

Islam and Religious Education in Turkey

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Abstract

Modern Turkey – a member of NATO and a candidate for membership in the European Union - continues to struggle to find an appropriate balance between religion and state. Turkey offers an excellent case study for those seeking answers to the following questions: Can Islam and democracy coexist? Is Turkey a secular state, is religion separated from the state in Turkey - as it is said in its Constitution: "The Turkish State is a Republic" and is it "a democratic, secular and social state governed by the rule of law ..." (Article 1-2, Constitution of Turkey). Is everybody equal before the law in terms of access to education and labor market, as it is said in the Constitution: "All individuals are equal without any discrimination before the law, irrespective of language, race, color, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such considerations?" (Article 10, Constitution of Turkey). Since the establishment of the Republic in 1923, one of the most controversial and debated issues in Turkey has been the question of religious education. The issue is still topical. The present paper considers teaching religion in Turkey in 3 chronological periods: from 1923 up to 1982; from 1982 to 1995 and from 1995 to 2009. A historic survey is also introduced.

*Keywords: Islam, Religious Education, Turkey,
JEL Classification Codes: I20*

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Introduction

Modern Turkey – a member of NATO and a candidate for membership in the European Union - continues to struggle to find an appropriate balance between religion and state. Turkey offers an excellent case study for those seeking answers to the following questions: Can Islam and democracy coexist? Is Turkey a secular state, is religion separated from the state in Turkey - as it is said in its Constitution: "The Turkish State is a Republic" and is it "a democratic, secular and social state governed by the rule of law ..." (Article 1-2, Constitution of Turkey). Is everybody equal before the law in terms of access to education and labor market, as it is said in the Constitution: "All individuals are equal without any discrimination before the law, irrespective of language, race, color, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such considerations?" (Article 10, Constitution of Turkey).

Since the establishment of the Republic in 1923, one of the most controversial and debated issues in Turkey has been the question of religious education. The issue is still topical.

The present paper considers teaching religion in Turkey in 3 chronological periods: from 1923 up to 1982; from 1982 to 1995 and from 1995 to 2009. A historic survey is also introduced.

Historic Background

Each historical period has the education relevant to it. As a mirror, education reflects all social changes. No essential changes are possible without deep changes in education. Traditional education - transmitted through generations - was spread for a long time in the early Turkish history.

Traditions were preserved and developed in the theocratic Ottoman Empire, where Sultan was Caliph and united civic and spiritual powers.

The Westernization and secularization processes among Turks started much earlier than the Republic and Atatürk's time - it was as early as in the late medieval Ottoman State. First of all the process was revealed in education which was crucial for economic and social changes. The secularization of education was set up on agenda; however the longstanding traditions of religious education were still very strong and viable. (Ergene, 2006)

According to the order (firman) issued by Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) in 1824 primary public (religious) education became obligatory. (Somel, 2001). The importance of the firman laid in the fact that the need for education and significant of being literate were articulated for the first time by an Ottoman sultan. All Muslims had to study their religion and after that the life affairs, - attested the document. By the same

document nobody could study a vocation without passing religious education and receiving permission from the kadi (judge) of Istanbul.

By the order of Sultan Abdul Medjid (1839-1861), who issued Tanzimat Firman (1839), some changes were introduced in education:

1. Liquidation of illiteracy;
2. Education of all levels alongside with vocational education;
3. Education according to religion and world demands;
4. Opening of schools over the country.

This firman appears as the first official document, which considered different levels of education as a whole, while emphasizing the necessity to expand public schools outside Istanbul (Berker, 1945).

In 1869, according to the Regulation of General Education the school system was to be graded. The system of education was organized into primary (sibyan schools and rushdies), secondary (idadis and sultanis), and higher education (darülfünun). Article 27 of the Regulation declared the opening of women's middle schools (inas rushdies) while Article 9 made education in the Ottoman Empire compulsory. The document stressed the promotion of secular knowledge, leaving religion to a secondary position, and for the first time questioned the function of Sibyan schools as a necessary level of religious education. This regulation remained in force, with some modifications, until 1913 (Çelenk, 2009).

In 1913 "Tedrisat-i iptidaye kanun-i muvakkat-i" (Provisional law of initial education) was set up. With different names, that law was in place for a long time. Primary education became obligatory. Junior (iptidaiyeler) and secondary (ru tyeler) schools were united. New schools were opened. The duration of education in the new schools was 6 years.

During the 19th century, since the 40s, there were several attempts to open a university. The university which was opened in 1874 seemed to be more viable. It had three graduations. However it was closed in 1880-81 by the Ministry of Education. In 1900, at 25th anniversary of Ascension of Abdul Hamid II Darülfünun ahane was opened with three faculties: 1. Literature; 2. Natural sciences; 3. Theology. Admission was limited: only 25-30 students were accepted. All was under governmental control. After overthrowing in 1908 the limitation of the student number was removed and education became free of charge. Later universities became more independent financially and administratively. There were already 5 faculties in Istanbul University. In 1914-1919 about 20 German professors, associate professors, and assistants were invited, who brought technical equipment. After 1919 they were forced to leave Turkey. Science was

also incorporated into universities. Instead of classes semesters were set up; faculties were called. The females were accepted to universities starting in 1914. In 1917 females were accepted to the medical faculties. In 1918 groups at the universities were mixed: males and females studied together.

Education in the Republic of Turkey

I period: 1923-1982

a) mono-party politics

After the establishing of the Republic in 1923 Turkishness, as a top priority set up on agenda, was viewed in Westernization, modernization, secularization and alienation from the Islamic past and the rest of the Islamic world. In 1926 Kemalists adopted the Gregorian calendar. Sunday was made a weekly holiday. In 1929 the parliament passed a law introducing the new Turkish (Latin) alphabet. The "National schools" were opened to teach a new alphabet to adults. One of the first laws was the law about the unification of education - *Tevhid-i Tedrisat*, issued in 1924. Duality in the educational system was suspended. The new law resolved unification of science and education, subordinated all educational institutions to the Ministry of Education (*Maarif-i vekalet*), the whole budget for education was assigned to the Ministry of Education.

According to the law issued on 3 March, 1924 madrasas (the total number 479) were closed. Religious courses were deleted from the curricula at high schools in 1924, at middle schools in 1927, and from urban and rural primary schools and teacher training colleges in 1929 and 1930. Such a situation lasted till 1949. Instead of madrasas - *mektepe* "school" became a symbol of Republic. In May 1933 *Dar-ül-Fünun* in Istanbul was closed and was converted into the Istanbul University (the Istanbul University was opened). Attention was paid to the training of teachers; independence in administration of education and science; increasing of the budget of the university.

When the Law of the Unification of Education was accepted, some people advocated that the Qur'anic courses had to be transferred to the Ministry of National Education. However, the first President of Religious Affairs, Rifat Börekçi, tried to open new Qur'anic Courses instead of *Daru'l Kurra*. On 2 April 1925 with the endeavors of Rifat Börekçi and upon the request of fifty deputies, the Turkish government allocated 50.00 Turkish Liras to the Qur'anic Courses for the aim of Qur'an memorization, "*Hafiz-ı Qur'an*". There were ten Qur'anic Courses between the years of 1925-1931, this number dropped to nine in 1932-3 Later (1941-42), their numbers increased to 28. Here, the important thing is not whether their numbers increased or decreased, but whether Qur'anic Courses existed or not. In the academic year of 1934-1935, records show that only one Qur'anic Course continued its educational activities. However, when the democratic process began to appear, the numbers of the Qur'anic Courses began to

meaningfully increase (Baltacı, 1999).

Thus CHP (Republican Popular Party in times of mono-party politics) allowed religious education out of schools, but under the state control. In 1928 the provision that Islam was the religion of the state was deleted from the Constitution.

The six principles or arrows of the party (Republicanism, Nationalism, Populism, Statism, Secularism, Revolutionism/Reformism) were adopted at the Third Party Congress (1931) and later (1937) were placed in the Constitution, the amended Article 2 of which read: "The Turkish State is Republican, Nationalist, Populist, Statist, Secularist and Revolutionary-Reformist."

The most important - but at the same time vulnerable - was secularism in general and secularism in education which is still disputable. Some scholars think that the secularization process is not completed in Turkey. "A country cannot really be called secular when it pays, every month, the salaries of 60000 imams and dictates the contents of their weekly sermons at Friday prayers, sometimes down to the last word," (It is noteworthy that during the early years of the Republic this figure was around five hundred) (Pope N., Pope H. 2004) that "Islam is the most controversial issue to divide the Turkish republic" from 1923. On one side, there were educated people who accepted secular agenda, and on the other side, there were uneducated people who lived in villages and were believers.

Multi-party Politics

The Situation changed in times of the multi-party system (Democrat Party in 1946, Nation Party in 1948, Freedom Party in 1955). The winner of 1950, 1954 elections – DP (Democrat Party) abolished the law prohibiting the use of the Arabic form of the call to prayer (azan); radio and television broadcasting on religious issues was allowed.

Religious instruction in the public schools was restored upon the written request of parents. The status of the religion courses in public schools was constitutionally secured. The title of the course was "The culture of religion and Knowledge of Ethics". After a long debate on the political level, religious education in public schools was introduced not only in primary schools (in 1949), but also in lower secondary schools (in 1956) on a voluntary basis. President İnönü's Republican Party also authorized the creation of a Divinity Faculty (Theology) within Ankara University and the training of imams (religious officials). The first Divinity Faculty in Turkey was established within Ankara University on June 4, 1949. The aim of the Faculty was to conduct teaching and research in the area of Islamic studies and religions in a scholarly way by making use of the scientific methodologies.

During a parliamentary debate on 10 June 1949, Prime Minister Günaltay, a former professor of Islamic theology, Republican People's Party (RPP) chairman, angrily

defended his party's religious credentials, declaring: "I am head of the government, which inaugurated the teaching of religion in elementary schools. I am the head of the government, which inaugurated in this country mam Hatip courses, which teach Muslims how to pray and how to wash the dead. I am head of the government, which opened a Faculty of Theology" (Jenkins, 2008).

On 13, October, 1951 the government decided to open new religious schools. The first schools known as "Imam-Hatip Schools" started to function in Ankara, Adana, Istanbul, Isparta, Konya and Kayseri in 1951-52. The total number of students at these schools was 876. Later, the number of students at these schools increased in parallel with the increasing number of schools. Imam-Hatip Schools were opened as a four-year secondary school, following a five-year primary school. Later, a three-year section for high school was opened (Ocal, 2007). Some five thousand mosques were built between 1950 and 1960, approximately the same figure given by the National Ministry of Education for the construction of new public schools in the same period. With the coming of Democratic Party in the year 1949-1950, this number of Qur'anic courses increased. Religious publications reappeared. Religious associations prohibited in 1938, began to be founded.

The socialist Mehmed Ali Aybar noted: "This party which has boasted so far about its revolutionism and secularism has found salvation by embracing religion at the most critical juncture of its life" (Feroz, 2002). Menderes was even ready to restore Caliphate, as he said in the Parliament. Nevertheless the country still was secular. The universities were granted administrative autonomy. The press laws were liberalized.

However when the chief editor of the newspaper "Vatan" (the supporter of secularism) was wounded, the government decided to forbid the interference of religion in the state affairs and politics. In 1954 Nation Party was closed down for violating the principles of secularism.

Military Coups and Education

In 1960, on May 27 military coup was carried out and Menderes government was overthrown. "Desire to bring an end to the exploitation of religion for political and private purposes" couldn't be carried out. The second clause of the Constitution adopted in 1961 stated that "No person shall be allowed to exploit and abuse religion or religious feelings or sacred things in any manner whatsoever for the purposes of political or personal benefit or for gaining power, or even partially basing the fundamental social, economic, political and legal order of the state on religious ground". However just from 1961 the spread of Islam among the people started and some scholars consider that as the time as "Islamic revival". Religious education was introduced in 1967 for upper secondary school still on a voluntary basis. Anyway Islamists started to establish parties only in the 70s.

The Presidency of Religious Affairs was set up in 1925, which was never closed and controlled religious education in Turkey.

After several changes in the Law (1935, 1939, 1950, 1955) concerning the status of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, a new law, Article 633, was enacted relating to its establishment and duties on 22 June 1965. Item 7 of this new law gave the duty of administration and executive powers of the Qur'anic Courses to the Presidency of Religious Affairs in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education. In order to execute its duties, the Presidency of Religious Affairs prepared "Special Instructions for the Qur'anic Teaching Courses" in 1965. When the Justice Party came to power in 1965, the number of the Qur'anic Courses began to increase very rapidly and reached 621 in 1966-67, 786 in 1971 when another military coup took place. The number of the Qur'anic Courses continued to go up from that date. Their count became 1538 in the 1978-1979 academic year (Kilavuz, 2009).

The Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University has progressed several stages since its establishment. The Faculty provided a four-year program until 1972-73. Between the years 1972 and 1982, a five-year program was adopted with the last two years for specialization in majors "Tafsir and Hadith" and "Theology and Philosophy." In 1971, Faculty of Islamic Sciences, Istanbul Higher Islamic Institute was established by the Ministry of National Education. Following it, other similar institutes were established in Konya, Kayseri, Izmir, Erzurum, Bursa, Samsun, and Yözü (Yurdagül, 2007).

As a rule Islamic organizations supported center-right parties. In October 1972 the Islamists were allowed to form National Salvation Party (1972-81). The party's goals were: compulsory secondary education, including of religion in curricula, restoration of Caliphate. Their voters were lower-middle class. The party (National Salvation Party) was against of the Common Market and exhorted for closer relations with Muslim countries. They believed that the Ottoman Empire was destroyed by Westernization process and alienation from Islam. Regardless of their anti-secular agenda after the elections in 1973, during the 70s Islamic parties were frequently in coalition with secularists (Bullent Ejevit, Suleiman Demirel). As a result Islamists were promoted to the high positions and number of mosques, or Imam-Hatip schools, courses of Qur'an or related personnel increased.

Two decisions of Education and Training have a positive effect on the future of the Imam-Hatip Schools. One decision (number 632, November 28, 1975) recognized the Imam-Hatip Schools' equivalency to regular high school IHS diplomas since then having read "Senior High and the Imam-Hatip Schools. Consequently, IHS graduates became eligible for admission to national universities. The other decision (number 394, August 25, 1974) introduced Qur'an, Arabic language, and religion courses into the junior high curriculum. Thus, the IHS junior high division was reinstated and IHS education was once again a seven year program. In 1975, the course was extended to the third (last) grade of

the high schools. Since 1975, the IHS graduates have successfully entered diverse majors in the national universities: Theology, Education, Economics, and Public Administration, Engineering, Medicine, Law and Political Sciences.

Once again the military forces intervened in the processes in 1980, September 12. In fall, 1981 all political parties were closed down. In November, the Law on Higher Education was adopted. Its main aim was purges of the universities from the leftists and non-loyal elements.

II Period (1982-1995)

Article 24 of the new Constitution (1982) made religious education compulsory in schools, thus deviated from the article 19 of the 1961 Constitution, according to which religious instruction was optional. Article 24 of the new Constitution said: "Education and instruction in religion and ethics (morals) shall be conducted under State supervision and control. Instruction in religious culture and moral education shall be compulsory in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Other religious education and instruction shall be subject to the individual's own desire and the in case of minors, at the request of their legal representatives". Thus, like other courses, two credit hours from the fourth to eighth grades and one credit course for high school students per week have become compulsory. Religion teachers taught most of those courses. The title of the course was, "The Culture of Religion and Knowledge of Ethics".

That step was made for de-politicizing of population. It was stuck in confrontation of left-right movements. The number of theocratic educational institutions increased. 7 Imam-Hatib schools in 1951 multiplied to 384 in 1989. Natural sciences were taught in a lyceum. But when lessons in English, History or Geography were missed, religion was taught instead. Imams and Hatips got a permission to continue education in universities.

By the Law of Higher Educational Council, in 1982, Islamic institutes were made as parts of the universities, which were located in the same cities, as the respective Faculties of Divinity. New Divinity Schools continued to be established under the administration of various universities. In the 1990s new faculties of theologies continued to be opened and the number of these faculties reached 24.

After the military coup of 12 September 1980, the number of Qur'anic Courses increased regularly and reached 5241 in the academic year of 1996-1997. During this time, not only did the number of the Qur'anic Courses increase but also the students attending them. In 1989, according to the University Exam Centre statistics, 22% of IHS (Imam-Hatip schools) applicants were admitted to Universities. The ratio of admission was 22 % (21 male and female) compared with regular high school at 23% (excluding private and special schools).

After 1990 the rate of growth of Imam-Hatip schools began to increase once again. In fact, that increase was the result of opening new sections or branches within existing schools, as after the 1980 military coup the opening new schools was forbidden. The ratio of female students attending these schools rose dramatically despite the fact that females cannot become imams. By 1995, 13,826 females compared to 29,103 males had graduated from Imam-Hatip schools.

III Period (1995-2009)

Islamists in Power

In 1983 Welfare Party was created, which was not allowed to participate in elections. The party was back to politics only in 1987, however couldn't overcome 10% barrier. In 1994 the party won, in 1995 Erbakan became a prime minister. Normally Islamic party members are law-abiding citizens. However in the 90-s attacks at distinguished secularists inspired by fundamentalists and supported from outside took place in the 90-s. When finally the editor of newspaper Cumhuriyet U ur Mumcu was assassinated (1993), the country as a whole rose up. Demonstrators in Istanbul and Ankara protested against terrorism and fundamentalism.

With the collapse of the coalition government of the Islamist Welfare Party and the moderate True Path Party in June 1997, a new coalition government excluding the Welfare Party was formed. Despite much controversy, with tremendous pressure from the military, Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, the first Islamist Prime Minister of Turkey, reluctantly had to sign the memorandum that approved the eight-year compulsory education. According to the decision of February 28, 1997, 8 year education became obligatory that was a blow to religious schools and fighting against fundamentalism was proclaimed. Atatürk principles were proclaimed inviolable, confrontation between secularists and non-secularists - inadmissible, as secularism was not only defense of regime that was defense of peace and order.

In the elections of 2002 AKP (the ruling Party of Justice and Development) was the first. The party stood for rapprochement with the West and membership of EU. They believe that Islam and democracy can coexist. Tamed inflation, rapid economy growth, deregulation of economy, reducing of state sector, openness to foreign investors support liberalism and democracy.

In Turkey, education stages were reorganized starting the academic year 1997-1998: Eight years for basic education and three years for secondary education. Along with the introduction of the new education reform bill, Imam-Hatip schools graduates lost their rights to enter employment in several state bodies, such as the police force and the army. The question whether the graduates of Imam Hatip religious schools should be able to enter non-religious faculties in universities is still disputable. In 1997, the middle

schools of the Imam-Hatip schools were abolished and they became three-year high schools, with one year of preparatory classes. Before that time, the students would go to the Qur'anic Courses when they graduated from the fifth grade, with this new law, they would go only after their completion of the eighth grade. As a result of this alteration, the number the Qur'anic Courses dramatically dropped to 3,852 in the academic year of 2003-2004. Qur'an courses were taught 32 weeks a year and 3 hours a day. They were also summer courses for the boys and the girls separately. Higher education was not obligatory for the teachers who were the graduates of Imam Hatip schools and for those who had experience of working as Hafiz. Some teachers were recruited without passing exams. The teachers of Qur'an passed exams holding by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The teachers had to instruct reading of Qur'an, the students had to learn by heart some excerpts which were needed for namaz. The textbooks were published and recommended by the Ministry. In times of Ramadan the students of those institutions had to fulfill function of muftis. They had to secure order in dormitories and outside, discharge other duties. They had to know Qur'an very well and transmit their knowledge to the others (Kilavuz, 2009).

According to the published lists, the number of the students as well as teachers increased. In 2000 only 8,3% of teachers had higher education, the rest were with the secondary education. Attention in teaching was paid to connection between religion and ethics, religion and person, religion and society, religion and other disciplines.

The courses at Imam-Hatip schools consist of vocational, cultural and scientific classes. While the ratio of professional or religious courses is 40%, the ratio of cultural and scientific courses is 60%. This 60% ratio is composed of the same courses that are found on the curriculum of general high schools. Thus, the 40% religious or vocational courses are additional courses.

The present program of the Imam-Hatip Schools is as follows: 1. Vocational or religious courses; 2. Cultural and scientific courses.

Vocational or religious courses: The Qur'an, Arabic, Commentary on the Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic Law, Islamic Theology, the Life of Muhammad, the History of Religions, and Religious Rhetoric.

Cultural and scientific courses: Turkish Language, Philosophy, History, History of Science, Geography, Science, Mathematics, Geometry, Trigonometry, Geology, Astronomy and Space Sciences, Advanced Sciences (Physics-Chemistry-Biology), Computer, Science and Technology, Foreign Languages (English-French-Germany), Physical Education, Music, Art, the History of the Republic, National Security, plus other courses. Although the majority of the cultural and scientific courses are compulsory, some of them are optional (Ocal, 2007).

Currently, religious education courses begin at the 4th grade of a primary school and continue throughout secondary and high schools. From the 4th to the 8th grades, classes consist of two hours per week. At the high school level, there is one hour of class per week. One can conclude that this subject matter that is taught at Turkish schools is not considered an Islamic Educational class. It is an informative class that comprises Religious culture and general moral principles. The curricula encompass information about different religions, at the forefront Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. But Islam forms the greater portion of the curriculum contents. Teaching of non-Muslim religious was frequently considered on the scholarly literature (Kaymakan, 1999). The Curricula were organized in a manner such that it took multiculturalism into consideration. It also comprises national issues. The existing curricula express the secular nature of the state and the inclination of the curricula authors (Akbulut and Usal, 2008).

Thus, a student who has graduated from high school receives 8 continuous years of religion courses. There are no fixed books for the course. Rather, each school decides which book to follow—provided that the book for each level is approved by the Ministry of Education. Nearly half of the content of these courses are concerns religion and Islam with remaining topics ranging from secularism to humanism and from ethical values to etiquette. The major world religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism are included in the content of the course. However not everybody is satisfied by level of teaching of them. All textbooks contain five main themes: 1. The major world religions; the history of Islam and the life of Prophet Muhammad; 3. The ways to perform Islamic rituals; 4. The role of religion in Turkish History; 5. Islamic Ethics and good manners.

Some Alewi groups (about 25% in Turkey – supporters of Kemalists, referred to as Islamic Protestants, believing that women are equal to men) demand that Alewi Islam must also be included in curriculum and textbooks. By the summer of 2008, just before the start of a new education year, the Ministry of Education added some basic concepts of Alewism in a religious course book for the 12th grade. Some people are not satisfied by them. Only offered at 12th grade, the total pages devoted to Alewism (five pages) and the interpretation of the Alewi concepts, clearly show an utmost reluctance to provide objective and satisfactory information about Alewism (Akbulut and Usal, 2008).

Religious education curriculum for primary school changed in the late 2000. In line with this new religious education curriculum, new textbooks are issued for religious education in September 2002 by the Ministry of National Education and private sectors. The new religious education curriculum for primary level supports the teaching of non-Islamic religions, and the purpose of teaching them is explained in the new curriculum like thus: "By gaining basic knowledge and understanding other religions by pupils, they will contribute to the development of more tolerant attitudes towards the followers of other religions". Moreover, it places great emphasis on the importance of teaching other

religions to contribute the creation of peace culture and tolerance in a globalizing world.

There have been recent efforts to improve the status of religious education in the public schools. The Ministry of Education has a specific department under the title, "The General Directory of Education of Religion." This department is involved with the implementation and development of the content of the course. In addition, The Divinity School of Ankara University has started a new program to train field (religion) teachers for public schools. There is ongoing cooperation between the Directory and divinity schools in order to develop a program for the instruction of religion which is open to contemporary theoretical developments and is sensitive to the practical needs of the society.

Today there are certain courses that are compulsory for all the curricula across institutions for a minimum of two semesters. These are the Turkish language, a foreign language course, Ataturk's principles, and the history of the Turkish reforms where the concept of Turkish secularism is part of the syllabus.

The third period of the evolution of education (1995-2009) in Turkey is characterized by increasing number of faculties of Divinity in the state universities. The Higher Learning Institute made a new arrangement for the faculties of theology in 1997. According to this new arrangement, the faculties of theology were divided into two programs: The program of Undergraduate Theology and the Program of Primary Schools Teachers for the course in the "Culture of Religion and Knowledge of Ethics".

The divinity undergraduate program has three departments with various major scientific areas: 1. Department of Basic Islamic Sciences; 2. Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies; 3. Department of Islamic History and Islamic Arts.

The Department of Basic Islamic Sciences consists of the following disciplines: 1. Tafsir; 2. Hadith; 3. Islamic Law; 4. Theology; 5. Islamic Sects; 6. Mysticism; 7. Arabic Language and Rhetoric.

The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies consists of the following disciplines: 1. History of Philosophy; 2. Islamic Philosophy; 3. Philosophy of Religion; 4. Logic; 5. History of Religion; 6. Sociology of Religion; 7. Psychology of Religion; 8. Education of Religion.

The Department of Islamic History and Islamic Arts consists of the following disciplines: 1. Islamic History; 2. History of Turkish-Islamic Arts; 3. Turkish-Islamic Literature; 4. Turkish Religious Music (Yurdagul, 2007).

Students are instructed on various issues concerning Islamic History, such as institution of Islamic historiography, sources of Islam, the periods of the Prophet Mohammed, and Turkish-Muslim states their institutions, culture and civilization. In this program with courses of history, religions, relations among religions, their similarities

and differences are considered with comparative methods.

Postgraduate education in the area of divinity is offered within the organization of the universities, Institute of social Sciences.

Headscarf Issue

In times of Atatürk the women achieved political parity with the men on paper. However achieving parity in reality took time. For instance although success of WP (Welfare Party) was caused by female activities they didn't participate in political life, since the main function of females by the party members' perception was family. Complaints about discrimination of females on the different levels are not rare at present. Disparity in education in reality is evident as well. One obstacle for getting education for females was ban on headscarves in universities or other public buildings. An important step for overcoming this drawback (lack) was the debates about headscarves.

On 7 December 1981, the Prime Ministry issued a list of regulations which required all personnel and students in institutions of higher education to wear "clothing which is compatible with Atatürk's revolution and principles" and explicitly stated that all university students must "not cover their heads while inside the institution." However, some universities simply chose to ignore the new rule and allowed girls in headscarves to continue attending classes. On 20 December 1982, the regulations were reissued by the Council of Ministers as a "Communiqué on Appearance and Clothing." The communiqué came into effect on 10 January 1983. This time the ban was enforced (Jenkins, 2008). Police were posted at the entrances to university campuses and many girls with headscarves were forced to abandon their classes. Many people see the decision as a reflection of the nation's partisan politics. The Republican People's Party called the verdict a "triumph of justice," while the Justice and Development Party, a group with roots in Islam, defended the scarves as a matter of individual rights. Consequently, many families send their children abroad for university education. The Prime Ministry, Tayyip Erdogan, said that he had two girls and they were going to universities in the United States because of the scarf problem. This rule decreases the enrolment rates of girls in Turkey (Cino lu, 2006).

Regulations issued by Supreme Educational Council (YÖK) in 13.01.1985 didn't comprise any restriction on students clothing. In the late 80s female students started to ignore the ban. Prime-Minister Özal's ANAP (the Motherland Party, formerly known as ANAP) made it legally acceptable to wear the headscarves. The parliament issued the law attesting: "According the acting law of YOK (Yüksek O renim Kurumlar) the clothing of the students is free". The Constitutional Court was forced to accept that decision. Thus the ban on headscarves was abolished and university rectors were given the right to decide. However since that time the females with headscarves mostly were not

accepted. In 1988, October 12 was adopted Law No: 3511, by which clothing had to be modern. In 1989 Constitutional law abolished law which permitted such females to study at the universities. [07.03.1989 by No 1989/1 and No 1989/12 decisions]. In 1998, the High Board of Education (YÖK) reinstated the ban and advised all universities follow it since the non-obedient presidents would be dismissed. The issue became once again topical since the AKP is in power (Tank, 2005).

On 9 February 2008, Turkey's parliament approved a constitutional amendment that lifted the ban on Islamic headscarves in universities.

The Parliament amended two articles of the constitution in order to create the constitutional framework for the lifting of the ban in universities. Article 10, on Equality Before the Law, (All individuals are equal without any discrimination before the law, irrespective of language, race, color, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such considerations) was amended by adding to its last sentence, . . . "and in benefitting from all public services." Article 42, on Right and Duty of Training and Education, was amended by adding the statement, "No one can be deprived of the right to receive higher education for reasons not openly mentioned by laws. The limits of the use of this right will be determined by law." Prior to this date, the public ban on headscarves officially extended to students on university campuses throughout Turkey. Nevertheless, according to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007*, "some faculty members permitted students to wear head coverings in class" (Turkey, 2008, March 11).

On 5 June 2008, Turkey's Constitutional Court annulled the parliament's proposed amendment intended to lift the headscarf ban, ruling that removing the ban would run counter to official secularism. While the highest court's decision to uphold the headscarf ban cannot be appealed (AP 7 June 2008), the government has nevertheless indicated that it is considering adopting measures to weaken the court's authority.

The last debates were solved in such a way: students can have headscarves but not their teachers. But only 30% of the universities supported that decision.

The followers of Said Nursi (was born in 1876) opposed secularists but strongly supported education. By their perception state officials had to be educated and trustworthy.

In the 90s Fethullah Gulen's followers showed up. They tried to combine Islam and democracy, oppose Islamic radicalism, and support Statehood Bridge Secularist and Islamists. Gullen's followers were in the army, police, military lyceum and they studied in police colleges. For this group education is a priority. The followers of Gulen open schools in different countries and universities, which are secular (Zahir, 2008, March 27; Balci, 2003; Solbery, 2005; Ay, 2004).

Conclusion

During the 19th - first half of the 20th c., the process of increasing secularization is traceable in the Ottoman State and Republic of Turkey. In times of the Republic, a big part of the society was alienated from the state, since radical secularism policy was not acceptable for the majority, who never stopped their attempts to be equal members of the community and participants in the leadership.

From the second half of the 20th c., after establishing a multi-party system there was a military coup to reinstate secularism 4 times. Each time it resulted in more liberalism in teaching religion and giving more rights to the Islamists. It helped to integrate the people who remained marginal and out of the main stream for a long time, no matter that integration was determined by the wish to attract the voters - a big part of which were believers. If religious courses were allowed as elective after 1949 step by step, after the military coup in 1980 those courses became obligatory. Graduates of the faith schools were admitted to universities not only to Divinity faculty, but to other departments as well. Just in times of WP (1997) access to universities was closed by signing a decision about 8 year compulsory education. Admittance to the other faculties for graduates of faith schools is currently under consideration.

The state secures teaching religion on all level, controlling curricula and textbooks through Presidency of Religious Affairs, President of which is a civic servant with a wage from the government.

In such a situation the perception that the project of secularism or the process of dividing the state and religion in Turkey is not completed yet (Çelenk, 2008) and is partly acceptable. Gender equality as well as equality in accessibility to universities and labor market makes us more optimistic about future. However, important steps are being made in this direction.

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