

The Rise Of Political Islam in Turkey:

Is democracy under threat?

By

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
*Master in Politics & Economics of contemporary Eastern &
Southeastern Europe*

In

The department of *Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies*
Macedonia University
Thessaloniki

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November 2012

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Abstract.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Chapter I.....	7
Kemalism's legacy.....	7
Islam in Turkey	10
a. Sunni Islam	10
b. Shi'a Islam	11
c. Alevi	12
d. Sufi Orders (tarikatlari).....	13
Religious movements.....	14
a. The Nur movement	14
b. The Gülen movement.....	15
Chapter II	17
The resurgence of Political Islam	17
The Democratic Party	17
Erbakan's Milli Görüş.....	19
Islam as a 'counter-attack'	23
The Özal era.....	24
Chapter III.....	26
The Rise of the 'moderate' Political Islam	26
The 2002 elections	26
The 2007 elections	28
The 2011 elections	29
AKP vs. Military.....	30
The Ergenekon menace.....	30
The Balyoz operation.....	31
Conclusion	32
Bibliography	36

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank my 19-year-old, new German friend Dimi, whose naive answer pushed my thinking to another direction. When I told her my thesis' topic, she just asked: 'Is Turkey a democracy?' This answer from a central European young girl, made me realize that even though Turkey has marked great progress in the democratization process, still it cannot be observed as a consolidated democracy of Western type. Turkey's democracy must be examined through a different 'lens'. It is another 'model' of democracy, so we cannot make our analysis based on the democracy-model of the Western world. Our approach must be looser and less absolute. Second, I would like to thank my professors Mr. Marantzidis and Mr. Keridis, because I feel that their lectures helped me broaden my mind. The greatest thing an academic can do...

ABSTRACT

During the last twenty years Turkey has experienced unprecedented cultural, socio-political and economic changes. The resurgence of political Islam in the 1990s marked a new era for Turkish politics, shaking the keystones of the Kemalist legacy, - the Alpha and the Omega of the Turkish republic-, since its establishment in 1923. Secularism became one of the most important elements of the new-born democracy and the military was nominated guarantor of the regime by the Turkish constitution. Right before the dusk of the 20th century a wind of change started blowing in Turkey's politics. Islamist parties managed to survive and dominate political life. Especially at the dawn of the 21st century this dominance became absolute and consolidated, alarming the military. Moreover, many questions arose such as whether Islam and politics are compatible and whether Islam is a threat to democracy. In this paper we are going to try to answer these crucial questions. We are going to present Kemalism's main principles in order to realize religion's role in the secular regime, analyze the resurgence of political Islam and the contribution of religious movements, especially the Gülen movement, to this renaissance. We are going to stress the role of the main protagonist: the AKP. Erdogan's pro-Islamist 'Justice and Development Party' is the ultimate guide in political Islam's path to power. Finally we are going to examine AKP's stance towards the secular regime's guardian: the military.

Keywords: *Turkey, Kemal, secularism, Islam, Erbakan, Erdoğan, military, authoritarianism, democracy*

Introduction

The fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, after the First World War, escalated the tensions between religion and modernity that pre-existed during the Ottoman era. Reformists implemented a radical secularism aiming to abolish any religious elements due to their notion that Islam constituted a hindrance to progress. To this vein, they tried to break any ties to the Muslim past, entrenching their reforms by a secular constitution. Mustafa Kemal, the founding father of the Turkish Republic, aspired to see Turkey in the pantheon of modern countries and proceeded in a series of reforms targeting at the convergence with the West. These reforms included the absolute separation of religion and state which was reinforced with repressive measures against any kind of public expression of religiosity¹.

Even though secularism oppressed religion for many decades, still it did not manage to eliminate it. In 1950, after the advent of multi-party democracy, political Islam gradually increased its momentum, which reached its peak during the 1990s and after it underwent several transformations finally became government in 2002 (AKP).

Turkey is a Muslim-majority country and at the same time, a secular state. There has been an increase of religiosity during the last 20 years which is associated with the rise of a new religious entrepreneurial middle-class and of course with the existence of a looser framework which permitted the blooming of pro-Islamist parties. The transformation of Islam-oriented parties played a decisive role in their electoral success.

Adalet ve **Kalkınma Partisi** (Justice and Development Party) is governing Turkey since 2002. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's party sprang from the reformist wing of Necmettin Erbakan's pro-Islamist **Refah Partisi** (Welfare Party). Unlike RP, AKP was in favor of adopting Western values², such as economic liberalism and globalization. Reformists put a strong emphasis on democratic principles and human rights, considering democracy and the West as crucial allies against radical secularism and as a means to promote and protect religious freedom.

Nowadays, there is greater tolerance towards the private practice of religion. The expression of religiosity is not connected *ipso facto* to underdeveloped Middle

¹ Demiralp Seda, *The Moderation in Political Islam in Turkey: The Case of the Justice and Development Party*, p.14

² Western is used as a synonym to modern.

Eastern people. The new religious bourgeoisie follows a more “westernized way of life”³, in parallel to its religious practices. Most secularists are concerned not to lose this westernized way of life rather than Islam *per se*. This issue seems to interest only intellectuals and the secular political forces. (Rabasa, Larrabee, 2008)

AKP declares that religion can be compatible with democracy and modernization. Its members define themselves as Muslim-democrats, like Western Europe’s Christian-democrats, or even better as described in their ideological manifesto, “conservative-democrats” (Aydin, Çakır, 2007)⁴. They stress the fact that religion is a cultural element and not a political goal. Despite the AKP does not have an apparent Islamist political agenda, its intentions to keep pace with the West are still questioned. After 10 years of absolute dominance in the political scene of Turkey and under the secular regime’s scrutiny, still there are suspicions about AKP’s objectives. Scholars query whether the AKP will continue its policies, or will secular restraints or coercion from the party’s more radical wing will force it to move towards a more religious political agenda. As Rabasa and Larrabee argue, “The EU project represents a convergence of the AKP’s international and domestic strategic goals”. The AKP seems to have realized the importance of democracy and its crucial contribution to the party’s global prestige. Furthermore, it is a means to shelter AKP from secularism’s absolutism. (Rabasa, Larrabee, 2008) Democracy along with the alliance with the West is the herald of Turkey’s entrance into the modern world. What an oxymoron; Mustafa Kemal’s dream is coming true owing to an Islamist-rooted party...

This paper will present Turkey’s secular heritage, religion’s status through the 20th century and political Islam’s transformation into a more moderate political actor. Moreover, it will analyze AKP’s 10-year government with regards to its orientation (Islamist or Western) and will try to answer whether democracy is threatened by AKP’s political agenda.

³ Rabasa A., Larrabee F. S., *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey*, 2008, p. 3

⁴ *Political Islam in Turkey*, p.2

Chapter I

Kemalism's legacy

The Republic of Turkey was officially proclaimed on the 29th of October 1923. Mustafa Kemal, the founding father of the Republic, was the leader of a revolutionary group of nationalists, who defied the sultan's power and finally deposed him. Later he was proclaimed *Atatürk*, the father of all Turks. Kemal was the first President of the new-born republic. His greatest aspiration was the establishment of a secular order from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. During the next 14 years, under Kemal's tutelage, the republic underwent a series of reforms aiming to transform Turkey into a secular state on the Western model⁵.

Kemalism, the ideology promoted by Kemal and his colleagues, was the means to fulfill this vision. It consisted of six main principles⁶:

- ***Republicanism*** (cumhuriyetçilik)

The sultan's authority was abolished and it was replaced by the rule of law and popular sovereignty. The government was elected by the people and its decisions were amenable to judicial scrutiny.

- ***Nationalism*** (milliyetçilik)

Nationalism was the idea that the Turkish language identified the Turkish nation, unchained of racial, religious or ethnic elements. The nation was composed of the Turkish people who embraced and defended the values of the constitutional republic. All people lying within the borders of Turkey were embodied in the Turkish nation.

- ***Populism*** (halkçılık)

⁵ Oxford Islamic Studies Online, *Atatürk Mustafa Kemal*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0083>

⁶ *Kemalism*, Oxford Islamic Studies Online, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0440>

Popular sovereignty was enhanced and entrenched. Populism promoted the reciprocal responsibility of the state and citizen aiming to eliminate the existence of social class.

- ***Revolutionism*** (devrimcilik)

The Turkish state would transform into an advanced republic, ready to enter in the modern world. This revolution constituted of social, political and economic reforms aiming to give an impulse to Turkey's westernization.

- ***Étatism*** (devletçilik)

The state would be the leading actor in the regulation of social, economic and cultural development.

- ***Secularism*** (laiklik)

Secularism was similar to the idea of *laïcité* in France⁷. This concept declared the separation of religion and state. In the new Turkish Republic there would be no state religion and there would be secular regulation of law (Landau, 1984). Moreover, a modern educational system would be established. The reforms pointing at that way had their roots in the Tanzimat era (1839-1876). The Tanzimat was a declaration that the old attitudes had failed to bring the empire to the modern world. The Sultan and his government recognized the commitment to cooperate with the subjects. The only way to save the empire was to introduce European-style reforms such as new secular laws and institutions, alongside with penal code. (Zürcher, 1997)

In 1924, the Caliphate was abolished and the members of the Ottoman dynasty were displaced. In 1925 the Shari'a⁸ courts were closed down and in 1926 new penal and civil codes of Swiss and Italian origin were enacted (Casier, Jorgenden, 2011). The new civil code improved markedly women's life. In the meantime, the headscarf and

⁷ In 1905 the *Law on the Separation of Church and State* was introduced by the French government, establishing the principle of *laïcité*. Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, Georgetown University <http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/resources/countries/france>

⁸ Shari'a is the religious law of Islam

the fez were banned and a more western style of dress was forced. Polygamy was forbidden. The Islamic lunar calendar was abandoned and the international calendar of the Christian world was adopted (Vertigans, 2003). The Latin alphabet replaced the Arabic, in an effort to converge even more with the ‘civilized’ world. (Fuller, 2008)

Kemal Atatürk intensified his secularist policy by suppressing any form of religiosity in the public sphere. He proceeded in the closing down of convents and monasteries and in the abolition of religious schools. Religious brotherhoods, such as dervish lodges were declared illegal. As a consequence, these extensive secular reforms placed religion in a strict and private framework, far away from public life. Despite all these suppressive measures, secularism was not anti-religious. The establishment of the Directorate for Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı) which was created in order to deal with religion issues⁹ supports this idea (Casier, Jorgenden, 2011). The Diyanet was responsible for all religious services, for the mosques’ operation, for organizing religious events and for publishing religious books. It also supervised Islamic schools. Moreover, all preachers were state employees (Baran, 2010). Kemalist secularism targeted at eliminating religion’s interference in state’s affairs. It dictated the ultimate separation of religion and state, promoted the regulation of religion through state institutions and especially aimed at protecting the secular identity of the republic, but it also defended its citizens’ right to worship (Zürcher, 1997).

Kemalism was the keystone and the guide-line for the creation of the new republic. In order to assure that these principles would survive through the years and to safeguard the secular identity of the state, Mustafa Kemal appointed the military as the guarantor of the regime and as the exclusive protector of the constitution’s secular identity. Moreover, it was the Turkish constitution which granted the military with extreme powers and provided legitimacy to the military’s intervention in politics. Since Kemal’s death in 1938, Kemalist ideology had been the indisputable protagonist in Turkish politics. An uncompromising secular religion, lying in all aspects of everyday life in the Republic of Turkey, Kemalism managed to survive over time,

⁹ Of course when we refer to religion issues in the Republic of Turkey, we mean Islamic issues and specifically Sunni Islam issues. The Directorate for Religious Affairs is not equidistant from all religions or Islamic sects. (Rabasa, Larrabee, 2008)

especially thanks to the alliance with the armed forces, which committed themselves to defend Kemal's legacy (Navaro-Yashin, 2002).

Almost eighty years on, Turkey has been rediscovering its Islamic roots. The oppressed religious heartland has now emerged as a booming middle class that drives Turkey to socio-economic development. Pious Muslims are responsible for Turkey's unprecedented performance in all levels. Especially during the 1990's and on, this 'rediscovery' is met in the resurgence of political parties with Islamic roots and their electoral success. The Justice and Development Party¹⁰ (Adalet ve kalkınma partisi) is the typical example of religion's triumphant victory, since it has sprung from Islamic political parties (Rabasa, Larrabee, 2008).

Islam in Turkey

Turkey is a Muslim-majority country. About 99% of its population identify themselves as Muslim. The other 1% consists of Orthodox Christians, Gregorian Christians, Catholic, Protestants and Jews. During the late years of the Ottoman Empire, the leaders of Islam gained excessive powers and great influence among the flock. Consequently, they started intervening in the state's affairs. This situation changed since the declaration of the Republic of Turkey, when Atatürk's secularization strategy drastically managed to isolate religion from the public sphere. All through the secular republic, religious expressions and convictions were oppressed and condemned in the sphere of private life.

The majority of Turkey's Muslims (about 80%) belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. The minority consists of Shi'ites and Alevis. (Rabasa, Larrabee, 2008)

Sunni Islam

Sunni is thought to be the orthodox doctrine of Islam, though this orthodoxy derives from the number of supporters and nothing more. It means 'the one who follows the Sunnah', meaning the follower of the prophet's words and actions, which are written down in *hadiths*. *Hadiths* are collections of statements, actions or sayings attributed to Muhammad, which are not included in the *Qur'an*. *Sunnah*, *hadiths* and the *Qur'an*

¹⁰ The Justice and Development Party took power in 2002 and it is still in office. It doesn't identify itself as Islamic, but as conservative-democratic.

compose the *Shari'a*, the Islamic law¹¹. According to Islam, Muhammad was the final prophet. The distinction between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims emanates from their different belief about who was to undertake the leadership after Muhammad's death. Sunni Muslims recognized the successor of the prophet in the eyes of Abu Bakr, Muhammad's close friend and consultant, and accepted him as the first Caliph, the spiritual leader of Islam. They believe that there is no hereditary right to leadership. People have the authority to elevate or dismiss spiritual leaders. The relationship between the flock and the leader is based on trust and respect.

Sunni doctrine is not united and it is characterized by a notable number of schools of *shari'a* (law). In contemporary Turkey there are two significant schools of law: the Hanafi, which was founded by the Iraqi theologian Abu Hanifah and the Shafi'i, which was founded by a jurist who was born in Mecca – the sacred city of all Muslims-, Muhammad ash Shafi'i. Most ethnic Turks are Hanafi adherents whilst most ethnic Kurds are Shafi'i followers¹².

Shi'a Islam

The followers of Shi'a Islam are called Shi'ites. This term comes from the phrase Shia-t-Ali, which means partisans of Ali. Ali Ibn Abu Talib was Muhammad's first cousin and son-in-law¹³ and since he was the closest male relative of the prophet, the Shi'ites accepted him as his legitimate successor. He was thought to have been nominated by the prophet himself just before he died. Shi'ites believe that only God has the right to select a representative on earth as protector of Shari'a and Islam, therefore they support the belief that the right to succession is hereditary. In contrast to the Sunni tenet, Shi'a promotes the idea that the Imam is immaculate and his authority is beyond all powers, provided straight from God, because he is the prophet's offspring. That is why the Shi'ites respect and honor their Imams as saints and often worship their tombs. Even though the Shi'a doctrine is more open to rendering than the Sunni one, which is more rigid, the prelacy in the Shi'a bosom is more fixed; Imam is the supreme authority, not the state. Of course, there are also

¹¹ U.S. Library of Congress <http://countrystudies.us/turkey/36.htm>

¹² BBC, Religions, *Sunni and Shi'a*,

http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sunnishia_1.shtml

¹³ He was married to Muhammad's daughter, Fatimah

differentiations between Sunni and Shi'a practices in all aspects of religious life¹⁴. Notwithstanding their differences, Sunni and Shi'a Muslims share the same fundamental principles and values of Islam. Besides, the vast majority of Muslims define themselves simply as 'Muslim', rather than using a branch term in order to refer to their religion¹⁵.

Alevis

Alevis are frequently confounded with Shi'ites because they share some customs and beliefs. In Turkey, Sunni Muslims refer to all Shi'ites as Alevis. Yet, Alevis compose only one out of four Shi'a sects in the country. Actually, some scholars believe that Alevis form a totally different religion. Even though they worship Ali Ibn Abu Talib as well, their beliefs and practices are influenced by Zoroastrianism and Shamanism (Rabasa, Larrabee, 2008).

The Alevis differentiate themselves from the orthodox dogma in many ways. Apart from the leadership issues, they don't follow the same practices. They don't accept the *hajj*¹⁶ as an obligation, they don't adopt the Shari'a law, they don't visit mosques and they don't fast the same days. Due to long-drawn-out persecutions by the orthodox majority, Alevis used to conceal their religious identity. Thereafter, there is no precise assessment about the size of their community. It is estimated that the Alevi numbers reach 11.5 million. Other analysts find this estimation exaggerating and assess that the numbers range from 5 to 10 million. Almost all the Arab community of the country, many ethnic Turks and about one third of the Kurds are Alevis.

Alevis were ardent supporters of the Kemalist regime, because Atatürk established a republic with no official religion, meaning that the Sunni absolute power was over. Persecution and discrimination by the orthodox majority was finally history. Even though Kemal's policy was hostile towards religion, which affected

¹⁴ There are differences in prayer, pilgrimage, fasting. For example, Sunni Muslims pray five times a day, while Shi'a Muslims combine the prayers and pray three times a day.

¹⁵ BBC, Religions, *Sunni and Shi'a*,
http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sunnishia_1.shtml

¹⁶ The *Hajj* is one out of the five pillars of Islam and it refers to the pilgrimage to Mecca (the other four are: fasting during the Ramadan, almsgiving, daily prayers and the Islamic Creed). Every Muslim must visit the Holy City at least once in his life, if he is able to.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/practices/fivepillars.shtml>

Alevis as well, some of them still believe that Kemal Atatürk is one of the most important political personalities –if not the most important-, in their history.

Sufi Orders (tarikatarlar)

The word Sufi comes from the Arab word *suf*, which means ‘wool’ and it refers to early Muslims who wore simple woolen clothes in order to promote rejection of materialism and devotion to the world of prayer and spiritual elevation. Sufi orders or brotherhoods were created after Muhammad’s death. A spiritual master taught the sacred wisdom to his ‘brothers’ in the community, aiming to reach divinity and knowledge through a personal experience of Allah. Sufis expressed the notion that the most important thing in life is a clean heart. They were pious Muslims, who exercised their religious duties according to Islam’s pillars¹⁷.

During the Ottoman Empire, the Sufi brotherhoods were under an umbrella organization, the Majlis al-Mesheikh¹⁸, which was state-controlled. When Kemal Atatürk established the new state, he put an end to the Council together with the Sufi orders. Even though the brotherhoods were closed down since 1925, mystical Islam never disappeared. Since 1950, when Turkey entered a new era of multi-party democracy, Sufi brotherhoods resurged. Nowadays, Sufi tarikatarlar represent the largest religious networks among Sunni Muslims. The most important brotherhood in contemporary Turkey is the Nakşibendi tarikat, a powerful orthodox mystical order, which transformed Islam into political force (Rabasa, Larrabee, 2008). Many members of the political scene are allegedly linked to the Nakşibendi order. Another brotherhood is the Bektaşî tarikat. Regardless of being embodied in the orthodox mainstream, the Bektaşîs retain elements of Shi’a Islam. The Mevlevî order was founded by Jalal al-Din Rumi, a Persian poet who lived in the 13th century, whose spiritual heritage was beyond borders. The Mevlevî members are widely known as ‘whirling Dervishes’. Other significant brotherhoods are the Kadiri and Safavi tarikatarlar¹⁹.

¹⁷ BBC, Religions, *Sufism*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/subdivisions/sufism_1.shtml

¹⁸ Council of Sheikhs

¹⁹ Eurasianet.org, *Sufism in Turkey: The Next Big Thing?*, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61379>

Religious movements

The Nur movement²⁰

Bediüzzaman Said Nursi was born in 1878 in Nurs, a Kurdish village in eastern Anatolia. He was a Sunni theologian, founder of the Nur movement, ardent supporter of the notion that there is no contradiction between religion and science. His famous collection *Risale-i Nur* was in favor of modernity and technology. *Risale-i Nur* or “Epistles of light” is a 6,000 pages interpretation of the Qur’an, where Nursi describes the compatibility of the Islamic faith and modern science through reasonable proof.²¹

Said Nursi upheld the respect for the freedom of religion. The Nurculuk movement was apolitical and promoted the idea that the state was its citizens’ servant and that it should be neutral without specific ideological framework. Additionally, it tried to be compatible with the westernization process. His followers, the Nurcus, usually did not vote for Islamic parties but for conservative centre-right political parties, hoping for religious freedom. Said Nursi defended the rights of other beliefs and furthermore he sent one of his books to the Pope, asking him to join his sacred battle against the threat of communism and atheism. He believed that communism was the major threat for religion, so he tried to unify Muslims and Christians against the common enemy²². (Akyol, 2007) He was preaching that “Our aim and programme is... to guard our fellow citizens against anarchy and aimlessness; and to protect ourselves with the steel-like truths of the *Risale-i Nur* against atheism, which destroys our lives in this world and the next”²³.

Even though the Nur movement was congruent with modernization, it was harshly prosecuted by the Kemalist regime. Yasin Aktay argues that the seculars had to vanish any track of their orientalism, in order to define themselves as Westerners²⁴. (Akyol, 2007)

²⁰ The movement of “Light”

²¹ <http://nursistudies.com/mod.php?lng=tr&ctgid=What%20is%20The%20Risale-i%20Nur?>

²² He also visited Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras several times.

²³ *The Risale-i Nur movement: Is it a Sufi order, a political society or a community?* Akgündüz A., http://www.nur.org/en/islam/nurlibrary/The_Risale_i_Nur_Movement_Is_it_a_Sufi_Order_170

²⁴ For more, see Yasin Aktay, *Body, Text, Identity: The Islamist Discourse Of Authenticity In Modern Turkey*

The Gülen movement²⁵

Even though its supporters boast for its uniqueness, the Gülen movement actually has its roots in the Nur movement²⁶. Its instigator, Fethullah Gülen, was born in 1941 in Erzurum, a city of eastern Turkey. Short after his graduation from a private religious school, he started preaching the word of God and in 1953 he became a state-paid preacher. In 1966 he was appointed to a mosque in Smyrna²⁷. In 1971 he was arrested for secret religious activities that undermined the secular regime and spent 7 months in prison. It was Turgut Özal, the Prime Minister of the Republic (1983-1989) and later President (1989-1993), who granted him official patronage. In 1998 he was self-exiled in the United States. (Aras, 1998)

One of the dominant ideas Gülen promoted was that religion constitutes a private issue and that its requirements cannot be enforced. This idea emanates from the holy Qur'an, where most regulations concern the individual and only a small number concerns the state. The movement's 'gospel' is tolerance and interfaith dialogue. Fethullah Gülen established the Institute of Interfaith Dialog²⁸ and the Interfaith Cultural Organization.²⁹ He has met with the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Christian Orthodox Church several times and with the Pope as well, in an attempt to throw a bridge across their religious gap and create a fertile ground for cooperation and tolerance. Moreover, he has introduced discussions with the Kurds and Alevis. The movement's aspect is that democracy is the best model of government, that's why there is a pungent opposition for the regimes in Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, their stance is claimed to be apolitical and their ideology is based on Sufi tradition (Thomas, 2005). Gülen drew inspiration from the state-citizen relations during the Ottoman era, where even though faith conducted the Sultan and his officials, still governance did not depend on the Shari'a Law. He is in favor of integrating with the modern world. He even supports Turkey's candidacy to join the European Union. According to Bülent Aras, Gülen's main goal is the Islamization of Turkish nationalism and the Turkification of Islam. His aspiration is to enliven traditional

²⁵ In Turkish, the movement is called Hizmet

²⁶ *Is the Gülen movement continuation of the Nur movement?*, <http://www.gulenmovement.us/is-gulen-movement-continuation-of-nur-movement.html>

²⁷ Forbes, *Gülen inspires Muslims Worldwide*, http://www.forbes.com/2008/01/18/turkey-islam-gulen-cx_0121oxford.html

²⁸ <http://www.interfaithdialog.org/>

²⁹ <http://ifco.uga.edu/>

Islamic values through the republic's modernization process and finally to create a Turkish-style Islam, an "Anatolian Islam" free from constraints and zealotry. This venture, he argues, must be based upon Turkey's 'merits', which are secularism, democracy, economy and its Ottoman heritage.

To this path, Gülen established religious schools, colleges, universities, summer camps, communication organizations and cultural facilities all around the world. He also tried to hearten the bonds with the Turkic republics by introducing "Educational Islamism", a notion that will contribute to the creation of a Muslim community which objects to political Islam³⁰. The movement represents a 'soft' face of Islam. Gülen condemned Erdoğan's poem in Siirt³¹ and he supported Erbakan's Refah Partisi closure. As a result, Islamists believed that Fethullah Gülen hindered their goals.

However, Gülen's censors claimed that the movement was promoted as an alternative to the Refah Partisi and in spite of using different tactics, it was aiming at the same goal with the Islamists: the establishment of a new Islamic order. They accuse Gülen for aspiring to restore the Caliphate, for promoting Turkish nationalism and for being a vicious controlling power within the borders of Turkey. Edward Stourton, a BBC journalist, reported that there are allegations that Gülen's supporters predominate in the police force and the judiciary. In 1998, the Turkish court convicted in absentia the movement's leader, who was accused of trying to undermine the secular order. This verdict was overturned by AKP's appointed judges, in 2006³². Turkish journalists who tried to investigate these allegations were arrested. "Whoever touches them burns", were the exact words of Ahmet Sik, one of the three men who are still in prison³³. Gülen frequently stated that the separation of religion and state was equal to atheism. This statement offended the secular establishment of Turkey, who argued that the 'isolation' of religion in private practice does not necessarily mean that there is an absence of "belief in God". Nevertheless in 2004, Gülen manifested that atheism equals to terrorism. (Rubin, 2008)

³⁰ Gülen's critics claim that this revealed the movement's Pan-Turkic aspirations, Park, 2009

³¹ In 1997 Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the mayor of Istanbul, read a religious poem in Siirt and was sentenced to a 10-month imprisonment. "The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers..." He lost his mayoral position and was also banned from politics. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2270642.stm>

³² It is alleged that when the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi took power, it staffed the judiciary with judges who were sympathetic towards Islamists. Rubin, 2008

³³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-13503361>

Gülen is an advocate of ‘*ummeten vasatan*’, the community of the middle way, which is the main reason for his great popularity. This ‘moderate Islam’ and modernity are compatible and over and above collateral. His followers, the *fethullahci*, are professionals, teachers, intellectuals and a new class of businessmen, who all constitute Gülen’s ‘*Golden Generation*’³⁴. Ahmet Alkan pointed that “Despite the general expectation, today the ‘middle-way’ is amazingly empty” ... (Yavuz, Esposito, 2003)

For all its activism, the Gülen movement is rather elitist. This can be concluded by the fact that successful candidates who take part in its educational activities are usually wealthy or children of government officials. Of course, there are some scholarships for less-privileged candidates, but their numbers are extremely limited. This enhances the movement’s controversial nature: it advocates state liberalization, extroversion and transparency, but it remains furtive. It is based upon religion and spiritual elevation, but it is extremely rich. (Park, 2008)

Chapter II

The resurgence of Political Islam

The Democratic Party

After Atatürk’s death, Mustafa İsmet İnönü became President of the Republic. İnönü was a prominent army General, who distinguished himself in the *War of Independence*³⁵. He was a close friend of Kemal Atatürk and he had been prime minister during Kemal’s presidency. In 1945, due to international pressure, İnönü decided to liberalize the state’s political system by permitting the constitution of opposition parties. Even though he could remain the absolute ruler until his death,

³⁴ *The Place of the Gülen Movement in the Intellectual History of Islam, Particularly in Relation to Islam’s Confrontation with Postmodernism*, Eldridge Bruce,
<http://gulenconference.net/files/London/Prd%20-%20Eldridge.%20B.pdf>

³⁵ The War of Independence was a war between Turkish nationalists and the Allies of the Entente, after the Ottoman Empire’s defeat and partition to the winners.

İnönü believed that the transition to a multi-party system would place Turkey among the modern states, which praised the virtues of democracy.

During the liberalization process (1946-1950), the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi)³⁶ which was the ruling party, became more tolerant towards religion. In spite of acknowledging religion as a hindrance to the modernization process, it allowed selective religious education in schools under the state's surveillance and the operation of training schools for preachers. A Faculty of Divinity was established in the University of Ankara. Also, in 1949 places of pilgrimage, such as tombs and shrines were reopened.

On the 7th of January 1946, ousted CHP members formed the **Democratic Party**, headed by Adnan Menderes. Apart from not being totally committed to the principles of secularism like CHP, DP launched an alternative stance towards religion. Its theses were based on religious liberalism, which consisted of more respect for religion and less government interference in religious affairs. The post-war period brought recession and social upheaval in the country, so Islam became another crucial issue in attracting discontented votes. The combination of these factors along with the emergence of a class of 'new' merchants and the dynamics of the rural electorate, contributed to the Democratic Party's victory on the 14th of May 1950 elections, where DP received 53,35% of the vote and won 408 parliamentary seats. CHP received 39.78% and won 69 seats in the parliament. (Hale, 1994) The Democratic Party came to power on the 22nd of May 1950. Adnan Menderes became Prime Minister and Celal Bayar, the party's chairman, was elected as President of the republic³⁷. The electoral triumph of the DP was called "White Revolution", because it managed to overthrow the old regime without weapons (Vanderlippe, 2005).

The establishment of the multi-party system resulted in a more liberal version of secularism. Democracy demanded religious liberation. Religious freedom was regarded as one of the aspects of fundamental freedom. Under the same constitution as in 1924, the Democratic Party continued the CHP policies with regards to religion. The DP acknowledged that Turkey was an Islamic society, so it promoted the perception that people were free to practice their religious duties as long as they did

³⁶ CHP was Kemal's political party and represented the Kemalist ideology

³⁷ Right after his election, Bayar resigned from the party's presidency, marking a new era for the Turkish democracy. Unlike Kemal and İnönü, who legally remained chairmen of CHP during their presidency, Bayar introduced the notion of the 'President's neutrality'.
<http://www.turkishweekly.net/article/60/the-menderes-period-1950-1960-.html>

not entangle religion with politics. Besides, it argued that religion and development were compatible. The new government loosened the restrictions concerning religious activities and made several concessions to the religious flock. The Arabic language was used again for *azan* (call to prayer) and the Sufi *tarikatlara* were re-legalized. Thousands of religious schools and mosques which had been closed down reopened. New preacher schools were established and religious education expanded through the legal blooming of religious literature. The appointment of preachers and imams remained under state control, since they were civil servants. Even though the DP was pro-Western it enhanced its links and bonds with the Muslim world. In parallel to all these concessions, any potential anti-secularist behavior was harshly suppressed.

In the years ahead, poor economy, high inflation and Menderes' growing authoritarianism set off social and military discontent. On the 27th of May 1960, high-ranking military officials conducted a coup, accusing the government of using religion for political purposes and for trying to undermine secularism, violating the constitution. Menderes and two other ministers of his cabinet were executed, despite the international pleas for forgiveness by the head of the state, General Cemal Gürsel. On the 29th of September 1961, the party was closed down (Rabasa, Larrabee, 2008).

Erbakan's Milli Görüş

Necmettin Erbakan, the 'star of religion' as his name literally means³⁸, was an outstanding personality in Turkey's political scene. Born in 1926 in Sinop, very well educated, Erbakan was the founding father of five political parties during his long-lasting life³⁹. He came of the İskenderpaşa Cemaati *tarikati*⁴⁰. His political philosophy was imprinted in a manifesto he published in 1969, promoting a Turkish-style Islam. His **Milli Görüş** (National View)⁴¹ praised lavishly the strength of Islam's principles and values. Erbakan argued that the Muslim world had declined because it had adopted Western ideas, such as secularism. Therefore, the duty of all devout Muslims was to contribute to the establishment of Islam's absolute sovereignty. His Milli

³⁸ Erbakan and his "National View Movement", 2011, <http://www.worldbulletin.net/?aType=haber&ArticleID=70763>

³⁹ He died at the age of 85, on the 27th of February 2011

⁴⁰ A major branch of the Nakşibendi order

⁴¹ Erbakan's death and the evolution of a political Islamic movement, Today's Zaman, <http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist-236970-erbakans-death-and-the-evolution-of-a-political-islamic-movement.html>

Görüş was inspired by the Ottoman legacy and by nationalist sways. It was a conservative ideology based on religion, adherent of the notion of *ümmetçilik*, the solidarity among all Muslims. Erbakan was aiming to strengthen traditional Islam and to reestablish it as a driving force in the country. He was an ardent opponent of the West and he aspired to end the Turkish alliance with the ‘Zionist world’⁴².

Even though there were the periods of the Democratic Party and the Justice Party (it succeeded the DP), political Islam and Turkey’s Islamists came into view after Erbakan’s National View, which led to the establishment of the Milli Görüş movement.

In 1969, Erbakan was an independent Konya deputy in the Turkish National Assembly⁴³. Impelled by his political and religious beliefs he founded the **Milli Nizam Partisi** (National Order Party), in 1970. MNP was closed down on the 20th of May 1971, accused of being opposite to the reforms of Kemal and to secularism. Erbakan left for Switzerland, where he stayed for several months. In October 1972, he founded the **Milli Selamet Partisi** (National Salvation Party). (Zürcher, 1993) The party’s chairman Süleyman Emre (Erbakan’s close friend), resigned after the 1973 elections and Erbakan became the official leader. In these elections the MSP won 11.8% of the vote, obtaining 48 deputies in the Parliament. In January 1974 MSP proceeded in forming a coalition government with Bülent Ecevit’s CHP (Republican People’s Party). Necmettin Erbakan became deputy Prime Minister. This coalition with the secular regime’s party (CHP) led to splits in the Islamist front, which resulted in the electoral decrease of MSP’s power. The military intervention of 1980 that took place in order to safeguard the regime from extremist ideologies ended up to the ban of MSP along with all other political parties. Erbakan was persecuted for ‘planning to change the constitutional order of the Turkish Republic’, but finally he was released free from charges.

On the 6th of September 1987, Turgüt Özal who was Prime Minister at the time, held a pan-Turkish referendum in order to amend the article 4 of 1982’s constitution,

⁴² ‘All Infidel nations are one Zionist entity; Jews want to rule from Morocco to Indonesia, the Zionists worked for 5,767 years to build a world order in which all money and power depend on Jews, the US dollar is Zionist money, the Jewish “bacteria” must be diagnosed for a cure to be found; Zionists initiated the Crusades, Jews founded Protestantism and the Capitalist order; and Bush attacked Iraq to build Greater Israel, so Jesus can return’, Necmettin Erbakan.

<http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/the-milli-gorus-of-germany>

⁴³ The Parliament

which had banned the leaders of political parties from taking part in politics⁴⁴. The referendum's result (50.24% 'yes') allowed Necmettin Erbakan to return to the political spotlight. He became the leader of **Refah Partisi** (Welfare Party), which was already established in 1983. Erbakan continued his Milli Görüş, by emphasizing in the superiority of Islam and the importance of Islamic values in order to develop. He was an ardent supporter of industrialization and gave great importance to the cooperation with the Muslim world. Moreover, he stressed the idea that Islam was compatible with science. He promoted the identity of a 'liberal-democratic Muslim'⁴⁵, bringing the Shari'a discourse to the political agendas of Islamist politicians. He also used *jihad*⁴⁶ as a tactic for attracting votes. (İmişiker, 2002)

In the municipal elections of 1994, the RP received 19.14% of the vote and also won the mayor's office in 28 municipalities including Istanbul and Ankara⁴⁷. In 1995 national elections, which emerged after the withdrawal of Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi) from the coalition with the True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi)⁴⁸, the Welfare Party received 21.38% of the vote marking a victory without precedent, even though it did not accomplish an overall majority. It was the first time in the history of the Republic of Turkey that a religion-based political party became the leading party. Erbakan formed a coalition with the True Path Party and became Prime Minister alarming the secular establishment, which was in shock watching an Islamist political party prevail.

Unfortunately, Erbakan did not have the potential and charisma to confront Turkey's problems. Moreover, he angered the hardcore Islamists by joining in a customs union with the European Union and by honoring treaties with Israel that he had promised to rescind. Turkish society became extremely polarized as Erbakan kept on challenging the secular establishment through the creation of D-8 (Developing 8), an alliance of developing countries with big Muslim populations. D-8 was created as an alternative

⁴⁴ SETA, Foundation For Political, Economic and Social Research
<http://www.setav.org/public/HaberDetay.aspx?Dil=tr&hid=66186&q=turkey-s-constitutional-referendum-of-2010>

⁴⁵ A very popular notion among the Islamist intellectuals during the 1990s, which emerged after 'the search for pluralism and the concept of civil society'

⁴⁶ The armed struggle against the infidels

⁴⁷ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was the representative of the Welfare Party for the mayor's office in Istanbul. He was elected with 25.19% of the vote.

⁴⁸ DYP is the current Democratic Party. It is a centre-right party, which supports economic liberalization, social democracy and Kemalism.

to the European Union. It consisted of Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey.⁴⁹

Erbakan's Islamist policies pushed the defenders of secularism into action. On the 28th of February 1997, the National Security Council which was dominated by the military presented an ultimatum to the Prime Minister warning him that his party would be expelled from the government if he refused to accept their 'recommendations' regarding secularism and political Islam in Turkey. Even though Necmettin Erbakan signed the military's decisions, tensions escalated. As a result, Erbakan was forced to resign in June 1997, without the dissolution of the parliament or suspension of the constitution. This was called a 'silent' or a 'post-modern' coup. After six months the Welfare party was closed down by the Constitutional Court and Erbakan and his partners were banned from politics for 5 years⁵⁰.

In December 1998 former members of the Welfare Party, created the Virtue Party (Fazilet Partisi-FP). Within the party there were two groups: the 'traditionalists' (Gelenekçiler) guided by Erbakan and the 'modernists' or 'reformists' (Yenilikçiler) led by Istanbul's mayor Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and former minister Abdullah Gül, who believed that the only chance for the Islamists to succeed was by placing less emphasis to their religious agenda and by reconsidering many fundamental issues such as human rights and democracy. This internal schism was easily detected. In June 2001, the Constitutional Court closed down the Virtue Party and the movement split. The 'traditionalists' founded the Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi-SP) and the 'reformists' established the Justice and Development Part (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi-AKP) with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the leading position⁵¹. Even though Erdoğan and Gül had shaped their personalities and ideas through Erbakan's Welfare Party, the AKP claimed to be a conservative democratic party and not an Islamic party. (Rabasa, Larrabee, 2008)

Milli Görüş had not been anti-secular from the beginning. Erbakan was not secularism's opponent, he simply criticized its practice of animosity against the Islamic faith. Even though his philosophy almost reached theocracy, he never

⁴⁹ "The objectives of D8 are to improve developing countries' positions in the world economy, diversify and create new opportunities in trade relations, enhance participation in decision-making at the international level and provide better standards of living" Tehran Times http://old.tehrantimes.com/index_View.asp?code=215026

⁵⁰ BBC News, Turkey's Welfare Party is Banned, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/despaches/48001.stm>,

⁵¹ *Islamism and Milli Görüş*, 2011, Today's Zaman, <http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist-237227-islamism-and-milli-gorus.html>

denounced democracy and its virtues and he was against any kind of political violence. Every new party he founded was more moderate than the previous one. However, the unprecedented victories in the municipal and national elections in 1994 and 1995 respectively, outstretched his radical beliefs. He even proposed the abolishment of the principle of secularism from the country's constitution. However, no one can underestimate his contribution to the country's history. Apart from being a mentor, teacher and advisor, he also paved the way for Turkey's contemporary success, since Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdüllah Gül are part of his legacy.

According to Akyol, Necmettin Erbakan can be described as a 'radical, utopian and authoritarian' personality. Or, as Bülent Arınç said, Erbakan was 'a man who did politics in the sake of God'.⁵²

'Islam as a counter-attack'

The left-wing and right-wing polarization that dominated the 1970s resulted in the military's intervention on the 12th of September 1980, aiming to re-establish order in the tensed society. Under the coup leader's tutelage, General Kenan Evren, the technocratic government realized that there was a pressing need to protect the population from the rise and spread of leftist ideologies and communism in particular. Moreover, they had to defend the country from external Islamic tentacles and Islamic fundamentalism. In this vein, the government introduced the 'Islamization from above' process. This 'controlled Islam' was an effort to stress any potential dangers that threatened the stability of the regime and eliminate them. It was also a means to prevent religion's use for political purposes. (Zürcher, 1997)

To this path, they turned to the 'Hearths of the Enlightened' (Aydınlar Ocağı). This was a conservative group of intellectuals, politicians and entrepreneurs, which was founded in 1970 as a counterbalance to the leftist intellectuals and it emphasized the importance of Islam and national values. The '**Hearths of the Enlightened**' would provide the philosophical framework for this transformation. The core of their ideology, the '**Turkish-Islamic synthesis**', was a new nationalism mixed with the prevalent Sunni Islam. It combined eclectic Ottoman, Islamic and national elements

⁵² <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=in-memoriam-necmettin-erbakan-2011-02-28>

and promoted the notion that Islam was an integral part of the Turkish identity. The Kemalist triptych of ‘the family, the mosque and the barracks’ was now stressing the importance of religious principles such as the submission to state authority. (Karakas, 2007)

The technocratic government used this ideology, aiming to safeguard the established regime (Eligür, 2010). They moved many restrictions the Kemalist rule had imposed in the past. The constitution of 1982 included articles regarding religious education. Compulsory religious courses were launched in primary and secondary schools and the number of preacher training schools (imam-hatip)⁵³ was expanded. The confinements concerning the *tarikatlara* were loosened, providing them the freedom to finance the establishment of private educational institutions. Many new mosques were built and the technocrats even allowed the broadcasting of religious programs. All these concessions were targeting at the configuration of a homogenous and depoliticized Islam that would unite the ideologically fragmented society and would consolidate the state’s stability. (Zürcher, 1997)

Thanks to the ‘Turkish-Islamic synthesis’ project, the Islamists strengthened their political power and took advantage of this unexpected opportunity. Fethullah Gülen was the leading figure that sprang out from this ‘religion-friendly’ stream. The technocratic government expected that Gülen would contribute to the cultivation of a strong national identity which would concentrate on the combination of Westernization and a Turkish-style Islam.

However, this project had a controversial interpretation; under the 1982’s constitution the state preserved its secular character, but at the same time, the ‘Turkish-Islamic synthesis’ reinforced Islamism’s expansion, jeopardizing the secular order. (Tank, 2005)

The Özal era

In order to proceed in the transformation of a new national identity, the government invited Turgüt Özal, a Turkish economist who was working in the World Bank in Washington, to serve the country as Minister of Finance. Özal was a member of the

⁵³ In 1970 there were 72 imam-hatip schools, which reached 374 in 1980. In 1997, their numbers expanded in 561. *Islam and Turkish National Identity*, Waxman, 2000

Nakşibendi tarika, but unlike Erbakan, he could not be characterized as Islamist, because he was in favor of Western notions.

As Minister of Finance, Özal launched a series of economic reforms which were very successful and provided him popular support. As a result, in 1983 he founded his own political party, the **Anavatan Partisi** (Motherland Party). In the 1983 elections, the ANAP made a triumphant entry to the political landscape of Turkey by obtaining the 45% of the vote. Turgüt Özal became Prime Minister until 1989 and then President, until his sudden death in 1993.

During Özal's era, the numbers of imam-hatip schools expanded even more. He launched the breaking of daily fast (*İftar*) during the sacred month of Ramadan and in 1988 he was the first Turkish Prime Minister who visited the holy city of Mecca during the annual pilgrimage. He legitimized donations to religious institutions and under his government the school curriculum was amended according to the 'Turkish-Islamic synthesis'. (Karakas, 2007)

Özal introduced the 'Islamist Finance'⁵⁴. As a consequence, there was an inflow of capital from the Arab world. He also tried to lift the ban of women's headscarf in universities, but failed⁵⁵. (Baran, 2010)

Under Özal, the process of democratization made only shallow progress. He was absorbed in the economy and left the military regime to retain order. (Ahmad, 1993) However, he liberalized the country's economy, producing a new class of entrepreneurs –the Anatolian bourgeoisie- with strong traditional background. 'Anatolian bourgeoisie' consisted of academics, family businesses and medium-size enterprises, especially in provincial cities of eastern Turkey, such as Gaziantep and Kaiseri. These 'Anatolian tigers' were the backbone of Turkey's economy and even though they were practicing Muslims, they were in favor of liberal markets and Westernization. (Karakas, 2007)

Turgüt Özal can be described as one of the most charismatic personalities in the political arena of Turkey. He managed to blend development and tradition and he contributed decisively to the creation of a new Turkish identity, which was an amalgamation of Islam and Westernization. (Baran, 2010) His pioneer reforms offered Turkey a new momentum for economic and social development.

⁵⁴ According to Shari'a Law interest was forbidden.

⁵⁵ The headscarf had become a trend during the 1980s, because of the Iranian revolution in 1979

Chapter III

The rise of the ‘moderate’ Political Islam

In 2001, the Constitutional Court closed down the Fazilet Partisi (Virtue Party) and the movement split. The ‘reformist’ wing of FP founded the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party), with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the party’s chairman.

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was born on the 26th of February 1954, in Istanbul. In 1973, he graduated from *imam-hatip lisesi* (Istanbul Religious Vocational High School) and in 1981 he graduated from Marmara University’s Faculty of Economics and Commercial sciences. In the local elections of the 27th of March 1994 Erdoğan was elected Mayor of Istanbul. His successful management of the metropolis’ enormous problems provided him a high level of public support⁵⁶. In December 1997, he was sentenced to a 10-month imprisonment (but he only served 4), due to a poem he had read in Siirt⁵⁷. He lost his mayoral position and was also banned from politics.

The 2002 elections

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came of the reformist wing of the Virtue Party. Even though the reformists were of an Islamic past, they were not of anti-Western rhetoric. They had realized that success had to walk through the path of modernization. The Turkish society struck by the 2001 economic crisis was longing for the wind of change to blow over the country. AKP was aware of this fact and was already in pursuit of new horizons in its political agenda.

In November 2002, the AKP won the parliamentary elections with 34.3% of the vote, obtaining 363 out of 550 seats in the Parliament, declaring that its goals were economic stability and EU accession⁵⁸. Most of the party’s votes came from immigrants of lower-class from the less-developed city areas (*varoş*). Due to the 10% threshold, only AKP and the Republican People’s party (CHP) managed to enter the

⁵⁶ <http://www.worldbulletin.net/?aType=haber&ArticleID=75998>

⁵⁷ ‘The mosques are our barracks, the domes our helmets, the minarets our bayonets and the faithful our soldiers...’

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/spotlight/turkeyelection/2011/05/2011526121054590355.html>

⁵⁸ <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/turkey/16346>

Parliament. It was the first time after 1987, that Turkey had a single-party government again. Abdullah Gül became Prime Minister, because Erdoğan was still banned from politics. After a few months the government voted for raising Erdoğan's ban. He was elected in the rescheduled elections in Siirt⁵⁹, in February 2003 and became Prime Minister. His time had come. (Rabasa, Larrabee, 2008)

Justice and Development Party's ideology was based on a synthesis of modern and traditional values (Yavuz, 2003). Even though most of the party's cadres came from the Milli Görüş movement, their political goals seemed to be liberal. Therefore, AKP rejected any ideological connection with Fazilet Partisi and identified itself as 'conservative-democratic'. The party's program stated that its vision was the 'blend of tradition and past with modern democratic values'⁶⁰ and referred to a 'moderate' modernization. This kind of modernization combined Western values such as human rights, constitutional government, secularism and free market economy with an Islamic way of life. AKP was influenced by the Ottoman modernization era in the late 19th century, when the Young Ottoman intellectuals launched a mixed ideology of modernity and tradition, which promoted human rights and a parliamentary political system, entrenched by a constitution. Hence, one of its main principles were the fundamental human rights, in accordance to the international and legal rules. The party's political agenda demonstrated that it would embrace any kind of differentiation, as it was a prerequisite for democracy. Religious freedom, freedom of thought, equality and democratization along with secularization, were only some of the theses of AKP's political program. The party's chairman stated that he would give priority to socio-economic matters rather than religious and that he would not touch sensitive issues such as the headscarf controversy. (Çaha, 2003)

Apart from Erdoğan's indisputable charisma, the economic crisis and the extensive corruption that plagued the country were two other major factors that led the Justice and Development Party to victory. When it came to power, AKP launched a series of legislative reforms in order to meet the European Union's political and economic membership criteria, in order to enhance the country's candidacy for full membership in 2004. These reform packages concerned fundamental political values, such as human rights, democracy, rule of law, minority issues, economic reforms and

⁵⁹ The Supreme Election Board canceled the national election results in Siirt, because of serious irregularities. The elections were rescheduled, so Erdoğan was able to participate.

⁶⁰ *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi programı, 2001*, http://www.belgenet.com/parti/program/ak_1.html

also a new framework for the relations between military and the state. Amendments to the Penal Code strengthened individual rights, broadening the fields of association and freedom of speech⁶¹, expanding the minorities' rights for property and culture, providing immediate access to legal services for the prisoners and lifting restrictions on freedom of religion. One of the most important constitutional reforms was the introduction of structural changes in Turkey's most powerful state security body, the National Security Council. Since the NSC was dominated by the military, - the secular regime's guarantor, - the government reduced the number of its meetings and promoted the appointment of a civilian to the chairman's position. All these measures were taken in order to curb the military and to decrease its role in the policy-making procedure. After 80 years of military dominance in Turkish politics, it was time for a true civilian government. (Gurkan, Beris, 2004)

The 2007 elections

The national elections of the 22nd of July 2007, accrued from the opposition's block to AKP's nomination for the President's office. The Presidential term of Ahmet Necdet Sezer would expire on the 16th of May 2007. On the 25th of April, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that AKP's candidate for the Presidency would be Abdullah Gül, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and deputy Prime Minister⁶². Due to the fact that the Justice and Development Party already held the Prime Ministry and the Parliament majority, the opposition considered this nomination as a threat to the secular regime. Moreover, they blocked Erdoğan's proposal for constitutional amendments concerning the direct election of the President. This political stalemate pushed the Prime Minister to call for early national elections, which were scheduled for the 22nd of July. (Migdalovitz, 2007)

The AKP won the parliamentary elections marking a triumphant victory. It obtained the 46.6% of the vote, increasing its power by more than 12 percent. Even though the AKP expanded its electoral power, there was still the center-periphery cleavage. Its supporters came mainly from the *varoş*, since the wealthier urban areas voted for the Republican People's Party. However, its massive support from different groups of voters differentiated it from the 'religious party' identity. AKP's electoral success was

⁶¹Some restrictions on press were removed.

⁶²Traditionally, the nominees for the President's office came from a secularist background

supported by the economic stability of the country and the kind of governance it represented: a mix of conservative (right) tradition and leftist socio-economic policies. After his victory, Erdoğan made a promise for more economic and democratic reforms. ‘We respect your choices, we regard your differences as part of our pluralist democracy. It is our responsibility to safeguard this richness’, were his exact words⁶³.

The 2011 elections

On the 12th of June 2011, **AKP**, Turkey’s conservative party came off an electoral victory without precedent. It won 49.9% of the vote and obtained 326 seats in the parliament⁶⁴. Even though it received a strong mandate from Turkey’s citizens, it did not manage to gain absolute majority. AKP came short of the 2/3 majority that was required in order to push for constitutional amendments without consensus from the opposition. 367 seats were necessary for a unilateral modification of the constitution. Since this criterion has not been met, AKP had to obtain 330 seats in order to be able to send a new constitution to referendum. As a result, its aspirations for drafting a new constitution and for a shift to a presidential system must find support from the other political parties, which entered the parliament⁶⁵.

In the heart of AKP’s political agenda lies the amendment of the military constitution of 1982. The party claims to be in favor of a more democratic constitution, which will promote human rights and freedom. It also wants to implement several constitutional reforms in order to move to a presidential political system. Since the party’s regulations do not permit one party member to serve as party chairman more than three times and this is Erdoğan’s third term, one can assume that this transition to a presidential system has an ulterior purpose; given the fact that he is extremely popular

⁶³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6910444.stm>

⁶⁴ Despite the overwhelming percentage, AKP obtained fewer seats than 2007 and 2002, due to the reduction of seats of some provinces and the redistribution of seats to provinces with higher population by the Higher Electoral Council. <http://www.gloria-center.org/2011/10/turkey%E2%80%99s-2011-elections-an-emerging-dominant-party-system/>

⁶⁵ **CHP** (Republican People’s Party), **MHP** (pro-nationalist) and independent parliamentarians members of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (**BDP**, Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi)

and Abdullah Gül's term is expiring in 2014, it is very likely that Erdoğan will be elected President⁶⁶.

AKP's third consecutive term is a powerful endorsement that its policies are enjoying great appeal among the Turkish voters. During AKP's governments the country has met economic and political stability and social prosperity. Turkey has turned into a regional super-power, becoming a leading actor in the Middle-East, and it has also moved closer to the European Union⁶⁷.

AKP vs. Military

The *Ergenekon* menace

“Ergenekon has become a larger project in which the investigation is being used as a tool to sweep across civic society and cleanse Turkey of all secular opponents. As such, the country's democracy, its rule of law, and its freedom of expression are at stake”.

Aysel Celikel, former justice minister⁶⁸

The military, one of the most powerful institutions in Turkey, considers itself as the guarantor of the secular constitution of the country. For this cause, it did not hesitate to intervene in politics when it thought secularism was under threat. There are three military coups in the history of the Republic of Turkey, in 1960, 1971 and 1980. Moreover, there is the 'post-modern' coup of 1997 with the unarmed military intervention for overthrowing Erbakan's Islamic government.

Ergenekon is an alleged ultra-nationalist secret organization which consists of the military and the secularist establishment, that aims to overthrow the pro-Islamist AKP's government through a coup, in the name of secularism. It is accused of committing terrorism. The first allusions for the existence of *Ergenekon* were made in 1996, after the *Susurluk* scandal. The *Susurluk* scandal that took place during the

⁶⁶ Gloria Center, Global Research in International Affairs, *Turkey's 2011 elections: An emerging dominant party system?* <http://www.gloria-center.org/2011/10/turkey%E2%80%99s-2011-elections-an-emerging-dominant-party-system/>

⁶⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13740147>

⁶⁸ The New York Times, 2009 http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/13/world/europe/13iht-turkey.html?_r=2&pagewanted=1

zenith of the conflict between the Kurds and the Turks, involved the close cooperation between the Turkish government, the military and organized crime.⁶⁹

In 2007, after an anonymous call, the police discovered arms' caches and explosives, which were linked to retired military officials and information in a computer's hard disc about an organization named Ergenekon. In 2009 new evidence for coup attempts came to surface and the Ergenekon operation deepened. Hundreds of high-ranking generals, admirals, academics, journalists and authors had been detained. Persecutions were massive and harsher and in many cases the accusations lacked sufficient proof.

After these persecutions, a wave of discontent started growing within the Turkish society. People were concerned of whether Ergenekon was a threat to democracy or whether those suspects were the innocent victims of a weak constitutional framework that allowed the authorities to act arbitrarily, serving specific interests⁷⁰. The debate for the Ergenekon affair continued more intensively after the massive arrest of journalists in 2010, accused of 'supporting terrorist organizations through their works, paintings, articles, poems and other art forms'⁷¹. Proponents of the investigation argue that its goal is to wipe out the remains of the so-called 'deep state'⁷² and to seclude the military from the political life once and for all. Conversely, critics of the AKP claim that the investigation focuses on the party's opponents and that the Ergenekon operation aims to obliterate any aspiring revolutionaries. Furthermore, the government's handlings over the Ergenekon affair raise suspicions whether the pro-Islamist AKP targets at eliminating secularism's most powerful institution, threatening the secular power that sustains the foundations of the Turkish republic since its establishment⁷³.

The 'Balyoz' operation

⁶⁹ For more, see *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*, Yael Navaro-Yashin, 2002, Princeton University Press

⁷⁰ The New York Times, *Subversion Trial Puts Cloud Over Turkey*, 12/11/2009

⁷¹ İndris Naim Şahin, Minister of the Interior, Freedom at Issue, <http://blog.freedomhouse.org/weblog/2012/02/the-ergenekon-case-and-turkeys-democratic-aspirations.html>

⁷² The *deep state* is alleged to be a 'state within the state'. A group of high-ranking military, judicial and security forces' officials, who cooperate with organized crime.

⁷³ Alakhbar English, *Turkey: Democracy or State of Fear*, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/turkey-democracy-or-state-fear>

The Balyoz (*Sledgehammer*) operation is another alleged secularist military coup that has its roots in 2003. This conspiracy allegedly planned to bomb 2 mosques in Istanbul, to provoke an episode with Greece by shooting down a plane over the Aegean Sea and to cause social upheaval in order to overthrow AKP's government, in the name of "a pure Turkish state".⁷⁴ 365 military officers were detained; generals, admirals, colonels, retired high-ranking officials and two civilians. 250 were held in prison during the 20-month trial⁷⁵. Finally, in the 21st of September 2012, the court convicted 250 officials in long prison sentences while the others are waiting for their trials without being in detention.

Many people believe that the court's verdicts are an important contribution to the establishment of democracy. Turkey has been struggling with secularism's oppression for more than 80 years and it is now time to move vigorously to the entrenchment of human rights, such as freedom of religion. Moreover, they argue that the coup was planning to overthrow an elected government, not to protect the secular regime but aiming to provide the military with absolute political superiority⁷⁶.

On the other hand, critics of the verdicts claim that the Balyoz operation was coined and that the evidence was forged. They argue that foreign forensic analysts verified these allegations. Furthermore, there have been human rights violations, regarding detentions and the client-lawyer privacy. The most terrifying fact, however, is the judiciary's denial to permit independent certification of the evidence. Moreover, "the court refused to allow the defense to call key-witnesses". The court's stance generated suspicions over its impartiality. Critics accuse the government of using the judiciary to eliminate its political opponents and to weaken Turkey's most powerful secular institution, in order to promote its Islamist agenda. The AKP professes to be an ardent supporter of fundamental freedoms, but it appears that it uses them just for its own benefit. (Rodrik, 2012)

⁷⁴ Sorlie T., Today's Zaman, *Sledgehammer and the new modern Turkey*, 2012, http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=295747

⁷⁵ Rodrik D, The Washington Post, *Turkey's miscarriage of justice*, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/turkeys-miscarriage-of-justice/2012/09/21/e2125276-033d-11e2-8102-ebee9c66e190_story.html

⁷⁶ Today's Zaman, *Voice recordings confirm Sledgehammer was coup plan*, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-295664-voice-recordings-confirm-sledgehammer-was-coup-plan.html>

Conclusion

After 10 years of dominance in Turkey's political scene, AKP has not shown any signs of 'creeping Islamization'.⁷⁷ Istanbul is more cosmopolitan than ever, there are bars everywhere, alcohol is served in restaurants. AKP has proved to be a centre-right, conservative party, which is willing to promote modernization and democracy adopting Western rules and not the Shari'a law. There is a big difference between an Islamist agenda and the mollification of rigid secularism. AKP appears to be in favor of a more "liberal secularism", aligned with fundamental values, such as freedom of expression and religious freedom⁷⁸. (Akyol, 2010)

However, even though AKP declared that it did not intend to overthrow the secular ground of the republic or to impose the Shari'a law, one cannot turn a blind eye to its effort to criminalize marital infidelity, through the 2004 reform of the Turkish Penal Code, which almost "derailed Turkey's candidacy for joining the European Union". After a long meeting with EU's Commissioners, Erdoğan withdrew this bill⁷⁹, which was opposed by secularists and fundamentalists, as well⁸⁰. Kemalism had not decriminalized adultery, which was illegal in Turkey until the 1990s. AKP simply wanted to restore that article in the Penal Code. This is the reason why some critics claim that this paradigm of Islamist behavior is overstated (Akyol, 2010). AKP has been accused of trying to take control over the media, the judiciary, the police and the military, by permeating its Islamist supporters in every institution in order to abolish their secular character. Municipalities connected to the governing party, are charged with using state resources in order to advance Islamic practices (Eissenstat, 2007). Another debate is the headscarf controversy. Secularists argue that this is a clear indication of AKP's intentions to turn Turkey into an Islamic state. On the other hand, AKP claims that this is a matter of freedom. Even though the Constitutional Court rejected the lifting of the ban, some university rectors allow their students to wear the headscarf informally. In 2008, the chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals,

⁷⁷Rabasa, Larrabee, *The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey*, 2008, p. xii

⁷⁸Hürriyet Daily News, *How 'Islamist is the AKP?'*,

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=how-8216islamist8217-is-the-akp-2010-12-03>

⁷⁹*How Adultery Almost Derailed Turkey's Aspiration to Join The European Union*, Ilkcaracan P, http://www.sxpolitics.org/frontlines/book/pdf/capitulo7_turkey.pdf

⁸⁰The radical Islamists opposed the criminalization of adultery, because this would lead to the criminalization of polygamy, which still exists in some underdeveloped areas of Anatolia.

Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya, accused the AKP of anti-secular activities such as human rights' violations and totalitarianism. All these activities, he concluded, were undermining the principle of secularism and were violating the constitution of the republic. He demanded AKP's closure. Moreover, in his indictment he called for the ban from politics of 71 people, including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül⁸¹. AKP's success along with its policies has brought discontent in the secular circles. This does not emanate from their belief that AKP will launch an Islamist agenda, but because political power has started changing hands after many decades of secular supremacy. Another thing is remarkable, though; the discontent among fundamentalists, who believe that AKP is a bad influence for their Muslim brothers because they are becoming more realistic and secular. AKP is an outcome of society's transformation. It is a result of the rise of the new religious bourgeoisie and it uses its power to make conservative Muslims more potent in the society. (Akyol, 2010)

However, its electoral success could not be described as an Islamist victory. AKP remained loyal to the country's aspiration for a European future and to economic liberalism that would be the means for a steady growth rate. AKP's main support derived from voters who simply wanted to be free to practice their religious beliefs and not from the dream of imposing the Shari'a Law⁸². Even though the shift from Turkey's traditional alliance with the West, to the Muslim world is more than obvious⁸³, the European Union project and its Copenhagen Criteria⁸⁴ is the opportunity to reconcile Turkey's polarized society: secularists must respect their country's religious landscape and fundamentalists must understand that some people consider Islam simply as a religion and that it should remain in the private sphere⁸⁵. (Oikonomakis, 2010)

"AKP is not too 'Islamist'. It is enjoying the very power it once found menacing", Mustafa Akyol stresses. AKP indisputably takes the credit for Turkey's success in the last decade. It came to office in 2002 and since then it managed to turn Turkey into a

⁸¹ "Political Islam in Turkey claims to change state rules", <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/turkey/8470126.asp?gid=231&sz=85577>

⁸² *The 2007-Turkish Elections: An Islamist Victory?*, Eissenstat H., <http://icga.blogspot.gr/2007/07/2008-turkish-elections-islamist-victory.html>

⁸³ We must keep in mind that this shift is associated with the economic crisis that hits Europe and also with the EU reluctance to proceed in incorporating Turkey in the Union.

⁸⁴ The 'Copenhagen criteria' define whether a country is qualified to access the European Union. Some of these criteria are: the existence of institutions that protect democratic governance and human rights, free market.

⁸⁵ *Political Islam and Kemalist laicism: New Tango on Turkey's Old Battlefield*, Oikonomakis L., <http://www.worldpress.org/Europe/3576.cfm#down>

regional superpower and boosted its economy through successful economic policies. Under Erdoğan's leadership, Turkey has become one of the most developing economies in the globe. No one can ignore the fact that Erdoğan played the prime role in Turkey's attempt to transform into a more open and liberal democracy. He was an ardent supporter of Turkey's European candidacy and promoted the respect to human rights in order to move closer to the West. AKP never demonstrated an intention –at least an overt one-, to impose the Shari'a Law. Turkey is definitely more democratic than it used to be, but still not liberal. Civil rights are not entrenched and there haven't been reforms of the totalitarian laws regarding “state-security” and of the judiciary which implements them⁸⁶. During the last years more than 700 people have been persecuted, including generals, journalists, TV-network owners, rectors, members of the parliament⁸⁷. At least 76 journalists and newspaper editors are held in Turkish prisons, accused of agitating against the regime. Turkey has more imprisoned journalists than China and Russia!⁸⁸ The appeals to the European Court of Human Rights reached extraordinary numbers in 2009⁸⁹.

However all these evidence indicate that democracy's underground enemy is not political Islam. During the last 10 years, AKP has proved that Islam can be compatible with democracy. But, can AKP's growing authoritarianism be compatible with democracy, too? We'll let history decide, just as it did in the Democratic Party's case...

⁸⁶ Hürriyet Daily News, *The risk for Turkey is illiberal democracy*
<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/the-risk-for-turkey-is-illiberal-democracy-.aspx?pageID=449&nID=11434&NewsCatID=411>

⁸⁷ The Wall Street Journal, *Intrigue in Turkey's Bloodless Civil War*,
<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704671904575194020905495614.html>

⁸⁸ *Turkey's Not-So-Free Speech*, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-10-22/turkey-s-not-so-free-speech.html>

⁸⁹ Financial Times, *Turkish laws fail to protect accused*, Daniel Dombley, 11/01/2012
<http://turkishpoliticsupdates.wordpress.com/2012/01/10/financial-times-on-erdogans-growing-authoritarianism/>

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