THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN TURKEY: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Turkey has increasingly become a center of attraction for researchers interested in the working of liberal democratic institutions in a country with overwhelming Muslim population, especially in the last two decades when the rise of political Islam became quite visible in the public sphere and political parties with Islamic roots took over the government by democratically held elections.[1] It has been viewed as unique case in the Islamic world in respect of the relationship between Islam and democracy. In academic studies and reports, it is frequently defined as the 'only Muslim-democratic state,'[2] and 'the only Muslim country in which Islam is not the state religion, while laicism is enshrined in the constitution.'[3] It is stated to be an important country since it is an example illustrating the compatibility of 'Islam with secular democracy, globalization, and modernity.'[4] Viewed as such, it has even been considered as a model, first, for the republics of Central Asia which were freed from the Soviet domination in the early 1990s, and had considerable Islamic population,[5] and recently, for the Middle East countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Libya which have been claimed to live their springs.

Such statements which are abundant in the extensive literature on Islam and the political system in Turkey, and just few examples in case implicitly suggest that Islam is not only a religion for itself providing the spiritual relaxation of its adherents but also a significant political phenomenon in Turkey and other Muslim countries.[6] Yet, what makes Turkey unique and separates it from the rest of the Islamic world seems to be basing the

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[1]   First, the Welfare Party and later the Justice and Development Party managed to get the electoral majority. In the former case, the Welfare Party was the winner of the elections in 1995. It led a coalition government in 1996 which came to end by a soft military intervention in 1997. The Justice and Development Party was founded by political figures who dissociated from the Welfare Party in 2001. In the elections held a year later, it gained approximately 34 % of the votes which allowed it, according to the electoral law of the time, to form one party government. Following the elections of 2007 and 2011, it was able to maintain its position as the leading party even by increasing its votes up to almost 50 %.

[2]   Banu Eligür, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 1.

[3]   Cemal Karakaş, "Turkey: Islam and Laicism Between the Interests of State, Politics, and Society," *Peace Reasearch Institute Frankfurt Reports No. 78,* 2007, 1.

[4]   Angel Rabasa and F. Stephen Larrabee, "The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey," *RAND Corporation Monograph Series,* 2008, iii.

[5]   Ömer Taşpınar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey: Kemalist Identity in Transition,* New York&London: Routledge, 2005, 144.

[6]   History of the Muslim societies illustrates well the interpenetration of Islam with political institutions. In Islam, political and religious functions mingled. It is the main instrument of legitimacy for Islamic rulers even during the modern era. When its legitimizing role came to end in many countries of the Middle East as a result of the socio-political transformation emanated from the increasing Western influence, it continued to exist as 'normative system' embedded in social and cultural life. Since 1970s, it has been adopted as the ideology in opposing the political regimes in the Middle East. Bassam Tibi, "The Renewed Role of Islam in the Political and Social Development of the Middle East," *Middle East Journal,* 37:1 (Winter 1983), 4-5.

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foundations of its political system in particular and state affairs in general on secular rules and thus limiting the role of religion, at least in theory, to spiritual sphere since the 1920s. In this way, political Islam has been integrated into the secular democratic system rather than making subservient to it as in the case of Middle East countries.

How did the 'Turkish model' of the relationship between Islam and liberal democracy emerge? What transformation did this relationship undergo? What specific roles did Islam play in political developments in the contemporary Turkey? How has political Islam been integrated into the secular political system as to run it in the last decade? This paper will attempt to answer such questions by focusing on the historical evolution of politicized Islam in Turkey. It will not be an exhaustive study; rather, it aims to provide with a framework introducing the issue of political Islam in contemporary Turkey by employing selectively the extensive literature in English and Turkish on this topic. To this end, first, after briefly explaining how Islamism, in the sense of 'reappropriation of a Muslim identity and values as a basis for an alternative social and political agenda to that of the state,'[7] rose as political ideology in the 19th century, it will deal with the attempts of the Republican regime to construct a secular regime by eradicating Islam from political sphere. Secondly, it will focus on the resurgence of Islam in the aftermath of the Second World War when Turkey adopted a political system based on multi-party politics. This part will also cover the formal politicization of Islam as exposed in the rise of a political party based on Islamic discourse in 1970. Finally, the era that began with the military takeover of 1980 following which political Islam lived its heyday and, paradoxically, its decline will be scrutinized with the aim of demonstrating its transformation in the case of the rise of the Justice and Development Party, the leading party in Turkey since 2002.

1. MODERNIZATION, POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION AND THE POLITICIZATION OF ISLAM

The rise of an Islamist ideology in the second half of the 19th century was a novel development conditioned by the increasing impact of modernization, which in the parlance of the time was *Garplılaşmak*, i.e., Westernization, on the Ottoman state and society. It developed as a mean of opposition criticizing the undergoing rapid transformation of the Ottoman state in the *Tanzimat* era (1839-1876) by a group of intellectuals, known as the Young Ottomans or *Jeunes Turcs*. It should be pointed out that Islamism did not emerge as an anti-modernist ideology rejecting all assets of the West. It was shaped as a response to the challenges coming from the West. In this respect, it was a product of modernity and a way of accommodation to modern politics. In other words, it did not disregard modern political concepts such as liberty, democracy, constitutional rule, progress, and modern political institutions; parliament, for example, which were coming from the West. On the contrary, the intellectual figures who promoted Islamism were staunch defenders of these concepts and institutions. However, they were in the conviction that these concepts and institutions could be met from within Islam. Their attempts were at synthesizing the Western liberal concepts and institutions with Islamic thought and values, and in that they suggested an alternative way of modernization to the ongoing one in the last analysis.[8]

Islamism, as an ideology, had considerable influence on the Ottoman intellectuals and rulers to the extent that it was seen as one of the prescriptions of saving the state from disintegration, the eventual aim of the Ottoman modernization, in the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, it was not without rivals. A group of intellectuals and political figures, with positivist and materialist outlook, and mostly Turkish nationalists viewed Islam as the cause of backwardness and defended total Westernization on secular basis. Their umbrella political organization; namely, the Committee of Union and Progress, came to power in 1908. During its rule (1908-1918), it introduced several reforms aiming the secularization of the public sphere as well as social life. In this period too, Islamism appeared as the ideology reacting to the undergoing change which was erod-

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[7] Nilüfer Göle, "Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites," *Middle East Journal,* 51,1 (Winter 1997), 47.

[8] Mümtaz'er Türköne, *Siyasî İdeoloji Olarak İslâmcılı ın Doğuşu* [The Birth of Islamism as a Political Ideology], 2nd Edition, İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1994, 47-143.

ing the Islamic basis of rule and introducing Western way of life to society. At the same time, Islam was also politicized as a mean of mobilizing the masses during the wartime period. In the successive years beginning from 1912 to 1922, the Ottomans/Turks found themselves in a series of wars which eventually resulted in the establishment of the Turkish nation-state in 1923. Islam was employed pragmatically, first, by the Committee of Union and Progress to counteract the states that the Ottomans fought against during the World War I, and secondly, by the Turkish nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal against the occupation powers during the Turkish Independence War (1919-1922).[9]

Following the establishment of the Turkish nation-state, secularism[10] became the foremost tenet of the reforms aiming at creating a modern state and society, and nation-building. Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk], the founding leader of Turkey, the political elite of the Republican People's Party which monopolized the political rule until 1945, involved in successive reforms aiming at secularization of almost every sphere of life.[11] This took the form of an attack to the Islamic institutions and culture as they were deemed to be anti-modern/anti-Western.[12] Accordingly, Islam was removed from politics and discarded from being a component of the national identity. Turkishness which was constructed on a secular nationalist ideology was projected as substitute of Islam in this regard.[13]

The efforts to remove the impacts of Islam from institutional, cultural and ideological spheres had also political considerations besides creating a modern state based on the Western model. The carriers of the secular reforms were quite aware of the fact that Islam was 'the only alternative ideological source for mass mobilization'[14] and in that a potential source that could be channeled into political opposition. In their perceptions of the past, Islam was an impediment to modernization and implicitly, the cause of backwardness. As a result, it was seen as the ideological force behind all reactionary movements threatening the political regime in the late Ottoman Empire. It is quite probable that this perception of the past was one of the major drives for secularization following the establishment of the Republican regime. Inversely to the expectations of the political elite, however, this approach to Islam and the secularization attempts opened the way for politicization of Islam in an efficacious way. As the overwhelming part of the population, mostly peasants, were not receptive to the reforms and were actually discontented by their enforcement, some revolts employing the Islamic discourse came to happen in 1920s and 1930s. Islamism became the name of the counter-ideology opposing the modernization program of the central state in the early Turkish Republic.[15] The government did not tolerate the reactions under Islamic veil; rather, it suppressed them harshly. Beginning from the 1930s until the end of the World War II, it followed a militant secularist policy which would alienate it further from the masses.[16]

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[9]   See Eyal Ginio, "Mobilizing the Ottoman Nation during the Balkan Wars (1912-1913): Awakening from the Ottoman Dream," *War in History,* 12:2 (2005), 156-177 and Erik Jan Zürcher, "The Vocabulary of Muslim Nationalism," *International Journal of Sociology of Language,* 137 (1999), 81-92.

[10] In the context of the contemporary history of Turkey, secularism has been generally referred as *laicism* and entrenched into the Constitution as such. Officially, it has been attributed the meaning of separation the state and religious affairs; yet, practically, it has denoted control of religion by the state and promoting of one, *Sunni* understanding of Islam into a society which is diverse in terms of religious creeds. Taha Parla and Andrew Davison, *Corporatist Ideology in Turkey: Progress or Order?,* New York: Syracuse University Press, 2004, p. 104; Umut Azak, *Islam and Secularism in Turkey: Kemalism, Religion and the Nation State,* London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010, 12-13.

[11] Secularization attempts consisted of the secularization of the state, education and law, social life and the replacement of the religious symbols by the Western symbols as well. Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey a Modern History,* London and New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd *Publishers,* 1993, 194-201.

[12] Binnaz Toprak, *Islam and Political Development in Turkey,* Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981, 38-40.

[13] Feroz Ahmad, "Politics and Islam in Modern Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies,* 27:1 (January 1991), 8.

[14] Toprak, *Islam and Political Development in Turkey,* 39.

[15] Iter Turan, "Religion and Political Culture in Turkey," in *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State,* Richard Tapper (ed.), London&New York: I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1991, 43.

[16] Ahmad, "Politics and Islam in Modern Turkey," 8.

2. INTEGRATION INTO THE POLITICAL SYSTEM: ISLAM IN THE MULTI-PARTY POLITICS

Gradual democratization of the political regime and transition to multi-party politics in 1945 brought the militant secularist policy of the 1930s into questioning and led the search for the redefinition of secularism. The role of Islam in the state and society and how government policy should be toward religion were heatedly debated.[17] At the same time, the Republican People's Party government relaxed its strict control on Islam, most probably to compete with the rival parties for the votes of peasantry. Islam began to be more visible thereafter. As a matter of fact, one can speak of an Islamic resurgence after 1950, when the Democratic Party which had well established itself among the peasants and had liberal attitude toward Islam, ousted the militant secularist Republican People's Party from power by an electoral victory.[18] Following the change in government, a drastic increase in religious activity, press and publications was noticed by the contemporaneous writers.[19] The government removed several restrictions which were the remnants of the militant secularist policy of the 1930s. This was not because of the government's aim of replacing the secular regime by an overtly Islamic one and restoring Islam's political role, but, rather, as a result of acknowledging its social role embedded in the traditional culture of the peasantry. In 1950s, Islam was actually the mean of getting electoral support and in that all political parties of the time exploited it during elections. In that it was the source of populist mobilization.

The Democratic Party rule was ended by a military coup d'état in May 1960. The military regime aimed to make Islam an instrument of the state and prevent its exploitation by the conservative groups and political parties, particularly by ones which were founded on the legacy of Democratic Party, to their political ends.[20] However, political as well as socio-economic developments in the 1960s would yield the contrary result. Islam was politicized under circumstances marked by the increasing influence of the left (ranging from social democrat to socialist and communist ideologies) and rapid industrialization which would create favorable conditions for the growth of big companies situated mostly in Istanbul and neighboring regions at the extent of small companies in Anatolia. Opposition to both was voiced through Islam. In this respect, Islam was seen as 'antidote to communism' especially by the right (conservative, nationalist and religious) parties on the one hand, and a way of resistance to the advancement of capitalism by the petty bourgeoisie including the small traders, artisans and shopkeepers on the other. By the end of 1960s, as Ahmad aptly states:

> "Islam was no longer merely a force to be exploited before elections, as it had been in the fifties. It was still that, but it was now an instrument to be used against the radical Left and on behalf of the NATO alliance. It was a means of mobilizing and organizing all the elements in the country against the rapid socio-economic change sought by monopoly capitalism".[21]

Tolerated by the secular state and the then government as it formed a barrier against left ideologies, the growth of political Islam, though outlawed, took a formal character by the establishment of the National Order Party with Islamic references in 1970.[22] It emerged as the representative of the religiously conservative population of small Anatolian cities, the small traders, artisans and shopkeepers of the countryside.[23] Following the military intervention in March 1971, it was closed down by the Constitutional Court due to its anti-

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[17] Kemal H. Karpat, *Turkey's Politics: The Transition to a Multy-Party System,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959, 272-273.

[18] By resurgence, it is meant that Islam became more visible particularly in urban centers concurrently to socio-economic development marked by commercialization of agriculture and migration to industrial centers, especially to Istanbul, rather than the rise of Islamic fundamentalism aiming the foundation of an Islamic state.

[19] For example, Bernard Lewis, "Islamic Revival in Turkey," *International Affairs,* Vol. 28, No. 1 (January 1952), 38-48.

[20] Feroz Ahmad, *The Turkish Experiment in Democracy 1950-1975,* London: C. Hurst & Company, 1977, 374.

[21] Ibid., 382.

[22] William Hale and Ergun Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey: The Case of the AKP,* London and New York: Routledge, 2010, 3.

[23] Nilüfer Narlı, "The Rise of the Islamist Movement in Turkey," in *Revolutionaries and Reformers: Contemporary Islamist Movements in the Middle East,* Barry Rubin (ed.), Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003, 126.

secular activities and reappeared a year later under the name of the National Salvation Party.

Beginning with the National Order Party, the Islamist political parties defined their ideological stand with the term 'national outlook,' which actually came to mean Islamic outlook. Inheritor of the National Order Party, the National Salvation Party and its inheritor parties -Welfare Party (1983), Virtue Party (1997) and Felicity Party (2001) - would continue this ideological stand with only minor revisions or change in discourse. The basic characteristics of this ideology can be enumerated as opposition to Western civilization which is viewed as 'materialist, oppressive and colonialist,' a unified Islamic world under the leadership of Turkey and anti-Zionism amongst other aspects.[24] While their approach to democracy and secularism is defined as 'ambivalent,' they advocated rapid industrialization accompanied by equitable distribution of income.[25] During the 1970s, the National Salvation Party managed to get approximately 10 % of the votes in the two elections and was represented in the Assembly. More important, it became influential in the politics of Turkey more than its acquired votes suggest as it became the coalition partner of the three governments in between 1973-1978.[26] The military takeover on September 12, 1980 ended all political activities in the country. In the aftermath, the National Salvation Party shared the destiny of other political parties and was closed down since it exploited religion to political ends and aimed to replace the secular republican regime with one based on the religious law, *shari'a.*

3. POLITICAL ISLAM AND MILITARY TUTELAGE IN THE 1990S

The military coup d'état of September 1980 aimed seemingly to end the ideological war between the radical leftist and rightist groups that had filled the agenda of the country throughout the 1970s. To this end, besides the establishment of military rule for approximately three years, the military junta banned all political activities including the closure of political parties, associations and trade unions in the first place. In the long run, it aimed to restructure the political and legal framework of the country in a way that would not allow the advancement of any radical ideology that would harm the national unity. To accomplish this, the military leaders envisaged a de-politicized, ideology-free society unified around moral and national values under an ideological framework called Turkish-Islamic Synthesis. Through this ideological stand, they aimed to curb the influence of the left as well as to end all differences, ethnic, sectarian and political, which were considered dividing the nation.[27]

The ideology of Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, which would practically become the official ideology of the state up to date, was developed by an influential organization composed of university professors and businessmen who were in search of strengthening the right-wing nationalist forces against the increasing influence of the left in the 1970s.[28] Called as the Hearth of the Enlightened, one of the leading figures of this organization formulated the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis on the basis that the Turkish culture was actually built on 'a 2500-year-old Turkish element and a 1000-year-old Islamic element.'[29] Synthesizing Turkish nationalism with Islam, this ideology became highly influential in the right. More important, however, it was adopted by the military in the aftermath of the coup as a mean of reorganizing the society and state around 'national culture' and 'Islamic values.' Accordingly, following the elimination of left cadres from the state institutions to a large extent, the supporters of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis filled the major posts in the Ministries of Interior, Education, Justice and Culture.[30]

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[24] Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey,* 6.

[25] Ibid., 7-8.

[26] Hugh Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent: Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic,* London: Hurst & Company, 1997, 177.

[27] Ta pınar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey,* 138.

[28] Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent,* 179. For the Hearth of Enlightened and an evaluation of the rise of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis see lhan Tekeli, et.al, *Türk- slam Sentezi* [Turkish-Islamic Synthesis,] stanbul: Sarmal Yayınevi, 1994.

[29] Zürcher, *Turkey A Modern History,* 303.

[30] Mustafa Şen, "Transformation of Turkish Islamism and the Rise of the Justice and Development Party," in *Islamization of Turkey under the AKP Rule,* Birol Ye ilada and Barry Rubin (eds.), London, Routledge, 2011, 63-64.

Although the proponents of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis did not aim the politicization of Islam, but, rather, promoting it as the 'essence of culture and social control,'[31] its wide propagation by state support, especially through education would lead the penetration of religious ideology into daily politics in the 1980s.[32] Such support was also quite visible following the transition to civilian politics in 1983. The Motherland Party which became the ruling power after elections and emerged as a coalition of the 'economic liberals, Turkish nationalists and political Islamists'[33] was actually led by a political leader who had once been the member of the Hearth of the Enlightened. During the rule of his party, the rise of Islamism was conspicuous. It was exposed by the building of new mosques, increase in the number of Islamic publications and bookshops,[34] and the enlargement of the Directorate of Religious Affairs,[35] which had been charged by the military rule with the task of promoting 'national solidarity and integrity.'[36]

The rule of the Motherland Party (1983-1991) led also the rise of what may be called a bourgeoisie class closely associated with Islamist movements. This class emerged out of the small and medium size businesses in Anatolia which had actually been represented in the Islamist political parties; the National Order Party and the National Salvation Party in the 1970s. Called as *Anatolian tigers* or *green* (Islamic) *capital,* the development of a capitalist class with Islamic culture goes back to

1970s; however, it was only after 1980 when neo-liberal economic policies became dominant that enterprises with Islamic colour disseminated their financial networks and grew to become major economic actors. In brief, traditional small and medium-sized companies were transformed into large-sized enterprises seeking new markets, employing technology in the production process but still culturally defined themselves in Islamic terms.[37] In the 1990s, they were organized under an umbrella organization, Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association, in order to defend and develop their interests as well as acting as pressure group.[38]

The visible *Islamization* of the state, society and economy in the 1980s began to have its repercussions in politics in the 1990s. The Welfare Party which was founded on the legacy of the National Salvation Party in 1983 and emphasized Islam as the main focus of loyalty, managed to get approximately 20 % of the national votes in the respective local and national elections in 1994 and 1995, and thus proved itself to be a mass party. More striking, it was able to win the municipalities of Istanbul and Ankara, the two foremost urban centers in Turkey.[39] Early 1990s also witnessed the rise of radical Islam aiming to replace the Republican regime by an Islamic one through use of violence. Professors and journalists reputed with their firm attachment to the secular order and Kemalism became the target of radical Islamic groups in Istanbul and Ankara. Some of them were assassi-

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[31]   Tapper, "Introduction," in *Islam in Modern Turkey,* 11.

[32]   Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf, and Crescent,* 184-187.

[33]   Ayşe Buğra, "Political Islam in Turkey in Historical Context: Strengths and Weaknesses," in *The Politics of Permanent Crisis Class, Ideology and State in Turkey,* Ne ecan Balkan and Sungur Savran (eds.), New York, Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2002, 119.

[34]   Zürcher, *Turkey A Modern History,* 303.

[35]   Poulton, 185-186. The Directorate of Religious Affairs through which the religious organization became a part of the state apparatus was created in 1924. Its personnel, that is religious functionaries, became civil servants and thus dependent to the state. Binnaz Toprak, "The Religious Right," in *Turkey in Transition,* Irvin C. Schick and E. Ahmet Tonak (eds.), New York, Oxford University Press, 1987, 225.

[36]   Şen, "Transformation of Turkish Islamism," 65.

[37]   Ömer Demir, Mustafa Acar and Metin Toprak, "Anatolian Tigers or Islamic Capital: Prospects and Challenges," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40:6 (November 2004), 169-170.

[38]   Şen, "Transformation of Turkish Islamism," 69.

[39]   For an explanation of the success of the Welfare Party see Ta pınar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey,* 145-150.

[40]   Poulton, *Top Hat, Grey Wolf and Crescent,* 197-199. For an evaluation of the radical Islamist movements in Turkey see Ely Karmon, "Radical Islamist Movements in Turkey," in *Revolutionaries or Reformers Contemporary Islamist Movements in the Middle East,* Barry Rubin (ed.), Albany, State University of New York Press, 2003, 41-68.

nated, some were threatened. Radical Islamists also targeted the left-wing Kurds in Southeastern Anatolia where a secular, leftist Kurdish nationalist movement was very influential.[40]

The rise of political Islam as manifested in the electoral success of a political party adhered to Islamism and the rise of radical Islamic groups brought Turkey into the brink of another military intervention in February 1997. Such rise caused an alarm in the 'secular establishment' composed of the military, major part of the bureaucracy, intellectuals, the press and large business sector, which have actually formed the bulwark of Kemalist worldview. Especially after the Welfare Party became the coalition partner of the government in 1996, they waged a political struggle against it through the 'secular' press which propagated the idea that the Welfare Party was in search of changing the secular order and replace it with an Islamic one. They also attempted at mobilizing some segments of population who were anxious about a forcibly change in their lifestyles by the allegedly Islamic government.[41] The campaign and counter propaganda against the Welfare Party eventually resulted in the presentation of a memorandum by the military to the government on February 28, 1997. Defining Islamism as the foremost threat to domestic security and secular state order, the military demanded the implementation of the listed measures, including among other things the strict enforcement of secularism, putting all kind of activities of the religious orders under close governmental control, introduction of an eight-year uninterrupted primary education and restriction to Qur'anic courses, etc., from the Welfare Party government.[42]

Following this intervention, the military maintained its pressure over the Welfare Party through several means. The process eventually resulted in its resignation in June 1997 and finally, its closure by the Constitutional Court in January 1998 on the basis that it had exploited religion for political ends and had encouraged anti-secularism. In the same year, the party re-appeared under the name of Virtue Party. Following the so-called February 28 experience, the new party changed its discourse. While it boldly stressed human rights, democracy and the rule of law, it abstained from appealing to Islamic references.[43] It even adopted a discourse of integration with the European Union, which it had strictly rejected in the past.[44] Besides the radical change in the discourse, the establishment of new party on the legacy of the Welfare Party and short later its closure by the Constitutional Court on the basis that it was the 'center of anti-secular activities,' brought to the fore the schism between the 'modernist' and 'traditionalist' groups, which is claimed to exist since the early 1990s in the Islamist movement.[45] It was this 'modernist' group that would dominate the political life in Turkey until present day after disassociating from the Virtue Party and establishing the Justice and Development Party in 2001 on liberal and democratic discourse by particular emphasis on 'conservatism' rather than 'Islamism'.

4. RECONCILING ISLAM WITH LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND NEO-LIBERALISM: THE JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY IN TURKISH POLITICS

In the three respective elections in 2002, 2007 and 2011, the Justice and Development Party managed to get the electoral majority even by increasing its votes at each time (34%, 42 and 50% respectively) and thus establishing one-party rule, a unique case in the history of contemporary Turkey. Due to the affiliation of most of its members with the Islamic 'national outlook' movement, the

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[41] Taşpınar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey*, pp. 154-155. Especially, secular middle class women were noticed as threatened for their 'modern' lifestyles by the Welfare Party at municipal level and claimed to participate increasingly in secularist organizations. Jenny B. white, "Islam and Democracy: The Turkish experience," *Current History*, 94:558 (January 1995), 11-12.

[42] M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2003, 244, 275-276.

[43] Ümit Cizre and Menderes Çınar, "Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism, and Politics in the Light of the February 28 Process," *The South Athlantic Quarterly*, 102: 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2003), 323.

[44] Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 248-249; Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*, 10-11.

[45] Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey*, 10-11.

course of action that the party would follow after each election became a question of concern. Allegations that it is an Islamist party with a 'hidden Islamic agenda' aiming to transform the state and society into an Islamic one and it was using democracy as an instrument to this end were widespread. Yet, the political programme of the Justice and Development Party has not carried any sign of religiousness; on the contrary, it has emphasized the liberal concepts of democratic rule; i.e., human rights, the rule of law, pluralism, etc. It has also viewed secularism as the prerequisite of democracy as well as the guarantee for religious freedom and the freedom of conscience.[46]

During the first period of its rule (2002-2007), the Justice and Development Party followed a reform programme aiming to hasten Turkey's integration into the European Union in accordance with its liberal and democratic discourse. Reforms aiming the improvement of human rights, the protection of minorities, the recovery of the judicial system and the removal of military tutelage over politics were successively held. While such reforms seemingly liberalized the political system, they made it possible for the Justice and Development Party to extend its power in the state apparatus at the same time. During the approximately a decade of its rule, it was able to curb the military influence in politics and to have under its control many crucial branches of the government. Politically, however, liberalization move of the Justice and Development Party seems to serve more for the lift of restrictions imposed by the secular establishment previously; for example, the prohibition of wearing headscarf in schools and public spaces, and the extension of power space of the conservative/Islamic elements in the state and society rather than bringing to a halt authoritarian and tutelary tendencies of ruling.[47] The course of action that the party has followed toward the Kurdish

opposition and opponents in the press, for example, seems to cause the perpetuation of the structural malaises of the democracy in Turkey.[48]

Liberalism of the Justice and Development Party demonstrate itself in the economic policies more influentially. From the beginning of its rule, it adopted neo-liberal path of development under the guidance of the IMF. Withdrawals of the state from the economy, privatization and marketization of public services have been the major indicators of this policy. These were also favored by the Anatolia based 'Islamic bourgeoisie' which had actually its roots of development in the adoption of this policy in the beginning of 1980s. This class viewed in the privatization of public services not only as a prospect of further growth but also as an opportunity to shatter the power and domination of the secular establishment which, through statist and protectionist measures in the past, created a non-competitive economic system and also imposed alien cultural values on the society.[49] In this respect, it is quite possible to argue that the Justice and Development Party met the expectations of this segment of the bourgeoisie to a great extent.

In consequence, the Justice and Development Party expanded the space for Islam through its political and economic policies. Yet, this Islam seems to be more social and cultural rather than political, and in that it is not new. From the early 1990s, under the impacts of globalization, disintegration of the Soviet Union and the favorable state approach to the dissemination of Islamic values within the Turkish-Islamic synthesis framework, the role of Islam, even in its political form, had increased significantly in the society. In 2000s, the only political movement that had the potential to further political Islamization was the Justice and Development Party. Contrary to broad expectations among the secular people and in paradoxical way, it can be suggested that Islam, in its political

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[46] Ibid., 20-21.

[47] The argument that the liberalizing attitude of the Justice and Development Party as manifested in successive reforms to meet the Copenhagen Criteria was a mean to promote Islamist demands of reducing the role of the military in politics, changing the definition of secularism and enlarging the opportunities for Islamic activities is not without solid foundations. Eligür, *The Mobilization of Political Islam in Turkey,* 248-249.

[48] Authoritarian tendencies of governments in Turkey have most demonstrated themselves in the freedom of expression. The rule of the Justice and Development Party is not exception in rule. Especially in the last four years of its rule, 2007-2010, the rank of Turkey in the Press Freedom Index of the 'Reporters Without Borders' retreated dramatically. In 2007, it was ranked as the 101th; in 2010 as the 138th. [http://en.rsf.org/spip.php?page=classement&id_rubrique=34], 33, 1001, 1034. Accessed on 4 November 2011.

[49] Şen, *Transformation of Turkish Islamism,* 72.

form, retreated during its rule.[50] Under the light of developments during its rule in 2002-2011, it is not possible to state that the motive of its social, economic and political policies is to advance Islam as the main reference of governance. The questions that should be posed at this point are related to the standing of the Justice and Development Party in the political spectrum and the role that it has attributed to Islam in the state and society.

Although the leading figures of the Justice and Development Party began their political career in the parties adhered to the 'national outlook' ideology in which Islam was attributed a central role in policy making, it seems that they underwent a transformation which led a change in their viewpoint toward the end of the 1990s. Behind this transformation, amongst many factors, the vulnerability of the Islamist movement in the face of the interventions coming from the secular establishment in general and the military in particular, which was tested by the 'soft coup' of February 1997 that brought to end the rule of the Welfare Party, should be highlighted in the first place.[51] It should be pointed out that such vulnerability is not only political but also economic. The Islamic bourgeoisie that had developed during the 1980s and 1990s was also threatened by the confrontation of the Islamists with the secular establishment. In maintaining its class interests, it seemed to adopt a stance that favored de-politicization of Islam and integration into the European Union; a stance that firmly represented in the Justice and Development Party. Secondly, the discredit of the radical Islamist movements on global scale and the emerging separation between 'fundamentalist' and 'moderate' Islam especially by the United States is another point that should be highlighted for adoption of a

liberal discourse based on human rights and democracy, and the swift turn toward the European Union. In this way, the leading figures of the party presented themselves as 'moderate Muslims' cooperating with the Western hegemony.[52]

As a result, from its foundation, the Justice and Development Party appeared as the party maintaining the centre-right tradition in Turkey rather than the tradition of the Islamic parties that its founders had been once affiliated. Turkish nationalism, emphasize on traditional and Islamic values, allegiance to technological modernization and economic development based on free market which had been the common denominators of the centre-right parties in terms of ideology since the 1950s are strongly represented in the Justice and Development Party today.[53] Compared to the preceding centre-right parties, however, Islamic values and sensibilities are more represented in the Justice and Development Party; yet, it seems not possible to explain its electoral successes one after another to its Islamic character. Amongst other things, it is its hybrid character which enables it to be Turkish, Muslim and Western at the same time that guarantees its broad appeal in the elections. In that it appears as representing Turkish-Islamic synthesis by articulating into it the global discourses of human rights and democracy on the political level[54] and neo-liberalism on the economic level. With some reservations, it will not be an exaggeration to brand it as the representative of 'liberal Islam' in Turkey.[55]

Domestic political and economic stance of the Justice and Development Party can also be observed in its foreign policy. Through a pragmatic and rational approach, it has developed a multidimensional foreign policy. Western orientation of

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[50] Such retreat was probably owing to the holding of political power by a party with Islamist roots. Religious population was in the belief that their party was in power. It is noticeable that many of the Islamists remained silent to the support given by their party to the occupation of Iraq, a Muslim country, by the United States in 2003. In that, it became a catalyst in pacifying the religious masses that had been mobilized by the Islamist movement previously. Cihan Tu al, "NATO's Islamists: Hegemony and Americanization in Turkey," *New Left Review,* 44 (March-April 2007), 21.

[51] It has been frequently stated that the 'soft coup' of February 1997 generated a 'learning process' among political Islamists in Turkey. For example, Senem Aydın and Ru en Çakır, "Political Islam in Turkey," *CEPS Working Document* No. 265 (April 2007), 1.

[52] Tuğal, "NATO's Islamists," 16-17.

[53] Hale and Özbudun, *Islamism, Democracy and Liberalism in Turkey,* 25-27.

[54] Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey,* 260-261.

[55] For evaluation of the Justice and Development Party as the representative of the liberal Islam see Thomas W. Smith, "Between Allah and Atatürk: Liberal Islam in Turkey," *The International Journal of Human Rights,* 9:3 (September 2005), 307-325.

the conventional Turkish foreign policy has been maintained by the Justice and Development Party. This orientation has been exposed in the integration efforts to the European Union and cooperation with the United States on especially regional level as well as continuing commitment to the NATO membership. By bi-lateral agreements, it further developed its political and economic relations with Russia, some states in Africa and Latin America. What can be reckoned as novel in the foreign policy of the Justice and Development Party is the increasing interest and involvement in the Middle East affairs. Actually, the Middle East has become almost another, beside the West, focal point of the Turkish foreign policy during the Justice and Development Party's rule.[56] Islam seems to play a role in this orientation; at least, on cultural level. Islamic roots of the Justice and Development Party as well as the common Islamic identity with the Middle East countries facilitated the expansion of Turkey's political and economic interests in this region. Yet, this has not an ideological dimension envisioning integration around would-be created Islamic institutions as the predecessors of the Justice and Development Party had once advocated. In the foreign policy of Turkey in the last decade, Islam has been promoted as cultural capital as in domestic affairs rather than a political one. Emphasize on Islamic identity of Turkey has generally been accompanied by the stress on its democratic tradition embedded in the secular constitution and the employment of the Western concepts of liberal democracy. These altogether have been considered as the requirements to make Turkey a major actor on global scale.

CONCLUSION

The rise of Islamism as a political ideology in Turkey goes back to the nineteenth century. It arose as a response to the increasing impact of institutional, economic and cultural Westernization in the Ottoman Empire. During its formative years, it had a vision of merging modern political institutions, Western science and technology with Islamic values and traditions. The foundation of the Turkish nation-state on secular basis brought to the fore a modernization vision which considerably challenged

the Islamic one. Political Islam was outlawed and an 'individual Islam' was imposed. Yet, the opposition against the secularist policies of the state in 1923-1945 was based on Islamic claims. In between 1945-1980, Islam, first, became an essential component of the populist discourses of political parties competing for the votes of electorate; secondly, an 'antidote' to communism and finally, a reaction of the 'losers' from the rapid socio-economic transformation marked by the growth of the big capitalist class at the extent of the small traders and artisans. All these led the formal politicization of Islam as exposed in the foundation of political party on Islamic ideology.

The military coup d'état of September 1980 was probably the most important turning point in respect of the enlargement the bases of political Islam. Promoting it as one of the foundations of the national identity, the other is Turkishness, it opened the way for further 'Islamization' of the state and society. Accompanied with socio-economic transformation structured by the neo-liberal economic policies, the rise of political Islam was signified by the electoral victory of the Islamic political party, which represented the segment of population mal-effected from neo-liberalization in urban places and, paradoxically, the Islamic bourgeoisie, in local and national elections in the midst of 1990s. For the first time in the history of Contemporary Turkey, a political party with Islamic vision was mandated to rule. However, its rule did not long last due to the increasing tension between the party and the secular establishment. On behalf of the latter, the military intervened in the situation and led the end of its rule. As the Islamic movement continued to be under close inspection of the secular establishment and other undergoing factors, there remained no way other than changing the Islamic discourse for political survival of the Islamists. The adoption of liberal, democratic values and the rule of law as the means of political existence came thereafter. The 'democratization' of the Islamist movement was represented in the Justice and Development Party which, notwithstanding its Islamist roots, appeared as committed to liberal democracy, the rule of law and secular basis of the state delimiting the role of Islam into the social and cultural life. As such, the rise of the Justice and Development Party marked the fall but not the end of political Islam in Turkey.

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[56] Ziya Öniş, "Multiple Faces of the "New" Turkish Foreign Policy: Underlying Dynamics and a Critique," *Insight Turkey*, 13:1 (2011), 50.