



Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey

M. Hakan Yavuz

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In 2002 the Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) swept to power in Turkey. Since then it has shied away from a hard-line ideological stance in favor of a more conservative and democratic approach. M. Hakan Yavuz, a premier scholar of Turkey, negotiates this ambivalence, asking whether it is possible for a political party with a deeply religious ideology to liberalize and entertain democracy or whether, as he contends, radical religious groups moderate their practices and ideologies when forced to negotiate a competitive and rule-based political system. While the author explores the thesis through an analysis of the rise and evolution of the AKP and its more recent 2007 election victory, his conclusion – that everyday political realities ultimately override ideology and dogma – can be comparatively applied to other Muslim countries facing similar challenges. The book, which tackles a number of important issues including political participation, economics, internal security, the Kurdish question and Turkey's bid to enter the European Union, provides a masterful survey of modern Turkish and Islamic politics, which will be of interest to a broad range of readers from students to professionals and policymakers.

M. Hakan Yavuz is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science and Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Utah. His recent publications include *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and AK Parti* (2006) and *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (2005).

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M. Hakan Yavuz

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To Tevhide, Neşe, Yasemen and Handan

Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is in themselves. (Qur'an, 13:11)

I am like a compass. With one foot I stand securely on the foundation of my faith, with the other foot I wander throughout the seventy-two nations of the world. (M. J. Rumi (1207–1273))

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Preface

This book examines the principal puzzle that confronts many Muslim and non-Muslim countries: is it possible for religiously inspired (Islamic) political movements to become agents of democratization and even of liberalization? Or is the adaptation of secular ideas (ideology) and institutions through a process of internal reform and secularization necessary to establish a liberal and democratic system in Muslim societies? In other words this puzzle is closely related to one central question that has been of primary concern to social scientists: what is the connection between religious movements and democracy, on the one hand, and democracy and secularism, on the other? Do prevailing Islamic ideas and norms pose an obstacle to the transition to democracy, as most prominently argued by Daniel Lerner, Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington?

My general contention is that radical religious groups moderate their practices and ideologies when they enter into a competitive and rule-based participatory political system. The political openness characterizing this kind of system leads to reflexivity and a gradual moderation of the interpretation of the religious dogma and of political platforms on the part of religious groups. This process, in turn, allows the log-jam between polarized secular and religious forces to be broken discursively, as each side is now able to engage directly with the other along multiple channels of interaction in political and public spheres, eroding monolithic and homogeneous socio-political blocs. Moreover, a peaceful transition to pluralist and democratic politics is facilitated if two conditions exist: a functioning tax-based liberal economic market, and a porous public sphere that allows for the cross-fertilization of contending values and identities.

Such a development has taken place in some Muslim countries, including Turkey, Malaysia and Indonesia, where major Islamic political movements have eschewed radical ideologies and now embrace democratic platforms. This book examines how and why this substantial transformation in the outlook of Islamist movements has happened. Earlier studies attempting to explain the absence of democratization have focused

exclusively either on structural factors or on a monolithic and unchanging view of Islamic beliefs and textual understanding. This study seeks to bring structure (socio-political context) and agency (religious leaders and believers) together to explain why and how religious movements can contribute to the processes of democratization and pluralism in Muslim majority states through a dynamic reinterpretation of the religious tradition. The focus of this study will be on the ability of religious actors to reconstruct the meaning of religious texts through hermeneutical approaches, rather than using established religious dogma, in explaining political behavior in the public sphere. The book develops an interactive model of interplay between structural factors such as the type of political system and economic conditions and the ability of believers to reread the religious traditions to respond to new challenges. To this end, the book first identifies structural conditions for the emergence of a liberal religious discourse and then examines the interpretive abilities of embedded religious leaders. The book explains the evolution of liberal political attitudes as a result of the convergence between political convictions, religious hermeneutics, textual exegesis and political/strategic interactions.

In undertaking such a textual- and discourse-oriented humanistic approach, I hope to enhance and move beyond more conventional social science approaches, which focus on socio-economic and structural factors to explain Islamic socio-political movements. In addition to these structural factors, it is important to study the discursive practices of Islamic movements, because Islamic idioms still remain the most potent force of political mobilization in different Muslim countries, due to the lack of a process of secularization as has occurred in the West. This dominant religious discourse not only defines the spiritual and moral understanding of believers, but it also provides guidance to Muslims in different aspects of their private and public life, including politics. Historically, Islam has been among the most visible public religions in terms of its politicization; it has made itself readily available to reformers – and even to revolutionaries – calling for drastic cultural, social and political transformations, as well as to conservatives skeptical of any change in the customs and traditions of their countries. As a result, while Islamic movements in various guises have functioned as the vehicle of democratization in several Muslim countries, depending on the textual, historical, cultural and hermeneutical traditions, they have also emerged as the main obstacle to democratic reforms in many others.

Islamic movements reflect competing visions of community, authority, legitimacy and identity. The Islamization of Turkish political language in the 1980s and 1990s has had a significant implication for the struggle to redefine the nation and the meaning of the good life. Islamic ideas are

injected into the debates over the meaning of nation and political life. Islam with the new media-saturated age became more significant in terms of its ability to provide symbols, networks, myths and identities, to be mobilized for or against real or imagined enemies. At the heart of the Islamic challenge in modern Turkey has been the continuing debate over how to define the public sphere, secularism and the political community. The conflict is between those who want a society based upon a Jacobin secular vision of social and political order – defined by the disestablishment of Islam in the public sphere – and those who embrace an Islamic conception of society and moral order. While the former affirm that the solution for Turkey's problem is modernity without Islam, the latter argue for modernity with Islam.

Islam as the most powerful source of solidarity helps to redefine who is a member of a given community; it offers shared moral values that regulate social order.¹ Thus, Islam, just like other religions, simultaneously homogenizes and differentiates. My study examines the manner in which religious ideas are deployed by social and political groups to enhance their interests, and the subsequent implications these have had for Islam, politics and social order. Since religion and politics are closely engaged in the same issues of normative order, collective identity and legitimate authority, they cannot be separated, as some militant secularists wish for. Indeed, Islamic pronouncements provide a licence to a specific political agenda, and identify it in the best interests of the community to be realized through mass mobilization. Thus, Islam affects the core identity of the ruling AKP and its conceptions of politics and identity.

This study will identify the contextual conditions under which Islamists prefer moderation over confrontation by utilizing the experience of Turkish Islamic groups. The case of Turkey is particularly important due to Turkey's recent experience of co-existence and co-evolution in the matter of the transformation of Islamic movements and the democratization and liberalization of political and economic systems. In Turkey, a group of committed liberal-democrats has emerged from within the ranks of an ostracized Islamic political movement, which has successfully formed a broad democratic platform appealing to a wide range of sectarian, ethnic, social and political forces hitherto marginalized by the Kemalist state. By utilizing the case study of Turkey, I reject an essentialist approach to understanding the politics of Muslim countries. On the contrary, I argue that the transformation of Islamic movements toward a

¹ Robert Wuthnow defines moral order as “values and norms that regulate and legitimate social institutions.” Wuthnow, *Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p. 1.

genuine Muslim democratic orientation is a vindication of the need for abandoning essentialism, and the outcome of several contextual variables: the ongoing process of liberalization creating competitive political and economic spaces, the growing role of the Muslim bourgeoisie, the expanding public sphere and the inclusion of new intellectuals into the movement. The most important factor in the evolution of a Muslim democratic movement is the rising bourgeoisie and its continued commitment to democratic values as expressed in its support for cultural exchanges and new intellectuals' projects.

The book consists of three sections. In the first section, the introduction raises a number of theoretical questions about the definition and evolution of Islamic parties. It also seeks to explore the conditions under which an Islamic political movement ceases to be Islamic and becomes non- or post-Islamic. I argue that due to three structural factors (political participation, neo-liberal economic policies and the expansion of the market), the Turkish Islamic political movement has evolved to a point that it has ceased to be Islamic. The first chapter examines the context within which the AKP emerged, by focusing on the impact of history and economy on contemporary Turkish politics. This section examines five critical stages of modern Turkish history to understand the connection between democracy and development. It also examines the role of the state and economic policies in the constitution of the Turkish Islamic landscape.

The second section starts with [chapter 2](#) and examines the socio-political origins of the AKP movement. It traces the trajectory of the Islamic political movement, starting from the establishment of the NOM until its culmination as the AKP. It also closely examines the political and social origins of the AKP's split from the VP, marking the historical transformation of the movement into a liberal-democratic force, abandoning its earlier discourse. It also analyzes the conditions that prepared the ground for the AKP's victory in the 2002 elections. The third chapter looks at identity, ideology and leadership issues within the AKP. The fourth chapter examines two prominent leaders of the AKP, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül, and their role in the evolution of the AKP's identity.

The third section consists of 3 chapters. [Chapter 5](#) analyzes the socio-political impact of the AKP government on Turkey's domestic politics, and the new political challenges it has faced during its term in government. It also examines the dynamic interaction between the AKP's policies and its supporters. The main questions to be addressed are: will the AKP convert its electoral majority into a durable electoral base? How will the AKP cope with poverty, secularism and the headscarf issue without confronting the powerful secular forces within the establishment? The

sixth chapter focuses on the most controversial domestic and foreign policy issue: the Kurdish question and the AKP's policies in this field. [Chapter 7](#) examines continuity and change in the making and implementation of Turkish foreign policy. It analyses the EU membership process, the Cyprus issue and US–Turkey relations within the context of Iraq. What guides the foreign policy of the AKP? Is it national/party identity or national/party interests? Is the confusing and fragmented foreign policy of the AKP a reflection of its syncretic identity? [Chapter 8](#) analyzes the causes and political consequences of the 2007 national elections. The book's conclusion reflects the major shift of political grammar in Turkey in terms of ending “two track governments” (the power sharing between the unelected military and the elected politicians) and of stressing human rights discourse.

In short, I call the contemporary transformation in Turkey a conservative revolution for two reasons: the current revolution is led and shaped by civil society; and societal and economic changes have preceded political change. The conservative revolution is a bottom-up transformation in terms of the institutionalization of “politically correct” creole language and new actors. Thus, this is a bottom-up and gradual revolution in society to control the political language and society; and eventually the state.² The Islamic groups already control the political society and seek to control the state. With the AKP government, Islam has become the undisputed identity referent of Turkey. The agents of this conservative revolution launched an impressive and multifaceted challenge to the Kemalist status quo by capturing civil society organizations and associations. In short, Sheri Berman is partially right to argue that civil society has become an “incubator for illiberal radicalism.”³ Contrary to the dominant literature on civil society in the Middle East, civil society is not an inherently liberal and tolerant space in which people and associations interact in order to achieve democracy and reform. In the case of Turkey, some illiberal and conservative voices are rooted and fed by civil society associations.

The questions I address in this book have engaged me since 1998. I have addressed some of them before, principally in *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (2003) and *The Emergence of a New Turkey* (2006). I revisit some of the questions here, because my views have continued to develop and

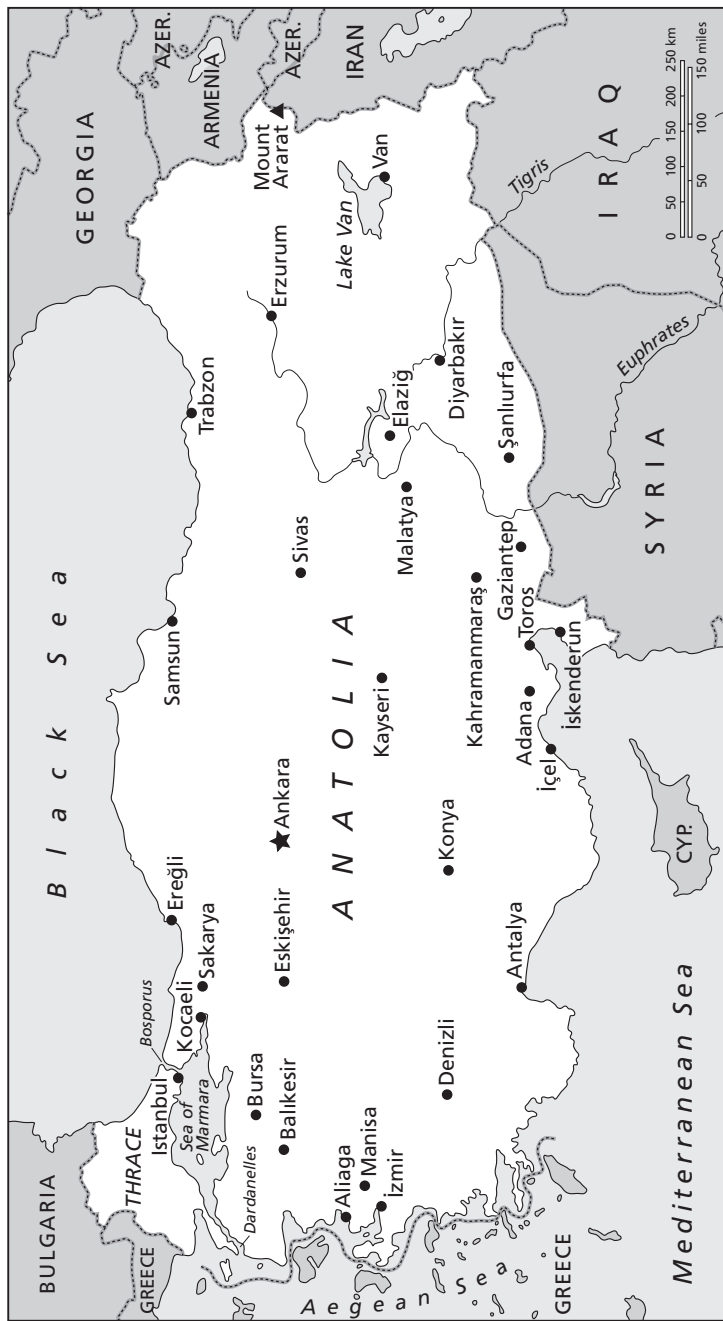
² Asef Bayat, “Revolution without Movement, Movement without Revolution: Comparing Islamic Activism in Iran and Egypt,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 40:1 (January 1998), 136–169.

³ Sheri Berman, “Islamism, Revolution and Civil Society,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 1 (June 2003), 257.

even to change. What I say in this book is continuous with my previous writings on Islam and politics. However, there are a number of chapters that represent a break with my previous work. I owe this intellectual development to a number of friends here and abroad. During the writing of this book, I visited Turkey five times and carried out a series of interviews. I would like to thank Mujeeb R. Khan, Atilla Yayla, Mustafa Erdoğan, Ali Carkaoğlu, Nihat Ali Özcan, Edibe Sözen, Frederick Quinn, Yasin Aktay, İhsan Dağı, Şaban Kardaş, Uli Schamioğlu, Umut Azer, Fatih Balcı, Ali Yacıoğlu and Uygur Aktan. A special note of appreciation is due to the two readers of this text – Peter Sluglett and Eric Hooglund – and the two anonymous readers from Cambridge University Press. Thanks also go to Judd King, Halil İbrahim Yenigün, Ergun Yıldırım, Hasan Kösebalaban, Ahmet Kuru, Nader Hashemi, Mark Button, Asma Afsaruddin, Etga Uğur and K. Haluk Yavuz, who helped in a number of ways to complete the project. Throughout the writing of this book, I have benefited from several opportunities to present my chapters as they were evolving and have received feedback from my colleagues in America and abroad. These included a workshop organized by Mehmet Ümit Necef at the Southern Denmark University in September 2006; a professional presentation at Carleton University (Ottawa) in December 2004; and an invited lecture at a conference on Turkish politics at Baku State University in April 2007. Finally, I would like to thank Özay Mehmet, Adil Bagirov and Elin Suleymanov for their helpful comments.

Abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party (<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i>)
ANAP	Motherland Party (<i>Anavatan Partisi</i>)
AP	Justice Party (<i>Adalet Partisi</i>)
BBP	Greater Unity Party (<i>Büyük Birlik Partisi</i>)
CHP	Republican People's Party (<i>Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi</i>)
DEHAP	Democratic People's Party (<i>Demokratik Halk Partisi</i>)
DP	Democrat Party (<i>Demokrat Parti</i>)
DRA	Directorate of Religious Affairs (<i>Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı</i>)
DSP	Democratic Left Party (<i>Demokratik Sol Parti</i>)
DTP	Democratic Society Party (<i>Demokratik Toplum Partisi</i>)
DYP	True Path Party (<i>Doğru Yol Partisi</i>)
ECHR	European Court of Human Rights
FP	Virtue Party (<i>Fazilet Partisi</i>)
HADEP	People's Democracy Party (<i>Halkın Demokrasi Partisi</i>)
HEP	People's Work Party (<i>Halkın Emek Partisi</i>)
MÇP	Nationalist Work Party (<i>Milliyetçi Çalışma Partisi</i>)
MHP	Nationalist Action Party (<i>Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi</i>)
MNP	National Order Party (<i>Milli Nizam Partisi</i>)
MSP	National Salvation Party (<i>Milli Selamet Partisi</i>)
MÜSİAD	Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (<i>Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği</i>)
NOM	National Outlook Movement (<i>Milli Görüş Hareketi</i>)
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (<i>Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan</i>)
RP	Welfare Party (<i>Refah Partisi</i>)
RTÜK	The Supreme Board of Radio and Television (<i>Radio ve Televizyon Yüksek Kurulu</i>)
SP	Felicity Party (<i>Saadet Partisi</i>)
TİP	Turkish Workers' Party (<i>Türkiye İşçi Partisi</i>)
TOBB	Turkish Union of Chambers and Stocks (<i>Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği</i>)
TSK	The Turkish Armed Forces (<i>Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri</i>)
TÜSİAD	Association of Turkish Industrialists and Businessmen (<i>Türk İş Adamları ve Sanayiciler Derneği</i>)



Map of Turkey

Introduction: what is an Islamic party?

Is the AKP an Islamic party?

In November 2002 and July 2007 the Turkish electorate voted decisively for the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AK Parti) – hereafter referred to by its Turkish acronym of AKP, demonstrating that it was willing to take a risk for broad political change.¹ The voters swept away a generation of established politicians to give Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP enough seats in Parliament to form a government on its own.² The election posed a dramatic challenge, that of whether a modern democratic party with deep roots in political Islam was capable of expanding civil liberties and maintaining the democratic system. Before the November 2002 election, many in the Western media had described the AKP as a “fundamentalist party.” After the election, the same journalists used the phrase “Islamist or Islamic party”; and when the party started to adopt the EU's Copenhagen criteria, they referred to it as a “party with Islamic roots.”³ Two years later, when parliament had passed several major reform packages, the AKP was characterized as a “reformed Islamist party.”⁴ Later, during parliamentary consideration of new legislation on adultery, the European media once again used the adjective “Islamist” or “Islamic” to describe the AKP.

¹ The “*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*” is usually translated into English as the “Justice and Development Party” and is sometimes abbreviated to “AKP.” The Party has declared that the official shorthand for its name is “*AK Parti*,” so in English it is also referred to as the “AK Party.” However, the use of this term is controversial since “ak” in Turkish means light, pure, white, clean and uncontaminated. The AK Party has the connotation of the “party of light” and its party symbol is a light bulb. Scholars who have a critical distance from the party do not use “AK Parti” or “Ak Party” but its Turkish or English abbreviation AKP, since “Ak Party” carries with it too much of a positive connotation. Therefore, the “neutral” and uncontroversial shorthand for the party is “AKP” in both Turkish and English.

² Emmanuel Sivan, “The Clash within Islam,” *Survival* 45:1 (Spring 2003), 30. Sivan treats the electoral victory of the AKP as the rise and consolidation of Islamism in Turkey. His sweeping generalizations reflect a rather limited understanding of Turkish politics and this leads him to a number of ideologically tinged conclusions.

³ Graham Fuller's writings were critical in the depiction of the AKP as an Islamic party. “Freedom and Security: Necessary Conditions for Moderation,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, 22:3 (Summer 2005), 23–24.

⁴ *The Economist*, November 27, 2004.

After the 2007 elections, *The Economist* called the AKP a “mildly Islamist” party.⁵ Jenny White of Boston University depicts the party as “the formerly Islamist AKP” and as a successful “manifestation of Islam.” Since the party was established in 2001, one wonders what she means by “formerly Islamist” or by presenting the AKP as a “manifestation of Islam.” Does she reduce Islam to the AKP?⁶

What is an Islamic party? How does one differentiate an Islamic party from a secular one? When and under what conditions does a formerly Islamic movement cease to be Islamic?⁷ This book will examine these three questions in the Turkish context. How should one classify the AKP? Is it Islamic, conservative or secular? Given its Islamic origins, the AKP firmly describes itself as a “conservative democratic” party and denies having an Islamic agenda. Islamists and some secularists argue that this is just a smokescreen, and that the AKP has no option but to present itself as “conservative” since it cannot legally refer to itself as Islamic. Indeed, the ban on the use of religion in politics has led to a politics of camouflage. Pro-Islamic or pro-ethnic parties are obliged to develop an areligious or non-ethnic language in the political sphere. People are often compelled to have recourse to a highly coded political language. Some scholars, such as Yasin Aktay, argue that “conservative democracy” is the only legally possible identity available to the AKP in the Turkish political landscape since it is illegal to form a party on the basis of religious ideas.⁸

Although the AKP leadership entered politics through Erbakan’s pro-Islamic National Outlook Movement, its leaders have constantly denied any connection with Erbakan’s Islamic agenda. The party leadership represents the modern and dynamic face of a new cosmopolitan Muslim identity; it regards Islamic networks as instruments of political mobilization. Yalçın Akdoğan, the ideologist of the AKP, denies party links with political Islam and even rejects the label “Muslim Democratic” party.⁹ The AKP marks the external boundary of political Islam after the February 28, 1997 process in Turkey.

⁵ *The Economist*, August 2, 2007.

⁶ Jenny White, “The End of Islamism?” in Robert W. Hefner (ed.), *Remaking Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 87–111.

⁷ Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Religious Mobilization and Unsecular Politics,” in T. Keselman and J. Buttigieg (eds.), *European Christian Democracy: Historical Legacies and Comparative Perspectives* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

⁸ Yasin Aktay, “Siyasette İslamiliğin Sınırları ve İmkânları,” *Tezkire*, 33 (July–August 2003), 31–41.

⁹ See interview with Akdoğan, *Sabah*, August 16, 2003. He argues that the AKP is not conducting the politics of ethnic or sectarian identity. It is not an identity-based party but it has its own inclusive identity. Yalçın Akdoğan, *AK Parti ve Muhafazakar Demokrasi* (İstanbul: Alfa, 2004).

Islamic ideas and an Islamic worldview are still included in the identity of its leadership and might also be included in the AKP's deep-seated philosophy, but the AKP never uses the explicit language of political Islam, and indeed often feels compelled to stress that it is not an Islamic party. In other words, the AKP evolved in reaction to the authoritarian, and somewhat messianic, leadership of Necmettin Erbakan: against his anti-systemic and confrontational National Outlook philosophy, which relied on religious networks and Islamic identity to differentiate itself from other political parties in Turkey. Erbakan's strategy was "we are not one of those who represent the system" while Erdoğan seeks to convince people that "we are one of the mainstream parties such as the DP of Menderes or the AP of Demirel."

The AKP's repressed identity occasionally re-emerges. Inevitably, the identity of the AKP is shaped both by what it wants to *forget* (Islamism) and what it wants to *become* publicly (conservative democracy); it reflects a conflict between Islamism and the new rubric "conservative democracy," the term party leaders use to demonstrate that they are not an Islamic party. The party has particularly exploited, but is also constrained by, the EU membership project to demonstrate that it is not Islamic in either domestic or foreign policy. Conforming to the Copenhagen criteria is an aspect of this identity-building. In other words, the EU accession process has played a significant role in transforming the identity of the diverse socio-political groups in Turkey, including the AKP. The pro-EU groups are closely linked with the democratization process of Turkey. After the 1999 Helsinki decision to recognize Turkey as a "candidate" to join the EU, the support for the EU-based reforms became broader and deeper. The Copenhagen process provides the compass for the transformation of the Turkish economy and for democratic reforms as well as for change in foreign policy. In the last five years, more political-legal reforms have been passed in Turkey than over the last three decades. After 1999, the death penalty was abolished, freedom of expression was expanded, and Kurdish language and cultural rights were granted. The reforms also curtailed military power and enhanced civilian control of the security forces.

The AKP embarked on the EU reforms as its main political platform for a number of reasons. The Turkish military is for the most part, if not openly, against the structural reforms, while the AKP views entry into the EU as a road to political survival and a way of curtailing the military's power. In short, the AKP seeks to end the dual-track government that effectively limits democratic practices. However, the AKP still functions under the shadow of fear of the military and the state bureaucracy, and the suspicion that they might overthrow the AKP government and revoke the new set of reforms.

For critics of the AKP, there is still a great deal of mistrust about the intentions of the party. Over a decade ago Erdoğan, while serving as the mayor of Istanbul, said “Thank God, I am for Sharia”¹⁰; “one cannot be a secularist and a Muslim at the same time”; and “for us, democracy is a means to an end.”¹¹ There is no fixed “litmus test” to establish the AKP’s commitment to a liberal view of secularism and democracy.¹² In this sense, the constraints and inducements presented by the EU and the secular regime have played a crucial role in getting the party leadership to re-examine and redefine its core beliefs and agenda.

According to the party programme, the AKP:

considers religion one of the most important institutions of humanity, and secularism as a prerequisite of democracy and an assurance of the freedom of religion and conscience. It also rejects the interpretation and distortion of secularism as enmity against religion. ... Our party refuses to exploit sacred religious values and ethnicity and to use them for political purposes.¹³

To what extent is the AKP different from the previous Refah and Fazilet parties, from which it has evolved? The party initially united a broad spectrum of Islamic activists, Turkish and Kurdish nationalists, and liberal reformers. The key leaders of the party have clearly given up their radical interpretations of political Islam, due to pressures from the military and from the main business and industrial association, TÜSİAD. The AKP is seeking to build its identity in government under Erdoğan’s strong leadership, but the party’s heterogeneous grassroots, with its different expectations, have complicated the process, which will necessarily be gradual, full of contradictions and inevitably entail intra-party conflict.

The AKP leadership consists of a core group of pious politicians who came to politics via Islamic networks and parties. Given the party’s Islamic roots and its leadership’s past activities and statements, one needs to explain how and why the party adopted its more liberal line. The transformation of this Turkish Muslim political movement, as it moved out of opposition and into political power, is an outcome of the change in civil society, especially the emergence of a new business class and new intellectuals. Although the Copenhagen criteria are important, it is a gross mistake to reduce the causes of this political transformation solely to the AKP’s acceptance of EU norms.

¹⁰ *Milliyet*, November 19, 1994.

¹¹ N. Bowcott, “Islamic Party Wins in Turkey,” *Guardian*, November 7, 2002.

¹² I use Casanova’s understanding of secularism as composed by three main dimensions: religious differentiation, privatization and decline. See Jose Casanova, *Public Religion in the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

¹³ *Development and Democratization Program 2:1*. www.akparti.org.tr/programeng3.asp

The transformation of an Islamic movement-party

What is an Islamic party? Under what *conditions* does the *transformation* of an Islamic movement-party take place? What conditions and what types of religious movements facilitate and consolidate democratization? The case of Turkey is important in answering these questions. How will the example of the AKP as a governing democratic party with an Islamic reformist background impact the rest of the Islamic world? At present most commentators are mesmerized by Turkey's impressive recent rate of democratization and economic development, and they tend to calculate its effect on the Muslim world by simply extrapolating it into the future. However, there are a number of problems with this simple reading of the Turkish experiment.

Before I examine these questions, it is important to provide the contextual meaning of "Islamic" in the case of Turkey. What does "Islamic" mean in the context of Turkey? Could it be possible to be Islamic in/by conduct and way of life, such as having a wife with a headscarf, or not drinking alcohol and sharing an Islam-based morality, without necessarily subscribing to an ideology to establish an Islamic state? In the context of Turkey, "Islamic" means someone who seeks a prominent role for Islamic ethics and practices in the organization of everyday life. The AKP deliberately avoids pursuing a policy of Islamic identity politics. Yet its politics are very much derived from Islamic life-styles. This is politics of life-style, or identity of a party derived from the identity of its key cadres and their pious acts in public. This life-style politics is also enhanced by the body-language of the person of Erdoğan. The party leadership participates in religious activities, with its headscarf-covered wives and daughters, and performs religiously sanctioned gender roles which differentiate them from other parties and also facilitate the covert ideology of the party. In short, the AKP leadership wants to liberate private and everyday life from the intervention of the "modernizing" state, whereas the Republican People's Party wants to keep religion out of public and private life at the same time.

With the greater expansion of economic opportunity spaces in Turkey and the formation of an assertive Muslim bourgeoisie, the process of moderation has intensified the commitment to political liberalization within Islamic movements.¹⁴ Not all but, rather, moderate Islamic

¹⁴ Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, translated by Carol Volk (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994) and *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); L. Carl Brown, *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); James Piscatori and Dale Eickelman, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

movements are likely to facilitate democracy if they perceive it as the optimal solution to existing socio-political problems. Commitment to democracy is very important for a movement to facilitate the democratization process.

Religious identities, institutions and networks are important in the constitution of social capital and movement formation. Religious identities and ideologies help to protect marginalized groups from the dominant classes and provide a conceptual tool to challenge an oppressive government in the name of justice.¹⁵ Moreover, in this context, religious movements can represent excluded groups and work for a more inclusive boundary between state and society via democratization. Studies on Christian Democratic parties in Europe and Latin America indicate that the secularization of the party's discourse stresses basic freedoms for the religious electorate. In order to appeal to the broadest possible electorate, confessional parties distanced their discourse and party organization from religious institutions and became more pragmatic. The result has been the evolution of a secular Catholic political identity. In addition to this electoral pressure for moderation, the parameters of the regime also play an important role in the transformation of religious parties.

1996); John Esposito and François Burgat (eds.), *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Joel Beinin and Joe Stork (eds.), *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997); Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *Mawdudi and the Making of Islamic Revivalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Charles Kurzman, "Bin Laden and Other Thoroughly Modern Muslims," *Contexts*, 1 (Fall/Winter 2002), 13–20.

¹⁵ With respect to the proto-modern character of both Puritanism and Islamism Goldberg argues that:

Calvinism and the contemporary Islamist Sunni movements in Egypt are discourses on the nature of authority in society. Historically both movements arose as central state authorities made absolutist claims to political power and, in the process, sought to dominate transformed agrarian societies in new ways. Ideologically, both movements asserted that the claims of sweeping power by nominally religious secular central authorities were blasphemous egotism when contrasted with the claims of God on the consciences of believers. Socially, both movements transferred religious authority away from the officially sanctioned individuals who interpret texts to ordinary citizens. Institutionally, both movements create communities of voluntary, highly motivated and self-policing believers that yield greater degrees of internal cohesion and compliance than the absolutist authority can achieve, and they therefore can become the basis of postabsolutist political authority in an authoritarian and antidemocratic fashion. (195)

Ellis Goldberg, "Smashing Idols and the State: The Protestant Ethic and Egyptian Sunni Radicalism," in Juan R. I. Cole (ed.), *Comparing Muslim Societies: Knowledge and the State in a World Civilization* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 195.

What is an Islamic party?

Definitional problems inevitably arise in any discussion of religious parties. For instance, is the AKP an Islamic party? How does one define a religious party? How should one differentiate religious parties/politics and secular parties/politics? I define a religious party as one whose ideology is derived from or shaped by religious ideas and which mobilizes the grassroots on the basis of shared religious identity. Such parties seek *regime change* by implementing their religious worldviews; in the case of the Muslim world, the Islamization of the state and society is their main goal. Religious parties seek to overcome class and ethnic divisions on the basis of a shared religious affiliation.¹⁶

Religious parties not only focus on religious norms and issues but their platforms incorporate secular as well as religious appeals, issues and themes. This makes the task of disentangling the reasons why voters support these parties difficult.¹⁷ Do voters choose these parties because they seek to bring religion back into the public sphere, or do they vote for them because these parties are seen as less corrupt and more committed to social justice, or because they provide a political opportunity to marginalized sectors of the population to take part in the political process? Religious parties may gradually moderate and secularize their agenda in response to electoral and non-electoral factors. Thus, the study of religious parties must focus on their ability to meld religious and secular agendas, on their electoral success or failure and especially on their protean nature, evolution and oscillation between religious and secular concerns and compromises. A closer study of Christian Democratic parties indicates that the evolution of these parties is the result of domestic and international transformations. The European Christian Democratic parties were often influenced by the ideas of the French Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain. In *Integral Humanism*, he argued for an “integral democracy” that consisted of “pluralist,” “personalistic” and “communitarian” conceptions of politics.¹⁸ His major contribution was to develop an argument that theism provides a better basis for democracy than liberalism. He defended personalism over egotistic individualism; moral communal responsibility over self-interest; sharing over the profit motive. Moreover, Maritain regarded democracy as the most important framework for bringing Christian values into the public domain and for

¹⁶ Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully (eds.), *Christian Democracy in Latin America: Electoral Competition and Regime Change* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Vali Nasr, “The Rise of ‘Muslim Democracy’,” *Journal of Democracy*, 16:2 (April 2005), 13–27.

¹⁸ Jacques Maritain, *Integral Humanism* (New York: Scribner’s, 1938).

enhancing communities. He argued that democracy requires full religious freedoms for the socialization of faith into everyday life.¹⁹

It is important to differentiate religious (Islamic) parties from religious (Islamic) politics. A party might not be Islamic, such as the case of the Democrat Party under Adnan Menderes, the Justice Party under Süleyman Demirel and the Motherland Party under Turgut Özal, but could pursue “Islamic politics” by acting in conformity with the religious demands and concerns of the people. By Islamic politics I mean the competition and contest to define the meaning of life, identity and community via Islamic values. Islamic arguments are public statements or speech acts that are grounded in a religious tradition. On the basis of this definition, the AKP cannot be considered a religious party because it does not seek the *religious transformation of state and society*. Rather it seeks to maximize its seats in parliament to enhance its political power, but it does not seek to institute Islamic law in the political and social sphere or make political claims on the basis of religion. The AKP is, however, deeply involved in Islamic social ethics and cultural norms, and stresses the religious values and interests of its pious electorate. Just like the BJP in India, it has deep religious roots, but it has evolved to the point that one can no longer easily consider it as simply a religious party. The AKP’s political activism demonstrates a deep interest in religious rights in terms of defending the freedoms of those who care about issues such as the headscarf, the imam-hatip schools where students receive a religious as well as a secular education, and optional Qur’anic study courses for students of high school age. The AKP toned down its Islamic identity and agenda after it came to power due to pressure from the Kemalist military and bureaucracy. The party has to adhere to strict secular regime guidelines for exercising power in order to maintain its legal status. The secular character of the regime in Turkey has been protected by the military through military coups in 1960, 1971, 1980 and 1997. The Kemalist elite have always remained suspicious about the activities of religious groups and parties, seeing them as reacting against the modernizing and secularizing mission of Kemalism.

In addition to the constraints set by the secular regime, Turkey’s international engagements with NATO, the European Council and the EU force Islamic parties towards accommodation. In some cases, domestic legitimacy is guaranteed by international, especially US, support. In recent years, EU support has been essential for the democratic and

¹⁹ More on the ideas of Maritain, see Paul Sigmund, “Maritain on Politics,” in Deal Hudson and Matthew Mancini (eds.), *Understanding Maritain* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), pp. 153–170.

economic transformation of the country. Hence AKP leaders became pragmatic and used opportunities to demonstrate their commitment to the Europeanization project and consciously avoided issues that could be viewed as overtly Islamic. They used Islamic language during the elections in dealing with emotionally charged issues, but largely in order to convert Islamic sentiments into votes. While its roots are Islamic and outwardly religious, as a political party the AKP leadership has compromised on its religio-political convictions and objectives. However, has the AKP actually reconsidered its ideology or even abandoned the Islamic vision so central to the movement's leadership and followers? Or is it more accurate to say that the AKP has in fact transformed itself into a typical political party, accepting the secular framework of the state while it functions within the confines of the Turkish polity. If this is the case, then what developments led to such a dramatic shift in ideology and goals? While it would be premature to suggest that Islamic objectives have been forgotten, it appears at least that they have been temporarily set aside in favor of more pragmatic goals. For now, it seems that a stable and more powerful Turkish democracy will suffice, with the AKP as the dominant political party. In the transformation of the movement, opportunity spaces played the most critical role. Eventually, the shortcomings of the February 28 coup in 1997 offered a tantalizing opportunity behind which new ideas of civil society and a democratic polity were promoted by a new leadership.

This book sheds light on the nature of the incentives that tend to lead policy makers to change their worldview, and also examines the conditions which facilitate socio-political transformation. The post-February 28, 1997 process was a critical juncture when a major change took place in the EU accession process. In the transformation of Islamic parties, we have to examine the facilitating and inhibiting factors, along with the recognition of windows of opportunity.

When and how does an Islamic Party cease to be Islamic?

Recent literature on the growing moderation of Islamic movements/parties argues that the parties moderate themselves as a result of a number of factors.²⁰ I tend to differentiate those factors associated with the opposition

²⁰ For more on Islamic movements and democracy, see Vali Nasr, "The Rise of 'Muslim Democracy'," *Journal of Democracy*, 16:2 (2005), 13–27; Njorn Olav Utvik, "Hizb al-Wasat and the Potential for Change in Egyptian Islamism," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 14:3 (2005), 293–306. For Indonesia, Robert W. Hefner, *Remaking Muslim Politics: Pluralism, Contestation, Democratization* (Princeton: Princeton University

from those associated with the government.²¹ When Islamic parties are in opposition, they utilize strategic calculations to maximize electoral support. When there is a chance of coming to power or joining coalition governments, they moderate their position to win the centrist votes. In the emergence and evolution of the AKP, state oppression and the electoral strategies to receive more votes played crucial roles. In order to survive, the AKP expanded its electoral base, and to avoid state oppression, it internalized its adherence to democratic norms. When the party was voted into office in 2002, it even took unexpected steps to compromise with the Kemalist establishment to maintain its domestic and international legitimacy. In the case of Islamic parties in Turkey, one can argue that the conditions of moderation before and after the parties come to power are not the same. Before an Islamic party can come to power, state repression, electoral strategies of expanding its base and the ability of the system to reward the change by allowing it to govern are necessary conditions or factors for moderation to occur. State repression leads to splits within the Islamic movement due to new opportunities for more moderate groups. However, repression by itself is not a sufficient condition for an Islamic party to adopt moderation. A splinter group must be given the opportunity to participate and, if elected, to rule. When the party is in government, it must avoid confrontation and seek further moderation in order to maintain its domestic legitimacy.

Moreover, in parliament or in government, Islamic parties become more moderate as a result of learning and internalizing democratic values and norms. In order to end authoritarian state repression, Islamic parties begin to realize the virtue of democracy and pluralism. However, sections of the party, rather than the whole, are more prone to democratic conversion. Why are some party members more prone than others to democratic conversion? It appears that those members who were directly targeted by state repression, those who experienced more harassment, jailing or even torture when in the legal or underground opposition, are less likely to adopt the democratic conversion process when in power. Yet, there is a way of shaping one's conduct through setting examples as well.

There is a trade-off between the AKP's participation and remaining in the government and the moderation of its ideology and tactics. Political

Press, 2005). For Turkey, M. Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). For Morocco, Isabelle Werenfels, "Between Integration and Repression," *SWP Research Paper*, S 39 (December 2005).

²¹ Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Commitment Problems in Emerging Democracies: The Case of Religious Parties," *Comparative Politics*, 22 (July 2000), 379–397; John Waterbury, "Fortuitous By-Products," *Comparative Politics*, 29 (April 1997), 383–402; Nancy Bermeo, "Myths of Moderation: Confrontation and Conflict during Democratic Transitions," *Comparative Politics*, 29 (April 1997), 305–322.

participation of all Islamic voices in competitive electoral politics as legitimate parties tends to moderate their discourses and tactics. During and after the 1995 elections, for example, one witnessed a major trade-off between ideology and vote maximization by the Refah Partisi (RP). After the closure of the RP, the Saadet Partisi (SP) emerged as the continuation of the RP, and its single goal was avoiding the oppression and closure of the party organization. Thus, both vote- and legitimacy-seeking behaviors constrained the conduct of the SP. In other words, in order to establish a democratic system the leaders do not need to be committed democrats. By complying with democratic rules, these parties have gradually moderated their positions and tactics. Hence the moderation of radical voices who seek regime change takes place more as a result of self-interest than of ideological change. In other words, behavioral moderation precedes ideological moderation. When the younger generation of the RP realized that their just-order ideology was not in tune with the practical realities of Turkey, they gave it up and adopted a neo-liberal framework instead.

Even though I agree with those scholars who stress (a) strategic calculation, (b) state repression and reward and (c) political learning as key variables in the moderation of Islamic parties, I stress the role of structural factors, which are: (a) economic opportunity spaces, normally accompanied with the public sphere and (b) legal protection to allow the opportunity of governance if they are to be elected. In the case of Turkey and the AKP, the rise of the Anatolian Muslim bourgeoisie has been at the center of the “silent revolution”, and the democratization and liberalization of Islamic actors has been very much achieved by this bourgeoisie. Özalian neo-liberal economic policies helped to create a new middle class that became the agent of a “historic compromise” between secularism and Islam, and between Kemalism and democracy. When in government, Islamic parties are constrained by the systemic constraints of the constitution, laws regulating political parties, the military establishment and the requirements of international organizations. In some cases moderation takes place while the party is in government. This is the case with the AKP, even though it was not particularly radical during the elections.

In addition to economic opportunity spaces and the evolution of a new Anatolian conservative bourgeoisie, one also needs to stress the role of political institutions in this ongoing contestation over the new “settlement” between religion and politics. Islamic politics in Turkey is not a zero-sum game between the Kemalist secularists and the religious groups that the secular regime is gradually losing. One needs to examine how the secular and Islamic confrontations shape each other and the political landscape of the country. Did the Islamic political agenda become more

secular as it moved into parliament and government? What is the impact of contact with the state institutions? In the case of Turkey, the boundary between religious and secular is becoming fluid and blurred. The Turkish state pursued a number of strategies towards the Islamic opposition: co-optation, repression and power sharing. This interaction between the Islamic opposition and state institutions led to a mutual transformation and the emergence of a *modus vivendi*. Yet, there is still an ongoing tension between religious and secular ideas and forces concerning legitimate life styles and the nature of state and society. The tension is not between the state and its religious challengers, as is the case in many Muslim states, but within Turkish society itself. This tension is not uniform and varies according to the changing economic, cultural and political context within which Islamic movements and the state policies are rooted.

Although the state's modernizing policies have largely been recognized as a contributing factor in the evolution of a political Islamic opposition, in recent years economic and political opportunity spaces have provided the necessary context for the formation of an Islamic modernity. Moreover, some states tend to legitimize their policies in terms of Islamic idioms and symbols. The relationship between state secularism and the institutions of official Islam have been challenged by societal secularization and society-centric Islamism as well. Thus, the religious field consists of official state Islam, traditional Sufi networks, the neo-Nur movement of Fethullah Gülen, as well as a small but deadly Kurdish-Hizbullah. In the case of Turkey, the religious field has been a contested zone among "religious specialists" who seek to administer the "means of salvation." Competition over the meaning and role of Islam constitutes a new form of political discourse. Politics is deeply rooted in the lifestyles expressed in diverse religio-secular symbols. For instance, the headscarf is a symbol which points to certain values and lifestyles. Eickelman and Piscatori rightly argue that the language and use of symbols are "signs that point to values."²² Eickelman and Piscatori's definition of politics is helpful in our attempt to understand contemporary Turkish politics. They define politics as "competition and struggle over the meanings of symbols ... and control of the institutions that define and articulate social values."²³ The politics of Turkey has become the conflict and competition over different lifestyle and value systems.

This transformation of Turkey's Islamic movement could be called a conservative revolution because it seeks to maintain Turkey's generally

²² Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 9.

²³ Eickelman and Piscatori, *Muslim Politics*, p. 9.

conservative traditions and bring local-level norms and identities to the national level; it is a normative revolution in that it seeks to moralize the political institutions and networks. By “conservative revolution” I mean not advocating wholesale change or an abrupt transformation, but rather creating new cognitive spaces for different imaginings of the past and the reconstruction of the present.²⁴ This conservative revolution is very much based on the Ottoman imperial dream of becoming “bigger” and “better” by overcoming the rigid nation-state ideology. This imagining is not carried out by the intelligentsia. It is a bottom-up imagining of those who feel excluded and dissatisfied with the prevailing socio-political conditions of Turkey. In its conception of a new Turkey, the AKP leadership has looked towards reconfiguring alliances and redistributing political power; it has sought ways to create new institutions and new values; and more importantly it has attempted to overthrow the ingrained Kemalist mode or pattern of “progressive” and elitist thinking. The main goal is to level society so that top and bottom are not widely separated. In short, the AKP’s dream is to re-shape politics along the identity and needs of civil society. However, the party’s dream of putting power firmly into the hands of people has failed to materialize fully, due to the authoritarian temptations of Erdoğan and the structural problems of modern Turkey.

²⁴ Bjorn Olav Utvik, “The Modernizing Force of Islam,” in John Esposito and François Burgat (eds.), *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in Europe and the Middle East* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp. 43–68.

1 Historical and ideological background

Sometimes major revolutions take place quietly, their importance obscured by the hubbub of more dramatic events. Only with time does the shift become perceptible. Turkey has changed, but not because of a war or a major crisis; it has changed because of the emerging Anatolian bourgeoisie with its EU ambitions. The catalysts for this change have been the February 28 coup of 1997, the 2001 economic crisis and the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership. The EU process has played an important role in the speed and focus of the political reforms since 1999. However, the impact of the process is very much conditioned by the dynamics of Turkish domestic politics, especially the commitments of the major civil society organizations, as well as the governing party's commitment to the EU process.¹ Although many scholars tend to explain the current wave of democratization in terms of the Copenhagen criteria, I tend to treat external factors as facilitators rather than direct causes of this ongoing democratization of the state and society in Turkey, and I stress the role of opportunity spaces in the constitution of a greater democratic and more civic consciousness in Turkey.² This book also explains the mechanism through which and under what conditions the EU process has shaped Turkish domestic politics.

The current transformation of Turkish politics is an outcome of the interplay between internal and external events. It is the product of a bizarre blend of Islamic tradition and EU norms, acting on local and

¹ Societal groups such as as the Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TÜSİAD), the Economic and Development Foundation (IKV) and the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) played a major role persuading the skeptical bureaucracy and the media.

² On those who stress external factors more than domestic, see E. Fuat Keyman and Ziya Öniş, "Helsinki, Copenhagen and Beyond: Challenges to the New Europe and the Turkish State," in Mehmet Uğur and Nergis Canefe (eds.), *Turkey and European Integration: Accession Prospects and Issues* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 173–193; Ziya Öniş, "Turkish Modernization and Challenges for the New Europe," *Perceptions*, (Autumn 2004), 5–28.

global policies. The framework for this transformation is, of course, the EU membership process. This process has a number of social and political implications. Politically Turkey is becoming more open, diversified and syncretic, and the AKP is both an outcome of this transformation and the agent of the new wave of change in Turkey.

Although some scholars explain the revolution of the AKP as a result of its search for security and legitimacy vis-à-vis the Kemalist establishment, I stress structural, social and economic factors. İhsan Dağı presents the AKP's adoption of human rights and democracy as a discursive shield and the building of a "liberal-democratic coalition with modern/secular sectors that recognize the AKP as a legitimate actor." Yet the 1997 military-civilian coup against the democratically elected Erbakan government revealed the weaknesses of domestic political forces and forced Turkey's Muslim groups to search for international support against the military's pervasive political power. The leadership of the AKP realizes that in order to foster democratization and the expansion of human rights, they need the safeguards of the EU. I would argue that this reliance on the EU is not simply tactical but rather an effort to deepen civil society and democracy. The biggest breakdown of the center-right alignment came as a result of the February 28 military-civilian coup. Before this, the Turkish electorate was divided between the left (twenty-five per cent) and right (seventy per cent). The right was dominated by two ideologies: Islamism and Turkish nationalism. These two forms of identity, like overlapping circles, have a constant circulation of people between nationalism and Islamism. The Islamic circle also has some overlap with Kurdish nationalism as well. In a way, Islamic identity functions as a link, although not a bridge, between Turkish and Kurdish nationalism. Yet Islamic identity has more dominant Ottoman and Turkish colors than Kurdish ones, since the dominant Islamic identity is largely constituted by and derived from the Ottoman legacy. Islamic identity in itself failed to address the Kurdish question, but it prevents radicalization between the two ethnic groups.

Since the February 28 coup, these circles have become more autonomous and less overlapping. Historically, the overlap between Islamism and Turkish nationalism established the ideological language of the center-right as pro-state and communitarian. It sought to protect itself against the left and foreign forces by taking refuge under the authority of the state. The center-right Islamic groups stress the significance of community over egoistic individualism. This center-right, along with Islamic groups, has come to regard freedom from the authority of the state as the first goal. By targeting the presence of Islamic values in the public sphere, the February 28 coup attacked the traditional base of the center-right by