# Transformation of Islamic Political Identity in Turkey: Rethinking the West and Westernization♣

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The post-September 11 developments including the US interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq have reinforced the view that Islam and the West are bound to conflict and confront each other. However popular this view is among both some westerners and Muslims, a contrary development has taken place in Turkey where Islamic political identity used to be shaped by an opposition to both the West and westernization policies of the Republic. In a unique way, Turkish Islamists have departed, in recent years, from their conventional position of anti-westernism and engaged in a process of "rethinking" the West, westernization and modern/western political values. The changing language of Turkish Islamists presents an important move not only for the spread of modern political values among the Islamic groups in Turkey, but also for a possibility of rapprochement between Islam and the West in the post-September 11 context. As opposition to the West and westernization used to be the basis of Islamic political identity in modern Turkey the effort of the Islamists at re-thinking this historical positioning, it is argued, has paved the way for the emergence of a new form of Islamic political identity as reflected in the program and practice of the ruling Justice and Development Party established in 2001 by a group of pro-Islamic politicians, which broke away from the National View Movement (NVM). Thus the objective of this research is first to explain the centrality of the western question in constructing an Islamic political identity in Turkey, then to explore the reasons for Turkish Islamists' rapprochement with the West and westernization, and finally to evaluate the impact of this discursive shift on the identity formation and policy orientation of the Justice and Development Party.

**The Source of Islamic Identity Formation: The West and Westernization**
The last two hundred years of Turkey is all about the history of westernization. Once the late Ottomans realized the decline of their state vis-à-vis the rising power of the Europeans they embarked on a process of adopting "western" ways that presumably made the West "great." It started with the westernization of the army, then of the

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administration and finally focused on the daily lives of the Turks. This history of westernization, in essence, constitutes the history of the response to the western challenge in the military, political, economic and cultural/civilizational realms.[1] Westernization as a concept and program to "renew" the state and society, in effect, became an identity-constituting orientation.

The early Islamic political stand, as demonstrated by the writings of Namik Kemal, Jamal ad Din Afghani, Said Halim Pasa and later Mehmet Akif, focused on the issue of the West and western civilization attempting to develop an Islamic response.[2] The challenge of the West was at least two-fold. By the 19th century, the West had penetrated into the Islamic lands politically, militarily and economically. Thus the question of how to stop the advancement of the West was a practical and political issue. Secondly, the growing superiority of the West put what the "Islamic civilization" stood for in question. For some it was not only an issue of the power of the West but the disability of Islamic civilization to produce wealth, power and science anymore. So the "glorious Islamic civilization" was to blame for the weakness of the Muslims as the attributes of backwardness were found in Islamic civilization itself.[3] This was a fundamental challenge that the Muslims had to respond to since the very relevance, validity and functionality of Islam in social life was questioned.[4]

Over the challenge posed for the validity of Islam, the Islamic thinking moved into a defensive/apologetic mode, arguing that there certainly existed a relationship between the fate of the Muslims and their faith in the world. What followed from this was the argument that the Muslims were left behind because they deviated from the true belief.[5] Then a soul-searching process began; what was the essence of Islam, how to go back to pure Islam, to the roots of Islam, how to revive Islam and Islamic civilization. That was the very beginning of the process of reconstructing a modern Islamic identity that was shaped by the immediate, burning challenge of the West. The search for the

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[1] Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp.45-72; Dankwart A. Rustow, "The Modernization of Turkey in Historical and Comparative Perspective," in Kemal Karpat (ed.), *Social Change and Politics in Turkey: A Structural-Historical Analysis* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), pp.94-95.

[2] See İsmail Kara (ed.), *Türkiye'de İslamcılık Düşüncesi*, Vol. I, (İstanbul, Risale Yayınları, 1986); Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962); Mümtazer Türköne, *Siyasi İdeoloji Olarak İslamcılığın Doğuşu* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1991).

[3] H. Ziya Ülken, *Türkiye'de Çağdaş Düşünce Tarihi* (İstanbul: Ülken Yayınları, 1966), pp. 207-208; Particularly Abdullah Cevdet who called for major reforms in Islam in his journal, *İçtihad*, was very critical of Islam as an obstacle to development and progress, see Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* (İstanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1981).

[4] When Earnest Renan published his famous pamphlet depicting Islam as an obstacle to development, science and technology, the response was swift, provoking strong reactions in Turkey. Namık Kemal wrote *Renan Müdafaanamesi* explaining progressive essence of Islam itself while putting the blame on the Muslims. See Namik Kemal, *Renan Müdafaanamesi (İslamiyet ve Maarif)* (Ankara, 1962); and Albert Hourani, *Europe and the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p.12.

[5] For an early expression of this diagnosis see Said Halim Paşa, *Buhranlarımız* (İstanbul: Tercüman Yayınlar, nd.). Said Halim Paşa was one of the influential figures at the turn of the 20th century.

roots led the Islamic thinkers to a textual construction; a prelude to modernist and fundamentalist readings of Islam in relation to the modern.[6]

In responding to western pressures, the West was described as the source of all problems encountered by Muslims; it was evil, degenerating and destroying Islamic civilization. Not only did the West bring violence, war, exploitation and imperialism to the Islamic world but it was also spiritually flawed. Lack of spiritual values and social decadence were among the features of western civilization that were felt to infect Islamic civilization. In short, the West was conceived as the absolute "other," generating identity issues to which the Islamic thinking had to respond. Yet the state of relationship between the two at the turn of the 19th century created a longing among the Muslims for modernization, which was expected to empower the Islamic communities to resist western hegemony; to make a differentiation between westernization and modernization has always been popular among the Islamists simply because they saw modernization as a prelude to emancipation while westernization was perceived as enslavement to the West and estrangement from Islamic civilization.[7]

## Kemalism, Islam and Westernization

However, it was not only the West itself but the wider question of how to respond to the West that raised identity issues. Western civilization was adopted in the Ottoman lands at least since 1839 as a means of catching up and coping with the West. The westernization process and policies, especially with the establishment of the Republic along secularist lines resulted in the exclusion of Islamic leaders, groups and thought from the centers of the power, eliminating appearances of Islam in public sphere. In the process of westernization and secularization during the early years of the republican era the Caliphate was abolished, religious orders and institutions were closed down, western civil law was adopted, and religious schools and education were banned.

For the Islamists, therefore, the republican reforms made it clear that it was not the West *per se* but the westernizers and the westernization program that swept them away from the centers of political and social order. They felt not only excluded but also their identity and discourse de-legitimized and marginalized in the process of radical secularization in which Islamic social space was threatened by the sweeping program of republican westernization.[8] Despite the historical references to the clash of "cross and the crescent," opposition to the radical secularization policies of the westernizers in the republican Turkey played a central role in the construction of an Islamic political identity.[9]

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[6] For the roots of Islamic thinking in modernity see Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London: Verso, 1993).

[7] See the sample writings of Turkish Islamists like Sehbenderzade Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi (pp.3-43), Said Halim Pasa (pp.73-174), Iskilipli Mehmed Atif (pp.241-272) in Kara (1986), and Nurettin Topçu (pp.113-239), N. Fazıl Kısakürek (pp.241-375), Sezai Karakoç (pp.377-479) and İsmet Özel (pp.595-702) in Ismail Kara, *Türkiye'de İslamcılık Düşüncesi,* Vol. III (İstanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 1994). Also see the early writings of late Islamists like Ali Bulaç, *Modern Kavramlar ve Düzenler* (İstanbul: Pınar Yayıncılık, 1987); and İsmet Özel, *Üç Mesele; Teknik, Medeniyet, Yabancılaşma* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1978).

[8] Nilüfer Gole, "Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites," *Middle East Journal*, Vol.51, No.1 (1997), pp.46-58.

[9] For a strong statement of anti-westernization in more recent times see Mehmet Doğan, *Batılılaşma İhaneti* (İstanbul, Beyan Yayınları, 1986). For an insider's critique of the Islamists' view of the West see Ahmet Harputlu, "İslamcıların Batı Tahayyülü," *Bilgi ve Düşünce* Vol.1, No.1 (2002), pp.23-27.

Westernization, presuming the possibility of a civilizational shift, was, for the Islamists, an abandonment of Islam. Islamists' rejection of the West and westernization was therefore to some extent an objection to the Kemalist design to re-form society and politics along a secularist line, eroding the influence of Islam in society and politics.[10] The West was then opposed on the grounds that it provided a source of inspiration, a framework of justification for the authoritarian westernization and secularization policies at home.

No doubt the Kemalist program, a secular experiment that marginalized Islam and Islamic groups, presented a break with the past that was heavily blended with Islam and its social authority. For the Kemalist elite, the process and eventual success of secularism became a matter of political survival in the face of the challenges put up by the Islamic periphery.[11] Thus the disagreement on secularism was part of an inter-elite fight for political power in which the Kemalists looked to the Turkish Armed Forces as the ultimate arbiter, which, especially during the multi-party politics after 1950, assumed a guardian role in maintaining secularism, not only as a constitutional order but also as a political/ideological discourse against the Islamic periphery.

**Islamic Political Identity in Modern Turkey and the West:**
**The Case of the National View Movement**
In the process of restructuring Turkish politics following the 1960 military intervention, Islam's political appeal increased. Its first outright political expression was the establishment of the National Order Party under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan in 1970. The party was closed down the following year by the constitutional court on the grounds that it exploited religion for political purposes. One year later, the National Salvation Party (NSP) was established under the leadership of the same group. Receiving 11.8 percent and 8.6 percent of the votes in the 1973 and 1977 elections respectively it joined in all coalition governments between 1973 and 1980, becoming an important political actor in Turkish politics.[12]

The movement led by Erbakan is known as the "National View," embracing a set of aspiring yet ambiguous references to the Ottoman past, and directing criticism against "cosmopolitanism" as opposed to the "national."[13] However ambiguous it may be, under the disguise of a historical and cultural discourse, the "national view" referred to Islam.

The issues related to the West and westernization served as a catalyst for the National View Movement's (NVM) identity formation, public discourse and policies.[14] It differentiated itself from other political movements by taking a critical stand on the westernization of Turkey. The actors, institutions, process and objective of westernization were questioned in the name of authenticity, i.e. Islamic civilization, and in the search for power vis-à-vis the West. The NVM leadership believed that westernization was

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[10] For an analysis of Kemalist reforms in relation to Islam see Şerif Mardin, "Ideology and Religion in the Turkish Revolution," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol.2, No.2, pp.197-211.

[11] Göle (1997), pp.46-58.

[12] Binnaz Toprak, "Politicization of Islam in a Secular State: the National Salvation Party in Turkey," in Said Amir Arjomand (ed.), *From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam: Essays on Social Movements in the Contemporary Near and Middle East* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984).

[13] Necmettin Erbakan, *Milli Görüş* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1975).

[14] İhsan D. Dagi, *Kimlik, Söylem ve Siyaset: Doğu-Batı Ayrımında Refah Partisi Geleneği* (Ankara: İmge Yayınevi, 1999), pp. 23-25, 42-75.

understood by the early republican leaders as a denial of the traditional (read Islamic) values, attitudes and institutions. The impact of westernization on the character of the state and society, traditionally influenced by Islam, was regarded as a more serious problem than that of the West itself. They regarded the attempt to replace Islamic-Ottoman civilization with the western one as the source of the ills of Turkish society. Thus, not only was western domination in Turkey to be eliminated to build a "national order," but also westernization. Erbakan thus proclaimed before the 1995 general elections that once they came to power they would put an end to the process of westernization.[15]

The West was conceived as "the mother of all evils" and as such represented the absolute "other;" the "national self" was to be created through differentiation from the West. Not only the NVM but also the identities of all other political parties, institutions or individuals in Turkey were thought to be determined by their stand on the West and the western question, either advocating the "national view" or imitating the West.[16]

For the NVM it was westernization policies that resulted in the abandonment of the Islamic world and laid the ground for Turkey to be an all-season ally of the West. They believed that historically, culturally and geographically Turkey did not belong to the West, instead it shared its past, values and institutions with the Islamic world, a world that had to be mobilized to balance the power and pressure of the West.[17] The pro-Islamic world orientation of the party and its call for an Islamic economic integration schema and defense organization were derived largely from the perceived need to resist and respond to the West. The Islamic world was conceived as an alternative not so much for its own sake but as a means to balance the power of the West.

Nevertheless, instead of adopting a total rejection of modernization, the NVM made a distinction between western culture and technology, advocating the technological renovation of Turkey. In the 1970s, the NVM leadership promoted the image of the party's relevance not only to the spiritual but also the material development of the Turkish people by emphasizing its commitment to and success in laying down the basis for heavy industry in Turkey, conceived as a precondition for independence from the domination of the West. The emphasis on "modernization and development" as a "liberating" pre-condition from the western hegemony remained an important feature of the NVM.

**The Rise of the Welfare Party and the Question of the West**
The NSP was closed down in 1981 along with other political parties by the military regime. In the process of transition to multi-party politics a new party named the Welfare Party (WP) was founded in 1983 by the leadership of the NVM. In the local elections the following year, the WP received 4.8 percent of the vote. It increased the share of its vote to 7 percent in the general elections of November 1987, yet failed to pass the 10 percent countrywide elections threshold. The party had a more promising and encouraging result

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[15] *Milli Gazete*, December 4, 1995.
[16] Dagi (1999), p.23.
[17] Hasan H. Ceylan, (ed.), *Erbakan ve Türkiye'nin Temel Meseleleri* (Ankara: Rehber Yayınları, 1996), pp.99-100; *Milli Gazete*, September 21, 1995.

in the 1989 local elections by receiving 9.8 percent of the votes, gaining mayorship of five provinces. This trend in the rise of the WP continued throughout the 1990s.

In the early 1990s, the WP leadership came to realize the need for turning the party into a mass political movement, adopting an agenda that put stress on social problems rather than on religious themes, using modern propaganda means. It particularly tried to mobilize the urban poor who suffered from the liberalization policies of the 1980s that had a negative impact on peripheral social and economic groups.[18] This policy continued right up to the March 1994 local elections in which the WP proved its growing political power, receiving 19 percent of the vote and capturing the mayorship of 28 provinces, including Ankara and Istanbul - a shocking result for centrist and secularist political parties. The real shock came with the 1995 general elections in which the WP came first holding 21 percent of the votes. After a short-lived coalition government of center-right political parties, Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of the WP, formed a coalition government with the center-right True Path Party. For the first time in the republican history of Turkey, a pro-Islamic political party came to power as a major force, holding a prime ministerial position.[19]

A number of factors contributed to the electoral success of the WP in the 1990s, notably the impact of international developments. Among these, the rejection of Turkey's full membership application in December 1989 by the European Community (EC) occupies a central role since it had a profound impact on the self-perception of the Turks, even of pro-western and secular groups, who felt excluded from the West.[20] The view that the rejection was motivated on cultural/religious grounds gained popularity in almost all sectors of the Turkish society.

Furthermore, the end of the Cold War resurfaced the view that Islam and the West would be the clashing sides in the new era. The Islamists believed that in the new era the West would replace the communist threat that disappeared with the threat of Islam as part of an effort to keep the West together and the NATO justified. The publication of Samuel Huntington's article on the "clash of civilizations" in 1993 spread this view beyond the Islamists.

The events concerning the Muslims in Bosnia and Azerbaijan in the early 1990s also enhanced these views. The discrepancy between the western diplomacy of protecting the Kurds in Turkey yet its inaction to stop the killings of the Muslims in Bosnia led Turkish public opinion to the conviction that the West was employing a double standard. The West lost its moral authority, appeal and attraction in the eyes of the vast majority of Turkish people.

In short, in the early 1990s, anti-westernism, which was even adopted by the then President Suleyman Demirel and other centrist political leaders, gained political currency.

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[18] Ziya Öniş, "The Political Economy of Islamic Resurgence in Turkey: The Rise of the Welfare Party in Perspective," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.18, No.4 (1997), pp.743-766.

[19] For an analysis of the WP's ideology and electoral performance in the 1990s see M. Hakan Yavuz, "Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey," *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 30, No.1 (1997), pp.63-82; Öniş, (1997), pp.743-766; Haldun Gülalp, "Political Islam in Turkey: The Rise and Fall of the Refah Party," *Muslim World*, Vol. 89, No.1 (1999), pp.24-36; Ahmet Yıldız, "Politico-Religious Discourse of Political Islam in Turkey: The Parties of National Outlook," *Muslim World*, Vol. 93, No. 2 (2003), pp.187-210.

[20] İhsan D. Dagi, "Turkey in the 1990s: Foreign Policy, Human Rights and the Search for a New Identity," *Mediterranean Quarterly: Journal of Global Issues,* Vol.4, No.4 (1993), pp.60-77.

In this nationalistic wave of anti-westernism, the West was commonly portrayed as plotting against Turkey's territorial integrity with the aim of resurrecting the Sèvres Treaty, the treaty that divided up Turkey following the First World War.[21] Yet, anti-westernism had always been a breeding ground for traditionalist-Islamist movements. Thus the wave of anti-westernism in the first half of the 1990s served the interest of the Welfare Party whose anti-West discourse gained a widespread legitimacy with the growing disappointment with the West. The crisis of the West in the eyes of the Turkish people brought the WP to the center of Turkish politics. Thus the post-cold war political milieu with its immediate crises and long term projections contributed to the normalization, justification and vindication of the NVM with regard to its attitude towards the West contributing to the WP's electoral successes in the 1990s.

**Secularist Response and the Search for Survival**
Nevertheless, the critical stand towards the West, shared by the Islamists and the centrist political actors, did not eliminate the concerns about the Islamists' political agenda. Despite its gradual yet rapid growth in the early 1990s, the WP did not have any prepared agenda except for a concept of "just order," an effective slogan to appeal to the masses but also the one that provoked reactions from the secularist/Kemalist center. A "National Policy Paper" prepared by the National Security Council (NSC) described the "reactionary forces" of Islam as the first priority threat to the Turkish state, more dangerous and immediate than the secessionist Kurdish nationalism.[22] The army, aligning with some sectors of civil society, justified by their concern for the future of secularism in the face of the Islamist challenge, launched a campaign against the WP and in effect against the government. Soon after the formation of the Erbakan-led government, the National Security Council, meeting on February 28, 1997, took a number of decisions to "reinforce the secular character of the Turkish state" threatened by the Islamists.[23] As part of the pressure put on the Islamists, numerous briefings, joined by judicial personnel, journalists and other professionals, were organized by the General Staff of Armed Forces on the danger of Islamic fundamentalism in which the ruling party was identified as a reactionary Islamic threat.

Meanwhile, the so-called "Islamic capital" was displayed, boycotted and prosecuted to eliminate financial sources for Islamic movements. The imprisonment of Tayyip Erdogan, the popular mayor of Istanbul, was another case by which the pressure over the NVM was demonstrated. Quranic courses run by various Islamic foundations were closed down, the remaining courses were strictly regulated and participation of students in these courses was made possible only after a certain age. Islamic NGOs and foundations were put under strict control. In sum, as result of the February 28 process, the discursive hegemony of Kemalism, eased by the countrywide celebrations of the 75th

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[21] Dietric Jung, "The Sevres Syndrom: Turkish Foreign Policy and its Historical Legacies," *American Diplomacy*, Vol.8, No.2 (2003).
[22] *Hürriyet*, November 4, 1997.
[23] For February 28 decisions of NSC see "Recommendations of the State Council meeting and Comment," *Briefing*, March 10, 1997, p.4. For analyses of the NSC decision see M. Hakan Yavuz, "Cleansing Islam From the Public Sphere," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.54, No.1 (2000), pp.21-40; Ümit C. Sakallıoğlu and Menderes Çınarlı, "Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism and Politics in the Light if the February 28 Process," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol.102, No.2/3 (2003), pp.309-32.

anniversary of the foundation of the Republic, was reasserted, while Islam's social and economic bases, as well as its political agents, were targeted.

As part of the campaign against the Islamists the public prosecutor lodged a file in the constitutional court in May 1997 for the closure of the ruling Welfare Party. The coalition government had to step down in July 1997 after a blunt threat of a direct military intervention. Subsequently, the WP was closed down by the constitutional court in January 1998 on the grounds that it had become the center of anti-secularist activities. This was the third party of the NVM that was closed down and its leader, Erbakan, was banned from politics for 5 years.[24]

**Rapprochement with the West**
With the closure of the WP, its parliamentary group joined the Virtue Party (VP), which had been formed by close associates of Erbakan. No doubt the Virtue Party was the successor to the Welfare Party. Yet it was different from its predecessor in many respects, including its approach to the West, towards which the statements of the party leaders and the policies advocated, displayed a radical shift. Anti-westernism of the old days had gone, and in fact gone so far that the party looked rather pro-European and pro-American despite its Islamic credentials.[25] This was the irony of the VP during its rather short lifespan from 1998 to 2001. The party seemed to have abandoned not only its opposition to the West but also adopted western political values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law as part of its new discourse. Calls for democracy, human rights and the rule of law became the new characteristics of NVM's political strategy after its party was closed down and its leader banned from politics.

Recai Kutan, the chairman of the Party in the absence of Erbakan, explained that they would no longer use the old concepts of the "national view" tradition, arguing that concepts like the "national view" and "just order" were misunderstood, misrepresented and misinterpreted by some. Instead, he seemed to be more concerned about the prospect for democratization in Turkey.[26] He claimed that Turkey had deficiencies in democracy, yet its democracy was still advanced in comparison to Middle Eastern and Islamic countries. Emphasizing the importance of the results of democratically conducted elections, he asserted, "political power should not be attained by non-democratic means."[27] Kutan also suggested that the "NSC should be rearranged according to the principles of a western model democracy" through which political influence of the civilian-military bureaucracy would be eliminated. The party now seemed to be calling for a liberal democracy; a democratic republic. A specific emphasis on freedom of religion and belief was added after stating the basic rights and liberties to be respected. Kutan declared that secularism should not be a means to limit freedom of religion and belief.[28]

In this new language, modern/western values and the West itself as represented by the VP were no more anathema to Islamic political identity. This was symbolized in an

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[24] Jeremy Salt, "Turkey's Military Democracy," *Current History*, Vol.98, No.626 (1999), pp.72-78.

[25] Öniş describes this shift as a move towards "liberal Islam." See Ziya Öniş, "Political Islam at the Crossroads: From Hegemony to Co-existence," *Contemporary Politics*, Vol.7, No.4 (2001), pp.283-284.

[26] R. Quinn Mecham, "From the Ashes of Virtue, a Promise of Light: the Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.25, No.2 (2004), pp.345-346.

[27] *Radikal,* December 18, 1998, p.7.

[28] *Ibid*. p.7.

ironic way by the decision of Erbakan to take the case of the WP closure and his ban from politics for 5 years to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). What he asked in effect was to be judged by a western institution, the European Court of Human Rights, and according to "western values" as incorporated in the European Convention of Human Rights. It was ironic to seek justice in Europe not only because of Erbakan's countless remarks about Europe being unjust, exploitative, imperialistic, anti-Islamic etc., but also because of what was sought in Europe, justice, which was claimed by the Islamic groups as the strongest attribute of Islamic civilization.

Given the identity and discourse of the national view movement (NVM) this was an agonizing decision to take as well as self-denial at a moment when Erbakan was trapped to choose between the discursive tradition of the NVM and its future. To preserve a future for his political career and the NVM he had to do everything he could to survive. This included asking for help from western quarters in general not only from the ECHR. As a result they sought refuge not only in the West and western institutions like ECHR but also in the discourse of modern/western values like democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Yet this went against their very tradition; the tradition of suspicions towards the West and the representation of the national against the cosmopolitan.

In a parallel move, the NVM's stand on the EU also changed, advocating strongly Turkey's integration in the EU in contrast to its former view of the EU as a Christian club. The Party leaders pushed the government to comply with the "Copenhagen criteria," which would take Turkey into the accession process. Kutan stressed the centrality of meeting the EU standards on democracy, demanding a civic constitution that would meet the Copenhagen political criteria for individual rights and freedoms.[29] They were in need to form a discursive alliance with the West and seek protection and legitimization through establishing contacts with the western quarters. This became even more urgent when the public prosecutor filed a lawsuit for the closure of the VP in April 1999.[30]

**Division in the Movement**

Under the prevailing circumstances, the new discourse (of democracy, human rights and the rule of law) was defensive in nature and objective. The party had grown in the opposition with its aggressive political language. The new discourse disabled the party's ability to launch an aggressive opposition like the one in the early 1990s. While trying to build a coalition with the others - liberals, democrats and the like - the party thus lost its voters in the 1999 elections coming third with only 15 per cent of the votes.

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[29] *Hürriyet*, May 4, 2000.

[30] Ibid. Following a Turkey-EU association council meeting in 2001 EU authorities who included the late Anna Lindh, the foreign minister of Sweden, and Gunter Verhuegen, the EU commissioner for enlargement, warned Turkey that closure of political parties was an obstacle before achieving plural democracy and freedom of expression by referring to the case of VP; see *Radikal*, June 27, 2001. But soon after, the VP was dissolved by the constitutional court. Over the decision of the constitutional court Kutan met with the western diplomats discussing political developments in Turkey; see *Hürriyet*, July 7, 2001. Verhuegen reacted to the closure of the VP by stating that "the decision could be in accordance to Turkish constitution but the problem was the constitution itself." A report submitted and adopted by the European Parliament criticized Turkey's practice of party closure for being against the essence of plural democracy and freedom of expression, see *Radikal*, June 27, 2001. All these indicate that the VP managed to establish a working relationship with some western quarters.

An internal debate erupted about the leadership and direction of the party over the poor performance in the elections. It became clear that the party was divided into two; the old guards close to Erbakan and the young members of the parliament asking for renewal of the leadership, ideology and public image.

In this process, the party congress of May 2000 marked a turning point for the VP. The congress revealed the existence of a division in the party when Kutan, the chairman of the party under Erbakan's tutelage, was challenged by Abdullah Gul, a moderate deputy close to the former Mayor of Istanbul, Tayyip Erdogan, contesting for the leadership.[31] The contest was close despite Erbakan's direct and open lobbying against Gul who received almost half of the delegates' support. This was a remarkable political event given the tradition of obedience to the leader within the NVM. It seemed that the discourse of change adopted recently by the leadership was taken so seriously by the grassroots that it hit the leadership itself.[32]

Although the division seemed to be over the leadership, deep down one can say that the ideological impasse the movement encountered was the real basis for the outbreak of differing views about the leadership and direction of the party. The ideal of democracy and human rights was not a unifying cause in comparison to the "national view" and "just order," and furthermore the age of anti-westernism had long gone, with over 70 per cent of Turkish people advocating EU membership. The vacuum created by the discursive departure of the party from its original position led to confusion about the leadership, ideology and the future.[33] As the division of the party between traditionalists (pro Erbakan) and the reformists (pro-Erdogan) had become apparent by the May congress, the closure of the party by the constitutional court in June 2001 only speeded up the process and legitimated the split within the movement.[34] Eventually, the traditionalists established the Felicity Party (FP) again under the formal leadership of Recai Kutan, with Erbakan remaining the "natural leader" of the movement behind the scenes, while the reformists engaged in a process of establishing their own party with an aim to form a broader political movement.[35]

Despite Erbakan's desperate effort while being banned to be elected as a member of parliament and to lead a political party, the FP received only 2.5 percent of the votes in the elections of November 2002, failing to pass the 10 percent national threshold to gain a seat in the parliament. More shocking was that this was the worst elections results the NVM has ever had since its formation in 1970, indicating that the period in which the religious periphery was represented by an overtly pro-Islamic political party has come to an end. The results heralded the end of political Islam in Turkey.

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[31] Gül described the congress as the first occasion where the movement engaged in self-criticism before the public. He said, "by this congress the party got out of the aquarium and started to swim in the open sea," *Milliyet,* May 20, 2000; *Radikal,* May 20, 2000.
[32] See the interview with Aydin Menderes in *Milliyet*, November 8, 2000. Cemil Çiçek, a member of parliament from the VP, also stated that the party must engage in an effort for evaluating the mistakes committed in the past. "Self-criticism is required for a better future," he said. *Sabah,* June 26, 2001.
[33] Yet the VP portrayed the internal opposition as about the issue of leadership pointing out that the opposition had no objection to the party program. See the interview with Oğuzhan Asilturk in *Milliyet*, October 28, 2000; for internal disputes see *Milliyet,* October 29, 2000.
[34] Birol Yeşilada, "The Virtue Party," *Turkish Studies*, Vol.3 No.1 (2002), pp.68-69.
[35] Mecham (2004), pp.339-358.

**The JDP: Limits of Islamism in the Age of Globalization**

The breakaway party, under the leadership of Tayyip Erdogan, the former mayor of Istanbul, named the Justice and Development Party, had officially been registered on August 14, 2001. Less than two years after its formation the party came to power with a landslide victory receiving 34 percent of the votes in the general elections of November 2002 in which its nearest contender, the Republican People's Party had 19 percent, and the pro-Islamic Felicity Party received an all time low 2.5 percent.[36]

The JDP's organizational network was to a large extent inherited from the WP/VP as did its leadership. Yet at the beginning they claimed to form a political party that would go beyond the WP/VP in an attempt to appeal to a wider public, in other words to the "political center."[37] The leadership referred to the Democrat Party of the 1950s, the Justice Party of the 1960s and the Motherland Party of the 1980s - all mass political movements from the center right that gained majority rule, each in its respective period - as their political predecessors.[38]

The JDP leadership seemed to have departed not only from the leadership of the NVM but also from its ideology claiming that the party stands for "democratic conservatism."[39] The party program of the JDP, named the "Democracy and Development Program," reflected the priorities of the new movement. While the emphasis on development has always been the legacy of center right politics since 1950, "democracy" is a new-found objective regarded convenient to disperse excessive pressures of the judiciary and the military as exemplified in the February 28 process.

Given the pro-Islamic background of its leaders and the newly adapted notion of conservatism the JDP can best be regarded as a post-Islamist movement; keeping its ties with Islam in the social realm but abandoning it as a political program. Witnessing how Islam's social base with its educational, commercial and solidarity networks was disrupted by the politicization of Islam in the 1990s they became more interested in keeping Islam's social and economic base intact as the basis of "conservatism" Erdogan

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[36] For analyses of the election results and the JDP see Soli Özel, "Turkey at the Polls: After the Tsunami," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.14, No.2 (2003), pp.80-94; Ziya Öniş and E. Fuat Keyman, "Turkey at the Polls: A New Path Emerges," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.14, No.2 (2003), pp.95-108; Ali Çarkoğlu, "Turkey's November Elections: A New Beginning?" *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 6, No.4 (2002), pp.30-41; Simten Coşan and Aylin Özman, "Centre-Right Politics in Turkey after the November 2002 General Election: Neo-Liberalism with a Muslim Face," *Contemporary Politics*, Vol.10, No.1 (2004), pp.57-73; Mecham (2004), pp.339-358.

[37] Erdoğan, before forming the party, contacted many people including businessmen like Rahmi Koç and a retired general, Atilla Kıyat, see *Sabah*, June 25, 2001; *Sabah*, July 4, 2001.

[38] *Milliyet*, July 15, 2001. For an early description of Erdoğan as a moderate politician see Metin Heper, "Islam and Democracy: Toward a Reconciliation?" *Middle East Journal*, Vol.51, No.1 (1997), p.37.

[39] Yalçın Akdoğan, *Muhafazakar Demokrasi* (Ankara: AK Parti Yayınları, 2003). The book was forwarded by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who hailed the publication of the book as an attempt to theorize the JDP's claim to be conservative democrat despite its Islamic origins. The party also organized an international symposium on conservatism and democracy held in Istanbul on January 10-11, 2004 commenced by Erdoğan's speech outlining the conservative stand of the party. For Erdoğan's speech in the symposium see *Uluslararası Muhafazakarlık ve Demokrasi Sempozyumu* (Ankara, AK Parti Yayınları, 2004). pp.7-17.

refs to.[40] In the party program and the election declaration the leadership acknowledged the end of ideologies including Islamism in the age of globalization.[41]

The JDP's position on the EU membership and globalization differs significantly from any conventional Islamist stand. The EU membership is regarded as a natural outcome of Turkey's modernization; "meeting the Copenhagen political criteria is an important step forward for the modernization of the country."[42] Right after the November 2002 elections, JDP leader Erdogan declared that their priority was not to resolve the "headscarf" issue, as would be expected from a pro-Islamic party, but instead to speed up the process to get Turkey into the EU, once called "the Christian Club" by the National View movement.[43] Since its formation the JDP government **has** introduced fundamental reforms on the Kurdish issue, human rights and civil-military relations with 7 harmonization packages passed by the parliament, and furthermore made politically risky compromises to resolve the long-standing Cyprus dispute. By desperately seeking the EU membership the JDP leadership, with its pro-Islamic background, must have explicitly abandoned the idea of an Islamic government in Turkey for the EU membership process practically eliminates such a possibility.[44]

It is also unusual to think of an Islamist party approving a globalization process that is believed by many to weaken the "local/national values" and thus erode the traditional society, the natural social base for an Islamist movement. An Islamist movement, on the contrary, is fed by the fears of globalization prevalent among the traditional sectors. But, the JDP, instead of leaning towards the local and nationalistic reactions, is taking a pro-globalization stand. Anti-globalist tendencies in the party have been overtaken by an analysis that places Turkey not in isolation but in integration with the external world as a precondition for further democratization, which is expected to open up a broader space for the survival and the legitimacy of the party. Indeed, by pledging to continue with the previously accepted IMF program, the JDP reaffirms its pro-globalization stand.[45]

**Rethinking the West**
As explained, Islamic political identity was traditionally built in opposition to the West, western values and, equally important, to the history of westernization in Turkey. Yet pro-Islamic politicians of the late 1990s, most of whom have joined the JDP, realized that they needed the West and modern/western values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in order to build a broader front against the Kemalist center, and to acquire

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[40] For "social Islam" in Turkey see M. Hakan Yavuz, "Towards an Islamic Liberalism?: The Nurcu Movement of Fettullah Gulen," *Middle East Journal*, Vol.53, No.4 (1999), pp.584-605.

[41] *Hürriyet*, July 7, 2001; *Milliyet*, July 15, 2001. See also the party program at www.akparty.org.tr/program, and Erdoğan's speech in the international symposium on conservatism and democracy in *Uluslararası Muhafazakarlık ve Demokrasi Sempozyumu*, pp.7-17.

[42] 2002 Election Declaration, at http://www.akparti.org.tr/beyanname.doc.

[43] Helena Smith, "New breed of politicians start to find their feet," *The Guardian*, March 10, 2003.

[44] A popular Islamist intellectual, Ali Bulaç, declared in 1999 that the project of an Islamic state has collapsed, interview with Neşe Düzel, *Radikal*, December 21, 1999. For an analysis of Islamist intellectuals' changing attitude towards globalization, human rights, democracy and the EU membership see İhsan D. Dagi, "Rethinking Human Rights, Democracy, and the West: Post-Islamist Intellectuals in Turkey," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 13, No.2 (2004), pp.135-151.

[45] Erdoğan's speech in the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington DC, January 28, 2002 as commented on by İhsan D. Dagi, "İslami siyasette Batı ufku," *Radikal*, March 3, 2002.

legitimacy through this new discourse in their confrontation with the secularist establishment.

In the face of pressures originating from the military's adamant opposition to the Islamists, which influences attitudes of the judges, high state bureaucracy as well as mainstream secular media, they realized the legitimizing power and the virtue of democracy which turned out to be a means to highlight "people power" vis-à-vis the state power. They knew that they could survive only in a country that was democratically oriented, respecting civil and political rights, and moreover integrated further into the western world, particularly the EU.[46] This discursive turn, speaking the universal language of political modernity instead of Islam's particularities, also served to justify the presence of an Islamic political identity.

The Islamists went through similar experiences concerning the value of human rights and the rule of law as they saw their political parties closed down, leaders banned from political activities, and associations and foundations intimidated. In response they moved to embrace the language of civil and political rights that provided both an effective leverage against the pressures of the state and grounds to build international coalitions. Under the pressure of the Kemalist establishment, the Islamists sought to form new alliances with westerners abroad and liberals at home who distanced themselves from the elements of authoritarian regime in Turkey. The search for international coalition led the Islamists to move westward where numerous human rights NGOs, the European Union, European Court of Human Rights and individual states had already been critical of Turkey's human rights record. At the end, the Islamists found themselves on the same side as the westerners, demanding democratization and further guarantees for civil and political rights in Turkey.[47]

Their pro-EU stand too was based on an observation that the more Turkey were distanced from the West and the EU in particular the stronger would be the tutelage of the army that treated the Islamic groups as an anomaly and threat. Thus, the EU emerged as a natural ally to reduce the influence of the army and to establish democratic governance within which the Islamists would be regarded as a legitimate player. The expectation was that the army's interventions in politics would be significantly lessened as a result of further democratization that had already been put as a precondition for Turkey's entry to the EU; a Kemalist state ideology guarded by the army would not be sustainable in an EU member Turkey.[48]

The Islamists have in fact been aware of the international/western dynamics of political reforms in Turkey since the declaration of the Tanzimat in 1839 attributed to the pressures of the European powers.[49] This historic view of the West as capable of imposing "reforms" in Turkey has played some role in the Islamists' recent rapprochement with the West. To push the reforms they wanted they turned to the West,

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[46] For an insider view on the need for change in Islamic movements see Yalçın Akdoğan, "Değişimin ve Dönüşümün Teorik Zemini," *Bilgi ve Düşünce*, Vol.1, No.4 (Jan. 2003), pp.12-14.

[47] Dagi (2004), pp.140-143.

[48] For an early analysis of this kind, see, "Is it Adieu to Ataturk?" *The Economist*, October 16, 1999. For the justification of the Islamists for supporting the EU membership see Ali Bulaç, "Niçin AB," *Zaman,* Dec. 11, 1999; Ali Bulaç, "Türkiye'nin ev ödevleri," *Zaman,* Feb. 16, 2000; Ali Bulaç, "FP, 312 ve demokrasi," *Zaman,* March 25, 2000; Ali Bulaç, "AB tartışması," *Zaman,* March 19, 2002.

[49] R. H. Davidson, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), p.78, 81; Lewis (1968), pp.45-72, 80, 122, 162.

realizing that the western demand for democratization and human rights overlapped with their search for protection against the Kemalist establishment including the military and the judiciary.[50]

As a result, the Islamists adopted a new and positive stand on understanding the West, Turkey's membership in the EU and integration of Turkey into global structures and processes.[51] This was a clear break from their very tradition, which used to be based on an open "crusade" against the West, deep suspicions about Western values (including democracy and human rights) and criticism of the Turkish history of westernization. The transformation of the Islamists' discourse, however, reinforced the Kemalists' growing anxiety about the West and western values.

**Kemalism and the Fear of Westernization**
The Islamist challenge has indeed served as a catalyst for testing the commitment of the Kemalists to take westernization to its logical end, i.e. a democratic republic. Such current issues like Kurdish separatism, human rights and the Islamic challenge all enhanced the Kemalists' perception of the West as plotting against Turkey.[52] References to the Sèvres Treaty were continuously made whenever the West took a critical position regarding human rights and the Kurdish question.[53] As a result, the West was criticized by the Kemalists/secularists for harboring not only the Kurdish separatists but also the Islamists. Through this discourse, old-time hard westernizers became vulnerable to the delegitimization of abandoning the goals of westernization that meant to lead to more democracy and human rights now considered by the Kemalists/secularists as threatening the integrity of the country and the regime by the manipulations of the Kurds and the Islamists who managed to forge a new alliance with the pro-European social, economic and intellectual sectors at home as well as in the western quarters.

The Islamists responded to the ideological dilemma of the traditional pro-western Kemalist elite, the arch rival of the Islamists, by adopting a pro-western stand themselves in an attempt both to win the support of the western powers abroad and liberal intellectuals at home, and to delegitimize the Kemalists who used to claim to be westernizers. By adapting "modern political values," the Islamists hoped to corner the Kemalists who readily disassociated themselves from the "ideal of democracy," opting for an elitist republicanism.[54] In fact, as the Islamists started to express their commitments to democracy and pluralism as a framework for their political and social

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[50] İhsan D. Dagi, "Human Rights and Democratization: Turkish Politics in the European Context," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 1, No.3 (2001), pp.51-68.

[51] Ahmet Harputlu, "Türkiye'de İslamcılığın Dönüşümleri ve Yeni Politik Durum," *Bilgi ve Düşünce*, Vol.1, No.4 (Jan. 2003), pp.15-18

[52] Oktay Sinanoglu, "Küreselleşmenin Gerçek Yüzü," http://www.aydinlik.com.tr/2004.04.11/default.html; Vural Savaş, "AB'nin Önlenemeyen Düşüşü," http://www.aydinlik.com.tr/2004.04.25/default.html; Vural Savaş, "Kuşatılan Türkiye," http://www.aydinlik.com.tr/2004.05.02/default.html; Yekta G. Özden, "Kazalar Zinciri," http://www.turksolu.org/63/ozden63.htm.

[53] For the impact of the Sevres Treaty on the Turkish perception of the world and foreign policy making see Jung (2003).

[54] See Yekta G. Özden, "Biçimsel Demokrasi," http://www.turksolu.org/56/ozden56.htm; and Vural Savaş, "Seçim Komedisi," http://www.aydinlik.com.tr/2004.04.04/default.html. The authors of these articles are two symbol names of Kemalism in recent years; the former was the president of the constitutional court when the court decided to close down the Welfare Party, and the latter was the prosecutor general who lodged the file for the closure of the Virtue Party.

survival, the Kemalists came to see western political values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law as ill-fitting the "realities" of Turkey. For them, if democracy is a political regime that would bring Islamists to power, and if human rights are values and a mechanism that protect the Islamists, and if the West still advocates these in a way that would harbor the Islamists then there would be no point in continuing with the declared objective of "westernization."

As the Kemalists seemed to have abandoned the ideal of westernization, some western quarters, particularly within the EU, realized that they could no longer do business with the Kemalists whom they used to describe as the pro-western architects of modern Turkey.[55] The resultant mutual distrust has led to the break-up of an historical block. The shift in the Kemalists' approach to the West, westernization and the EU in turn helped the Islamists overcome their historical hesitations towards the West that used to be seen as the ally of the Kemalists, while the West's questioning of Kemalist authoritarianism in recent years justified the Islamists' rapprochement with the West.

Developing a pro-western stand and adopting liberal democratic discourse may not only have damaged the Islamists' traditional appeal but it has also erected an Islamic identity based on a new political language that coexists with the West and westernization. The emergence of the JDP as a breakaway party from the NVM, embracing modern political values and integration with the EU is indicative of the direction the Islamists have taken.

**Conclusion**
Modern political values like human rights and democracy used to be debated among the Islamists by references to their "western origins" with no relevance to Islamic communities. Yet, the Islamists in Turkey seem to have distanced themselves from the earlier position that viewed the notions of democracy and human rights as a Western construction irrelevant for the Muslims. Rethinking the western question and criticizing the Islamist tradition paved the way for the emergence of the JDP as a post-Islamist political movement.

The ruling JDP's enthusiastic efforts for Turkey's EU membership, used to be described by the state elite as the last stage of westernization, in contrast to the hesitations of the Kemalists, is indicative of the changing positions of political forces in Turkish politics. It can be asserted that the Islamists in Turkey have had more problems with westernization and the Kemalist secularization than with the West itself. As the Kemalists seemed to have abandoned the idea and ideal of westernization, the Islamists have moved in advocating further westernization, which meant deeper democracy, broader human rights, closer integration with the EU and a lesser (Kemalist) state.

As rejection of the West and westernization was the very basis on which modern Islamist identity was traditionally built, the rapprochement with the West and westernization shakes the very basis of Islamist political identity. What is left is not an Islamist identity as we know it. Transformation of the NVM from the early 1970s to the

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[55] See for example the report presented to the European Parliament, by Dutch MEP Arie Ostlander, http://www.nethaber.com.tr/haber/arsiv/haberler/0,1106,83168_6_9094,00.html; and the statement of Chris Patten, the EU commissioner for external relations, in a conference at Oxford University http://www.zaman.com.tr/?hn=51832&bl=dishaberler&trh=20040525. Both identified Kemalism as a great obstacle to full democratization of Turkey.

late 1990s has given birth to a new political party (the JDP) with a liberal, democratic and pro-western orientation and political agenda. A movement that embraces modern political values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, which advocates integration with the EU, and manages to get votes from all segments of society can hardly be called Islamist. It is a case demonstrating that a discursive shift may be followed by an identity change under certain circumstances. The Islamists' recent departure from their traditional anti-West and anti-westernization position seems to have transformed the Islamic self in Turkey, opening up new possibilities for the coexistence of Islam and the West.