constructing an authoritarian model of political system. Is secularism simply inclined to accentuate the role of religion – the tradition of which Turks have inherited from the past? Is religion most likely in the process of becoming over politicised again? For Turkey, these are hugely difficult questions, while admitting that current tendencies pose problems.

Key words: Democracy, Faith, Identity, Religion, Secularism.

1. Introduction: The Background on the Turkish Secularism

The Ottoman Empire was regarded as theocratic both in character and outlook, although there is remarkably little evidence to suggest that there had been attempts to establish a theocracy. The Islamic law (*Sharia)* was the fundamental law for believers, as well as the rulers, but few Muslim rulers in history made it the main business of state. From the beginning of Islamic community, administrative, criminal, civil and commercial law had almost

* Phd, University of Reading

been separated from the domain of *Sharia*, despite this separation was not formally and explicitly codified until the 19th century. Islam was not only a faith and a credo, but also a legal system aiming at organizing the whole life including, political, social, civil and cultural aspect (Daver 1967: 57).

From the perspective of secular logic, some steps were taken towards restoring political, educational and legal institutions. First, reaction to end the traditional fusion of political and religious authority began in 1839 by a *ferman* of the Sultan during the *Tanzimat* period. This reaction was largely fuelled by the major intellectual movements, notably the *Renaissance* and the *Enlightenments,* which had already been swept through Europe. For *Jön Turks,* it was inconceivable to combine Islam with a secular political framework. During their legacy, secularism developed as a prohibition of administration and jurisdiction role of religion for the benefits of the Empire, rather than as an attack on Islamic law on the spiritual grounds. It is also important to note that the Constitution of 1876 explicitly stated that Assembly would function in accordance with the principles of *Sharia*.

Following the First World War, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire pronounced the beginning of the rise of modern Islamic politics. Under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Turkey became the only predominantly Muslim and yet secular state in the world, with the establishment of the republic in 1923. At the core of the republican revolution was a change of values, which articulated itself through the conceptual opposition between "republican" and "Islamic"[1] (Sandıkçı and Ger 2001: 147). On the main, Turks looked to the West for ideas and model of reforms in order to create a modern Western nation state.

Along these lines, one important objective of the Republicans was to create the Turkish identity, which was dissimilar to the Ottoman traditions. This involved both the acceptance of ritual and status in conventional politics, combined with the democratic values. Apparently, secularism took the form of the Western style of the modernization process. For that reason, rejecting liberal values was virtually impossible, certainly far more difficult than daunting enough task of promoting modernity. The Turkish state showed a strong desire to embrace the scientific method of prosperity. The emphasis

---

1 Former implies modern, urban, secular, European and later backward, rural and religious.

placed on reforms concerning the social and institutional structure, together with cultural or moral values, which were, to a certain extent, associated with the principle of secularism.

From 1924 onwards, Turkey witnessed several reforms that were keys to its modernization process. To illustrate this, the *Caliphate* was abolished; the *madrasas* were closed; education was brought under state control; the religious courts were closed down; the religious orders were banned (1925); the Swiss civil code was adopted (1926) and the alphabet was Latinized (1928). In 1931, the principle of secularism was first adopted by the Republican People's party as one of the six guidance principles. These principles made their way into the Turkish Constitution (Adanalı 2008: 228). It is important to note that decisions regarding these reforms were taken by a handful of elite groups, who believed that secularism was indispensable for economic development and modernization. They pushed through a full separation of state from religion that was modelled, for the most part, upon principles of *laicism* borrowed from France. Incrementally, as secularism became an essential part of positive law, religion was increasingly marginalised in public affairs.

Predominantly, democracy and secularism appeared to be interrelated or inseparable in the West in the 1980s. Yet, for the most part its significance arose from the way in which these terms gave individuals rights and freedoms. While they appeared to be indispensable in Turkey, a diverse situation could often arise to dismantle such relationships. This is especially true, when Turkey experienced the *military Coup* on September 12: in September 1980 that largely mirrored the human rights violations. It is this *Coup* that the issues of democracy grabbed the attention of many Turks, who have, in turn, helped to variegate the concept of secularism itself. Existing structures that were already embodied in a set of norms and values shaped the principle of secularism. An attempt of this kind was one way to keep democracy alive, but secularism on its own was not capable to save democracy. After all, democracy was reinstated under Turgut Özal, since the civilian rule returned by the general election of 1983.

On the road to the restoration of democracy, secular norms (for example, the constitutional amendment of Article 163 concerning the banning

of politics on the basis of class or religion) became entrenched through a gradual liberalisation of the political system in the period of 1989-91. It can also be observed that the newly enhanced role of religion in this period inflamed secularism's zeal to maintain its crucial function of the separation of religion and the state; with its corollary that no one should interfere with others' religion affairs. Above all, the state was expected to be impartial and should keep balance between different faiths.

In the late 1990s, Turkey was tested. The rise of modern Turkish society was accompanied by a general increase in religious belief and observance. Not surprisingly, the issue of Turkish identity was questioned, since a large group of Turks were already advocators of the principles of Islam. The irony was that the Kemalist model of modernity was dominant, implying that secularism was deeply entrenched in Turkish society.

In the early 2000s, the situation was, to say the least of it, difficult. Here, party politics was key to this. The period witnessed a shift, when the political discourse of mainstream Islamic groups embraced secularism, albeit passive form. The emergence of the Justice and Development (AK) Party in 2002 was usually greeted with distrust and suspicion by secularists and reflected on the rethinking of the nature of Turkish democracy. This rhetoric is closely associated with the prospect of Turkey's European Union (EU) membership. Although Turkey's aspiration to become a member goes back as far as 1963, with the Ankara Association Agreement, the negotiations talks only started in 2005. Efforts at harmonization process continue, since the opening negotiation talks have reinforced enthusiasm for political, economic and social reforms. Often such reforms have occurred, with more conventional expressions of faith on the rise.

2. Religious Freedom in Turkish Constitution

Despite its allegedly conventional expressions of faith, Turkish secularism derived its jurisdiction from the constitutional framework. In this regard, the most politically significant development concerning legal mechanisms was the introduction of constitutional principle of secularism in 1937, as an amendment to the 1924 Constitution. Later, this principle was incorporated

in the 1961 and 1982 Constitution. Given its focus on the democratic principles, the Turkish historical and spiritual values, and the sacred tenets of religion were regarded as important parts of the state ideology, but only to the extent that they were compatible with the principles of Kemalism. And the judicial protection provided that religious doctrines do not go beyond the rigid boundaries drawn by the Constitution. From this perspective, the religion of Islam is constitutionally considered as sacred and worthy of the governmental endowment.

The key phrases specified in the 1982 Constitution were contemporary civilization and secularism to the extent to which: of the state was expected to favour and enforce a secular way of life. In the first place, such phrases were a primary goal of the Kemalist reforms, all of which are guaranteed were by Article 174 of the Constitution. The aim was to make Turkish society accord with the values of contemporary civilization and to safeguard the secular character of the Republic. Today, this rhetoric constitutes a core of Turkish state's ideology.

The necessity of separation of religion from the political domain is best exemplified in Article 24/1, where it places an emphasis on the boundary for freedom of religion and consciousness. Article 24/1 provides that 'no one shall be allowed to exploit or abuse religion or religious feelings or things held sacred by religion, in any manner whatsoever, for the purpose of personal or political influence, or for even partially basing the fundamental, social, economic, political, and legal order of the State on religious tenets'. Moreover, Article asserts that everyone has the right to conscience, religious faith and freedom of expression. No one is forced to attend religious services or ceremonies, or declare religious faith and thoughts. Referral to any religion convention by politicians and political parties in the course of political activity is uncommon. Otherwise such practices can be seen as abuse or exploitation of relevant provisions in the Constitution. Article explicitly defines the boundaries prohibited behaviour, which is applicable in civil liberties (i.e., freedoms of expression and association). It is, thus, obligatory to elude personal influence. Furthermore, the principles regarding the social order should remain inviolate. In practice, no one can make claims on social order. It is by no means within the purview of religious freedom of individuals, but the Turkish state.

With regard to the right to religion education, Article 24/2 of 1982 Constitution designates that Islamic religious and moral education are to be performed under the supervision of the state. On the one hand, the religious culture and moral training are among the compulsory subjects that are taught in primary and secondary educational schools. On the other hand, for all other religious education and training is left to the preferences of individuals; for those under aged, their families' views are taken into consideration. This is despite the fact that Article serves as a basic source of national law so that individuals are expected to conform to it, but does not make any referral to freedom of religious education for the ethnic groups. A practical difficulty of this is that Article prohibits the private educational institutions on the basis of the uniformity and, to some extent, coercive secular education system.

Article 136 states that religion is subject to the parameters of secularism to maintain national integrity. In practical terms, the Constitution of 1982 does not ensure that Islam will dominate the public or political sphere, despite its sympathy with the concept of nationalized Islam. This Constitution defines religious belief as a feeling, and a private faith of individual conscience. Basically, this means that the right to organize public and political life was denied to devout Muslims. They were allowed to practice Islam only in private venues (Erdoğan 1999: 378, 379).

There is no doubt that the Constitution guarantees freedom of belief and warship, whilst admitting that they may effectively be constrained in order to protect the public order and generate ethnical principles. Given that secularism concerns the rights of the citizen and humanitarian policies on the basis of reason (Naidu 2007: 1), substantive specific rights exist in the 1982 Constitution. Article 10 implicitly or explicitly states that no one should be discriminated on the basis of language, race, colour, gender, political opinion, religion or belief and ethnic origin, etc. Article also provides the basis for the exercise of legal and political rights. Therefore, legitimate pattern of religious behaviour is essential that has to be more transparent and regularized. At the same time, the government institutions should function in line with the principle of equality so that the principle of secularism can easily be reinforced.

Gönül OĞUZ

Still, the issue of constitutional reform is becoming more prominent in Turkey, which indicates growing disillusionment with the existing rights and freedom. Equally important, the headscarf has been one of the controversial issues in Turkish politics. Because it is viewed as a political symbol representing an Islamist ambition to maintain control in the public sphere, the secularist circles have always remained alert to make sure that it does not appear in public institutions (Çakmak 2009: 25). Although the government efforts to lift the long standing ban on the headscarf in: universities by amending the Constitution in 2008, the Constitutional Court annulled the legislation and the ban remains in effect. In the same period, the AK Party was faced with a closure case filed by the Supreme Court due to its move to lift the headscarf ban. The constitutional amendment to Article 10 provides that 'state organs and administrative authorities shall act in compliance with the principle of equality before the law in all their proceedings and in utilization of all forms of public services'. Perhaps, this is an effective action that the constitutional court is expected to preserve the status quo. This situation may lead to perverse effects on democracy and individual freedoms.

Given this outlook, one may assume that the Constitution contains provisions that are inconsistent with pluralist society. At its most extreme, many people urge Turkey to overhaul its military-inspired Constitution of 1982 in a sense that the revised Constitution may eventually reflect the country and society. In fact there is a greater scope for the Constitutional Court to contribute to the realization of secular aspirations. The key question is that whether Turkey will attempt to promote secular values on a European scale or embrace the Islamic principles of the third-world. It should not go unnoticed that the successive Turkish governments have tried to combine religion (Islam) with a secular political framework. This is seen in the decision of the Constitution Court on 7 March 1989 as the Court stated that 'Turkey could not be European type secular country'. The Court regarded liberty as a threat to the Country and denied that functioning Turkish secularism implied European style freedom. At best, a modern form of religious freedom in the Turkish Constitution is yet to be established.

3. Secularism and the Rise of the AK Party

Since 1980s, the spectre of the trouble of Turkish democracy raised: political Islam, which founded its expression within the far peripheral segments of both political and civil society. Apparently, the Welfare Party and the Virtue Party were the representatives of the political Islam in Turkey and they were far from the centre (Gönenç 2006: 14). It was certainly the case that the rising Islamist the Welfare Party, which had already become the largest party in general election of 1973, was a worrying development for Turkey's secularism. This was more relevant to secular centre-right and centre-left parties. In the 1980s, the new business elite pioneered by Turgut Özal, took advantage of the economic liberalization to internationalize itself. In the process, Anatolian-based businesses gained self-confidence, lessening fear of the outside world. As more flexible and adaptive newcomers, this new class tacitly endorsed the EU process and demonstrated very little, if any, opposition to privatization efforts. It is this socially conservative, but economically liberal business elite that forms the backbone of the AK Party's support (Çakmak 2009: 25).

Paradoxically, the outcome of economic liberalization demonstrates the success of the political Islam. Simply, the Welfare Party's challenge derived from the ideological roots of the system. In the mid-1990s, there were already great anxieties over growing Islamic activities, when the Welfare Party's had headed many local governments, mainly in Istanbul and Ankara. The Party rejected the notion that religion must remain outside politics, despite exact nature of policies, which it would pursue if given a free hand, was difficult to discern.

It is interesting to note that the Welfare Party represented a continuity of views on the question of how to integrate Islam into government. Under these circumstances, the Army Generals sent signals to intervene, while one eye on the Kemalist principles. In 2001, this "soft" *coup,* which directly targeted political Islam, led to split of the National Outlook Tradition (NOT). The result was separation of reformist faction itself from the conservative cadres. What is striking about this separation is that the new generation of the NOT founded a new political party – the AK Party. This marked a new period of Turkish politics when it became a leading party in November 2002 general elections, with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Prime

Minister. Obviously, the AK Party was founded by politicians, who experienced the failure of a pro-Islamist policy and the states' determination to deal with a strong emphasis on an Islamist style in government. Although Erdoğan, the leader of the party, frequently stated that he severed his former affiliations, his party has always been considered as the successor of the banned pro-Islamist Welfare and Virtue Parties (Çakmak 2009: 25). The Party embraced "passive secularism" as a principle. This new discourse has been sceptical of both political Islamism and the assertive secularism in line with the Kemalist principle.

Not surprisingly, ever since the crushing victory, discussions have revolved around whether the AK Party would blur the boundaries between secularism and religion. What was clear from the early stage was to maintain peace among diverse beliefs, schools of thoughts and perspectives as a new paradigm of its polity. Such tendencies have been described as an insurance of freedom of religion and conscience. The AK Party shares the values of conservative democracy. Much consideration has, therefore, been given to the protection of important values and principles, rather than the conservation of established institutions and relations.

This rhetoric provided many credits to the conservative circle. Even more striking, the conservatist and central rightist parties including the National Action Party, the True Path Party, the Motherland Party and the AK Party won about 70% of votes in the national elections for decades (Kuru 2007: 149). Even so, these parties had limited impact on state policies the concerning religion, indicating a continuing pointing to secularist dominance in military and judicial bureaucracy. Although the AK Party cadres were rooted in the NOT, from its inception, the Party leadership took pains to prove it was a moderate (conservative-democracy) party, with centre-right disposition. With certain exceptions, not only at the level of discourse, but at the policy level, the AK Party has been careful to remain within the parameters of secular-democratic regime (Gönenç 2006: 15).

Undoubtedly, this discourse has provided some insights into pursuing progress. Erdoğan claimed that the religion should not act as a political instrument, instead contribute to social peace and political diversity in society because it has allegedly created and exacerbated divisions. The AK Party has veered towards more morality and rationality, while synthesizing local

and universal values, tradition, and modernity. This view is clearly evident in the very fact that an increasing number of the Party members committed to the EU membership issue. Its most sustained practical result was Turkey's adaptation of the EU's legal structure by the liberalization of the political systems. In economic front, Erdoğan government, which has, so far, favoured the pro-globalization values and endorsed the idea of global economy. As ever, the Party has been a keen supporter of the free-market economic policies including privatization and foreign direct investments in Turkey.

4. Is Turkish Secularism Special?

Literally, secularism is the view that religious considerations should be excluded from civil affairs or public education. In a purely secular state, there would be no preferential treatment given to any religious viewpoint, indeed in both local and national affairs there would be no place given to religious convictions (Phillips 2006: 3). Secularism is not merely about communal harmony, but tolerance. By no means, does secularism ban religion, but it does promise to overthrow political leaders, who are corrupt and tyrannical or have desire to exploit religion for political or personal purposes. Therefore, freedom and democracy become prerequisite for secularism. If one sees the principles of democracy as insurance for perfect balance, then religion and state affairs should not be played in the hands of a single entity (Kışlalı 1991: 93). Generally, religious power, combined with political authority, may act as mechanisms to discredit the functioning of a true form of democracy.

According to Samur (2009), politics has always been considered as the central dimension of Islam. As regards to widespread perception, Islam is easily labelled as the political religion. In contrast to this reductionist perception, Islam is a multidimensional phenomenon, which includes theology, philosophy, ethics, law and spirituality alongside with politics. Therefore, it is appropriate to label Islam as the political religion, but it is not appropriate to reduce Islam merely to politics. Identifying Islam with politics is the source of many misunderstandings and problems, because such identification makes Islam nothing, except politics. While Islamists are proud to empha-

size close links between Islam and politics, they forget that the politization of religion makes Islam no longer religion, but political ideology, which jeopardizes the religious essence of Islam (Samur 2009: 119).

Taking into account these approaches, many studies suggest that the Turkish secularism lacks modernity. Historically, this is because Islamic political thinking was deployed extremely conservative ideas or traditions. As Kışlalı points out (1991), the Ottoman Sultans were not fully prepared to benefit the scientific research. As religion stood on the way as an obstacle, the society could not catch up with the era. One piece of evidence of this claim is that *Seyhulislam* had introduced a *fetwa* for the Ottoman Muslims to make use of the press after 270 years. This is despite the fact that the printing house in Turkey was established after few years of Guterberg's invention (Kışlalı 1991: 68). The Empire needed to modernise its reasoning and way of life, but had fallen behind. The argument from the special condition of Turkey should be taken as a reference point for retaining the current situation.

Against this background, Daver (1967) argued that the Turkish reformers never intended to create a new religion or suppress Islam by banning all moral and religious values prevailed in society, despite the curbing the freedom of religion on behalf of the secular state. Rather, they sought to set up of a new "milieu" for the development of religious liberties. Some limitations were inspired by nationalistic feelings (such as the Turkish prayers in mosques), with a strong desire to oppose the obscurity and idleness as the case of abolition of the religious orders (Daver 1967: 65). On the main, these reforms were accomplished within the context of secular principles.

It is generally accepted that the Kemalist preoccupation with secularism and the marginalisation of Islam is not without basis. Aydın and Keyman (2004) highlight, at least three factors that are worth emphasising. First, insofar as Islam is characterised by the incorporation of the political into the religious realm, it constitutes a radical alternative to both secularism and secular political authority. Second, Islam is conducive to the creation of an alternative political community and identity on the basis of divine revelation and in this respect is able to have a unifying appeal to the masses as a source of common identity. Third, the Islamic impact on Ottoman social and political life serves as a reminder that Islam can indeed be a base of resistance to modernisation efforts that follow the Western pattern (Aydın

and Keyman 2004: 6). In simple terms, Islam is a sensitive issue for the Kemalist elites, who attempt to impose a strict version of secularism on Turkish society, with a fruitful outcome.

While acknowledging that democracy and secularism are twinned, neither religion nor secularism can be enforced without consent. Pierre-Jean Luizard, who studied secularism in many countries, claimed that The Turkish secularism did not bear a resemblance to French model, rather reflected on the characteristics of its former colony, notably Algeria. Simply, France has separated religion from the state affairs that is a sharp contrast with Turkey's management of religion affairs. Luizard has taken the view that the main problem of Turkish secularism is transformation, which occurs between old and new elites (Kahraman 2008: 74). This can be a reason why the heart of Turkish secularism is often portrayed as a process of conflict vacillation, as far as common European values are concerned.

Democracy is not a desire for romanticism, but indispensable for political and social modernisation. In the West, such exploration is largely based on ideological ground, whilst in Turkey on the socio-economic domain. In the West, attempts by the church to restrict powers of the state had resulted on a formation of the political system that embodied freedom. Even if level of belief remained relatively high in some European countries, such as the UK and Germany, religion is increasingly marginalised in public affairs and confined to the private sphere. Consequently, more conventional and established expressions of the faith have continued to decline (Adams 2001: 255). As a matter of fact that secularism was a key demand of the leaders of the bourgeois revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries in the Western European countries (i.e., France). Accordingly, human beings (or at least a minority of them) could arrive at truth through reason and construct rational social institutions. It is essential to reduce the role of religion and expand the role of the non-religious - secular - sphere in public life, with the aim of separating the functions of Church and State.[2] Socratic irony lies in the fact that in countries including Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and England, where constitutional linkages exist between the Church and the state, secular values are more prevalent in every day practice and norm

_____

2 Comper, A. (Why, We Should Defend Secularism?, International Viewpoint, News and Analysis from the Fourth International, http://www.internationalviewpoint.org

(Naidu 2007: 1).

The corollary of this is that secularism in the West emerged as a class struggle. The bourgeoisie demanded separation of religion from the state affairs on the basis of ending the relationship between aristocracy and church due to rivalry. This was resulted in success, when political power of the aristocracy was diminished. Unlike the West, the origin of Turkish secularism is linked to the philosophical insights rather than the institutional or political entity. This is because of absent of clergy, as was not the case in the West. Religion gained political significance over time. Consequently, the principle of secularism acted as substitution of 1923 Republican reforms of which the national sovereignty constituted always a device. No less important in such reforms was the sovereignty of the people as a gift, which intensified secularism. The current form of Turkish secularism still draws heavily on the positivism. This derives from 19th century traditions, faith and culture (Kahraman 2008: 73).

On a deeper level, it is here where the secular values can easily be infringed. In this respect, all artefacts can be removed by democratisation of secularism as the main solution. Quite apart from this, the modern form of secularism asks, ''what causes such infringements?'' In some ways, a long-standing tension between religion and state in Turkey reflects World events. However, there are divergences of domestic politics that is shaped by the internal dynamics. The changes in Turkish political lives have acted as determinant of divergent policies, which were pursued in different periods (Tarhanlı 1999: 15). For the former, Turkey is located in the Islamic geography and surrounded by the Muslim states. This surrounding reflects essentially religious perception. Since the early 1970s, there has been a remarkable revival of Islam. Turkey could not afford to be isolated from this geography for political and economic reasons. Rather, it has been "held in the countries arms". For the latter, instability of political system has made the way to Islamic tendencies that have been a matter of practical politics.

As it has been claimed, the religious freedom in Turkey has been curbed by hard-line secularism. Because of the sensitivity of the issues, judiciary and military are called upon to protect secular aspiration of the state, whenever necessary. This is usually done by either the *Coup* or challenging government decisions through judicial review on the ground that the secular principles

of the state are infringed. As Mardin put it, Turkey has a compassion for negative secularism (Mardin 2005: 129). In similar vein, Sterling (2011) takes view point that secular system has been as intolerant toward religion. The AK Party and its supporters might be undermining its key elements including the country's pro-Western identity, gender equality, educational and economic progress, and Turkey's constitution, which defines the country's system as democratic, secular, and parliamentary (Sterling 2011: 2).

Determining how large popular religious demands enter the priority lists of the political parties in Turkey, politicians are bound to be problematic. The irony is that every party constantly regarded religion as an individual conscience. Each felt obligated to initiate political reforms that allowed religious freedoms. For example, the Democratic Party (DP) eased the curbs on religious liberties in the 1950s. Accordingly, the DP led by Adnan Menderes came to power and showed a more flexible and tolerant policy toward Islamic practices (Samur 2009: 119). The advent of the Party, which in the freely contested the election of 1950 ousted Atatürk's own Republican Peoples Part (RPP), was hailed as the ultimate vindication of Atatürk's policies and dreams (Harris 1970: 421). The whole situation led to the Revolution of March 1960.

In principle, the very meaning of secularism ensures that the state should allow different religious groups to co-exist and excluding religion from public life is the only way to allow such to happen. In this regard, one particular area of cry that attracted critics by the West is the poor record for protection of human rights in Turkey, although some impressive legislative changes have occurred in recent years. Turkey continues to be criticised for its restrictive practices, which fall short of full respect for freedom of religion. Walker (2008) writes:

'one of the drawbacks of the Turkish secular system is that it does not let religious groups or congregations enjoy the same rights and privileges that are enjoyed by the Christian denominators in the West. Secular Turkey is a myth because under the surface there is a different Turkey based on preserving the dominance of orthodox Sunni Islam' (Turkey and Secularism: Myth or Reality).

These deficiencies pointing to Turkish secularism may simply be con-

trasting with the image of the West. For example, limitations on the use of the scarf may infringe upon human rights, as defined by the rules of the game, but the unlimited use of the scarf within Turkey would amount to a violation of the same rules. In the latter case, the presence of the scarf represents not simply right but an demand (and threat) to the mainstream system of Turkish democracy (Kordela 2005:213). In cases where secular women's civil rights and religious rights to free expression are in conflict, whose rights should be privileged and why? (Yukich 2011: 5). In May 2011, President Nicolas Sarkozy's Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) party opened a controversial debate on secularism and Islam amid signs of dissent from within his own party over the merits of re-opening discussions on such a hot-button issue. The result was the implementation of a ban on wearing full face veils in public places.[3]

To elaborate this point further, the secular understanding of human rights has had a particularly pronounced impact on the European politics and culture. Although religion and human rights need not exist in a zero-sum relationship, the recent history of Europe would seem to indicate that to some extent they have. Religion thus stands at tension with the idea of a human rights culture (Calo 2005: 105). In this context, freedom of worship continues to be respected. The Turkish government has recently announced an initiative with the aim of improving dialogue, with the ethnic minorities and addressing their concerns. For the first time, a municipal council has, for instance, allowed *Alevis* to practice their worship at *Cem Houses.* Additionally, same mosque tariffs have applied to their water charges. Despite these positive developments, obstacles still have to be overcome. *Alevis* continue to face the same problems as before with regard to the right to education and places of worship, in particular.

Ironically, non-Muslim communities still face problems due to the lack of legal personality. They include restrictions on the training of clergy and private higher religious education, together with the lack of opportunities in the public education system. The closure of the Halki (*Heybeliada*) Greek Orthodox seminary illustrates restrictions of kind. This does not constitute the total picture. In the last decades, there have been a series of court rulings

---

3 International News, Sarkozy Party Launches Debate on Islam, Secularism, France 24, 05/04/2011 HTTP://WWW.FRANCE24.COM/EN

following the attacks against non-Muslim clergy and places of worship in number of Turkish provinces. In April 2007, killing of three Protestants in Malatya was listed as one of such incidents (Turkey's Progress Report 2008: 19). Yet, implementation of the Ministry of Interior circular of June 19 2007 on freedom of religion of non-Muslim Turkish citizens is yet to born fruits. These limitations simply stand on the way of true form of democracy and thus weakening secularism.

Given these limitations, however, one should not underestimate the fact that the AK Party attracted a great deal of external attention and support owing to its breathtaking performance with respect to Turkey's EU bid. Bold reforms were introduced; the reform packages were adopted at the parliament in an attempt to harmonize Turkish legal and political system with the EU legislation. These attempts have paid off; the EU circles welcomed the AK Party's performance, extending huge support and encouragement for the party leadership (Çakmak 2009: 25). This is self-evidently plausible to assume, but there is now more opportunity than in the past to reinforce the democratization process. Under the influence of the EU, serious attempts have been made to strengthen the human rights regime, develop free market principles and more importantly, form *the acquis communautaire* as a candidate country. Since 2001, the Turkish Parliament adopted 8 reforms packages regarding granting more rights to religious and ethnic minorities. Concerns over a number of property issues for non-Muslim minorities were often eased, when the Law on foundations adopted in February 2008.

Indeed, there are positive aspirations of Turkish secularism that distinguish it from other Islamic countries, which are apparently reluctant to embrace democracy in defence of their values. This owns much to the different evolution that is linked to the question of why other Islamic countries have a difficulty of establishing secular-democratic systems. Kışlalı highlighted in 1991 the term as different evolution that has much to do with religious and cultural factors. Apart from Kemalist revolutions, Kışlalı famously confined the answer to the Central Asian Turkish culture or cultural legacy prevailed in Anatolia. Turks synthesized with the natives and different cultures that had previously existed in Anatolian soils, when they settled in Anatolia. Through a sense of tolerance, Turks learned to view things, which were different than theirs. This attitude was stimulated by democratic elements

that had long embedded in their earlier traditions. As another reason, Kışlalı rightly pointed out, the Anatolian *tariqats* were established on the basis of the principles of affection for *Allah,* whilst Arabian and Iranian originated *tariqats* bore upon *Allah fears.* The *Mevlevis, Bektashies*, and *Baıalis* contain solid evidence of such affection. In this sense, discrimination between the Anatolian *Alevies* and the Middle Eastern *Shias* is alarming, despite they have both the same ethnic origin (Kışlalı 1991: 70). It is clear that, as in the case of the West, Turkish secularization as an evolutionary process has come a long way, as it has evolved. Additionally, the distinction between Turkey and Islamic states was further made by Atatürk, who accomplished the enlightenment revolutions compromised secularism. Presumably, in the absence the cultural, as well as social legacy under the leadership of Atatürk, such revolutions, of which the Islamic countries do not dare to carry out even today, would have been far more difficult to attain.

There are, of course, other reasons for secularism that is different from one that enduring in the European countries. One prominent reason of this differentiation is that the case of religion is not Christianity, but Islam – does not remain a private concern among individuals and groups. Secondly, the Ottoman history of religion ancient institutions, such as *seyhulislam* and *calips* played a political role in reinforcing *fetwa*. Thirdly, a religion standpoint has merged with and corresponded to socio-economic factors. Turkey's underdeveloped regions, especially the South (East), have provoked widespread cynicism with regard to the public policies of the government. Consequently, commitment to the sacred has become more alive in recent years. So, the ways in which parties perform this role depends upon socio-economic development of the region in which they operate. Unlike the West, tendency is that the pro-Islamic parties usually act as charitable organizations, distributing the basic necessities, such as food, firewood and coal etc. The criticism is often levelled at parties because they allegedly manipulate religion sensation of *masses,* with one eye on the increasing their popularities.

Finally, one needs to point out that European identity is yet to prevail over the national identities, which are still at the fore front and do not appear to be eroding in favor of the newly emerging values. In this context, European identity is a new layer of self-identification, added on top of national identities

without necessarily challenging them (Bac 2007: 38). While Islamism and *laïcism* have been competing for the top prize, the Turkish notion of *laïcism* has gradually transformed itself to a religion like, political ideology. Two cosmologies are hereby treated in a historical-cultural perspective: first, an overview of highlights from the Empire to the Republic; second, a review of secular trends from the Republic to the present. The conclusion is that, as regards the quest for national identity, *laïcité* may well be an arbiter for the peaceful co-existence of contenders like Turk and Islam (Güvenç 1998: 1).

5. Turkish Secularism: A Fading Relevance?

In recent years, secularism became one of the key issues in Turkey. A great deal of the debate has centered on whether Turkey is a purely secular state and how far it can be a secular role model for Islamic societies. In fact Turkey is often praised for a modern state, despite secularism is claimed to be in need of constant defence. There have always been those who have argued that the land of Turkey is a beacon of hope and, that democracy and secularism prevail within a mainly Muslim country.

From secularists point of view, radical Islamism has little potential to rule in Turkey. Atatürk's reforms transformed society deeply, secularism and multiparty democracy have relatively long legacies, and the military and western alliances oppose radical Islamism. Thus, although the majority of Turks consider themselves religious, they are non-conservative in the sense that they are willing to reconcile their faith with the opportunities that democracy, modernity and largely secular lifestyles offer. It is unlikely that they would support a revolutionary Islamism (Somer 2007: 1275).

It should be pointed out that, since 19th century, an attempt has been made to reconcile the revival of Islam with Turkish nationalism, which has become known as "the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis". Its advocates appear to have moved into important positions in the state apparatus. And their views are said to be influential in the Constitution and education system. The basic approach is based on the elements of moral, patriotic and ordered society, whereby the state and family are bound together. As claimed, such elements had long rooted in Turkish communities before the advent of

Islam. These characteristics of the national culture had produced two great Turkish empires; the *Seljukian* and the Ottoman. The important point is that the synthesis have, to some extent, broken with modern intellectuals (as well as Kemalists), who strongly support the liberal ideas of the West. Typically, these intellectuals endorsed the importation of elements including positivism, pragmatism, humanism and cosmopolitanism. The Turkish modernisation process is still a combination of Islam and such elements. On the main, there has been a decreasing influence of religion on the state, whilst highlighting the religion on collective conscious and identity level.

In many ways, Turkey is a vibrantly modern and secular country, where Atatürk's legacy appears, on one level, to be alive and well.[4] There is a greater stress upon drawbacks, whilst studies have focused on the positive aspirations for the Turkish secularism. A series intellectual attempts, which exclude religion from public life, do not yet appear to be in the making and is perhaps impossible at the present time.

First, what is frequently criticised about the Turkish model of secularism is the state's involvement in religious services. In order to meet the demand of society, the state of Turkey continues to finance civil servants, where it clearly cannot be the case in most European countries. The role of the state has been shaped by a trend that favours Islam through the existence of obligatory religious instruction in schools. This is to say, the state plays a key role in funding the *Imam-Hatip* schools (religious education) and *imams* in mosques, who are civil servants of the States' Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*).

Second, in recent years, the number of *Imam-Hatip* schools has increased significantly – about third of the whole, as the Turkish Statistic Institution (2008) noted. This trend provides a greater opportunity for those with strong and informed religious beliefs that have gained a high position in Turkish society.

Third, Muslim voluntary organisations are regarded as powerful fillip to the expansion of Islamic way of life. These organisations have survived, but have no legal status. They now operate openly than used to be the case. In this regard, the most influential recent case is the *Gülen Movement*,

---

4 Muslim in the World Stage Turkey: Battle of the Headscarf, BBC News, July 22 2002.

which was initiated by Fetullah Gülen in the early 1970s. The movement has focused on mainly mosque activities in some Western European countries (most notably, Germany). In particularly, the movement has opened dormitories and schools in Turkey. Significantly, it has proved valuable in proving students with bursaries, scholarships, jobs, finance for new financial ventures, etc. On the main, such organizations illustrate a pattern of inherited Islamic traditions.

Fourth, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (PRA)[5] makes a substantial contribution to the religion services. The PRA administrates mosques and Qur'an schools, appoints local religious representatives (*imams* and *muftis*), and organizes pilgrimages. Apparently, its most basic goal is to influence, if not determine the religious activities. Above all, most political discussions are the product of the interaction between the PRA and secularism. The PRA issues opinions on a specific religious issue. Therefore, it is often under severe criticism.

Fifth, from the legal point of view, there is now more "room for manoeuvre" than ever before to use religion for political ends. The legal principles makes it possible pointing to the Constitutional lift of Article 163. So, the abuse of religion is most likely.

For future prospects, it is by no means clear which way the wind will blow. What is clearer is that globalization increasingly nullifies attempts to bring into the progressive and rationalistic values that may govern Turkish society. Turks have now quite different ways of looking at the world from those who were sceptical of the modernity and progress. What has evolved here is freedom of expression in the art and faith, freedom of choice of representatives in governance, and in particular, freedom to make life choices. Gradually, these elements tend to be translated into democratic practice from the so-called authoritarian relationships. It is not surprising that, since the beginning of 2008, the "Republican strikes" led millions of Turks to drag to the streets in big cities (İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir), in order to protest Islamic tendencies of the government, when they were perceived to be threat to Turkey's secular system. It should also be noted that, even though the distinct commitments, affiliations and beliefs persist

---

5 The Presidency of Religious Affairs was established in 1924 and is accountable to the Prime Ministers' Office.

in Turkey, most people are tolerant and content to allow for religion to remain separate from politics. At the same time, a significant numbers of Turks reject the government attempts to impose Islamic perceptions that are regarded as clashing with secular principles. Certainly, this suggests a culturally based hostility to religious values, with conflicting notions of morality. Under those circumstances, the regime should find it difficult to establish a durable Islamic identity.

It remains to discuss the question of whether or to what extent the principle of secularism is defined as the separation between the affairs of the state and religion is implemented objectively in Turkey. Whether the Turkish model of secularism meets the essential requirement of this definition is still on unsolved controversy. Currently, Kemalists defend the dominant assertive secularist ideology, which excludes religion from the public sphere. The pro-Islamists such as the AK Party, on the other hand, try to promote a new passive secularist ideology, which allows public visibility of religion. Therefore, as argued, what Turkey has witnessed for last decade has no longer been a struggle between secularism and Islamism, but has been a conflict between the two types of secularism (Kuru 2007: 150). Under these circumstances, the famous quotation from the France Revolution as – when one of the revolutionaries boasted to a peasant – 'we are going to pull down everything that reminds you of God' highlights the supporting view that religious considerations in Turkey need to be excluded from public education or civil affairs, whatever it is. For a simple fact, they are standing on the way of Turkey's prosperity.

6. Conclusion

For decades, debate between secularism and religion has been a discernible feature of Turkish politics. The religious exploitation has been taken place in Turkish political system, especially since 1950s. From the socio-economic point of view, this trend will continue as long as Turkey lags behind. Yet, the experience that Turkey has gone through since the Ottoman legacy is very crucial to figure out how far religious tendencies can exert influence on a secular society, and thus prevent the democratization process. The issue of constitutional reform is becoming more prominent in

Turkey, which indicates growing disillusionment with the existing rights and freedoms.

Within this broad framework, there is a shift in secularism. This is already seen in the transformation in a sense that Turkey has undertaken a series of reforms, which should help to understand the dynamics of democratization and political secularism in a Muslim country. Yet, the context in which the idea is forged these reforms have outflanked the challenges. Turkey provides some evidence that democracy and Islam can work together. Undoubtedly, Turkey has a great passion for modernization, but its perception of secular thoughts is yet to be in line with a true form of democracy.

Ideally, secularism is best achieved if the state leaves masses largely to their devices. It seems more appropriate to say that the successive Turkish governments have not freed religion to function independently from state the affairs and performed their religious tasks via the PRA. This failure incites religion to enter public places as social and political instruments. It seems more appropriate to say that in such cases, Turkey endorses separation of religion and state affairs, but it retains large control on the issues fall under faith, and thus intervenes in the lives of individuals. The whole issue turns on which and to what extent religious activities should be restricted or to the extent religion is precluded and whether it will become institutionalised as an independent entity. Overall, Turkish secularism has a fragile existence.

References

Adams, I. (2006), Political Ideology Today, *Manchester University Press.*

Adanalı, A. H. (2008), The Presidency of Religious Affairs and the Principle of Secularism in Turkey, *The Blackwell Publishing Ltd.*

Aydın, S. and Keyman, E. Fuat (2004), European Integration and the Transformation of Turkish Democracy, Centre For European Policy Studies, EU-Turkey Working Papers, No.2 August.

Baç, M. Müftüler and Taşkın, E. (2007), Turkey's Accession to the European Union: Does Culture and Identity Play A Role?, Ankara Review of European Studies Volume: 6, No:2 (Spring: 2007), pP. 31-50.

Calo, Zachary R. (2005), Pluralism, Secularism and the European Court of Human Rights, Journal of Law and Religion, Vol. 26, Calo Final Document, pp.102-129.

Commission of European Communities (2008), Turkey's Progress Report. Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges, SEC(2008) 2699 final, COM(2008)674, Brussel.

Çakmak, C. (2009), Limits of the Constitutional Court As a Political Actor Shaping Political Lanscape, Wise Man Centre for Strategic Studies, Bilgesam, 11 Aralık, www. Bilgesam.org/en

Daver, B. (1967), Secularism in Turkey, A Dilemma in Turkish Politics. *Faculty of Political Sciences,* Ankara University.

Erdoğan, M. (1999), Religious Freedom in the Turkish Constitution, Vol. LXXXIX, No.3-4, *The Muslim World,* July-October.

Gönenç, L. (2006), Dynamics of Political Reform in Turkey. *Europa-Kolleg Hamburg,* Institute for Integration Research, Discussion Paper 1.

Güvenç, B. (1998), Secular Trends and Turkish Identity, Perceptions Journal of International Affairs, December (1997)-February (1998), Volume II - Number 4.

Kahraman, M. (2008), Secularism in European Countries and Turkey. *Mustafa Kemal University Journal of Social Science Institute*, Vol.5, Issue.9.

Kışlalı, A. T. (1991), Political Systems, Political Conflict and Compromise, *Imge Publications*, 67-8.

Kordela, A. Kiarina (2005), Secular Faith: Beyond Postmodern Reason and Religious Belief, Macalester International Vol. 15, pp.210-220.

Kuru, T. A. (2007), Changing Perspectives on Islamism and Secularism in Turkey: the Gülen Movement and the AK Party, www.GülenConference.org.uk.

Mardin, Ş. (2005), Turkey's Islamic Exceptionalism Yesterday and Today: Continuity Rupture and Reconstruction, *Turkish Studies*, Vol 6, No. 2.

Naidu, R. (2007), Is Secularism a Fairytale?, *The University of Hyderabad.*

Phillips, D. (2006), The Pressure of Secularism, *Cross Way Issue*, Summer, No.101.

Sandikci, Ö. and Ger, G. (2001), Fundamental Fashions: the Cultural Politics of the Turban and the Levi's, in Advances in Consumer Research, Volume 28, Pages: 146-150.

Sambur, B. (2009), The Great Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey: The Case of Justice and Development Party and Erdogan, European Journal of Economic and Political Studies, ejeps (2) 2, pp. 117-127.

Somer, M.(2007), Moderate Islam and Secularist Opposition in Turkey: İmplications for the World, Muslims and Secular Democracy, Third World Quarterly, Roudledge Taylor Francis Group Vol. 28, No. 7, pp. 1271-1289.

Sterling, J. (2011) Faith and Secularism in Turkey: A Divide or A Synthesis? June 10, CNN World, http://articles.cnn.com/2011-06-10/world/turkey.elections.secularism

Tarhanlı, İ. B. (1999), Muslim Society, Secularist State: Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey, İstanbul, *Afa Publication.*

Yilmaz, İ. (2011), Beyond Post-Islamism: Transformation of Turkish Islamism Toward 'Civil Islam' and Its Potential Influence in the Muslim World, European Journal of Economics and Political Studies, Ejeps-4(1), pp.245-280.

Yukich, G. (2011), In Turkey, Religious and Secular Living Side by Side, SSRC Secularism, Religion and Public Sphere, http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/2010/09/27/in-turkey-religious-secular-side-by-side.

Walker, L. J. (2008), Turkey and Secularism: Myth or Reality? *Asyrian International News Agency.*