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Restructuring State-Society Relations under the Rule of the AKP through Diplomacy

AKP Yönetimi Altında Diplomasi Yolu ile Devlet Toplum İlişkilerinin Yeniden Yapılandırılması

Shaimaa Magued¹

Abstract

Unlike his predecessors, the AKP refused to be at the crossroads between Secularism and Islamism as two ideological antonyms by restructuring the State-society relations. The efforts of conciliation on the national scene are not enough in integrating politics and alleviating polarization between these two antagonistic tendencies. The simultaneous recourse to a balanced diplomacy is then considered as an effective means in ensuring stability, transcending the establishment resistance and normalizing the Turkish politics through the reformulation of the centre and the acceptance of the marginalized groups as legitimate actors both on the domestic and the external levels.

Keywords: *AKP, State-Society Relations, Secularism, Turkish Politics, Foreign Policy.*

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Özet

Kendinden önce gelenlerin aksine, AKP birbirine ideolojik olarak zıt olan Sekülerizm ve İslamizm arasında kesişme noktası olmayı devlet-toplum ilişkilerini yeniden yapılandırarak reddetmektedir. Ulusal sahne üzerindeki uzlaşma çabaları siyasi bütünleşmede ve bu iki zıt eğilim arasındaki kutuplaşmayı hafifletmede yeterli olmamaktadır. Dengeli bir diplomasiye eş zamanlı başvuru, istikrarın sağlanmasında, kuruluş direncinin aşılmasında ve Türk siyasetinin, merkezin yeniden formüle edilmesi yoluyla hem iç hem de dış düzeyde marjinal grupların meşru aktörler olarak kabulü yoluyla normalleşmesinde etkili bir araç olarak kabul edilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: AKP, Devlet-Toplum İlişkileri, Sekülerizm (Laiklik), Türk Siyaseti, Yabancı Politika.

Introduction

Political history has been illustrated as a continuous competition between Secularism and Islamism in terms of defining the nature of the ruling system and the State-Society relations. Therefore, the literature emphasizes the binary division between Secularism and Islamism as a dichotomy that can't be conciliated in the elite's cognitive system and political reference.² This article tries to show that the evolution of the Turkish history manifests a permanent attempt to harmonize between these two spheres of identification that reached its peak under the rule of the AKP.³ Our arguments are based on the examination of the ruling party's foreign policy as a conventional tool in confirming and strengthening the state's secular and western character since 1923. The reconsideration of the Kemalist definition of Secularism and the integration of the Islamic values and conservative actors without violating the rational and modern mechanisms of the State's institutions constitute the pillars of a new Turkey. Therefore, this ideological metamorphosis on the national sphere is analyzed through the AKP's orientations on the external level.

In light of the leadership impact on the State's foreign policy, self-perception, identity and national interests, there is a strong relationship between the elite change and the regime transformation (Ataman, 2002: 2). In Turkey, the traditional elite endorsed the Kemalism foundations in running the internal and external affairs. The military, the bureaucrats, the political parties and TUSIAD are the main actors who maintained their practices compatible with the Kemalist ideology in their fields of action. As the ultimate expression of Western determinism on the external level, the Turkish foreign policy has followed the Kemalist paradigm in defining its goals and guidelines in accordance with the

² Ziya Onis, Hakan Yavuz, Nilufer Gole, Binnaz Toprak, Pinar Bilgin and Muhittin Ataman are the main authors who developed an analysis on the Turkish politics based on this dichotomy. They distinguished between the traditional Kemalist elite who occupy the center and the conservative one that is permanently marginalized and confined to the periphery since the declaration of the Turkish Republic.

³ Philip Robins has already underlined the harmonization process between the center and the periphery in his writings since 2002 where he emphasized the arrival of the AKP as the starting point of a possible co-habitation between the secular elite and the conservative one, notably the AKP which he refers to as a post-Islamic party. While Robins shed light on a possible coexistence between two antagonist elites, this article defies the aforementioned literature by denying the existence of two kinds of dichotomy: the secular/conservative and the Arab-Islamic countries/West. Accordingly, the conciliation between contradictions led to the emergence of a new elitist configuration where no difference exists between the center and the periphery neither the foreign policy orientations towards the West or the Muslim neighborhood. Besides, it should be noted that Islamism and Kemalism were not two opposing antithesis on the domestic scene. Rather interaction and co-optation determine the relationship between the two visions since the State has used Islam through the establishment of the Diyanet and the acceptance of the ruling of some conservative parties like the ANAP which incarnated the demands of Islamic groups. In this regard, it is a process of accommodation and permanent exchange between Islamism and Kemalism.

systemic and national developments. In light of its inability to pursue Turkic and pan-Islamic policies, the Turkish elite developed a one-dimensional foreign policy to ensure the State independence and development (Karaosmanoglu, 2004: 14). To achieve these goals, Turkey has taken a distance from the Middle East for security reasons and others related to the prevention of its derogation from the modernization path once it becomes active in an unstable neighborhood (Keyman and Icduygu, 2003: 226).

On the other hand, the conservative elite defended a different vision of development than that advocated by the Kemalists and manifested an attachment to the Islamic civilization and identity. Thus, it refused the secularization process as a constitutional order and an ideology that allowed the traditional elite to maintain their authorities against Islamic forces (speech Erdogan in Kabul, 2009, in the United Nations, 2009, in New York, 2009 and in Qatar, 2010). According to Andrew Mango, the Kemalist regime has reached its limits in achieving development by manifesting a governance crisis related to the institutionalization of authoritarianism as the sole means to protect the republican principles. Therefore, while it is important that Turkey remains secular, it is essential that it goes beyond the establishment's oppressive practices (Mango, 2000: 50).

Secularism in the AKP Political Discourse

The restructuring of the Turkish political system and its center on the practical and cognitive levels is visibly manifested under the rule of the AKP through its political discourse. Being supported by the conservative bourgeoisie, the party has reformulated the political center in accordance with the society's interests as articulated by the newly emerging socioeconomic elite (Erdogan's speech in Yavuz, 2006). Such a change incited the bureaucratic apparatus to be subordinated to the citizens' demands instead of being an instrument of social domination. Thus, the AKP discourse is a form of relaxation of the State apparatus in terms of allowing the opening of the center and preventing its perpetuation as an exclusion mechanism.

In light of the center right and leftist parties' failure in solving the economic crisis in the 90s, the AKP managed to unify the different segments of the electorate.⁴ By transcending the Kemalist rigid center, restructuring Turkey's

⁴ The party's economic performance in terms of reducing inflation, achieving a growth rate of 12%, increasing investor's confidence in the stability of the Turkish economy and regulating the bank structure has increased

Islamic identity and abandoning the anti-Western rhetoric of the conservative movements, the party managed to align with the globalization exigencies and increased the masses' freedom. Being the mayor of Istanbul in the 90s, Erdogan's experience allowed him to formulate a pragmatic policy geared towards solving everyday problems and the society well-being without resorting to religion as a political tool. Accordingly, he transposed this local practice to the political center without confronting the State or highlighting the ideological antagonism between Islamism and Secularism. The conservative figures were able to end corruption and poverty through the mobilization of informal networks that played an important role in the implementation of various projects at the local level.

According to some academics, such as Serif Mardin, the arrival of the AKP manifests the Kemalist system success in controlling the role of Islam in the public sphere (Duran, 2010: 42).⁵ In this sense, the AKP represents a paradox in the Turkish political system in light of its conservative basis that in spite of being marginalized by the Kemalists managed to consolidate its position.⁶ The implementation of the European Union reforms and other imposed by the IMF⁷, the management of the Iraqi crisis and the Cypriot issue allowed the AKP to increase its legitimacy and diversify its external relations. In light of its balancing strategy between the Kemalists and the Islamic trends, the AKP illustrates a turning point in the Turkish political history. Its pursuit of accession to the European Union has reformulated the political scene by eliminating the self division that has always marked the elite's mentality in its conduct on the internal and external levels. The AKP, historically and psychologically

the credibility of the AKP. Moreover, the party was effective in fighting corruption through legal reforms and the allocation of credits to small and medium enterprises in order to reduce the gap between them and large firms.

⁵ The terms center and periphery, borrowed from Serif Mardin and restated by Dimitri Keridis in its analysis of Turkish politics in terms of dualities and antitheses, reflects the ongoing interaction that occurs between the Kemalist ideology and the promoters of an order inspired by socio-political values and religious norms.

⁶ Secularism and territorial integrity are considered as security issues that must be defended by the army as they are the pillars of Kemalism, the essence of the Turkish State. The defense of Kemalism is considered as a moral and a legal responsibility that involves not only a limitation of religion's role in public affairs but also controls religion in the private sphere. In this sense, the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Diyanet, was created to control the process of cultural and religious socialization in line with the Kemalist principles.

⁷ There is a convergence between TUSIAD and MUSIAD with respect to the performance of the Turkish government in terms of the economic performance, the fiscal discipline, the control of inflation and the process of accession to the European Union. The structural difference between them is the main reason for their difference vis-à-vis the IMF program in light of the small and medium enterprises of MUSIAD which requires more flexibility in the banking system in order to have access to the State credit and resources. In contrast, the large companies of TUSIAD had a positive vision towards the reforms because they guarantee economic stability.

associated with the Islamic political tradition and identified as a Conservative Democrat party, adopts a speech that manifests a disruption with the religious dogma whose elements were discarded in favor of pragmatic orientations. Islamic groups, following the postmodern coup, have agreed to develop a more flexible approach towards the West (Yavuz, 2006: 312). The resistance faced by the conservative elite throughout the Turkish history led to the reformulation of its Islamic identity through their orientation towards the European Union in order to ensure democratization and openness for the marginalized masses (Keyman and Icduygu, 2003: 231). The party's political identity reflects the universal values and the traditional Kemalist principles in a liberal conservative synthesis inspired by the Islamic civilization. Thus, according to Omer Caha, the party initiated an identity transformation process in a "local approach" oriented towards globalization that, despite its rejection of the Islamic State option, emphasizes values and concepts related to Islam.

In light of the vagueness of the notion of "Conservative Democrats", in terms of positioning vis-à-vis the State and the society, the foreign policy has contributed to the conciliation between Islam and modernism as well as progressivism and conservatism internally. It compensates for the party's inability to reach a consensus with the Kemalist elite in the formulation of the political culture. Accordingly, the party has transposed its conciliatory nature and political ideology to the external level by the development of multidimensional and simultaneous relations with Western and Arab/Muslim countries to assert an existing harmony between Muslims and the West (Erdogan's speech in Washington, 2004). The ideological transformation of the Islamic movements was manifested by the party's attitude in foreign policy where leaders abandoned anti-Western and Islamic rhetoric. Erdogan denounced the religious character of the D8 and endorsed the OIC in order to manifest an affirmed will to develop relations with Western countries without neglecting the Muslim world. Similarly, Gul added that the Turkish diplomacy manifests the party's ability to reconcile their Muslim identity and religious traditions with the universal principles of democracy, human rights, transparency and secularism (Gul's speech in Washington, 2005 and Erdogan's speech in Washington, 2009).

Therefore, the AKP, being devoted to the promotion of human rights, modified the balance of power on the national scene in favor of the civilians as a result of the weakening of the military and the adoption of the legal reforms imposed by the European Union. Besides, the feeling of insecurity engendered by the refusal of the Islamic identity of the party and the political exclusion of some Islamic

figures like Erbakan and Erdogan led the AKP to adopt a defensive strategy that enabled it to obtain popular support and to build alliances with secular and modern sectors. This normalization of internal politics from the ideological polarization, either by Kemalism or Political Islam, allowed the party's leadership, both internally and externally, to advocate for "democratic conservatism" to realize its electorate's well being.

In this regard, the bureaucratic elite has no longer the monopoly on the policy formulation in the name of the Republic protection and the defense of its secular principles (Carkoglu, 2006: 65). Thus, the adoption of a democratic and liberal discourse led to the emergence of a new concept of security and national interest that reversed the political lexicon of the traditional elite and interrupted arbitrary interventions. The Turkish national security became multidimensional by including economic factors, educational and cultural demands, the pursuit of democratization and securing natural resources in addition to military concerns (Metinoglu, 2009: 71).

The AKP strengthened its position by confirming its liberal tendency and engaging into various causes like the Human Rights' issues, the safeguard of pluralism and cultural identity as well as the empowerment of the civil society and the private sector that constituted the main themes of its political campaign in 2002 (the party's election program of 2002). It follows that the increase of its legitimacy among the secular milieu and the rejection of the military authoritarianism and the Western determinism justified by arguments relying on the Turkish politics specificities.⁸

A series of reform packages were introduced by the parliament, since January 2003, enforcing the right of association, the prohibition of torture and the closure of political parties, the cancellation of the Act of terrorism and the limitation of the National Security Council authorities (Altunisik, 2009: 182). In April 2004, further constitutional amendments were related to the release of the Higher Education Council from the military domination and the ban of the death penalty and the State Security Courts. This line of modernization adopted by the AKP in conformity with the Copenhagen criteria has legitimized the AKP at the grassroots level where 70% are for a full membership and among civil circles

⁸ This is a manipulation of the modernization process that was selectively implemented by the Kemalists in the name of the Turkish specificity which mutilated democratization and national development. By contrast, the AKP represents a direct relation between modernization and foreign policy in terms of alleviating the exclusive Kemalist model.

like TUSIAD, some media associations, intellectuals as well as other nongovernmental organizations.

Beyond the Secularism vs. Islamism Antagonism

Although the AKP is devoid of an ideological motivation in its political activity, it adopts the Ottoman past as a tool of inspiration to enhance his vision. The use of the Ottoman legacy allows the party to balance its external behavior while approaching Arabs alongside the pursuit of accession to the European Union (Gul's speech in London in 2005). This legacy plays the ideology role in the formulation of the political ethics of the party and the definition of national interest beyond territorial integrity and State survival. The foreign policy changes have affected the formulation of the national interest that became more inclusive than the Kemalists' version. The AKP perception of globalization has introduced a new conception of national interest based on the development of relations with the Muslim World and the West as complementary dimensions in ensuring Turkey's regional role and global position. In this regard, the AKP has shown a disruption with the binary division between Islamism and Secularism in its foreign policy. By adopting a pragmatic and conciliatory speech and internalizing Western liberal values, the party has relegated the confrontation with Kemalism beyond the national sphere (Duran, 2006: 45).

This line of conduct allowed Turkey to approach Arab countries by developing economic and trade relations with them and exceeding the psychological gap to achieve prosperity and fulfill the interests of the party's socioeconomic basis (Onis, 2006: 58). On the other hand, the AKP considers Turkey's accession to the European Union as a natural result of modernization (Acikmese and Aydin, 2007: 21). The instrumentalization of the accession process ensures the party's survival and the deployment of an assertive diplomacy with neighbors. The AKP's style reconsiders the modernization path in order to allow the urbanized masses to coexist on an equal footing with the Kemalists at the center on the economic, political and social levels. A kind of synergy was created between the AKP's proactive policy on the external level and the reforms undertaken on the domestic level that promoted its position and legitimized its foreign policy in line with the official ideology of the State. Although the rapprochement with Arab States increased the distrust of some secular milieu vis-à-vis the AKP especially with the freezing of the accession negotiations in 2006, the party managed to deemphasize its Islamic nature by adopting a pragmatic policy that denies the dichotomy between Islamism and Secularism (Terzi, 2010: 39).

Accordingly, the AKP manifests continuity with the traditional line of the Turkish diplomacy by according importance to the modernization process and strengthening ties with the United States and the European Union while maintaining common interests with its neighborhood (Onis and Turem, 2001: 112). The Kemalist adage is thus pursued in accordance with national and international exigencies within a clear policy based on multi-dimensionality, multilateralism and pro-activism in achieving a stable and peaceful surrounding (Gul's speech in Kuwait, 2004). The Europeanization of the Turkish foreign policy, especially vis-à-vis the Middle East and the Arab/Muslim world, allows Turkey to dismiss the clash of civilizations theory. Thus, the will to pursue accession to the European Union is a method to increase the opportunity for the expression of a political, cultural and ethnic diversity. The borrowing of a modernization discourse once adopted by the Kemalists, while relating it to the adopted reforms will transform the internal politics and "eliminate the roots of the September 12th regime " according to Ahmet Insel (Onis, 2009: 27). Hence, the party started with questions related to the State political identity such as the Kurdish problem, the headscarf issue and the dominance of the military on the decision making process as a requirement of the legal harmonization package (Walker, 2009: 46).

After the post-modern coup of February 1997, the intellectual, business and political circles have debated the re-conceptualization of Turkey's alliance with the West and the State-Society relations. It is at this point of time that Islamic groups have adopted a new political discourse, both internally and externally by emphasizing the need to adapt to the domestic situation to avoid their restriction. The corollary of Sherif Mardin's argument, advanced by Hakan Yavuz, states that the AKP's adaptation to the national exigencies manifests its inability to cope with the system, as a conservative party which, for fear of assuming the same fate of his predecessors, denies its religious roots (Yavuz, 2006: 41). Thus, by concealing its Islamic character and refraining from formulating political arguments based on religion, the AKP is a post-Islamic party that engages in the political process to serve its electorate. In this sense, the nature of the party is the result of the globalization process where political and economic liberalism produces allegiance ties based on improving services provided to the population. Accordingly, the party formulates its policy in a rational reasoning divorced from Islam (Gul's speech in Washington, 2003).

Accordingly, the party embodies a transition from Political Islam in his speech where the national policy is formulated in the name of the "ethic of service"

(Onis and Keyman, 2004: 69). This notion is inextricably linked to the political sociology of the party and its socioeconomic structure. Being identified as a social democratic party of the third way inspired by the European model, it adopts a pragmatic program that promises Turkey's integration to the economic globalization in terms of participation and competition while ensuring justice and social freedom (Onis, 2009: 16). Accordingly, the AKP was forced to change the premises of the Kemalist ideology and its social hegemony by turning the State into a subject to the nation and the society that were previously subordinated to the traditional elite's exigencies (Yilmaz, 2007: 480). Therefore, the State serves the society and satisfies the people's demands expressed by intermediaries, such as political parties and civil societies that are not an extension of the State apparatus but rather independent institutions.

The contractual nature of the relationship between the party and the public was well entrenched by the process of harmonization with the European Union supported by the socioeconomic elite, the electoral base that constitutes the backbone of the party and represents an antithesis to Orientalism by highlighting compatibility between Islam and Liberalism. Turkey's integration into globalization created spheres of opportunity for Islamic groups and civil society, changed their traditional configuration and turned them into the main economic and sociopolitical actors. This bourgeoisie has emerged as a counterweight to the secular economic elite that had symbiotic relations with the State. The economy deregulation and liberalization allowed the emerging elite to transcend the State network and develop its own model of transnational economic and financial transactions (Onis, 2006: 29). Having undergone a process of urbanization and socialization marked by a high educational level and a religious revival, the elite manifested a remarkable social mobility and created a middle size business. These small and medium sized companies, being organized in a traditional structure and owned by conservative families in different fields like transportation, services, textiles and construction, are beyond the State control. Their Islamic identity allowed them to reposition themselves vis-à-vis the secular elite while making their own networks based on Islamic capitalism that justifies their share in the market.⁹

⁹ In response to the exclusion mechanisms, the Islamic identity was the instigator of a form of economic and social organization that challenges the State policies while developing an alternative economic model based on the traditional Islamic organization "Ensaf".

Secularism Reconsideration through the State-Society Relations

This Anatolian elite's strategy defies the binary division of society between the center and the periphery while presenting an alternative based on a communitarian model that is more liberal and less constrained by the ideological limits of Kemalism. The emergence of these elite on the economic, social and political level is a revolution that reverses the traditional up-down development model through the integration of new forces in a bottom-up dynamic opposed to the Kemalist socialization process. Similarly, it advocated for the integration of traditional values to the center as an attempt to moralize the State institutions and structures (Yavuz, 2006: 57).¹⁰

In this sense, the notion of freedom, designed by Erdogan, eliminates all kinds of barriers and interventions into the majority's lifestyle aligned to a moral identification opposed to that advocated by the State (Erdogan's speech in the United States, 2006). It is a new political discourse that reformulates Kemalism in accordance with the requirements of liberalization and universal standards. Therefore, the AKP, in its speech, emphasizes freedom, human rights, supremacy of law and transparency while denouncing the secular idioms that consolidate the opposition between modernity/religion and progressivism/conservatism. A debate on numerous political issues related to national identity was opened while taking into consideration and integrating the marginalized masses by creating a new imaginary of State-society relations (Erdogan's speech in Cairo, 2011 and Riyadh summit Arab League, 2007).

The AKP discourse manifests a reconsideration of the Islamic/conservative groups' position vis-à-vis the West (Dagi, 2005: 24). The questioning of the Islamic civilization's values by the linear path of modernization had a negative impact on the political and cultural position of Islamic countries vis-à-vis the West. The inability to produce an intellectual and economic wealth in addition to the military and administrative weakness in facing colonial expansion are major factors that shaped the identity of the political and intellectual elite in the Muslim world. The reconsideration of the linear rationality of modernization by the Islamic elite, including Milli Gorus, has reflected a fundamental and radical

¹⁰ The military was forced to accept the reforms imposed by the European Union because it incarnates an ultimate national goal that the traditional elite have pursued for achieving national modernization. Therefore, these reforms have not been resisted by the military and are positively received by secular circles although they were criticized and suspected.

interpretation of the sacred text in response to "the distortions" inflicted by the westernization process to the Muslims' identity.

The refusal of the Westernization process by Erbakan took the form of an outward conduct that is more focused on the Arab and Muslim States (Yavuz, 1997: 70). Erbakan's movement "Milli Gorus" presented a different formulation for national identity and history based on a religious reference in opposition to cosmopolitanism (Dagi, 2005: 36). It consists of a resurrection of authenticity and Islamic civilization in search for autonomy from the West. The identity reconstruction, according to Erbakan, has to follow a national vision that enhances the Turkish role in the Muslim world in order to cure the West's double standard policy and injustices.

As for the AKP, the process of identity reconstruction is based on the distinction between modernization and westernization and the refusal of the subordination of the former to the latter (Dagi, 2006: 30). Its leaders, called the reformists, disassociated themselves from Milli Gorus and reconsidered the political identity of the Islamic movements. The rejection of the Milli Gorus ideological dogma was also crystallized by the appointment of various liberal elements who were once members in various secular parties such as the Right Path and Motherland Parties. By abandoning the Islamic and the anti-Western line, the AKP followed a different policy than that of the previous Islamic movements and parties by adopting a pro-European policy. In light of the military repression and the Israeli-American rejection of the D8, an organization opposed to the global order, the Virtue Party changed his discourse and approach towards the West.¹¹ He advocated a more open and moral vision that is consistent with the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. This change has created a leadership crisis and led to a split in the party followed by the emergence of the AKP. By adopting a program affiliated to the center right under the name of the "Program for Development and Democracy", the AKP expresses a post-Islamist vision as well as a reconciled position with the premises of globalization whose scope expands internally in terms of democratization and externally by the

¹¹ It is important to mention that Erbakan had the same priority on its agenda but formulated within an Islamic lexicon that focuses on an Islamic ideology whose intended purpose is to realize industrial and technological development through the D8. Since the adoption of structural reforms by Ozal in the 80s in terms of exports oriented economy and liberalization, the foreign policy began to be economically oriented rather than being dominated by security concerns. The growth of the service and the manufacturing sectors led to the exports' increase and the extension of the Turkish markets which justifies the adoption of an open policy on the regional and the global levels (Kut, 2002). Besides, economy, in its liberal approach, was introduced as a means of conflict resolution and regional interdependence that aims for a political rapprochement.

integration into the global order (Erdogan's speech in the United States, 2004, Istanbul, 2006 and Ankara, 2008).

Hence, the AKP presents a new identity for the Islamic parties that are not opposed to the secular system of the State while promising to achieve internal stability (Danforth, 2010: 10).¹² The adoption of the "conservative democracy" as a partisan ideology is a form of integration to the Turkish political scene.¹³ In this sense, having abandoned the brotherhood model of the Refah party to avoid confrontation with the state, the AKP's¹⁴ ideology is an innovative policy (Introvigne, 2006: 21).¹⁵ The quasi-absence of political parties from the opposition has emphasized the AKP's success especially after the economic crisis of 2000 where the parties of the coalition of the DSP, ANAP and the MHP failed to cope with the crisis or corruption in the political and economic system.

Similarly, the Republican Party was unable to adapt to the internal conditions while focusing on the ideological rigidity of nationalism and secularism that made him lose a considerable percentage of its electorate in 2002. The parties affiliated to the left and right showed a similar vision based on an authoritarian administrative system in spite of their difference in terms of political orientations. Besides, Islamic parties like Refah and Virtue were unable to win a broad support among the electorate like the AKP while relying on some votes from some cities of central Anatolia. In the expression of Ziya Onis, Islamic parties incarnate regional projects while the AKP presents an international and transnational vision that rallied support from different political, ideological and social strata in Turkey and from international bodies like the European Union and the IMF in light of the liberal language of its program that meets globalization and the new world order premises.

¹² The suspicion of the party's religious identity is due to the political history of some AKP members, its disruption with the Virtue Party and its domination on the political scene.

¹³ Akif Gulle considered this ideology as a pluralistic and inclusive notion for the different tendencies and affiliations among the Turkish population. According to Erdogan, it is a formulation that considers the expectations and social values in order to reduce the gap between society and the State. Although Yalcin Akdogan emphasizes the importance of ideology in formulating a consistent policy line, the party program indicates that the AKP adopts realism and pragmatism in solving problems and presenting public services without referring to ideological rhetoric.

¹⁴ Different groups of voters come mainly from the middle class that benefited from the liberalization wave in the 80's and the 90's and the lower classes as well as the marginalized one among the conservative and pious strata. Islam was a major factor in attracting the electorate as it formed the basis of trust between different segments of the population and the AKP. The fact that the electorate of the AKP is mainly dominated by the conservative bourgeoisie contributed to the attenuation of the party's Islamic character in order to prevent direct confrontation with the State to protect its economic interests.

¹⁵ The AKP designation manifests some hesitation which, in spite of its adaptation to the political identity of the State, has confused the intellectual milieu. In this sense, Islamists, Revolutionary Democrats and Muslims were the different connotations attributed to the AKP.

This is a process of adjustment to global change without losing the essence of traditional values which underlines the hybrid and vague nature of its ideology that allows it to adopt a flexible and conciliatory policy.¹⁶ It is a synthesis between rationality and morality, the universal and local values and traditions (Kuru & Tepe, 2006: 76-92). According to Yalcin Akdogan, Conservative Democracy¹⁷ conceives a political participation based on the reconciliation of differences where political power is exercised as an expression of the people's sovereignty and the supremacy of law. It is a conciliatory and inclusive notion towards the different trends, ethnic and religious groups in Turkey aiming for the normalization of the national scene in terms of the relationship between State and society where the first meets the expectations and preferences of the second (Gul's speech in Vilnius and Maastricht in 2004 and in Istanbul, 2007).¹⁸ Although this concept is challenged in different literature because of its intellectual and theoretical deficiencies, by using it, the AKP has introduced a political debate, without opposing Secularism to Islamism and accepted the former as the foundation of the State politics while offering alternative interpretations for its application.¹⁹

The priority is to reconcile the interests of the periphery in the constitutional provisions with the ideological lexicon of the center and to eliminate the affiliation to the center as the only legitimate channel to participate in politics.

¹⁶ This political identity refuses to prioritize the cultural variable in the realization of the nation's progress and development as well as in the definition of the State-society relations and denounces the various aspects of modernization. On the other hand, the AKP sees that the clash between Secularism and Islam has nothing to do with State politics dominated by a statist and centralist model that limits the freedoms of the whole society especially the pious people. The adoption of this approach in understanding these internal dynamics justifies the synthesis of "Conservative Democracy" that arises as a solution.

¹⁷ Ali Bayramoglu denounced this concept while criticizing the linkage between democracy and conservatism. Others like Atila Yayla and Mumtazer Turkone considered that this concept highlights an ideological orientation that, following its adoption as a political reference, will be a theory. However, this concept is based on the experiences of political parties in the United States and Europe where the political practice and the culture of the parties that declare themselves as conservatives show the compatibility between democracy and conservatism. According to Etyen Mahcupyan, the notion of conservative democracy was adopted by the AKP as a substitute for the one of Muslim Democrats that raises a lot of suspicion among the establishment and the secular circles.

¹⁸ The nature of these values is not precise: Who will choose and by what criteria, are still undefined issues within the conservative democracy ideology. It consists of a selection of the positive aspects of modernity in terms of education, science and technology along with traditional values. The notion of conservative democracy deemphasizes the dichotomy in the Turkish political system between State and society while guaranteeing the party's integration without giving Islam a political role.

¹⁹ The question of interpretation is manifested by the existence of a class that supports a passive secularism where the State is neutral vis-à-vis religion while refuting its adoption of a political doctrine that determines the individual's identity and his worldview. The AKP believes that secularism must be tolerant vis-à-vis the different religions and not a tool of repression. According to Arinc, secularism in Turkey must consider the socio-cultural duality in Turkey that belongs to the West while being predominantly Muslim. The AKP's vision of a flexible secularism has led Erdogan to declare that Turkey wants to borrow the American model of secularism.

The majority wasn't satisfied with the State policy that marginalized the mass by its patronage and secular urban classes in the implementation of economic projects within the modernization process and the import substitution policy. To transform the political culture of the center where Islam can be accepted as a political identity, the AKP passed a less stringent definition of secularism while denouncing it as an individual ideology (Kuru, 2006: 65). By becoming a body that serves the society in developing and shaping the center, a new social contract is created between the people and the State that is no longer based on the Kemalist ideology nor the authoritarian socialization process but rather on the promotion of liberal democratic principles of freedom and well being protection.

While the internal structure of the party manifests a limited democracy, the AKP's policies are designed to anchor a democratic system.²⁰ The party avoids to be placed at the crossroads of democracy and Islam as two different courses by denying the adoption of political Islam as a reference (Gul's speech in Tehran in 2003 in Istanbul, 2004, in New York, 2005, in Jeddah, 2006 and Erdogan's speech in New York, 2009). Thus, the AKP, as distinguished from the different parties, especially those affiliated to an Islamic reference and those of the center, aims to anchor democratic practices in terms of individual and religious freedom, fighting poverty and corruption and ensuring a better distribution of resources and income. In March 2005, the AKP has conducted a series of constitutional changes including 533 laws, called the "silent revolution" by Gul (Tepe, 2006: 40).

Foreign Policy: A Manifestation of a New Understanding for the State Secular Bases

The accession to the EU was seen as the only alternative for better governance that manages the internal situation on the political and economic levels (Onis, 2007: 745). A tacit alliance was created between the Islamic forces, the AKP, and the West to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the military by implementing principles and values advanced by Western institutions and organizations, like the IMF and the European Union. Against the positivist view of the social and political model based on the Kemalist motto "Order and Progress", the social

²⁰ The party has a hierarchical structure where the leadership dominates the Central Committee of Policies Implementation and Decision Making. The central leadership has authority over the party without giving an opportunity for debate and discussion between the elite and members. Erdogan holds all the authorities related to decision-making and appointments in the party. Consequently, there is a likelihood of a possible internal fragmentation and an inability to consider all the electorate's views about the party's policies.

ethics advanced by the AKP, is an alternative developed by intellectuals and professionals who embrace social Islam as a group identity. This syncretism of values and norms from tradition and modernity allows the reformulation of the internal order and the adoption of a balanced and multidimensional diplomacy.²¹

The slogan “Peace Homeland, Peace Abroad” is respected by the AKP leaders who, in light of Turkey’s normative importance for Europe and the United States after September 11, adopt an assertive and autonomous diplomacy in its neighborhood. Gul used a European approach in describing the Turkish-American relations while indicating that both partners are bound by common values such as human rights, democracy and market economy. As a result, the traditional elite, including the military and the judiciary, have become increasingly skeptical about the liberalization process adopted by the AKP since it is perceived as a threat to the secular foundations of the Republic that may lead, in their view, to a possible Islamization of the Turkish society (Oguzlu, 2007: 89).²² Besides, regional instability, following the strengthening of the Kurds in northern Iraq in particular, has increased the distrust of the military that emphasized the security aspect in its speech that negatively affected the relationship with the West.²³

By transposing its identity formulation to the external level, the AKP adopts an equidistant and a multidimensional diplomacy (Carkoglu, 2006: 29). The priority of economic exchanges in terms of gains and development projects form the basis of the diplomatic activity pursued by the party. The purpose of modernization and development, being anchored since the declaration of the Republic in the Turkish foreign policy, is manifested by the adoption of alternative visions and courses of action. The increase of trade and economic interaction with neighbors and the emergence of various economic centers in the

²¹ According to a poll conducted among the AKP electorate, the majority is in favor of integration into the European Union or an alignment with the West and showed a positive perception towards Turkey’s membership in NATO and in Western civilization.

²² This antagonistic position towards the modernization process is related to its deviation from the intended goals by the founders of the Republic in terms of guaranteeing its security, territorial integrity, identification with the West, adoption of internal reforms and security cooperation with European states. As a result, Turkey became a secular and centralized State where citizenship is based on a uniform national identification that dilutes differences often seen as the main source of foreign intervention.

²³ This position explains the refusal of Turkey’s role model advocated by the United States as part of its Greater Middle East Project in the wake of September 11. Accordingly, Turkey cannot be an example of moderate Islam or compatibility between Islam and Secularism as advocated by the United States that adopts a strategy encouraging the emergence of moderate Muslims in the region in order to legitimize the war against terrorism.

world have made Turkey a regional power that defends its territorial integrity and realizes its development.

Accordingly, Davutoglu stressed the need for adopting a multidimensional diplomacy while indicating that the marginalization of the Middle East and the exaggeration of security interdependence between Turkey and the West, during the previous decades, had severe effects on Turkey especially on the economic level and in terms of obtaining international support for national causes (Canan, 2009: 36). Accordingly, the reformulation of the relation with the West while considering the Arab-Muslim neighborhood falls within the moderate and conciliatory nature of the AKP discourse. It consists of creating a transnational and an inclusive vision that underlines the maturity of the Kemalist principles through adaptation to the exigencies of the internal and the external environment.

This process of reconciliation that began with Ozal, continued under the mandate of the AKP in terms of foreign policy formulation on the economic, cultural and ethnic level (Ataman, 2002: 14). A Turkish-Islamic synthesis integrating modernization through economic and political liberalization as well as nationalism and Islam are the bases of the AKP diplomacy aiming for strengthening Turkey's position on the international scene. Unlike the Kemalist line in the foreign policy as a tool that confirms the secular order, the AKP has adopted a diverse, active and daring style that increases its commitments in multilateral instances (Ataman, 2002b: 130).

It follows the development of a rhythmic, multifaceted and interrelated links with Central Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, the European Union and the United States. The party adopts a balancing strategy in terms of preserving its Western alliance, diversifying its commitments with various regional partners and focusing on its projection of a political and economic power. Turkey considers the foreign policy orientations as a means to achieve its broad national interests rather than some limited elitist goals and Western exigencies. The reformulation of the party's identity led to the reconsideration of the State relations with the West in terms of autonomy and independence. Therefore, the economic liberalization, the increasing trade and financial relations with neighbors and other non-Western States in addition to attempts to solve the Kurdish issue empower Turkey's position towards the West (Hale, 2009: 54).

The accumulation of economic agreements, free trade and elimination of double taxation treaties and the expansion of the Turkish market in the neighborhood fall within the reconsideration of the Turkish identity as a central State and a regional power where Islam is an essential articulator of its diplomacy as a global player.²⁴ Thus, the notions of power center and leader of the Islamic world have been deployed to describe foreign policy as a reflection of the economic reforms undertaken by the AKP and its desire to strengthen the Islamic character of the Turkish identity and its presence in the region. Similarly, joining the EU is not an objective in itself but a means for improving the economic situation and strengthening the position of conservative groups in Turkey. In this sense, although the EU has suspended eight chapters related to the Cypriot issue leading to a political stalemate in the accession process by some European states, the AKP declared in 2007 that Turkey will continue the efforts to harmonize with the EU criteria and adopt the different reforms.

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²⁴ Dogan Heper introduced the link between development and economic prosperity on one hand and the manifestation of the role of a regional power role on the other. Accordingly, the AKP liberal discourse establishes a link between Turkey's status as a regional power and the party's identity as the ultimate expression of Kemalism that terminates the dualism and the antagonism between the center and the periphery.

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