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Islamic Political Identity in Turkey: Rethinking the West and Westernization

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The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 by the 'Islamic' terrorists and the ensuing 'crusade' waged by the US president Bush against terrorism have brought the relationship between Islam and the west to the agenda of global politics. Amid the talks of clash of civilizations both in the west and the Islamic world there is a possibility of building a new "iron curtain" between Islam and the west. Perception and representation of the west has historically contributed to formation and radicalization of Islamic identity in modern times. The post-September 11 developments are likely to reinforce the view that Islam and the west are bound to confront each other. The inclination to see Islam and the west in confrontation, popular among both some westerners and the Muslims, should not blind us to notice a fundamental change in some Islamic groups' approach towards the west and the western/modern political values with a possible impact on the path for democratization of the Islamic world and a dialogue between Islam and the west.

This research is an attempt to understand the shifts in the identity shaping perception of the west prevalent among the Turkish Islamists. While observing that modern Islamic identity in Turkey has been shaped by an opposition to the west, western political values and westernization policies of the republic it is argued that understanding of the west by the Islamists was not locked in the late 19th century. In recent years it can be observed that in a 'unique' way the Islamists have departed from their conventional position and seemed to engage in a process of 'rethinking' the west, modern/western political values as well as westernization. What I call *rethinking* the west and westernization have its roots in recent political developments in Turkey, which will be explained in detail in the forthcoming pages. The changing discourse of Turkish Islamists presents an important move not only for the spread of modern political values among the Islamists of Turkey but also for a possibility of rapprochement between Islam and the west in the post-September 11 context. Thus the objective of this research is to assess the depth of Turkish Islamists' rapprochement with the west and westernization, and evaluate whether this discursive shift is circumstantial or substantial with an impact on the identity formation of modern Islamists. The paper will therefore address at political and intellectual background of the roots and elements of 'rethinking' the west, 'western/modern' values and westernization by explaining the themes and terms of the Islamists' debate, and evaluate its outcomes and impacts.

The Source of Islamic Identity: The West and Westernization

Last two hundred years of Turkey is the history of westernization. Once the late Ottomans realized the decline of their state vis-a-vis the rising power of the Europeans they embarked on a process of adopting 'western' ways that made the west 'great'.[1] It started with westernization of the army, then the state/government and finally daily lives. This history in essence was a history of the search for the ways to respond to western pressures in military, political, economic and cultural/civilizational realms. At the very inception the quest for westernization was defensive in nature, it was the attempt of a declining power to revive and catch up with the rising western civilization.[2]

Thus the west and westernization have emerged as central concepts, a key to understand Turkish politics in modern times. As references to the 'Eastern Question' of European powers help understand the process of disintegration of the Ottoman empire at the dawn of the 20th century the concepts of the west and westernization, the latter being a response to the former at domestic front, is a key to analysis the late Ottoman and recent Turkish history. The western question, that is the way to look at, relate to and imitate the west, became a central debate in the attempt of the late Ottomans to "save the state" against disintegrative pressures of the European powers. The debate addressed to the grand question of the 19th and early 20th centuries, that is how to cope with the challenge of the west, thus how to save the country? It in practice turned to be a debate about how to westernize. Westernization as a concept and program to "renew" the state and society also became an identity constituting orientation.

On the one hand the west with its might was poising a threat to the very existence of the shirking empire, on the other it was the rising civilization with its wealth and power. As a result the Turks were both threatened and attracted by the west. It was both a source of threat and admiration. Thus the relations of the Turks to the west right from the beginning of the modern times had a double edge of love and hate; admiration and fear.

The challenge and penetration of the west in the 19th century was central to formation of the early modern Islamic identity too. Islamic political identity was a construction in response to the western penetration in, domination on and resulting humiliation of the Muslims. Early Islamic thinking was provoked by the western challenge. Writings of Namik Kemal, Afghani, Said Halim Pasa and later Mehmet Akif addressed to the issue of the

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[1] B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1968, pp.45-72.
[2] For 'defensive modernization' see D. A. Rustow, 'The Modernization of Turkey in Historical and Comparative Perspective' in K. Karpat (ed.) *Social Change and Politics in Turkey: A Structural-Historical Analysis*, Leiden, Brill, 1973, pp.94-95.

west/western civilization attempting to develop an Islamic response to the western challenge.[3] Even in the pan-Islamist policy of Abdulhamid II the idea of resisting to the pressure of the west was dominant. It was to a large extent designed to balance the power of the British in India by invoking the notion of the caliphate.[4]

The challenge of the west was at least two folds. The west had penetrated into the Islamic lands politically, militarily and economically by the 19th century. Thus the question of how to stop the advancement of the west into the Islamic lands was a practical/political issue. Secondly, the growing superiority of the West put what the 'Islamic civilization' stood for in question. For some it was not only an issue of the power of the West but disability of Islamic civilization to produce wealth, power and science anymore. So the "glorious Islamic civilization" was to blame for the weakness of Muslims too as the attributes of backwardness was also found in the Islamic civilization for some.[5] This was a fundamental challenge that the Muslims had to respond since the very relevance, validity and functionality of Islam was questioned. When Earnest Renan published his famous attack on Islam which was depicted as an obstacle to devoploment, science and technology, the response was swift provoking strong reactions in Turkey. N. Kemal wrote his famous Renan Mudafanamesi explaining progressive essence of Islam itself while putting the blame on the Muslims.[6]

On response to the challenge posed on the validity of Islam the Islamic thinking moved into a defensive/apologetic form arguing that there certainly exited a relationship between the fate of Muslims and their faith. What followed from this was the argument that the Muslims were left behind because they deviated from the true belief .[7] Then a soul-searching process was started; what was the essence of Islam, how to go back to pure Islam, to the roots of Islam, how to revive Islam and Islamic civilization? That was the very beginning of the process of reconstructing an Islamic identity which was shaped by the immediate, burning challenge of the west. The search for the roots led the Islamic thinkers to

[3] S. Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1962; M. Turkone, *Siyasi Ideoloji Olarak Islamciligin Dogusu*, Istanbul, Iletisim Yayinlari, 1991.

[4] For Abdulhamid's pan-Islamist policies see his memoirs *Siyasi Hatiratim*, Istanbul, Dergah Yayinlari, 1974, pp.171-185; J. M. Ladau, *The Politics of Pan-Islam, Oxford*, Clarendon Press, 1990.

[5] H. Ziya Ulken, *Turkiye'de Cagdas Dusunce Tarihi*, Istanbul, Ulken Yayinlari, 1966, pp. 207-208; Particularly Abdullah Cevdet who called for major reforms in Islam in his journal, Ictihad, was very critical of Islam an religion in general as obstacles to development and progress, see S. Hanioglu, *Bir Siyasal Dusunur Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Donemi*, Ucdal Nesriyat, Istanbul, 1981.

[6] I. Kara (ed.), *Turkiye'de Islamcilik Dusuncesi*, Istanbul, 1986, p.xxi, xxii; Ulken, *Turkiye'de Cagdas Dusunce Tarihi*, p.119; A. Hourani, *Europe and the Middle East*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1980, p.12.

[7] For an early expression of this diagnosis see Said Halim Pasa, *Buhranlarimiz*, Istanbul, Tercuman Yayinlari, nd; Kara, *Turkiye'de Islamcilik Dusuncesi, pp.73-174.* Said Halim Pasa was one of the influential figures in the second constitutional period starting in 1908..

a textual construction of Islam; a prelude to modernist and fundamentalist readings of Islam in relation to the modern.[8]

In responding to the western pressures the west was described as the source of all problems Muslims encountered; the west was evil, degenerating and destroying Islamic civilization. In the construction of a modern Islamic identity there were also references to the history; the history of clash between the cross and the crescent. The western assault on Islam in the modern times was nothing but a continuation of historical conflicts.[9] The historical account was actualized by references to the 'wrongdoings' of the west in the modern times. The west did not only brought violence, war, exploitation and imperialism to the Islamic world but it was also spiritually flawed. Materialism was the essence of western civilization; a civilization that killed the God. Lack of spiritual values and social decadence were among the features of western civilization that was to poison the Islamic civilization with its illness.[10]

However, the Islamists, while adhering to a notion of historical clash between the cross and the crescent, have always maintained a kind of messianic hope about the future of the clash between Islam and the west. In a mood of escapism despite the apparent superiority of the west the Islamists believed that the west was destined to fall down because of its 'inherent illness'. Moreover theories of rise and fall of great civilizations have always attracted the Islamists with the hope that "the circle of history" will one day bring down the western civilization even if the west escapes from its inherent deficits and the challenges of the Muslims. As time passed by without realization of the anticipated the messianic utopia among the Islamists was further enhanced.

In short the west was conceived as an absolute other, an identity generating "problem/issue" to which the Islamic thinking had to respond. Yet the state of relationship between the two at the turn of 19th century created a longing among the Muslims for 'modernization', which was expected to empower the Islamic communities to resist the western hegemony. To make a differentiation between westernization and modernization has always been popular among the Islamists simply because they saw modernization as a prelude to emancipation while westernization as enslavement to the west and estrangement from the

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[8] For the roots of Islamic thinking in modernity see A. Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities*, London, Verso, 1993.
[9] See the chapters on Afghani, Abduh, and Qutb in A. Rahnema (ed.), *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, London, Zed Books, 1994.
[10] Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb were particularly strong on this theme; see D. Commins, 'Hasan al-Banna", pp.125-152 and C. Tripp, 'Sayyid Qutb: The Political Vision', in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, pp. 154-183.

Islamic civilization.[11] It was through technological renovation and economic development that the quest to finish off Western domination was possible. Thus the emphasis put on 'heavy industry' by Erbakan, the leader of National View movement, in the 1970s was not only a populist policy to create employment and welfare to the backward regions of Turkey in a bid to buy off their votes, but it also had a wider political/strategic objective. Technological and economic development was conceived as a means for securing full independence and ridding of western supremacy.[12] They seemed not interested much in the western civilization *per se* and its components instead impressed by its outcome; i.e. power. What they were after was to acquire power by modern/western means.

Kemalism, Islam and Westernization

However it was not only the west itself but the wider western question, as confronted by the Muslims, was an identity generating issue. The western question, as explained, was about how to respond to the western challenge. The dominant currency was westernization, adopting western civilization in whole as a means of catching up and coping with the west. Westernization pursued by Turkish state elites therefore was bound to influence the form of government and the traditional way of life. As such westernization also meant secularization by which the traditional Islamic sectors were pushed aside from the governmental affairs and even from their social leadership in the community. Westernization process and policies along a secularists direction resulted in the exclusion of Islamic leaders, groups and thought from the centers of the power making Islam in practice irrelevant for Turkish state and society. The westernization program did not consider Islam as a source of strength against the supremacy of the west, instead it was seen as an obstacle, the source of the problem. Thus westernization presuming the possibility of a civilizational shift was, for the Islamists, a rejection of Islam in the renovation of Turkish state in the face of western pressures.

In the process of westernization and secularization during the early years of the republican era the caliphate was abolished, religious orders and institutions were closed down, western civil law was adopted, religious schools and education were banned. The republican project of westernization aimed at making Islam socially invisible, swept to

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[11] The views of early pro-Islamic intellectuals in Turkey such as Said Halim Pasa, Mehmet Akif Ersoy and Seyh'ul-Islam Mustafa Sabri see B. Toprak, 'The Religious Right', in I.C. Schick and E. A. Toprak (eds.) *Turkey in Transition: New Perspectives*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp.227-228.

[12] I. D. Dagi, *Kimlik, Soylem ve Siyaset: Dogu-Bati Ayriminda Refah Partisi Gelenegi*, Ankara, Imge Yayinevi, 1999, pp.17-18.

individual/private sphere. In short westernization meant the use of the (modernized) state apparatus to suppress the roles of Islam in social and political realms.

For the Islamists therefore the republican reforms made it clear that it was not the west but the westernizers and the westernization program that swept them away from the centers of political and social order. They felt excluded and marginalised not only as a group of people but their identity and discourse were de-legitimized in the process of radical secularization embarked on by the republican leaders. As would be expected Islamic individuals, groups and institutions opposed 'de-Islamization' of society through westernization. Foreign occupation was more acceptable in comparison to westernization for it could be resisted somehow and sometime. But the wesernization program, transforming social/daily life, posed to take away the very social base on which Islamists had to operate. Being deprived of political authority Islamic social space was threatened by totalistic program of republican westernization. So the issue turned out to be a domestic power struggle. The process resulted in the emergence of a new elite who regarded Islam as part of private domain with no impact on social and political spheres.[13]

As a result the west was viewed as reflected/represented by the westernizers and westernization program. In the struggle for survival against the westernizers the Islamists were bound to develop an identity based on anti-westernism. However, despite the historical references and actual domination of the west reinforcing the culture of clash between the "cross and the crescent" the main issue for the Turkish Islamists was the revolutionary/radical secularization policies of the westernizers in the republican Turkey for it was a fight fought at domestic level. Thus for the internal construction of an Islamic identity objection to westernization became the main theme.[14]

As such Turkish Islamic identity was shaped to a very large extent by its rejection of the Kemalist program. But this was not a rejection on pure ideological/programmatic ground. The rejection was a form of quest for survival against eliminating pressures of the Kemalist reforms. Rejection of the west and westernization was embodied in their objection to Kemalist program. Kemalism, brought an ultimate program for the westernization of Turkey, was identified with the west and western domination over Turkey. The west was therefore also opposed on the ground that it provided a source of inspiration, a framework of justification for the authoritarian westernization and secularization policies at home. Thus

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[13] N. Gole, 'Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites', *Middle East Journal*, Vol.51, no.1, 1997, pp.46-58.
[14] Mehmet Dogan, *Batililasma Ihaneti*, Istanbul, Beyan Yayinlari, 1986.

Islamists' rejection of the West and westernization was to some extent a rejection of the Kemalist design to re-form society and politics along a secularist line eroding influence of Islam in social and political formations.[15]

This formed the very basis of secularist/Islamist tension in Turkey.[16] The republic shaped by the Kemalist program was a secular experiment that marginalized Islam and Islamic groups. Kemalist notion of secularism was rejected by the Islamists as being anti-religion and as such designed to eliminate Islam at least in public sphere. Yet Islamic groups did not accept the peripheral role assigned to Islam in a secular, Kemalist republic.

No doubt the Kemalist program was a break with the past. Secularism was one of the means to break with the past that was heavily blended by Islam and its social authority. For the Kemalists elite the process and eventual success of secularism was also a matter of political survival in the face of the challenges put up by the Islamic periphery. Thus the disagreement on secularism was part of an inter-elite fight for political power.[17] In this the Kemalists looked at the Turkish Armed Forces as the ultimate arbiter. The army assumed especially during the multi-party politics after 1950 a guardian role in maintaining secularism not only as a constitutional order but also a political/ideological discourse to prevent, and if necessary eliminate, the Islamist challenge.

Islamic Political Identity in Modern Turkey and the West:
The Case of the National View Movement (NVM)

In the process of restructuring Turkish politics following the 1960 military intervention Islam's increasing popular and political appeal continued. Its first outright political expression was the establishment of the National Order Party under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan in 1970. The party was closed down by the Constitutional Court in the following year on the ground that the party exploited religion for political purposes. One year later the National Salvation Party was established under the leadership of the same group. Receiving 11.8 % and 8.6% of the total votes in the 1973 and 1977 elections respectively it joined in all coalition governments between 1973 and 1980 becoming an important political actor in Turkish politics.[18]

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[15] M. H. Yavuz, 'Turkey's Imagined Enemies: Kurds and Islamists', *The World Today*, Vol.52, No.4, 1996, pp.99-101.

[16] S. Mardin, 'Ideology and Religion in the Turkish Revolution', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.2, No.2, pp.197-211.

[17] Gole, 'Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites', pp.46-58.

[18] B. Toprak, 'Politicization of Islam in a Secular State: the National Salvation Party in Turkey', in S. A. Arjomand (ed.), *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam: Essays on Social Movements in the Contemporary*

The movement led by Erbakan is known as the "National View"[19] which was defined as the very essence of the nation and its values. It referred to nation's own civilization derived from its history and culture that was shaped by Islam. The term did not tell much and the movement did not have a well defined political program. It was a set of aspiring yet ambiguous references to history, and criticism directed against 'cosmopolitanism' as oppose to the 'national'. The premises of the "national view" could not be questioned, yet there could be no doubt about its truthfulness. As such the "national view" was conceived as the embodiment of the nation that encapsulated the truth, a kind of sacred text without a text, yet unquestionable and undoubtful.[20] However ambiguous it may seen, under the disguise of a historical and cultural discourse, in fact the 'national view' referred to Islam.

The National Salvation Party (NSP) differentiated itself from other political movements with a critical stand towards the history of Turkish westernization. The leadership believed that westernization was understood by the early republican leaders as a denial of traditional (read it as Islamic) values, attitudes and institutions. This was the very reason for the break up of the Ottoman Empire and break down of social, economic and political order during the republican era, the argument went.[21] Attempts for replacing Islamic-Ottoman civilization with the western one was the source of spreading and continuing illness of Turkish society. Yet instead of adapting a total rejection of the west and modernization as a whole they made a distinction between western culture and technology, and strongly advocated a technological renovation of Turkey. To follow this point the NSP claimed that it was the only party that could manage economic development based on "heavy industry". In the 1970s the NSP leadership promoted the image of the party's relevance not only to spiritual but also material development of Turkish people by emphasizing its commitment to and success in laying down the basis of heavy industry in Turkey. Yet economic and technological development was also conceived as a precondition for independence from the domination of the west. Thus modernization meant not only the welfare of the people but also full independence from the west. Thus the way in which they approached to the western question led them to uphold development not in itself but as a prelude to get rid of western domination.

This emphasis on 'modernization and development' as a 'liberating' pre-condition from the western hegemony was an important feature of the NSP. While the fundamentalist

Near and Middle East, Albany, N.Y., State University of New York Press, 1984; Toprak, 'The Religious Right', pp.227-231.
[19] Hereafter it will be referred as the NVM.
[20] _Milli Gazete_, August 3, 2001.
[21] Toprak, 'The Religious Right', p. 229.

Islamic movements oppose western "modernity" as a whole the NSP's heavy emphasis on industrialization, the material outcome of western "modernity", distinguished it from the fundamentalist thinking. The NSP was in its essence conservative and traditionalist heavily colored by a peripheral Islamic-discourse. It will be a mistake to portray NVM as merely an Islamic party using only Islamic symbols. It is essential not to forget that NVM was also a political vehicle for the modernization demands of traditionalist sectors. In fact they represented the renewing face of modernizing Islam in Turkish politics. While advocating a submission to 'national and spiritual values' they were also quick to express a demand for material wealth.

The party used a strong anti-capitalist language with a reference to traditional notion of social justice. It drew support from the "men of bazaar" of provincial towns. Anti-Western and anti-capitalist ideological stand of the NSP was appealing especially for this group. In the process of Turkey's economic development up to 1970 small towns emerged as the periphery in economic terms that was challenged by the growing capitalist monopolist. So in this period by supporting the NSP the economic periphery was responding to its growing weakness in the face of capitalist-big business challenge. They now wanted not a mere participation in political process through which they could express their traditional values and life styles but also an economic redistribution through the political center. That was the basis of the NSP's challenge to the center-right Justice Party that aligned with the big business. This feature of the 'national view' movement continued up to the 1990s.

Islamic Identity, the West and the Welfare Party

The issue of the west, or attempt to give an answer to the west/ern question has been a fundamental problem for the NVM.[22] The Welfare Party's *view of the world* and its choice regarding the place of Turkey within constituted its domestic source of identity. Perception of external world, namely the west, and the need to stand against it was a significant source of NWM's identity formation, its public discourse and policies.[23] Identity formative features of anti-westernism prevented this attitude to be confined merely within a debate about direction of Turkish foreign policy and its alignment with the West but it led to policies aimed at shaping domestic political architecture accordingly.

As for many Muslim societies the question of the west also relates to the local history of westernization. In the case of NVM it could be argued that the response of the NVM to the

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[22] Dagi, *Kimlik, Soylem, ve Siyaset*, pp. 23-25, 42-75.

history of westernization in Turkey had even a greater impact on the formation of its identity with implications on its assessment of both domestic and foreign affairs. The NVM tradition did not only propose a re-orientation of Turkish foreign policy from its traditional pro-Western stand to the Islamic world, but even more importantly brought a fundamental criticism of recent Turkish history of westernization. Erbakan proclaimed before the 1995 general elections that once they came to power they would put an end to the process of westernization.[24] The actors, institutions, process and objective of westernization were questioned in the name of authenticity, i.e. Islamic civilization, historical confrontation between the "cross and the crescent", and the search for power vis-a-vis the west.

The way in which the western question was viewed gave some clues about both the NVM's stand on domestic politics and its foreign policy priorities. In fact this positioning answered the question of 'where Turkey belonged to internationally' for the NV followers . The answer came up with was that historically, culturally and geographically Turkey did not belong to the western world, instead it shared its past, values and institutions with the Islamic world. Turkey belonged to the East/Islamic world internationally, a world that had to be mobilized to balance the power and pressure of the west.[25] Here one should not miss the point that even pro-Islamic world orientation of the party derived largely from the perceived need to resist and respond to the west. Islamic world was conceived as an alternative not on its own but as a means to balance the power of the west.

Yet anti-westernism formed the basis of a criticism not only of western oriented Turkish foreign policy but also of Turkish history of westernization regarded as bound to lead to an alliance with the west. It was westernization policies that resulted in the abandonment of the Islamic world and laid the ground to be an all-season ally of the West. As such NVM had a domestically oriented and targeted analysis of the west. Making a linkage between westernization and western oriented foreign policy the NVM proposed in its foreign policy agenda a rapprochement towards the Islamic world which had been excluded from the foreign policy priorities during the republican period.

To sum up, as a political movement derived, to a very large extent, from indigenous cultural and political sources the identity of the NVM relied on a criticism of the last two hundred years of Turkey-West relations, and the perception and imitation of the west by westernizers. This stand displayed historical roots of the NVM which envisaged a

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[23] Ibid., pp.41-44.8
[24] *Milli Gazete*, December 4, 1995.
[25] *Erbakan ve Turkiye'nin Temel Meseleleri*, H. H. Ceylan, (ed.), Ankara, Rehber Yayinlari, 1996, pp.99-100; *Milli Gazete*, September 21, 1995.

confrontation not only with the west but also with the local history of westernization, formation of the new Turkey along this line and the leading actors of this process, the westernizers. The NVM, in a way, resembled other Islamic movements in the Middle East which were prompted by western penetration into the region. The fact that Turkey had not been colonized differentiated the NVM's approach to the west in comparison with other anti-western Islamic movements in the Middle East. Due to this historical fact the NVM was more focused on 'degeneration of the national values' by the process of westernization rather than direct penetration of the west into the country. The impact of westernization on the Islamic formation of Turkish state and society, traditionally influenced by Islam, was a more serious problem than that of the west itself. The identity of the NVM required confronting not only the west but also westernization of Turkey in the hands of the "west's lackeys".[26] Thus not only western domination in Turkey but also westernization, with its actors, institutions, process and objectives had to be eliminated to have a 'national order'.

Therefore the resistance to westernization, with its actors, institutions and objectives constituted the very basis of NVM's political stand that differentiated itself form all other political movements in Turkey. It was the issue around which the identity of the movement was constructed.

To conclude, the NVM's identity and discourse were defined in relations to the West/ernization. The west was conceived as 'the mother of all evils' and as such represented the absolute 'other'. In this way the "national self" was to a very large extent created through the otherness of the west. Not only the WP but also the identities of the other political parties, institutions or individuals in Turkey were thought to be determined by their stand on the west and western question. At the end they were described either as those advocating the 'national view' or the imitators of the West.[27] The west was evil, corrupting, degenerating and thus the mother of all problems faced by the Muslims. Westernization was even worse; it was an ultimate betrayal of the nation and what the nation stood for. It was the westernization project and the westernizers that led to the break up of the late Ottoman Empire; it was westernization project and westernizers that were responsible for the exploitation of the country, its backwardness and poverty of the people as well as cultural alienation of the people from their own civilization.

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[26] *Milli Gazete*, December 4, 1995.
[27] Dagi, *Kimlik, Soylem, ve Siyaset*, p.23.

Explaining the Rise of the Welfare Party: Crisis of Turkish Politics and the Question of the West

The NSP was closed down in 1981 along with other political parties by the military regime. In the process of transition to multiparty politics a new party named the Welfare Party (WP) was founded in 1983 by a group of people close to Erbakan who had been banned from politics along with all other leaders of pre-1980 political parties. In the local elections of March 1984 the party received 4.8% of the total votes. The electoral system geared to curb the fragmentation of the votes along small parties had introduced general and regional thresholds to pass. Under the leadership of Erbakan following the lift of ban on former political leaders imposed by the military regime of 1980-1983 it increased the share of the total vote to 7% in the general elections of November 1987, yet failing to pass 10% country-wide election threshold, and could not have representation in the parliament. The party had a better, in fact promising and encouraging result in the 1989 local elections by receiving 9.8% of the total votes gaining mayorship of five provinces. The increase in the WP's votes was attributed to the declining popularity of the ruling Motherland Party (MP) and withdrawal of support by the Nakshibendi dervish order from the Motherland Party after the disassociation of Turgut Özal with his former party after being elected as the president in 1989. This trend in the decline of the MP and rise of the WP continued throughout the 1990s. Determined to enter the parliament the WP made an election alliance, so called the holy alliance, with two other right-wing nationalist political parties. The result was a success with nearly 17% of the total votes and 65 seats in the parliament. It was a success also because the single biggest party emerged with only 28% of popular support. Forged out of pragmatic considerations the alliance broke up within a month but nevertheless it served to carry conservative-right wing and Islamist forces to the parliament. While it was difficult to judge the real power of the WP by the election results due to the coalition of the three it was obvious that the WP was on rise.

As the election campaign displayed the party stressed on social problems not religious themes with modern propaganda means. It particularly tried to mobilize the urban poor, a strategy that paid off in 1994 municipal elections. The NVM seemed in touch with reactions of the people who suffered from liberalization policies of the 1980s that had a negative impact on peripheral social and economic groups. Erbakan often blamed the rant economy and the collaboration of the beneficiaries of rant economy with political forces for the poverty, budget deficit and unemployment. The call for production, investment and employment touched upon the sensitivities of the masses, particularly of urban ones. One can say that the NVM was

always able to mobilize support through its messages for the periphery based on the language of the sacred and poverty[28]. The leadership came to realize the need for turning the party into a mass political movement. As a result not an exclusionary but an inclusionary language was adopted. A softer image of the party was promoted by publicizing participation of new "moderate" names to widen support base of the party from different social and economic groups. This policy continued right up to the March 1994 local elections in which the WP proved its growing political power. It received 19% of the total votes and captured the mayorships of 28 provinces including Ankara and Istanbul, a shocking result for centrist and secularist political parties. The real shock came with the 1995 general elections in which the WP came first capturing 21% of total votes. After a short-lived coalition government of center-right political parties Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of the Welfare Party, formed a coalition government, known as Refah-Yol, with the center right True Path Party. First time in the republican history a pro-Islamic political party came to power as a major force, holding a prime ministerial position.[29]

In a deadlocked domestic political scene the Welfare Party had emerged as the party for change. It was able to mobilize not only rural but also urban periphery. This may be because the traditionalist forces of rural areas who used to support the NSP in the 1970s had moved to shanty towns around metropolitan centers, and there under the increasing pressures of unemployment, housing, health care etc., needed more of a community, solidarity and identity provided by Islamic groups and the WP.[30] The election results, hence, did not prove that the Welfare Party became an urban movement as such but it meant that urban areas were encircled by traditionalist rural migrants who were poor and thus receptive to propaganda machine of WP emphasizing social and economic problems as well as the need for community and solidarity.

In fact economic and social problems dominated Turkish politics in the 1990s following the 1994 economic crisis. Around 22% electoral support received by WP was a reaction to the failures of neo-liberal policies in the late 1980s and early 1990s.[31] It had become clear by 1994 that the benefits of neoliberal policies could not be extended to the urban poor and to the emerging new small scaled industrialists who used to support

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[28] *Sabah*, 28 April 2001.
[29] M. H. Yavuz, 'Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 30, No.1, 1997, pp.63-82; S. Sayari, 'Turkey's Islamist Challenge', *Middle East Quarterly*, September, 1996, pp.35-43.
[30] Z. Onis, 'The Political Economy of Islamic Resurgence in Turkey: The Rise of the Welfare Party in Perspective', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.18, No.4, pp.743-766; R. Cakir, *Ne Seriat Ne Demokrasi: Refah Partisini Anlamak*, Istanbul, Metis, 1994.

Motherland Party of Ozal, both hit hardest by the economic crisis. So social and economic themes raised by the WP had a wider effect going beyond its traditional pro-Islamic supporters.

Apart from economic and social circumstances in favor of the WP the party leadership also tried to transform the WP from an ideological outlook into a mass political movement in 1990s in order to widen its support base. Yet the WP was careful not to lose its traditionalist character and discourse. In fact it proved to be a vehicle through which traditionalist forces claimed not only a political voice but also an economic share in the growing Turkish economy in which the state traditionally performed a redistribute role. This was true especially for urban poor and traditionalist bourgeois, the groups that emerged as the support base of the WP. The WP' effective use of the party slogan "just order" was appealing for the poor of urban periphery and the middle class who were fed up with corruption in the system. One should notice that "just order" did not only refer to a 'divine' order but also a redistribution of the wealth. As such it was a perfectly designed political language cutting cross various social and economic segments.

The Welfare Party's emergence as an alternative to power was also closely related to the crisis of centrist politics in Turkey. Fragmentation of center-right and center-left parties and their inability to produce reformist policies to address social problems created a vacuum that the WP moved to fill with its call for "just order". In this context that the shaky coalition government of the True Path Party (TPP) and Social Democrat Populist Party (SDPP) formed following the 1991 general elections served to the crisis of the centrist politics. The coalition, while welcomed as a historical compromise between the two arch rivals of the left and the right, damaged the public credential of both parties as a result of governmental policies leaving no alternative in the center-right or center-left but the growing WP with its radical and populist discourse. Thus the alternative of the government could not be the other political parties of the center but the WP, which declared itself as an anti-systemic party.

The WP also benefited from the problems emerged with the end of the cold war. The impact of international developments on the growth of WP is generally underrated. It can be argued however that changes in international politics at the beginning of 1990s had a strong impact on Turkey given the fact that the country had been opened up to the world during the 1980s by liberalization policies of Ozal governments making the country receptive to

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[31] Onis, 'The Political Economy of Islamic Resurgence in Turkey: The Rise of the Welfare Party in Perspective', pp.753-754.

international developments.[32] The country had thus become more sensitive to the developments that took place beyond its borders. Among these the most important of all was the rejection of Turkey's application for full membership in the EC in December 1987. The rejection had a dramatic impact on the self-perception of the Turks and their views of the west, and created a sense of exclusion from the west even among pro-western and secular groups.[33] A conservative view that the rejection was motivated on cultural/religious grounds gained popularity in almost all sectors of Turkish society. The emerging disappointment with the west enhanced the position of the Welfare Party that had always opposed to EC membership and made its anti-westernizm public.

Furthermore the end of the Cold War resurfaced the view that Islam and the west would be the clashing sides in the new era. There were some speculations among the Islamists that in the new era the west would replace the communist threat with the threat of Islam as part of an effort to keep the west together and the NATO justified in the absence of a communist threat. The publication of Huntington's article on the "clash of civilizations" in 1993 only reinforced this view prevalent among the Islamists. Furthermore the statements of General Willy Claes, the secretary General of NATO, in 1995 describing Islamic fundamentalism as a new global threat for NATO was a confirmation for the Islamists of the new age of the clash between Islam and the west.

The events concerning the Muslims in Bosnia and Azerbaijan at the end of the Cold War also enhanced this views. Dramatic events in Bosnia where the Muslims were subjected to ethnic cleansing without any protection in the heart of Europe had a effect on the self-perception of the Turkish masses. In fact, a sense of total identification with the west among the vast majority of Turkish people turned into questioning the very values that the west stood for. The incomprehensible discrepancy between the western diplomacy of promoting human rights in Turkey, its interest in the Kurdish problem and yet its inaction to stop the killings of the Muslims in Bosnia led Turkish public opinion to the conviction that the west was employing a double standard.[34] From Turkey it seemed that the Europeans stood by and watched the massacre of the Muslims mercilessly because the Serbs were finishing off the remainings of "the Eastern question". The West lost its moral authority, appeal and attraction

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[32] I. D. Dagi, 'Human Rights, Democratization and the European Community in Turkish Politics: the Ozal Years', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37, No.1, 2001, pp.17-40.

[33] I. D. Dagi, 'Turkey in the 1990s: Foreign Policy, Human Rights and the Search for a New Identity', *Mediterranean Quarterly: Journal of Global Issues,* Vol..4, No.4, 1993, pp.60-77.

[34] Dagi, 'Turkey in the 1990s: Foreign Policy, Human Rights and the Search for a New Identity', p. 71-75; D. Pipes and P. Clawson, "Ambitious Iran and Troubled Neighbors", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.72, No.1, (1993), p.136.

in the eyes of the vast majority of Turkish people.[35] Westernization, as an unquestioned orientation based on self-identification and association with the west, seemed to be heading for an end. Realizing that Turkey was unable to do anything about it led to frustration, anger and disillusionment. Frustrated by the whole event, disappointed with the west, a deep skepticism about western values and the friendship of the Europeans emerged. The ideological gap about the place of the west and its values in Turkey among secularists, liberals, leftists, conservatives and Islamists seemed disappearing.[36] The image and prestige of the west was further worsened by the critical western approach to the Kurdish question and human right in Turkey. Even a talk of the end of westernization as a cultural and political orientation of Turkey started leading to a search for a new identity orientation as well as foreign policy direction.

Political repercussions of alienation from the West, the discrediting of Western values, and hence the search for a new indigenous national identity was reflected by the end of 1992. The anti-Western Islamist Welfare Party came first by winning 28 % of the vote in local by elections in Istanbul. The result did not only reflect the frustration of the urban masses with the government but was also a rejection of the west as a set of justifications for cultural and political modernization, and the disappointment with the policies of Europe with regard to the Turkish membership bid in the EC and the Bosnian tragedy.

In short in the early 1990s anti-westernism, which was even adopted by then the president Demirel other centrist political leaders, gained a political currency. However anti-westernism had always been a breeding ground for traditionalist-Islamist movements. Thus the wave of anti-westernism in the first half of the 1990s served to the interest of the Welfare Party. The WP's anti-west discourse gained a widespread legitimacy amid the growing disappointment with the west. Once being a joke by many the WP's political jargon of "western clubism" became the new center of political language. The crisis of the west in the eyes of the Turkish people brought the WP to the center of Turkish politics due to its very identity: anti-westernism. The National View was not seen anymore as an anomaly but an accurate observation about the attitude of the west and the place of Turkey in the world. Thus the post-cold war political milieu with its immediate crises and long term projections

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[35] For the disappointments of the Turkish people with Europe on its Bosnian policy, see K. Mackenzie, "Turkey's Circumspect Activism", *The World Today*, (Feb.1993), p.26; and Dagi, "Turkey in the 1990s", pp.71-75.
[36] M. Calik, "Turklesmek, Islamlasmak, Muassirlasmak", *Yeni Toplum*, Vol.1, (1992), No.1, pp.36-38; M. Turkone, "Tanzimat'in Sonu" (The end of Tanzimat), *Turkiye Gunlugu*, No.20, 1992, pp.40-42; Zulfu Livaneli, *Milliyet*, January 11, 1995, p.5. Also see the volume by A. Eralp, M. Tünay and B. Yesilada (eds.) *The Political and Socioeconomic Transformation of Turkey*, Westport: Praeger, 1993 for assessments of the changes Turkey went through in late 1980s.

contributed to the 'normalization' / justification/ vindication of traditional position of the NVM towards the west, which was the very basis of its identity leading to the WP's electoral successes in the 1990s.

The February 28 or a Post-Modern Coup against the Islamists

Despite its gradual yet rapid growth in the early 1990s the WP did not have any programmatic preparation except a concept of 'just order', an effective slogan to appeal the masses but also the one that provoked reactions from secularist/Kemalists circles. The party looked anti-secularist and anti-democratic largely because of their traditional positioning in Turkish politics. However from the 1991 elections onward the WP had tried to be a mainstream party despite its anti-systemic discourse by opening up to wider electorates stretching beyond the Islamists. They successfully reflected social and economic problems into the language of the party and as a result its activities appealed poverty stricken urban masses. Its success in the 1990s lied in the ability to appeal to the masses, particularly the urban-poor masses with an emphasis on social and economic problems apart from its peripheral Islamic discourse. The WP's core supporters and obviously leadership remained strongly pro-Islamic. In early 1997 when the traditional Islamic language used in small party meetings, meant to remain within the WP/Islamic circles, was exposed to the public at large the party, its ideas and leadership looked threatening the secular regime.

A simple fact that Necmettin Erbakan had occupied a prime ministerial position was hard to digest for many Kemalist/secularists groups including the military. Furthermore a banquet given by Erbakan at his official residence to the leaders of Islamic groups and the dervish orders during the fasting month of Ramadan provoked strong secularist reactions. Another social activity organized by a WP mayor at the Sincan district of Ankara to show solidarity with the people of Palestine in which pro-Hamas slogans were chanted and the Iranian ambassador were present was seen an attempt of the Islamists to stage a revolt against the secular Turkish regime. A few days later a tank division of the Turkish army located nearby marched through the streets of Sincan in an open warning that the military would take any action deemed necessary to suppress the Islamic challenge.

The army aligning with some sectors of civil society launched a campaign, justified by their concern about the future of secularism in the face of Islamist challenge, against the WP and in effect against the government. Within the General Staff of Armed Forces the 'West Working Group' was formed to investigate Islamist activities all over the country and in every

parts of society and the state. Soon the National Security Council (NSC), meeting on February 28, 1997, took a number of decisions to 'reinforce secular character of the Turkish state' and its determination to eliminate the Islamist threat. The council, comprised of the commanders of the main forces in the military, the Chief of General Staff and some members of the cabinet, advised the government to take measures to protect secularism against the pressures of the Islamists. The council's constitutional mandate to advise the government on the issues concerning national security meant in effect an ultimatum given the historical influence of the military over political affairs. The council asked the government headed by Erbakan of the Welfare Party to maintain official dress code in the government offices and universities, to introduce compulsory 8 year elementary school education practically closing down the middle school sections of country-wide Imam Hatip Schools (prayer leaders and preachers), to impose strict control over Qur'anic courses and student dormitories run by religious groups and foundations, to reduce the number of Imam Hatip Schools, to establish a section within the Prime Ministers' office to investigate reactionary/Islamic activities in bureaucracy, and to pass law enabling to fire those civil servants found engaged in Islamic activities.

As a result of the February 28 decisions compulsory education was extended to be 8 years effectively closing down the middle school section of the Imam Hatips seen as the breeding ground for Islamist politics, supporters, and sympathizers. While enrolment to these schools fell by 75% in 1999, it is projected that the number of Imam Hatip students will decrease from 192,786 to 24,749 by the year 2004.[37] As part of the pressure put on the Islamists numerous briefings were organized by the General Staff of Armed Forces about the danger of Islamic fundamentalism. Judicial personnel, journalists and other professionals were invited to these briefings in which the ruling party was identified as a reactionary Islamic threat. The briefings were accompanied by an intensive media campaign. Companies described as representing "Islamic capital" were publicly identified and investigations conducted on their networks, source of capital and activities. Islamic organizations and groups had become important economic actors in the mid 1990s through their economic enterprises financed by multi-owner partnerships spreading from Germany to various parts of Anatolia.[38] They were referred to as Islamic capital represented by a pro-Islamic/Anatolian based business organization, Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (MUSIAD). During the February 28 process the so-called Islamic capital was displayed, boycotted and

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[37] B. Oran, 'Kemalism, Islamism and Globalization: A Study on the Focus of Supreme Loyalty in Globalizing Turkey', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2001, p.49.
[38] Ayse Bugra, 'Class, Culture and the State: An Analysis of Interest Representation by Two Turkish Business Association', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.30, No.4, 1998, pp.501-519.

prosecuted as part of an attempt to eliminate financial sources of Islamic movements. Imprisonment of Tayyip Erdogan, popular mayor of Istanbul, was another case by which the pressure over the NVM was demonstrated. Erdogan was sentenced to 10 mounts for inciting hatred among people on religious ground by a speech he made in Siirt in 1998 in which he read a poem written by Ziya Gokalp, pan-Turkish sociologist and ideologue of the new republic.

Quranic courses run by various foundations were closed down, the remaining courses were strictly regulated and participation of students in these courses was made possible after a certain age. Islamic NGOs and foundations were put under a strict control.[39] In sum by the February 28 process, which is later labeled as a post-modern coup d'etat, Islam's not only political but also social and economic bases were targeted. It was accompanied by a heavy ideological/discursive 'attack' of Kemalism eased by the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the Republic. Discursive hegemony of Kemalism was reasserted throughout this period. This was done in collaboration with some civil sectors, the media, Kemalist intellectuals and universities, which justified the label as post-modern coup, on the ground to resist the "reactionary forces" of Islam. "Islamic fundamentalism" was described as the first priority threat to the Turkish state in a "National Policy Paper" prepared by the National Security Council, in which Islamic challenge was cited as a source of threat more dangerous and immediate than the secessionist Kurdish nationalism.[40]

As part of the campaign against political Islam the public prosecutor lodged a file in the constitutional court in May 1997 for the closure of the ruling Welfare Party on the ground that the party engaged in anti-secularist activities. After a public campaign led by the General Staff Headquarter through its "briefings on reactionaryizm" covered enthusiastically by the media the coalition government was brought down in July 1997. It was later disclosed that the army was close to a direct intervention unless the government had not stepped down. Not long after the WP was closed down by the Constitutional Court in January 1998 on the ground that it had become the center of anti-secularist activities. This was the third party of the NVM led by Erbakan, banned from politics for 5 years, that was closed.[41]

The presence of an Islamic challenge, described as the 'internal threat' exemplified by the position of Erbakan as the prime minister was a justification enough for an active involvement of the army to "guard the secular republic" against the Islamic threat, which

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[39] For February 28 decisions of NSC see *Briefing*, 'Recommendations of the State Council meeting and Comment', March 10, 1997, p.4.
[40] *Hurriyet*, November 4, 1997.
[41] J. Salt, 'Turkey's Military Democracy', *Current History*, February 1999, pp.72-78.

resulted in militarization of society further during the February 28 process. A limited democracy by which army enjoyed a veto role in politics was advocated and in fact was developed by the coalition formed between the army, and some civil and political sectors.

The Virtue Party: A Pro-Western Political Party?

Over the closure of the WP parliamentary group joined in the Virtue Party (VP) which had been formed by Ismail Alptekin, a close associate of Erbakan, after the petition of public prosecutor Vural Savas, to the constitutional court demanding the closure of the WP, to provide a substitute party in case the WP were closed by the court. Recai Kutan, a trustee of Erbakan, was elected as the leader of the party on 14 may 1998.[42] Erbakan who remained as the natural leader of the movement run the party behind-the-scene.

There is no doubt that the Virtue Party was the successor to the Welfare Party. Yet the Virtue Party was different from its predecessor in many respect including its approach to the west. The party's official stand and statements of the party leaders and policies advocated displayed a radical shift. It was not antagonistic to the west anymore; rather moderate, pragmatic and cooperative they seemed. Anti-westernism of the old days had gone, and in fact gone too far that the party looked rather pro-European and pro-American despite its Islamic credentials. This was the irony of the VP during its rather short life-spin from 1998 to 2001. The party seemed abandoned not only its opposition to the west but also adopted western political values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law as part of its new language. Calls for democracy, human rights and the rule of law became the characteristics of NVM's strategy to pursue political struggle in the post-February 28 process during which their party was closed down and the leader was banned from politics.[43]

In a press conference Kutan explained objectives and ideas of the new party stating that they would not use old, yet fundamental concepts of the 'national view' tradition. He explained the reason as that those concepts like the "national view" and "just order" were misunderstood, misrepresented and misinterpreted by some people. Instead he seemed to be more concerned about the need for further democratization in Turkey. He claimed that Turkey had deficiencies in democracy, yet its democracy was still advanced in comparison to Middle Eastern and Islamic countries. He emphasized the importance of the results of democratically

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[42] *Radikal,* May 15, 1998.

[43] The VP leaders often drew similarities between the post-February 28 process and the single-party years of early 1940s. They were careful not to use the 1930s when Ataturk was in power under an authoritarian one party rule until his death in 1938. By referring to the past the VP was trying to highlight that people were under pressure and democracy was lacking in the country. *Yenibinyil*, May 21, 2000.

conducted elections; "Political power should not be attained by non-democratic means". By this he referred to the influence of the army and judiciary to shape political life after February 28 as a result of which the WP-led coalition was forced to resign and the WP was closed down by the constitutional court. Kutan also suggested the 'NSC should be rearranged according to the principles of a western model democracy' through which political influence of civilian-military bureaucracy would be eliminated. He seemed calling for a liberal democracy; a democratic republic. A specific emphasis on freedom of religion and belief was added after stating basic rights and liberties to be respected. Kutan declared that secularism should not be a means to limit freedom of religion and belief. Free market economy along with privatization should be implemented in full. [44]

Thus modern/western values and the west itself were no more anathema to Islamic political identity represented by the VP. This was symbolized in an ironic way by the decision of Erbakan to take the case of the WP closure and his ban from politics for 5 years to the European Court of Human Rights. What he asked in effect was to be judged by a western institution, European Court of Human Rights, and according to western values as incorporated in the European Convention of Human Rights. It was ironic to seek justice in Europe not only because of Erbakan's countless remarks about Europe as unjust, exploitative, imperialistic, anti-Islam, anti-Turkish etc. but also because of what was sought in Europe that was justice, which claimed by the Islamic groups as the strongest attribute of Islamic civilization.

Given the identity and discourse of the national view movement (NVM) this was a hard decision for its leaders. After years of accusation directed towards the west for plotting against Turkey, and the westernizers for being lackeys of the west they now had to seek the help of the west. It was an agonizing decision to take as well as a self-denial in a moment when Erbakan was trapped between the discursive tradition of the NVM and its future. To preserve a future for his political career and the NVM he realized that he must do everything he could to survive. This included asking for help from western quarters in general not only from the ECHR. Given political and legal pressures orchestrated by the Kemalists/secularists forces at home they sought protection for the future of the movement. They sought refugee not only in the west and western institutions like ECHR but also in the discourse of modern/western values like democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Yet this went against their very tradition; the tradition of suspicions towards the west and the tradition of representing the national against the cosmopolitan.

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[44] *Radikal,* December 18,1998, p.7.

The national view tradition had always been critical of Turkey's relations with the west and its quest to be a member of the EU. This was the case even when the WP came to power in 1996. Just before the elections of 1995 a customs union agreement had been reached between the EU and Turkey. In the elections the WP campaigned against the customs union by which they argued Turkey had been colonized by the European capital. Not only the customs union agreement had been targeted as unjust and therefore to be thrown away after the elections but the EU membership in general had been described as a deviation from Turkey's own destiny towards the Islamic world. [45] Following the elections in which WP came first with 21 % vote and formed a coalition government with the True Path Party they showed inclination towards the East as a foreign policy orientation. As such prime minister Erbakan made his first foreign trip to Tehran in a symbolic gesture to show that his party was to depart form West-centric foreign policy orientation.[46] During the WP period free market economy had also used to be described as wild capitalism that would be replaced by the "just order", a model developed by WP on rather a collectivist assumption about production, distribution and social interactions.

In the VP period however the NVM's stand on the EU changed advocating strongly Turkey's integration in the EU in contrast to its former views of the EU as a Christians club. The Party leaders pushed the government and other political parties to comply with Copenhagen political criteria and take Turkey into the accession process. Kutan stressed the centrality of meeting the EU standards on democracy for Turkey. He put his demands for a civic constitution that met Copenhagen political criteria for individual rights and freedoms. Kutan often stated that Turkey faced an open resistance to Copenhagen. 'Yet this (meeting the Copenhagen political criteria) will determine the future of the country'. [47] In sum the VP departed from its own tradition on these and many other issues. The fast break with the tradition of anti-westernizm however gave rise to justified questions about sincerity of the VP leaders.

Kutan and his friends paid special importance to contact to western diplomats and statesmen in an attempt to form an international coalition against institutional and judicial pressures exerted on them. References to Copenhagen political criteria and call for meeting its requirements was an attempt to form a kind of discursive alliance with the west. To seek protection and legitimization through establishing contacts with the western quarters became

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[45] Erbakan's statements in *Milli Gazete*, October 29, 1995; *Milli Gazete*, December 14, 1995.
[46] P. Robins, 'Turkish Foreign Policy Under Erbakan', *Survival*, Vol.39, No.2, 1997, pp.82-100.
[47] *Hurriyet*, May 4, 2000.

even more urgent when the public prosecutor filed a lawsuit for the closure of the VP in April 1999. The case concerning the VP in the constitutional court was portrayed as a source of political instability when the country was implementing an IMF directed stability program. The possible closure of the VP and possibility of an ensuing early elections worried foreign investors and the creditors. Furthermore it was also concerned that closure of the VP may harm Turkey-EU relations further contributing economic and political instability.[48] Kutan had regular meetings with the ambassadors of EU member countries in Ankara.[49] In a Turkey-EU association council meeting in 2001 and the following press conference EU authorities, including Anna Lindh, the foreign minister of Sweden, and Verhuegen, the EU commissioner for enlargement, warned Turkey that closure of political parties were an obstacle before achieving plural democracy and freedom of expression by referring to the case of VP.[50] But soon after the VP was dissolved by the constitutional court. Over the decision of the Constitutional Court Kutan met again with the western diplomats discussing political developments in Turkey.[51] This was a move to gain support from the westerners who were believed to be in a position to pressurize Turkish establishment. Verhuegen reacted to the closing of the VP by stating that 'the decision could be in accordance to Turkish constitution but the problem was the constitution itself'. A report submitted and adopted by the European Parliament criticized Turkey's practice of party closure for being against the essence of plural democracy and freedom of expression.[52] It seems at the end that some sort of international understanding had been secured by the VP's public discourse and institutional contacts with the EU officials.

The military posed as a staunch defender of secularism and they never made their dislike secret for the NVM. In fact the army considered the NVM as a threat to secularism and the republican regime. In the post February 28 process the headquarter of general staff had issued various statements in this direction. In those declarations military asserted that irtica (reactionarism) remained as number one priority threat towards the republic linking NVM to the danger of irtica.[53] These statements attempted to 'delegitimize' the party that was portrayed

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[48] See *Milliyet,* September 15, 2000 for such views expressed in an international symposium held in London on Turkey's financial situation and investment opportunities.

[49] *Hurriyet*, May 4, 2000.

[50] *Radikal*, June 27, 2001.

[51] *Hurriyet* July 7, 2001.

[52] *Radikal*, June 27, 2001.

[53] In one of those occasions Kutan quoting from a columnist C.Ulsever of Hurriyet daily asked why the military the so-called balancer of democracy did not explain the activities of Hizbullah and destroy them in the aftermath of Feb28 1997 and instead brought the tanks into the streets in Sincan, a reference to the attempt of the army to bring down the WP-led coalition government. This statement received a strong reaction from the army pointing

clashing with the state and its foundational principles. Kutan, in response to the statement of General Karadayi, the Chief of General Staff, noted that 'irtica' such concepts needed to be defined properly. He accepted that 'irtica' defined as 'going backward' not only in religious interpretation but also in democratic principles and practice had indeed grown in recent years. Thus he defined disruption of democratic process and advocacy of authoritarianism as 'irtica'.[54]

Under these circumstances it would be expected that the movement would either chose a confrontational policy or settle down for a legal/political struggle. They opted for the latter. While the shallow background of this strategy prevented the movement from winning the support of the wider audience it enabled them to play the 'victim' by which they at least managed to keep their traditional grassroots.

The fact that VP adopted discourse of liberal values after they have been victimized gave way to legitimate questions about their sincerity. Neither the "cause" nor the language of the movement had never been democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The NVM was an attempt to represent the periphery through overtones to religion and promises of material improvement. They could claim to pay tribute to democracy as far as their role of representing the periphery was concerned. Yet their concept of democracy was distanced from liberal democracy and rather akin to a majoritarian rule that comes out of a ballot-box notion of democracy. Furthermore they had fundamental questions about origins of democracy as being an off-spring of western civilization, values and institutions that were alien to Turkey and the Islamic civilization.

VP's attitude to democracy was criticized from within the party by Aydin Menderes, a former WP-VP member of parliament, and the son of legendary prime minister of 1950s, Adnan Menderes who were executed in 1961 following a military coup. Aydin Menderes had joined the WP in 1996 in an attempt on the part of the party to appeal the center-right voters. Menderes described the WP's attitude towards democracy as its basic mistake right from the beginning. He stated that 'they could not clarify their position on democracy unable to accept let alone internalize democracy'.[55] After criticizing the WP he called on the VP to prove its sincerity about democracy and human rights to get at least tacit approval of the people who did not vote for VP and to avoid a big social chaos and disturbances; it had to ensure the masses about their program, projects and intentions. The wider public, according to

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out that VP was pro-shariat and a danger for the republic. Kutan in a way apologized by saying that he only quoted from a journalist without making a specific statement of approval, see *Milliyet* January 27, 2000
[54] *Radikal* November 8, 1998.
[55] Interview with Aydin Menderes in *Milliyet*, November 8, 2000.

Menderes, should be convinced that the VP was not a threat to their freedoms and life styles. Compatibility of Islam and democracy should be proved by the Islamists according to Menderes.[56]

Deep down this was the predicament of the Islamist political movements. While having no commitment to democracy yet realizing that democracy was serving their interest and cause led the Islamists to adopt a discourse of democracy without thinking over its substance and consequences. This was a pragmatic position for popular Islamist movements that had numerical advantage of universal suffrage, yet some more radical and elite groups still regarded democracy as an anathema to Islam. Dogmatism of the latter and pragmatism of the former however created ambiguities about compatibility of Islam and democracy contributing to the accusations of takiyye that is to hide one's real beliefs in the face of state pressures.[57] However the public stand for democracy, human rights and the rule of law has gradually 'infected' the leadership and the grassroots under the pressures of the Kemalist center as demonstrated by the opposition directed against the leadership and the eventual division of the movement along traditional and reformist lines.

In the face of pressure directed against the NVM as shown by the closure of WP the new party was bound to declare itself as a new political movement trying to keep a balance between its novelty and the tradition. The VP, being clearly a continuation of the WP, was careful not to use the concepts that were associated with the tradition.[58] Thus the 'national view' or 'just order' used effectively in previous times were ignored in an attempt to disassociate itself from the tradition. But the VP's claim for novelty threatened to cut it off from its traditional support base. Disclaiming its traditional discourse coupled with the loss of leadership -Erbakan- created a vacuum in the party and on the minds of its supporters. Thus ideological and discursive vacuum and mild attitude in political debates prevented the new party to appeal wider masses on which they used to enjoy an influence during the 1994-1998 period. Under the prevailing circumstances the new discourse (of democracy, human rights

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[56] See the interview with Aydin Menderes in *Milliyet*, November 8, 2000. Cemil Cicek, a member of parliament from the VP, also stated that the party must engage in an effort for evaluating the mistakes committed in the past. "Self-criticisim is required for a better future' he said. *Sabah,* June 26, 2001.

[57] Concerning the ambiguities of the Islamists about human rights for example a statement of Oguzhan Asilturk is interesting. Asilturk, a leading figure in the NVM, stated that "Turkey faced two major problems; poverty (unequal distribution of wealth) and human rights. But the concept of human rights should also include moral and spirutual values criticising the opposition for ignoring this aspect of human rights". This was in fact an attempt to insert the NV ideology into the language of human rights, see *Milliyet*, October 28, 2000.

[58] References to novelty was not limited to discourse only. Before the 1999 elections some individuals with no national view background, like journalist Nazli Ilicak and academics Oya Akgonenc who were elected as the VP members of parliament in 1999, were invited to the party as part of party's quest for a renewed appearance. Yet this had been the policy of the NVM since 1994 in an attempt to create a moderate image of the party; an election strategy to appeal wider public not only NV grassroots, see *Radikal,* November 8, 1998.

and the rule of law) was defensive in nature and objective.[59] Thus it did not bring new supporters for the VP; it was rather directed to build new coalitions beyond the NV movement against the pressures described as undemocratic and unlawful. The new position prevented the party from staging an aggressive opposition and popular/discursive manipulation in its political struggle. Therefore while adapting a new discourse to protect itself the new discourse scaled down the Islamic self. The party had grew in opposition with its aggressive discourse and identity. The new discourse disabled the party to launch an aggressive opposition like the one in early 1990s. While trying to build coalition with the others -liberals, democrats and alike - the party thus lost its voters in the 1999 elections of which democracy, human rights and the rule of law was the main theme. The VP came third in the 1999 elections with an only %15 of the total votes. The election results showed that the politics of pressure worked in cutting down electoral support of the NVM.[60] As such it was a signal for the leaders of the VP to reconsider their identity, politics and discourse to regain the momentum once they had in the mid 1990s to be the rising power of Turkish politics again. The leadership of the Justice and Development Party (JDP or AK Party), formed in 2001 by Tayyip Erdogan and his friends who left the NVM seemed to have reflected upon this results when they described themselves as a conservative-democrat political movement with no religious leanings.

Identity and leadership: Tradition at the Crossroad

Over the poor performance of the VP in the 1999 general elections the VP seemed engaged in an internal debate about the leadership and direction of the party. It became clear that the party was divided into two; the old guards close to Erbakan and the young members of the parliament asking for renewal of the leadership, ideology and the public image.

In this process the May party congress marked a turning point for the VP. The congress proved the existence of a division in the party when Kutan, the chairman of the party under Erbakan's tutelage, was challenged by Abdullah Gul, a moderate MP close to the former Mayor of Istanbul, Tayyip Erdogan, contesting for the leadership. This was an unprecedented event in the history of the movement which was formed like a closed-community in which obedience to the leader (enhanced by a reference to Islamic concept of biat) was regarded as a central political virtue. It may be due to the challenge put up against

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[59] M. Hakan Yavuz argues that the VP even turned into an apolitical party as a result of its search for an accommodation with the Kemalist establishment, see M. H. Yavuz, 'Search for a New Social Contract in Turkey: Fettullah Gulen, the Virtue Party and the Kurds', *SAIS Review*, Vol.XIX, No.1, 1999, pp.114-143.
[60] Party members with whom I talked in Ankara, Adana, Trabzon and Osmaniye in April 2001 confirmed that pressure the party was subjected had a negative impact on the voters.

this tradition that Gul referred to the congress as the day the movement met politics first time in its history. In the run up for the May congress there had broken out a fierce competition that was unknown to the NVM. Asilturk, close to Erbakan, accused the opposition of plotting to split the party by inserting functionalism (nifak).[61] The inner-party opposition received strong reactions from the traditionalist circles. Milli Gazete criticized the inner-party opposition for blowing up its own house. The opposition group was called on to act like main opposition party in the parliament instead of opposing the leadership of its own party. The editorial of Milli Gazete warned the VP members against the dangers of 'functionalism' within the movement.[62] Erbakan too claimed that Gul was supported by media that wanted to see VP divided. He told the reporters that he had asked Gul to wait and not declare his candidacy.[63] It was obvious that Gul stood for the party leadership against the wishes of the ultimate leader of the movement, Erbakan who called on the delegates not to break down the tradition.[64] The contest was so close despite Erbakan's direct and open lobbying against Gul who received almost half of delegates' support. This was a remarkable political event given the tradition of obedience to the leader within the movement. Based on the support Gul received one could infer that VP grass-root was prepared for a leadership change. The discourse of change adopted recently by the leadership was taken so seriously by the grass-root that it hit the leadership itself that initiated the discourse of change.

Gul described the congress as the first occasion where the movement engaged in self-criticism before the public. He said 'by this congress the party got out of the acvarium and started to swim in open sea.'[65] That meant the young generation wanted to bring politics back in the movement expanding the limits imposed by the tradition. The may congress heralding the 2001 split in the NVM between the Felicity Party and the Justice and Development Party was a break with the tradition of obeying the leadership. It seemed that the party was opened up within and engaged in rethinking politics and the leadership. In sum the division of the party between traditionalists (pro Erbakan) and the young Turks (pro-Erdogan) became inevitable by the May congress.

Although it seemed that the division was over the leadership deep down one can say that ideological impasse the movement encountered was the real ground for the outbreak of differing views about the leadership and direction of the party. After all if the party was not

[61] *Yenibinyil*, May 6, 2000; *Milliyet*, April 15, 2000.
[62] it was claimed that those critical editorials of *Milli Gazete* was written by N.Erbakan, see *Milli Gazete,* October 26, 2000; and *Sabah*, October 28, 2000.
[63] *Milliyet* April 29, 2000.
[64] *Hurriyet*, May 10, 2000.

raging a holy war against the unbelievers then there was no need to have a warrior (mucahit) as its leader, Erbakan.[66] Therefore once the party started to change its political discourse in the wake of pressures from the Kemalist circles it seemed that the "national view" was no longer a glue sticking the people around the leadership. As ideological cohesion appeared to had gone the movement looked in disarray. The ideal of democracy and human rights was not a unifying cause in comparison to the 'national view' and the "just order'. The vacuum created by the discursive departure of the party away from its original position led to confusions about the leadership, ideology and the future.[67]

Furthermore VP's relatively poor performance in the 1999 elections in which it received %15 of votes coming third in the parliament and then its ineffective and low profile opposition in the parliament did not satisfy the younger and more ambitious generation of the VP members. Among them the ambitious former mayor of Istanbul Tayyib Erdogan was the most vocal one with a sizeable supporters in the parliament as well as in the provincial party centers. Months after the May congress Erdogan, who had been imprisoned for his political remarks and banned from politics, made a written statement following a meeting with the chairman of the VP, Kutan, in which he asserted that VP was unable to mobilize mass support and put up opposition in the parliament. He was also critical of the changes within the party that was claimed to silence the opposition supporting Gul in the May Congress. The main argument of Erdogan was that Turkish politics and the movement itself needed 'restructuring'. He announced that he would be in a process of forming a new political movement despite the fact that he was banned from forming and joining a political party due to his conviction under the article 312 of Turkish penal code.[68]

Erdogan was right in criticizing the party for being soft on it opposition to the government and not pushing for the issues that concerned the party grassroots. This was in fact the attitude of the VP leadership. The party had become over-cautious after the February 28 process adopting rather mild policies on issues like headscarf, religious education and the Imam Hatip schools that had led tension in the past between the party and secularist/Kemalist establishment. The leadership was careful not to look confrontational. This policy of coaptation (with the system) not confrontation justified Erdogan who claimed that the party

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[65] *Milliyet,* May 20, 2000; *Radikal,* May 20, 2000.

[66] Erbakan was frequently cheered as "mucahit Erbakan"(Erbakan the warrior) who waged a holy war against the infidels.

[67] Yet the VP portrayed the internal opposition as about the issue of leadership pointing out that the opposition had no objection to the party program. See the interview with O. Asilturk in *Milliyet*, October 28, 2000; for internal disputes see *Milliyet,* October 29, 2000.

[68] Abdullah Gul supported the statement of Erdogan, see *Milliyet,* September 10, 2000.

was not effective in the opposition. Such a criticism was received well by the grassroots that used to aggressive opposition of Erbakan with his body politic and discourse.[69] Thus passificisation of the party by the February 28 process enabled Erdogan to put up an opposition not only against the VP leadership but the natural leader of the NVM, Erbakan.

As the division of the party between traditionalists (pro Erbakan) and the young Turks (pro-Erdogan) had become apparent by the May congress the closure of the party by the Constitutional Court in June 2001 only speeded up the process and legitimated the split within the movement.   There was no doubt that the young wing of NVM led by Erdogan engaged in works before the closure of the VP. The above mentioned written statement of Erdogan after meeting with Kutan was a clear indication that Erdogan and his friends would depart from the old guards, the so called traditionalists. They claimed from the very beginning that the new movement would reach out new people outside the NVM tradition to embrace a wider political ground.[70]

Division and the Break in the Movement

The fourth political party of the national view movement, the VP, was closed down by the constitutional court in June 2001 on the ground that the party had been the center of anti-secular religious activities like the proceeding Welfare Party. Over the decision the movement split into two. While the so-called traditionalists established the Felicity Party again under the formal leadership of Recai Kutan, while Necmettin Erbakan remaining the 'natural leader' of the movement behind the scene the so-called renewalists engaged in a process of establishing their own with an aim to form a broader political movement including some influential figures from the center-right political groups. It seems that the latter was breaking from the traditionalists, yet it was not clear at the time whether this was a break only from the leader of the movement, Necmettin Erbakan, or of a more significant departure involving program and the projects.

After the closure of the Virtue Party a public opinion survey indicated that 68% of VP voters wanted the new party to be more in the center, while 28% insisted on maintaining the national view path.[71] This survey showed that VP voters moved along with the discourse of the leadership to place themselves on the center. Thus one can also argue that mild and

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[69] Even the provincial party members felt constrained as expressed in my conversations with the VP members in Ankara, Trabzon, Adana and Osmaniye showed that

[70] Apart from the contacts of Erdogan with the leaders of various segments in Turkey the movement conducted opinion polls to trace down the signs and size of likely support; see *Milliyet*, September 12, 2000 for early preparations for organizing a political movement.

centrist policies of the VP between 1998 and 2001 reflected the mood among its supporters. The people who advocated an uncompromising stand on national view was only 28% among the VP voters. This indicated that even among the lesser voters of the VP (15% in comparison with 21% of the WP) there took place a change in the perception of the party, its role and ideology. Thus the language of change adopted after 1997 could not only be a discursive choice of the leadership but had its roots even among its loyal supporters.[72] The choice of VP supporters for a moderate new political party explains the appeal of Ak Party by the grassroots right from its inception in late 2001 not that of the Felicity Party. The Ak Party found its strength in the changing attitude of the grassroots who grew more pragmatic in response to the state's strong resistance to pro-Islamic political movements.

Felicity Party: Formation and Identity

The 5th party of the NVM was founded on 20th of July, named Saadet Partisi (the Felicity Party, FP). Recai Kutan was again elected as the chairman of the party. In the FP program it was stated that its 'objective is the happiness (felicity) of all humanity primarily of the people who live in this country'. In this statement one can see an internationalist-messianic approach that goes beyond the nation and the national encompassing the felicity of all humanity. This seems akin to the WP under Erbakan who used to talk of salvation of all humanity as the party's mission.

Five basic principles were spelled out; love, tranquility, peace and fraternity; human rights and freedoms; justice; welfare; honor and respect. These five principles of the FP led some speculations of its content and objective since they do not really compose a meaningful whole. Some argued that the five principles referred to the five principles of Islam and some others understood that they referred to the FP as the 5th political party of the NVM.[73]

Since its formation the FP did not change its appeasing discourse on the west and western/modern political values. They supported reformists initiatives of the coalition government led by Bulent Ecevit. The party even voted for a package of bill in August 2002 introducing major reforms in line with Copenhagen political criteria as part of Turkey's full membership bid. Thus they continued to back Turkey's membership process in the EU and the reforms taken in this direction. Yet their stand on globalization and global institutions like the IMF and the World Bank has been sharpened as Turkey moved to an election mood by the

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[71] *Milliyet*, June 28, 2001.

[72] In my conversations with the party members I had the impression that the grassroots got frustrated with the obstacles brought before the NVM, and looked for a way out.

summer of 2002. To capitalize on social discontent due to economic crisis that exposed the IMF as an interfering global institution at the expense of the poor and the disadvantaged the FP adopted a policy of heavy criticism not only directed at the government but the IMF and international financial institutions.[74] This aimed at channeling social and economic dissatisfactions into votes in the upcoming elections through a nationalist/anti-globalists discourse.

Kutan, after the closure of the VP expressed his commitment to national and spiritual values, a dictum of Erbakan and the NVM. [75] This was an early sign that the new party would be more like the WP of Erbakan. This classical statement reflecting the position of the NVM was further elaborated by a veteran of the movement, Bahri Zengin. In response to Abdullah Gul's statement that the new splitting party (AK Party) would not be a party of religious people Zengin said they would not give up defending the rights of religious people in fear that their party might be closed down again.[76] As the NVM was based its existence on representing the religious periphery it would be expected that they would continue to herald their voice in a time in which religious groups faced serious pressures from the state. Religious sentimentality has always been a significant theme that appealed the masses. This has become a dilemma for the NVM, because some religious groups realized that they had been better off before pro-Islamic WP came to power in 1996. In the 1999 elections some religious groups and individuals had not supported the VP in an attempt to ease the pressure on them by scaling down the power of the VP, known by the Kemalist establishment as representing political Islam, and thus in clash with the state. Political visibility of Islam was deemed problematic both by the establishment and some Islamic groups while the social visibility used to be tolerated in the post-1980 period during which activities of Islamic groups in social sphere increased dramatically. As a result the continuing discourse of religiosity by the FP is not likely to appeal religious sectors who are fearful of growing tension between the establishment and the NVM. This was reflected in the 1999 elections in which the FP's vote dropped to 15% from 21%. In this result the image of the party as being in clash with the state was effective. The 2002 elections in which the FP got only 2% of the total votes also showed that the NVM lost its ability to represent religious periphery let alone the periphery at large.

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[73] *Yenisafak*, July 17, 2001.
[74] Conversation with Mehmet Bekaroglu, FP deputy chairman of the party and a member of parliament, Abant Platformu, sessions on globalization, July 12-14, 2002, Abant.
[75] *Hurriyet*, July 7, 2001.
[76] *Milliyet*, July 15, 2001.

After the closure of the VP Erbakan began an assertive public appearance. In a meeting in Bursa organized by Milli Gazete, the unofficial newspaper of NVM, he claimed that he would come back soon as a leader as he did several times in the past.[77] As expected Erbakan played an open role in the formation of the Felicity Party.[78] Both Erbakan and Kutan did not make it a secret that the natural leader of the party was Erbakan himself. When compared to the process of formation of the VP this openness was unusual. Yet it had some reasons. First, Erbakan coming to the end of his term in which he was banned from active politics due February 2003 he considered that it was the time to step into the arena. Moreover as ECHR approached to a final verdict on the closure of the WP case he was quiet confident that with the ECHR's decision the ban on him would be discredited so that he would in practice be left free to involve in daily politics. However the most important factor for Erbakan's impatience was the growing popularity of Erdogan who was forming a splinter party. In the face of the threat posed by Erdogan to appeal NVM's grassroots that there was nobody but Erbakan himself who could match with the charisma and appeal of Erdogan. Thus his public appearances were gestures to the VP voters that he was there and ready to move into the political arena. It was a move by Erbakan to keep Erdogan's hands off the VP voters and the member of the parliament. He continued to be at the frontline of the FP's 2002 election campaign making numerous speeches in the meetings and rallies.

Despite Erbakan's desperate effort while being banned to be elected as a member of parliament and lead a political party the FP received only 2 % of total votes in the elections. As a result the party could not pass 10 % national threshold to have a seat in the parliament. What was more shocking was that this was the worst election result ever the NVM has had since its formation in 1970. This could be indicative that the period in which religious periphery was represented by an overtly pro-Islamic political party has come to an end. The last election results can therefore be understood as the end of NVM's ability to rally mass support through its religious sentimentality and traditional networks. In these results the realization that Islamic groups were hit hardest during the reign of an Islamic political party may have been effective.

The AK Party: A Break with the Tradition?

Over the closure of the VP there were some attempts to prevent the division of the movement. Yet given the controversies since the party congress in May 2000 and statements

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[77] *Sabah*, June 25, 2001.

made by Erdogan the division of the movement was inevitable. Erdogan stated right after the closing down of the VP that he would continue his search for a new political movement disregarding what had happened to the VP.[79] The renewalists seemed rather determined to break with the tradition, at least with its leadership. Before the formation of the party the leaders of the splitting movement insistently pointed out the demand of the people for a 'change' and the need for a new movement.[80]

The leader of this new movement was obvious; Tayyip Erdogan, the former mayor of Istanbul, who had been convicted by a state security court to a 10 month prison sentence for his speech in Siirt in 1997 when he read a poem found by the court indicting people for hatred and enmity based on religion according to article 312/2 of the penal code.[81] On July 19, 2001 a decision of the constitutional court opened up the way before the banned mayor of Istanbul to be a member of any political party. Over the decision Erdogan made a press statement in which he declared that he was starting off a new political movement after criticizing the state of poverty and unjust distribution of wealth and democracy. The party was officially registered in July 2001 named the Justice and Development Party (the Ak Party).[82]

The AK Party trying to create a new impression started to make transfers from the ranks of other political parties. However AK Party's organizational network was to a large extent inherited from the WP/VP. This was so for its leadership too. Yet at the beginning they claimed to form a political party that would go beyond the WP/VP in an attempt to appeal wider public, in other words 'political center'. Among the founders of the party there were many new names. Some members of parliament from the center right the True Path Party and the Motherland Party, namely H. Celik, E. Yalcinbayir and M. Aksener joined in the movement before it became a registered political party. With these new names with no NVM background the leadership was giving a message to the public that the party would embrace centrist politicians and attract voters from the center right.[83]

However participation to the movement from other political groups remained limited and as such the claim to be a party of the center could not be met during the process of party formation. There were at least two reasons for this. First, Erdogan, being aware of his popularity rising to 30 % according to opinion polls in comparison to average 5% of his

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[78] *Milliyet*, July 22, 2001; *Sabah*, August 4, 2001.

[79] *Sabah*, June 25, 2001.

[80] See the press conference of Abdullatif Sener, a leading figure in the VP and later the deputy chairman of the Ak party, *Yenisafak*, July 17, 2001

[81] Over the decision he called for a country that abided by the rule of law. He said that his struggle for the supremacy of law and democracy would continue, see *Sabah*, April 22, 1998.

[82] *Milliyet*, July 20, 2001.

rivals, wanted to form a political movement that he could control. A more homogenous political party meant less inner party competition and conflict. Early departure of Aksener in fact proved this point that with the newcomers cohesion of the party would not be guaranteed. Second, Erdogan wanted to present a broad coalition with his founding members coming outside the NVM. Yet the people with whom he contacted turned down his offer. Businessmen, academics and politicians were invited to join the party.[84] Those who were known with their liberal views were not convinced about a new direction of a party that was built on the remains of the VP. They were also concerned not to be associated with a movement that had a pro-Islamic background. As it became clear that AK Party did not meet the expectations that it would reach out personalities outside the NVM some uttered the criticism that the AK Party was a reproduction of the WP and the VP. The mayor of Ankara Melih Gokcek, himself of the VP yet trying to form his own party, repeated the view that AKP was just a continuation of the VP.[85]

Even before the formation of the party whether Tayyip Erdogan was changed has been an issue of controversy not only among the people at large but also between the old guards and the new within the NVM. Kutan, who said that 'they are our 30 years old friends and we share the same views', raised a question that he did not know what was new in the party formed by the so-called renewalists. [86] But there were severe criticism too directed at Erdogan by the hard-liners within the NVM. B.Zengin for instance accused Erdogan of making takiyye, hiding his beliefs and ideas as he felt the need to get on well with the establishment. He called on Erdogan to bring proofs of his process of change. Yet Zengin also accused Erdogan of being a revisionist, a language that is in line with a conventional rigid ideological party formations, a proof by itself that Erdogan had departed from the NVM. [87] Description of Erdogan as such indicates that the old guard of the NVM realized the departure Erdogan and his friends embarked on.

The founders of the party and Erdogan made it clear that the party would not be religious   based but one of conservative and democratic.[88] Abdullah Gul, the deputy chairman of the party and the current prime minister, too stated that their understanding of politics was not religion based and oriented, instead he emphasized democratic rights and

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[83] *Hurriyet*, July 7, 2001.

[84] Erdogan, before forming the party, contacted with many people including businessmen like R. Koc and retired general A. Kiyat, see *Sabah*, June 25, 2001.

[85] *Sabah*, August 3, 2001; *Sabah*, August 4, 2001.

[86] *Sabah*, July 4, 2001.

[87] *Sabah*, August 4, 2001.

[88] *Hurriyet*, July 7, 2001; also see the party program at www.akparty.org.tr/program.

freedoms, and also called for an end to manipulation of religion and Ataturk for political purposes.[89] Furthermore the party leadership explained that headscarf was a matter of individual rights and freedoms and as such it should be resolved by a broader social consensus not by confrontation.[90]

The party program referred to the individual and his/her happiness as the ultimate objective of the party. "The development and democracy" program of the party claims to fulfill basic rights and freedoms of the people, not only legal guarantees but proper implementation of human rights provisions are promised. Globalization of human rights norms are welcomed by the party. Among the issues covered by the 2002 election declaration basic rights and freedoms, democracy and civil society, justice and the rule of law and restructuring the state came up as central themes. Different social, ethnic, political and religious identities are regarded a source of richness not of a threat. The election declaration stated that "Ak Party does not only recognize their differences but encourage them to participate in politics with their identities". A limited state that would respect the expanding role of private sector and the NGOs is promised. The party also claims to broaden the realm of politics vis-a-vis the historical domination of bureaucracy. In short the Ak Party program and the election declaration reflects the claim to be a democrat and liberal political movement.[91]

Yet the questions have been asked whether the AK Party was an Islamist party. It is obvious that the leadership, including Erdogan and his top aides, is inherited from the National View Movement. As such they could have claimed to represent 'religious periphery'. But they by then knew very well that this meant a very 'limited' space for popular politics, and that they must go beyond and reach to the center. The leadership referred to the Democrat Party of 1950s, the Justice Party of 1960s and the Motherland Party of 1980s all being mass political movements of center right that ruled the country with great majority in the respective periods, as their political models in an attempt to reach that center that brought those political parties to the power.[92]

The party meant not to be a religious based party, instead it would be a centrists party trying to reach out all segments of society. The idea that the AK Party was trying to pull the periphery into the center reflects in fact the position of the Democrat Party tradition and even the WP. Yet this is a troubling process itself as it implies economic redistribution of wealth as

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[89] *Milliyet*, July 15, 2001.
[90] See Gul's satement as such in *Milliyet*, July 15, 2001.
[91] See the party program and the election declaration at www.akparty.org.tr.
[92] *Milliyet*, July 15, 2001.

well as redistribution of power and privileges vested in the state. This is in fact the radicalism of the AK Party as it was of the other center of right political parties in the past.

Claiming to be a centrist party led to a great debate about the views of the leader, Tayyip Erdogan whether he was still committed to the National View or had he changed? Was he still a pro-Islamic politicians or as he claimed a moderate conservative? There is no doubt that Erdogan, who grew political at a time when the ideas of Sayyid Qutb of Muslim Brotherhood and Mawdudi of Cemaat'al Islami got into the Islamic circles in Turkey through a translation boom in the 1970s, had a doctrinaire Islamic background. Yet in recent years he continuously claimed that his views have "evolved" rejecting that he was changed but developed his political views.[93] By this he did not deny his political background but emphasized that he was a pragmatic leader responding to the changes taking place in Turkey and in the world.

As explained one should also remember that the Islamic politics has been undergoing a change in recent years. With the Welfare Party experience and the February 28 Process they realized the "limits of political Islam". It seems that they saw how Islam's social base with its educational, commercial and solidarity networks was disrupted by the politicization of Islam. They became more interested in keeping Islam's social and economic base intact as the ground of 'conservatism' Erdogan refers to. The emphasis on "political Islam" was left in realization that it undermined social and economic bases of pro-Islamic community. So ideas for a 'social' not 'political' Islam has gained ground.[94] As noted in the party program and the election declaration the leadership seems to have acknowledged the end of ideologies including Islamism in the age of globalization.[95] This can be described as the failure of political Islam in Turkey, a failure that was noticed by the Islamists at large at a time when social and economic networks of Islamic groupings were deeply disrupted when political Islam was at its zenith.

Moreover concerning Erdogan one should remember that he was a mayor, a local politician. In local politics, though it was such a big metropolitan city like Istanbul, politics is about 'services', not about great ideas, visions, transformative projects, bringing up a new generation through education etc. It is not a field of 'grand politics', but politics of possibilities

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[93] For an early description of Erdogan as a moderate politician see M. Heper, 'Islam and Democracy: Toward a Reconciliation?', *Middle East Journal*, Vol.51, No.1, 1997, p.37.
[94] For a study on 'social Islam' see M.H. Yavuz, 'Towards an Islamic Liberalism?: The Nurcu Movement of Fettullah Gulen', *Middle East Journal*, Vol.53, No.4, 1999, pp.584-605. Politicization of religion came to be seen as a problem by the Islamists in response to the way in which the secularists/Kemalists debated Islam in public. I had the impression during my interviews with the VP members in April 2001 that they had got tired of the public debate on Islam, secularism and description of Islamic groups as threat to the state.

within social and economic limits. There recognizing differences in social space that encircles the city is important, mayors have to be cooperative and pragmatic, able to form alliances with others to get various services done. Erdogan's experience in Istanbul have certainly influenced him at a great degree in a way to turn him into a pragmatic, service oriented, non-conflictual politician. It seems that he came to see politics as non-ideological but instrumental for solving the daily problems of people; politics as problem solving not as a means to build an ideologically oriented Islamic community.

Another important issue concerning the "identity" of the AK Party is its stand on globalization. The party program and the election declaration embrace globalization as a fact within which policies of all kind have to be developed. The party expresses its determination to open up Turkey to the globalized world as a competitive country. The party recognizes globalization yet seems concerned that it may bring risks for the developing world. It is stated that an adherence to local /national values should not be the base for rejecting globalization.

It is not clear yet whether party will be embracing "globalization" or represent "national discontent" with globalization, the IMF, World Bank, the west, etc. They may sink into an anti-globalist position representing (and defending) the national space/sovereignty/values against the international/global to rally the reactionary nationalist sentiments alive among the people who were hit worse by the process of globalization especially during the recent economic crises. In his contacts in Washington DC in early 2002 Erdogan made it clear that they would not challenge "global financial capitalism". Instead he complained that Turkey could not appeal foreign capital enough, and that they would do everything they could once in power to change this. What was also interesting in the post September 11 context was that Erdogan in his speech delivered at the CSIS referred to "global responsibilities of the USA".[96] That was interesting and had to be put in context of pro-Islamic groups' recent "rapprochement with the West".[97] Following the 2002 elections Erdogan declared that integration with the EU will be their absolute piority. The EU membership is regarded as a natural outcome of the modernization history; "meeting Copenhagen political criteria is an important step forward for the modernization of the country".[98] To this end political reforms would be carried out and economic recovery will be achieved both leading to further integration with world economy. He called on international

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[95] For the Party Program and the election declaration see the AK Party web page at www.akparty.org.tr.
[96] See Erdogan's speech in the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, January 28, 2002.
[97] I. D. Dagi, 'Islami siyasette Bati ufku', *Radikal*, March 3, 2002.
[98] 2002 Election Declaration, at www.akparty.org.tr.

financial circles to come and invest in Turkey promising that they will eliminate all barriers for foreign investment in Turkey.

Yet the AK Party's position regarding globalization still remains ambiguous. Different things said at various times. Erdogan declared the AK Party's wish to lead Turkey further into the global economy in his speech given at the CSIS. Concerning Kemal Dervis's future in Turkish politics Abdullah Gul, the deputy chairman of the party and the current prime minister, described him as 'representing the power of the external world'.[99] This statement implies that to be associated with the external world had a negative connotation, a defect. Here we could see a deep suspicion about the external world. This may not be unique for the AK Party but common to political culture of Turkish people at large. However this was an expression of local/national reaction against the global, which can be seen as a sign for the AK Party's generic anti-globalist stand. It may well dwell on representing the national space/sovereignty/values against the international/global to rally the reactionary nationalist sentiments alive among the people at large and those who were hit worse by the process of globalization. However this is not a prudent strategy for AK Party. Aligning with the nationalist forces against the global may push the party to the grip of secularist groups at home that do not consider AK Party as a "proper" political movement, but a threat. AK Party being capable of mobilizing national/local reactions against the global refrained from doing so with a wisdom that a Turkey isolated from the influences of global drivers of openness, competition and democratization would also significantly limit its presence....This was also evident during the election campaign of the party. Being the party of dissatisfied masses, masses that were discontent with and disturbed by the IMF-led economic program it could have manipulated the anti-IMF sentiments. But it did not do so. Even it was harshly criticized by the FP for supporting the IMF policies in Turkey. In sum it can be asserted that anti-globalist stand of the party was overtaken by an analysis that placed Turkey not in isolation but in integration with the external world as a precondition for further democratization expected to open up a broader space for the presence and the legitimacy of the party. The same can be said about their policies towards the EU membership.

Erdogan had had many obstacles before him as the election date of November 3 approached; his conviction, the political ban on him to lead a political party, the ambiguities about his fitness to be elected as an MP. But it seems that these "official/legal/procedural" obstacles did not emerge as a handicap for Erdogan in the November elections. In Turkish politics to be the underdog, to be the one who is victimized has always been a political asset.

Erdogan enjoyed this too. The victimization of Erdogan, a leader who was considered as a successful one by many, enhanced his popularity. Furthermore his record as the mayor of Istanbul was an advantage despite corruption claims in the mainstream Turkish media before the elections. The fact that he broke with Erbakan also added to his credential if not among traditional Erbakan voters but certainly among the people who were more mainstream.

His image among the people was 'one of us'. He was seen as ordinary yet determined, modest but aggressive once challenged. This served to the strength of the AKP in the November elections. Erdogan has repeatedly said that AKP is not religiously oriented but a conservative party of "average" Turkish citizens. He looked like an average Turkish man and praised the man of the streets by which this he claimed to 'understand' and 'recognize' the streets. He also portrayed himself as someone coming from the streets.[100] His understanding and recognition of the streets turned into a quest for understanding and recognition for himself in the face of obstacles brought before him by the state establishment; legitimization through streets. He knew that he must rely on people power vis-a-vis the Kemalist/secularist opponents who were powerful in the state apparatus. This constituted one of the bases on which the call Erdogan made over his conviction for democracy, human rights and the rule of law was built. The legitimization was granted on November 3rd; the AK Party received 34 % of total votes capturing 363 seats (out of 550) in the parliament while the Republican Peoples Party came second with a 19 % share of the votes.

Erdogan made it straight that the new party would not be dominated by the leader; "We will not obey the leader unquestioned and worship the leader. The party will be led by a team".[101] But from the very beginning there was a clear driving force behind the party; that of Erdogan's popularity. Thus it was born as the party of Erdogan not a party formed by a group of renewalists. Despite the continuos claim of the party leaders including Erdogan himself that AKP was a party of ideas run by a team, he was the person around which the public support was gathered. Given the leadership dominated aspect of Turkish politics and attitude of the voters this claim can be seen as a political maneuvering. As such it aimed at criticizing dominant leadership of Erbakan within the national view movement against which they justified their departure. This was reflected in a statement of Abdullah Gul who criticized Erbakan by saying that "in the past the decisions taken by the leader could not be discussed but just dictated; this would not be the model for the new party".[102] This showed that the new

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99 *Milliyet*, July 15, 2001.
100 Conversation with T. Erdogan, Georgetown University, Washington DC, January 29, 2002.
101 *Milliyet*, July 6, 2001.
102 *Milliyet*, July 15, 2001.

party went against organizational tradition of the NVM and as such was certainly a break from the leadership of Erbakan.

De-emphasizing the leadership of Erdogan was also a prudent strategy to disperse media criticism directed at Erdogan who was accused of corruption during his term as the mayor of Istanbul. The most important of all was the uncertainty about legal status of Erdogan resulting from his conviction according to article 312 of Turkish penal code. Despite changes in the article by which Erdogan was found guilty of inciting ethnic and religious hatred there were ambiguities about eligibility of Erdogan for a parliamentary seat. Thus the party tried to reduce the impact of a possible exclusion of Erdogan from running for a parliamentary seat. This was proved to be prudent as exactly the same happened in the forthcoming elections in 2002. Yet personality-based nature of the party remains to be a problem despite a kind of collective leadership.

Rethinking the West: Reasons and Objectives

The issue of the west is particularly important for Islamic politics in Turkey since the perception and representation of the west have always been an identity generating phenomena. As explained Islamic political identity was traditionally built in opposition to the west, western values and, equally important, the history of westernization in Turkey.

Yet a unique development has been taking place in the Islamic politics of Turkey. That is in recent years the Islamists have come to 'rethink' the western/modern political values and the west itself, and as such they seem to depart from their conventional stand on human rights/democracy and the West. A significant sign of change in this direction was the decision of the banned leader of the WP, Necmettin Erbakan, to take the case of party closure before the European Court of Human Rights. Although it turned out to be a risky move the application to the Court in 1998 was ironic in the sense that Erbakan's political position had always been anti-Western. However by then Erbakan and his friends had realized that they needed the west and western values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in order to respond to the authoritarian pressures and also to acquire legitimacy through this new discourse in their confrontation with the military. Thus the pressures of the army and judiciary, among others, forced the national view movement to 'rethink' the west and western values.

Furthermore the Islamists in recent years have also realized that they could live their religion with its public appearances in Western countries freer then it was the case in Turkey.

In this perception liberal attitude of western governments to the headscarf issue and activities of Islamic associations formed in Europe was particularly effective. As the army and the judiciary increased their pressure on the Islamists particularly since 1997 they noticed the degree of liberties enjoyed by the Turks living in the Western countries numbering around 3 million with close relations with the national view movement. This experience contributed to 'rethinking' the west and western values/institutions as a possible framework for the existence of the Islamists.

What I call *rethinking* the west and "western values" by the Islamists have therefore its roots in recent political developments. The shift in the discourse of the NVM was generally attributed to the so-called February 28 process that referred to a set of decisions taken by the National Security Council. There is no doubt that the process had a dramatic impact on the Islamic thinking and strategy. In the face of pressures originating from the military's adamant opposition to the Islamists, which influences attitudes of the judges, high state bureaucracy as well as mainstream secular media, they realized the legitimizing power and the virtue of 'ballot box democracy'; they claim to represent the 'power of the people'. Popularity of Islamist politics displayed through elections is considered to be the most valuable 'asset' in their quest for 'recognition' from the secularist forces. As a result calls for a 'liberal democracy that existed in the West has become the main political discourse of the Islamists in political and intellectual debates.

However the Islamists had never taken democracy seriously until the so called February 28 process started in 1997.[103] By then they realized that democracy and human rights were needed for the survival of the NVM. The new language of democracy and human rights adopted then also served to the 'legitimization' of the Islmaists as political actors. Legitimization was a protection by itself. After 1997 they understood that despite their popular support they were seen and would always be seen as an 'illegitimate' political force, an anomaly to be corrected in Turkish politics by the Kemalist/secularist center. Thus they had to rely on democracy/democratic participation as a source of legitimacy. Moreover democracy was a source of strength because through democratic means that the party could display its popular legitimacy. Displaying its popular legitimacy was a strength and step in seeking to acquire 'systemic' legitimacy. In the face of pressures coming from the army, the judiciary and the other Kemalist circles democracy was a means to highlight 'people power'

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[103] A set of decisions taken by the National Security Council to curb the activities of Islamists in politics, bureaucracy, education, civil society and economy. The historical irony was that those decisions were signed by pro-Islamic prime minister Erbakan along with the generals; see *Briefing*, 'Recommendations of the State Council meeting and Comment', March 10, 1997, p.4.

vis-a-vis the state power. As they felt the pressures of the state power (i.e. the military and judiciary) opposing them they turned to 'people power' they knew they enjoyed. Thus they adopted the discourse of democracy, human rights and the rule of law as a means to protect themselves against the excessive power of the state. They knew that they could survive only in a country (Turkey) that was democratically oriented, respecting civil and political rights, and moreover integrated further into the western world, particularly the EU. This discursive turn was also an attempt to justify the identity and presence of the Islamic political movement by reference to a "modern political language". They came to see democracy as a matter of survival.

The Islamists did not only realized that a democratic governance would be protective of their identities and interest, but it would also help their cause. The ballot box democracy was a source of strength for the Islamists who managed to mobilize increasing number of people through their religious references and organizational perfection. As a movement that enjoyed grass root support it was only natural to demand that this popular support had to be counted on deciding who was to govern. While their notion of democracy was majoritarian, unlike a liberal democracy, they nevertheless moved to embrace its outcomes. Thus the Islamists' love for democracy, at least for a start, was rather a consequentialist kind based on pragmatic calculation that it would help them instead of valuing its built-in values and principle. It seems that the Islamists moved from the denial of the rules of the game (i.e. democracy, and western notions of human rights and the rule of law) to politicize the rules. As such this was a retreat from an attitude that valued the game but deny or devalue its rules. In the face of pressure the rules themselves emerged as a protective framework for survival.

The Islamists went through similar experiences concerning the value of modern concepts of human rights and the rule of law as they saw their political parties closed down, leaders banned form political activities, and associations and foundations intimidated. In response they moved to embrace the language of civil and political rights that provided both an effective leverage against the pressures of the state and a ground to build international coalitions. Under the pressure of the Kemalist establishment the Islamists sought to form new alliances with the westerners abroad, which was expected to enhance legitimacy of the movement among the traditional pro-Western sectors and the liberals at home who distanced themselves from the elements of authoritarian regime in Turkey. The new language adopted by the Islamists enabled them to engage in activities to form new domestic and international fronts against a regime that oppresses them. The search for international coalition led the Islamists to move westward where numerous human rights NGOs, the European Union,

European Court of Human Rights and individual states had already been critical of Turkish human rights record. At the end the Islamists found themselves in the same side with the westerners demanding further democratization and further guarantees for civil and political rights in Turkey.

Thus pro-Islamic Virtue Party (1998-2001), a successor to the banned Welfare Party, adapted a new and positive stand on approaching to the West, Turkey's membership in the EU and integration of Turkey into global structures and process. This was a clear break from its very tradition represented by the Welfare Party of Erbakan. The Islamic political tradition in Turkey used to be based on an open 'crusade' against the west, a deep suspicions about Western values (including democracy and human rights) and objection to Turkish history of westernization. However following the closure of the WP by the Constitutional Court in 1998 the successor Virtue Party (VP) seemed broke with its predecessor on the questions of the west, westernization and globalization by emphasizing democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and advocating integration into the European Union.

The Islamists by then realized that western demand for democratization and human rights overlapped with their search for protection against the Kemalist establishment including military and the judiciary. The VP's pro-EU stand was rather based on an observation that the more Turkey were distanced from the west and the EU in particular the stronger would be the tutelage of the army that treated the Islamic groups as an anomaly and threat.[104] Thus the west emerged as a natural ally to reduce the influence of the army and established a democratic governance within which the NVMwould be regarded as a legitimate player. They understood it pretty clear that one of the ways by which the power of the army in Turkish politics could be curbed was to take Turkey in the EU. The expectation was that army's interventions in politics would be significantly lessened as a result of further democratization that had already been put as a precondition for Turkey's entry to the EU. In this context they also realized that a Kemalist state ideology guarded by the army would not be sustainable in an EU member Turkey.

Since the adoption of multi-party politics in 1945 following the victories of democracies in the Second World War political reforms in Turkey have been influenced by international dynamics. Realization that political reforms somehow linked to western/international linkages of Turkey would certainly may have pushed the VP to align itself with political centers in the west that demanded reforms in Turkey. The NWM has in

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[104] Conversations with N. Ilicak, the member of the parliament from the VP, at the Abant Platform on 'Pluralism and Social Consensus', 13 June 2001, Abant.

fact been aware of the international/western dynamics of Turkish politics since the declaration of Tanzimat in 1839. Early political reforms, which were part of westernization process, in the late Ottoman Empire were traditionally attributed to the pressures of the European powers.[105] This was in fact one of the reasons for the rejection of westernization by the Islamists as orchestrated by the European powers and imposed on the Ottoman Empire. The reforms were regarded as concessions to the European powers and the beginning of Western domination in the Ottoman Empire. This historic view of the west as capable of imposing "reforms" in Turkey has played some role in the NVM's recent rapprochement with the west. Unable to push the state to adopt a less restrictive political regime the NVM needed the traditional influence of the west on the state elite governing Turkey. To push the reforms they wanted they therefore moved to embrace the west and even westernization realizing that in the late 1990s western demands and the needs of the Islamic politics overlapped. It was hoped this time that the reforms demanded by the west would also serve to the interest of the NVM.

It therefore seems that the Islamists came along the liberals' position that Turkey's integration with global dynamics and actors would ease political reforms that would widen the space in which the Islamic groups could exist too.[106] Turkey's opening up to the world, particularly the western world and its participation into globalization process were accepted and encouraged by the Islamists. In this context the Islamsits seemed realized, this time in a positive ways, that Turkey's democratization was tied to international dynamics.[107] They understood that the more distanced Turkey were from the west the more authoritarian the state would develop. So the west and western linkages were recognized as positive elements for safeguarding themselves in a plural/democratic governance. However this view adopted by the Islamic groups naturally strengthened the Kemalists' growing anxiety about the west and the western values.

Moreover it was also noticed by the Islamic political and intellectual groups that there existed a historical contradiction in Turkish attempt to westernization that was a weird combination of Jacobean politics and a discursive commitment to Western model of governance.[108] Westernizers on the one hand championed sovereignty of the people along with the western political models yet did not trust the choices of the people in their

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[105] R. H. Davidson, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1968, p.78, 81; B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1968, pp.45-72, 80, 122, 162.
[106] I. D. Dagi, 'Human Rights and Democratization: Turkish Politics in the European Context', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 1, No.3, 2001, pp.51-68.
[107] Conversations with A. Ates and B. Arinc and N. Ilicak, the members of the parliament from the VP, at the Abant Platform on 'Pluralism and Social Consensus', 13 June 2001, Abant.

radical/revolutionary polices of transformation. That envisaged not a popular but limited democracy in which the tutelage of the state elite and the army was justified as formulated in the post-28 February process as republicanism. Republicanism disregarding its very definition as sovereignty of the people aimed at creating by the force of state apparatus a new nation and a new identity. Ethnic and religious identities were regarded as competing with and opposing to the republican identity.[109] It was openly expressed during the 'February 28 process' that the Kemalist state's commitment was to republicanism not to democracy. Democracy was viewed as a means used by reactionary forces who oppose republican revolutions.

The Islamists managed to capitalize on this historical contradiction of Turkish westernization which claims to seek catching up with the west in all domains but fails to bring about one in the model of governance. The contradiction lies in that the Kemalist revolution was carried out from top to bottom; it was not a people revolution but a state revolution. The revolutionary leaders and later their guardians had an inherent 'insecurity' about their regime because they sensed that the regime was established not with the consent of the people but against the will of the people. So the source of insecurity was the people who were grotesquely distrusted by the Kemalists. Thus the power of immature and uneducated people who would easily be deceived by the enemies of the regime, especially by the Islamists, could not be a reliable ground for the survival of the regime. Democracy would be a nightmare for this set of revolutionary mind. Thus the fear of people power among the state elite turned into a fear of democracy in recent years that was made public and found supporters among some civil sectors and secularist intellectuals. The fear of democracy intensified the concern for the west and westernization both seen as dictating democracy in Turkey. Current issues of Kurdish separatism, human rights, Islamic challenge all enhanced Kemalists' perception of the west as plotting against Turkey. References to the Sevr Treaty, the treaty that divided up Turkey following the First World War, were continuously made when the West took a critical position regarding human rights and the Kurdish question. The Islamists realizing this contradiction that the old westernizers had become new western skeptic voiced their rapprochement with the west thus further contributing to the skepticism of the secular center about the west. As a result the west was criticized by the Kemalists/secularists for harboring not only the Kurdish separatists but also the Islamists. Through this discourse old-time hard westernizers became vulnerable to the delegitimization of abandoning the goals of westernization that meant more democracy and human rights considered by the

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[108] Ibid.
[109] Yavuz, 'Turkey's Imagined Enemies: Kurds and Islamists', pp.99-101.

Kemalists/secularists as threatening integrity of the country and the regime by the manipulation of the Kurds and the Islamists while the latter made new alliance with the pro-European social, economic and intellectual sectors.

The NVM responded to the ideological dilemma of the traditional pro-Western Kemalist elite, the arch rival of the Islamists, by adopting a pro-western/westernization stand in an attempt both to win the support of the Western powers abroad and liberal pro western intellectuals at home, and delegitimize the Kemalist who used to claim to be pro-western westernizers. By adapting 'modern political values' the Islamists also hoped to corner the Kemalists who were readily disassociate themselves from the 'ideal of democracy' opting for an elitist republicanism. In fact as the Islamists started to express their commitments to democracy and pluralism as a framework for their political/social survival the Kemalists came to see western political values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law as not fitting to the 'realities' of Turkey. The Kemalists tend to put the question in this way; if democracy is a political regime that would bring Islamists to the power, and if human rights are values and mechanism that protect the Islamists, and if the West is still advocating these in a way to provide a shelter for the Islamists then we do not anymore pursue our declared commitment to 'westernization'.

As a result the Kemalists lost their claim to represent the 'modern' and the western while the modern political values as adapted, used and championed by the Islamists were declared irrelevant to Turkey's 'particularities'. This shift in the discourse became soft belly of the Kemalists; by disassociating themselves from the 'ideal of contemporary civilization' they lost their ideological and historical legitimacy, and turned out to represent a political regime that is inward looking, authoritarian and in clash with the wishes of its own people.

To sum up the Islamists' change in discourse may both mean a change in the constituting elements of the identity of the Islamists and reflect a survivalist attitude, given judicial and military pressures directed against the NVM, to make coalitions with liberal democratic forces at home and abroad. While developing a pro-western stand and adapting liberal democratic discourse may have damaged its traditional power base it could also in time transform the movement to construct a new Islamic political identity based on a new political language with rethinking the "western question" leading to the emergence of a unique "Islamic" political movement that would be "pro-western" and in favor of global integration. Some say they have been making 'takiyye' with their "new" discourse. Yet discourse may in time produce an identity that goes along with it. That is to say that discourse may not always be reflective of identity, determined by identity; in some cases and for that matter in the case

of the Islamists the newly adopted discourse may in time shape identity through the inner-debates among the Islamists. The emergence of the Ak party as a break from the NVM embracing modern political values and integration with the EU is indicative of the direction the Islamists have evolved.

As the NVM was moving onto a path that seemed breaking with its tradition it received three major setbacks. First, the closure of the VP by the constitutional court again and subsequent split in the party. Second, the European Court of Human Rights 's decision that found the closure of WP by the constitutional court in 1998 as not breaching the European Convention of Human Rights. Third, the challenges brought by the September 11 attacks on the USA and ensuing policies developed by the American administration.

As the movement was adopting a pro-western stand on its external orientation it was closed down in June 2001 by the constitutional court on the ground that the party had become a center of anti-secular activities.[110] The proceedings in the court had been continuing for more than a year, and the decision was not very surprising for the party leadership. Yet the important point was that by the closure of the party parliamentary group and provincial organizational leaders of the party turned to have no party anymore. The closure of the party provided a seemingly legitimate ground for the split up within the party along the lines of Erbakan, the natural leader of the NV, and Erdogan, the former mayor of Istanbul. As the splinter party seemed to take up the new language of democracy, human rights and the rule of law the newly found Felicity Party led behind the scene by the banned leader of the movement, Erbakan, fell into an ideological vacuum. Those who left the movement for another party were the faces behind the new moderate image and the discourse of democracy and human rights.

Then came another shock that made the impact of the first felt deeper. That was the decision of the ECHR concerning the closure of the WP. The court decision came right after the closure of the Virtue Party when the movement was in the process of disintegration and in need of the uniting leadership of Necmettin Erbakan. The ECHR decided that the Constitutional Court of Turkey did not breach article 11 of European Convention of Human Rights, and the closure of the Welfare Party was justified because it aimed at destroying democracy and democratic liberties.[111]

That was a shock which brought back some degree of traditional animosity towards the west that was described as having double standards, prejudes and an historical dislike

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[110] M. Erdogan, FP kapanis, Liberal Dusunce
[111] V. Bicak (ed.), *AIHM Kararlari ve Ifade Ozgurlugu*, Ankara, Liberte, 2002.

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towards the "crescent". Given the discursive transformation of the movement concerning the west, western institutions and values the decision of the Court was hard to digest. This was partly due to the expectation for a positive outcome from the court proceedings. The decision was shocking while the NVM was in a process of 'rethinking' the west and the western values. As the Islamists had adopted a pro-western orientation and aligned themselves with the west on the issues of 'political reforms' in Turkey they were expecting a positive verdict from the ECHR. The fact that on the previous three cases of party closure the ECHR found Turkey breaching the European Convention Erbakan and the VP leaders were expecting a positive outcome. To free Erbakan through a decision of the ECHR was particularly important as for the first time in its history the movement was expected to split up. It seemed that Erbakan was the only person who could balance the influence and charisma of the splitting leader, Erdogan.

While the closure of the VP enabled the 'young Turks' to depart from the NVM under the leadership of Erdogan, the ECHR's decision concerning the closure of the previous party (WP) disabled the movement to balance the growing popularity of Erdogan with the leadership of Erbakan. Thus decisions of both courts, at home and in Strasbourg, about two political parties from the 'national view' tradition had an impact on the movement raising question marks about its discourse of and newly adopted pro-western orientation.

The NV movement reacted to the decision of ECHR concerning the closure of the WP on several grounds. First, it was found contradictory to previous decisions of the court. In fact for the first time the ECHR found Turkish government not violating European Convention of Human Rights on a case of party closure. This exceptional aspect of the decision seems to increase the unease about the decision on the Welfare Party and led accusations of the west of being prejudice about Islam and not applying the same standards to Islamic groups as they did to the Kurdish nationalists.

Second, they became concerned that court's decision vindicated not only the closure of the party but also the process of February 28 that was directed to eliminate Islamist activities. Thus NVM turned into an anomaly not only in the eyes of the secularist/Kemalists in Turkey but in the world at large by the decision of the ECHR. While trying to win the support of the west in an attempt to gain both domestic and international legitimacy the ECHR's decision was a blow.[112] In response to the arguments that ECHR's verdict proved that WP was a threat

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[112] *Milli Gazete*, Yorum, August 3, 2001.

to democracy and as such deserved to be closed down the Islamists reacted strongly that the decision can not be seen as confirming radical secularism.[113]

Third, the decision was viewed as being conflictual towards the East/Islam not cooperative and pro-dialogue. Historical prejudices towards Islam was thought to be decisive in refusing the claims of the WP before the ECHR. The decision of ECHR provoked a debate among the Islamists about the west, western institutions and values. Initial reactions of the Islamic politicians and intellectuals described the decision as hypocrisy of the West and double standard. Some, including the daily newspaper Milli Gazete, the mouthpiece of the national view movement, explained the decision of ECHR as part of 'clash of civilizations', an old theme for the Islamists. Thus the opponents of the rapprochement with the west, who claimed that previous stand of anti-westernizm was the correct line, gained ground. The daily newspaper of NVM Milli Gazate asserted that the west chose to go on the direction for a clash of civilizations concluding that the Muslims should face the west as such.[114]

Since the court verdict was interpreted by the secularists in Turkey as a vindication of the February 28 process and the crackdown on the Islamists the ECHR (read it as the west) was regarded by the Islamists siding with the Kemalists/secularist forces in the domestic power struggle that was in fact a struggle for survival for the Islamists. Therefore the expectation that the Islamists could form international coalitions by which Kemalists regime could be opened up proved unrealizable. The west seemed to have preconceptions about Muslims. While the west was pushing for democracy in Turkey it did not mean a democracy with Islamists.[115] As a result they thought that they failed in forming genuine international coalitions despite their attempt for a rapprochement with the west, western institutions and political values. Even a moderate political figure like Aydin Menderes, a former MP of the Welfare Party, stated that the decision to go to ECHR did not correspond to the declared principles of the NV movement. He said 'you say *national* view and then go and complain against Turkey in an *international* court'.[116]

It then seemed that there was a real challenge for the Islamists to rethink their position concerning the west and western values. In the years between 1997 and July-August 2001 the move towards the west was justified on the ground that western and global dynamics would serve as a barrier and counterbalance against the oppressive measures of the Kemalist establishment. Yet the ECHR decision proved that that was not the case leaving no ground for

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[113] *Milli Gazete*, Yorum, August 3, 2001.
[114] *Milli Gazete*, Yorum, August 3, 2001.
[115] M. Erdogan, 'Islam in Turkish Politcs: Turkey's Quest for Democracy Without Islam', *Critique*, 1999.
[116] See the interview with Aydin Menderes, *Milliyet, November* 8, 2000.

the justification of the continuity of the rapprochement. Encountering a cold-shoulder from the West and its most trusted institution that had always been critical of the state practice of banning political parties in Turkey the Islamists arrived at a crossroad. Some advocate a return to old identity and discourse that is based on anti-Westernism and some other still maintain that 'rethinking' should continue. Those who adhere to the latter have chosen to carry on with the Justice and Development party.

A new debate has been generated about the west and its policies towards Islam following the attack on the USA by a fanatical Islamist group on September 11, 2001whence the Islamists in Turkey found themselves in an awkward position. They could not distance themselves from the view that the whole event had something to do with Islam and the west. The west and particularly the USA was described as waging war against Islamic world and Islam itself in the name of its fight against terrorism. But the Islamists were accused of not disassociating themselves from Bin Ladin and Taliban, instead jumped into generalizations about Islam and the West. Thus once again we saw the old discourse on the clash between the two.[117]

The September 11 event that posed to hijack the rapproacment with the West turned to be a challenge for the Islamists who support the dialogue with the west. While there was strong criticism directed at the USA due to its operation in Afghanistan and its policies towards the Muslims in the USA the event also proved the urgency of an inter-civilizational dialogue between Islam and the west. Furthermore harsh measures and aggressive policies of the Bush administration has pushed the pro-Islamic groups who are in favor of a dialogue with the west in the process of rethinking the west to prefer the EU as their likely partner. The AK Party's diplomatic initiatives taken after coming to power to secure the EU membership can also be put in the context of pro-Islamic groups' choice of western allies in favor of those who would support plural identities and democratic process in which the Islamic social, economic and political groups could exist.

Conclusion

The Turkish pro-Islamic groups' approach to the west and modern political values is important since they are still a formidable social if not a political force. Yet the presence of a strong opposition of Turkish military, a powerful political actor at national level that claims to be the ultimate defender of 'secular republic', to the presence of the Islamists in social,

political and economic spheres presents an 'impasse'. While the Islamists' commitment to human rights/democracy is questioned the military's attempts to eliminate them turns the country into a 'tutelage democracy'. To overcome this 'vicious circle' and establish a working democracy and human rights regime in Turkey it is essential for Turkish Islamists to clarify their understanding of democracy and human rights. Part of the issue is their attitude towards the west which has been at the very heart of contemporary Islamic political identity.

Modern political values like human rights and democracy used to be debated among the Islamists by references to their 'western origins' with no relevance to Islamic communities. Yet the Islamists in Turkey seem to have distanced themselves from the earlier position that presented itself as a denial of the notions of democracy and human rights as Western construction irrelevant for the 'Muslims'. The changing discourse of Turkish Islamists presents an important move not only for the spread of modern political values among the Islamic groups in Turkey but also for a possibility of rapprochement between Islam and the West. Furthermore the changes seem not confined to the discourse of the Islamists but the Islamic self (identity) is being transformed at least among some Islamic sectors.

In their search for a polity in which they could exist the Islamists have realized the effectiveness of international/western linkages between Turkey and the west established over the years of westernization and western-oriented foreign policy. They have in recent years encountered with a new west where numerous human rights NGOs, the European Union, European Court of Human Rights and individual states are critical of the level of democracy and record of human rights in Turkey. At this juncture the Islamists have found themselves in the same side with the westerners demanding further democratization and guarantees for civil and political rights in Turkey. The effect of this was significant; first time the Islamists have had a common cause with the west concerning the form of government in Turkey. They thought that transformation of an authoritarian regime into a democratic one was in their interest, and realized that the west with its call for democracy, human rights and pluralism could be a possible partner in bringing down the authoritarian tendencies in the state apparatus.

The Ak Party's and FP's enthusiastic support for Turkey's EU membership in contrast to the hesitations of the Kemalists is indicative of the overall "rethinking" engaged by the Islamic groups concerning the west and westernization. While they have come to be supportive of Turkey's full membership in the EU demanding that Turkey should take all

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[117] See articles of C. Candar, a liberal columnist writing in a pro-Islamic newspaper *Yeni Safak*, and the responses he recieved from A. Tasgetiren from the same newspaper.

necessary steps to reach this objective, used to be described by the state elites as the last stage of westernization, the Kemalists have gone away from the EU (the west) and the very objective of westernization. The west in recent years is seen by the Kemalist/nationalists as plotting against Turkey's territorial integrity and the secular regime. Here the reference was often made that the west supported Kurdish insurgency and harbored anti-secularist forces. As a result conventionally pro-western kemalist/nationalist/leftist groups grew suspicious of the west and its intentions over Turkey. The west was continuously described as imperialistic, intrusive and supportive of internal 'enemies' of the state; the Kurds and the Islamists. The shift in the Kemalists's approach to the west, westernization and the EU in turn helped new Islamists overcome their historical hesitations towards the west and westernization.

In this context it was not surprising to see that Bulent Ecevit, prime minister of the last coalition government (1999-2002) known for his Kemalist, leftists and nationalist stand, accused the EU and west of being racist and having an idea of the EU as a 'Christian club'. This would have been a standard statement of Erbakan when he spoke of the EU in the 1980s and early 1990s.[118] What came out of abandoning westernization was an advocacy for authoritarian regime, an adherence to 'national security' ideology, resistance against globalization including membership in the EU and an aggressive regional policy. It can be argued that the Islamist challenge served as a catalyst for testing the commitment of the Kemalists to take westernization to its logical end i.e. democracy, human rights, the rule of law and the EU membership.

To conclude it can be asserted that the Islamists in Turkey have had more problems with westernization and the Kemalist secularization than the west itself. Therefore as the Kemalists seemed to have abandoned westernization in recent years the Islamists have moved in advocating further westernization that meant democracy, closer integration with the EU and a lesser Kemalist state. A democratic state that could be formed by the support of the west was expected to be a non-ideological state leaving the Islamists free from the interventions/exclusions of the Kemalists. That is to say that the Islamists' attitude towards the west was rather 'situational' determined by the pro-westernism of the Kemalists. As the situation changed so did the positions of the Kemalists and the Islamists. The Islamists seem to have determined their position of the west on the attitude of the westernizers. This new situation provided an opportunity for the Islamists to rethink the west and western values.

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[118] Ecevit explained that the EU was debating Turkey's place/identity in Europe because 2/3 of Europeans are racists who see the EU as a Christian club. He made this speech in a symposium organized by Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi (Directorate General of Religious Affairs) on International EU Symposium, see *Hurriyet*, May 4, 2000.

Then a fundamental question emerges; what is to be left of Islamism as a result of the rethinking process? As rejection of the west and westernization was the very basis on which modern Islamist identity was built the rapprochement with the west and westernization shakes the very basis of Islamist identity. What is left is not an Islamist identity as we know it. A political movement that embraces modern political values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and advocates integration with the EU, and manages to get votes from all segments of society can hardly be called Islamist, that is the break away Ak Party. Transformation of the NVM shows how the movement gave birth to a new political party (Ak Party) with a liberal, democratic and pro-western identity and politics as a result of its changing discourse on democracy, human rights, the rule of law and the EU membership. It is a case proving that a discursive shift may be followed by a fundamental change in the identities under certain circumstances. A departure from rejecting the west and westernization seems to have transformed the Islamic self in Turkey with a tremendous impact on the relationship between Islam and the west.