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Hegemonic conflict in post-cold war Türkiye: Established elites encountering rising elites and changing dynamics

Soğuk savaş sonrası Türkiye'de hegemonik çatışma: Yerleşik elitlerin yükselen elitlerle karşılaşması ve değişen dinamikler

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Yazar bu çalışmada olası bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan ederler.
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Soğuk savaş sonrası Türkiye'de hegemonik çatışma: Yerleşik elitlerin yükselen elitlerle karşılaşması ve değişen dinamikler

Öz

Bu makale, Gramsci tarzı bir çerçeve kullanarak, 1990'ların ortalarından itibaren Türkiye'de sivil alanın neden ve nasıl bir mücadele alanı haline geldiğini açıklamayı amaçlamaktadır. Soğuk savaş sonrasında bloklar arasında tercih yapmak zorunda olmayan Türkiye bir belirsizlik dönemine girmiştir. Bu durum uzun zamandır üstü örtülü olan hegemon ve karşı-hegemonik sivil hareketler arasındaki çatışmanın ortaya çıkmasına neden olmuştur. Karşı-hegemonik yapı yeni şehirli dindarlardan oluşurken hegemonlar ise şehirli Kemalistlerden oluşmaktaydı. Karşı-hegemonik sivil toplumun Kemalist hegemonik söylemin etkisini kırmaya çalıştığı, bazı sivil toplum örgütlerinin ise devlet tarafından güç araçları olarak sahiplenildiği tespit edilmiştir. Bu amaçla, 1990'larda devlet-toplum bağını açıklamak için arşiv kaynakları ve süreli yayınlar kullanılmış, özellikle Türkiye'deki sivil topluma odaklanılmıştır. İlk olarak, Osmanlı döneminden bu yana Türkiye'deki sivil topluma dair tarihsel bir bakış açısı sunulmaktadır. Ardından, sivil toplum teorisine dair teorik bir genel bakış aktarılmış ve son bölümde 1990'larda Türkiye'deki sivil alan üzerindeki hegemonik mücadele üzerine bir tartışma yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Soğuk Savaş, Türkiye, 28 Şubat, Sivil alan, Kamusal alan.

Hegemonic conflict in post-cold war Türkiye: Established elites encountering rising elites and changing dynamics

Abstract

This paper aims at explaining why and how the civic sphere became a site of contestation in Türkiye from the mid-1990s, using a Gramscian framework. Türkiye, no longer having to choose between the two blocks after the Cold War, entered a period of uncertainty. This situation led to the outbreak of a long-hidden conflict between the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic civil movements. While the counter-hegemonic structure consisted of new urban religious people, the hegemons comprised of urban Kemalists. It is viewed that counter-hegemonic civil society sought to undermine the Kemalist hegemonic discourse, while some civil society organisations were appropriated by the state as apparatuses. This study draws on archival resources and periodicals to explore the state-society relationship in Türkiye during the 1990s, with a specific focus on civil society. The paper begins with a historical overview of civil society in Türkiye, tracing its development since the Ottoman period. Following this, a theoretical examination of civil society theory is presented. The final section discusses the hegemonic struggle over civil space in Türkiye during the 1990s.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This paper aims at investigating the complex role of civil society in shaping public discourse and democracy, with a particular focus on Türkiye's historical and sociopolitical landscape. It examines how civil society and the public sphere are intertwined in fostering collective action, as well as the emergence of social movements as described by Tilly. These movements thrive under deliberative democracy, characterized by the rule of law and freedom of expression, which allow for robust public engagement. Besides, it claims that key concepts such as civil society, the public sphere, and contentious pluralism, play vital roles in the development of democracy. As highlighted by thinkers like Habermas and Fraser, the public sphere provides a necessary space for collective identities and demands to emerge and contest prevailing power structures. This dynamic is essential for legitimizing the modern state and fostering a society responsive to various interests.

The article delves into the historical trajectory of Turkish civil society, rooted in the Ottoman Empire and evolving through the reforms of the Tanzimat and Islahat Edicts. These reforms laid the groundwork for modernization, although they were fraught with tensions between secularism and Islamic tradition. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's founding of the Turkish Republic marked a decisive break from the Ottoman-Islamic heritage, as the state adopted Westernized, secular reforms, particularly in areas like family law and gender roles. However, this secular identity met resistance from Islamic groups and subaltern publics who sought to maintain religious traditions in the face of Kemalist policies.

Throughout the twentieth century, various political factions debated Türkiye's ideological direction, often oscillating between Western secular ideals and Islamic identity. Following World War II and the onset of the Cold War, Türkiye was encouraged to adopt a multi-party system, further intensifying political diversity and public demands. The transition from a state-controlled to a liberal market economy in the 1980s sparked significant economic challenges, and the subsequent rise of small and medium enterprises contributed to an emergent conservative middle class aligned with Islamic political movements. Ultimately, the 28 February process of 1997, in which the Turkish military intervened to curb Islamist influence, highlighted the role of the military as a secularizing force and underscored the tensions between secularism and political Islam. This period saw an increased politicization of religious symbols, notably the headscarf, which became a prominent symbol of resistance for Islamist groups. During this time, civil society organizations advocating for religious rights, such as MAZLUM-DER, began to challenge secular state policies more openly.

Consequently, the rise of the AK Party represented a significant shift in Türkiye's political landscape. The AKP initially espoused a more democratic, pro-European Union stance, incorporating Islamic identity into a framework that emphasized pluralism, democracy, and human rights. Under the AKP, Turkish civil society experienced a resurgence, as various NGOs and advocacy groups engaged in public discourse on religious freedom, human rights, and political participation. To put all in a nutshell, the paper underscores that for deliberative democracy to flourish in Türkiye, public discourse must be inclusive and representative of all social strata. Civil society organizations, embodying diverse interests, have a crucial role in this process, as they challenge dominant narratives and promote a vision of the common good.

Keywords: Cold War, Türkiye, 28 February, Civic space, Public space.

INTRODUCTION

Civil society represents the common interests of the public and is closely linked to the public sphere. Civil society serves as the mechanism through which demands are raised, while the public sphere is the medium through which these demands are shaped. Both civil society and the public sphere rely on collective action. As Tilly argued, "Britain's burgeoning collective activity marked the birth of what we now call the social movement" (Tilly, 1993, p. 275). Social movements have historically thrived in countries where deliberative democracy is present. The rule of law, coupled with full freedom of expression, is essential for deliberative democracy to effectively promote social welfare.

Moreover, while there is no strong positive correlation between civil society and democracy, civil society entails a public comprised of subaltern entities and a free market (Kadıoğlu, p. 2005, 23). Deliberation serves as the process for arriving at collective decisions on issues, with the goal of advancing notions of the common good (Eriksen, 2005, p. 343).

Contentious pluralism is the mechanism by which deliberative democracy maintains its integrity, as deliberation often involves contentious issues that must be addressed and resolved (Guidry & Sawyer, 2003, p. 274). A fundamental component of modern democracy is a public sphere in which demands are expressed through civil society (Habermas, 2018, p. 110). The public sphere is defined "as the area of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be

formed" (Habermas, 1974, p. 49). Therefore, to legitimize the modern state and preserve collective identity, a "proxy" and a "space" for the expression of contentious issues must be created through media channels such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television (Habermas, 2007, p. 179).

Accordingly, civil society consists of a well-connected public free from the financial hegemony of any dominant authority. Financial hegemony may take the form of authoritarian rule, such as a monarchy, while opposition often arises from the free-market bourgeoisie. In this context, Turkish civil society is examined from a historical perspective.

Ottoman Roots and Modern Türkiye

Turkish modernization in the nineteenth century was initiated in response to European expansion, which prompted Ottoman statesmen to question the foundations of the state. While Islam was frequently invoked in the Tanzimat Edict, the Islahat Edict marked the true break between Islamic law, which had previously structured the Ottoman state, and secular law, which aimed to integrate the Ottomans into the European political order. Even Mustafa Reşid Paşa, a long-standing reform pioneer, criticized this abrupt departure from tradition (Davison, 1963, p. 57). Although strict reforms were implemented, the Ottoman state was still theoretically governed by Sharia law. Secular laws, known as kanun, coexisted along with religious law, and judges were accustomed to responding to regional demands. Furthermore, central authority was adaptable and capable of enacting new laws as needed (Gerber, 1994, p. 26).

The reformist faction advocated for following the European model of modernization in order to resist European encroachment. In contrast, Islamists argued that a return to Islamic values would ensure the survival of the Ottoman Empire against Western threats. This ideological divide remained unresolved until the establishment of the Turkish Republic. Since its founding, the Republic of Türkiye has been led by anti-liberal elites, whose primary agenda was maintaining the omnipotence of the inner ruling strata, especially through statist policies (Çınar, 2006, p. 471). The secular form of government was adopted by the elite from the outset of the republic, and a new national identity was forged through a rejection of the Ottoman-Islamic past. Islamic identity was strongly denied, and the political and judicial reforms devised by the Committee of Union and Progress were rigorously followed by the new Turkish republic. These reforms included redefining family roles and women's status to create a Turkish society with a Western appearance. Gender roles previously assigned by Sharia were rejected, and new roles were established through laws based on rationalism, devoid of theocratic influence (Kodaman, 1990, p. 144).

The Kemalist regime consistently suppressed public expression of will through elections, driving the oppressed underground and depriving them of political participation. This repression fostered the development of subaltern counter-publics, notably religious groups, whose goal was to free religion from political interference. These groups, deeply rooted in Turkish society, were notably oppressed by the Kemalist regime. As Fraser argues, the proliferation of subaltern counter-publics can enhance subaltern participation in stratified societies (Fraser, 1990, pp. 57-65). In this context, women were transformed into symbols of a political outlook, with modernity being defined through their assigned roles. Furthermore, the theocratic connotations of the Ottoman ancien régime made it imperative for the new republic to eradicate these symbols while constructing a new secular order, as the ancien régime permeated all aspects of daily life (Kandiyoti, 2012, p. 515).

Despite these efforts, Islam remained a significant element of Turkish identity. As Lewis observed, Turkish identity was inconceivable without religious declarations (Lewis, 1955, p. 354). The establishment of the Presidency of Religious Affairs aimed to cultivate a rational, secular ideal of the Turkish citizen, but a portion of society still adhered to a traditional Islamic worldview, distinct from the secular state structure. Instead of addressing existential issues through reformist or paradigm-shifting strategies, this traditional Islamic perspective sought to reject and oppose Western values. Since the entire body of knowledge was considered to be derived from the Holy Qur'an, there was no need for new theoretical concepts. Religious practices were seen as defining the totality of existence, with a strong rejection of "the other," which was perceived as an entity against which a perpetual struggle was necessary. Islamist groups only reacted when their religious practices were under threat. In this context, an Islamist is one who advances a political agenda aimed at establishing a religiously based way of life (Jenkins, 2003, p. 46). Ultimately, there was no bourgeois class to challenge the Kemalist regime, and civil society did not develop multidimensionally during this period.

The language, laws, education, and the role of women in society, as imposed by Kemalist modernity in the effort to create a modern Turkish citizen, were unilaterally reconstructed in defiance of societal values, continuing without attempts at reconciliation. However, this process began to change in response to new political demands following World War II. The existential threat posed by the USSR made adopting a Western-style democracy necessary, leading to Türkiye's transition to a multi-party political system (Karpat, 2015, p. 142-143). The migration of people with traditional Islamic cultures from rural areas to cities accelerated due to agricultural mechanization initiated by the Democratic Party. These traditional symbols, such as

the headscarf and Friday prayers, became central to the identity of these rural migrants as they encountered the state for the first time in urban centers (Rabasa & Larabee, 2008, p. 33). The 1960s witnessed the rise of new political actors influenced by global political movements. In Türkiye, however, the conservative government of Adnan Menderes was overthrown in a coup, and a new constitution was introduced. While the 1961 constitution guaranteed many basic human rights, it also entrusted the military with the protection of the Turkish Republic (Jenkins, 2007, p. 343).

Necmettin Erbakan entered the political scene in the 1970s with the National Order Party. The party's notable feature was its discourse on returning Türkiye to its former greatness and preserving traditional values. However, the party's rhetoric about establishing a "sharia state" was limited (Özbudun, 2006, p. 544). The Welfare Party aimed to establish a "just order" inspired by Islam. To this end, it proposed the formation of a union of Islamic countries, complete with an Islamic common market, NATO, UNESCO, and IMF. A staunchly anti-Western foreign policy was also adopted, with the European Union dismissed as a "Christian club" (Özbudun, 2006, p. 545). Furthermore, the political Islamist movement, which gained momentum in the 1970s, proposed creating a common Islamic army, adopting the dinar as a shared currency, and using Arabic as a common language (Rabasa & Larabee, 2008, p. 41).

Liberalization and the Awakening of Anti-hegemonic Discourse

The 1980 coup created a conducive environment for those who felt oppressed. The number of NGOs tripled after the coup, despite the dissolution of many of the two thousand existing NGOs (Şimşek, 2004, p. 48). NGOs established under Article 33 of the Constitution faced restrictions in their activities, as they were prohibited from engaging with political parties or trade unions until 1995 (Kadıoğlu, 2005, p. 28). Türkiye's transition to a free-market economy, which was fully liberalized in 1989, increased its vulnerability to economic crises. These crises, inherent to the free-market system, caused different social strata to adopt varying political positions, while previous policies had provided more stable economic conditions for all societal groups (Cizre-Sakallıoğlu & Yeldan, 2000, p. 484). Despite economic liberalization, the military retained significant control over civilian government, empowered to enforce the decisions of the National Security Council. This military influence, legitimized by Law 2945, represented a significant obstacle to the development of a fully liberalized civil society (Jenkins, 2007, p. 344).

In the 1990s, the growing influence of the media led ordinary people to become more aware of national developments, resulting in new political demands (Cizre-Sakallıoğlu & Yeldan, 2000, p.

494). Following the Cold War, the ruling elites could no longer shape foreign policy to suit domestic needs, leading to widespread mismanagement. With the eradication of the socialist threat, new challenges emerged to maintain control over the population. The effects of the free-market economy became visible across Anatolia, with the rise of small and medium-sized enterprises, which were often linked to the Welfare Party (Başkan, 2010, p. 402). Meanwhile, traditional Islamic political movements were strengthened by the economic and administrative challenges—such as unemployment, inflation, and political instability—exacerbated by the large-scale migration from rural areas to cities during the 1990s (Lombardi, 1997, p. 195).

Religious urbanites felt increasingly marginalized due to their underrepresentation in parliament. Islamic parties, constrained by their theoretical foundations, were forced to politicize religious symbols to sustain their presence. The "turban" issue became a major political symbol during the 1990s, serving as a key marker of secularism during the 28 February process (Grigoriadis, 2009, p. 1202). In this context, MAZLUM-DER emerged as a pioneering civil society organization advocating for the rights of religious individuals, focusing particularly on the headscarf issue. Additionally, MÜSİAD was founded in 1990 with the aim of representing Islamic values in commercial life. The Anatolian Tigers, fueled by capital accumulation from the growth of labor-intensive sectors in the free market, played a significant role in establishing the organization (Cizre-Sakallıoğlu & Yeldan, 2000, p. 500).

The Turkish military, with its praetorian character, sought to influence politics to pursue its own agenda (Uzgel, 2003, 180). This informal but well-established role was driven by Cold War imperatives, such as the perceived communist threat (Uzgel, 2003, p. 188). However, the end of the Cold War freed Turkish society from such militant concerns, ushering in a period where public interests had to be considered for the sake of political legitimacy (Keyman & İçduygu, 2003, p. 231).

After Erbakan came to power through a coalition with the True Path Party, he made controversial visits to Iran and Libya and accused Israel and the United States of terrorism. He also advocated for unity within the Islamic world, proposing a common currency (Waldman & Çalışkan, 2017, p. 962). Despite these anti-hegemonic stances, some Islamist factions believed that the movement's relevance would fade if it ignored modern ideas (Gümüşcü & Sert, 2009, p. 962). While the Turkish military's opposition to Islamist parties was well-known, U.S. interest in moderate Islamists as a bulwark against the USSR contributed to the strengthening of political Islam. The Turkish Armed Forces' declaration that they would always protect the Republic highlighted the tension of the period (Müftüler-Baç, 1998, p. 247).

The division between pro-regime and anti-regime NGOs became increasingly visible, with secular NGOs adopting pro-secular positions. Regime type determined which NGOs received support, and those aligned with government institutions were likely to benefit from increased funding (Altan-Olcay & İçduygu, 2012, p. 171). Islamic parties continued to politicize religious symbols for survival, with the "turban" issue remaining a prominent political symbol during the 28 February process. The National Security Council called for educational reforms, while the Chief Public Prosecutor's Office pushed for MÜSİAD's closure. Following the process, MÜSİAD became more cautious in its dealings with Islamist groups (Başkan, 2010, p. 407).

Debates over the headscarf intensified, particularly in universities, where it was officially banned in state institutions in 1990. The headscarf became a symbol for political parties with strong religious references. Although the Motherland Party (ANAP) left the decision regarding the headscarf to university rectors, the ban was ultimately enforced through a Constitutional Court ruling after the 28 February trial (Cindoglu & Zencirci, 2008, p. 799). The issue also gained international attention through legal channels, with women who were banned from wearing headscarves in universities turning to the European Court of Justice for recourse (Yavel, 1998, p. 9).

28 February Process

The 28 February process led the military, traditionally seen as the guardian of Westernization since the founding of the Republic, to view the Westernization process with increasing suspicion. Due to the Copenhagen criteria required for EU membership, military circles became concerned that Sharia law was gaining traction in the country. As a result, the military began to approach the EU process with scepticism, seeing the EU's demands for individual freedoms and minority rights as potentially fueling "Islamic fundamentalism and separatist terror" (Patton, 2007, p. 341). Furthermore, the military adopted civilian methods to legitimize its actions in the public sphere, consulting with academics, civil groups, and Supreme Court judges (Heper & Yıldırım, 2011, p. 7). However, the political crises of the 1990s, along with the 17 August earthquake and the 2001 financial crisis, eroded public faith in secular and state-centric politics, demonstrating that military tutelage was unsustainable (Keyman & İçduygu, 2003, p. 223).

After a nine-hour meeting with the National Security Council, a list of 18 articles was presented to Prime Minister Erbakan for his signature, which he refused (Milliyet, İmza Gerilimi, 03.03.1997). The military's self-imposed role as the guardian of the Republic motivated the 18 articles, which included the closure of imam-hatip schools, the abolition of mystical foundations,

and the introduction of a secular dress code. A January 1997 intelligence report further claimed that religious orders were attempting to infiltrate the state and create a parallel order (Heper & Günay, 2000, p. 640). The extension of compulsory education from five to eight years was another point, one that was already part of the Welfare Party and True Path Party coalition agreement (TBMM Kütüphanesi, Refah Partisi ile Doğruyol Partisi Koalisyon Hükümeti Protokolü, 28 Haziran 1996).

An interesting feature of the 28 February process was the military's use of non-military channels, such as the media, judiciary, and academia, rather than merely relying on force (Heper & Günay, 2000, p. 648). The coalition partner, the True Path Party, distanced itself from the Welfare Party's stance on the headscarf issue (Milliyet, Koalisyon Sallanıyor, 03.02.1997). Although the military demonstrated its strength by parading tanks in Sincan on 5 February (Milliyet, Sincan Manevrası İktidarı Sarstı, 05.02.1997), opposition grew from university rectors and civil society (Milliyet, Üniversiteler Ayakta, 07.02.1997). Even U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright commented, calling on Türkiye to uphold its secular regime (Milliyet, Laiklik Uyarısı, 03.02.1997). At the same time, President Demirel expressed concerns that politicians were jeopardizing the regime and that the state had become ungovernable (Milliyet, Demirel Kaygılı, 18.02.1997). Erbakan, however, maintained that his party did not support a Sharia regime, aligning with ANAP and DSP on this point (Milliyet, Erbakan: Şeriatta DSP ve ANAP ile aynıyız, 23.02.1997).

Public protests, such as the "minute of darkness for eternal light," organized by pro-military NGOs, added further pressure on the Welfare Party (Milliyet, Demokratik Karartma Geceleri, 10.02.1997). Şevket Kazan, the Justice Minister of the Welfare Party, dismissed these protests, linking them to the Alevi community (Milliyet, Sönen Her Mum Hükümeti Tüketiyor, 13.02.1997). Leading Turkish labor and trade unions, such as Türk-İş, DİSK, TİSK, TOBB, and TESK, also took a pro-military stance. In the meanwhile, Yalım Erez's model of a rotating prime ministry backed by the military is the clearest indication yet that the military wants to see an administration under its sole control (Özdemir, 2015, p. 175).

Islamic intellectuals, who had emerged in the 1980s, advocated a return to Islamic principles as a framework for addressing contemporary issues, rather than developing a new ideological foundation. They viewed Islam as offering comprehensive solutions, not just a religion. However, after the 28 February process, this group faced a rupture. Opposition to the secular Kemalist system began to be articulated in universal terms like "pluralism, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law," marking the early ideological foundations of what would become the

"pro-EU" AK Party (Taniyici, 2003, p. 478). The closure of imam-hatip schools and the military's cautious stance on EU membership reaffirmed the secular values the army sought to protect (Müftüler-Bac, 1998, 255).

The political turbulence of this era cannot be fully explained by domestic factors alone. The end of the Cold War and Türkiye's adoption of a free-market economy contributed to increased economic instability, prompting calls for a new political order. After the closure of the Welfare Party in 1998, the newly formed Fazilet Party shifted to a more modern discourse, moving away from Islamic terminology. While this shift was necessary at the leadership level, it did not resonate with the party's electorate. This internal tension ultimately sped up the transformation of the party's ideology and structure (Taniyici, 2003, pp. 474-475).

The 28 February process also highlighted the role of subaltern publics—marginalized groups such as devout Muslims, Kurds, and Alevi communities—who had been suppressed under secularism. Unlike in free societies, where subaltern publics serve as spaces of resistance and reorganization, in Türkiye, these groups were brutally repressed, their identities distorted over time (Fraser, 1990, p. 68). According to Yashin's research, pro-Islamist groups utilized civil society to secure their rights, which they viewed as ordained by God (Yashin, 1998, pp. 12-14).

Islamists did not reject Western ideas about rights. After the 28 February process, Erbakan declared that "Şimdi biz Batıcı olduk. Eski Batıcılar, Batı düşmanı oldu," revealing the evolving discourse of the Islamists (Hürriyet, Erbakan'ın Çelişkileri, 9 Ekim 1997). The Welfare Party even cited Western legal frameworks, such as Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, in its defense against closure (Erbakan, 1997, p. 16). However, Erbakan's rhetoric was inconsistent; in Sivas, he declared that only those serving the Welfare Party would have their prayers accepted by God (Hürriyet, Refah'ı Yakan Yedili 17.01.1998).

Fethullah Gülen, leader of FETÖ, took an anti-democratic stance and said that the soldiers were doing the right thing. Thus, religious and political divisions were further aggravated (Menek, 2016, p. 139). Despite these contradictions, Erbakan maintained his close ties to religious leaders, continuing to seek advice from Sheikh Mehmet Sait Kotku (Jenkins, 2003, pp. 48-50). The 17 August earthquake, however, dealt a blow to the military's image. Both the military and the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay) were slow to provide aid, while civil society, including the Welfare Party's local networks, were more effective (Jalali, 2002, pp. 126-128).

Ultimately, the AK Party would emerge, drawing on universal principles of democracy and human rights to advance its political agenda. This shift marked a departure from static opposition

to the secular order, emphasizing a new discourse of inclusion. Under the AKP, Türkiye's EU aspirations brought democratic reforms, while the number of religious affairs personnel grew dramatically, signaling the state's commitment to promoting a Sunni interpretation of Islam (Grigoriadis, 2009, p. 1203).

NGOs such as AK-DER, ÖZGÜR-DER, and MAZLUM-DER, formed to advocate for headscarf freedoms, also became vocal critics of political hegemony. Some, like ÖZGÜR-DER, openly declared their preference for Islamic law over the modern Turkish constitution, seeking to dismantle the entrenched tutelage regime (Sarkissian & Özler, 2013, p. 21). For true deliberative democracy to emerge, public discourse would need to be inclusive and open to all, with inequalities of status bracketed out, and the resulting consensus would reflect the common good (Fraser, 1990, p. 59).

CONCLUSION

The influence and scope of civil society in Türkiye remain limited. A robust public sphere that could challenge the supremacy of state authority has not materialized, largely due to the absence of a bourgeois class. With the advent of multi-party politics, earlier reforms were reversed, but no new policies were implemented to secure the rights of the people. During the Cold War, under the perceived threat of communism, the Turkish military employed militant rhetoric to hinder the growth of civil society. Although the 1980 coup d'état further curtailed civil society, the Özal government, which embraced a free-market economy, facilitated the emergence of a bourgeois-like class, such as the Anatolian Tigers. These organizations gained prominence after the Cold War, freeing the public from military tutelage.

The headscarf issue became a symbol of the ongoing clash between modernists and Islamists. While the United States distanced itself from the modernists, the European Union remained committed to supporting democratic processes in Türkiye. Civil society organizations (CSOs) formed to support the headscarf cause remained theoretically constrained in the immediate aftermath of the 28 February process. Since then, a broader human rights discourse has emerged, but it has been adopted primarily for political gain. Rather than serving as a genuine commitment to universal human rights, this discourse has been instrumentalized to challenge political power without sustaining a truly universal human rights paradigm.

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