

CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON ISLAMISM AND SECULARISM IN TURKEY: THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT AND THE AK PARTY

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Abstract

The debate between secularists and Islamic groups, a conspicuous feature of Turkish politics for decades, changed in the late 1990s when the political discourse of mainstream Islamic groups embraced secularism. The establishment elite advocate the existing French model of an ‘assertive secularism’, meaning that, in the public domain, the state supports only the expression of a secular worldview, and formally excludes religion and religious symbols from that domain. The pro-Islamic conservatives, on the other hand, favour the American model of ‘passive secularism’, in which the state permits the expression of religion in the public domain. In short, what Turkey has witnessed over the last decade is no longer a tussle between secularism and Islamism, but between two brands of secularism.

Two actors have played crucial roles in this transformation: the Gülen movement and the Justice and Development (AK) Party. Recently the Gülen movement became an international actor and a defendant of passive secularism. Similarly, although the AK Party was originated from an Islamist Milli Görüş (National Outlook) movement, it is now a keen supporter of Turkey’s membership to the European Union and defends (passive) secularist, democratic regime. This paper analyses the transformation of these important social and political actors with regard to certain structural conditions, as well as the interactions between them.

In April 2007, the international media covered Turkey for the protest meetings of more than a million people in three major cities, the military intervention to politics, and the abortive presidential election. According to several journalists and columnists, Turkey was experiencing another phase of the ongoing tension between the secularists and Islamists. Some major Turkish newspapers, such as *Hürriyet*, were asserting that the secularists finally achieved to bring together millions of opponents of the ruling Adalet ve Kalkınma (Justice and Development) (AK) Party. In addition to their dominance in military and judicial bureaucracy, the secularists appeared to be maintaining the support of the majority of the people.

The parliamentary elections that took place few months later, in July, revealed that the mainstream Turkish media's presentation was misleading and the so-called secularists' aspirations were unrealistic. The AK Party received 47 percent of the national votes, an unusual ratio for a multiparty system where there were 14 contesting parties. The main opposition, Cumhuriyet Halk (Republican People's) Party (CHP), only received 21 percent of the votes, despite its alliance with the other leftist party. Both the national and international media's misleading presentation of Turkish politics was not confined by the preferences of the voters. Moreover, the media was primarily misleading with its use of the terms "Islamists" and "secularists."

What Turkey has witnessed for the last decade has not been a struggle between secularism and Islamism; but it has been a conflict between two types of secularism. As I elaborated elsewhere, the AK Party is not an Islamist party.¹ It defends a particular understanding of secularism that differs from that of the CHP. Although several leaders of the AK Party historically belonged to an Islamist -*Milli Görüş* (National Outlook)- movement, they later experienced an ideational transformation and embraced a certain type of secularism that tolerates public visibility of religion. This transformation was not an isolated event, but part of a larger experience that several other Islamic groups took part in. I argue that the AKP leaders' interaction with the *Gülen* movement, in this regard, played an important role in the formation of the party's new perspective toward secularism. In another article, I analyzed the transformation of the AK Party and *Gülen* movement with certain external (globalization process) and internal (the February 28 coup) conditions.² In this essay, I will focus on the interaction between these two entities to explore their changing perspectives.

I will first discuss the two different types of secularism that the Kemalists and conservatives defend in Turkey. Then, I will briefly summarize diverse discourses of the *Milli Görüş* and *Gülen* movements. Finally, I will examine the exchanges between the *Gülen* movement and the AK Party with regard to their rethinking of Islamism and secularism.

Assertive Secularism and its Critics in Turkey

The Turkish Republic is the first secular state with a Muslim majority society. I define secular states by two main characteristics: 1) their legal and judicial processes are out of institutional religious control, and 2) they constitutionally lack official religions.³ Besides this general

1 Kuru 2006.

2 Kuru 2005.

3 Many scholars emphasize two other dimensions while defining a secular state: a) Separation of church/mosque and state, and b) religious freedom. See Smith 1999, esp. 178-183. A complete separation is, in fact, neither constitutionally declared in many secular states nor a practical issue. Religious freedom, on the other hand, is both constitutionally declared and practical; yet, it is neither necessary nor sufficient to be secular for a state to provide religious freedom.

definition, secularism is not a monolithic concept. There are two different types of secularism, with distinct normative backgrounds and policy implications. I call these two types “passive” and “assertive” secularism.⁴ Passive secularism allows for the public visibility of religion. It requires that the state play a “passive” role in avoiding the establishment of any religions. Assertive secularism, on the other hand, excludes religion from the public sphere.⁵ It demands that the state plays an “assertive” role as the agent of a social engineering project that confines religion to the private domain.⁶

Assertive secularism has been the dominant ideology in Turkey since the foundation of the Republic. The Kemalists, who have embraced Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s principles as non-negotiable dogmas, have been the main supporters of this ideology.⁷ They have included the CHP, military generals, majority of the high court members, and major media outlets. Despite its some disagreements with the Kemalists, the Association of Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen (TÜSİAD), has also supported assertive secularism. The assertive secularists currently refer to the Turkish Constitutional Court’s definition of secularism as the official and unchangeable depiction of secularism in Turkey.⁸ According to the court, secularism does not denote the separation of religion and state, but it implies “separation of religion and worldly affairs.” Secularism means separation of “social life, education, family, economy, law, manners, dress codes, etc. from religion.”⁹ Like the court, the former President Ahmet Sezer was also attaching importance to separating religion from “this-worldly affairs.” For him, “Religion only belongs to its sacred and special place in individuals’ conscience.”¹⁰

One may argue that assertive secularism is not the dominant ideology in Turkey because the Turkish state favours Islam through the existence of obligatory religious instruction in all schools, state funding of religious education (in Imam-Hatip schools), and public funding of the imams in mosques, who are all civil servants of the state’s Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet).¹¹ Yet these policies do not mean that the Turkish state has a positive attitude toward Islam for four main reasons. First, the main rationale behind these institutions is not to support Islam, but rather it is to take Islam under state control.¹² Public schools provide religious instruction and the state runs the Imam-Hatip schools because any type of private religious education is banned in Turkey, despite the popular demand for such an education. Similarly, the Diyanet controls the mosques, including all vaazs (sermons before Friday prayer) and hutbes (sermons during the Friday prayer).¹³ Second, through these institutions, the state also aims to create an “individualized” version of Islam, which exists behind

4 Kuru 2008.

5 I follow Charles Taylor’s definition of the public sphere: “The public sphere is a common space in which the members of society are deemed to meet through a variety of media: print, electronic, and also face-to-face encounters; to discuss matters of common interest; and thus to be able to form a common mind about these.” Taylor 2004, 83. See also Habermas 1999; Habermas 1989.

6 See Taylor 1999; McClay 2002.

7 See Turam 2006, 144-145.

8 As an example, see the speech of General Staff Deputy Chief General İlker Başbuğ, May 27, 2004, accessed at <http://www.tsk.mil.tr/genelkumay/bashalk/2004basinbringleri/mayis2004/sempozyum1.htm>, June 1, 2004.

9 The Turkish Constitutional Court’s ruling on the *Welfare Party* case on January 16, 1997; no. 1998/1. For a critique of the Court’s decision, see Erdoğan 1999.

10 Quoted in “Laiklik Özgürlük Demek,” *Radikal*, February 6, 2004.

11 See Selçuk 1999, esp. 48.

12 Kara 2003, 92-106; Canatan 1997, 33-34; Keyder 2004, 69.

13 Çakır and Bozan 2005, 34.

the walls of private homes or within one's own conscience.¹⁴ Third, the state expropriated the financial sources of the Islamic foundations in the founding period and still controls these foundations. Since the state historically confiscated Islamic funds and currently does not allow independent financing of the imams, it has to pay their salaries. Last but not least, the Turkish state pursues restrictive policies toward Islam, such as the ban on headscarves in all educational institutions, the prohibition on teaching the Qur'an to children under 15 year (with the exception of summer courses for those who are above 12), and the disallowance of the Imam-Hatip schools' graduates to attend universities (except the Schools of Theology).

There have been two main opponents of assertive secularism in Turkey. One has been the central rightist/conservative parties, such as the Demokrat (Democratic) Party (1950-1960), Adalet (Justice) Party (1961-1980), Anavatan (Motherland) Party (1983-), and True Path (Doğru Yol) Party (DYP) (1983-2007). These parties have generally opposed the policies of the assertive secularists. They have tolerated public visibility of religion, in general, Islam, in particular. The other set of opponents has been pro-Islamic conservative movements, particularly the two most influential ones--the Milli Görüş and Gülen movements. Despite their common critique of assertive secularism, these two movements had several disagreements as explained below.¹⁵

The Gülen Movement vs. the Milli Görüş Movement: Faith Service vs. Political Islamism

Up until the late 1990s, the Gülen and Milli Görüş movements were representing almost opposite perspectives. The Gülen movement was focusing on faith service (iman hizmeti), by publishing magazines and books about Islamic faith, opening student housings and dormitories, and bringing business people together to fund this activities. This movement was avoiding party politics arguing that the most important project would be training the youth to create a "golden generation", instead of seeking the state power. The Milli Görüş movement, however, was representing political Islamism in Turkey, by founding Islamist political parties.

Fethullah Gülen initiated his movement in the early 1970s, in the Izmir region, where he was a preacher of Diyanet. Throughout the 1970s, the movement was focusing on mosque activities and providing student housings. In the 1980s, it started to open dormitories, university preparation courses, and schools in all around Turkey. The movement also founded a media network, including publication companies (e.g., Nil Publication), magazines (e.g., Sızıntı and Yeni Ümit), and a newspaper (Zaman). Before the mid-1990s, the Gülen movement was focusing on education and avoiding political debates, following Said Nursi's statement "I seek refuge in God from Satan and [party] politics."¹⁶ The leader of the movement, Fethullah Gülen, was contacting with the public only through his preaching in mosques and his articles published in the movement's magazines.

Necmettin Erbakan initiated the Milli Görüş movement in the early 1970s too. The parties he led—Milli Nizam (National Order) Party (1970-1971) and Milli Selamet (National Salvation) Party (1972-1980)—were accused as anti-secular Islamist and disbanded following the 1971 and 1980 military coups. In 1983, Erbakan and his followers founded the Refah (Welfare) Party (RP). The RP became successful in local elections in 1994 and won mayor

¹⁴ See Bozarslan 2004; Ulusoy 1999.

¹⁵ See Turam 2006

¹⁶ Nursi 1996, 368.

posts of Istanbul and Ankara. In terms of national parliamentary elections, The RP increased its share of the votes from 7.2 percent in 1987 to 21.4 percent in 1995 and became the leading party. Erbakan became the prime minister in 1996 in the RP-DYP coalition.¹⁷

In the mid-1990s the disparity and tension between the Gülen and Milli Görüş movements got deeper. At that time the Gülen movement experienced two transformations. First, it became an international movement with its schools and business network in different parts of the world.¹⁸ The movement first opened schools in former Soviet Republics following their independence. Then, it expanded its educational institutions to other Asian, European, African, and North American countries, which would eventually result six universities and more than 500 schools in about 100 different countries.¹⁹ Moreover, the movement developed an international media network, which included a newspaper that printed in about ten countries (Zaman), an internationally broadcasting TV channel (STV), and an international magazine in English (The Fountain). The more the Gülen movement became international benefiting the opportunities of globalization, the more it developed a pro-globalization discourse.²⁰ The movement began to support Turkey's membership to the European Union (EU).²¹ Gülen himself initiated certain interfaith dialogue activities in Turkey and abroad. He met with religious leaders, including Pope John Paul II, the Panahriot Greek Patriarch Bartholomeos, and Israeli Sephardic Head Rabbi Eliyahu B. Doron. For him, there were two main motives behind these activities. One is theological: Islam had many things in common with other two Abrahamic religions and that required interfaith dialogue.²² The other is contextual: in the post-Cold War world Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilization" thesis was taken seriously. Gülen was aiming to prevent such an inter-religious clash with interfaith dialogue.²³

Erbakan and his cadre, however, had opposite views about globalization, Turkey's membership to the EU, and interfaith dialogue. The RP clearly opposed Turkey's membership to the EU seeing it as a "Christian club."²⁴ As a part of his Islamist foreign policy agenda, Erbakan gave his first visits to countries such as Iran and Libya. He also led the foundation of an international organization among eight Muslim countries, known as Developing Eight (D-8).²⁵ The tension between the two movements on these issues was clear on Gülen's speeches and writings. For example, he defined D-8 as a vain project and a "cheap message" to Erbakan's constituency.²⁶

The second transformation the Gülen movement experienced was its public outreach in the mid-1990s.²⁷ To coordinate its public activities the movement founded the Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı (Journalists and Writers' Foundation) (GYV). The GYV organized dinners at five star hotels in Istanbul and Ankara to maintain the movement's outreach to Turkish

17 Yavuz 1997.

18 Yavuz and Esposito 2003.

19 Agai 2003. For the list of the schools run by the Gülen movement worldwide, see *Yeni Aktüel*, No.13, October 11-17, 2005.

20 Kuru 2005.

21 Kösebalaban 2003.

22 Gülen 2006; M. Fethullah Gülen, "The Necessity of Interfaith Dialogue," *The Fountain*, No. 31 (July-September 2000).

23 Gülen 2004; M. Fethullah Gülen, "At the Threshold of the New Millennium," *The Fountain*, No. 29 (January-March 2000).

24 Dağı 1998.

25 The members of D-8 are Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Nigeria.

26 Gülen's interview with Nevval Sevindi. Sevindi 2002, 33.

27 Yilmaz 2003.

elite. Numerous politicians, journalists, and academics attended to these dinners and other meetings of the GYV, where Gülen delivered key note speeches. In those speeches, as well as his interviews at top circulating newspapers (e.g., *Sabah* and *Hürriyet*), Gülen stressed the importance of democracy, tolerance, and dialogue. His messages were largely welcomed by country's secular elite.

Erbakan's discourse, on the other hand, was almost the opposite. He was accusing those who did not vote for RP as belonging to "religion of potato," instead of Islam. Erbakan was claiming that the political regime in Turkey would be certainly changed but the question was whether it would be done "with or without blood." Erbakan's discourse provided an excuse to the military, particularly a junta within it, *Batı Çalışma Grubu* (Western Working Group), to stage a soft coup d'état on February 28, 1997.²⁸ The generals and their civilian supporters justified the military intervention arguing that Erbakan's premiership encouraged *irtica* (Islamic reactionism). Following the intervention, several people and institutions asked Erbakan to resign. Gülen joined them on April 16, 1997, by giving an interview to the TV channel *Kanal D*, where he encouraged Erbakan to leave the office. The following day two major newspapers (*Hürriyet* and *Milliyet*) made Gülen's critique of Erbakan their headlines. That meant the deepest tension between the two movements. Yet a new period in Turkish politics, in general, and the relationship between the Gülen and the *Milli Görüş* movements, in particular, began following this crisis.

The Gülen Movement and the AK Party: Passive Secularism and Globalization

Erbakan resigned in June 1997. Seven months later, the Constitutional Court dissolved the RP. Following that, the RP's parliamentarians founded the *Fazilet* (Virtue) Party (FP). Within the FP, there emerged a disagreement between the *Milli Görüş*'s old generation led by Erbakan and the new generation led by three figures: *Tayyip Erdoğan*, *Abdullah Gül*, and *Bülent Arınç*. These leaders had better personal relations with the Gülen movement than Erbakan did. *Erdoğan* had attended the GYV's dialog meetings and made a key note speech. *Arınç* became the first politician who defended Gülen when assertive secularist media launched a lynching campaign against him in June 1999. Beyond personal relations, the young generation was ideationally resembled to the Gülen movement. In terms of foreign policy, they supported Turkey's membership to the EU. In terms of domestic politics, they developed a new discourse that emphasized democracy and dialogue.

The *Milli Görüş*'s young generation and the Gülen movement had two main venues to interact their ideas. One is the Gülen movement's media network, especially newspaper *Zaman*. For example, in February 2000, *Erdoğan* and *Arınç* first publicized their new discourse in *Zaman*. In two separate interviews, these two leaders emphasized democracy as their priority and embraced (passive) secularism while criticizing the idea of an Islamic state.²⁹ These two interviews received the attention of other newspapers. Assertive secularist *Hürriyet* positively announced them in its headline "Political Islam at the Crossroads," while Islamist *Vakit* criticized them arguing that *Zaman* corrupted *Erdoğan* and *Arınç*'s mind.³⁰

The second venue was the *Abant* meetings organized by the Gülen movement's GYV. The GYV has organized the *Abant* meetings to head off socio-political polarization and to search

28 Yavuz 2000.

29 *Erdoğan* and *Arınç*'s interviews, *Zaman*, February 6, 2000.

30 See "Siyasal İslam Yol Ayrımında," *Hürriyet*, February 8, 2000.

for a new social contract in Turkey.³¹ Each annual Abant workshop has included about fifty Turkish intellectuals (academics, politicians, and journalists) from sharply different ideological backgrounds (Islamists, liberals, socialists, nationalists, and Kemalists). The first meeting was organized in 1998 and devoted to Islam and secularism. Its press declaration emphasized that God's ontological sovereignty was compatible with the political sovereignty of the people.³² The second meeting also examined the relationships among state, society, and religion.³³ The third meeting focused on democracy and the rule of law, while the fourth one discussed pluralism and social consensus.³⁴ Among the attendants were several leaders of the Milli Görüş's new generation, such as Gül, Arınç, Cemil Çiçek, Ali Coşkun, and Nevzat Yalçıntaş. Moreover the chairperson of the meetings, Mehmet Aydın, and some frequent participants, such as Hüseyin Çelik and Burhan Kuzu, joined them, when the new generation founded the AK Party.³⁵ These meetings contributed to a new discourse based on democracy and a liberal (read passive) version of secularism that the Milli Görüş's new generation and the Gülen movement shared. This new discourse was critical of both Erbakan's political Islamism and the Kemalists' assertive secularism.

In 2001, the Constitutional Court dissolved the FP arguing that it defended the freedom to wear headscarves and was therefore anti-secular. Following the closure of FP, the followers of Erbakan founded the Saadet (Felicity) Party (SP), while those of Erdoğan, Gül, and Arınç founded the AK Party. The SP had an Islamist and anti-EU discourse. The AK Party, on the other hand, declined to be defined as Islamist and defended Turkey's membership to the EU. In the elections of November 3, 2002, the SP was marginalized with 2.5 percent of the national votes while the AK Party became the leading party with 34.3 percent of the votes and about two third of the seats in the parliament. Erdoğan became prime minister, while Gül became the vice prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, and Arınç became the speaker of the parliament.

The AK Party completely cut its ties with the Milli Görüş movement.³⁶ It embraced (passive) secularism as a principle that "maintains peace among diverse beliefs, schools of thoughts, and perspectives."³⁷ Its party program depicts secularism as "an assurance of the freedom of religion and conscience" and rejects "the interpretation and distortion of secularism as enmity against religion."³⁸ The AK Party identified its ideology as "conservative democracy."³⁹ Erdoğan emphasized that the AK Party's understanding of conservatism did not mean the conservation of established institutions and relations but implied the protection of important values and principles while pursuing progress. He stressed that using religion as a political instrument was harmful to social peace, political diversity, and religion itself. For him, the AK Party aims to synthesize local and universal values, tradition and modernity, and morality

31 The author's personal interviews with the GYV representatives, Istanbul, June 14, 1998.

32 Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı 1998.

33 Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı 1999.

34 Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı 2000; Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı 2001.

35 In the first AK Party government, in late 2002, Çiçek became the minister of justice, Coşkun became the minister of industry, Mehmet Aydın became the minister in charge of religious affairs (the Diyanet), and Çelik became the minister of education. At that time, Kuzu became the chairman of the Constitutional Affairs Committee in the Turkish Parliament.

36 "Erdoğan: Millî Görüş'ün Değil Demokrat Parti'nin Devamıyız," *Zaman*, May 17, 2003.

37 AK Parti N.d., 13-14.

38 AK Parti 2002.

39 The author's personal interviews with AK Party politicians, September 2004, Ankara, Turkey. See also Akdoğan 2003.

and rationality.⁴⁰

Besides their similar emphasis on democracy and (passive) secularism, the Gülen movement and the AK Party have had a tacit agreement on two important points. One is that both are pro-globalization, in the sense that they try to take advantage of globalization's opportunities, rather than pursuing an isolationist policy to avoid its challenges.⁴¹ A clear indicator of being pro-globalization in Turkey is to defend the country's membership to the EU. For the last five years, the AK Party government has been active on this issue. The AK Party group in the parliament led the passing of seven legal reform packets, which resulted in Turkey's adaptation to EU legal structure, by the liberalization of the political system. The Gülen movement has also tried to contribute Turkey's membership. The movement's media network has played an important role in promoting pro-EU sentiments, particularly among the conservative people. Moreover, the eight Abant meeting in 2004 took place in the European Parliament in Brussels to discuss Turkey's membership with the participation of several European academics and politicians.⁴² Similarly, in 2006 and 2007, the GYV organized Abant meetings in Paris to engage with French intellectuals.

Another aspect of being pro-globalization is to adapt global economy. The AK Party has been a keen supporter of privatization and foreign direct investments to Turkey, despite the opposition of statist judges. The Gülen movement supported the AK Party government's such policies in its newspapers and TV channels. In addition to its international educational and media institutions, the movement is also active in international business. In 2005, the businesspeople affiliated with the movement initiated the Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey (TUSKON), which included 124 business unions and 9500 businesspeople. In 2006, Bank Asya, the interest-free bank affiliated with the movement, publicly traded its stocks to Turkish and international buyers.

Due to their pro-globalization stands, the AK Party and the Gülen movement have been criticized by both the SP and the anti-globalization nationalists (ulusalcıs), who are a strange combination of some Kemalists, nationalists, and leftists.⁴³ The ulusalcıs, such as certain columnists in *Yeniçağ*, accused the AK Party and the Gülen movement of selling the country to global capitalists, as well as being a spy of the EU, an agent of the "moderate Islam project" of the US, or even a servant of Israel.

The second major point that the Gülen movement and the AK Party have been in tacit agreement is the importance of interfaith dialogue. As I already mentioned, the Gülen movement has been very active in interfaith dialogue in Turkey and abroad. Each year the movement organizes dozens of dialogue dinners in the US, European countries, and other parts of the world. Domestically, the movement has supported rights of non-Muslim minorities. For example, Gülen has repeatedly stressed that Turkey should allow the reopening of Halki Seminary of Greek Orthodox Patriarch in Istanbul.

The AK Party also tried to pursue benevolent policies toward non-Muslim communities in Turkey. Non-Muslim communities in Turkey have faced several official restrictions since the founding of the Republic, such as the "absence of legal personality, education and training of

40 Erdoğan 2004. Erdoğan's view on synthesizing seemingly opposite things resembles to Gülen's understanding of the "middle way." See Kuru 2003.

41 Kuru 2005.

42 The author's personal observation and interviews in the Abant Meeting, Brussels, December 3-4, 2004.

43 Kösebalaban 2005.

ecclesiastic personnel as well as full enjoyment of property rights.”⁴⁴ The AK Party initiated certain reforms to alleviate such conditions.⁴⁵ In 2003, the AK Party group in the parliament led the legal reform concerning religious places, replacing the word “mosque” in the law with “place of worship.” This allowed all religions to open temples in Turkey.⁴⁶ In 2004, the AK Party government cancelled the state surveillance over non-Muslims citizens by abolishing the Subcommittee for Minorities, which had been monitoring non-Muslim citizens for 42 years.⁴⁷ Moreover, Erdoğan has made several visits to Jewish synagogues and Christian churches in Turkey, a gesture which has been appreciated by these communities. That is why the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch Mesrob II announced that they would vote for the AK Party in the July 2007 elections.⁴⁸

AK Party’s benevolent policies toward non-Muslim communities are also a reflection of its adoption of passive secularism. The assertive secularists, such as CHP, have not been active on this issue. Since the assertive secularists have focused on the exclusion of religion from the public sphere, they have not taken non-Muslim communities’ problems seriously. Moreover, they have been worried about non-Muslims’ rights of association because if the Christians and Jews were free to have legal entities, found associations, and open private temples, then independent Muslim communities in Turkey would want these freedoms too.⁴⁹ For example, in 2006, assertive secularist President Sezer vetoed a parliamentary bill that recognized the legal status and full property rights of non-Muslim foundations. He argued that the bill would wrongly allow the expansion of the economic activities and social status of these foundations.⁵⁰

The AK Party has also embraced interfaith, or inter-civilisational, dialogue as a foreign policy principle. It has presented Turkey’s membership to the EU as the marriage of two civilizations. Erdoğan has also taken personal initiatives on this issue. He became the co-sponsor, with the Spanish Prime Minister Jose Zapatero, of the UN General Secretary Kofi Annan’s “Alliance of Civilization” project. The ulusalcis and some marginal Islamic groups, such as the Haydar Baş community with its newspaper (Yeni Mesaj) and TV channels (Meltem TV and Mesaj TV), have targeted the Gülen movement and the AK Party for their interfaith dialogue activities. They particularly blamed Gülen as a fifth-column of Christian missionaries. The attacks of their common enemies deepened the friendship between the Gülen movement and the AK Party as explained below.

The Gülen Movement and the AK Party: Protecting Democracy

The Gülen movement had close relations with Turgut Özal in the early 1990s and Bülent Ecevit in the late 1990s. Yet it has avoided explicitly supporting one single party at the expense of others. Recently, the movement largely dropped its neutrality principle and supported the AK Party in the national elections of July 22, 2007. The chief editor of Zaman accepted the movement’s indirect support and explained it with the aim of protecting democ-

44 WRR 2004, 30.

45 “Members of Turkey’s non-Muslim communities are unanimous in declaring that, since the ruling ...AK Party came to power in November 2002, relations with the government have improved considerably.” Jenkins 2004, 54.

46 The law passed in the Parliament on July 15, 2003. See Öktem 2004.

47 Şükrü Küçükşahin, “Sessiz Azınlık Devrimi, *Hürriyet*, February 23, 2004.

48 “Ermeni Cemaati Seçimlerde Ak Parti’yi Destekleyecek,” *Yeni Şafak*, June 4, 2007.

49 See İsmet Berkan, “AB ve Din Özgürlüğü Eksikliği,” *Radikal*, May 26, 2004.

50 “Sezer Vakıflar Yasası’nı Lozan’a Aykırı Buldu,” *Zaman*, November 30, 2006.

racy against authoritarian assaults.⁵¹

The assaults against Turkish democracy took place from mid-2006 to mid-2007, because of the presidential election scheduled in April 2007. The presidential post was very vital for the dominance of assertive secularism in Turkey. The conservative and central rightist parties, including the AK Party, MHP, DYP, and ANAP, won about 70 percent of votes in national elections for decades. Yet they had limited impacts on state policies toward religion due to the assertive secularist dominance in the military and the judicial bureaucracy. Presidency played the key role for the preservation of the assertive secularist domination in these state institutions, since the president would sign the appointment of high ranking generals and top civil bureaucrats, as well as appointing high court judges and presidents of universities. The president was elected for seven years by the parliament. The military kept intervening to the presidential elections to force the parliamentarians to elect an assertive secularist candidate. Yet the assertive secularists were very concerned about the April 2007 election since it would not be easy to force the AK Party majority in the parliament to elect an assertive secularist president. That resulted in a political crisis that took more than a year.

In February 2006, the Council of State decided that it was inappropriate for a teacher to wear headscarf even on the street. The conservatives condemned the decision as a violation of religious freedom. Two months later, an assassin shot the judges who made this decision and killed one of them. The assertive secularists accused the AK Party government for targeting the judges following their decision. Yet the police and conservative media uncovered that the assassin was linked to some *ulusalcı* retired military officers. The Gülen movement's *Zaman* and STV led other conservative newspapers (e.g., *Yeni Şafak*, *Star*, and *Bugün*) and TV channels (e.g., *Kanal 7*) in revealing this link. That created serious doubts that the murderer was a puppet used by some paramilitary organizations that wanted to topple the AK Party government.

In April 2007, the assertive secularists brought together the total of more than one million protesters in meetings in major cities to prevent the AK Party to elect the new president. The AK Party, however, nominated Gül for presidency. Gül needed to receive two third of the votes (367/550) in the first two rounds. In the third round, however, more than half (276/550) would be enough. Gül received 357 votes out of 361 participant deputies in the first round, when the CHP, DYP, and ANAP boycotted the voting. He was planning to be easily elected in the third round. Conservative media, including *Zaman* and STV, was fully supporting Gül. At that midnight, the military issued a statement in its web site threatening with intervention. It was particularly shocking that the statement included explicitly negative words about certain Islamic values, such as the birthday celebrations of the Prophet. The CHP supported the military's statement, while the AK Party government declared that the military was under its authority. *Zaman* and STV, alongside with other newspapers (e.g., *Sabah*) directly rejected a possible military intervention. Gül did not quit his candidacy. Nevertheless, the CHP had already applied to the Constitutional Court arguing that at least 367 parliamentarians should have been present at the first round. The court supported the CHP's claim, cancelled the first round, and put the 367 quorum as a requirement.

During this process, *Zaman*, which reached the largest national circulation (700,000) at the time, published several op-eds written by respectful scholars to criticize the CHP, military, and Constitutional Court, in terms of their attitudes during the presidential election. An example is Ergun Özbudun, who is Turkey's top professor of constitutional law. In his op-ed in

51 Ekrem Dumanlı, "Medya, Kendi Seçim Karnesine de Bakmalı," *Zaman*, July 23, 2007.

Zaman, Özbudun criticized the court's decision as a political manoeuvre that clearly contradicted the text and original intent of the Constitution, as well as the precedents of presidential elections.⁵²

In short, the presidential election polarized Turkish politics. The CHP and other assertive secularists tried to prevent AK Party to elect the new presidents by encouraging the military to stage a coup. In response, the Gülen and some other democratic forces, which were not explicitly supporting the AK Party before, provided an unprecedented support to this party. As a result, the AK Party received 47 percent of national votes in July 2007 parliamentary elections. The CHP lost about half of its seats, while the DYP (which got the name DP) and ANAP remained completely out of the new parliament, mainly as a result of the voters' disapproval of their boycotting the presidential election. The new parliament re-initiated the presidential election. This time all parties, except CHP, participated in the election and Gül became 11th President of Turkey on August 28, 2007.

Conclusion

The debate between the assertive secularists and Islamic groups had been a major aspect of Turkish politics for decades. In the late 1990s, however, mainstream pro-Islamic groups changed their political discourse by embracing passive secularism. Currently, the Kemalists defend the dominant assertive secularist ideology, which excludes religion from the public sphere. The pro-Islamic conservatives, such as the Gülen movement and the AK Party, on the other hand, try to promote a new passive secularist ideology, which allows public visibility of religion. What Turkey has witnessed for the last decade has no longer been a struggle between secularism and Islamism, but it has been a conflict between the two types of secularism.

In addition to secularism, this paper also pointed to the second fault line of Turkish politics: globalization. Besides the assertive secularists, the ulusalcıs are the main critic of the Gülen movement and the AK Party. The Gülen movement and the AK Party are pro-globalization, in a sense of supporting Turkey's membership to the EU and its integration to global economy, as well as promoting interfaith dialogue. The ulusalcıs and some marginal Islamic groups have allied in their opposition to globalization and their critique of the Gülen movement and the AK Party on these three particular issues.

Although the AK Party had originated from the Islamist Milli Görüş movement, it embraced passive secularism and became pro-globalization. Throughout this transformation, the AK Party leaders have been in direct interaction with the Gülen movement. The movement's media outlets and Abant meetings played important roles in this interaction. The movement and the party have also many other overlapping: they address to a similar set of conservative businesspeople (generally called Anatolian Tigers), several party members send their children to movement's schools, and several movement sympathizers politically support the party. In short, scholars who simply focused on the "political" actor (i.e., the AK Party) of ideational transformation in Turkey make a mistake by undermining the important role of a "social" agent (i.e., the Gülen movement).

It has been long debated whether Turkey can become a model for other Muslim countries with its democratic and secular regime. It is very difficult to give a positive answer to such a question because of Turkey's own political problems and several peculiar characteristics that make its political system hard to transfer elsewhere. Yet the Turkish experience is still

52 "Cumhurbaşkanlığı Krizinin Götürdükleri," *Zaman*, May 14, 2007.

very important to understand dynamics of democratization and political secularization in a Muslim country. This essay particularly reveals three lessons from the Turkish case. First, Islamic groups do not have monolithic and frozen relationships with secularism and democracy. Instead, these groups may and do reinterpret their political views and revise their attitudes towards secularism and democracy in a dynamic manner. Second, the democratic process helps moderation of Islamic actors' perspectives and discourses. Free, fair, and frequent elections are especially important to marginalize radical discourses and to empower realistic, pragmatic, and moderate voices. Finally, a political project can only be successfully materialized if it has a social basis. Political actors always need some social counterparts to appeal majority of the people and to redesign political debates.