

## **TURKEY UNDER CHALLENGE: CONFLICTING IDEAS AND FORCES**

*The author argues that in spite of its pro-European makeup, the AKP stands within the tradition of political Islam. The party supports Turkey's integration with the EU, foreign investments and privatization, but at the same time it undermines secularism, the fundamental constitutional principle of the Turkish state. It uses its pro-Western rhetoric and pro-business attitude as an instrument to achieve its political goals. It attempts to replace the secular identity of Turkey with an Islamic religious identity. It thus opens the gate for the country's complete transformation, from a secular to a religious state. Without secularism that the Kemalist establishment defends, Turkey will be neither democratic nor truly pro-European. Hence, the author claims, the AKP does not deserve the support it gets from the Western press and EU politicians.*

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The recent years have been a period of a great ambiguity in Turkish politics. On the one hand, they have been marked by accession negotiations with the European Union, which can be regarded as an indication of Turkey's intention of becoming a part of the West, or even as the culmination of Kemal Atatürk's policy of modernization and Westernization. On the other hand, these years have also witnessed some symbolic acts that can be perceived as signals of Turkey's departure from the secular, Kemalist or Atatürk's heritage. Most paradoxically, both sides of this ambiguity stem from actions of the same Justice and Development Party (AKP), which in the 2007 elections achieved a clear victory for the second time. The AKP supports Turkey's integration with the EU, foreign investments, and privatization, but at the same time, as this article argues, it undermines secularism, the fundamental constitutional principle of the Turkish Republic.

An off-shoot of the Virtue Party (FP), which was shut down because of its Islamist activities, the AKP, established in 2001, is a broad political coalition including liberal intellectuals and religious conservatives, and is sometimes described by political analysts as pragmatic, or even as post-Islamist.<sup>1</sup> Its leader, the former mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has attempted to present himself as a moderate politician and to show that he and other leading party members have been transformed and no longer have any Islamist agenda.<sup>2</sup> The extent of the AKP electoral success can largely be explained by the rapid economic growth that Turkey has recently enjoyed. As a result of the party's prudent economic policies, supervised by the IMF, the growth rate has averaged 6.1 percent since the financial crisis in 2001, and inflation declined from 29.7 percent in 2002 to 7.7 percent in October 2007.<sup>3</sup> There was also a decrease in public spending and a more balanced budget. However, the criticism of AKP focuses not so much on its guidance of the economy or its pro-business attitude, but rather on its non-secular practices.<sup>4</sup> The party's opposition to the Constitutional Court decisions prohibiting women from wearing the Islamic headscarf at universities (considered "public sphere") is a paradigmatic example.

The headscarf controversy goes back to the 1980s. In 1988 the Parliament, dominated by the Motherland Party (ANAP) of Turgut Özal, passed legislation (act no. 3503) that would allow students to wear any dress, including headscarves, at universities. This legislation, which challenged an earlier directive of the

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<sup>1</sup> As Prof. Özbudun perhaps more precisely describes, the "AKP brings together moderate Islamists, moderate nationalists, secular but socially conservative centre-right voters, and a sizable number of liberal intellectuals." See Ergun Özbudun, "From Political Islam to Conservative Democracy: The Case of the Justice and Development Party", *South European Society and Politics*, 113-4 (2006), p. 555.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 547-550.

<sup>3</sup> "Data and Statistics for Turkey" and other reports of the World Bank, <http://www.worldbank.org.tr>.

<sup>4</sup> The indictment submitted by Abdurahman Yalçınkaya, the Chief Public Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals, to the Turkish Constitutional Court on 14 March 2008 demands that the AKP should be closed down because it had become "a focal point for anti-secular activities." Quoted after "Turkey's Dark Side," *European Stability Initiative*, April 2008, <http://www.esiweb.org>.

Council of Higher Education (YÖK) was vetoed by President Kenan Evren, who argued that absolute freedom of dress was against Atatürk's reforms and principles.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, the Parliament passed another bill (act no. 3511) that allowed covering the neck and hair with a headscarf for specifically religious reasons. President Evren made an appeal to the Constitutional Court which declared that the legislation abolished "the constitutional boundaries of religious freedom by allowing religion to pass beyond individual life" and thus contradicted the principle of secularism.<sup>6</sup> Despite the decision of the Court, in 1990 the Parliament passed another bill (act no. 3670) which was similar to the first legislation vetoed by President Evren. This legislation was also nullified by the Constitutional Court.<sup>7</sup> Then, in the late 1990s the headscarf issue surfaced once again with the coming to power of the Welfare Party (RP), led by Necmettin Erbakan. The party "proposed the lifting of the ban on wearing headscarves in public buildings."<sup>8</sup> It also asked for more flexibility in working hours during the holy month of Ramadan and declared its intention to build a mosque on Istanbul's Taksim square, close to the Atatürk monument.<sup>9</sup> Although none of these proposals seemed to radically change the secular character of the Turkish Republic, they were perceived as a threat and consequently led to the closure of the RP in 1997. In explaining its decision to close down the party, which at that time had the largest number of seats in the Parliament, the Constitutional Court stated that by tolerating wearing of headscarves in the public buildings, the RP encouraged anti-secularism.

Laicism or secularism is one of the six principles of Kemalism, the political doctrine attributed to Kemal Atatürk which, as an ideological foundation of the Republic of Turkey, is embedded in the country's constitution.<sup>10</sup> Although secularism has

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<sup>5</sup> President Evren gave the following reason for the cancellation of act no. 3503: "freedom of dressing given to academicians and students is contradictory to the principles and reforms of Atatürk, and ... would cause dissociation between students." Quoted after "Constitutional Court of the Republic of Turkey, Judgment of April 9, 1991, 1990/36, Related to Türban," research paper written for Prof. Yüksel İnan by students Osman Kısaer and Özge Hazır, Bilkent University, Ankara, 14 May 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Ahmet T. Kuru, "Reinterpretation of Secularism in Turkey: The Case of the Justice and Development Party," *The Emergence of New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2006), pp. 147-148.

<sup>7</sup> "Constitutional Court of the Republic of Turkey, Judgment of April 9, 1991, 1990/36, Related to Türban."

<sup>8</sup> Ömer Taşpınar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey: Kemalist Identity in Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> There was a series of events that were perceived as the challenge to the Republic's secular character. For example, on 10 November 1996 one city mayor, who was a RP member, refused to participate in the traditional remembrance of Atatürk. On February 1997 another RP city mayor organized a protest against Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem at which the Iranian Ambassador was present. See Ömer Taşpınar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey*, pp. 154-155.

<sup>10</sup> As a political doctrine, Kemalism, a term coined in 1929, is based on four principles: republicanism, laicism (secularism), nationalism, populism which were embraced by the Republican People's Party (CHP) in 1927, and two principles, etatism (statism) and reformism that were adopted by the CHP in 1931. Although based on these principles, Kemalism is not meant to be a dogmatic system or hard ideology. The essence of Atatürk's heritage is national development and modernization, based on scientific discovery and reason. See İsmet Giritli, "Kemalist Ideology and Its Characteristics," *Papers and Discussions: International Symposium on Atatürk*, Türkiye İşBankası Cultural Publications, No. 254, 1984, p. 319.

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been recognized as a key characteristic of the modern state, it has been interpreted in different ways. Traditionally, Turkish “laiklik” is closer to French *laïcité* than Anglo-Saxon secularism.<sup>11</sup> It does not merely imply the separation of state and religion, but also the separation of religion from educational, cultural, and legal affairs. It defends public institutions from the interference of religious thinking and institutions.<sup>12</sup> The historical reason for the adoption of such a concept of secularism was the strong opposition of conservative Islamic groups to the program of the country’s modernization in the early years of the Republic, and even at earlier periods when modernizing reforms were attempted by the Ottoman Empire.<sup>13</sup> To be sure, Atatürk did not advocate atheism. It was not religion that he and his associates opposed, but reactionary and obscurantist religious sects, whose influence, they believed, would keep Turkish people in ignorance. A proponent of modernity, he saw the country’s development as based on the advancement of science and reason. Accordingly, the Kemalist view of secularism can be termed “assertive” or active secularism. It entails the state’s preference for a secular worldview in the public sphere and it can be contrasted with liberal or “passive” secularism, which merely “implies state neutrality toward various religions and allows the public visibility of religion.”<sup>14</sup>

Now, the ideological conflict between the AKP and the Kemalist establishment is first of all about different views of secularism.<sup>15</sup> The AKP’s leadership rejects the assertive concept of secularism which they claim discriminates against individuals and which they regard as “undemocratic and in contradiction to human rights and freedoms.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, they in fact question the secularism that lies at the foundation of the Turkish Republic. They support liberal secularism, according to which religious veiling does not violate the secular character of the public sphere, but is a matter of individual preference and should be allowed as a matter of free expression. Since liberal secularism is closer to today’s Western political experience than the assertive secularism, the AKP’s leaders are hailed as post-Islamist

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<sup>11</sup> Ahmet T. Kuru, “Reinterpretation of Secularism in Turkey,” pp. 137-138.

<sup>12</sup> Whereas the original goal of the *laïcité* in France was to reduce religion to a private affair of the individual, the Turkish *laiklik* goes one step farther. It puts religion under the direct control of the Prime Minister’s office through the Directorate of Religious Affairs. This institution, established in 1924, appoints and pays all Sunni Muslim clergy in Turkey and issues standardized sermons to be read out in mosques each Friday.

<sup>13</sup> The first attempts at modernizing the Ottoman Empire and bring it closer to the West were undertaken as early as the eighteenth century. These and following attempts were met with resistance from those conservative religious groups that were interested in the maintenance of the status quo of Islamic institutions and of the traditional way of life.

<sup>14</sup> Ahmet T. Kuru, “Reinterpretation of Secularism in Turkey,” p. 137.

<sup>15</sup> This ideological conflict can in a sense be traced down to the beginning of the multiparty system and seems to be a permanent feature of Turkish politics. When, because of Atatürk’s initiative, in August 1930 the Freedom Party was established as an opposition to the ruling People’s Republican Party, and then dissolved only three months later, the main differences between the two parties were related to the issues of religion and economy. See Suna Kili, *Kemalism* (Istanbul, 1969), p. 120. Like the Freedom Party, a number of subsequent parties that challenged the Kemalist establishment, such as the Democratic Party in the 1950s, the Justice Party in the 1960s, the National Salvation Party in the 1970s, the Motherland party in the 1980s, the Welfare Party in the 1990s, and recently the AKP, tried to advocate a more liberal approach to economy (as against the state controlled economy that is implied in the Kemalist principle of etatism) and/or introduce a more moderate approach to religion (as against the Kemalist principle of secularism). The Freedom Party was voluntarily dissolved, whereas the Democratic Party, the Justice Party, the National Salvation Party, and the Welfare Party, although for different reasons, shared the same fate of closure.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted from the AKP’s *Development and Democratisation Program* after Gareth Jenkins, p. 189.

democrats and reformers. This image is strengthened by their pragmatic pro-business and pro-market economy attitudes.

Before I further explore the ambiguity and complexity of today's Turkish politics, let me stress one point and make a brief remark on the nature of politics and philosophy, as the two are so often confused in everyday thought. Politics is not philosophy. Whereas philosophy is about ideas, politics is about forces; for political ideas can be put into practice only if they are backed by force, and force forms a realm of its own. Whoever mistakes politics for philosophy, and considers ideas without taking into consideration relevant forces, engages in wishful thinking which ultimately brings about political disasters. Whereas in philosophy there is a search for truth, in politics there are lies, false electoral promises, secret agreements, and the pursuit of power.

Kemal Atatürk, the country's founder and its first president can perhaps represent a rare union of philosophy and politics, of sincere ideas and power. He was a man of vision whose leading purpose was to modernize and Westernize Turkey in order to raise the country to the level of the most prosperous and civilized countries in the world.<sup>17</sup> To achieve his goal he had to struggle against two powerful forces. On the one hand, there was the force of imperialism represented by the Western invaders who were trying to divide the Ottoman lands in the aftermath of the First World War, and against whom Mustafa Kemal, along with other officers, orchestrated the War of National Liberation between 1919-1922. On the other hand, there was the force of reactionary Islam that, especially in the early years of the Republic violently opposed his ideas of modernization and Westernization, and which he thought was an obstacle to his country's development and led the Ottoman Empire to backwardness and collapse.<sup>18</sup> Out of the struggle against these two forces, Atatürk's political doctrine, Kemalism, was born – not as a product of abstract wishful thinking, but a theory born “out of action, practice, and experience; in short, out of the realities of Turkish history.”<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, although modified by the flow of time and new political occurrences, these two forces which Atatürk once confronted are still at play. The force of European imperialism has become more subtle and changed its image from a hard military power to a soft dominating power represented by European institutions, regulations, and recommendations. On the other hand, by developing a new theory and practice, and penetrating deeply into societies in both the East and the West, the force of reactionary Islam has grown stronger and harder, and it is known today as Islamic fundamentalism.

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<sup>17</sup> İsmet Giritli, “Kemalist Ideology and Its Characteristics,” p. 326.

<sup>18</sup> After World War I, the war victors, France and Great Britain, were trying to divide the Ottoman lands according to secret wartime agreements they previously made. Hence, the first aspect of Atatürk's legacy is national independence. He tried to defend his country and unite all Turks around such values as independence and national sovereignty. The second aspect of his legacy is secularization and Westernization, which continues to be a matter of controversy in Turkish society. He believed that in order to come to a certain level of civilization and to modernize, society must be organized according to secular principles, and guided by science and reason. He identified modern civilization with Western civilization, and thought that it belongs not only to the inhabitants of European countries, but to all humankind. Ömer Taşpınar, *Kurdish Nationalism and Political Islam in Turkey*, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Suna Kili, *Kemalism* (Istanbul, 1969), p. 71.

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Political Islam or its more extreme form which is Islamic fundamentalism, in Turkey as elsewhere, is related to an opposition towards the West, to Western ideas and models. In particular it offers a criticism of the culture of modernity which is committed to the ascendance of reason and science, and based on the distinction between religion and public affairs; that is, it is critical of the worldview which lies at the foundation of Kemalism. However, fundamentalism is not traditionalism; as an ideological perspective it has to be distinguished from traditional Muslim religion. Not only is it a product of modernity, betraying the stamp of unacknowledged modern influences, but it also attempts to move beyond the modern worldview in a way that is simultaneously parasitic on it.<sup>20</sup> While critical of modernity, Islamic fundamentalists can embrace it on instrumental grounds. This seems to be the case with the Justice and Development Party, which although often described as post-Islamist, has in fact pro-Islamic roots. As Prof. İhsan Dağı, who is by no means unsympathetic to the AKP bluntly says: “the pro-Islamic politicians of the 1990s [most of whom subsequently joined the AKP] realized that they need the West and modern/Western values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in order to build a broader front against the Kemalist/secularist center, and to acquire legitimacy through this new discourse in their confrontation with the Kemalist/ secularist center.”<sup>21</sup> The pro-Western and pro-European attitudes of the AKP have been thus adopted on purely instrumental grounds. The leadership of the AKP has realized “that having a democratic and European agenda would open a new path for transforming Turkish domestic politics.”<sup>22</sup> In particular, it could thus restrain the political influence of the military.<sup>23</sup>

Consequently, one can argue that in spite of its pro-European makeup and rhetoric, the AKP cannot truly be regarded as a post-Islamist, but rather as an Islamist political party. The party’s real goal is not Westernization, but can be inferred from the AKP’s concept of “conservative democracy,” as contrasted with liberal democracy.<sup>24</sup> The conservative/local (Islamic) values are combined there with democratic (modern) values into a new synthesis.<sup>25</sup> The end product is an Islamic

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<sup>20</sup> Roxanne L. Euben, “Mapping Modernities, ‘Islamic’ and ‘Western’,” *Border Crossings*, pp. 11-37. See also, Bassar Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> İhsan Dağı, “The Justice and Development Party: Identity, Politics, and Human Rights Discourse in the Search for Security and Legitimacy,” *The Emergence of a New Turkey*, p. 92.

<sup>22</sup> Burhanettin Duran, “JDP and Foreign Policy as an Agent of Transformation,” *The Emergence of a New Turkey*, p. 297.

<sup>23</sup> Gareth Jenkins, “Symbols and Shadow Play,” p. 186.

<sup>24</sup> To make it more clear, earlier Islamic political movements in Turkey considered the West as the opposite to political Islam. They built their identity on the basis of anti-Westernization. However, after the experience with the “soft coup” closing of the Welfare Party and the Virtue Party, and a period of military pressure on political Islam, dubbed the “28 February process,” the leaders of the AKP realized that the Islamic political identity could be established only with the help of the West. They thought that the process of integration with the EU would weaken the “Kemalist center” in Turkey, eliminate the control of politics by the military, and thus would open space for Islamic political identity to flourish. For example, they would embrace the Western rhetoric of human rights and freedom expression to lift the ban on the headscarf at universities. Hence, one can make a case that the real party’s goal is not Westernization. The AKP leaders use the West as an instrument of pressure to realize their goals.

<sup>25</sup> Burhanettin Duran, “JDP and Foreign Policy as an Agent of Transformation,” *The Emergence of a New Turkey* p. 285.

democracy, a contradiction in terms.<sup>26</sup> Still, I admit that it is possible to interpret “conservative democracy” in a different way, and indeed this concept has been the subject of debate.<sup>27</sup> The party’s identification can perhaps be conceptualized as being religiously conservative on the one hand and economically liberal on the other. Even so, whatever the AKP’s self-declared identity with conservative democracy means, and whatever the true intentions of the party’s leadership are, what ultimately count in politics is not ideas but forces. My contention is that by undermining the traditional Kemalist concept of secularism, and particularly by engaging in the headscarf controversy, the AKP invokes the great force of political Islam, independently of what the party leaders or their supporters actually think, and of whether the party is in fact Islamist or not. It moves Turkey from a Western-oriented country to an Islamic-oriented country.<sup>28</sup>

Political Islam can assume many forms: from moderate and non-violent to extreme and violent.<sup>29</sup> It can be more accepting of the ideas of modernity or less. While it can be considered Islamist, the AKP certainly represents a moderate and modernistic form of political Islam. In his youth, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was influenced by Mehmet Zahid Kotku (1897-1980), the head of the Istanbul branch of the Nakşibendiya, a religious movement that resisted the Kemalist ideas of modernization. The teachings of Kotku –whose circle included such prominent politicians as the leader of the Motherland Party and Prime Minister Turgut Özal, and the leader of the Welfare Party and Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan– emphasized compatibility between Islamic political culture and modern economic development.<sup>30</sup> Extreme fundamentalism which aims at a total rejection of the modern state and attempts to subvert it by violent means is rare in Turkey, even though the country has actually witnessed sporadic terrorist attacks attributed to some Islamic fundamentalist groups. Nevertheless, what in spite of its moderation the AKP does, cautiously following the earlier attempts of other Islamist political parties is to make religion stronger, more independent, and more visible in Turkish society. It replaces the Western secular identity of Turkey with an Islamic religious identity. It thus directly challenges Atatürk’s policies of secularization aimed at making religion less noticeable, controlled by the state, and confined to the private sphere of life. This challenge is perfectly exemplified in the headscarf issue.

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<sup>26</sup> Democracy refers to a political order based on the sovereignty of the people; an Islamic state, to a political order based on God’s sovereignty. The sovereignty of the people, which implies that people make laws by themselves, and God’s sovereignty, which implies that the country is ruled by the Islamic law, Shari’a are not compatible. One excludes another. This is why “Islamic democracy” is a contradiction in terms. See Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> Yalçın Akdoğan, “The Meaning of Conservative Democratic Political Identity,” *The Emergence of a New in Turkey*, p. 54.

<sup>28</sup> One can see this movement in a paper written by Ahmet Davutoğlu, one of the key governmental advisers. See Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Rewriting Contemporary Muslim Politics: A Twenty-Century’s Polarization,” *Border Crossing: Toward a Comparative Political Theory*, ed. Fred Dallmayr (Lanham: Lexington Books, 1999), pp. 89-118.

<sup>29</sup> Massimo Introvigne, “Turkish Religious market(s),” *The Emergence of a New Turkey*, pp. 35-45.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

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In Turkey, wearing a headscarf is not just a private matter. It is not merely an issue of physical appearance. First, like the oriental fez, the man's head covering which was regarded as a symbol of the Ottoman Empire and whose wearing was prohibited by law in 1925, the headscarf symbolizes backwardness: an inability or unwillingness to modernize.<sup>31</sup> It is associated by the country's secularized elites with lower or less educated social groups.<sup>32</sup> Regardless of whether it is used for religious purpose or not, it contradicts the idea of a modern, well-developed country.<sup>33</sup> Second, when it not the traditional Turkish headscarf, but *türban* (the Islamic headscarf that completely covers a woman's neck and shoulders, and that became popularized in Turkey and elsewhere in the aftermath of the Iranian Revolution), the headscarf symbolizes a political statement: an opposition to Turkey's secular character.<sup>34</sup> Like other forms of veiling, such as *burka*, that virtually covers all of the body leaving just a mesh to see through, it is questionably religious or moralistic.<sup>35</sup> It is not associated with freedom of conscience, but rather with a social pressure and challenge to secularism.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the AKP's recent attempts to remove the prohibition on the headscarf, both implicitly through the example of the party leaders' wives wearing *türban* during official ceremonies and explicitly through the legislative process, have been perceived as undermining secularism by allowing religion to pass beyond the individual's private sphere to the public sphere, and have stirred up a highly publicized controversy. Because of this and other issues, described as "anti-secular actions and statements," on 14 March 2008, the country's chief public prosecutor made an appeal to the Constitutional Court with a demand to close the AKP and to ban seventy-one senior party members, including President Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, from political life for five years.

The attempt to close down the AKP has been met by rather unsympathetic comments by the Western, especially European press, and has been the subject of critical remarks by EU politicians. It has been described as a serious backlash against democratization and as a move that would take Turkey away from the

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<sup>31</sup> The 1925 act no 671 "on the Wearing of Hats" and the 1931 act no 2596 "on the Prohibition of the Wearing of Certain Garments" are both referred to in the Constitutional Court judgments concerning the headscarf. See "Constitutional Court of the Republic of Turkey, Judgment of April 9, 1991, 1990/36, Related to *Türban*."

<sup>32</sup> It is a relatively common image in Turkey: a professional woman dressed in a Western way and her house-cleaning aid, wearing a traditional headscarf. One can see this picture at Bilkent University.

<sup>33</sup> This was basically the Constitutional Court's view when it declared that the law passed by the Parliament in 1988 that allowed covering the neck and hair with a headscarf at universities for religious purposes was unconstitutional. See Ahmet T. Kuru, "Reinterpretation of Secularism in Turkey," pp. 147-148.

<sup>34</sup> In the indictment against the Justice and Development Party the headscarf has been described as a political symbol. The prosecutor Yalçınkaya writes: "the headscarf has been transformed into a political symbol for opposing women's freedoms and the basic values of the Republic".

<sup>35</sup> Questionnaire conducted Prof. W. J. Korab-Karpowicz's IR 481 "Comparative Political Theory" class, Bilkent University, April 2007.

<sup>36</sup> In Iran, Iraq, and Palestine and other areas dominated by Islamic fundamentalists, veiling is often a result of a social or political pressure. It is forcibly imposed on women and is part of a larger phenomenon of gender discrimination. It has become identified with pro-Islamist revolutionary movements. See Nancy J. Hirschman, "Eastern Veiling, Western Freedom," *Border Crossing: Toward a Comparative Political Theory*, ed. Fred Dallmayr (Lanham: Lexington Books, 1999), p. 43.

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EU reform process. Expressing his regret, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt told the press that the AKP's government was made up of "profound European reformers." EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said: "It is difficult to see that the lawsuit respects the democratic principles of a normal European society."<sup>37</sup> European Commission President José Manuel Barroso stressed that the closure of the AKP would be unacceptable in the context of the EU values and principles. The Berlin-based European Stability Initiative newsletter suggested that the dissolution of the AKP would offer the Turkish supporters of European integration no choice but to fight, to play offence not defense.<sup>38</sup> But these opinions, I am afraid to say, are largely based on misperceptions.

The Western supporters of the AKP think that it represents a democratic, pluralistic and pro-European force in Turkey, whereas the Kemalist establishment that defends the traditional Turkish secularism represents its opposite; an authoritarian, unitary, and nationalistic mind-set. However, the AKP is not a conservative party that has its equivalent anywhere in Europe. To compare it with the Christian Democrats in Germany or the Conservative Party in the UK is a misunderstanding.<sup>39</sup> As a party that attempts to make a synthesis between Islamic culture and modern development, the AKP stands in the tradition of political Islam. It is perhaps its moderate and modernistic expression, but the party undermines Turkey's secular foundations. It uses its pro-European rhetoric and pro-business attitude as instrument to achieve its political goals. In reality, it opens the gate for a complete transformation of the country, from a secular to a religious state. By evoking the great suppressed forces of religion, it brings them to pre-eminence in the public sphere. Dominated by those forces, Turkey will lose its secular and democratic character. Secularism is a precondition of democracy. Without the secularism that the Kemalist establishment defends, Turkey will be neither democratic, nor truly pro-European or pro-Western. Therefore, it would not be without some justification to say that it shows complete political naïveté on the part of European politicians to, in effect, undermine the basis of secularization in Turkey by giving support to the AKP.

Like the politics of today's Turkey, the West is an ambiguous phenomenon. It has both a liberating and dominating aspect. The liberating aspect of the West is represented by its culture based on rationality and science. It was this aspect of the West, its modern civilization that he believed was not merely Western but universal that was so very attractive to Atatürk when he was reforming Turkey.

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<sup>37</sup> Both quotations come from the report "Turkey's Dark Side," European Stability Initiative, April 2008, <http://www.esiweb.org>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Christianity and Islam refer to different political traditions. Whereas in Christianity there is a tradition of separation between state and religion, such a tradition does not exist in Islam. The Islamic law, Shari'a, regulates all aspects of human life, including the political. There is no equivalence for such a law in Christianity. Therefore, it is rather unjustifiable to compare a Christian political party with an Islamist political party. As a rule, the former does not want to challenge the secular order of the state; the latter does. On this issue see also Yalçın Akdoğan, "The Meaning of Conservative Democratic Identity," p. 57

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On the other hand, the dominating aspects of the West are represented by its attempts to impose either its rule or its rules on others. In those attempts, arrogance, having its source in the self-imagined superiority of the West in all areas of life, is often combined with ignorance of other cultures and outside realities. It was this dominating aspect of the West that Atatürk tried to avoid. The result is Turkey as it stands today: a modern, secular state that values its cultural and particularly religious heritage, and its independence. As such it is a model for others to follow: a country that is built on the delicate balance between what should be private and what public. The destruction of this balance, which seems to be the ultimate aim of the AKP would lead to erosion of the secular foundations of the Turkish Republic.

It would be a great disaster indeed if the directives imposed on Turkey by the European Union and its support of the AKP were to help turn the country from a secular into an Islamic state. The prominent place of Turkey in today's world, its strength and development is a consequence of the idea of secularism that lies at its foundations. On the continued maintenance of this bold idea of the country's founder, the future of Turkey depends.