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Secularism and Islam: The Building of Modern Turkey

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I. Introduction

$\mathcal{T}$urkey has a unique position in the Muslim world. It is the only secular democracy among Muslim majority countries. The foundations for its secularism were laid in the first decade following the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. The roots of the secular movement go back to the mid-nineteenth century when the Ottoman Empire began to modernize. Its democracy is now more than half a century old. The republic was ruled by a single party between 1923 and 1946. The first competitive elections were held in 1946. Since then, Turkey has been struggling to consolidate its democracy. The democratic process was cut short for brief periods after the 1960 and 1980 military coups when military regimes were established. In addition, democratically elected governments were twice ousted by military interventions in 1971 and 1997. Nevertheless, despite these setbacks, democracy in Turkey has become institutionalized and the likelihood of yet another military coup, or even an intervention, seems out of the question.

Since the 1997 military intervention, Turkey has engaged in a substantial effort to further liberalize its political system in order to meet the criteria set forth by the European Union (EU), to which Turkey has applied for membership. Surveys show that about 80 percent of the Turkish population support EU membership, a figure that is a major motor behind government initiatives to reform the system to conform with EU demands. In December 2004, the European Union set a definite date to start negotiations on Turkey's membership. If Turkey

becomes a member of the EU within the next decade or so, this will be a success story for Turkey's secular road to democracy and modernity. Indeed, the Turkish case has been drawing greater attention by Western policy analysts as a "model," or an "example," for the rest of the Muslim world.

This essay outlines the changes Turkey underwent in its transition from empire to nation-state in terms of its experiment with secularism and democracy. It especially looks at the tension between secularism and Islam, showing how this tension was originally contained by authoritarian measures during the early years of the republic but was later transformed into a major issue of democratic politics. The manner in which the strained relationship between secularist and Islamist politics was played out in the democratic arena and the outcome of this power struggle have no parallel in the Muslim world. This experience shows that the road to Turkish modernity was a long but continuous process and that the outcome is a result of the complex interplay of indigenous social and political actors, on the one hand, and international influence, on the other.

II. The Ottoman Background

The Turkish Republic is the heir to the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman rule lasted for 600 years. It was a multi-ethnic empire with 75 different ethnic groups living within its borders. It was also a multi-religious empire with large populations of Muslims, Jews, and Christians of various denominations. Its founders were Muslim Turks and the administration of the empire was a semi-theocracy. Although Islamic law was the basis of political rule, this coexisted with the secular decrees of the sultans in administrative matters. The Ottoman system of administration recognized the multi-religious composition of the population and was accordingly organized around the concept of *Millets*, or religious communities. Each *Millet* was subject to its own religious law in personal status issues and was given autonomy in its internal affairs concerning the community. This system of administration was relatively successful in keeping peace within the borders of the empire until the advent of nationalism in the 19th century.

The need for reform in the Ottoman Empire was first recognized as a result of failures in various military campaigns. At the height of its power in the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire ruled over lands in the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe. It was a "super-

power" of the period. The Ottomans gradually lost their military superiority as science, industry, and technology developed in Europe. Like other great empires, such as the Chinese, Russian, or Japanese, the Ottomans, too, tried to reverse the decline by a concerted effort at Westernization. The mid-19th century witnessed large-scale reforms in administration, education, and law that culminated in a constitutional movement towards the end of the century. However, these were insufficient in preventing the disintegration of the empire. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Ottoman Empire was considered to be the "sick man of Europe" by the European powers, which sought to divide its lands among themselves after the empire's final collapse.

The empire fought on several fronts in the late 19th century to stop its disintegration but continued to lose much of its lands in the Balkans and the Middle East as a result of nationalist movements. Its final collapse came at the end of World War I. Defeat in the war was accompanied by the occupation by Western powers of what had remained in its hands, namely, the land area that approximately makes up the present borders of the Turkish Republic. After a nationalist struggle that ended the occupation, and a brief civil war between the nationalists and the Ottoman dynasty, the Turkish Republic was proclaimed in 1923.

The collective memory of having once been a "superpower" that was now considered to be "sick" gave way to a torturous process of soul-searching among Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Ottoman opinion was divided into two camps about the route to be followed in order to "catch up" with the West. The first camp, the Islamists, argued that the reasons for decline had to be sought in the Westernization reforms that started in the mid-19th century. Instead of simply appropriating Western industry and technology, which they agreed had to be imported into the empire, Ottoman reformists had opted to adopt Western institutions and cultural forms. This created a nation of "imitation men" in an "imitation world" that could be no panacea for the problems that the empire faced. In the view of the Islamists, the Ottomans had built a great Islamic civilization that was in no need of reform. On the contrary, they thought that the decline of the empire accelerated when it began to lose its mission as an Islamic state and chose to "ape" the West.

The Westernists, on the other hand, argued that Western science, industry, and technology were closely related with institutional structures. One could not simply take one and leave the other. If the empire were to modernize, it would do so by adopting a comprehensive program of Westernization.

It was the second camp, the Westernists, who won the debate upon the establishment of the republic. For the republican cadres, modernization meant Westernization. The new republic had to undergo radical changes in order to be included among what the founding fathers of the republic considered to be the "civilized nations" of the West. This soul-searching drama was picked up later, after the advent of democracy in 1946, and gained further momentum in the 1980s and 1990s as Turkish politics and the public increasingly became divided into "Islamist" versus "secularist" camps. It is the unfolding of this drama that the rest of this essay will address.

III. The Secularization Program of the Early Republican Years

For the founding fathers of the republic, cultural change was the key to Turkey's modernization. These men had been educated in the secular military academies of the late Ottoman Empire and were very much influenced by the Enlightenment ideas of science and progress that entered the empire through the Young Ottoman and Young Turk movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is rumored, for example, that Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk), the founder of the Turkish Republic and its first president, kept Rousseau's books at his bedside. Indeed, two hundred pages were devoted to the French Revolution in the Ottoman secondary school textbooks of the early 20th century.

For Mustafa Kemal and his associates, the role of Islam in Ottoman society and politics was responsible for the failure to modernize. In their view, Islamic teaching and codes of behavior had kept Muslim women outside the public sphere, and the *ulema* (learned men of religion) had played a key role in the opposition to all forms of reform and progress in the empire. Hence, the new republic would undertake a series of reforms both to emancipate the women and to destroy the influence of Islam in education, law, and public administration. At the same time, all religious brotherhoods of unorthodox Islam, the folk Islam—which they found to be the force behind the popular ignorance of rational thought—had to be banned in the effort to create a new nation of men and women who would be guided by positivist ideas of reason.

To this end, the republic undertook a series of legal reforms. The *Shariat* (Islamic law) was abolished and in its place new civil and criminal codes were accepted. On the bases of these, women were given equal rights with men in matters of marriage, divorce, custody over children,

and inheritance. Polygamy was outlawed. The veil was banned for women who were government employees and it was discouraged for the rest. Later, in the early 1930s, women received the right to vote and stand for office. At the same time, compulsory primary school education became mandatory for both sexes and all state schools, including high schools and universities, became co-educational. Similarly, Islamic principles in criminal law gave way to secular codes. At the same time, the republic opened career opportunities for women. As early as the 1930s, women were employed in prestigious jobs hitherto reserved for men. Large numbers of women became judges, lawyers, doctors, and university professors, the counterparts of which were mostly unknown in the West. Even today, there are more women professors in Turkish academia than, for example, in Germany.

However, it should be added that these early reforms for the emancipation of women were not built upon by successive governments after the end of the single-party period. With the advent of democracy, politicians seemed content with what Turkish women had already achieved, and the issues of women's rights and problems receded into the political background. Since the 1980s, a vocal and organized women's movement has been quite effective in raising consciousness and forcing governments to enact new legislation or amend the old. Nevertheless, despite the exemplary earlier record, Turkey scores poorly in international statistics on gender equality and empowerment as compared to Western countries. The literacy rate is lower, women's participation in the labor force is unsatisfactory, women politicians are rare (with an embarrassing 4.4% in the present parliament), and women seem to hit a "glass ceiling" when it comes to top administrative positions. At the same time, women continue to be the victims of domestic violence, sexual harassment in the workplace (a recent survey found 14% of the population reporting that they "knew" a woman who suffered it), and honor killings. However, the same survey showed that there is overwhelming public support to alleviate these and other problems concerning gender roles.[1]

The early reforms of the republic also targeted the role of Islam in politics and administration. The Caliphate, an important institution that symbolized the unity of all Muslims in the world, was abolished. All religious schools were banned and the educational system was unified under a Ministry of Education. Orthodox Islam was put under state control through the creation of a Directorate of Religious Affairs. Tied to the office of the prime minister, its personnel serving

in the mosques became paid employees of the state to be controlled, watched, and used to back up government decisions.[2] In addition, the *Sufi* brotherhoods that represented unorthodox practices within Islam were outlawed.

At the same time, republican constitutions, the criminal code, legislation on parties, labor unions, and associations all included articles that banned the use of religion for political purposes or personal gain. On the basis of these articles, a number of parties were closed down and individuals were given prison sentences for activity that the state considered dangerous to the foundations of the secular republic. Although some of this legislation has recently been relaxed, it is still illegal for any political party, association, or individual to advocate the establishment of an Islamic state.

It was also during the early republican years that symbolic measures were undertaken to reduce the influence of Islam in Turkish society. For example, the weekly holiday was changed from Friday, the day of rest for Muslims around the world, to Sunday. The calendar changed from the Muslim lunar to the Gregorian. The Arabic alphabet was changed to the Latin, which meant lack of access by the new generations to Islamic/Ottoman sources. The language itself changed as vocabulary and grammatical forms borrowed from Persian and Arabic (that had heavily influenced literary Ottoman Turkish) were eliminated.

These and a host of other minor changes added up to a radical rupture with the Islamic past. The republic's understanding of secularism was, and to a large extent still is, closer to the French understanding of *laïcism* than to the Anglo-Saxon experience with secularism. The new republican elite consisted of men and women who might be religious in their personal lives but who refrained from any display of their religious belief as actors in the public sphere. Overtly religious people were not accepted into the political, social, or intellectual elite circles.[3] The republic marginalized them, caricaturized them as fanatics, and considered them uncivilized. It was these marginalized groups that later formed the backbone of political Islam.

These reforms were undoubtedly from the top down and imposed by a single-party regime. In the 1920s and the 1930s, the new republic confronted a number of rebellions, some of which were instigated by Islamist groups. These were suppressed by force. However, compared to other revolutions such as the French, Russian, or Chinese, the Turkish revolution did not involve massive bloodshed. Nevertheless, the severe measures undertaken, such as death sentences to the leadership

of these rebellions, pushed the Islamist opposition underground. When it re-emerged after 1950 with the advent of democracy, the nature of the opposition had already changed from direct armed conflict to challenging the system through party politics.

Although the early republican reforms were originally forced on the majority of the population, they eventually came to be accepted. A survey in 1999 found that an overwhelming majority (77.3%) of Turkish citizens believe that the early republican reforms have led to Turkey's progress. Only 8.3% think otherwise. In addition, 60.6% do not approve of religious parties.[4] More importantly, support for the establishment of an Islamic state based on Islamic law has remained around 10%. Although 21.2% in 1999 supported an Islamic state,[5] answers to other questions, such as the replacement of the secular civic code with Islamic law, showed that this percentage is reduced to around 10% when specifics are at issue. The percentage of those who support Muslim criminal law is almost negligible, with only 1.2% favoring *recm*, stoning to death for adultery.

IV. The Advent of Democracy and of Political Islam

Although the first competitive elections in Turkey were held in 1946, there was widespread suspicion about its results. The same party (Republican People's Party, RPP) of the single-party years won the elections against the Democrat Party (DP) of the opposition. There were rumors that the election results were rigged. The first change of government was four years later, following the 1950 elections, when the Democrats came to power with an overwhelming majority of the votes.

There had been two attempts earlier, first in 1924 and the second in 1930, to allow political competition. However, these were short-lived and the opposition parties that were established were closed down by the single-party regime on the grounds that they had encouraged the Islamist opposition. The final change of regime from authoritarian single-party rule to democracy in 1946 came about partially at the insistence of the United States that Turkey accept democratic rule as a condition for membership in the newly founded United Nations. Foreign encouragement was to play a significant role years later when successive Turkish governments in the 1990s and early 2000s had to take a series of measures to liberalize and consolidate the democratic system in Turkey at the insistence of the European Union.

The Turkish case is a good example of how international encouragement and pressure can democratize the system. However, it would be erroneous to attribute Turkey's democratization solely to the impact of this single factor. The more important factors are Turkey's historical legacy and the internal changes within the system itself. These include the state tradition of self-rule inherited from the Ottoman system; the already developed bureaucracy that increasingly functioned on merit and written rules; the existence of a codified system of law that culminated in the recognition of universal citizenship rights after the establishment of the republic; the proximity to Europe and the entry of Enlightenment ideas; the previous experience with constitutionalism in the last half century of the empire; the republican program of secularization; the emancipation of women; the emphasis on socialization through education; the changes in the class structure; and the economy. All these factors played a role in the transition.

The issue of secularism was one of the major topics of the election campaign in 1950. Already in 1946, the Democrat Party had established itself as the center of political opposition to the republican understanding of secularism. The Democrats promised changes in this understanding. In the first month after they came to power, they began to implement some of these changes. For example, devout Muslims who wanted to make the pilgrimage to Mecca were allowed to make transfer of Turkish liras to foreign exchange; the call to prayer (*ezan*) was permitted in its original Arabic version; the tombs of holy saints were reopened for visits; the state radio could now broadcast prayers during religious holidays; the budget of the Presidency of Religious Affairs was increased; and a number of religious schools and one program at the university level were opened to train religious personnel. All this activity had been restricted or banned during the single-party years.

These changes led to intense debate in Turkey between groups who wanted greater exercise of their faith and those who saw such change as a dangerous threat to the secular foundations of the republic. Andrew Mango, a British scholar of Turkish politics, wrote in 1967 that readers of the Turkish press could get the impression that politics in Turkey was about religion.[6] Indeed, much was written by both Turkish and foreign observers at the time about the "resurgence" or the "revival" of religion in Turkey.

The politicization of this issue and the division of the electorate into two "camps" has continued to this day. Issues that might seem unimportant or even absurd to foreign observers flare up in Turkey from

time to time over the question of secularism and its limits. For example, a coalition government in the late 1970s, in which an Islamist party was a participant, implemented a new regulation that required a liquor permit for the sale of beer. This decision occupied newspaper headlines for weeks as a major assault on the secular state. Similarly, the controversy over whether or not a mosque could be built on the Taksim square in Istanbul, considered to be the center of the city, became a symbol of the tug-of-war between the "Islamists" and the "secularists" throughout the 1980s. The ban on headscarves for women university students, over which there were sit-ins and demonstrations in front of university gates for years, remains an unresolved issue.

The sensitivity over secularism can seem excessive at times. However, it is not totally groundless either. For one thing, examples of Islamic states that have resorted to extreme repression, such as Iran, Afghanistan under the Taliban, or the Saudi regime, feed the public paranoia about political Islam. Second, there have been cases of violence against known atheists or public critics of political Islam. The most notorious of these was mob involvement in the 1990s in setting fire to a hotel where a famous atheist writer and other intellectuals were staying. The incident claimed 35 lives. A university professor and a number of journalists known for their critical outlook on Islam were assassinated in the 1980s. Mass graves of victims tortured by the Turkish *Hizballah* were discovered in the 1990s. Added to these were less important but nevertheless worrisome demands and/or decisions by Islamist groups and power holders. For example, the Minister of Education from the Islamist party in the 1970s proposed banning Darwin's teachings at secondary schools. A mayor from the Islamist party, again in the 1970s, proposed sex-segregated city buses. Another fined an individual who publicly ate during the fasting month of Ramadan. A university student was killed on campus by a fellow student for doing the same. Islamist students at medical faculties were demanding that cadavers in anatomy lessons be dressed in briefs, panties, and bras. The leader of the Islamist party in the 1990s even talked about coming to power "by blood, if need be." His party's program proposed to change the legal system from that of universal law for all citizens to a "multiple system" based on religious membership, which, in effect, would have meant the application of Islamic law for Muslims.

As the Islamic movement gained strength in the late 1980s and the 1990s, the polarization of the electorate reached its peak. A report in a weekly news journal, *Nokta*, demonstrated the extent of this polar-

ization. Two young women working for the journal reported on an experiment they had conducted. First, they dressed in mini-skirts and went to a movie theater in a religiously conservative area of Istanbul. The audience inside the theater was segregated by sex in terms of the seating arrangement and the women were covered. During the inter-mission, the journalists were circled by angry young men who questioned their intentions, as a result of which they felt threatened and left. Alternatively, they appeared in black veils in a nightclub and were asked to leave the premises, this time having been forcefully thrown out by bodyguards after having refused to do so. Their report demonstrated that it had become difficult for these two camps to share the same public space.

Although this polarization continues to some extent, attitudes seem to have shifted as a result of changes in the Islamic movement itself. A 1999 survey showed that for the majority of the Turks, this kind of intolerance is not the case. According to its results, 91.5% find tolerance of differences of faith to be important for social peace. On questions about whether believers would be considered Muslims even if they did not conform to an Islamic way of life—such as performing the daily *namaz*, fasting during Ramadan, refraining from alcohol, or wearing headscarves as women—an overwhelming majority (around 85% for each, except for the 67% on the question of alcohol) answered in the affirmative. A surprising 53.1% said that there might be good people among the atheists. Eighty-six percent said that they would eat in a restaurant in which the majority of the women were covered while 83.5% said that they would not mind if the majority of the women in their neighborhood were covered. A full 66.3% said that they would not be bothered if the majority of the women in their neighborhood wore mini-skirts. And 56.2% considered it acceptable for covered women to wear make-up.

Over the years, the composition of these two camps has changed. In general, those who have kept a "vigil" over the secular state have been the most distinguished groups in Turkish society: intellectuals, academia, the judiciary, the mainstream press, the business community, the army, and the educated middle classes. However, there have been changes in the attitudes of these groups in recent years as many have adopted more liberal attitudes toward Islamist sensibilities. The Islamists, on the other hand, are no longer made up of marginal groups in society. They have integrated themselves into the centers of political power, economic wealth, social status, and intellectual prestige. This

has largely been a result of the challenge to the secular elites of the republic by Islamist political parties and the movement at large.

V. Democratic Politics and the Changing Nature of Political Islam

The transition to democracy in Turkey had important consequences in terms of the struggle between the secularists and the Islamists. The logic of revolutionary politics was replaced with the logic of democratic politics. This required that post-1950 governments had to take into account the demands of both sides. The religious versus the secular sensibilities of the voter had to be balanced. The power struggle between these two camps was carried out within democratic processes and was peaceful. Hence, Turkey has never been in serious danger of a change of regime from a secular-democratic to an Islamic state. The Islamist movement in Turkey has been moderate and has not been associated with the kind of violence that exists among similar movements in the region.

Several factors contributed to the moderate politics of the Islamist movement in Turkey. First, the role of the military has been decisive. It sees itself as the guardian of the secular republic and interferes in the political process when it perceives a threat to the secular, unitary foundations of the republic. It has been the major force in controlling the power of the Islamist movement, as it has of other movements that the generals found threatening to the regime. This self-appointed role as "guardian" is under scrutiny. Reducing the role of the military in politics has been on the agenda of recent governments in Turkey and legal changes to that end are demanded by the European Union for Turkish membership.

The second factor is the role of the judiciary and the legal system. The secular state is protected by an article in the Constitution not subject to amendment. As mentioned earlier, there are legal restrictions on the use of religion for political purposes. Some of this legislation has been amended in recent years to allow greater freedom of speech and association. Nevertheless, the judiciary has been particularly on the watch. The offices of the Attorney General and the Constitutional Court have used their power to limit the activity of Islamist organizations and political parties.

A third factor is public commitment to the secular state. Over the years, important groups within Turkish society and a large middle class have been very sensitive on the question of secularism. Surveys

show that the majority of the population opposes the politicization of religion and the granting of a role for Islam in state affairs.

Fourth, Islamists were integrated into centers of power through the democratic process. This has been the most important factor in moderating the Islamist movement. In this context, it is useful to look at its evolution and see by what means a movement that turned radical in so many other regions was contained within a democratic regime.

When Turkey made the transition to democracy in 1946, twenty-four political parties were founded with the aim of challenging the incumbent party in the coming elections. Of these, the programs of eight emphasized issues of secularism versus Islam. The political climate at the time seemed conducive to the electoral success of any party that popularized the issue. It was known that there was widespread opposition to the radical program of secularization that the Republican People's Party (RPP) had put into effect throughout the single-party years. However, seven of these had already closed their doors within four years. The remaining one received a single seat in the Grand National Assembly following the 1950 elections. The Islamist vote went to the Democrat Party, which combined a new economic program with promises to relax the secularization program of the RPP. An explicitly religious party was established only in the early 1970s. By then, it had become clear that economic policy was much more important for the electorate than concerns over religious issues.

The National Salvation Party (NSP), under Necmettin Erbakan's leadership, was relatively successful at the polls in the 1970s. It was a coalition partner in several governments of the period. Its success rested on its recognition that meeting the everyday needs of the electorate had priority for electoral success. The NSP's program emphasized rapid industrialization. On the one hand, the party appealed to the Anatolian entrepreneurs with conservative and provincial backgrounds. On the other hand, it appealed to the poor with its promises of cutting down inflation and providing social welfare. Islamic themes were of secondary importance for the party's declared goal of economic growth.

The National Salvation Party was closed by the military after the 1980 coup. In 1983, when the generals handed power back over to civilian governments, the Welfare Party (WP) was founded, again under Erbakan's leadership. The WP of the 1980s and the 1990s, like the National Salvation Party of the 1970s, based its strategy on answering the needs of the electorate. It was exceptionally active at the grassroots

level. Party activists performed wide-ranging community services that delivered help to the urban poor. The party also became a channel for social mobility. This led to success in the municipal elections of 1994 when Welfare candidates for mayor won in 28 municipalities. A year later, following the 1995 elections, the Welfare Party came to power in a coalition government. The Welfare Party had received the highest percentage of votes. Hence, the job of forming the government was given to the Welfare leader, Erbakan, who became the prime minister in 1996.

The decline of the Left after 1980 was one of the most important factors in the rise of the Welfare Party. The 1980 military coup was staged largely against the growing power of the Left in the 1970s. Parties were closed down, leaders were sent to jail, and there was a massive crackdown on leftist organizations. When the system opened up again in 1983, the parties on the Right were able to reorganize. The Left, on the other hand, suffered further from both the collapse of the Soviet Union and the inability to originate a new program that would challenge free market economics (as did so many social democratic parties in Europe). Turkey had discarded import-substitution policies at this time and the economy was reorganized for export-oriented growth. With state subsidies cut down, the poor became poorer. Whereas the vote of the urban poor had been largely for the Republican People's Party in the 1970s, it was transferred to the Welfare Party in the 1980s and the 1990s.

The Welfare Party played the dual role of both providing upward social mobility for its followers in this new economic milieu and of mobilizing the poor. Volunteers from the ranks of devout Muslims, especially women, worked for the cause. Through these volunteers, the Party provided a network of social welfare help to the poor. The Party's grassroots organizations were active in the squatter sites and poor neighborhoods of metropolises, delivering a host of services. This assistance ranged from finding people jobs and hospital beds, visiting sick patients, taking care of funerals, and attending weddings to distributing free food and fuel.

At the same time, the Party offered its supporters a wide range of opportunities for upward social mobility. It formed a network through which recommendations, credits, capital, and contracts went to its followers. The Party supporters were employed in municipal governments and the state bureaucracy. Some municipal and governmental contracts went to the entrepreneurs among its ranks. By making use

of this network of connections as well as domestic and international Muslim capital, the Welfare Party was able to create its own bourgeoisie, including its own intelligentsia and media, within a relatively short period of time. The network helped people in the professions or small businesses through a chain of references. In this way, it was able to integrate people who had been marginalized by the secularist elite into centers of power and prestige.

In sum, the success of the Welfare Party had less to do with its image as an Islamist party than with its activities in delivering material goods. The Welfare Party was successful because it had learned the first lesson of democracy, namely, to answer the demands and interests of the electorate. However, while doing so, it used the issue of secularism and Islam as a background theme to mobilize a following that was sensitive to the issue. This led to a situation in which the Party leadership, now in power, attempted to play a dual role. On the one hand, its leaders wanted to attribute to the Party a responsible position on the Center-Right. They would be engaged in "normal" politics—business as usual, so to speak. On the other hand, however, they had acquired a following precisely because the Party was more radical on the issue of Islam than the parties on the Center-Right.

Unable to play this dual role, the Welfare leadership found itself in the precarious position of polarizing the electorate. The more the Party was critized for its discourse on Islam, the more radical the discourse became. Media and public scrutiny of the Party were especially directed at understanding the "real" as opposed to the "hidden" intentions of its leadership. Erbakan's comment that his Party would come to power by shedding blood, if necessary, increased the public paranoia. The issue was whether the Welfare Party would abide by democratic procedures or whether the leadership was hiding its intentions. Discussions began to be centered on the Hitler example and the question was increasingly asked whether a democracy should allow political parties that would end up destroying it.

In the end, Erbakan was forced to resign from his post as prime minister in 1997. This was the result of military pressure but also of public protest against the use of religion for political gain and the threat it felt about the Party's growing strength. Subsequently, the Welfare Party was closed by the Constitutional Court, and Erbakan was banned from political activity. In retrospect, the major reason behind the Welfare Party's defeat was the failure of its leadership to understand the consensual nature of democracy. It had done well in grasp-

ing the rationale of democratic politics, namely, the idea of solving the day-to-day problems of the electorate. Yet it failed to understand the aspect of democracy that rests on compromise and consensus (i.e., on moderate politics). In power, the Welfare Party interpreted its 21% vote as an arithmetical calculation that equated the percentage of votes with a clear mandate. This miscalculation polarized the electorate and turned the political arena into a tug-of-war between the secularists and the Islamists. In this electrified political atmosphere, its leadership became unable to govern.

The legacy of polarized politics left its successor, the Virtue Party (VP), little chance to survive. The VP tried to distinguish itself from the Welfare Party. It claimed that there was no continuity between the two parties. However, it was unable to convince the judiciary that the very same people who had been active within Welfare and now formed the political cadres of Virtue had changed. Hence, it shared the fate of both its predecessors, the National Salvation and the Welfare parties, and was closed down by the Constitutional Court. The movement then split into two groups, both of which were organized around new parties. The younger generation, known as the "reformists," founded the Justice and Development Party (JDP), which is now in power following a landslide victory in the 2002 elections. The old guard formed the Happiness Party (HP) but suffered a major defeat in 2002 with only 2.4% of the votes.

The Justice and Development Party seems to have studied Welfare's saga well and drawn lessons from it. The JDP leadership cadres have been extremely careful to avoid a renewal of the kind of polarization that paralyzed the country in the 1990s. Tayyip Erdogan, the present prime minister and leader of the JDP, has consistently shied away from public questioning or discussion of the role of Islam in Turkish society. The Party disclaims its past and positions itself as a "conservative democratic party" on the Center-Right. Even a cursory reading of the JDP's program and the legal changes that the Erdogan government has accomplished shows the extent to which a political party with roots in the Islamist movement has transformed itself. It has consistently defended democratic rights and liberties. It sees secularism as a guarantor of the individual's right to believe or not to believe in a faith. It is an enthusiastic supporter of Turkey's entry into the European Union and has taken a historic step to solve the Cyprus problem in order to achieve EU membership. The JDP is a success story of Turkish democracy.

The history of Islamist political parties in Turkey demonstrates that a democratic environment provides a platform for the organization of anti-system parties while forcing them to limit their sphere of action and moderate their ideology. This is one of the most important lessons of the Turkish experience and it has significant implications for Islamist movements in other Muslim countries. Turkey's case shows that a democratic system works best to integrate Islamist movements into mainstream politics. The interplay of freedom of action and its limits in a democracy has a dynamic of its own which leads potentially radical movements to play by the rules of the game. In doing so, these rules come to define the parameters of both their discourse and practice. Moreover, this process works both ways. Power centers also learn that there are limits to how much they, in turn, can impose the system's definition of rights and freedoms on substantial numbers of people who contest them.

"The Building of Modern Turkey," the subtitle of this article, is intentionally in the present continuous tense. The Turkish experience shows the difficulties involved in the transformation to modernity and democracy. Turkey has been struggling to integrate itself with the modern world for two centuries. It has achieved much in the process. However, its drive towards modernity in terms of both its economic performance and its democratic record is far from complete. Nonetheless, it has "taken off' in the right direction, to use a term that W. W. Rustow designated years ago as an important stage in development. As such, it stands as an example to the rest of the Muslim world. ◉

Notes

1. This survey was carried out in 2003 by Ersin Kalaycioglu and Binnaz Toprak. A book based on the results is in publication.

2. Thus, for example, the decision taken in the 1980s that legalized free abortions in state hospitals and clinics was followed by a *fatwa* (a religious sanction) by the Director of Religious Affairs that argued for its compatibility with Islam.

3. This was the case in France as well, for many years in its history. During the Third Republic (1870–1940), for example, not a single individual who regularly attended mass was given a cabinet position or was promoted in the army.

4. Ali Çarkoglu and Binnaz Toprak, *Türkiye'de Din, Toplum ve Siyaset*, TESEV Publications, 2000.

5. This percentage was down to 14% in the Kalaycioglu-Toprak survey in 2003.

6. "Purpose in Turkish Politics and Its Outcome," *Middle Eastern Studies* 3, no. 3 (April 1967): 301.

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