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**THE DIRECTORATE OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS AS A POLITICAL
INSTRUMENT IN TURKISH POLITICS: 1980 - 2016**

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TÜRK SİYASETİNDE POLİTİK BİR ENSTRÜMAN OLARAK DİYANET
İŞLERİ BAŞKANLIĞI: 1980 - 2016

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ABSTRACT

Elif Çam, “The Directorate of Religious Affairs as a Political Instrument in
Turkish Politics: 1980 - 2016”

The initial aim of the Turkish modernizers to establish the DRA was to take religion under state control and render religion compatible with state ideology charging the institution with an official role in propagation and protection of the latter, as well. Since its establishment on March 3, 1924, the DRA has mostly fulfilled its obligations throughout different governments and tried to avoid potential controversies either by refraining from hot topics that are likely to result in confrontation with the state or by making declarations that are instrumental in protecting state ideology. State-religion relations have undergone new momentums after 1980 coup d'état and the AKP period, in particular, and the DRA has assumed a more marked role. The DRA, as an ideological apparatus of the state, has been at the center of ongoing discussions due to its *de jure* monopoly on defining, regulating, producing and representing official Islam. Thus, the current thesis aims to show that DRA functioned as political instrument to legitimize Turkish state policies and reinforce its ideology between September 12, 1980 and July 15, 2016 coup d'états. To clarify the argument stated above, the discourse, function, role, empowerment and restriction of the DRA within the context of Turkish politics between 1980 and 2016 are analyzed.

ÖZET

Elif Çam, “Türk Siyasetinde Politik Bir Enstrüman Olarak Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı: 1980 - 2016”

Türk modernleştiricilerinin Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nı kurma amacı, dini devlet kontrolü altına almak ve kurumu devletin propagandası ve korunmasında da resmi bir rol üstlenen devlet ideolojisiyle uyumlu hale getirmektir. 3 Mart 1924'teki kuruluşundan itibaren, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı yükümlülüklerini büyük ölçüde farklı hükümetler genelinde yerine getirdi ve devletle çatışmaya yol açması muhtemel olan konulardan kaçınarak ya da devlet ideolojisini korumada etkili olan beyanlar yaparak olası tartışmalardan kaçınmaya çalıştı. Devlet-din ilişkileri 1980 darbesi ve özellikle AKP döneminden sonra yeni bir ivme kazandı ve kurum daha belirgin bir rol kazandı. Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, devletin ideolojik bir aygıtı olarak, resmi İslam'ı tanımlama, düzenleme, üretme ve temsil etme konusundaki yasal tekeli nedeniyle tartışmaların merkezinde yer aldı. Dolayısıyla mevcut tez, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nın 12 Eylül 1980 ile 15 Temmuz 2016 darbeleri arasında devlet politikalarını meşrulaştırmak ve ideolojisini güçlendirmek için siyasi bir araç olarak işlev gördüğünü göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Belirtilen argümanı açıklığa kavuşturmak için, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı'nın 1980-2016 yılları Türkiye siyaseti bağlamında söylemi, işlevi, rolü, yetkilendirilmesi ve sınırlandırılması incelenmiştir.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Most of the intellectual and institutional structures of modern Turkish state were modeled after late Ottoman state tradition. The new cadre of reformists who were active in the early republican era propagated the continuation of secularization efforts that had already been introduced in the Tanzimat period (1839- 76). Authoritarian- bureaucratic nation-building approach as a prominent component of Ottoman-Turkish modernization project geared towards a top down transformation of the individual and society has left its print on every republican institution, specifically on the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* in Turkish, the DRA hereinafter). The DRA has been one of the most controversial state institutions in modern Turkey. Much of the debate stems from the fact that the DRA is a state body that is constitutionally charged with regulation, production, management and dissemination of religion in a laic state.

Existence of an official institution under the Prime Ministry is due to the exceptional development of Turkish style laicism, which subordinates religion to the state. Similar to the Ottoman tradition of keeping the *ulama* within the state, the DRA was incorporated into the state system to control religion and prevent possible threats from it, however, the institution was different from its predecessor, the Office of the Sheik-ul Islam, in that it was disabled in public and governmental matters. Yet, Islam, which had considerable influence on the society, was instrumentalized in way that legitimized the founding ideology. Rather than disestablishing religion, the Kemalist modernizers reestablished it through the DRA, which reinforced and preached officially sanctioned religiosity that was cleansed from former “superstitions” and “backwardness”. Since its establishment, the DRA has had *de jure* monopoly in producing, regulating, defining and representing “correct” Islam in the public sphere. Thus, independent Islamic groups and activities have been deemed illegal and threat to the status quo.

That the Turkish state has exercised control over religion and considered religion a unifying factor in its nation building process has been voiced by various scholars studying the relationship between the state and religion. Through the Directorate, the Turkish state has instrumentalized religion in creating acceptable citizens loyal to its ideology. Sunni Islam was considered as the *de facto* religion of the laic state and other sects and religious orders were not represented in this scheme. Thus, the DRA has functioned as an ideological state apparatus. This was further reinforced in 1982 constitution, where the institution was charged with “aiming at national solidarity and unity”.¹

While there are important studies on the relationship between the DRA and the state in the literature, instrumentalization of the DRA between the September 12 and July 15 coup d'états has not been studied comprehensively. Majority of the studies shed light on preparation and content of khutbahs and the agency of imams in preaching the khutbahs sent from the central Directorate office.

İřtar Gözaydın analyses the history, organization, budget and staff of the DRA as well as religion-state relationship and discussions on laicism comprehensively in her pioneering study *Diyanet: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Dinin Tanzimi*.² She discusses the intervention of the state in religion and the social organization of it through the DRA. In her analysis, the DRA mainly functions by responding to both the expectations of the state and society. Similarly, İsmail Kara deals with the interaction between the state and religion from a historical perspective in a detailed way in *Cumhuriyet Türkiye'si'nde Bir Mesele Olarak*

¹ The article 136 of the 1982 constitution reads: “The Presidency of Religious Affairs, which is within the general administration, shall exercise its duties prescribed in its particular law, in accordance with the principles of secularism, removed from all political views and ideas, and aiming at national solidarity and integrity.” (milletçe dayanışma ve bütünleşmeyi amaç edinerek)

² İřtar Gözaydın, *Diyanet: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nde Dinin Tanzimi* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2016).

İslam.³ Kara argues that debates about the DRA is mostly due to laicism which is exercised as an ideological mechanism by the Turkish political authorities rather than a scientific or legal concept. He puts succinctly that the DRA has been subservient to the state and deals with the religious affairs of the state rather than that of the Muslims.

Some studies analyze the khutbahs prepared by the DRA. Ceren Kenar explores attempts to regulate Islam by the state through Friday khutbahs and compliance of imams to the texts in her master thesis.⁴ She shows voluntary compliance of imams to the state centralization of religion in her in-depth interviews with imams and the DRA staff in mufti offices and through disciplinary measures implemented by the Directorate. In his master thesis, Muhammet Habib Saçmalı considers the state, the society and the AK Parti government to be the main actors determining the position, aim, discourse and activities of the DRA.⁵ He presents the passive agency of khutbah committee members and their employment of self-censorship to comply with the demands and orders of the various actors including the state, government and society in order to avoid confrontation. Drawing on the Kemalist-Islamist cleavage, Ömer Akalın discusses the transformation of the official Islam adopted by the DRA after the consolidation of power by the AKP in his thesis.⁶ He argues that the institution has represented the version of Islam embraced by the AKP as a result of AKP's "desecularization". He elaborates on the idea of nation, ethnicity, terrorism and science preached in khutbah texts to show this distinction.

³ İsmail Kara, *Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinde Bir Mesele Olarak İslam- 1* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2017a); İsmail Kara, *Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sinde Bir Mesele Olarak İslam- 2* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2017b).

⁴ Ceren Kenar, *Bargaining Between Islam and Kemalism: An Investigation of Official Islam Through Friday Sermons* (MA Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2011).

⁵ Muhammed Habib Saçmalı, *Compliance and Negotiation: The Role of Turkish Diyanet in the Production of Friday Khutbas* (MA Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2013).

⁶ Ömer Akalın, *The Change in Official Islam in Turkey: An Analysis of Friday Sermons Published by the Presidency of Religious Affairs* (MA Thesis, Sabancı University, 2016).

Using something as a political instrument is related to political employment of it to promote and legitimize policy goals of governments or subordination of it for political purposes. Political authorities use a variety of means ranging from arts, the media or government provision of services in the areas of healthcare, education or religion to inculcate certain policy aims. It has already been emphasized in the literature that the DRA has functioned as a political instrument for preaching a pro-state and tamed version of Islam in the Turkish case. Thus, this thesis aims to analyze continuities and changes with respect to the instrumentalization of the DRA by various political authorities between 1980 and 2016. The main argument of the thesis is that the period between September 12, 1980 and July 15, 2016 signifies a historical shift in the instrumentalization of the DRA. The first reason for this change was that the Directorate was charged with a moral task of ‘aiming at national solidarity and integrity’ and promote Turkish Islam abroad after the September 12. Secondly, during the AKP era, the DRA has assumed a key position in shaping social life in line with AKP’s ideology. It would be stating the obvious that extending the religious sphere and designing the society based on Islamic credentials are important considerations for the AKP policies. The AKP’s consolidation of power and increasing dominance on the DRA has resulted in a widening of the Directorate’s power and functions that reach far into religious, social and political issues. The new function of the DRA reflects such AKP policies as social and political issues, family, women and education policies and foreign policy.

I further develop the study by addressing the agency of the DRA and political actors in a comparative manner. Analyzing how the DRA recalibrate its discourse, publications and activities and resituate its function according to the changing political atmosphere would offer an insight into the dynamic and complex relationship between the state and religion. Additionally, it intends to show that the role and function of the DRA as an ideological state apparatus and a constitutional unit in a laic state in legitimizing state policies and holding *de jure* monopoly on Islam has not changed under the AKP, which comes from a strand

of political Islam.

The study tries to contribute to the existing literature on how the relationship between the state and religion develops through focusing on the DRA. A deeper analysis into the policies of different governments and instrumentalization of the DRA along the lines of state ideology gives us a better understanding of DRA's role. Furthermore, how the AKP's consolidation of power and its hegemony over the entire state institutions are reflected on the DRA would make modest contributions to recent developments in state-religion interaction.

The second chapter of this study will start with the development of state-religion relations in Turkey through the secondary literature. The dominant Turkish state ideologies and instrumentalization of the DRA in response to these ideologies will be presented. This chapter will discuss the Kemalist nation-building project, the constituents of the new citizen in the young republic and the envisioned role of Islam in it. Then, the motives that led to the establishment of the DRA and the function of it throughout different political authorities will be discussed. The chapter will proceed with criticism raised against to legal status with respect to laicism, discrimination towards other sects and its function by laicists and Islamic wings. Then, the unique character of Turkish laicism contrary to Western examples will be underlined. An analysis of the state as the propagator and regulator of laicism will be useful for explaining the reasons for existence of a constitutional unit responsible with religious affairs in a laic state.

The third chapter of the study will focus on instrumentalization of the DRA in Turkish politics under different political authorities. The chapter starts with analysis of the Turkish Islamic synthesis and its ideological influence on the junta. This ideological influence was reflected through the 1982 constitution, war on leftist ideologies and deployment of the DRA both at home and abroad. Transformation of the DRA from a domestic control mechanism over religion to a tool to ensure national unity abroad within this political atmosphere will be

analyzed. It is noteworthy that the junta and subsequent civilian governments attached great importance to religion and they were competent in instrumentalizing Islam. Then, statist and nationalist discourse of the DRA, its control of religion through various mechanisms, its reaction to the coups and other political developments will be discussed.

The fourth chapter focuses on the AKP period where the DRA has experienced major transformations. Especially after 2010, when the party consolidated its power and managed to replace the ingrained Kemalist ideology with its own, the DRA has become one of the most important state institutions that promote the AKP's ideology and reinforce its policies. Thus, a brief discussion of factors that facilitated the authoritarian backslide will be offered. The position of the DRA vis-à-vis the state is highly influenced by the ruling actors and it can be argued that under the AKP period the DRA has transformed from containing Islam to supporting it. This is, nevertheless, a nationalized and state-controlled Islam with no change to the DRA's traditional function and role. The institution has experienced its strongest time under the AKP both financially and legally. Its support to AKP policies in education, family, ethnicity, refashioning the society, Alevi issue, foreign policy and the Gülen Movement will be analyzed to show the relationship between the DRA and the rulers. The July 15 coup attempt is particularly significant to show how the DRA lent its support to the government, legitimized its policies and tried to criminalize and discredit the coup plotters. To summarize, the chapter tries to show that while the DRA has functioned as an ideological state apparatus to legitimize the policies of the ruling group and reinforce the state ideology, its function has increased remarkably both in capacity, intensity and frequency.

1. 2. Data and Method

The related data for the analysis consists of different archival sources; legal regulations, official documents and records, speeches given by politicians or the military and activities and publications of the DRA. The 1982 Constitution drawn after coup d'état charged the DRA with a new role; "aiming at national solidarity and unity" while keeping the articles of the related law on the DRA intact. Another point that should be paid attention is the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (hereinafter TIS) of which some principles were incorporated into the 82 Constitution. The underlying principles of the synthesis and its deployment in politics especially with respect to the DRA were analyzed. With the 28 of February 1997, the DRA was affected negatively and came under close scrutiny due to the active intervention of the military commanders into the activities of the DRA. The involvement of the military in 1997 through the National Security Council was examined by referring to the meetings held and decisions taken during through *Resmi Gazete*, official documents, circulars, the media and other related sources.

The public speeches given by the military and politicians were also analyzed in order to show the Turkish state's control on religion/the DRA and mobilization of religion through the institution. As such, it has been a practice for the ruling elite to intervene in the practices of and interpretation of religious knowledge by the DRA in order to generate support for state policies and prevent reactionary activities. The speeches also serve as channels whereby politicians or the military warn and even threaten the DRA indirectly. Within the scope of this study, only the speeches given by high profiles were analyzed.

The last source of data is the reaction of the DRA. The function and activities of the DRA experienced a turning point with September 12, 1980 and have increased tremendously since then. Religion was incorporated into the state discourse and the DRA was deployed in reshaping the society morally and in Turkish foreign policy throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s. The activities

and function of the institution increased in range and extent tremendously in the AKP period. The discourse/activities of the DRA have tended to show a synchronizing trend with the policies and discourse of the incumbent party. To show the role of the DRA with respect to its changing function between 1980 and 2016, public speeches by the DRA members, its fatwas, khutbahs, *Diyanet Gazetesi* between September 1980 and December 1990, its scientific magazine *Diyanet İlmî Dergi* between 1980 and 2016 and its monthly magazine *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* between January 1991 and August 2016 were analyzed.

One key point is the khutbahs which are delivered every week before the Friday prayer since khutbahs serve as a channel of communication between the state and the public. As mentioned earlier, a complete centralization of khutbahs between 1997 and 2006 was ensured, and as of 2006 khutbah committees under the mufti offices in each city are charged with khutbah preparation. Khutbah preparation including the selection of topics and use of certain vocabulary is subject to certain guidelines and rules, which indicates both the scope of state control on religion and the conformity of the institution. Within this context reports, regulations and circulars by the DRA with the purpose of defining the content of Friday khutbahs were studied. Additionally, a discourse analysis of khutbahs which overlap with the policies and discourse of the ruling elite were carried out. Khutbahs to be analyzed were taken from *Diyanet Gazetesi* and official DRA website.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this chapter is to present the development of state-religion relations and function of the DRA in Turkey. The conceptual framework will draw on the Althusserian ideological state apparatuses in explaining the instrumentalization of the DRA in Turkish politics in response to the changing state ideologies. The ideals that shaped the Turkish modernizers, the establishment of the DRA, its role in Kemalist nation-building project and multi-party period will be explained. Then, criticisms towards the existence and function of the DRA with by different societal groups will be evaluated. The chapter will proceed with the ‘exceptionalism’ of the Turkish laicism compared to the Western secularism which fulfills a complete separation of the state and religion. The final part will discuss the ‘official Islam’ as the de facto state religion. A discussion of Turkish state’s favoring a specific interpretation of Islam, despite its absence in the constitution, will provide insights into the instrumental usage of religion through a constitutional state unit.

2. 1. The Development of State-Religion Relations in Turkey

Analyzing the development and trajectory of state-religion relations in modern Turkey entails acknowledging early Ottoman modernization efforts that were initiated during the Tanzimat era in that the Republican state structure and most of its institutions are heir to the Ottoman Empire.⁷ The roots of the Westernization, which took as its target strengthening the central state, can be traced back to the Ottoman Empire. Although Westernization/ secularization was

⁷See İřtar Gözaydın 2016, p. 13; Ümit Cizre Sakallıođlu, “Rethinking the Connections Between Turkey’s “Western” Identity versus Islam”, *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, 7:12, 3-18 (1998), p. 7; řerif Mardin, *Din ve İdeoloji* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2018), pp. 142-149.

a priority for the rulers of the Republican state, the policies in shaping Turkish identity adopted by them were continuation of the historical Ottoman duality, with Islam being the primary marker. Thus, the process that was both the continuation of the Islamic movements developed between 1908 and 1922 and the Ottomanization- Islamization policy of Abdülhamid the second should be taken into consideration.⁸ Indeed, the idea of mobilizing Muslims in order to avoid the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire propagated by Namık Kemal was drawn on by the new Republic and during the establishment of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Similarly, Ziya Gökalp, known as the “father of Turkish nationalism”, advocated that progress could be achieved through “modernization” that was accompanied by parallel processes of “Turkification” and “Islamization”.⁹

The founders of the Republic were heavily influenced by the Enlightenment, as science had to replace religion and traditions in order to attain civilization. Multi-religious, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual population as well as traditions and religion which accounted for the backwardness of the society were the ill legacy of the Ottoman Empire. A homogenous nation state and replacement of religion with nationalism was the cure proposed. This era was marked by a staunch positivism and nationalism. The Republican revolution engaged heavily in transforming the *ancien* values of the *ancien regime*; Islamic community was to be replaced with the *secular nation*.¹⁰ In this framework, nationalism would unify the population rather than religion, and sovereignty would belong to the nation, thus Turkish nationalism would serve as a “civic religion”.

On the other hand, a positivist understanding of religion which was compatible with science and reason was accommodated by the Kemalist modernizers. Emphasizing logic, reason, nature, science and technique as

⁸Şerif Mardin, *Türkiye, İslam ve Sekülerizm* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2017), p. 75.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Metin Heper, “Turkey: Yesterday, today, tomorrow”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 1: 3, (2001) p. 3.

manifestations of a positivist interpretation of religion were embodied by Mustafa Kemal in 1923 when he expressed that “Our religion is the most reasonable and natural religion. And only because of this, it is the last religion. In order to be natural, a religion should be in accordance with reason, science, technique and logic. Our religion is completely in accordance with these.”¹¹

“Yet, they should never identify these principles with dogmas of the books that were supposed to be descended from the skies. We deduce our inspirations directly from life, not from the skies or the invisible world”.¹² The sentences uttered by Mustafa Kemal in his address to the Grand National Assembly are manifestations of a sharp divergence from the orthodox consensus of state-religion interaction and his positivist approach. Abolition of the Caliphate and the Shari’a Law and adoption of Western laws instead, outlawing the religious headgear and outfit and many other revolutions that were designed to alter the fundamental values of the population proved to be instrumental in creating a sharp rupture from the Ottoman system.

The reformers targeted not only religion, but also traditions to fight the “backwardness” of the population. By imprisoning religion to individual conscience, they eliminated the role and visibility of Islam in public, thus religious powers were deprived of any legitimate control or check mechanisms over the executive. In rare cases of pressure attempted by religious powers, they were outlawed and a more authoritarian secularism policy was pursued by the state. Lapidus best summarizes the role of Islam and the secularization/Westernization policies pursued during the early Republican era

¹¹ “Bizim dinimiz en makul ve en tabii bir dindir. Ve ancak bundan dolayıdır ki, son din olmuştur. Bir dinin tabii olması için akla, fenne, ilme ve mantığa tetabuk etmesi lazımdır. Bizim dinimiz bunlara tamamen mutabıktır.” Halis Ayhan, “Cumhuriyet Dönemi Din Eğitime Genel Bir Bakış: Atatürk’ün İslam Dini ve Din Eğitimi Hakkındaki Görüşleri”, *M. Ü. İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 18 (2000), 5-27, p. 15.

¹² “Fakat, bu prensipleri, gökten indiği sanılan kitapların dogmaları ile asla bir tutmamalılar. Biz, ilhamlarımızı, gökten ve gaipten değil doğrudan doğruya hayattan almış bulunuyoruz.”

when he argues that “Islam was ‘disestablished’ and deprived of a role in public life”,¹³ which is shared by many scholars, too.¹⁴

The establishment of the DRA helped facilitate this transition. The fact that it was established in order to defend the Kemalist state against any possible religious threat and to reinforce state ideology demonstrates that it functioned as a fundamental ideological state apparatus within the state. In his distinction between repressive and ideological state apparatuses, Althusser shows that repressive state apparatuses which are under direct state control and consist of the police, the judiciary, the prison system and army resort to coercion; while the latter such as the education system, religious institutions, the family, the media or culture use ideology in order to transform society along the lines of principles and aims of the dominant political groups.¹⁵ For Althusser:

“An Ideological State Apparatus is a system of defined institutions, organizations, and the corresponding practices. Realized in the institutions, organizations, and practices of this system is all or part (generally speaking, a typical combination of certain elements) of the State Ideology. The ideology realized in an ISA [Ideological State Apparatus] ensures its systematic unity on the basis of an “anchoring” in material functions specific to each ISA; these functions are not reducible to that ideology, but serve it as a ‘support’.”¹⁶

Furthermore, ideological state apparatuses ‘teach ‘know-how’ but in forms

¹³Ira Marvin Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, (Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 608.

¹⁴Binnaz Toprak, “Türkiye’de Dinin Denetim İşlevi” In *Türk Siyasal Hayatı: Türkiye’de Politik Değişim ve Modernleşme*, edited by Ersin Kalaycıoğlu and Ali Yaşar Sarıbay, (Istanbul: Sentez Yayıncılık, 2016), pp. 389-401; Nilüfer Göle, “Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites”, *Middle East Journal*, vol. 51, no. 1, (1997), pp. 46-58; Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “Rethinking Connections between Turkey’s “Western” Identity versus Islam”, (1998), *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, 7:12, 3-18, p. 7.

¹⁵ Louis Althusser, *İdeoloji ve Devletin İdeolojik Aygıtları*, (İstanbul: İthaki, 2014), pp. 44-52.

¹⁶ Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, (Verso: 2014), p. 165.

that ensure subjection to the dominant ideology.¹⁷ A certain type of ideology is realized in ideological state apparatuses. Moreover, ideology is produced and reproduced in ideological state apparatuses. In Althusser's words "this ideology, being the dominant ideology, is that of the dominant class, the class that holds the state power and directly and imperiously commands the repressive state apparatuses."¹⁸ Ideological state apparatuses manufacture consent among the population in order for the dominant structure to maintain political and social hegemony. Various associations, foundations and unions with direct and indirect connections to the dominant political groups can insemminate a certain outlook and can compel people to internalize this worldview through habits, rituals and practices.

The Althusserian analysis above brings us to the discussion of the Turkish state ideology and political instrumentalization of the DRA along the lines of this ideology. In a broad sense, ideology refers to "a more or less coherent set of ideas that provide the basis for some kind of organized political action."¹⁹ The term political instrument refers to employment of something systematically and consciously by governments and ruling elite. Political actors make use of a number of different means to reinforce their ideologies or values. It can be described as an indirect propaganda method to maintain power or reach desired policy aims. For the Turkish context, the most dominant state ideology has been Kemalism, which is based on the doctrines of Mustafa Kemal and promotes secularism, nationalism, economic development and Westernization as the ideological basis of the modern Turkish Republic.²⁰ According to Zürcher the

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

¹⁹ Andrew Heywood, *Key Concepts in Politics and International Relations*, (Palgrave Macmillan: 2015), p. 96.

²⁰ Kim Shively, "Taming Islam: Studying Religion in Secular Turkey", *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 81, No. 3, (Summer, 2008), p. 684.

basic principles of Kemalism were republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism and revolutionism.²¹ Similarly, Mesut Yeğen argues that Kemalism refers to a radical secularism, ethnicist nationalism and authoritarian centralization.²² Yet, the Turkish state ideology has developed through the changing socio-political atmosphere. Whereas Kemalism declined dramatically after transition to the multi-party politics in 1950s, it still exerted influence in Turkish politics.²³ Since the 1980s, Kemalizm has transformed into a conservative ideology²⁴ and the Turkish Islamic Synthesis (Türk İslam Sentezi), which argues for the historical closeness of Islam and Turkishness, has accelerated this transformation through the incorporation of religion in the state discourse after the military intervention in 1980. Nationalist-conservative centers had important positions within the state during the September 12, which resulted in overlappings between right-wing Kemalism and nationalist-conservatism.²⁵ Members of the *Aydınlar Ocağı* (Hearths of Intellectuals) made their ways into key institutions such as TRT and the Constitutional Committee. However, a coup on February 28, 1997 attempted to reverse the situation and restore the old Kemalist secular nation-state in response to rise of political Islam and Kurdish movement. Reactionarism was designated as a major internal problem that posed imminent threats to the survival of the state. All the politics with the exception of nationalism were suppressed during this time.²⁶ The repercussions of the February 28 proved to be short-lived with the AKP's ascent to power in less than a decade.

²¹ Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2003), p. 189.

²² Mesut Yeğen, "Kemalizm ve Hegemonya?" In *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: Kemalizm* edited by Ahmet Insel, (İstanbul: 2019, İletişim Yayınları), pp. 57-61.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 62-63.

²⁴ Murat Belge, "Mustafa Kemal ve Kemalizm" In *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce* 2019, p. 40.

²⁵ Tanıl Bora, Yüksel Taşkın, "Sağ Kemalizm" In *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce* 2019, p. 544-545.

²⁶ Ümit Cizre, "Egemen İdeoloji ve Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri: Kavramsal ve İlişkisel Bir Analiz" In *Bir Zümre, Bir Parti: Türkiye'de Ordu*, (İstanbul: Birikim Kitapları, 2017), p. 149.

The party coming from Political Islamist tradition of National Outlook (Milli Görüş) declared itself conservative-democrat. Since the party challenged the hegemony of the classical Kemalist ideology, some scholars argue that Political Islam has been the “dominant ideological reference for the AKP”.²⁷ Those who subscribe to this view draw attention to lifting of the headscarf ban by the AKP on the grounds that it violated the laicism principle. Yet, the headscarf issue should be addressed within the context of rights and freedom in a constitutional-democratic regime rather than assertive laicism debates.²⁸ In its first term at the office, the AKP government aimed at decentralization, liberalization and general limitation of the immediate state intervention in the areas of religion, economy and democratization due to the prospect of EU membership.²⁹ This period was marked by democratization efforts to fulfill the criterias set by the EU. As the party consolidated its power and captured the state in its second term in office, and after 2011 in particular, the consolidation of democracy has been reversed. The party has embraced traditional nationalist policies and Islamism and as indicated by Öktem the general structure of a state ideology that adopts supremacy of the state over the individuals and homogeneity of the population has been kept intact.³⁰

The instrumentalization of the DRA throughout the changing political atmosphere and ideologies reflected the political developments in modern Turkey. Different political parties, including the junta rules, have instrumentalized the DRA to appeal to the predominantly Sunni Muslim population. As Islam is the

²⁷ Kerem Öktem, “Ruling Ideologies in Modern Turkey” In *The Oxford Handbook of Turkish Politics* edited by Güneş Murat Tezcür, (July 2020), p. 2.

²⁸ See the analysis of the issue from the rights and freedoms perspective, Murat Borovalı and Ömer Turan, “Haklar ve Özgürlükler Perspektifinden Başörtüsü: Bir Demokrasi Sorunu”, *Doğu Batı*, vol. 64, pp. 53-85, (2013).

²⁹ Günter Seufert, “Religion: Nation-Building Instrument of State or Factor of Civil Society? The AKP between State-and Society-Centered Religious Politics” In *Turkey Beyond Nationalism: Towards Post-Nationalist Identities* edited by Hans-Lukas Kieser, (2006: I.B Tauris), pp. 144-146.

³⁰ Kerem Öktem 2020, p. 4.

definite marker, resorting to a religious discourse and capitalizing on religion have gone unconstested for different rules seeking for political and social stability regardless of their ideological inclinations. It is noteworthy to state that the support of the Directorate has been decisive for ensuring the stability of the society for the junta governments that defined themselves above all ideologies and did not seek electoral support. For the political parties, on the other hand, expanding the religious sphere has facilitated voter base and helped serve their ideological purposes. Politicians from different spectrums have engaged in promoting their ideologies and values rather than merely representing the existing ones. Enhancing the status, budget and staff of the Directorate was important for accountability and electoral support.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the DRA was one of the key institutions that rested at the center of the cultural revolution project that Atatürk was determined to carry out. In the early Republican period the main aim of the DRA was to disseminate a version of Islam which did not contradict with the new laicist nation state and to provide legitimacy for the state structure. Yet, the modernizers adopted a double discourse: firstly, Islam was disestablished from the public political arena; secondly, Islamic politics were incorporated into the system in many ways.³¹ Religion was instrumentalized to provide sovereignty of the new Republic, to purify religion and free it from superstitions through the DRA. During this time, the most radical Kemalist implementation was the Turkish recitation of the Qur'an and the *azan* in 1932 as part of its Turkification and purification of the language endeavor. The DRA issued a circular to ensure that khutbahs were read in Turkish during the Eid- ul Fitr (Ramazan Bayramı) and those who did not receive a certificate from the Directorate were not allowed to do so. Another circular in the same year by the Directorate banned the recitation of

³¹ Ümit Cizre, "Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (May, 1996), p. 231.

azan in Arabic.³² The institution, authorized to represent and regulate public forms of religion, was instrumentalized in direct state intervention into religious life.

While the Kemalist ideology lost its hegemony with transition to democracy, the status and structure of the DRA were not altered. Rather than restricting the public visibility of Islam, the subsequent rulers adopted the policy of increasing it. Appealing to religious sentiments to legitimize political decisions, sustain power, curb social backlash and reinforce their ideologies has gained importance. In fact, during the Democrat Party (DP) rule, successor to the single party government, the DRA showcased sending troops to the Korean war as a jihad fought against atheist communists and designated the soldiers fallen in the war as martyrs in a book it published in response to the government policy of legitimizing the action religiously.³³ Since then, Islam has been incorporated to the state discourse marking a sharp rupture from the previous staunch laicism. Furthermore, military interventions strengthened the Directorate institutionally: it was incorporated into the constitution after the May 27, 1960, was constitutionally charged with the moral task of “aiming at national unity and solidarity” after September 12, 1980. Yet, February 28, 1997 signified resurgence of totalitarian Kemalism with direct intervention of the army into politics. The Directorate represented official Islam during the heydays of February 28. It was to preach “correct” Islam against the reactionary movements that tried to deceive and exploit pious people.

The AKP favored relinquishing state grip on religion and, if possible, granting an autonomous status to the DRA in its first term of the at the office.³⁴

³² “Ezan 18 Yıl Türkçe Okundu”, *Hürriyet*, June 16, 2000.
<https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/ezan-18-yil-turkce-okundu-39161709> (Retrieved January 23, 2021).

³³ Behlül Özkan, “Türkiye’de Milli Vatanın İnşası: Dar’ul İslam’dan Türk Vatanına”, (Istanbul: Kırmızı Kedi Yayınevi, 2019), p. 277.

³⁴ Günter Seufert, 2006, pp. 142- 145.

The party challenged the ingrained Kemalist state-religion relationship in line with its general policy of liberalization. As the party returned to its previous Islamist ideology accompanied with Turkish nationalist policies and authoritarianism, the instrumentalization of the DRA in politics has gained a new momentum. President Erdoğan's frequent references to religion and his remarks about raising 'pious generations' are clear indicators of the new state ideology which is promoted and reflected by the DRA. Ahmet Erdi Öztürk argues that 'the DRA, under the AKP rule, has been transformed into a pliable state apparatus geared towards implementing the political ideology of the ruling cadre'.³⁵ Traditionally, the DRA would always refrain from intervening in politics or making comments about controversial topics and act as a loyal supporter of the Turkish understanding of Islam-state relations. Due to a significant change in state ideology, a more pronounced position of the DRA and increased public visibility of the key DRA staff alongside the politicians point out its instrumentalization as an ideological state apparatus during the AKP period. Being the highest religious authority in Turkey, the institution has increased its means and extent of its services access to a great majority of the population with its diverse publications, *Diyanet TV*, *Diyanet Radyo*, social media outlets, fatwas and Friday khutbahs. Also, the *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı* (Turkish Diyanet Foundation) supports the institution financially. In the AKP period, religious functionaries, abroad in particular, have enjoyed a relative autonomy and can take initiatives on their own.

2. 2. The Kemalist Nation Building

Although the Turkish nationalist consciousness started to come into question during the Ottoman mobilization against the European imperialism, it

³⁵ Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, "Turkey's Diyanet under AKP rule: from protector to imposer of state ideology?", *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16:4, 619-635, (2016), p. 619.

experienced its culmination with the Turkish War of Liberation, the creation of the Turkish Republic and subsequent events. Dual processes of nationalism and modernization were the epitome of Kemalism. Within this schema, Turkish nationalism was based on territorial identity; Turkey was defined geographically and people who lived within the borders of this territory were Turkish people. However, within official state and cultural practices a “Turk” meant someone who spoke Turkish and was a Sunni Muslim.³⁶ Rather than supporting ambitions of Pan-Turkish supporters of a Turkish Empire that would unite the entire Anatolian and Central Asian Turks, the Kemalists mobilized a territory-based nationalism.³⁷ According to Bernard Lewis, “Mustafa Kemal aspired to imbue the minds with a new Anatolian Turkish motherland idea. His aim was to eradicate loyalty towards Islam and Ottoman Empire, to confront Pan-Islamist and Pan-Turkish inclinations, and to create a new loyalty to homeland among the Turkish nation.”³⁸ This posed a stark contrast to earlier notions of nationalism namely ethnic and Islamist. Turkish nationalism was to replace previous forms of ideologies such as Ottomanism and Islamism propagated vis-à-vis imperialist European powers. Unlike Ottomanism, which promoted genesis of an Ottoman nation among multi-ethnic and multi-religious groups of the large empire, and Islamism, which attempted employ Islam as a social cohesion among the ethnically diverse Muslim population of the disintegrating empire, Turkish nationalism aspired to eliminate any multiplicities of ethnicity and religion in an attempt to create a homogenous nation state.

Concomitantly, ‘anti-imperialism’ and ‘pro-westernization’ characterized Kemalism. All the legacy of the Ottoman past was to be relinquished on the grounds that the empire was an instrument of the imperialist powers. The

³⁶ Kemal Kirişçi, (2000) ‘Disaggregating Turkish Citizenship and Immigration Practices’, *Middle Eastern Studies* 36 (3):1-22.

³⁷ Behlül Özkan, 2019, p. 187.

³⁸ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 358.

founding cadre of the new Republic aspired to mold a homogenous nation state geared towards nationalism, secularism, Westernization, citizenship rights, modern society, rule of law and democracy rather than the Shari'a and the Sultanate. The founders of the Republic thought that religion accounted for the backwardness and illiteracy among the public, and the ill legacy of the previous state was a political threat to their project. Abolishing the caliphate, ascribing sovereignty to people rather than divine sources were the first series of goals met in order to rescue Islam 'from the position of a political instrument'.³⁹ However, with the outbreak of the Shaikh Said rebellion in 1925 the Kemalist regime felt under an ethnic and religious threat. Its brutal repression by the regime and implementation of many reforms afterwards to secure its stability consolidated Turkish nationalism and secularism. The reforms were legitimized in the fight against 'reactionary movements' and 'Kurdish separatists'.

The Italian Penal Code and the Swiss Civil Code were adopted, the Alphabet Law and the Dress and Headgear Law were enacted, and all the religious orders, shrines and lodges were closed down and declared illegal. İsmail Kara gives an account of early Republican reforms that were connected to religion such as proclamation of Sunday as public holiday instead of Friday which had been the holiday since then (1925), acceptance of the European time zone (1925), and European calendar (1926), erasing the *tughras* (a calligraphic signature of an Ottoman sultan that was affixed to official documents) on the official buildings (1927), annulment of the second article of the 1924 Constitution, which designated that "The religion of the Turkish state is Islam"⁴⁰ from the Constitution (1928), changing the administration of oath⁴¹ (1928), repealing Arabic and Persian from the school curricula (1929), banning the use of traditional and

³⁹ Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 54.

⁴⁰ "Devletin dini din-i İslam'dır"

⁴¹ Before that time, the traditional oath statement was in Arabic "Vallahi, Billahi" meaning "To God it's true".

religious titles such as *efendi, bey, paşa, ağa, hacı, hafız, hoca, molla, beyefendi, hanım, hanımefendi* and *hazretleri* (1934).⁴² Apart from these, traditional Turkish music named *musiki* was banned, calligraphy and flute playing (*neyzenlik*) were disgraced due to the adoption of the Latin alphabet and outlawing of dervish lodges. Secularism in the Kemalist regime was not the separation of state and religion as such, but was the banishment of religion from public life and subjugation of religion through state institutions.

The Kemalist regime attempted to propagate the idea among the nation that the new Republic was completely independent of the Ottoman Empire and everything was novel about it. In order to disestablish Islamic and Ottoman elements from the new identity solely based on nationhood, two projects were undertaken in 1930s. Thus, a thesis put forward by the Turkish Institute of Historical Research, founded by the government, stated that Turks came to Anatolia from Central Asia because of adverse climatic conditions. The Turkish History Thesis argued that Anatolia had long been a homeland for Turks, Turks were civilized disapproving Western claims that Turks were incapable of establishing civilizations, Turkish history dated back to ancient times and Turks belonged to the Caucasians - not to the yellow Mongolian race which was considered a second race by the Europeans.⁴³ The thesis also presented a detailed account of earlier civilizations established by Turks, while it briefly explained the Ottoman history, and by highlighting kinship with Anatolian civilizations it denied the Ottoman legacy.⁴⁴ Similarly, the Turkish Language Institute put forward the Sun Language Theory, which asserted that all languages in the world derived from Turkish originally spoken in Central Asia. Both of the theses were included in textbooks and school curricula as part of a grand cultural project including education in order to consolidate the ideology of the new republic.

⁴² İsmail Kara 2017a, p. 32.

⁴³ Elif Gençkal Eroler, *Dindar Nesil Yetiştirmek* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019), pp. 46-47.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Creation of these historical myths which can be characterized as manifestation of an extreme form of nationalism were instrumental in the building of a new national identity and the replacement of religion as a binding ideology.

The Law on Unification of Education was a manifestation of state secularism on education and mobilization of educational institutions in disseminating the Kemalist message. The law unified all the education institutions under the Ministry of National Education and the state could implement all education policies including curriculum design and appointment of teaching staff. The underlying reason for the law was to eliminate school *-madrasahs* (Muslim theological school) duality in education which gradually became prevalent after Tanzimat as the justification for the law presented "... Individuals in country can be given a standardized education. Providing two different education can bring up two different people".⁴⁵ However, what actually took place was not an equal unification of both types of schools, it was to suppress madrasahs (read religious education).⁴⁶ In other words, the law was the extension of policy of erasing religion from the public sphere to the education pillar. Unification of education would standardize beliefs and consciousness by imposing certain a cultural and moral character upon the public. State-regulated education would have paramount importance in bringing up monotype citizens that were loyal and obedient to the new state and internalized values of the new regime.

Accordingly, Kemalism acknowledged a temporary tutelage that could pave the way to Westernization and democratization, and that a stable democracy could be achieved gradually.⁴⁷ Yet, transforming an overwhelmingly pious Muslim population and structures into a staunchly secular one meant an uneasy undertaking with potential social backlash and resistance for positivist founders of

⁴⁵ See İsmail Kara 2017b, p. 211.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Menderes Çınar, "Kemalist Cumhuriyetçilik ve İslamcı Kemalizm" In *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: İslamcılık* edited by Yasin Aktay, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 2018), p. 158.

the Republic, who unquestioningly inherited the legacy of the late Ottoman and Orientalist thinking appraising Islam to be in conflict with modernization and progress. The Republican elite had to resort to Islam, being a legitimate source, to convince ethnically and religiously mixed masses to the Republican ideals. The founders had to accept the potency of Islam among the public for Islam had always been the sole authority and unifying power for the traditionally living society. While Islam was empowered being a faith for individuals, it had major roles in individual, social and even political lives and even in definition of the ‘Turk’.⁴⁸ Heper succinctly recounts that in the late 1930s Christian ‘Gagauz Turks’, who lived in Romania and spoke Turkish were not let to emigrate to Turkey on the grounds that they were not considered Turks due to their religion; however, a few years later, the Ankara government welcomed Bosnian ‘Turks’, who were Muslims but did not speak Turkish.⁴⁹

According to Şerif Mardin, Mustafa Kemal employed the strategy of using Islam as the basis of civil participation.⁵⁰ What the new Republic aimed was to reconfigure Islam as a “national religion” or “protestant” type of Islam freed from “superstitions” as opposed to folk Islam. Similarly, Toprak states that the nationalist movement led by Mustafa Kemal politically aimed at adopting an ideology that could guarantee legitimacy for the national state and objectives of it; ensuring authority of the state over individuals and ethnic, religious or any other groups, and; creating a national consciousness to mobilize the masses.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Metin Heper, “Turkey: Yesterday, today, tomorrow”, p. 5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Şerif Mardin 2017, p. 75.

⁵¹ Binnaz Toprak, “Türkiye’de Dinin Denetim İşlevi”, p. 319.

2. 3. The History and Function of the DRA in the Early Republican Period

The first article of Law on Fundamental Organization (Teşkilatı Esasiye Kanunu), de facto constitution of the resistance movement in Turkey adopted by the first assembly in January 1921, designated that “Sovereignty is vested fully and unconditionally in the nation.”⁵² The article considered that power rested solely on the nation, which manifested a clear ideological divergence from the Ottoman Empire though no stipulation was made on religion partly due to the conditions of the time. The Abolition of the Ministry of Sharia and Pious Foundations (Şeriye ve Evkaf Vekaletinin İlgası), the Law on Unification of Education (Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu), and Abolition of the Caliphate (Hilafetin İlgası), which were passed on 3 March 1924 by the Turkish Grand National Assembly and were the backbone of the authoritarian secularism and a top-down modernization, marked the history of state and religion relations in modern Turkey. The Abolition of the Caliphate meant that the state adopted a secular character by resigning its claim to religious identity and abolished the competent authority responsible with the connection to Muslim countries.⁵³ Although the Ministry of Sharia and Pious Foundations, active between the years of 1920 and 1924 in Ankara, had a restricted status and authority when compared to the Sheik al-Islam (the highest religious authority in the Ottoman Empire), it was still a ministry attached to the Council of Ministers and charged with the management of religious service, religious publications, *madrasahs* (Muslim theological school), *dervish* lodges (a dervish gathering place), and foundations. As a result, the ministry was able to deliver its opinion on diverse issues including legal arrangements.⁵⁴ Law on the Abolition of the Ministry of Sharia and Pious

⁵² “Hakimiyet bila kaydü şart milletindir” Ali Kazancıgil, “Türkiye’de Modern Devletin Oluşumu ve Kemalizm” In *Türk Siyasal Hayatı: Türkiye’de Politik Değişim ve Modernleşme*, p. 207.

⁵³ İsmail Kara, “Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı: Devletle Müslümanlar Arasında Bir Kurum” In *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce: İslamcılık* edited by Yasin Aktay, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayıncılık, 2018), p. 180.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

Foundations assigned management and interpretation of religion to the DRA, which was attached to the Under secretariat of the Prime Ministry. The explanation provided for the annulment is “The involvement of religion and army in politics results in many handicaps. This reality is acknowledged by all the civilized nations and governments as a fundamental norm.”⁵⁵

The institution was authorized to oversee “all cases concerning the Exalted Islamic Faith which relate to beliefs (*itikad*) and rituals of worship (*ibadet*)”⁵⁶ while Presidency–General for Foundations were given the task of the administration of mosques and prayer rooms. Thus, a complete separation of the sacred and the secular was not ensured. On the contrary, religion was, similar to the Ottoman tradition of integrating *ulama* (Muslim theologians and scholars) into the state structure, transformed into an institutional government body.⁵⁷ The DRA, however, was excluded in the Cabinet and governmental affairs and the head of the DRA was appointed by the President upon the recommendation of the Prime Minister, which was highly effective in ensuring a strict control on religion and rendering Islam compatible with secular political objectives.

Thus, establishment of DRA was a vital step in disseminating a particular interpretation of Islam, which was tamed and in line with the aspirations of the ruling elite. The DRA, though it lacked clerical hierarchy of its own, would hold the *de jure* monopoly in Islam related matters invalidating any alternative productions and interpretations of Islam by cults, Islamic sects or brotherhoods who could constitute possible opposition to the Republican transformation. Religion was institutionalized in a government body whose task was first to

⁵⁵ “Din ve ordunun siyaset cereyanlarıyla alakadar olması birçok mehziri da’idir [mahzurları davet eder]. Bu hakikat bütün medeni milletler ve hükümetler tarafından bir düstur-i esasi olarak kabul edilmiştir” İsmail Kara 2017a, p. 57, (explanation added by the author).

⁵⁶ Andrew Davison, “Turkey, a “Secular” State? The Challenge of Description”, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 102, Number 2/3, (Spring/Summer, 2003), p. 337.

⁵⁷ Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “Parameters and Strategies of Islam- State Interaction in Republican Turkey”, p. 234.

provide legitimacy for the Republican revolutions for the public to accept and internalize and to execute a rupture with the old system to transform the society into a secular nation. Yet, the Kemalist bureaucracy ensured that religion was eliminated from the powers that controlled political mechanism and did not subscribe to the idea that religious interests could constitute a legitimate leverage.⁵⁸

The Sunni branch of Islam suited the aspirations of the Republican elite partly due to the significant weight of Sunni Islam among the public and the legacy of its organizational structure formed by the Muslim scholars.⁵⁹ In addition to this, the Republican elite, Sunni-Muslims themselves, considered Sunni Islam as ‘high culture’ as opposed to folk Islam, namely Alevism and Sufism since Sunni Islam was characterized by uniformity, simplicity and scripturalism which afforded the state to control it easily compared to the folk Islam with many different interpretations and deprived of canonical authority.⁶⁰ Aktay adds that Sunni Islam was suitable for bringing insuppressible religious tendency of the public in line with the ideological tenets of the Republic, as Sunni school of Islam has a high opinion of literacy through the Qur’an and obedience to the rulers (ulu’l amr) through the Shari’a.⁶¹ In fact, the DRA had an important role of supporting the modernization efforts of the state by referring to obedience to the rulers in Islam. With the enactment of the hat reform in 1925, a khutbah in Turkish was delivered to major mosques throughout Konya in November and December to “enlighten” the public about wearing Western-style hat. The text highlights the importance of obeying the rulers in Islam and invites the crowd in the mosque to wear “modern attire which is appropriate for contemporary needs

⁵⁸ Binnaz Toprak, “Türkiye’de Dinin Denetim İşlevi”, p. 390.

⁵⁹Yasin Aktay, *Türk Dininin Sosyolojik İmkanı*, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2011), p. 37.

⁶⁰Ufuk Ulutaş, “Religion and Secularism in Turkey: The Dilemma of the Directorate of Religious Affairs”, (2010), *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (May 2010), pp. 389-399, p. 391.

⁶¹Yasin Aktay 2011, p. 37.

of our country” as deemed “by the honored Republican Government, that is the *ulu’l amr*”⁶², and implicitly threatens the ones who do not obey. The rest of the text clearly equates being a Muslim with obeying the rulers by establishing a connection with the commandments of Islam.⁶³ Obviously, the DRA used its official authority to interpret an issue within an Islamic framework and capitalized on Islam itself to legitimize the hat reform. One thing more important in this text is the title, *ulu’l amr*, granted to the government, which means a direct legitimization through religion for the Republican elite. Once the religious people accept the political authority in power as their *ulu’l amr*, they would consent to and internalize its deeds.

The 1927 Budget Law was the first law to designate the administrative structure of the central and provincial organizations of the DRA. A Consultative Council (Heyet-i Müşavere), a Koran Verification Commission and new directorships were incorporated into the structure of the DRA.⁶⁴ However, in 1930 Budget Act no. 1827, which charged the Directorate of Public Endowments (Evkaf Umum Müdürlüğü) with the administration of mosques and masjids and relocated the DRA staff working in the units of the Directorate of Religious Institutions (Dini Müesseseler Müdürlüğü) and the Directorate of Equipment (Levazım Müdürlüğü) in the Directorate of Public Endowments, was issued.⁶⁵ Upon the promulgation of this act, the jurisdiction the DRA was significantly restricted, which resulted in institutional weakening of the Directorate until 1950.

With the introduction of multi-party politics in Turkey in the mid-1940s, the CHP, much aware of a public backlash of its aggressive secularism, had to reassess its policy towards religion and accommodate Islam on the eve of the

⁶² “memleketimizin asrî ihtiyacâtına muvafık gördüğü kisve-i medeniye” and “ülü’l-emir olan mübeccel Hükümet-i Cumhuriyemizin”, İsmail Kara 2017a, p. 124.

⁶³ “Allah’a, Peygamber’e karşı vazife-i ubudiyet”, Ibid., p. 125.

⁶⁴ İştâar Gözaydın 2016, pp. 64-65.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 65.

upcoming elections. In fact, during late 1940s the CHP had already seen a vested interest in loosening the tight grip on religion and the 7th Congress marked this policy shift. Another issue that needed attention was the communist “threat”. The deputies and delegates stressed that religion, particularly Islam and ethics, needed to be propagated in order to contain the “threat”.⁶⁶ Yet, loosing electoral base and concerns about communism were not the only underlying reasons for the religious openings introduced. According to Yasin Aktay, when the demand for religious instruction met by informal groups such as religious orders or local religious functionaries, it resulted in the formation of potent, uncontrolled and irregular strongholds that advocated opposition to the regime, which, for the center, clearly signified a loss of control on the periphery.⁶⁷

With the seventh Congress of the CHP held in 1947, the religious opening introduced by the party indicated a loosening of the tight grip on religion after decades of repressive laicism, though it should be highlighted that this reconciliatory approach did not mark a stark deviation from the ideals of Kemalism. Thus, the establishment of the Ankara Theological Faculty in 1949, enlarging the financial structure of the DRA, the provision of selective religious courses to the elementary and secondary school, the opening of *imam-hatip* seminaries, the opening of seminaries to educate and train preachers, abolishing the ban on the tombs of Ottoman Sultans and prominent religious figures, and providing foreign currency for the *hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca) were introduced to reassure the public who respected religious figures and cherished Islamic values or Muslim identity as opposed to secular nationalism.⁶⁸

Thus, on April 29, 1950 an additional act on the organizational structure of the DRA was enacted. According to the amendment, the administration of places

⁶⁶ Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi Yedinci Büyük Kurultayı, pp. 448-454, <https://acikerisim.tbmm.gov.tr/handle/11543/842> (Retrieved April 28, 2020).

⁶⁷ Yasin Aktay 2011, p. 191.

⁶⁸ Erik Jan Zürcher 2003, p. 244; Gözaydın 2016, p. 29.

of prayer were assigned to the DRA and its name was changed into *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* from *Diyanet İşleri Reisliği*, and various subunits within the DRA were reorganized, renamed and assigned new duties. Yet, major problems such as finance, the shortage of personnel or ambiguity of the law defining jurisdiction and the function of the DRA were left unaddressed. Moreover, the imams, especially in villages and small provincial places did not undergo a formal religious education and thus, they were not state employees, and they were free to prepare their own sermons without being overseen by a higher religious authority since the DRA was not authorized in the preparation, distribution or supervision of sermons, which put severe restraints on the access of the DRA to the public. Since the DRA was unable to penetrate rural areas, the Turkish state failed to achieve its cultural revolution in the periphery. To summarize in Zürcher's words "the [Kemalist] reforms hardly influenced the life of the villagers who made up the great mass of the Turkish population."⁶⁹

2. 4. Multi- Party Period

In his analysis of the Turkish modernization, Çağlar Keyder states that the two pillars of opposition to the CHP rule were liberalism in economy and religious freedom against the violations and ideological penetration of the state.⁷⁰ Keyder also underlines the transformation of politics from an elite business to populism during the Democrat Party (DP) era.

Although the DP argued representing the periphery against the Kemalist bureaucracy, the party was committed to the shared ideals of the republican state elite, namely to modernization and progress through secularization, and adopted the same policy of keeping Islam under tight control through the civil-military

⁶⁹ Erik J. Zürcher 2003, p. 194.

⁷⁰ Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey: A Study in Capitalist Development*, (London: Verso, 1987), p. 117.

bureaucracy.⁷¹ Thus, the tradition of integrating religious establishment into the bureaucracy through the DRA did continue. Islam was used instrumentally for the unity of the nation rather than ideologically in that laic character of the state and administrative status of the DRA were not challenged. The party also imposed strong measures against possible activities that could threaten the secularism. During DP tenure, for example, supporters of *Ticani* dervish order started to smash Atatürk busts. Their leader was sentenced to prison and then to house arrest. A law protecting the memory of Atatürk was passed in 1951. Similarly, Nurcu Movement, reactionaries and Islamist publications were prosecuted. At the same time Islam and religious sentiments of the populace were upheld in order to gain political maneuver and electoral support. Menderes himself appealed to religious sentiments during election campaigns. At the party conference in 1958 he stated: “Turkey is a Muslim state and will remain so.”⁷² Additionally, Cizre Sakallıoğlu argues that “the secular state resorted to the non-secular use of religion for checking and blocking communism”⁷³ in defining the accommodating approach of the DP towards religion.

The Menderes government had reversed some strict policies of the earlier period which resulted in resentment across the public such as the recital of *azan* (call to prayer) in Arabic in 1950 after 18 years of reciting in Turkish, broadcasting the Qur’an in the state radio three times a week, religious talk broadcasting, the inclusion of the religious courses to the curriculum in public schools, the opening of *imam-hatip* schools in 1951, increasing the constructing of new mosques and allowing the sale of religious literature,⁷⁴ though major issues,

⁷¹ Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “Parameters and Strategies of Islam- State Interaction in Republican Turkey”, p. 237.

⁷² Erich J. Zürcher 2003, p. 243.

⁷³ Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey”, p. 238.

⁷⁴ Erich J. Zürcher 2003, p. 232.

lack of adequate staff and financial status of the DRA in particular, were not addressed.

It can be argued that with the introduction of multi-party politics in 1945, Islamist movements started to exert considerable influence in politics. With the loosening of state control on religious life, religious networks and groups spawned, which resulted in an Islamist mobilization and engagement with the politics. Islamists used various publications to mobilize and formed close relations with politics, the mainstream Democrat Party and the Nation Party.⁷⁵ During this period, attendance to mosques and number of Qur'an courses increased vastly, brotherhoods which had previously been designated illegal flourished and new ones such as *Süleymanlılar* and *Risale-i Nur Talebeleri* emerged. Additionally, some of the most influential Islamist magazines such as *Büyük Doğu*, *Sebilürreşad* and *Serdengeçti* were able to prosper and enjoy substantial popularity among religious circles. The relatively lenient political atmosphere led to liberalization of the press, the political arena and the associations. With massive migration movement from rural areas into urban areas and relatively lenient policy towards religion, religion became much more salient in cities, which, for hardline- Kemalists, meant resurgence of Islam. However, the overall policy of the Democrat Party towards religion cannot be regarded as something that led to revival of it, but rather legitimizing Islam and traditional culture by keeping the state policy of imposing strict control on religion.

The 1960 coup transformed the political atmosphere and had significant effects on the society especially due to the new constitution of 1961, which supported pluralism and liberal democracy in politics. The justification of the coup given by the military junta was divergence from Atatürk revolutions. This was openly expressed by Alparslan Türkeş, a colonel who was a member of the National Unity Council (*Milli Birlik Komitesi*, NUC), that carried out the coup, in his interview given to the newspaper *Cumhuriyet* as he complained about

⁷⁵ Menderes Çınar and İpek Gencil Sezgin, "Islamist Political Engagement in the Early Years of Multi-party Politics in Turkey: 1945-60", *Turkish Studies*, 14: 2, (Routledge: 2013), p. 330.

religious clothing worn by women⁷⁶ and re-Arabicization of azan and implied Turkification of azan and the Quran. However, another notice by NUC contradicted the one by Türkeş and clarified that “Belief and practices of our citizens about religion cannot be interfered with ‘Neither by law, nor by coercion’”.⁷⁷ Various statements by the military junta indicated that they were not indifferent to religion, quite on the contrary they signaled use of religion as an ideological principle. For example, a member of the NSC, colonel Mucip Ataklı stated that “The target of the NUC is to raise citizens that have moral standards and religious faith” in a speech delivered in Eskişehir, and lieutenant colonel Ahmet Yıldız expressed that “We do not support irreligiousness. An irreligious nation does cease to exist”.⁷⁸ State-religion relations were not restored as it had been prior to 1950s after the coup; on the contrary, the military regime supported Islam without relinquishing its control on religion as “it could use the popularity of the Islamic movement to its advantage”.⁷⁹

The DRA was the officially authorized unit that could collaborate with regime in legitimizing the coup and controlling religious publications that could pose threats against the state. To contain reactionary and opposition movements, the DRA publications were improved in number, in quality, in distribution and in sales. The publications were expected to serve republican principles and Atatürk revolutions. That the regime expected the DRA to wage a war against dervish orders or radical religious formations, and to entrust two academicians at Ankara Theological Faculty with translation of the Qur’an into Turkish do suffice to demonstrate that the state policy of propagating an enlightened Islam was

⁷⁶ He even went further and sent a notice to the DRA in 1960 expressing his thanks for some muftis who “enlightened the public... in order to emancipate Turkish women from chador” and ordered circulation of “this exemplary behavior in the institution.” See İsmail Kara 2017b, p. 166.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁷⁹ Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey”, p. 238.

continued. The sermons and khutbahs prepared by the DRA served the purposes of supporting and legitimizing the military intervention.⁸⁰ Khutbahs, in that case, have always been good opportunities for the state to spread its propaganda, which was also employed by the military junta, who accused the DP of political reaction. To consolidate its regime, the junta members mobilized the DRA to clarify the public about the importance of the military intervention through khutbahs, hadiths and Qur'anic verses. In one of the khutbahs, for example, it was stated that:

“We are a brave nation that follow the paths of Fatih, Yavuz, Yıldırım and Atatürk. The NUC and its members represent the divine nation.... A nation ceases to survive without a state, so does the state without the nation.... Therefore, dear [believers], we, as the nation, peasants and townsmen should all be supportive of our alliance to our National Unity Government.”⁸¹

A document sent to all the mufti offices in cities and districts in 4th of June 1960 by the Chairman of the DRA reminds that the DRA had important role in “warning and enlightening the society” about potential threats against “the freedom and liberty movement which was executed for the benefit of the nation and homeland by our Armed Forces” and continues with that “it is a religious obligation to support our government which works very hard to protect our national interests” and finally the document demands that the public be informed through sermons and khutbahs.⁸² The tone and content of the document is interesting as the support for the military intervention and enlightening the public were presented as a religious obligation, thus the actions of the regime would be given legitimacy through religion. More importantly, the document signals centralization or standardization of the scope and content of khutbahs. At that

⁸⁰ Yet, the DRA support for the military regime should be considered within the conditions of the time as there are cases where some DRA and junta members were in open conflict. For more information, see İsmail Kara 2017b, pp. 166-187.

⁸¹ İsmail Kara, “Cami, Ordu, Siyaset: 27 Mayıs İhtilaline Dair Bir Hutbe”, *Toplumsal Tarih*, 173, (May 2008), pp. 44-45.

⁸² İsmail Kara 2017b, p. 177.

time, including time slot between 1924 and 1965, the DRA did not have the authority to prepare or oversee khutbahs, so it was at imams' disposal to prepare khutbahs. However, one book called "Turkish Khutbahs", written by Ahmed Hamdi Akseki and published in 1927, set a model for the imams, for only a minor percentage, though.

The policy of taking accommodating approach towards religion, and incorporating Islam into the state mechanism and Turkish nationalism continued during the İnönü government, established after the general elections in 1961. More mosques were built, shrines were restored and religious education in schools were improved. In order to fight religious bigotry, a rationalist and modern version of Islam was propagated. However, risks related to religious fanaticism were eliminated; the prohibition of the political use of religion, which had previously been integrated into the High Treason Law in 1925 and later into the penal code in 1949, was transformed into an article of the new constitution.

The 154th article of the 1961 Constitution, which integrated the DRA in the constitution for the first time and restored its reputation, defined the status of the institution as "The Directorate of Religious Affairs, which is within the general administration, shall exercise duties prescribed in its particular law".⁸³ A new act numbered 633, publicized in parliament on the 22nd of June 1965, is as follows:

Directorate of Religious Affairs, attached to the Prime Ministry, was established in order to carry out affairs related to the beliefs, worship and moral foundations of Islam, to enlighten Turkish society about religion and to manage places of worship.⁸⁴

While the first two clauses of the Act 633 restrict the DRA mostly to the maintenance of places of prayer, "enlightening the population with regards to

⁸³ See 1961 Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, Article 154.

⁸⁴ İsmail Kara 2018, p. 183; İştâar Gözaydın 2016, p. 109.

religion” means regulation of religious sermons and khutbahs, replying religious questions and religious publications. Pertaining to the task of “conducting tasks related to the moral principles”, Gözaydın argues that “To impose a function such as ‘conducting tasks related to moral principles’ in this institution whose content cannot be determined by law, but that the state has adopted a religious ideology”.⁸⁵

Through this law, the DRA was assigned a special role in the production and distribution of religious knowledge. Organizational structure of the institution was changed through the creation of the High Council for Religious Affairs (Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu), whose one of the duties is “To determine the principles of khutbahs and sermons and to prepare sample texts”.⁸⁶ Through this article, the institution was charged with task of providing exemplary sermons and khutbahs. It was in 1968, when the biweekly Religious Affairs Journal (Diyanet Gazetesi) was published regularly, the DRA imams could access to sample khutbahs. Yet, the fact that the DRA did not employ strong control and supervision mechanisms on imams suggests that imams were free to deliver their own khutbahs.

The law also provided the DRA with higher levels of administrative and financial autonomy and broader jurisdiction. New departments⁸⁷ were added to the DRA and the number of vice presidents was doubled indicating a significant organizational enlargement of the institution.

⁸⁵ Bu kuruma ‘ahlak esaslarıyla ilgili işleri yürütmek’ gibi içeriği hukuken belirlenemeyecek bir işlev yüklemek ancak devletin bir dini ideoloji olarak benimsemiş olduğu anlamına gelir.” İftar Gözaydın 2016, p. 252.

⁸⁶ “Hutbe ve vaazların esaslarını tesbit etmek ve örnek metinler hazırlamak”, T.C. Resmî Gazete, 02 July 1965, no. 12038.

⁸⁷ The new departments are Advisory Board (Danışma Kurulu), Inspection Board (Teftiş Kurulu), Legal Consultancy (Hukuk Müşavirliği), Directorate of Enquiry and Research (İnceleme-Araştırma Müdürlüğü), Directorate of Library and Publications (Kütüphane ve Yayın Müdürlüğü), Directorate of Sects (Mezhepler Müdürlüğü), Directorate of Religious Tourism (Dinsel Turizm Müdürlüğü), Directorate of Personnel (Personel Müdürlüğü), Directorate of Supplies (Levazım Müdürlüğü), Directorate of Mosque Services (Cami Hizmetleri Müdürlüğü), Directorate of Correspondence and Archive (Yazı İşleri ve Arşiv Müdürlüğü).

The Law No. 633 on the “Establishment and Duties of the Directorate of Religious Affairs” was widely amended by the Law No. 1982, which entered into force in 1979. In addition to the Central and Provincial Organizations, Religious Affairs was organized abroad. However, this Law was annulled in accordance with the Constitutional Court’s decision dated 18 December 1979 and numbered E.79 / 25-K: 79/46. The current organizational structure of the Directorate has been determined to a large extent by Law No. 6002 dated 01 July 2010, which amended the Law No. 633 and the legal void could finally be filled 31 years later. The Directorate has been hierarchically upgraded from the level of the General Directorate to the Undersecretariat level, in addition to newly established units. In accordance with the amendment made in the Constitution and transition to the Presidential administration system in 2018, the DRA was attached to the Presidency with the Decree No. 703 published in the Official Gazette on 09 July 2018.

2. 5. The DRA as a Contested Institution

As an institution charged with the management of an issue as sensitive as religion, the DRA has always been subject to heavy criticisms raised both by laicists and Islamists. The criticisms can be categorized under three headings; its legal status with respect to the principle of laicism, discrimination towards other sects, most notably Alevism, in Islam and criticisms by the Islamic wings.

The ongoing debate about the status of the DRA has been centered around the existence of the DRA in a country which defines itself laicist in its constitution. The inclusion of the DRA in the state mechanism, in Andrew Davison’s words, “weakens even the officially declared laicism”.⁸⁸ Contrary to common practices of secularism where a complete separation between matters

⁸⁸ Andrew Davison, “Turkey, a “Secular” State?”, p. 339.

related to world/state and religion exists, the Turkish case exhibits a strong control and oversight over religion. The DRA is charged with the promotion of “official Islam”, which is state-sponsored and in line with the Kemalist revolutions. Mustafa Kemal himself employed Islam to promote the ideology and policies of the secular state when he made distinction between Islam; superstitions-driven religion and religion guided by science. He stated that “our religion is fitting reality, intellect and logic” and it is “the most reasonable and the most natural religion.”⁸⁹ The authoritarian nature of state-religion relations ensured monopoly of religious sphere and orthodoxy by favoring Sunni Islam. The institution functioning within the bureaucracy has transformed into an ideological and legitimizing instrument to constitute the national bond consisting of the relationship between Islam, nationalism and national solidarity. The parallel process of weakening state’s laicism also occurs when “official Islam” is indoctrinated to shape individuals and social morality.⁹⁰ The top-down nation-state building project accompanied by restrictive and exclusionary secularism undermined religious plurality and equality through the DRA. One striking case of how the DRA, which is confined to official state ideology, restricts religious pluralism is that it did not accept religious *Nubihar Yayınları* in Beyazıt Ramadan Book Fair, which has been held since 1982 in İstanbul Sultanahmet for years on the grounds that it is published in Kurdish.⁹¹ The state undertakes the task of teaching “true Islam” through the DRA as it fulfils the task of “enlightening” the public on religion freed from superstitions and yoke of “backward bigots”, which directly means no tolerance to or acceptance of other *cemaats* apart from Sunni Islam.

⁸⁹ See T.C Atatürk Kültür ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Başkanlığı <https://www.atam.gov.tr/duyurular/din-ve-islam-dini> (Retrieved April 21, 2020).

⁹⁰ Andrew Davison, “Turkey, a “Secular” State?”, pp. 339-340.

⁹¹ Nevzat Eminoğlu, ‘Diyanet, Kürtleri, Alevileri ve Şafileri dışlıyor’, *T24* August 29, 2012, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/diyanet-kurtleri-alevileri-ve-safileri-disliyor,211919>, (Retrieved April 21, 2020).

Another discussion regarding the existence of the DRA is that whether it is a violation of the principle of laicism by a state to provide public religious service. Scholars subscribing to this argument contend that secular states are not obliged to provide such services on the grounds that public services are fulfilled through taxpayers' money regardless of their religion. For example, a prominent scholar of law, Süheyp Derbil argues that believers in Islam, Christianity and nonbelievers equally pay taxes, and when an atheist who is openly against all religions and believes that people should be freed from the shackles of religion is enforced to pay taxes for religious service, both the secularism principle is violated and religious freedom is jeopardized.⁹² Another view sharing the similar outlook holds that “[a secular state] is only charged with the affairs related to world and allocates tax revenues exclusively on them. Afterlife cannot be subject to public service.”⁹³ A secular state should not be involved in religious matters either by promoting or obstructing religious belief. However, by funding the DRA, an organization that is charged with the management of religion- Sunni Islam, the state openly favors one specific religion.

The second criticism against the DRA centered around discrimination towards other sects in Islam. “Official Islam” does not have many different interpretations as opposed to folk Islam, read Alevism and Sufism, as it is uniformed, simple and scriptural. Therefore, it is easier for the state to control it and the DRA is charged with representing mainstream Sunni-Islamic belief, which is state-sponsored belief. The 10th Article of Act No. 2709, ‘Equality Before Law’ dated 1982 stipulates that ‘Everyone is equal before law without distinction as to language, race, color, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion, sect or any such grounds’; and ‘State organs and administrative authorities are obliged to act in compliance with the principle of equality before the law in all their proceedings’. The law applies to the DRA as well, because it

⁹² Süheyp Derbil cited in Gözaydın 2016, pp. 170-171.

⁹³ Lütfi Duran cited in Gözaydın 2016, p. 170.

functions as an administrative office. However, the DRA is believed to provide services to Hanefi branch of Sunni Islam. Others groups namely Alevis, Shiites, and Caferis, who have different interpretations of Islam, constitute a significant number in Turkey. Alevis⁹⁴ have raised their criticisms regarding their representation within the DRA, staff and activities of the institution, and compulsory religious instruction in public schools. In their comprehensive study on the DRA, Ruşen Çakır and İrfan Bozan argue that the DRA has failed to acknowledge Alevism and the demands of Alevis due to its biases and the DRA, as well as some Sunni groups, tend to define Alevism as they think it is or should be rather than how Alevis live and see Alevism.⁹⁵ One influential Alevi association assert that the number of staff employed at the DRA was increased by political powers and parties due to their vested interests in religion and transformed it into a dependent institution, which in turn has led to creation of new kind of Islam foreign to Turkish society and an Arab/Persian Islamic interpretation is favored and practiced.⁹⁶ Some other Alevi associations and citizens share similar views that the DRA aims to assimilate Alevism, it smears and insults Alevism in its publications, defines *cemevis* (Alevi places of prayer) “recreation” places⁹⁷, legitimizes denial and hostile policies, does not represent Alevis⁹⁸ and does not employ any Alevi citizen in its ranks.⁹⁹ The views

⁹⁴ Some DRA staff are at the opinion that Alevism is not a true belief system, it is only a distorted version of Islam; some others state that if Alevis are granted rights or represented within the DRA, other sects and cults will demand similar rights.

⁹⁵ Ruşen Çakır and İrfan Bozan, *Sivil, Şeffaf ve Demokratik Bir Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Mümkün Mü?*, (Istanbul: TESEV Yayınları, February 2005), p. 265.

⁹⁶ An excerpt from an interview conducted with CEM Foundation See Ruşen Çakır and İrfan Bozan 2005, p. 271.

⁹⁷ The DRA stated that “Cem houses and similar places shall not be considered as places of worship.” Suphi Koray September 2012 and HYD February 14, 2020, “Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Cemevleri ve TC’nin Laikliği” <https://hyd.org.tr/attachments/article/668/yazi-diyanet-isleri-baskanligi-cemevleri-ve-tc-nin-laikligi.pdf> (Retrieved April 21, 2020).

⁹⁸ Yet, some Alevis point out that representation of Alevis within the DRA might lead to state control on Alevis, assimilation and transformation of Alevis into Sunnis. For more information see Ruşen Çakır and İrfan Bozan 2005, pp, 271-281.

expressed by Alevi associations are shared by ordinary citizens who define themselves Alevi. In a survey conducted by Konda in 2014, it is revealed that most Alevis discredit the DRA, believe that it has discriminatory practices and demand a more pluralistic DRA and they have a low opinion of its services and poor conditions of places of prayer.¹⁰⁰

The policies and practices of the DRA towards Alevis are also closely watched by Europe. Monitoring reports on Turkey annually released by the European Commission contain the state of affairs for Alevis. A Monitoring Report dated 1998 clearly stated in Human Rights and the Protection of Minorities chapter that “Turkey’s Alawi Muslims are estimated to number at least 12 million. There are no government-salaried Alawi religious leaders, in contrast to Sunni religious leaders.”¹⁰¹ Reports for the first decade 2000 state similar criticisms such as unchanging official approach towards the Alevis, the lack of financial support for the Alevi places of prayer, representation of the Alevis within the DRA, compulsory religious instruction, and discriminatory practices towards the Alevis.¹⁰² Similar reports highlight that the DRA as well as the authorities have discriminatory practices as regards the Alevis and despite efforts to improve dialogue with the Alevis¹⁰³, the overall state policy of not recognizing *cemevis* as places of worship and granting them same rights as mosques has remained unchanged. In addition, the European Court of Human Rights judged

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 271-273.

¹⁰⁰ While 46% of Alevis think that the DRA “should provide services to all Muslims including Alevis”, 43 % believe that it “should provide services to both Muslims and other religions”. 48% of Alevis demand the DRA to provide services to them and include Alevi representatives within the institution. KONDA Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Araştırması: Algılar, Memnuniyet, Beklentiler, (November 2014), pp. 37-40.

¹⁰¹ Regular Report from the EU Commission on Turkey’s Progress towards Accession, 1998 p. 19. Reports available at: <https://www.avrupa.info.tr/en/regular-reports-turkey-744>. (Retrieved June 26, 2020).

¹⁰² Reports dated 2001,2002,2003,2004, 2005, 2006, 2007.

¹⁰³ Reports dated 2009 and 2010, pp. 21-22 and 23-24 respectively.

that Turkey violated the Articles 9 (right to freedom of religion) and 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the European Convention on Human Rights on 26 April 2016.¹⁰⁴ The Court has reiterated the most frequent Alevi complaints with respect to discrimination within the DRA¹⁰⁵ and decided that Alevi demands should be met.

Islamic wings have also raised their criticisms against the existence, practices and policies of the DRA. Religious people have criticized the DRA on the grounds that it is a laicist bureaucratic instrument established to control and restrict religious life. In 1949, Eşref Edip, the editor in chief of the Islamist magazine *Sebillürreşad*, directed the following questions to the Islamist Prime Minister Şemseddin Günaltay, who once was a writer in the same magazine: “Will the DRA keep its status of an official administration attached to the government or an autonomous Islam community be formed similar to other elements? Today, your so-called government has a religious character. Because the DRA is officially attached to your government, its budget is approved by the parliament and it is incorporated into the system. Does this situation conform to laicism? What country in the world has this bizarre laicism?”¹⁰⁶ Another writer, Ali Fuad Başgil questioned the laicism of the state by underlining the fact that whereas the DRA is directly attached to the office of the Prime Minister and the entire staff take orders from the Prime Minister, the Turkish state is laicist.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ “The refusal to provide a public service to the applicants, followers of the Alevi faith, entailed a breach of their right to freedom of religion.” See ECHR, Grand Chamber Judgement “Case of İzzettin Doğan and Others v. Turkey” no. 62649/10, Strasbourg, April 26, 2016, https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/6659/file/ECHR_Izzettin%20Dogan%20and%20Others%20v.%20Turkey_2016_en.pdf (Retrieved June 26, 2020).

¹⁰⁵ “... whereas the Muslim religion as understood by the DRA was almost wholly subsidized by the State, virtually none of the religious public services benefited the Alevi community, and its specific characteristics were almost entirely overlooked.” “The Court reiterated that, in accordance with the principle of autonomy for religious communities established in its case-law, only the highest spiritual authorities of a religious community, and not the State (or even the national courts), could determine to which faith that community belonged.”

¹⁰⁶ Eşref Edip cited in Ruşen Çakır and İrfan Bozan 2005, p. 106.

¹⁰⁷ Ali Fuad Başgil cited in Ruşen Çakır and İrfan Bozan 2005, p. 107.

Similarly, Rasim Özdenören draws attention to the fact that the existence of the DRA and Imam Preacher Schools is a violation of the laicism principle and the DRA was established to manipulate religion.¹⁰⁸ Ahmet Taşgetiren argues that the DRA is not effective enough to protect religious people from the negative influences of radical groups because it imposes a top-down regulation of religious domain.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps the harshest criticisms towards the DRA have been voiced by Islamist writer Ali Bulaç, who thinks the practices of the DRA actually harms Islam and thus it should be abolished. According to Bulaç, the DRA lacks legitimacy in terms of Islamic faith; it functions like state Islam meaning that it cannot contradict with the ideology or politics of the state, political parties and ruling elites have substantial influence on it and the state legitimizes the official ideology through religion.¹¹⁰ Abdurrahman Dilipak argues that the rationale behind the state policy of regulating religion is to provide a pragmatist, deterministic and rationalist ground for Islam in his book where he analyzes religion-state relationship with respect to compulsory religious courses, Theology Faculties and the DRA.¹¹¹ The author asserts that the DRA disseminates a religion that equates compliance to God with compliance to the state. The book highlights the devastation made in the name of religion right after the 12 September military intervention.

Finally, former directors of the DRA have expressed concerns related to status of the institution. They acknowledge that the DRA is subject to pressures from political authorities. While most of the directors object abolishing the DRA and charging *cemaats* with the management of religion, they argue that it should

¹⁰⁸ Rasim Özdenören, “Doğrudur: ‘Türkiye Laik Değil’” *Yenişafak*, September 25, 2014, <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/rasimozdenoren/dogrudur-turkiye-laik-degil-56055> (Retrieved April 21, 2020).

¹⁰⁹ Ahmet Taşgetiren, “Diyanet neden kuşatamıyor?” *Yenişafak*, February 10, 2000, <https://www.yenisafak.com/arsiv/2000/subat/10/atasgetiren.html> (Retrieved April 25, 2020).

¹¹⁰ Ali Bulaç, “Neden Diyanet’e lüzum yok!” *Zaman*, May 16, 2015, accessed through timeturk.com (Retrieved April 25, 2020).

¹¹¹ Abdurrahman Dilipak, *Bu Din Benim Dinim Değil*, (Istanbul: İşaret-Ferhat Yayınları, 1990).

be reformed and it should have an autonomous status within the state system such as Higher Education Council (YÖK) so that the influence of politicians on the institution will be minimized.¹¹² The former director M. Said Yazıcıoğlu was straightforward arguing that Turkey cannot be considered a secular state and that “in Western and scientific terms”, secularism is the complete separation of state and religion. He further concluded that “religious matters should be left to *cemaats*.”¹¹³ In another interview, Yazıcıoğlu stated repressive treatment of politicians and being accountable to politicians due to peculiar structure of Turkish secularism that incorporates religious institution in the state body. He also drew attention to a key point that the DRA staff lacks competence and mastery in religious knowledge¹¹⁴ due to which *cemaats* can penetrate the society easily when compared to the DRA. As the *cemaats* are more dynamic, flexible and friendlier, they are more skilled in building informal relationships than cold – formal units of the state. The views expressed by the former directors, Muslim journalists and writers seem to summarize that the DRA officials are paid employees of the state and their main task is to implement the policies of the state. Critics question the representatives of Muslim community and Islam suggesting that it lacks religious legitimacy because of being under the direct influence of political authority. In short, religion is subordinated to the state through the DRA rather than achieving indifference of the state towards all religions.

¹¹² For the views of the former presidents of the DRA, see Ruşen Çakır and İrfan Bozan 2005, pp. 110-111.

¹¹³ Fikret Bila, “Türkiye Laik Değil”, *Milliyet*, December 9, 1989, http://gazetearsivi.milliyet.com.tr/GununYayinlari/NZR_x2B_7onyi1hjEQOPE3o6dQ_x3D_x3D_, (Retrieved June 9, 2020).

¹¹⁴ Interview with M. Said Yazıcıoğlu, *Altınoluk*, November 1993, <https://www.altinoluk.com.tr/blog/makale-16761> (Retrieved June 9, 2020).

2. 6. The Debate of Laicism and Secularism

Laicism, known as French secularism in Turkish, is part of a more comprehensive secularization movement. Secularism means “of the world” rather than “of the church”. The Turkish Language Association has coined *dünyacılık* for this concept. Secularism, which derived from the Latin “saeculum”, means “generation or age”, and in Turkish it conveys the meanings of “laicism, modernization” or “worldliness”. Legal definition of the concept expresses a complete distinction between state and religion. Thus, believing in one religion is matter of individual conscience and choice. The state has no official religion of its own, it employs an equal tolerance to all religions and it respects its citizens who perform worship as to the state they are subjects regardless of their faith.

It should be noted that secularism and laicism are not the same concepts for the same institutional arrangement. Secularism derives for the Latin word *saeculum*, meaning generation or age, and conveys the meaning “of the world” as opposed to “of the church”, while laicism derives from the French word *lai* which means “of the people” as distinguished from “the clergy”.¹¹⁵ So, there is a distinction between lay members of a church such as religious, nonclerical believers and its ecclesiastical strata in the definition of laicism. Process of laicization entails charging lay members with state affairs such as governance, thus underlines the distinction between affairs of religion and affairs of state while at the same time retains a religious character. The connotation of secularism varies greatly today due to its belonging both to worldly matters and to religious matters. It is associated with different concepts ranging from humanism, materialism, atheism to antitheism used to conceptualize worldliness, which may suggest that it has a negative point of view to matters of religion. Thus, the term secularism connotes “a policy of life for those who do not accept theology” in the definition of George Holyoake, who coined it, while the secularization process,

¹¹⁵ Andrew Davison, “Turkey, a “Secular” State?”, p. 333.

for sociologists, is as the “diminution of the social significance of religion,” and “the growing tendency... to do without religion.”¹¹⁶

However, in the Turkish case the distinction between laicism and secularism is blurred and challenging to describe due to the peculiar characteristics of Turkish modernization. The trajectory of Turkish modernization has always been intertwined with the question of secularism. Islam was held responsible for the backwardness of the population and the demise of the old regime during the early republican period. Accordingly, Islam signified the Ottoman Empire, which hindered economic and social progress for Turkey to be an advanced and modern nation.¹¹⁷ A parallel process of modernization and secularization program was employed, which resulted in the subjugation of Islam to the state, criminalization of religious opposition, eradication of it from the public sphere and restriction to private realm.

A secular state has a neutral stance towards religion, does not favor any religion, and refrains from promoting or curbing religious faith of its citizens. It prioritizes religious freedom, deals with worldly matters, and is a more tolerant and pluralistic approach. That religion and secularism cannot be imposed on citizens is the inherent principle in a truly secular state. In addition, it does not have an official religious institution, with the exception of a few states, undertake maintenance or building of places of worship, control religious institutions or communities and use public funding to pay salaries of ecclesiastics. The public fulfills the tasks of building places of worship or paying salaries of ecclesiastics through fund raising or donations. Since the state does not adopt a policy of raising a religious generation or creating a more secular society, it leaves the regulation of religious life to its citizens. However, the Turkish Republic does not fulfill any of these conditions. In Turkey, the state renders a complete

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

¹¹⁷ M. Hakan Yavuz, “Understanding Turkish Secularism in the 21st Century: a Contextual Roadmap”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 19:1,55-78, (2019), p. 56.

subordination of the religious institutions, thus regulates social life through religion. The ban on religious orders, religious shrines, traditional clothes, veil and headscarf, intolerance to religious forms of expression and restriction of religion to narrowly defined private sphere are prime examples of a state which is hostile to religion accompanied by aggressive measures to keep religious institutions under tight control and promotion of a 'religion-free', 'rational' society.¹¹⁸

Turkish secularism is unique in that contrary to most Western examples of secularism, in which secularism has been a social phenomenon of bottom-up movement. Turkish state has been the propagator and regulator of a state-imposed secularism and it has exploited Western philosophical background and the early Ottoman experience with secularism. Much notably incorporation of an ideological state apparatus into the bureaucracy to keep religion under control and to promote a 'rationalist' or 'enlightened' form of Islam indicates exceptionalism of the Turkish case. The Kemalist state could contain any religious threat and 'reactionary' movements through its agency which has been downgraded to a tutelary position. However, the state found religion highly instrumental for political purposes when, for example, it felt a leftist threat and separatist ethnic minority nationalism. Sunni Islam has been favored as a counterweight to aforementioned threats, a binding element in Turkish national identity and a supporter of the regime's legitimacy. In Turkey, the principle of secularism has accomplished control of religion in line with the aspirations of state elites rather than freedom of or from religion contrary to Western counterparts. So as to say, 'separation of matters of religion and state affairs' is a rather formal expression in Turkey.

¹¹⁸ Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, "Islam and Democratization in Turkey: Secularism and Trust in a Divided Society", *Democratization*, 16:6, 1194-1213, (2009), p. 1196.

2. 7. Official Islam in Turkey

Turkish Constitutions written in 1961, 1982 respectively did not officially endorse religion. In 1929, the provision that “religion of the Turkish State is Islam” was removed from the Constitution and with the constitutional amendment in 1937 the principle of laicism was incorporated into it. The 1982 Constitution clearly stipulates that “... that sacred religious feelings shall absolutely not be involved in state affairs and politics as required by the principle of secularism.”¹¹⁹ The 10th Article of the same constitution guarantees equality before law regardless of religion and sect and the 24th Article specifies privacy of religion and freedom of beliefs, and forbids exploitation or abuse of religion/religious feelings for personal or political interests.¹²⁰

Despite the absence of an official state religion in Turkish constitution, religion, namely Islam, has always been favored as the de facto state religion. Yet, the development of state-religion interaction was marked by several strategies of accommodating and restricting religion. On one hand, the state engaged in imposing strict secularization policies in order to curb public visibility of religion. On the other hand, it incorporated religion into the bureaucracy and tried to ensure legitimacy of the regime and solidarity among the citizens through this state agency. Thus, it can be argued that rather than a complete eradication of religion, the elites monopolized a specific version of religion which, in their terms, is defined as “rational Islam”. Within this context, the DRA has been extremely instrumental in creating an enlightened form of Islam to promote the modernization project, in using Islam as a bond for consolidating national unity,

¹¹⁹ See Constitution of the Republic of Turkey Preamble as amended on October 3, 2001; Act No. 4709, global.tbmm.gov.tr.

¹²⁰ See Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, Articles 10 and 24.

in legitimizing the state ideology through Islam and suppressing the use of religion by religious groups against the state.¹²¹

The needs of the state set the parameters for controlling and reconstituting Islam. The modernization project was based on the idea that secularism was the key to a modern, developed and a powerful state, which underscores the potency of secularism in centralizing and reforming the state power through various reforms. One aim of the Republican reforms was pursuit and imitation of Western styles of living, institutions and practices and modernization of Islam's existing status and role in society simultaneously.¹²² After the War of Independence, a set of new reforms were implemented in order to carve out a homogenous nation-state from the multi-ethnic and multi-religious remnants of the Ottoman Empire. The new secular society could be created by bringing production and dissemination of religious knowledge under state control and stripping Islamic institutions of their privileged position that they previously held. The Kemalist reformers drew their ideas from positivism of Comte. Göle concludes the positivism of early republicans as:

“Positivism served to legitimize the Turkish Republican elites’ modernization attempts. From the ‘Young Turks’ onwards, the secular vision of history shaped by the positivism of Auguste Comte provided the frame of reference for reform for progressive Turkish elites. Social engineering, seen as a corollary to positivism, became the reformist elites’ model for a rational reconstruction of Turkish society. The positivist motto of ‘progress and order’ mirrored the views of the Turkish modernizers for a national order, without which, according to them, secularization could not be achieved in a Muslim country.”¹²³

¹²¹ M. Hakan Yavuz, “Understanding Turkish Secularism in the 21th Century”, p. 62.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹²³ Nilüfer Göle, “Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The making of elites and counter-elites”, *The Middle East Journal* 51, no.1: 46-58, (1997), p. 48.

Guided by positivism, they engaged in eliminating folk Islamic practices, rituals and superstitions along with religious orders to reconstitute an ‘enlightened Islam’ or ‘rational Islam’, which could be utilized when need be. This period was marked with reformulating Islam as “pristine”, “authentic” and “genuine”. As the Republic engaged heavily in “civilizing” the “backward” masses, alternative sources or outlets of Islam were banned in order to ensure standardization in production and dissemination of religious knowledge and practice of religion. Official Islam was indoctrinated and being a proper Muslim was guided. At this juncture, the DRA was informally charged with the task of enlightening the society with religious knowledge and culture that were purified and reconciling religion with the state, the republican ideology and revolutions. Thus, Islam was not limited to private sphere, on the contrary, it was transformed into a public religion. However, it reflected a particular understanding of the reformers which constituted a binding element among the society in order for them to “imagine” themselves as homogenous and unified citizens possessing identity of the Muslim-Turk. Andrew Davison gives a concise explanation pertaining to new mission of Islam as such:

“Islam was not disestablished; it was differently established. Religion became a separate concern among other state concerns, not separate from politics or the state. Thus, it may be said that the RPP removed Islam from the condition of being used as a political instrument in the way it was previously used, but not from the condition of being an instrument of politics as such, since they understood well the role that the state would play in fostering a specific interpretation of Islam, support for they have been quite explicit about over the years.”¹²⁴

The function of Islam is most decisive in official definition of Turk and Turkish nationalism most particularly when population exchange between Greece and Turkey in 1923 was based on religious identity, rather than ethnicity, and

¹²⁴ Andrew Davison, “Turkey, a “Secular” State?”, p. 341.

minority groups residing in Turkey were designated as non-Muslims with the Lausanne Treaty with Kurds being exempt from the minority status due to the fact that they were Muslims. In a similar manner, granting permanent settlement to “those who only belong to Turkish ethnicity and culture” with the Law of Settlement in 1934 clearly exhibits the same policy of using religious affiliation determining who would be a Turk, since the ambiguous expression of ‘culture’ refers to Islam in that Muslim minorities such as Albanians, who did not speak Turkish, Bosnians, Pomaks and Sandjak Muslims were regarded Turk, whereas the Gagauz Turks, who were Orthodox Christians and spoke Turkish, were not considered Turk.¹²⁵

The single party of the early republican period never hesitated to use Islam in politics. During the RPP congress in 1947, many deputies asserted that special emphasis had to be attached to religion, particularly Islam ethics and the DRA had to be empowered with respect to teaching Islam ethics, that religious instruction had to be incorporated into school curricula and religious instruction be given both in secondary and higher education in order to prevent social and political fragmentation that the Turkish society then experienced.¹²⁶ Another anecdote quoted by Kara reveals the intricate relationship that the Turkish state has developed with religion over the years. When Birlik Partisi (Union Party) applied to the Constitutional Court claiming that the Act 633 was against the principle of secularism in 1970, the Court overruled the annulment appeal on the grounds that

“the DRA is an administrative unit within the state as stated by the Article 154 and its staff are public servants, which is required by many historical causes, facts, needs and conditions of the country; [the Act] promotes prevention of religious bigotry, arrangement of religion as a moral discipline for the society and thus attainment of progress and modernization of the Turkish society by

¹²⁵ Metin Heper, “Turkey: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow”, p. 5.

¹²⁶ İsmail Kara 2018, pp. 183-84.

implementing state-supervision of religion and by recruiting competent religious personnel.”¹²⁷

Turkish Army, which has always been the staunch defender and supporter of secularism and Atatürk revolutions, resorts to Islamic terminology and enshrined tenets. In fact, militarism has been characterized to be synonymous with nationalism and religion through its extensive use of martyrdom which is the highest virtue in Islam as those who fall dead when defending their country are heralded with heaven. *Mehmetçik*, a name referring to any enlisted man in Turkey, is actually the modified version of Muhammed, the name of the Prophet. Similarly, military service is glorified as *Peygamber Ocağı* (the Hearth of the Prophet). A year after the Law on the Unification of Education, Fevzi Çakmak, the chief of the general staff, asked religious authorities to prepare a book on religion for soldiers. The book, *Askere Din Dersleri (Lectures on Religion for Soldiers)* written by Ahmet Hamdi Akseki, explains the duties expected from the enlisted within an Islamic framework and even the definition of military service has its share. *Askere Din Dersleri* was reprinted twice 20 years after its first printing and it was named *Askere Din Kitabı (The Book on Religion for Soldiers)*. The new edition indoctrinates some values and capitalizes on *jihad* in Islam by relating military service to a religious duty and stressing the fact that the Prophet himself was a military commander.¹²⁸ Akseki tries to reformulate connection between military service and religion from a traditionalist perspective, which underpins the much-needed values and principles for the soldiers to internalize and fight.

¹²⁷ See *Resmi Gazete*, No: 14216, July 15, 1972.

¹²⁸ Kürşat Bumin, “Askere Din Kitabı”, *Yeni Şafak*, April 15, 2006, <https://www.yenisafak.com/arsiv/2006/nisan/15/kbumin.html> ; April 16, 2006 <https://www.yenisafak.com/arsiv/2006/nisan/16/kbumin.html> (Retrieved June 9, 2020).

2. 8. Conclusion

The establishment and incorporation of the DRA into the state apparatus informed the new role of Islam in the early Republican era. Sunni Islam was favored as a counterweight to ‘threats’ to the unity and solidarity, a binding element in Turkish national identity formation and a supporter of the regime’s legitimacy. Although religion was deprived of its role in public life, the DRA was authorized to represent, regulate and reproduce public forms of Islam. The DRA, being as an administrative instrument, helped facilitate direct state intervention into the religious sphere.

The Directorate has become one of the key ideological state apparatuses since its establishment. The ruling ideology was indirectly, sometimes directly, realized in the discourse and practices of the DRA without any repression or recourse to violence. The state could contain reactionary and anti-Turkish movements through instrumentalizing the DRA to supervise Muslim citizens and inculcate them with the state ideology. The DRA ensured the process of “interpellation” of individuals as subjects of the ruling ideology. For example, it supported the Turkification of the *azan* and imposed imams to strictly comply with the official policy at the time, its support to the DP government’s policy of sending Turkish troops to Korea, it presented fighting in the war as a *jihad*, and legitimized the military coup in 1960 in a khutbah.

The functioning of the DRA as an ideological state apparatus and a political instrument was reflected in its role in legitimizing the state policies, consolidating national unity and promoting official Islam in line with the state ideology after the single party era. Regardless of their ideological inclinations, all the ruling parties instrumentalized the DRA for social stability, electoral support and their ideological causes. The access of the DRA to huge numbers of citizens through its publications, khutbahs, mosque and other services could be translated into a great leverage for all governments. Thus, the institution was gradually

strengthened both institutionally and financially over the years without relinquishing state control on religious activity.

The integration of the DRA into the state bureaucracy and state-sponsored Islam violate the principle of secularism which is characterized with a complete indifference to religion. In modern Turkey, state intervention into the religious matters is categorized as fulfilling a collective need. Yet, the DRA's political instrumentalization to propagate official ideology and its monopoly on religious activity are not independent from the official politics. For that reason, the institution has come under harsh criticisms for its discriminatory practices against other sects in Islam and subordination of religion to the state. In fact, the primary function of the DRA has been tutelary throughout the republican period, despite some challenges against the state and its efforts to extend the religious sphere.

CHAPTER 3: THE ANALYSIS OF THE DIRECTORATE OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS AS A POLITICAL INSTRUMENT IN TURKISH POLITICS BETWEEN 1980 - 2002

The purpose of this chapter is to present the transformation with respect to political instrumentalization of the DRA between the September 12, 1980 military intervention and November 2002. It will be shown that the DRA was re-emphasized as a political instrument and an ideological state apparatus both in domestic and foreign policy after the coup through the Turkish Islamic Synthesis. Reflections of this influence on the 1982 constitution and deployment of the DRA for maintaining national unity and suppressing leftist ideologies will be analyzed. Then, the chapter will focus instrumentalization of the DRA under the civilian governments with different ideologies and policies. The same chapter will present that the February 28, 1997 was a different process of political instrumentalization of the DRA in that it was used to suppress religious activity. The chapter will be finalized with the activities of the DRA abroad in order to show the transformation of the Directorate from a domestic control mechanism over religion to an instrument for promoting national unity and Turkish Islam abroad. The speeches by politicians and the army staff, circulars and press releases by the DRA, publications of the DRA such as *Diyanet Gazetesi*, *Diyanet İlmi Dergi* and *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* and khutbahs published in the *Diyanet Gazetesi* between 1980 and 1991 are analyzed for the chapter.

3. 1. Introduction

In 1980, the military junta took control of the government, dissolved the parliament, abolished the political parties and declared martial law. It was a war in full swing against all the public actors in that all the labor unions and associations were closed down, many newspapers and magazines were ordered to halt publishing, thousands of people were put on trial, jailed and many were executed. The intervention rearranged the entire society in order to create a unified and

obeying one as radical Islamic and leftist tides and Kurdish separatism were, for the military junta, threats to the survival of the state.

Two separate strategies were adopted: the dual process of militarization and Islamization of the state became the distinctive formula. The Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) promoted an ideology based on fear that the country was surrounded by enemies at home and abroad. Thus, it had the monopoly of the political regime through the National Security Council (NSC), where a strong threat to survival of the state was reproduced and a “national security state”¹²⁹ structure was formed. While the 1961 Constitution created “a semi-military state council” by incorporating the NSC in the executive power along with the President and the Cabinet, the 1982 Constitution further consolidated this structure.¹³⁰ The Constitution ensured a superior position for the military bureaucracy in politics against the elected civilians making the NSC the most important actor in decision making ranging from security to independence and survival of state. The Constitution served the authoritarian and statist purposes of the military as put succinctly by a scholar “... the underlying philosophy of the 1982 Constitution was to protect the State from the actions of its citizens rather than to protect fundamental rights and liberties of the citizens from the State’s encroachment.”¹³¹

The latter strategy can be explained as “the strategy of the Islamization of secularism” since official discourse articulated and tolerated Islamic elements in the public-political realm that had until that point been under the monopoly of secular standards and criteria.¹³² Turkish - Islamic Synthesis (*Türk – İslam*

¹²⁹ Tanıl Bora, “Ordu ve Milliyetçilik” In *Bir Zümre, Bir Parti, Türkiye’de Ordu* edited by Ahmet İnsel and Ali Bayramoğlu (Istanbul: Birikim Kitapları, İletişim Yayınları, 2017), p. 173.

¹³⁰ Taha Parla, *Türkiye’de Anayasalar*, (Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, 2016), pp. 78-79.

¹³¹ Ergun Özbudun, “Democratization Reforms in Turkey, 1993-2004”, *Turkish Studies*, 8:2, (2007), p. 179.

¹³² Ümit Cizre-Sakallıoğlu, “Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey”, p. 244.

Sentezi), which, when succinctly clarified, connotes historical and cultural intimacy of Turkishness and Islam so it is impossible to separate them¹³³ gained popularity among the military commanders as a buffer against the emergence of radical (leftist- Islamic) and conflicting ideologies.

3. 2. The Turkish Islamic Synthesis and Re-emphasizing the DRA as a Political Instrument

General Kenan Evren, leader of the military government between 1980 and 1983, stated in his public speech in Erzurum that

“...I asked you not to send your children into informal Qur’an courses. We incorporated this into the Constitution. By this means, they will teach religions and religious matters to our children, as remarked by great Atatürk, in the State school and by the State.”¹³⁴

Evren’s remarks indicated state controlled religious education in order for the “unity” of the society. His frequent references to religion through the concepts “positivism, science, secularism, knowledge” characterizes the new regime’s competency in using Islam which was, nevertheless, a nationalized and state-controlled, official Islam without ceasing to uphold secular character of the state. The state heavily employed “tamed” version of Islam together with militarism. Conforming to the political discourse and policies of the time with respect to religion, the government program of Bülend Ulusu, who was the Prime Minister during the junta era between 20 September 1980 and 13 December 1983,

¹³³ İbrahim Kafesoğlu, *Türk İslam Sentezi*, (Istanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2018), pp. 143-145.

¹³⁴ “... çocuklarınızı gizli Kur’an kurslarına göndermemenizi istemiştim. İşte bunu Anayasa’ya koyduk. Bu suretle çocuklarımıza dinleri, diyanetleri, aziz Atatürk’ün söylediği gibi, Devletin okulunda, Devletin eliyle öğretecekler.” *Öğretmenler, Öğrenciler, Veliler ve STK’lar Açısından Eğitim Sisteminde Din Öğretiminin Rolü*, HDY (Istanbul: November 2016), p. 13.

informed the new role of the DRA and deployment of religion in national unity. The program echoed the discourse of Evren and pledged to “try hard to raise religious functionaries who are adherents of Atatürk and enlightened”.¹³⁵ The statements indicate the state plans of regulating the strong power base of Islam and eradicating folk elements inherent in religion through “enlightened religious functionaries”.

For the military, the heavy clashes between differing ideologies, namely between left and right, posed threats to national unity and state-sponsored Islam would unite the society. Thus, they drew on their ideologies from the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis. The synthesis had deep ideological influence on the coup context and was designed by the *Aydınlar Ocağı* (the Hearths of the Enlightened), which had been founded a decade earlier by rightwing and Islamist politicians, academicians and businesspeople to curb the hegemony of leftist ideology on social, political and cultural issues in Turkey. Zürcher puts that;

“Its basic tenet was that Islam held a special attraction for the Turks because of a number of (supposedly) striking similarities between their pre-Islamic culture and Islamic civilization. They shared a deep sense of justice, monotheism and a belief in the immortal soul, and a strong emphasis on family life and morality. The mission of the Turks was a special one, to be the ‘soldiers of Islam’. According to this theory, Turkish culture was built on two pillars: a 2500-year-old Turkish element and a 1000-year-old Islamic element.”¹³⁶

The leading ideologue of the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis was İbrahim Kafesoğlu, who was also the chairman of the *Aydınlar Ocağı*. In the 1960s, Kafesoğlu was a Turkist and in the later decades, the harmony between Islam and Turkish culture left its imprint on his works. In a book he wrote in 1966, he would

¹³⁵ “Atatürkçü ve aydın din adamlarının yetiştirilmesi için her türlü gayret sarf edilecektir”. Nuran Dağlı and Belma Aktürk 1988. <https://acikerisim.tbmm.gov.tr/handle/11543/1786> (Retrieved May 16, 2020).

¹³⁶ Zürcher 2003, p. 303.

argue “The main aim of Turkey, the grand purpose where all social, cultural, legal and administrative problems get tangled is to achieve the goal of modernization which is expressed as ‘rising to the level of contemporary civilization’.”¹³⁷ Yet, modernization is not Europeanization; on the contrary, it is modernizing while maintaining or embracing ‘national- moral’ values.¹³⁸ The ideas presented in the book are a rather romanticized and glorified narration of Turkish history. For him, laicism starts with pre-Islamic Turkish history, Turkish nationalism is not a religious cause or racist and it is a belief system which respects justice, helps extol universal civilization; thus, Turkish people have a through comprehension of nationalism.¹³⁹ The discourse of Kafesoğlu and other members of the *Aydınlar Ocağı* was based on the fact that Westernization caused a rupture with our roots. This rupture was presented as the cause of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, where imitation of the West in architecture, literature, fashion and recreation resulted in cleavages and “betrayal of customs”.¹⁴⁰ He raised harsh criticism against Humanism and translation movements on the grounds that “...Humanism movement quickly gained a socialist-materialist character, the interpretation of the West through translation movement has transformed into a propaganda tool that operates under the control of materialists and Marxists...”¹⁴¹ Similar predominant discontent with the intellectual and cultural hegemony of the left were shared by influential members of the *Aydınlar Ocağı*, in the monthly *Türk Edebiyatı* magazine. The writers of the magazine shared a Gökaldpist ideology and want to revive it. According to Erol Güngör, one of the writers, “... the composition of

¹³⁷ İbrahim Kafesoğlu, *Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Meseleleri*, (İstanbul: Ötüken Neşriyat, 2017), p. 42.

¹³⁸ He also criticizes intellectuals in Turkey, with the exception of Atatürk and Gökaldp, for being influenced by European culture and equating modernization with Europeanization. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

¹⁴⁰ İbrahim Kafesoğlu 2018, pp. 199-200.

¹⁴¹ İbrahim Kafesoğlu 2017, pp. 179-180.

Turkey is the fusion of Oghuz Turk's national character and Islamic faith."¹⁴² Their aim was to "revive an 'ideal' national culture and literature"¹⁴³, because in the words of Kabaklı "Only one power exists, it is cultural power... Unlike the Marxist and Smithian views, economy is structured on culture..."¹⁴⁴ Similar ideas characterize the discourse of Kafesoğlu in his writings that exhibit a disdain for class struggle and wage a war against leftist ideologies. They offered an alternative to the humanist cultural movement propagated by the state in the 1940s. While they reconciled state-driven cultural transformation with their schema of a top-down transformation of the society, they discredited the humanist movement on the grounds that it lacked national or authentic characteristics.¹⁴⁵

Members of the *Aydınlar Ocağı* tried to legitimize their ideas by including Atatürk's ideas on nationalism. Incorporating Islamic values into Turkish nationalism, without rejecting Atatürk nationalism, was the defining principle of the Synthesis due to conformity between Islam and Turkishness. Their success in influencing state leadership for the strong reforms they had contemplated rested on the common features between the official Islam propagated by the junta and the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis. It was founded upon strong nationalism, social harmony, national unity and a central role for the state. The twin enemies of radical leftist ideologies and Islamic movements would be defeated with the state policy of Islamization of Republican nationalism. As an organized intellectual movement, the members became de facto allies of the September 12 restoration by monopolizing the definition of nation, nationalism or nationhood. The regression of left wing Kemalism, which offered an alternative to socialism and

¹⁴² Yıldız Akpolat, "Milliyetçi-Muhafazakar Bir Dergi Olarak Türk Edebiyatı Dergisi" In *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: Dönemler ve Zihniyetler* edited by Ömer Laçiner, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2009), p. 711.

¹⁴³ Yüksel Taşkın, *Milliyetçi Muhafazakar Entelijansiya*, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2019), p. 206.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

capitalism with emphasis on planned development, social justice, citizen rights and welfare state, afforded the right wing Kemalism a historic opportunity to show an upward trend in that it was adept in exploiting the negative atmosphere of the Cold War and appropriating conservative reflections while legitimizing itself through Atatürk at the same time.¹⁴⁶ Cizre attributes the transformation in national identity to “the neo-conservative tone of international politics, revival of Islam and the escalation of the Kurdish conflict since 1984...”¹⁴⁷ The cooperation between the state and conservative elites became determining in politics, culture and economics, as the nationalist conservatives attempted to restore a strong state and eliminate other ‘illegitimate’ actors. The goal of the military intervention was to “ensure national unity and solidarity” and this mission was officially given to the guardians of the regime -the army. To “prevent destruction made in the name of Atatürk”, Kemalism was declared the official ideology of the state, all parties, and in particular, national education. The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis had tremendous effects on the 82 Constitution. Religious connotations of the Constitution such as the “moral values of Turkishness” were reflections of the Synthesis.¹⁴⁸ For example, it declared religious instruction mandatory in primary and secondary schools and the DRA was assigned with “aiming at national solidarity and integrity” and its scope and organizational structure were extended tremendously. Thus, Kemalism was reconciled with Islam through the incorporation of Atatürk, strong state and religion in the Constitution as observed by Parla it contained a “Turkish -Islam trinity” overtones.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Suavi Aydın and Yüksel Taşkın, *1960'tan Günümüze Türkiye Tarihi*, (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları 2018), p. 341.

¹⁴⁷ Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “Rethinking the Connections between Turkey’s “Western” identity versus Islam”, p. 14.

¹⁴⁸ According to Taha Parla “moral” implies “Islamic”. Taha Parla 2016, p. 37.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

The congress speeches¹⁵⁰ of the time reveals that the deputies perceive leftist ideologies as threats and religion as the antidote. One of the deputies, Mehmet Pamak, quoted Atatürk's ideas on nationalism that "We are neither Bolsheviks nor Communists. We can't be either one or the other. Because we are nationalist and respectful of our religion" and added that "...Marxist propaganda tries to erase the fact that Turkish history started in Central Asia".¹⁵¹ Thus, the DRA, along with the Ministry of Education, became one of the key institutions that could reinforce state ideology. The overlapping ideology of the commanders and the *Aydınlar Ocağı* was perhaps best voiced by Kabaklı:

"'Mosque, school and the army' are hearths that strengthen the national essence equally and give exact national education. No one has the right to favor one and disregard any other."¹⁵²

Sam Kaplan shows that religious and martial virtues are historically constituted through the school system and argues that since the 1980 coup the school curriculum has incorporated into "a nation of soldiers" narrative a *din-u devlet* concept which is the duality of state and religion in pre-Republican statecraft.¹⁵³ During this time, the military embarked on a mission of education which was charged with a militarist mission.¹⁵⁴ Yet, this mission was also

¹⁵⁰ During a session, one of the deputies pointed out the "active role of radio and television in achieving unity of thought and feelings" and complained about the closure of TRT radio stations in some areas due to electricity service failure in that citizens in those areas had to listen to "harmful" content of Baku radio broadcast from Russia. *Danışma Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 17, 100. Birleşim, May 11, 1983, pp. 460-461.

¹⁵¹ *Danışma Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 10, 154. Birleşim, September 21, 1982, p. 543.

¹⁵² Ahmet Kabaklı cited in Yüksel Taşkın 2019, p. 223.

¹⁵³ Sam Kaplan, "Din-u Devlet All Over Again? The Politics of Military Secularism and Religious Militarism in Turkey Following the 1980 Coup", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34, (2002), p. 117.

¹⁵⁴ The high- school curriculum in Turkey has been integrated a course on National Security since 1926, The curriculum and the coursebook are designed by the Department of Chief of Staff and the lectures are delivered by military officers. Besides, the fact that Atatürk is frequently referred to as the "Headteacher" (Başöğretmen) and "Commander in Chief" (Başkomutan) is the manifestation of the tight relationship between militarism and education in Turkey.

characterized with religious accents through which the entire society could be indoctrinated by capitalizing on Islamic maxim of complying with rulers. It is noteworthy to analyze *Tebliğler Dergisi*, the official periodical of the Ministry of National Education, to see how the military dictates its agenda on the Ministry in a militarist and religious approach.¹⁵⁵

The 1982 Constitution stipulated that “The Presidency of Religious Affairs, which is within the general administration, shall exercise its duties prescribed in its particular law, in accordance with the principles of secularism, removed from all political views and ideas, and aiming at national solidarity and integrity.” The institution was constitutionally assigned with the protection and consolidation of Turkish identity. Taha Parla argues that the ruling elite between 1980-86 reincorporated religion into public and political life within the oversight of the state by de facto abandoning the classical Kemalist laicism principle.¹⁵⁶ Through the Article 136, creating a moral order by using Islamic values as the cement is the declaration of official state tradition of reconciliation of Islam and Turkish nationalism which can be traced back to the early Republican and the late Ottoman times. Furthermore, Article 89 of the Law of Political Parties numbered 2820 promulgated as of April 1983, which is in effect today and bans political parties that propagate the abolition of the DRA, took the status of the DRA under legal protection, rendering a specific immunity to the institution.

¹⁵⁵ A memo, Public Institutions and National Unity, by the Defense Secretariat of Ministry of Education released in 1982, 1 February issue of *Tebliğler Dergisi* highlights the importance of fighting against harmful and disruptive ideologies. The ideologies are fascism and communism, which the memo designates as autocratical ideologies. Communism is specified as “Atheist Dictatorship” and enforces a mission on public institutions to fight against them. By quoting Atatürk’s opinion on religion that “Religion is an indispensable institution. It is out of the question for a nation to survive without religion...”, the regime aims to propagate its ideology to fight disruptive ideologies. The rest of the document continues with recommendations such as “abstaining from gambling, alcohol, prostitution and theft” and “believing in the existence of Allah, avoiding the things that are banned in our religion and fulfill its requirements”, TD 45, 2105 (February 1, 1982), pp. 67- 77.

¹⁵⁶ Taha Parla, *Türkiye'nin Siyasal Rejimi (1980-1989)*, (Istanbul: Deniz Yayınları 2009), p. 212.

For the military religious authority of Turkey became a useful ally to ensure subjection to the dominant ideology. Religion was incorporated into state discourse and the DRA was used as a political instrument to legitimize the policy of the rulers and reinforce their principles. This alliance with the Directorate helped the military exercise power and legitimize their undemocratic practices. For example, the DRA had allocated extensive coverage to importance of a strong executive and the news of the coup was presented in a hopeful manner: the front page of the *Diyanet Gazetesi* right after the coup wrote “The executive must be strengthened!” and “Anarchy will not be allowed to flourish in schools, universities, or trade unions disguised in the name of freedom and independence”.¹⁵⁷ On September 1-15 issue of the magazine, the 1st anniversary of the coup, the overall statement of the coup appeared beneath the headline “ We Lived a Peaceful Year” and positive developments in the areas of economy, anarchy, executive power and administration were explained.¹⁵⁸ To this end, some khutbah topics, as if written by statesmen rather than a religious authority, encouraged national values and unity and laid down responsibilities of a good citizen such as “Paying Taxes is a very Important Civic Duty” (Vergi Vermek Çok Önemli Bir Vatandaşlık Görevidir), “Consultation and Republic in Islam” (İslam’da İstişare ve Cumhuriyet), “Tree and Forest Love” (Ağaç ve Orman Sevgisi), “Let’s Adhere to Our National and Religious Traditions” (Milli ve Dini An’anelerimize Bağlı Kalalım), “Every Visitor to Our Country is Our Guest” (Ülkemize Gelen Her Ziyaretçi Misafirimizdir), “Benefits of Economy and Saving” (İktisat ve Tasarrufun Faydaları),¹⁵⁹ “Increasing Production, Avoiding

¹⁵⁷ Hamdi Mert, “İcra Güçlendirilecek Mi?”, *Diyanet Gazetesi*, October 1, 1980, pp. 1-8. Mert continued the topic on the October 15, 1980 issue of the magazine, pp. 8-9.

¹⁵⁸ See Hamdi Mert, *Diyanet Gazetesi*, September 1-15, 1981, pp. 1, 16-18.

¹⁵⁹ “...Dear Muslims, economy and savings, which are the orders of our religion, are also a national duty that we have to comply with in order for our country to progress in every field and reach the level of contemporary civilization... As people who believe in the holiness of the homeland, let’s help our country develop with our savings. Let us understand the current importance of the meaning expressed in the hadith of our beloved Prophet: ‘The time will come so that neither religion nor the world will be preserved unless there is money’”. See Sadık Ağaç, *Diyanet Gazetesi*, July 1, 1981.

Luxury and Waste” (Üretimi Artırmak, Lüks ve İraftan Kaçınmak), “Smuggling” (Kaçakçılık),¹⁶⁰ “Saving and Energy” (Tasarruf ve Enerji), “Islam and Tourism” (İslamiyet ve Turizm), “Republic” (Cumhuriyet),¹⁶¹ In short, issues like the Eastern Thrace, Atatürk and national values, national days, Çanakkale wars, victories, being martyr and veteran, communism, the conquest of Istanbul, the unity and solidarity of the nation, qualities of a good preacher and imam, superstitions, missionary activities were frequently recurring in its publications and khutbahs.

The DRA, for its part, benefitted from the alliance: it entrenched its monopoly on regulating, reproducing and representing official Islam. In order to control religious individuals and groups, on October 4, 1983 the administration of the religious associations was given to the jurisdiction of the DRA with the amendment of the Code that regulates the associations. Thereby, religious associations were to submit the regulatory statutes, the names and the addresses of their members to the DRA.¹⁶² Although the DRA has never been an autonomous institution, several religious orders and brotherhoods made inroads into the DRA. Hence, in accordance with the policy of “aiming at national solidarity and integrity”, tighter supervision and control both on central and provincial units of the DRA were employed. The most distinctive example that exhibits collaboration of the DRA with the military regime was a secret report on the activities of some

¹⁶⁰ “First of all, in smuggling, the state treasury and the national economy are harmed, and national interests are damaged. However, the Prophet pointed out in a conversation that “love for homeland is a part of faith”. A person who loves his homeland and nation cannot be the perpetrator of such behavior...Smuggling, ignoring the national economy and disregarding national interests, has nothing to do with the benevolence targeted by our religion.” See Talat Karaçizmeli, *Diyanet Gazetesi*, June 1983.

¹⁶¹ “The state administration system best suited to Islam is the Republic. Our beloved Prophet, always in consultation with his companions in worldly affairs, did not deviate from “consent”, which is the essence of republic and set good examples to Muslims in this regard...We must be cautious against internal and external forces that try to endanger our independence and freedom.” See Mehmet Bulut, *Diyanet Gazetesi*, October 1983.

¹⁶² Dernekler Kanunu, *Resmî Gazete*, No: 18184, 7 October 1983.

brotherhoods which were accused of recruiting staff in order to establish a sharia state.¹⁶³ The report named “Religious Education in Turkey- Exploitation of Religion” champions the official Jacobin laicism, stresses the importance of religious instruction by the state and nationalizes and officializes the religious content in mosques. The same report introduced the centralization of khutbahs:

“To ensure a pleasing, warming and uniting tone and content in the khutbahs and preaching by the Directorate of Religious Affairs; to avoid personal, political and ideological implications and suggestions; to ban extemporaneous khutbah delivery [reading the sermon by speaking method without looking at a written / prepared text] and to submit the written khutbah and preaching plan to the public after being approved by the relevant mufti; to circulate sufficient number of khutbah texts and preaching plans from the center to the provinces by taking into consideration of the conditions of the region and to ensure the unity of the text throughout the country; to publish books containing khutbahs and preaching texts...”¹⁶⁴

The meeting held with the muftis to supervise and control provincial units shortly after the coup is another example of the unification attempts of the DRA. During the meeting, groups that function as guesthouses, associations and mass education centers and conduct unofficial Koran courses outside their field of activity were drawn attention to and measures to be taken against them were

¹⁶³ Mehmet Şevket Eygi, “Diyamet’in 1981’deki gizli raporu” <https://www.mehmetsevketeygi.org/2019/03/10/diyamet-in-1981deki-gizli-raporu/> (Retrieved May 19, 2020); The report was prepared by Mehmet Özgüneş (Minister of State), Cevdet Menteş (Minister of Justice), Selahaddin Çetiner (Minister of Internal Affairs), İler Türkmen (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Hasan Sağlam (Minister of National Education), Münir Güney (Minister of Rural Affairs and Cooperations), Vecdi Özgül (Minister of Youth and Sports), and Tayyar Altıkulaç (President of the Directorate of Religious Affairs), İsmail Kara, “Cami, Ordu, Siyaset”, pp. 45-46.

¹⁶⁴ “Diyamet İşleri Başkanlığı’nca hutbe ve vaazların sevdirci, ısrırdıcı, bütünleştirici bir üslup ve muhtevada olması; şahsi, siyasi ve ideolojik ima ve telkinlerden kaçınılması; irticali hutbe iradının [yazılı/hazırlanmış bir metne bakmadan konuşma usulüyle hutbe okumanın] yasaklanarak yazılı hutbe metni ve vaaz planının ilgili müftüye onaylatıldıktan sonra halka sunulması; bölgenin şartları da gözönüne alınarak, ülke çapında metin birliğinin sağlanması için, merkezden illere ihtiyacı karşılayacak sayıda hutbe metinleri ve vaaz planları tamim edilmesi; ayrıca hutbe ve vaaz metinleri ihtiva eden kitaplar yayınlanması...”

discussed, and an evaluation on the centralization of khutbahs were made. The commentary entitled “Center and Provincial Units in Harmony” (Merkez ve Taşra Uyum Halinde) by the vice president of the institution emphasized the importance of unity in aim and approach of religious functionaries.¹⁶⁵ The measures listed by the president Tayyar Altıkulaç to be taken for achieving unity among the center and the province indicate the nature of centralization efforts;

1-It will be ensured that the preachers are prepared seriously before taking the pulpit.

2-As always, from now on, no opportunity will be given to the people who want to interfere with politics in mosque pulpit, provisions of Article 25 of Law No. 633 will be applied to those acting otherwise.

3-Those who recite khutbahs extemporaneously will not be allowed. Khutbahs will be selected from the sermons sent by the Directorate. Our officers who try to raise themselves by preparing khutbahs will not be forbidden, but such khutbahs will be read under the responsibility of the relevant mufti...

1-In 1981, in-service training courses will be organized for Quran course instructors and unity in teaching will be established...

4-Regional Quran courses will be opened, the needs in this regard will be met quickly and misuse of Quran courses will be prevented.

6-The provisions of the Regulation of the Qur'an Courses will be seriously implemented, arbitrariness, discipline and disorder will not be allowed in the operation of these institutions...

-Arbitrariness and emotional behavior will not be allowed in administration and all transactions will take place in an objective manner within the framework drawn by the laws and the legislation.

-While our society is enlightened about religion, it will be acted in the light of the Book and Sunnah, and will never be deviated from this line.

-Our work place is the Republic of Turkey founded by Atatürk. All our officers will be in grasp of this.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Hamdi Mert, “Merkez Taşra Uyum Halinde”, *Diyanet Gazetesi*, February 15, 1981, p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ 1- Vazilerin kürsülere ciddi şekilde hazırlanarak çıkmaları sağlanacaktır. 2- Her zaman olduğu gibi, bundan sonar da, cami kürsüsünde siyaset yapmak isteyenlere kesinlikle fırsat verilmeyecek, aksine hareket edenler hakkında 633 sayılı Kanun'un 25. Maddesi uygulanacaktır. 3- İrticalen hutbe okuyanlara izin verilmeyecektir. Hutbeler, Başkanlığımızca gönderilen hutbelere seçilecektir. Hutbe hazırlayarak kendini yetiştirmeye çalışan görevlilerimize de engel olunmayacak, ancak bu gibi hutbeler, ilgili müftünün sorumluluğu altında okunabilecektir. 1-

About a year later, Altıkulaç released a circular where he warned against some problems such as interfering with politics in khutbahs and homilies, extemporaneous recitation of khutbahs, recitation of khutbahs and homilies by unauthorized people and violation of duty.¹⁶⁷ In another circular issued by Altıkulaç, it was stated that “Due to the conditions of recent years in particular, it is necessary to make a strong enlightenment movement in order to consolidate our weakened national unity” and it was stipulated that “khutbahs and homilies will be followed closely, and those who do not apply the specified points will not be given the duty of preaching and guidance, and that topics that will strengthen religious integrity and national unity will be emphasized in khutbahs, lectures, conferences and seminars.”¹⁶⁸

The speech delivered by the related Minister of State, Mehmet Özgüneş, during the discussions on the DRA budget in the Parliament corroborates the strict regulation and supervision of the khutbahs officially. After stressing the formalities for khutbah preparation,¹⁶⁹ the Minister continued:

Kur'an Kursu öğreticileri için 1981 yılı içerisinde meslek içi eğitim kursları düzenlenecek, öğretimde birlik sağlanacaktır. 4- Bölge Kur'an Kursları açılacak, bu konudaki ihtiyaçlar süratle karşılanarak, Kur'an Kurslarının istismarı önlenecektir. 6- Kur'an Kursları Yönetmeliği hükümleri ciddi bir şekilde uygulanacak, bu kuruluşların işleyişinde keyfiliğe, disiplinsizlik ve düzensizliğe izin verilmeyecektir. -İdarede keyifliliğe; hissiliğe yer verilemeyecek, her işlem kanunların ve mevzuatın çizdiği çerçevede objektif olarak cereyan edecektir. -Toplumumuz din konusunda aydınlatılırken, Kitap ve Sünnetin aydınlığında hareket edilecek, bu çizgiden asla sapılmayacaktır. -Görev yerimiz, Atatürk'ün kurduğu Cumhuriyet Türkiye'sidir. Bütün görevlilerimiz, bunun idraki içinde olacaklardır. See Tayyar Altıkulaç, *Diyanet Gazetesi*, February 15, 1981, p. 14.

¹⁶⁷ See Tayyar Altıkulaç, “Genelge NO:17”, *Diyanet Gazetesi*, January 1, 1982.

¹⁶⁸ The President pointed out the content of khutbahs, lectures, and seminars and underlined including programs that would ensure national unity and help strengthen development of the country, khutbahs that were not supervised or prepared by the Directorate were strictly banned. “Ramazandan İtibaren İrşad Faaliyetleri Başlıyor”, *Diyanet Gazetesi*, July 15, 1981, p. 2.

¹⁶⁹ “... it is mandatory for these khutbahs to abide by the basic tenets of the Constitution; in other words, for religion [khutbahs], to not to engage in activities in a way that violates political, economic and social order of the State; Secondly; certain points that are in violation of public moral cannot be covered in khutbahs. Third; certain issues that may violate public order cannot be covered in khutbahs by all means. Finally, no topic that is against the laws can be covered in khutbahs.” *Danışma Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 2, 37. Birleşim, 18 January 1982, pp. 270-271.

“... I would like to state that only in 1980, one hundred sample khutbahs were compiled and published and in 1981, sixty khutbahs were published and sent to all mufti offices and relevant religious officials. ... A separate unit for this topic [khutbahs] is present in the DRA and they are constantly supervised by this unit. ... Nobody can deliver khutbah extemporaneously, it is delivered by selecting among one of the given texts.... 188 auditors were appointed to ensure that no issues against the law and the Constitution are covered in homilies and from time to time they listen to homily disguised as citizens, detect those who digress and punish them. Also, every three years, a province is inspected and khutbahs and homilies are also subject to audit No imam-preacher or orator can deliver a homily unless the plan is submitted to the mufti three days before. No one approved by the mufti is authorized to deliver homily.”¹⁷⁰

The policy of raising generations devoted to religion and nation through mandatory religious courses which imposed a “tamed” interpretation of Islam was realized through the inclusion of the DRA. Propagation and indoctrination of official ideology through the DRA while eliminating different interpretations that might result in potential cleavages in unity were adopted. The DRA reiterated the official discourse; teaching of moral values was seen prerequisite to unity, strength and stability of a nation.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, that “people had to benefit from unqualified people to learn religious and moral matters” and “our nation came to the verge of a civil war due to insufficiency of religious and moral education” were articulated in its publications.¹⁷² The role tailored for the DRA was to curb radicalization of society that might be indoctrinated by fundamentalists through

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 271. In addition, the DRA released “Modern Management System and 1981 Work Schedule”, which imposed a strict standardization and a top-down regulation of the entire units. See “Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı’nda Modern Yönetim Sistemi ve 1981 Çalışma Programı”, *Diyanet Gazetesi*, June 15, 1981, p. 5; July 1, 1981, pp. 10-11; July 15, 1981, p.14.

¹⁷¹ The author linked anarchy that devastated the country before September 12 and student unrest a moral crisis. Abdullah Özbek, “Ahlak Eğitiminin Önemi”, *Diyanet İlmi Dergi*, Cilt, XIX – Sayı 3, Temmuz-Ağustos-Eylül, 1983, p. 62.

¹⁷² Abdullah Özbek, “Okullarımızda Ahlak Eğitimi”, *Diyanet İlmi Dergi*, Cilt, XIX- Sayı 4, Ekim-Kasım-Aralık, 1983, pp. 58-61.

teaching “genuine” Islam and enlightening the society about religion. Yet, the fact that the number of mosques, imam- hatip schools and religious broadcasts of TRT were increased, High Islamic Institutes (Yüksek İslam Enstitüleri) were transformed into Faculty of Theology and university right was granted to graduates of imam- hatip schools¹⁷³ should not be considered as moves to ease the strict secularism and relinquishing tight grip on religion; on the contrary, a “tamed-Islam”, which was in accordance with the ideological purposes of the state, was favored and clash of religious and national interests were prevented. Although the DRA was strengthened during the military rule, the graduates of imam-hatip schools were deemed ineligible for enrollment in military academies¹⁷⁴ and the ban on headscarves was enacted by the Cabinet of NSC. According to the 5th article of the related law, “Regulation on the Dressing of the Personnel Working in Public Institutions and Organizations”, women working in public institutions “shall always be bareheaded”.¹⁷⁵ The same year the Ministry of National Education¹⁷⁶ and Higher Education Council (YÖK)¹⁷⁷ issued a similar circular. The moves indicate the regulation of religious life by the state rather than a religious opening, which was accepted voluntarily by the DRA. A paper presented by the Vice President of the DRA, Hamdi Mert, in the late 80s proved the position of the DRA vis-à-vis the state.¹⁷⁸ The paper answered the criticisms directed to the institution regarding the clothes of female university students

¹⁷³ Muhammed Habib Saçmalı, 2013.

¹⁷⁴ Sam Kaplan, “Din-u Devlet All Over Again?”, p. 122.

¹⁷⁵ *Resmi Gazete*, No: 17849, October 25, 1982.

¹⁷⁶ “Türkiye’de başörtüsü yasağı: nasıl başladı, nasıl çözüldü”, *Aljazeera Türk*, December 30, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/dosya/turkiyede-basortusu-yasagi-nasil-basladi-nasil-cozuldu> (Retrieved June 3, 2020).

¹⁷⁷ “YÖK Raporu”, *Mazlumder Raporları*, November 6, 2001, <https://www.mazlumder.org/tr/main/yayinlar/yurt-ici-raporlar/3/yok-raporu/1030> (Retrieved June 3, 2020).

¹⁷⁸ Hamdi Mert, “The Position, Legal Status and Function of the Diyanet in Turkey’s Spiritual Life (Diyanet’in Türkiye’nin Manevi Hayatındaki Yeri, Resmi Statü ve Fonksiyonu)”, which was presented on April 8-10, 1988, in Ankara, <https://dergi.diyanet.gov.tr/makaledetay.php?ID=18093>.

(headscarf issue), obscene publications and broadcasts that were blasphemous and in violation of national values. The answer stressed the official discourse; “The desire to compare the DRA with its counterpart to its services in history is undoubtedly incompatible with its status, whose powers and duties have been formally determined within the general administrative structure of the state.”¹⁷⁹ Mert drew attention to certain people who exploited the fight against reactionarism to provoke disturbance between the state and the nation, warned against informal activities to fill the fields of religious service and that “some neighbors exporting “Revolution” with “Religion” packaging found supporters” in Turkey and proposed “benefiting from the integrative character of religion in preventing abuse of “Region”, “Wealth” and “Ethnic” difference claims against the state.”

3. 3. The DRA between 1983 and the AKP Period

The neo-liberal economic policies and liberalization in politics during Özal era resulted in a significant pluralization and transformation of religion and expansion of religion in public space. Yet, the traditional state policy of supervising religious activities persisted.¹⁸⁰ In fact, in the post-1980 period the

¹⁷⁹ Mert also answered criticisms that “management of religion by the state is in violation of the principle of secularism” and “the status of the DRA in the ‘General Administration’ is contrary to the practice of secularism in the West” by presenting the Resolution of the Constitutional Court published in *Resmi Gazete* No. 14216, dated June 15, 1972.

¹⁸⁰ The discussions at the Parliament suggest that uncontrolled religious activities were seen as threats. For example, Bahriye Üçok submitted an oral question to the Minister of Youth and Sports on assertions that religious culture and moral lessons were taught by imams in some primary and secondary schools in the Aegean region and Halil İbrahim Şahin submitted a written question about Süleymancılık, Nakşilik, Nur Medreseleri, Işıkcılık inquiring about reports by intelligence agencies and their compliance with Atatürk principles and revolutions, *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 36, 64. Birleşim, February 12, 1987, pp. 450 and 460-461; Tefik Bilal warned about sects and fundamentalism in Turkey and the government’s attitude towards them, and Günseli Özkaya submitted an oral question on the measures taken against Sharia supporters in Turkey, *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 35, 53. Birleşim, January 13, 1987, pp. 594- 597 and 601; Rüştü Sarıdağ gave a speech about Islam, religious orders and Khomeini in Turkey, *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 36, 55. Birleşim, January 15 1987, pp. 6-9; Salih Alcan criticized Anavatan Party due to a group of

classical secular character or “the primacy of the role of the state”¹⁸¹ was kept intact despite the rise of Islamic movements. The preservation of the unity of the state and the status quo had a powerful appeal. Therefore, the discourse and actions of the DRA reflected this view and majority of the debate for the DRA in the post-September 12 era concentrated around the unity of the state, preserving the Turkish-Islam character of Turkish people both at home and abroad, leftist ideologies and missionary activities as such. The DRA spread its messages through its publications, namely the *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* and *Diyanet İlmi Dergi*, and khutbahs. The nationalist outlook which overlapped the policies pursued at the time is visible through the topics put down on the agenda.¹⁸² In this context, July 1993 issue of the *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* stated that “the country is at the focal point of world power balances” and “is in a threat zone due to its strategic location” in its analysis of terrorism in Turkey. The country was presented as a “Regional State”, which could transform the balance of power to its advantage due to its geographical, strategic and socio-economic potential and thus, a strong and stable Turkey was undesirable for some powers.¹⁸³ One issue of the same

women visitors who wore *kara çarşaf* (black chador) and were welcomed by the party, which was “in violation of Atatürk’s principles and revolutions and principles of laic republic”, *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 37, 68. Birleşim February 24, 1987, pp. 18-19.

¹⁸¹ Ümit Cizre Sakallıoğlu, “Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey”, p. 247.

¹⁸² They were commemoration of Atatürk, the leadership of Atatürk, April 23 National Sovereignty and Children’s Day, August 30 the Victory Day, the Turkish National Struggle for Independence, anniversary of the Republic, the Dardanelles War, the Cyprus Peace Operation, the Battle of Manzikert, the Epic of Manas, Turkish police, Turkish Grand National Assembly, the Conquest of Istanbul and Fatih Sultan Mehmet, and important figures in Turkish history such as Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Akşemseddin, Mimar Sinan, Ertuğrul Gazi, Hoca Ahmed Yesevi, Yunus Emre, Mevlana, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek, Mehmet Fuat Köprülü and Ahmet Kabakalı, etc. Imam Ghazali and Uthman ibn Affan, the third Caliph were the only two Islamic figures covered with the exception of the Prophet himself. The *Diyanet İlmi Dergi* released a special issue for the 700th anniversary of the foundation of the Ottoman Empire on January 1999 and in the February 1999 issue of the *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* the same topic was covered. The magazine also covered diverse topics; traffic accidents, environmental issues, gambling, addictive substances such as drugs, alcohol and cigarette, cleanness in Islam, disabled citizens, problems of the youth, earthquake, human rights, cloning, Satanism were among the recurring topics from the early 90s to early 2000s.

¹⁸³ Hamdi Mert, “Tehdit Kuşağı ve Türkiye”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, July 1991, p. 5.

magazine warned against the internal and external betrayal that had not been successful in the past and cooperated in an activity of fracturing and dividing up Turkey today.¹⁸⁴ The analyses purport that “national security state”, which is the legacy of the military juntas and create artificial fear was adopted unanimously by the DRA authorities. The January 1993 issue of the magazine gave extensive coverage to importance of nation and homeland, which were “indivisible like soul and body.” Particularly with the hadith of the Prophet and a verse of the Qur’an military service and martyrdom were sanctified:

“One day and one night guarding the border is better than a month of fasting during the day and worship at night... “Do not say ‘dead’ to those who are killed in the way of Allah, because they are alive but you are not aware.”¹⁸⁵

The editorial for the August 1996 issue of the magazine written by Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz, the president of the Directorate, was named “The Month of Victories” referring to August 30 The Victory Day, which “was a national resistance and shaking movement against the Western states pursuing imperialist policy.”¹⁸⁶ National values, emotions and unity were frequently addressed in these magazines. For example, a writer noted that:

¹⁸⁴ Ali Sarıkoyuncu, “Cumhuriyet’in 70. Yılı Kutlarken”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, October 1994, p. 31. Another writer stressed that “...our country has attracted the attention of many imperialist nations that are accustomed to occupation and developed via colonialism.” See Alaattin Koçak, “Ülkemizin Coğrafi Konumu ve Milli Birliğimizin Önemi”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, March 1995, p. 46.

¹⁸⁵ The hadith of the Prophet and Surah Bakara, verse 154 of the Koran in Gaffar Tetik, “İslam’ın Askerliğe Verdiği Önem”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, January 1993, pp. 22-23. In these articles, the defence of homeland and military service amounted to a religious liability: “Homeland defense also means defense of religion, virtue and honor. There is no doubt that defending them is a religious duty.” Lütfi Şentürk, “Vatan Savunması”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, January 1993, pp. 14-15.

¹⁸⁶ Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz, “Zaferler Ayı”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, August 1996, the editorial. The articles were about the importance of flag, the Dardanelles War, the Battle of Manzikert, the Cyprus Peace Operation and the story of a martyr in Tripoli. Another article released in the same issue was “Crusader Mentality around Turkey and Cyprus Greeks Orthodox Church” written by the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus Presidential Advisory and Political Affairs Director Mustafa Evran, who argued that “Turkey is enclosed by a ‘Slavic-Orthodox Circle’.”

“National feeling is a transcendental love that connects members of the nation tightly. The hearth and land of this love are family, school, barracks and mosque... Nations and communities deprived of national feelings are like bedridden patients.”¹⁸⁷

Similarly, *Diyanet İlmi Dergi* expanded the importance of religious unity on our cultural formation and stressed the promotion of ideal culture, which has an important place in Turkish-Islamic thought.¹⁸⁸ According to the writer, religion and morals education was among the elements that provide national unity:

“It is possible for societies to have modern qualities by using the techniques of the age while preserving their unique national and cultural values... The indivisibility of our state with its country and nation should be preserved and national attitudes and behaviors should be developed in the face of the great issues of our age... The ability of this ideal and moral foundation [Turkish-Islamic culture] to ensure integration by preventing social dissolution in societies expresses the need for an effective religious education.”¹⁸⁹

Missionary activities such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, missionary activities in the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and in Turkey were covered frequently by the DRA. The November 1995 issue of the *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* featured the topic prominently pointing out that missionary groups choose institutions such as schools, colleges, hospitals, foreign language courses, prisons, publishing houses, foster homes and the Red Cross.¹⁹⁰ Orientalism, colonialism, trade, political domination and scientific research were explained as the Western origin activity

¹⁸⁷ Muammer Yılmaz, “Milli Duygu”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, October 1996, p. 43.

¹⁸⁸ Ülker Akkutay, “TRT’nin Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Programları”, *Diyanet İlmi Dergi*, Cilt 25-Sayı 2, Nisan-Mayıs- Haziran, 1989, pp. 59-62.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60. Importance of national unity was also covered in January 1993 issue of the *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*.

¹⁹⁰ “There is always a missionary in every disaster helped by the Red Cross. They act like doctors, nurses and caregivers.” Fatwa of the High Council of Religious Affairs,” *Misyonerlik Faaliyetleri*”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, November 1995, pp. 36-37.

areas that cooperate with orientalist, politicians, tradesmen and scientists for religious propaganda. Similarly, in October 1999 issue of the magazine, the aims of missionary activities in Turkey were to raise Muslim youth in a material way and sever ties with their history:

“They are particularly in propaganda in the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolian regions. They fuel the ethnic tides around them. They take discriminatory attempts by exploiting the neglect of the region living in unity and misleading them religiously.”¹⁹¹

The DRA tried to take all measures to ensure full supervision on its staff and different units. Therefore, it held regular meetings with the provincial mufti offices, orators, imams and other units both at the center and the provincial units.¹⁹² Within this context, standardization in its services and staff, raising enlightened staff¹⁹³ and fighting superstitions were among the priorities of the DRA, which was also addressed in its publications. For example, the *Diyanet İlmî*

¹⁹¹ Hasan Yıldırım, “Misyonerlik Dalgaları İslam’ın Sağlam Duvarlarına Çarpıp Durmaktadır”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, October 1999, p. 44. Missionary activities were featured in 1989 January and 2002 April issues of the *Diyanet İlmî Dergi* in great detail.

¹⁹² In fact, “Directorate of Religious Affairs Provincial Organization Duty and Work Directive” (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Taşra Teşkilatı Görev ve Çalışma Yönergesi), which listed the rules and responsibilities for all provincial units officially had already been published in 1986. See *Diyanet Gazetesi*, January 1986, pp. 24-25; February 1986, pp. 24-25; March 1986, pp. 18-19; May 1986, pp. 24-25; June 1986, pp. 25-26.

¹⁹³ In order to increase quality education level of the staff, it was decided to open a two-year vocational school of theology for religious officials at a meeting held with Higher Education Council on December 28, 1988 during the tenure of Mustafa Said Yazıcıoğlu. See “Başkanlığımızın Girişimi İle İlahiyat Meslek Yüksek Okulları Açılıyor”, *Diyanet Gazetesi*, February, 1989, pp. 1,28. Yazıcıoğlu frequently laid stress on the necessity that religious officials should not fall behind the society and the world. He stated that: “Our most pressing issue is the employment of highly educated and qualified staff.” M. Said Yazıcıoğlu, *Diyanet Gazetesi*, October, 1990, pp. 1, 25; “It is difficult to provide quality religious service to our rapidly changing society with the current staff. Should the application for full membership to the European Community granted, we have to be prepared for it now. In that case, competition will be not only in the economic field but also in the cultural field. In fact, we are now intertwined with the world. If an economic link is established, competition will increase. Western countries also have religious officials. All of them are highly educated. In order to be successful in this competition, the solution is to increase the education level of our staff and to make them more qualified.”, M. Said Yazıcıoğlu, *Diyanet Gazetesi*, January, 1990, p. 7.

Dergi released an article on the qualifications that religious officials should have. For the author, “religious officials who provided accurate information free from superstition, helped ensure unity, solidarity and strengthen national ties of the society” had important roles in mass education.¹⁹⁴ Superstitions were deemed in violation of the essence the religion as they harbor folk elements which are difficult to maintain control. Religious knowledge and culture free from superstitions was among the official duties of the DRA for the reconciliation of religion with the Republican ideology. Therefore, the DRA publications highlighted that superstitions harmed society and religion and some people took advantage of weaknesses of our people.¹⁹⁵

During a meeting held in Istanbul in 1993, the chairman of the DRA warned the religious functionaries to “not to make propaganda of any political party in mosques” pointing out that supporters of any political party might join the mosque service.¹⁹⁶ In another meeting with muftis, it was recommended for the *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* to “cover current issues on the country agenda more”; to conduct joint study groups with the DRA, Faculties of Theology and the Ministry of Education for more efficient guidance; to establish “Guidance Services joint Working Group”; to found “Specialized Orator” units; to open “Specialized Orators Department” under Haseki Education Center and to work for the

¹⁹⁴ Mustafa Köylü, “Din Görevlisinde Bulunması Gereken Nitelikler”, *Diyanet İlmi Dergi*, July 1993, p. 101. Another article that had addressed the issue: “It is necessary for the religious official who works up not only for the two thousand years but beyond the ages to read constantly, follow the press published throughout the country day by day, improve his/her culture, study new scientific researches, follow foreign press by learning at least one Western language besides Arabic, file deadlocks within the systems throughout the world and the solutions of Islam for them comparatively, improve filing and indexing method if working on the computer is not possible, and be curious both about religious and all kinds of scientific studies.” Nihat Hatipoğlu, “Bir İslam Davetçisi Olarak Din Görevlisi ve Özellikleri”, *Diyanet İlmi Dergi*, October 1992, p. 111.

¹⁹⁵ Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz, “Hurafeler”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, July 1992, the editorial. In another issue, Yılmaz listed the factors such as ignorance, customs, tradition, negative propaganda, personal interests, abuse of people’s pure beliefs, personal weaknesses and misinterpretation of religion that led to emergence and spread of superstitions. Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz, “Hurafeler ve Batıl İnançlar”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, July 1995, the editorial.

¹⁹⁶ İstanbul Din Görevlileri Toplantısı, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, November 1993, pp. 32-34.

establishment of “Provincial Mufti Offices Discipline Committee”. In the same meeting, Yılmaz also stated that orators would prepare the sermons themselves, sermons would be predicated on the Quran and Sunnah and expressions that run contrary to logic would be avoided.¹⁹⁷ During the seminar with the mufti offices held in Ankara, Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz underscored the necessity of improving oneself in the developing and changing world and avoiding any support for political parties both in the mosque and outside the mosque.¹⁹⁸

The DRA for the first time brought forward the Alevi issue in the early 90s as a result of discussions on Alevism, Islam, laicism and the DRA. In December 1991, the Directorate had meetings with the Alevi representatives, which was upon the approval of the government. Later on, Alevi representatives visited the Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel and Erdal İnönü and demanded recognition of Alevism in khutbahs, promotion of Alevism in the media, employment of Alevis in the DRA, celebration of Muharram month and incorporation of Alevism in religious instruction in schools. To this end, January 1992 issue of the *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* published interviews with various Alevi representatives. The chairman of the DRA Yazıcıoğlu noted that “the DRA has to serve all sects” and “there is no sect problem in our country” warning against the assessment of religion with political and ideological considerations.¹⁹⁹ Also, Turkish *Diyanet*

¹⁹⁷ Ahmet Arslan, “Antalya İl Müftüleri Semineri”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, January 1994, pp. 32-34. In another meeting, some of the decisions taken were that the institution would prepare a khutbah on widespread superstitions such as demonism, magic and amulets in order to enlighten the society in a proper way about the activities of certain groups that were incompatible with the Islamic creed and spoiled Muslim faith considering that this phenomenon might cause serious problems for Islam, national unity and integrity. Ahmet Arslan, Yusuf Kol “İl Müftüleri Semineri İzmir’de Yapıldı”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, March 1994, p. 55.

¹⁹⁸ “İl Müftüleri Semineri Ankara’da Yapıldı”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, November 1994, p. 31. Yılmaz added that “Religious official should be unifying, integrative, and aim at our national unity and solidarity in homily and khutbahs. Our country has been surrounded by many dangers. Turkey is almost in a ring of fire. Our friend is less, our enemy is many. Maybe we do not have any friends at all, but have lots of enemies. These enemies invent a new *fitnah* (mischief) every day in order to set our nation against each other in our country. Our religious officials should warn our nation against these fractions and ensure unity and solidarity.”

¹⁹⁹ Mustafa Said Yazıcıoğlu, “Diyanet Aylık Dergi İkinci Yılına Girerken”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, January 1992, the editorial.

Foundation, the Rectorate of Gazi University and Hacı Bektaş-ı Veli Research Center held a panel on “Alevism and Bektashism Today”, where it was stated that Sunnis and Alevis were Muslim brothers who mainly believed in the same book.²⁰⁰ Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz argued that Sunnism, Alevism and Bektashism were frequently exploited by certain circles who tried to present them like causes of separation²⁰¹ and the masses, who, despite some conflicts, lived in peace with their traditions, love and respect were set against each other by the artificial Alevi-Sunni distinction.²⁰² Almost all the views expressed in the DRA publications agreed on the existence of a mutual culture between Alevis and Sunnis and that some people tried to provoke discrimination against Alevis.

3. 3. 1. The February 28 Process

Almost three decades after the coup it became obvious that some consequences unforeseen and unintended by the architects of September 12 developed. Political Islam, Kurdish movement and popular culture-based actors developed beyond the control of bureaucracy and the military²⁰³ and with September 12 restoration the foundations of the Refah Party and AKP were laid down, which would be purged with another coup on February 28, 1997. Since the September 12, the National Security Council has had monopoly on maintaining

²⁰⁰ Abdlbaki İřcan, “Gnmzde Alevilik ve Bektařilik”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, April 1992, p. 56. Similar views were articulated in another issue: Groups that are called Alevi and Bektashi evolved in Islamic culture and ancient traditions of Turkish culture. Ethem Ruhi Fıđlalı, “Alevilik-Bektařilik Tartıřmaları zerine”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, January 1993, p. 37.

²⁰¹ Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz, “Birlik ve Beraberliđimiz”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, August 1994, the editorial.

²⁰² Politicians also joined in the debate. One Deputy described the misinformation about Alevis and “explanation of Alevism, which is not a lifestyle other than Islam, with non-Islamic rules and standards”. Cemal řahin, “Alevilik ve Snnilik İstismanı”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, October 1995, pp. 23-25.

²⁰³ Suavi Aydın and Yksel Tařkın 2018, p. 344.

order and national security by its related law. The National Security Council General Secretariat Law refers to the policy that covers the principles of internal, external and defense actions determined by the Council of Ministers in line with the opinions determined by the NSC in order to ensure national security and achieve national goals.²⁰⁴ While Greece and the Soviet Union were designated threat zones during the Cold War in this policy, known as National Security Policy Document, after the Cold War it was the Kurdish nationalism and terrorism and in 1997 reactionarism increased in importance.²⁰⁵ The articles of the NSC Law give the Council immense power²⁰⁶ and they suggest that the NSC can extend jurisdiction on determination and taking precautions as experienced in 1997 and expressed by former Chief of the General Staff Doğan Güreş:

“As defined in our Constitution, the NSC determines the National Security Policy, which is the god of all policies, its constitution. It is unthinkable to act against this. For this reason, the 1982 Constitution used the expression ‘notifies’ instead of ‘the NSC recommends the government’. Since this is the constitutional situation, it is wrong to consider the decisions of the NSC as a

²⁰⁴ *Resmi Gazete*, No. 18218, November 11, 1983.

²⁰⁵ Ümit Cizre, “Egemen İdeoloji ve Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri” In *Bir Zümre, Bir Parti, Türkiye’de Ordu*, p. 159.

²⁰⁶ To report opinion on the determination, direction and implementation of the state’s national security policy and to ensure the necessary coordination; To determine the measures for the realization of the national goals and national plans and programs ascertained in line with the national security policy of the state; To constantly monitor and evaluate the national strength elements that will affect the national security policy of the state and the country’s political, social, economic, cultural and technological situation and developments; to identify the basic principles that will strengthen them towards national goals; To determine the measures required for the existence and independence of the state, the integrity and indivisibility of the country, and the protection of the peace and security of the society. To determine the necessary measures to protect the constitutional order, to ensure national unity and integrity, to guide the Turkish Nation to national goals in line with Atatürk's ideas, Atatürk's principles and reforms, and to the national ideal and values; to fight domestic and foreign threats addressed to these issues, to identify the strategies, basic principles, and the views, needs and measures to be addressed in planning and implementation services in order to neutralize this threat. See the National Security Council General Secretariat Between 1982 and 2003 <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/kurumsal/hakkimizda>.

recommendation.”²⁰⁷

February 28 was a restoration project of Kemalist state targeting the Refah Party and the center right. The resolutions adopted at the 9-hour NSC meeting on February 28 were:

“2. In this meeting of the Council, destructive activities and declarations that aim to demolish our state and Republican regime whose principles and qualities were specified in the Constitution, committed to Atatürk nationalism, democratic, laic and social constitutional and to establish a religious political order and threats and dangers of them were viewed.

3. As a result;

a. Groups aiming to establish an Islamic Republic based on Sharia law in our country constitute a multidimensional threat against our democratic, secular and social constitutional state defined by the Constitution.²⁰⁸”

After emphasizing the above statements at the press release, the NSC declared “measures against anti-regime reactionary activities” on March 19, 1997.

²⁰⁷ Ali Bayramoğlu, “Asker ve Siyaset” In *Bir Zümre, Bir Parti, Türkiye’de Ordu*, p. 92.

²⁰⁸ The other articles of the resolution are:

b. The laic and anti-laic separation of the extremist religious groups that oppose the Republic and the regime have attempted to devastate the democratic, secular and social constitutional state,

c. Laicism in Turkey is not only the guarantee of the regime, but also democracy and public weal and it is a lifestyle,

d. A consensus was reached on that social constitutional state and principles of justice concept which constitute the structural core of the state cannot be abandoned and that not supervising the outdated practices which ignore the law is incompatible with the rule of law.

4. In line with these views and considerations:

a. In order to prevent the multifaceted threat by extremist religious groups in Turkey aiming to establish an Islamic Republic based on Sharia law against democratic, laic and social constitutional Republic; reporting the Council of Ministers that the measures in APPENDIX-A are taken in the short, medium and long term.

b. In accordance with Article 9 of the Law No. 2945 on the NSC and the General Secretariat of the NSC, it is decided by the NSC General Secretariat; to inform the Prime Minister, the President and the NSC within a certain period of time about the implications of the implementations that have not been turned into a Council of Ministers Decree regarding the measures specified in the Appendix.

It was decided to apply Atatürk's principles and reforms without compromise, requested to increase the compulsory education to eight years, to convert imam hatip schools to vocational schools, transfer private dormitories, foundations and schools affiliated with dervish orders and Qur'an courses to the Ministry of Education, prevent "outdated" dressing particularly in public services, close down dervish orders and prevent the employment of soldiers in public service who were dismissed from their duties in the TAF because of their involvement in reactionary activities.

The Psychological Operation Department formed within the body of the General Staff engaged in many activities against the Refah Party and reactionarism on February 28. The media, business world and non-governmental organizations supported the TAF's project of generating consent to hegemony. The Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan was forced to resign by the military and his party was closed down on grounds that "the party acts against the principle of the laic Republic". The civilian government was dismissed, all Islamic activities were suppressed and a 'witch hunt' was started with the voluntary complicity of the media, the judiciary and business world against "reactionary" activities and religious people. During that process, female students with headscarves were treated as terrorists, thousands of them were detained and their education rights were encroached upon,²⁰⁹ 8-year compulsory education was enacted (read de facto closure of the Qur'an courses) and graduates of imam-hatip high schools were prevented from entering the university outside of their field due to the application of coefficient in the university exams. The mission of "balance adjustment" was accomplished.²¹⁰ In this period, *Batı Çalışma Grubu* (Western Working Group) was created to monitor, control of reactionary activities and to oversee the

²⁰⁹ Istanbul University Rector Kemal Alemdaroğlu and his Deputy Nur Serter got the students into 'persuasion rooms' and signed a letter of commitment that they would enter the school without the scarf.

²¹⁰ "Demokrasiye balans ayarı yaptık." A famous quote by the Second Chief of the General Staff Çevik Bir to summarize the February 28 process. He would also say in February 1997: "We will protect the legacy of Atatürk. The army is the guarantee of secularism and democracy. We will not compromise. We expect the government to fully comply with these principles."

implementations of NSC decisions. The General Staff gave briefings on the reactionary movements to the members of the army, civil society, the media and the judiciary. In these meetings the attendees were warned about the “reactionary threat” in Turkey and protecting the secular order. In the second series of these briefings during February 28, General Staff Intelligence Department Chief Lieutenant General Çetin Saner said in his opening speech:

“The void created by the fact that passive, incompetent and unmanaged staff of the DRA does not function domestically and abroad is filled by religious orders and the National Outlook Organization, thereby increasing their organizational activities. This enables the religious orders and institutions such as the National Outlook to grow rapidly and fully control certain masses.”²¹¹

During this time, the General Staff engaged in activities to prevent the reactionaries by preparing secret reports. A report named “Activities Against Secularism” signed by Çetin Doğan, Lieutenant General Chief of Operations on April 16, 1997 warned that:

“1. It has been observed from various sources that anti-secular sermons were given in our mosques, that the content of these sermons was legally criminal, and the document published by the Directorate of Religious Affairs was not followed in the delivery of khutbahs and sermons.

2. It is considered that the follow-up of the khutbahs and sermons given at non-specific times, primarily Friday and Eid prayers by the commanders of the garrison, by assigning personnel, and reporting the identified issues by specifying the place and time will be beneficial for efforts to prevent anti-secular attitudes and behaviors.

3. Considering the sensitivity of the subject, it is considered appropriate that the selection of the personnel to be assigned and the execution of the task is followed

²¹¹ Chief Lieutenant General Çetin Saner cited in Ruşen Çakır and İrfan Bozan 2005, p. 27.

and controlled by the garrison commands personally.”²¹²

The February 28 process was different to its predecessors in that unlike previous military interventions that strengthened the DRA, the February 28 discredited the institution. It still functioned as a political instrument: through the Directorate, the public visibility of Islam was diminished and other forms expressed by ‘unauthorized’ groups were suppressed. Its role as the official representative Islam was reinforced. Direct intervention of the army in politics in order to reorganize political and social life facilitated restructuring and re-establishing the Kemalist hegemony in an authoritarian form. The DRA complied with the ideological aims of the regime and embraced its underlining principles. It waged a war against dervish orders and was not critical of the repressive practices against the religious people. In fact, the Directorate had declared that it did not approve of fake sheiks about a month before the February 28, and drew attention to some groups trying to take advantage of religion and cause social unrest at a press statement.²¹³ Due to scandals about religious orders, Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz held a press conference and clarified its opinion on religious orders and weddings, where he stated that it was not possible for a Muslim to approve unpleasant incidents disguised as religious orders and that there was no obligation to follow a religious order.²¹⁴ It delivered its opinion on religious orders through its publications at various times. For instance, Yılmaz held another press release denouncing Hizbullah and stating that divisive and destructive acts such as terrorism and anarchy have nothing to do with Islam.²¹⁵

²¹² Ali Bayramoğlu, “Belgelerle Ergenekon’un ruhu olarak 28 Şubat”, *Yeni Şafak*, March 9, 2010, <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/alibayramoglu/belgelerle-ergenekonun-ruhu-olarak-28-ubat-21278> (Retrieved June 3, 2020).

²¹³ Press Statement by Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, February 1997, p. 10.

²¹⁴ Press conference by Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, March 1997, p. 41. Yılmaz also expressed that at the time of the Prophet concepts like Religious Order and Sufism were not used during a visit to the Directorate paid by Bülent Ecevit. Ecevit called attention to some groups who “damaged Islam and laic, democratic Republic”. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²¹⁵ Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz, “Basın Toplantısı”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, February 2000, p.71.

The Qur'an courses not attached to the DRA were closed down. For example, former Mufti of İstanbul commented that closure of the Qur'an courses were overwhelming and that the Governor wanted the seal of the courses in a celebration fashion with drums in front of the media.²¹⁶ At a press conference on the Qur'an courses, Yılmaz articulated that "Qur'an courses are opened by the DRA²¹⁷ with the approval of the Prime Ministry in cooperation with the Ministry of National Education in accordance with the "Qur'an Courses Regulation" based on the "Law on the Establishment and Duties of Religious Affairs No. 633" and that lessons strengthened national unity and solidarity, mutual love, respect, friendship, embraced concepts such as homeland-nation, state, flag and martyrdom.²¹⁸ Similar to the Qur'an courses, mosques were also placed under the jurisdiction of the DRA with the Law 4379 deeming the mosques by religious orders or associations illegal:

"Mosques and masjids are opened to worship with the permission of the Directorate of Religious Affairs and administered by the Presidency. The administration of mosques and masjids, which have been opened to worship with or without permission, although they are built by real and legal persons, are transferred to the Directorate of Religious Affairs within three months."²¹⁹

After the February 28, the Friday khutbahs were centralized and the DRA published many example khutbahs and homilies on its monthly magazine. Ceren

²¹⁶ "İstanbul Eski Müftüsü Selahaddin KAYA ile... 'Davullu Zurnalı Kurs Kapatmamız İsteniyordu...'" *Altinoluk*, March 1999, <https://www.altinoluk.com.tr/blog/makale-18509> (Retrieved June 3, 2020).

²¹⁷ "Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Kur'an Kursları Yönetmeliğinin Bazı Maddelerinde Değişiklik Yapılmasına Dair Yönetmelik", *Resmî Gazete*, No. 23086, August 20, 1997.

²¹⁸ "Diyanet İşleri Başkanı Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz Kur'an Kursları İle İlgili Bir Basın Toplantısı Yaptı", *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, April 1997, p. 9. In addition, the State Minister Nevzat Ercan stressed that Qur'an courses were subject to inspection and the ones that were not attached to the Directorate were deemed illegal which could engage in ideological education and organization activities. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²¹⁹ "Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı Kuruluş ve Görevleri Hakkında Kanununun Bir Maddesinin Değiştirilmesine Dair Kanun", *Resmî Gazete*, No. 23421, August 2, 1998.

Kenar argues in her thesis that “the army personnel were dictated to monitor the sermon and open files for the imams who violate the sermon delivery policy” and that the Directorate pursued repressive policies over its provincial units with circulars sent to mufti offices by Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz in order to strictly follow khutbah and sermon texts published by the DRA.²²⁰ The Directorate tried to impose its own interpretation of official Islam on the public; many practices in folk Islam were negated as superstition in order to ensure unity. Reactionary activities and religious orders were deemed illegal and the public were warned and enlightened against them. While the DRA seemed to have embraced the hegemonic rigid laicism principle of the bureaucracy, it challenged this assertive form at some instances. It shared precedent decisions on some controversial issues during the repressive atmosphere of February 28. For instance, the High Council of Religious Affairs delivered a negative opinion on reciting Turkish translation of the Qur’an at daily prayers stating that no translation could convey the original meaning Resolution numbered 103 dated December 1997, and the Directorate objected the Turkish translation of the Qur’an verses at prayer warning against distortion of the verses.²²¹

3. 4. The DRA in the International Arena

Perhaps one of the central effects of the 1980 coup on the DRA was its deployment in Turkish foreign policy and promoting Turkish Islam abroad through expanding its activities abroad and providing religious services to Turkish expats, Turkic countries, the Balkans, the Middle East and countries with large Muslim communities. Since then, the DRA has sent religious personnel abroad as a measure taken to balance possible effects of other Muslim communities on

²²⁰ Ceren Kenar, 2011, pp. 156-159.

²²¹ Orhan Kuntman, “Türkçe Mealler İle Namaz Kılınabilir Mi?”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, March 1998, pp. 31-33.

Turkish people and Muslims, to sustain the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis and to spread Sunni Islam and it has integrated to Turkish foreign policy as an important soft power. The mission of “aiming at national solidarity and integrity” was extended to Turkish immigrants abroad in the government program of Bülend Ulusu; “Turkish children abroad shall be provided with national and religious education” and; “Exploitation of beliefs and sectarian differences between our citizens at home and abroad shall be prevented, measures that ensure our citizens’ commitment to national ideals shall be taken”.²²² The program declares the Turkish state’s grand project of ensuring loyalty of all individuals at home and abroad to shared goals and regulating the entire society without ceasing to maintain the official outlook that disregards existence of sects in Islam. In fact, a secret report, Religious Education in Turkey- Exploitation of Religion, pointed out the state’s incompetency in managing the “National Culture, prayer and religious education of Turkish workers and their children abroad”²²³ long before the government program of the Prime Minister. The report predicates the Turkish state’s inconvenience with the activities of *cemaat* movements which were harmful and needed to be eliminated to consolidate unity among the emigrants abroad. The same concerns were raised by the DRA in its publications. January 1983 issue of the *Diyanet İlmî Dergi*, analyzed “Religious Education and Teaching of Muslim Turkish Children in Christian-German Schools”. The writer asserted that “Turkish-Islamic children in Germany” were raised according to the principles of Christian education and fulfilled rituals of Christianity and complained about the inefficiency of Turkish state and activities of some associations trying to fill the void.²²⁴ The same topic was put down on the agenda

²²² “Yurt dışındaki Türk çocuklarının milli ve dini eğitim görmesi sağlanacaktır...Yurt içinde ve dışında, vatandaşlarımız arasındaki inanç ve mezhep ayrılıklarının sömürülmesi önlenecek, yurttaşlarımızın milli ülkülere bağlılıklarını koruyucu tedbirler alınacaktır.” Nuran Dağlı and Belma Aktürk (1988), “Ulus Hükümeti Programı” in *Hükümetler ve Programları*, p. 19. <https://acikerisim.tbmm.gov.tr/handle/11543/1786> (Retrieved May 16, 2020).

²²³ Abdurrahman Dilipak 1990, p. 137.

²²⁴ Salih Zeki Önsöz, *Diyanet İlmî Dergi*, Cilt, XIX- Sayı 1, Ocak-Şubat- Mart, 1983, pp. 52-53.

on the July 1985 issue of the magazine. The writer warned against “Germanization and Christianization” of the children born there as well as being vulnerable to materialist and communist ideologies.²²⁵ The views expressed by the writer synchronize with the official state discourse and policies: “It is obvious that Religious Education is no different than moral education. Religious Education can be given systematically only in school. Religion is like a protective armor for every nation”. The strong emphasis on “teaching Turkish children abroad their beliefs, customs, traditions and values” and “raising them Muslim-Turkish children” suggests that statist and political tendencies outweigh Islamic sensitivities. Islam was equated with Turkishness, which contradicts with the universality of Islam. One senior DRA member put forward the view of the DRA: “Religious services provided to our citizens abroad increase their loyalty to our country and state.”²²⁶

The state had started to send imams to Europe temporarily in 1971 during the Eid al-Fitr (Ramadan Feast) and Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice)²²⁷ Until 1984, religious functionaries, selected by the DRA, were sent abroad by the

²²⁵ Osman Cilacı, “Yurtdışındaki İşçi Çocuklarının Dini Problemleri Açısından Türkiye’ye Uyumları Meselesi”, *Diyanet İlmî Dergi*, Cilt, XXI- Sayı 3, Temmuz-Ağustos-Eylül, 1985, pp. 50-54.

²²⁶ Interview with Sami Uslu, the Vice President of the DRA, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, November 1993, p. 8.

²²⁷ With the Cabinet Decree, dated 25. 05. 1971 and numbered 7/2486, “Foreign Services Directorate” was established attached to the Directorate of Religious Services and Religious Officers. On 14. 06. 1972, the Directorate was renamed as “Foreign Services, Press and Public Relations Directorate”, and it was reorganized as “Foreign Relations Office” upon the Cabinet Decree numbered 7/11680 on 13.04.1976. In 1984, in accordance with the Decree Law No. 190 and Law No. 3046, “Department of Foreign Relations” was established and the names of the branch directorates affiliated with the Department were designated as “Foreign Relations Department Directorate”, “Foreign Religious Services Department Directorate” and “Foreign Religious Education Department Directorate”. With the approval of the Presidency dated 11.11.1994 and numbered 170-260, the branch directorates within the Foreign Relations Directorate were renamed as “Foreign Relations Branch Office I”, “Foreign Relations Branch Office II” and “Foreign Relations Branch Office III”. With the approval of the Presidency dated 29.12.1999 and numbered 148-72, the number of Branch Managers has increased to four. The General Directorate of Foreign Relations was established with the Law No. 6002 of 01.07.2010 on the “Establishment and Duties of the Presidency of Religious Affairs and the Amendment to Some Laws”. Taken from: <https://disiliskiler.diyaret.gov.tr/sayfa/53/tanitim>.

Ministry of Labor as Social Assistants and until July 1985, the wages of religious functionaries sent abroad by the DRA were covered by the associations established by Turkish citizens. As of this date, the wages have been covered by the Turkish Cultural Heritage Protection and Promotion Fund by establishing a special staff. The subunits of the General Directorate of Foreign Relations are Foreign Turks Department, Eurasian Countries Department, Foreign Education and Guidance Department, Muslim Countries and Communities Department, Foreign Social and Cultural Religion Services Department. Today, attachés and consultants offer services in matters related to religion in a number of countries.²²⁸

The DRA is organized most effectively in Europe due to high number of emigrants from Turkey. Workers in Germany, where the number of people from Turkey is the highest, opened their first mosque by themselves organizing around certain associations.²²⁹ In the 70s, political and *cemaat* movements which were active in Turkey mushroomed in Germany. The most important ones were Islam Culture Center (İslam Kültür Merkezi) formed by *Süleymanlılar*, Europe National Outlook Organization (Avrupa Milli Görüş Teşkilatları), a movement led by Necmettin Erbakan, and Europe Democratic Idealist Associations Federation (Avrupa Demokratik Ülkücü Dernekleri Federasyonu) formed by associations supporting the MHP. The Turkish state did not favor the activities of various religious groups which, for them, were harmful organizations that propagated ideas against the state as addressed by the State Minister Mehmet Özgüneş:

²²⁸ Consultants are in operation in 52 countries stretching from North America, China, the Nordic Countries, Europe, the Balkans, the Turkic Countries, Africa, the Middle East to the Russian Federation; it has Religious Services Coordination Offices in Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Bashkortostan, Serbia, Poland, Ukraine, Greece, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Tanzania, Palestine, Madagascar and Japan; Attaché Offices are in the USA, Germany, Australia, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Canada, Belgium, Nakhichevan, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan and Afghanistan.
<https://disiliskiler.diyenet.gov.tr/kategoriler/yurt-d%C4%B1%C5%9F%C4%B1-temsilcilikler>

²²⁹ The first mosque was opened in 1967 by organizing under Turkish Islam Association and the second one was opened in 1973 in Köln.

“I have to say that we are quite weak both in terms of education, general culture and national education, and religious education, especially in Germany... A number of people who have been fired from their post within the DRA or have not acquired any religious officials go abroad under the identity of workers, establishing and maintaining some associations, mosques, and masjids. Our foreign representatives are in contact with local governments and try to prevent them... All of the religious officials sent abroad after September 12, without exception, were first subjected to a security examination and then they were sent...”²³⁰

The DRA had to send imams upon the request of people who were not affiliated with any of the associations. In 1984, DITIB (Religious Affairs Turkish Islam Union), which is an umbrella organization with 960 associations attached to Turkish Embassy in Berlin, was formed in order to organize religious, social, cultural and sports activities. Yet, when the DRA started its activities in Europe a large population of emigrants had already been affiliated with the aforementioned groups. Thus, the establishment of DITIB²³¹ was the institutionalization of Turkish Islam through the DRA, which would become a key actor among different institutions representing Turkish Muslims in Europe. The DRA has transformed from a domestic control mechanism over religion to an instrument to ensure national unity outside its borders and its monopoly over representation of Turkish Islam in homeland has been spread beyond borders. Main principles and aims of the General Directorate for Foreign Relations indicate the agency of the DRA abroad in line with the official discourse which attaches particular attention

²³⁰ The speech of State Minister Mehmet Özgüneş during budget discussions of the DRA, *Danışma Meclisi Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 2, 37. Birleşim, 18 January 1982, pp, 271-272; The speech of the Minister also has strong Atatürkist and nationalistic underpinnings: “There exist people who comment adversely upon the Turkish State, the founder of Turkey Atatürk in particular and respectful statesmen. We have identified their names, we are in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, their passports will not be extended, but unfortunately the German law, the German Constitution is against us establishing a religious organization there in any way as the State.” *Ibid.*, p. 278.

²³¹ The association operates within free and democratic order of Germany. It strictly complies with the Constitution and all laws. It carries out all its activities within the framework of law.

to homogeneity in faith and in national consciousness.²³² Gözaydın stresses the expansion of the DRA's activities into countries in which citizens with Turkish origin live to preserve the Turkish-Islam character of the emigrants:

“Since the early 1980's, the *Diyanet* has sent imams to Europe to counterbalance the influence of other Islamic communities on Turkish Muslims and to maintain their loyalty to the Turkish state. To counter undesirable Islamic influences, *Diyanet* is to propagate the 'correct' Sunni Islam through the mosques and compulsory classes on Islam, with a strong emphasis on ethics, human rights, and each citizen's duties towards state and country.”²³³

The regulations enacted in 1980s specifying the DRA's mission abroad were not limited solely to providing religious service or managing materials

²³² -To share our country's richness in Islamic thought tradition, the understanding of religion that accepts true knowledge and its experience in the field of religious services, if requested, with our citizens and fellow citizens living abroad; -To present knowledge that will not leave room for abuse that may arise with the wrong and biased interpretation of religion to the attention of our citizens, citizens and fellow citizens with different means of communication as well as at home and abroad;

- To contribute to the establishment and development of religious education institutions where true religious knowledge will be produced and religious scholars will be trained in addition to religious services that are delivered directly to the countries and communities where our citizens, citizens and fellow citizens live,; to develop cooperation and sharing of experience in this context; assist these countries and communities to develop their official-Islamic institutions and improve services; establishing close and warm relations between institutions;

-To contribute to the elimination of tensions by pointing out the sources of false information or prejudices about the identity of Islam and Muslims that hinder respect and understanding among individuals; To ensure the correct understanding of Islam;

-While protecting their national identity, to support the execution of integration activities on the right ground by encouraging our citizens living in western countries to benefit from all kinds of rights and opportunities as equal individuals in harmony with the society they live in;

-To protect our historical and cultural common heritage and values that connect us and our history;
<https://disiliskiler.diyamet.gov.tr/sayfa/51/ilkeler-ve-hedefler>

²³³ İřtar Gözaydın and Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, “Management of Religion in Turkey”, *Turkey Institute*, November 2014, p. 15.

conditions of religious life. On the contrary, it kept its bureaucratic mission that monitored and ‘Turkified’ Islam through conducting religious services for non-Turkish Muslim communities abroad, aiming at integration to host countries and organizing religious educational programs and conferences. The institutionalization of the DRA in Germany set a model for similar organizations in other European countries. The Turkish model had a claim to represent moderate and rational Islam of a secular state as opposed to radical currents propagated by Saudi Salafism and Iranian interpretation,²³⁴ so religious services conducted by the DRA was accepted gladly by the host countries with the aim to counterweight fundamental Islamic currents that could result in radicalization of Muslims.²³⁵ The imams sent abroad were subject to a selection process, which meant the DRA had the potential to influence Turkey-originated Muslims in host countries in accordance with Turkish interests. In fact, most of these Muslims were granted dual citizenship or permanent residency by the host countries, so they enjoyed a privileged status to influence the social and political life of these countries that could provide Turkey with spheres of influence in continental Europe.

Other important geographic areas that the DRA expanded its transnational activities were the Balkans and the Turkic republics in Asia especially after the Cold War. With the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, millions of Muslims experienced religious consciousness and revival of Islam. Within this context, many Muslim countries including Turkey, Egypt, Iran and Saudi Arabia competed to fill the void and to help their co-believers. One reason for the expansion of the DRA in these regions was the socio-political developments after the collapse of the bipolar world order. The clash and reconciliation of “civilizations” appear to divide the world; thus, religion, being an important component of civilization, can

²³⁴ Zana Çitak, “The Institutionalization of Islam in Europe and the Diyanet: The Case of Austria”, *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, Volume 5, No 1, (July 2013), p. 177.

²³⁵ Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, “Transformation of the Turkish Diyanet Both at Home and Abroad: Three Stages”, *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, (27/ 2018), p. 8.

exert significant influence in international relations.²³⁶ With the American doctrine of war on terror and reconfiguration of the world emerged after the 11 September, Turkey, being labelled as a ‘moderate Islamic actor’ with a laicist state and “having advantages in maintaining a balance between religion and politics in Euroasia”²³⁷, outshined its Iranian and Saudi competitors. The second reason lies within the context of neo-Ottomanism, which is also an outcome of the new international world order. The socio-political developments after the independence of these countries compelled Turkey to shift its passive and isolationist foreign policy paradigm and to establish transnational links with the Ottoman legacy. For Hakan Yavuz neo-Ottomanism “...is about constructing a new ‘national’(*milli*, not *milliyetçi*) identity and translating it into foreign policy by using historical, cultural and religious ties to former Ottoman territories”.²³⁸ The concept of “foreign Turks” which was effective during the late Ottoman era regained its popularity due to the economic and social conditions of the 1990s. The new policy of “the Turkish World from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China” set in motion Turkey’s proactive foreign policy in the Turkic republics and the Balkans.²³⁹ In addition, the violent ethnic conflict in Kosovo and Bosnia with the fragmentation of Yugoslavia increased Turkish diplomatic intervention in the region to put an end to Turkish isolation in the Balkans during Özal era.²⁴⁰ Özal was followed by İsmail Cem, the Foreign Minister of the late 1990s and early 2000s, who posited that “ ...[Turkey] has to embrace its past as an imperial power and to engage with its immediate neighborhood” to have a voice in the

²³⁶ Şenol Korkut, “The Diyanet of Turkey and Its Activities in Eurasia after the Cold War”, *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, Tomus 28, p. 121.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ M. Hakan Yavuz, “Social and Intellectual Origins of Neo-Ottomanism: Searching for a Post-National Vision”, *Die Welt Des Islams* 56 (2016), p. 443.

²³⁹ Şenol Korkut, “The Diyanet of Turkey and Its Activities in Eurasia after the Cold War”, p. 123.

²⁴⁰ Sedat Laçiner, “Özalism (Neo-Ottomanism): An Alternative in Turkish Foreign Policy?”, *Journal of Administrative Sciences* (1:1-2), 2003-2004, pp. 185-186.

world.²⁴¹ In order to become an economically and politically strong power, TİKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) was established in 1992 within the Foreign Ministry. The organization undertook many economic, social and cultural projects and activities in the fields of education, health, restoration, agricultural development, finance, tourism and industry and after the mid-90s it engaged in educational and cultural projects building schools, libraries and laboratories and providing universities with technical equipment. To this end, Turkey had a lot in common with the Balkans and Turkic republics: cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious values. The aforementioned common grounds could enable Turkey's integration into the neo-liberal economies under the structural adjustment program of Turgut Özal being in effect since the early 1980s.²⁴² Therefore, Özal made sincere efforts to revive diminished ties with these countries and included the DRA as a soft power in the project of establishing economic and social relationships. The inclusion of the DRA facilitated Turkey's ground-level engagement within these geographies as overwhelming majority of them, the Balkans in particular, share the same Islamic jurisprudence- the Sunni Islam of the *Hanafi* school. The fact that many independent states in Eurasia adopted secularism and tried to strike a balance between religion and state²⁴³ and the DRA was attached to the Prime Ministry, which increased its penetration into Islamic and grassroot organizations afforded a leverage for the DRA. Therefore, many newly independent states in Eurasia regarded the DRA a model for managing the religion-state relationship. Minister of the State Cemil Çiçek stated the involvement of other Islamic groups, countries or religions other than Islam as

²⁴¹ Kerem Öktem, "New Islamic Actors after the Wahhabi Intermezzo: Turkey's Return to the Muslim Balkans", *European Studies Center*, (University of Oxford, December 2010), p. 23.

²⁴² M. Hakan Yavuz, "Social and Intellectual Origins of Neo-Ottomanism" p. 444.

²⁴³ Şenol Korkut, "The Diyanet of Turkey and Its Activities in Eurasia after the Cold War", p. 122.

risky when explaining the reason of providing religious services by a state body in Europe and Eurasia.²⁴⁴

The reasons provided by the DRA parallel with that of the state:

“Balkan and Soviet Republics are available geographies and market for Turkey now. Turkey can render these countries which share geographical and cultural affinities with it a target of foreign economy and cultural approach... Without Turkey, Balkan-Black Sea cooperation is unrealistic to think. Eastern Europe can be a new viable market for Turkey. This Balkan and Regional cooperation will make Turkey stronger in the Turkish-Greek dispute and the Cyprus issue. It is of great value for Turkey to be politically effective in this region. Balance of power can change thanks to this closeness particularly in the Balkans... One factor that compel Turkey to pursue active foreign policy is the existence of large Turkish minorities in the mentioned countries. The situation of the Turks in Greece and the tragedy of our fellow countrymen in Bulgaria clearly shows that we have to revise our “Foreign Turks” policy. Turks in the Balkans and Caucasus should be considered as factors that will increase the political weight of Turkey... Promoting culture, morals and values of Turkish people within neighboring geographies will enhance the reputation of Turkey and will be helpful for fellow minorities residing there.”

²⁴⁵

Similar views were expressed by the then President of the DRA Mustafa Said Yazıcıoğlu in the editorial of the March 1991 issue of the *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*:

“It is an undeniable fact that our country has started to gain the image of a pivot country in the Turkish world, where we witness that they have started to gain their cultural independence with the collapse of the Eastern Block... This

²⁴⁴ Ahmet Arslan, “İlahiyat Fakülteleri Dekanları İstişare Toplantısı Ankara’da Yapıldı”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, July 1996, p. 40.

²⁴⁵ Turan Aydınbeyli, “Doğu Blokunda Ortaya Çıkan Boşluk ve Türkiye’ye Düşen Görevler”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, January 1991, pp. 8-9. In fact, almost each issue of the *Diyanet Aylık* and *İlmi Dergi* covered the problems, developments or the relationships with the Eurasian countries in detail. Through the magazines, the DRA addressed the tragedy in the Balkans, the Cyprus issue, Muslims in the Western Thrace and Muslims in former Soviet countries especially until late 1990s.

exceptionalism loads Turkey with a historical role and duty but a concession. This role and duty are the task of being a leader and a guide.”²⁴⁶

The DRA’s activities in Eurasia in the 1990s can be roughly grouped under sending religious personnel, publishing and education activities, building and restoration of mosques. Starting in 1990, the DRA has sent personnel to provide guidance during the month of Ramadan and Eid al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice) and permanent religious scholars in order to help with practices and rudiments of religious knowledge. In order to meet demands of religious personnel, the DRA placed emphasis on training of co-believers of Eurasia by sending teaching staff to these countries and educating students and religious personnel in Turkey.²⁴⁷ The institution granted scholarships to graduate students from Eurasia within the framework of a quota allocated to each country and all kinds of costs from Qur’an courses to university of more than five thousand students from Eurasian countries were covered by the DRA. Approximately 4.5 million religious publications and the Qur’ans in fourteen different languages and dialects were dispatched to Eurasia.²⁴⁸ Books on Islamic law and history, religious calendars and compilation of hadiths were also among the dispatched

²⁴⁶ The Editorial by Mustafa Said Yazıcıoğlu, “Türkiye’ye Düşen Tarihi Görev”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, March 1991. Yazıcıoğlu touched upon the same topic in the Editorial of the same magazine November 1991 issue. He stressed the need to include economic, cultural and social arenas for permanent and fruitful relationships between countries and to reinforce the steps taken in the economic field with versatile relationships.

²⁴⁷ In order to raise religious officials, theology faculties in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Krgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Dagestan and Afghanistan and theology high schools in Nakhichevan, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria and one imam-hatip and pedagogical high school in Romania were put in operation, *IV Avrasya İslam Şurası*, p. 22; The graduates of the Theology Faculty in Azerbaijan continued their master or doctorate studies in Marmara University, *V. Avrasya İslam Şurası*, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Ankara, 2003, p. 283; Islamic academy in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a theology faculty in Sarajevo and an Islamic Institute in Bulgaria were opened and the DRA provided tutors and financial support to the Islamic Institute in Karachay Circassia as well, *III. Avrasya İslam Şurası*, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2000, p. 231 and 399 and all the expenses of these institutions including education and training were financed by the Turkish Diyanet Foundation, *I. Avrasya İslam Şurası*, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Ankara, 1996, p. 155.

²⁴⁸ *IV. Avrasya İslam Şurası*, pp. 63-64. Furthermore, a publishing house was established in Baku for printing religious books, *I. Avrasya İslam Şurası*, p. 154.

publications. The DRA made use of developing technology such as audio and video broadcast to access to kin states in Eurasia. To address the Eurasian countries' needs in religious broadcast, the DRA prepared a program *Diyanet Saati* (Diyanet Hour) in cooperation with TRT- 4 Channel. Within the scope of educational broadcasting activities to protect and promote Turkish cultural heritage, the DRA has started educational broadcasts in Albanian, Azerbaijani, Georgian, Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Tatar and Karachay-Balkar Turkish and has published *Diyanet Avrasya Dergisi* (Diyanet Eurasia Magazine) since 2000. To sum, a significant number of students who have had religious education in Turkey or by Turkish teachers and the recipients of the DRA broadcasts and publications with a certain interpretation of religion translate into considerable spheres of influence for Turkish authorities beyond its borders.

The DRA undertook a mission of preserving the Ottoman architectural heritage in Eurasia realized through the Project for Protection of the Turkish Cultural Heritage. The institution funded the restoration and construction of mosques, tombs and Islamic schools in the Eurasia. For example, five new mosques in Azerbaijan, three in Kazakhstan and Russian Federation, one in Nakhichevan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Abkhazia and Afghanistan were built; one mosque in Azerbaijan, five mosques in Crimea and Fatih Sultan Mehmed Mosque in Macedonia, built during the Ottoman time, were restored.²⁴⁹

In 1995, the DRA started the regular Eurasian Islamic Council (EIC) for the promotion of dialogue and cooperation among the Eurasian Muslim boards. These meetings reveal that the DRA and Turkey act as the symbolic leader of

²⁴⁹ I. *Avrasya İslam Şurası*, pp. 156 and 159. Other similar activities included building 30 masjids in Mongolia with the financial help from the Turkish Diyanet Foundation, II. *Avrasya İslam Şurası*, Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, Ankara, 1998, p. 265; building 30 mosques in Crimea, III. *Avrasya İslam Şurası*, p. 232; restoration of Gazi Ali Paşa Camii in Romania, one of the Turkish-Islamic works, its tomb and its apartment for imams, IV. *Avrasya İslam Şurası*, p. 42; building the Tokyo Mosque for the Kazan Turks in Japan in 2000, IV. *Avrasya İslam Şurası*, p. 110, and; building a central mufti office in Bulgaria in 2001, V. *Avrasya İslam Şurası*, pp. 332-333.

Eurasian Muslim communities.²⁵⁰ The representatives of spiritual boards from Eurasia had a channel to articulate their needs and problems, analyzed and evaluated the quality of religious services, publications and reported situation of places of prayer. The first Council, held in Ankara in 1995, was welcomed by politicians and some high-profile politicians gave speeches. The representatives agreed on promotion of coordination, provision of immediate needs such as sending teaching staff and religious publishing, construction of mosques and schools and demanded determination of religious holidays, days, the information regarding prayer times by the DRA in order to ensure unity. At the second meeting, while providing mutual assistance was underlined, missionary activities, establishment a television channel in Istanbul to broadcast religious programs with satellite channels to Eurasia, and promotion of extensive research on religious, national and cultural histories by religious administrations were some of the important topics discussed.

The third Council was held in Ankara in 1998 to evaluate decisions taken at the former Councils, to plan and discuss future operations. The speech of İsmet Sezgin, the Minister of National Defense and Vice Prime Minister, manifested the classical Kemalist view of state elites on religion and secularism while informing the place of the DRA in the multifaceted state policy of expanding cooperation.

“The freedom of religion and conscience is guaranteed by the constitution in our country. Our state has assumed responsibility and duty to teach religion and moral education under its own supervision... Turkey is happy to perform its historical mission by offering religious service to our kin and brethren who share the same roots, history and culture.”²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ Kerem Öktem, “New Islamic Actors after the Wahhabi Intermezzo”, p. 35.

²⁵¹ *III. Avrasya İslam Şurası*, pp. 15-16.; The participants agreed on preparation of a common curriculum on religious education to establish unity, preparing khutbahs in local languages and dialects thereby fighting against missionary activities used as religious oppression mechanisms and condemnation of inhuman violence against Muslims living in Kosovo by members of the

The fourth Council was held in Sarajevo in 2000 to show the world that Muslims in Eurasia lent their support to their Bosnian co-believers, who were victims of a brutal ethno-nationalistic war. Dialogue between religions and coexistence dominated the agenda of the Council.²⁵² That Islam is harmonious with universal values such as democracy, human rights, peace, tolerance and dialogue and correction of the negative image of Islam promoted in the West were emphasized; establishing of a “Turkish Language Education Center” in Ankara for unity in language; organizing scientific symposiums, panels and conferences for the promotion of common values in the member countries and communities; making religion prevalent through all kinds of communication means considering that religion is an important factor in the preservation of national culture were the key decisions taken. The fifth Council was held in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in order to draw attention to the fact that Turkey and Muslims in Eurasia were in support of Cyprus.²⁵³ The members discussed the universality, peace and tolerance of Islam, its view of terrorism, interfaith dialogue and missionary activities. The spiritual boards denounced all kinds of wars and violence around the world including September 11 terrorist attacks and conflicts in the Middle East rejecting “Clash of Civilizations” thesis and identification of terrorism with Islam; called for lifting of the embargo on the Turkish Republic of the Northern

organization. See *III. Avrasya İslam Şurası Teşkilatı Toplantısı Sonuç Bildirisi*, 29 Mayıs 1998-Ankara.

²⁵² Nikola Mrdza, the Representative of Bosnia-Herzegovina Orthodox, Danilo Nikolic, the Representative of Bosnia-Herzegovina Jews, Marko Josipovic, the Representative of Bosnia-Herzegovina Catholics Cardinal and Jack Klayn, the United Nations Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina gave speeches at the Council as well as academicians from Turkey. Bülent Ecevit, the Prime Minister, Devlet Bahçeli and Mesut Yılmaz, the State Ministers and the Vice Prime Ministers, Tansu Çiller, the Doğrueyol Party leader, Recai Kutan, the Fazilet Party leader, many State Ministers and deputies sent messages.

²⁵³ Politicians from the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus such as Derviş Eroğlu, the Prime Minister, Vehbi Zeki Serter, the Speaker of the Parliament and Rauf Denktaş, the President of the Republic and many academicians from Turkey gave speeches. The Turkish Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit, a considerable number of ministers and deputies from Turkey sent messages.

Cyprus and developing relations with it; commencement of Israel Palestinian peace talks and reaching fair resolution in the region.²⁵⁴

Finally, the operations of the DRA and its Foundation to establish transnational links included provision of humanitarian aid such as food and medicine, organizing hajj to Mecca and conducting funeral proceedings for Muslims in Europe. Despite enormous investment of the DRA and improvement in material conditions of religiosity in Eurasia, the experts are of the opinion that the organization lacked insight into the multicultural, multinational and multiconfessional character of Eurasia.²⁵⁵ Instrumentalization of religion for political purposes such as promoting “Turkishness”²⁵⁶ as a bulwark against the influence of Shi’a Iran and Wahhabi Saudi Arabia went bankrupt. Therefore, the overall Eurasian policy of the DRA has undergone a significant reshuffling during the consecutive AKP governments.

3. 5. Conclusion

The period between 1980 and 2002 was a turning point for the instrumentalization of the DRA in Turkish politics. Although the general state policy of instrumentalizing religion for political purposes continued, the scope and extent of instrumentality significantly increased. The influence of the Turkish Islamic Synthesis was reflected on the 1982 constitution where the DRA was charged with “aiming at national solidarity and integrity”. The Directorate was officially assigned with a moral task of protecting and consolidating Turkish identity. Its task was to enlighten the society with respect to ‘correct’ Islam in order to arrest the development of leftist as well as radical Islamic waves. In order

²⁵⁴ *V. Avrasya İslam Şurası Teşkilatı Toplantısı Sonuç Bildirgesi*, 19 Nisan 2002- Gazimağusa.

²⁵⁵ Şenol Korkut, “The Diyanet of Turkey and Its Activities in Eurasia after the Cold War”, p. 134.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

to counterbalance the influence of Islamic brotherhoods that had long been active in Europe on Turkish muslims and to maintain their loyalty to the state, the DRA's services were extended to Europe. Furthermore, the DRA was integrated into the Turkish foreign policy in order to promote Turkishness and Islam against the Saudi Wahhabism and Iranian Shi'ism in Euroasia. Thus, the institution has transformed into a transnational actor creating spheres of influence for the Turkish state outside its borders.

The instrumentalization of the Directorate within and beyond the borders of Turkey is indicative of its deployment as an ideological state apparatus. It functioned to transform the society along the lines of the ruling ideologies and policies and to generate consent for state policies. It is noteworthy to mark that all the ruling groups, including the ones without electoral concerns or defined themselves non-ideological, accommodated religion and instrumentalized the DRA during this specific political period. The DRA functioned in the service of the state policies and ideology. It provided assistance to state efforts of maintaining order by supervising Muslims and indoctrinating them with certain beliefs without any recourse to physical violence. Much of the content and discourse of the DRA during the 80s and 90s revolved around such themes as nationalism, homeland defense, martyrdom, noble characteristics of the Turkish nation, important events in Turkish history and supremacy of the state. Concepts as such were mobilized to manufacture a collective will that the citizens could relate to.

The February 28, 1997 process was a manifestation of how the DRA was controlled and instrumentalized by the state to execute important social roles. This process highlighted the *raison d'être* of the institution: its primary function of, for hardliner Kemalists, protecting the state against the 'danger' from religion. The Directorate represented the rational and enlightened understanding of Islam against the 'reactionary' movements that deceived people. Through the use of 'rational' and 'enlightened' forms of religion, religion was categorized as legitimate and illegitimate. The DRA had the monopoly of representing and

regulating public forms of Islam and religious activity outside the control of the state were considered threats. To this end, a complete centralization of khutbahs was a significant effort to ensure subjection of individuals to the dominant ideology and discipline them into obedient subjects. Contrary to repressive state apparatuses which are classified in public sphere, the DRA acted as an ideological state apparatus in the private domain realizing the ideology of the state. Thus, it became a hegemonic instrument and disciplinary site of the state to instill individual citizens with the correct practices and understanding of religion and to legitimate undemocratic practices that disregarded freedom of belief.

However, it should be noted that the DRA has argued for expanding the religious sphere and preventing state intervention into religious matters, which resulted in confrontation with the state. For instance, the title of the January 1992 issue of the *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* read “Bitmeyen Çile: Başörtüsü” (Unending Suffering: Headscarf). Covering a sensitive topic as such from the perspective of human rights and religious obligations in a country where headscarf was banned in public institutions and education posed a challenge to the assertive laicism. During the tense period of February 28, during which debates on worshipping in Turkish were held, it took a strong stance and prioritized religious fundamentals, as well. Thus, the fatwa and articles against reciting Turkish translation of the Qur’an at prayer were other instances that the Directorate engaged in challenging the classical Kemalism.

CHAPTER 4: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE DRA UNDER THE AKP RULE

This chapter aims to focus on the major transformation in the political instrumentalization of the DRA between 2002 and 2016. The chapter starts with the discussion of the factors that facilitate AKP's slide into authoritarianism after its consolidation of power and subjugation of the state bureaucracy after 2010. The section will provide insights into the background that transformed the DRA into one of the most important ideological state apparatuses that legitimize, promote and reinforce AKP policies. Then, the chapter presents the enlargement and strengthening of the DRA as well as its active roles in social-political issues. Its activities and discourse that reflect successive AKP governments' policies in the areas of education, youth policies, family and gender relations, nationalism, Kurdish and Alevi issues, the July 15 coup attempt and the international undertakings are analyzed. The analysis is mainly based on the speeches of politicians, newspaper articles, DRA's publications such as the *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* and *Diyanet İlmi Dergi*, and its khutbahs, prepared by the General Directorate of Religious Services, that are available on the related Directorate's official webpage.

4. 1. Introduction

In the November, 2002 national election, AKP came to power by receiving the 34 percent of the popular votes and gaining 363 of 550 seats in the parliament. The three previous governing parties of the coalition government and the two opposition parties could not pass the 10 percent national threshold. AKP was formed in 2001 by a splinter group called "yenilikçiler" (the reformists). They were active in politics in the Virtue Party of Erbakan-led National Outlook (Milli Görüş) movement which was banned by the Constitutional Court on the grounds that the Party was a threat to the secular foundation of the Republic. The reformists were different when compared to National Outlook in that they had a

moderate understanding of religious ideology and politics. The new party defined itself as conservative democrat and this was emphasized by Erdoğan himself stating that they “took off the National Outlook shirt”.²⁵⁷ Erdoğan described the party’s philosophy “as a party that defends the democratic and secular rule of law, regards secularism as the guarantee of democracy and the basic principle of social peace, and seeks a permanent social consensus around the fundamental characteristics of the republic” at the meeting held for the establishment of the AKP.²⁵⁸ The party also strongly opposed to being labelled as an Islamic party at several occasions. For example, Hüseyin Çelik, the Deputy Chairman of the AKP, criticized foreign media:

“In the Western press, when the AK Party administration, the ruling party of the Turkish Republic, is being named, unfortunately most of the time, ‘Islamic’, ‘Islamist’, ‘mildly Islamist’, ‘Islamic-oriented’, ‘Islamic-leaning’, ‘Islamic-based’ or ‘with an Islamic agenda’, and similar language is being used. These characterizations do not reflect the truth, and they sadden us. Yes, the AK Party is a conservative democratic party. The AK Party’s conservatism is limited to moral and social issues.”²⁵⁹

Another significant difference between the reformist and National Outlook laid in the anti-Western and anti-EU stance of the latter. The reformists came to the agreement that EU membership should be the target both in foreign and domestic policy.

The AKP won landslide electoral victories by increasing its votes 47 percent in 2007 and 50 percent in 2011 and marking a power consolidation. As

²⁵⁷ “Milli Görüş gömleğini çıkardık.”

²⁵⁸ Yalçın Akdoğan, “Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi” In *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce: İslamcılık*, edited by Yasin Aktay (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2018), p. 625.

²⁵⁹ “AKP explains charter changes, slams foreign descriptions”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 28, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160720090313/http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageid=438&n=akp-explains-charter-changes-slams-foreign-descriptions-2010-03-28>. (Retrieved June 15, 2020).

Keyman and Gümüşçü indicate “The success of the AKP in elections has been so strong that it has brought about what can be called the “electoral hegemony” of the party in Turkish politics, as well as in the eyes and perceptions of the electorate as a whole.”²⁶⁰ The enormous political power it held has given the party a strong mandate and transformative capacity. The first terms of the AKP was marked by commitment to democratization, modernization, progress, globalization, proactive foreign policy and EU membership. The party appealed to main victims of economic and social crisis with a pragmatic outlook. The government, considering the deep-rooted tensions between the secularists and AKP supporters, tried to prevent polarization in politics. The macro-economic reforms initiated by the previous government after the 2001 economic crisis were adopted by the AKP rule. The result was a complete political benefit for the government due to steady growth of the economy, increasing prosperity of individuals and foreign investments. During this, term significant reforms in political and legal arenas were carried out along with EU accession process in order to consolidate democracy and civilianize politics. To this end, the state security courts were abolished, the National Security Council was reorganized curbing the power of military over elected civilians, bans against broadcasting in other languages were lifted and party closures were made harder.

Yet, this term was also marked by a tug of war between the AKP and laicist Kemalist bureaucracy, namely the military and the judiciary. Due to its Islamic background, the party was under constant check and balances by the military, the judiciary and the president. The presidential election in 2007 resulted in a conflict between the state and the government as the presidency meant a strong check mechanism over the government. The CHP and the Constitutional Court stepped in to prevent the AKP, which had enough number of seats in the parliament to elect the new president among its own ranks. This effort was joined

²⁶⁰ Fuat Keyman and Şebnem Gümüşçü, *Democracy, Identity and Foreign Policy in Turkey: Hegemony Through Transformation*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 34.

by the military which saw itself as the self-appointed guardian of the Kemalist regime. On April 27, 2007 the then Chief of General Staff, Yaşar Büyükanıt, issued a memorandum, known as ‘the e- memorandum’, expressing the military’s concerns over the elections and the AKP candidate. The government bypassed the legal, judicial and military maneuverings and called for elections. Abdullah Gül was elected as the new president by winning 47 percent of the votes and the presidential crisis turned out to be a victory for the government. In the words of a scholar “For the first time since the 1950s, peripheral social forces which were hitherto marginalized in republican Turkish politics would assume control of the state.”²⁶¹ With its strong electoral power, the government was able to cut back the influence of the military over the elected civilians through legal reforms, criminalization and political delegitimization of such interventions. Firstly, the backlash of the AKP to the military memorandum during the presidential election process was strong. Contrary to the established norms between civil-military relations in Turkey, the government criminalized the attempts of the military and characterized them as illegitimate intervention in politics. Secondly, the immense powers of the National Security Council (MGK) was curbed by increasing the number of civilians in the council, by reducing the numbers of NSC meetings and characterizing the decisions taken at these meetings as recommendations significantly altering the balance of power in favor of the civilians.²⁶² In addition, with the institutional and legal changes in the compositions of the Higher Education Council (YÖK) and the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) the military members of these institutions were discharged of their posts. The EMASYA protocol which was signed between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the General Staff and gave the General Staff the authority to intervene in social incidents that it deemed necessary without any request from the related

²⁶¹ Ioannis N. Grigoriadis, “Islam and Democratization in Turkey”, p. 1206.

²⁶² Berk Esen, Şebnem Gümüüşçü, “Rising Competitive Authoritarianism in Turkey”, *Third World Quarterly*, 37:9 (2016), pp. 1584-1585.

governor was abolished in 2010.²⁶³ Finally, a series of court cases started against the military on the grounds that several high-ranking military staff involved in overthrowing the government by plotting a coup. The cases, “Ergenekon” and “Balyoz” (Sledgehammer), were publicized and undermined the privileged position of the military.²⁶⁴ Therefore, increased electoral dominance of the party empowered the government to maintain civilianization of politics and subdue the military.

The AKP rule also diminished the power of the judiciary through a series of reforms. The judiciary had prominent roles in checking and blocking some efforts of the government through the Constitutional Court. The two was in conflict over several instances, one of which involved AKP’s proposal to lift the ban on veil in universities and public buildings. Although a two-third majority in the Parliament was garnered in favor of lifting the ban, the Constitutional Court rejected the package and accused the AKP of subverting the secular foundations of the republic. In March 2008, the conflict peaked when the chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court filed a closure case against the party. The Constitutional Court did not close the party, but imposed a penalty for being the focus of anti-secular actions. However, the AKP seized the opportunity to curb the influence of the secular bureaucracy and prepared a constitutional reform package. The package which was accepted by 58 percent in a popular referendum in 2010 involved redesign of the Higher Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK) and the higher courts. To summarize, successive AKP governments managed to subdue the hegemony of the secular establishments like the judiciary and the military due to its electoral success accompanied by the Europeanization process which further accelerated democratization.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

4. 2. The Transformation of the AKP: The Authoritarian Backslide

Turkey, where almost all the important political transformations were materialized through a process of revolution from above, has been marked by the legacy of the military and bureaucratic cadres who carried these transformations into effect regarding that it was their fundamental duty to protect the revolutions and struggled to retain their privileged and tutelary status within the system in order to realize it.²⁶⁵ “Electoral” democracy or “tutelary” democracy are the correct terms that characterize Turkish experience with democracy to the extent that reserved domains entitled to non-elected bodies have enjoyed superior authority and power in political arena and lack of free elections that guarantee a strong decision-making process for major political issues by officially elected bodies.²⁶⁶ With the military interventions into politics, Turkey became acquainted with tutelary mechanisms where the military had increased powers and autonomy against the civil authority, most notable of which is the National Security Council designed as a constitutional unit. The Constitution of 1961, the constitutional amendments 1971 and 1973 and finally the Constitution of 1982, where the trend culminated, consolidated the authoritarian drift.

The post-2011 era, referring to the third tenure of the AKP at the office, has shown a democratic backslide or reversal. Therefore, “hybrid democracy”, “illiberal democracy”, “competitive authoritarianism”, “delegative democracy” or “plebiscitarian democracy” are the terms used to characterize the regime in Turkey²⁶⁷ rather than democratization. The current state of political regime in

²⁶⁵ Ergun Özbudun, *Otoriter Rejimler, Seçimsel Demokrasiler ve Türkiye*, (Istanbul: İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2016), pp. 129-130.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

²⁶⁷ Ziya Öniş, “Monopolising the Center: The AKP and the Uncertain Path of Turkish Democracy” *The International Spectator*, 50:2, 22-41 (2015); Ergun Özbudun, “AKP at the Crossroads: Erdoğan’s Majoritarian Drift” *South European Society and Politics*, 19:2, 155-167, (2014); Ergun Özbudun, “Turkey’s Judiciary and the Drift Toward Competitive Authoritarianism” *The International Spectator*, 50:2, 42:55, (2015).

Turkey represents what Guillermo O'Donnell describes as a 'delegative democracy' or as a 'plebiscitarian democracy'. O'Donnell puts as follows:

“Delegative democracies are not consolidated (i.e. institutionalized) democracies, but they may be enduring. In many cases, there is no sign either of any imminent threat of an authoritarian regression, or of advances towards representative democracy... DD is strongly majoritarian. It consists in constituting, through clear elections, a majority that empowers someone to become the embodiment and interpreter of the high interests of the nation ... Elections in DDs are a very emotional and high-stakes event: candidates compete for a chance to rule virtually free of all constraints ... After the election, voters/delegators are expected to become a passive but cheering audience of what the president does.”

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Another important characteristic of the DD is that weakened power of some autonomous institutions such as the courts or the judiciary disrupts horizontal accountability, which results in use of unhindered power by a strong leader. While DDs retain vertical accountability, accountability of elected officials to the ballot box as in consolidated democracies, extremely weak existence or nonexistence of horizontal accountability creates a democracy deficit. Excessive concentration of power in the leader, overemphasizing mission, justification of policies through values or national will, portraying each criticism as treason, violation of civil liberties as with the case of large number of journalists in jail and monopolization of media characterize the regime. As Özbudun succinctly puts “... Erdoğan sees the ballot box as the only instrument of accountability and the only source of democratic legitimacy. ‘National will’, as expressed through the ballot box, is elevated to a nearly sacred status.”²⁶⁹

The era of power consolidation has resulted in an adoption of a remarkably conservative and majoritarian policy by the ruling party. The electoral success and

²⁶⁸ Guillermo O'Donnell cited in Ergun Özbudun, “AKP at the Crossroads”, p. 162.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

strong majority in parliament have turned out to be its ultimate weakness,²⁷⁰ as the high public support seemed to have emboldened the party to rule as they wish disregarding the demands of the half of the electorate. Erdoğan's remarks suffice to show that they have a narrow majoritarian conception of democracy, because Erdoğan refers to the election results, that's the will of the nation, to legitimize their policies. Hakan Yavuz describes the conflict between Kemalists and the AKP:

“The AKP is more interested in imposing religio-communal values upon society and protecting religious liberties, but less focused on protecting personal liberties or reducing economic inequality. The leadership of the AKP stresses the power of majority opinion in restructuring political power.”²⁷¹

Though coming to power through fair and free elections is one of the procedural minimal condition for modern democracies, it is not sufficient condition for a full-fledged one. The majoritarian system where political stability and a strong executive prevent fragmentation of the parliament, it does not mean that a complete representation of different groups of the electorate in the parliament is achieved. Especially in countries including Turkey where the national election threshold is high, it may result in severe democracy deficits. Therefore, the national will discourse ignores the rest of the electorate and prevents consensus or compromise. Another important point is the separation of powers and effective checks and balances mechanisms. However, the ruling party, by dwelling on the national will discourse, tend to think that they have a strong mandate to rule and impediments to this rule is a violation of the national will. Erdoğan and his close supporters in the party use strong vocabulary, sometimes insulting, to describe opposition and criticism against the government such as

²⁷⁰ Ziya Öniş, “Conservative Globalism at the Crossroads: The Justice and Development Party and the Thorny Path to Democratic Consolidation in Turkey”, *Mediterranean Politics*, 14:1, (2009), p. 37.

²⁷¹ Hakan Yavuz, “Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey”, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 170.

“spies”, “foreign forces”, “interest lobbies” or “traitors”.

One internal factor that facilitated the authoritarianism of the party is the decreasing level of institutionalization within the party. Contrary to earlier years when formal procedures and rules were binding for the party organization, decision-making was heavily centralized accompanied by a process of purging alternative factions. Thus, the AKP and Erdoğan have become synonymous. Yet, external factors also transformed the AKP authoritarian and conservative to an unprecedented scale.

As mentioned before, party closure case against the AKP, the crisis around Abdullah Gül’s candidacy and the constitutional referendum of 2010 rendered the AKP more authoritarian and radical. The party closure case in 2008 was the climax of the cleavage between the government and the guardians of the secular state. The verdict of the Constitutional Court did not stop the AKP government from taking measures to weaken the power of the judiciary over the government. The constitutional reform package taken to the referendum in 2010 enabled the AKP to restructure the organization of the higher courts and the Higher Council of Judges and Prosecutors (HSYK). The Grand National Assembly and the president were entitled to appoint two members and fifteen members respectively to the Constitutional Court, which previously consisted of eleven members appointed only by the president of the Republic, and the minister of justice was to preside over the HSYK with his aide being the natural member. Although the government claimed that the reform package would create an independent judiciary by freeing it from the tutelage, it increased the control of the government over the judiciary and thus, decreased the influence of the remaining institutions over the legislative and executive power of the government. Ersin Kalaycıoğlu states that the Constitutional Referendum of 2010 resulted in the “kulturkampf” long-running between secular center, socio-cultural liberals and religious conservative,

traditional periphery.²⁷²

The Gezi protests, which started as peaceful environmental protest and evolved into anti-government protests, sent a shock wave to the ruling party. With the decisive victory in the 2011 elections, the AKP entrenched its “dominant party” position and emboldened it to impose policies that would cause dissatisfaction within the secular segments of the society. Increased references to Islamist themes and promise to “raise pious generations” aggravated concern within the secular segments who saw recent developments as encroachment on their lifestyles. Therefore, Gezi protests posed a great challenge to the government as the protests attracted various people ranging from leftists, Kemalists, liberals, environmentalists, Alevis and conservatives. For the government, the protests were existential threat, it, therefore, repressed the protests with excessive force. The protesters were called “thugs”, “occupiers” and “hooligans”, which deepened the cleavage between the government supporters and the other segments of the society. For the ruling party, the ballot box was the source of accountability and the protests against the government were attempts of the minority who were backed by foreign forces to impose its will on Turkish society unlawfully. While media coverage of the uprisings in the Western media helped to popularize resistance to the AKP’s conservative policies, for religious conservative people and media outlets close to the government, Gezi was ‘an attempt by the secular minority to regain their stronghold in Turkish politics and remove the gains made by the religious-conservative majority in terms of their political rights as well as economic standing’.²⁷³

Another factor that facilitated the radicalization of the AKP was the falling out with the Gülen Movement. The conflict became highly publicized, known as 17-25 December investigations, in 2013 when a corruption investigation that

²⁷² Ersin Kalaycıoğlu, “*Kulturkampf* in Turkey: The Constitutional Referendum of 12 September 2010”, *South European Society and Politics*, 17:1, 1-22 (2012).

²⁷³ Ziya Öniş, “Monopolising the Center”, pp. 28-31.

involved Erdoğan, his son Bilal Erdoğan and several AKP members was started by the Gülen linked public prosecutors. The investigation was dismissed by the AKP and a war was declared on the movement. The government's response was harsh; several public prosecutors, law enforcement personnel and police officers that were allegedly linked to the movement were purged. The movement was discredited and Gülen himself was declared a "false prophet" as it constituted a major threat to the AKP's Islamic credentials.

In the June 2015 elections, the AKP lost the votes from 50 to 40 percent when compared to the previous election result. For the first time in its history, the party faced a loss of parliamentary majority. The party had to relinquish its parliamentary dominance and form a coalition government with one of the three opposition parties. Instead, it prevented the coalition efforts of the CHP and forced snap elections, which signified a direct violation of the constitution. For the first time in Turkish politics results of an election was disregarded. At the backdrop of the election was the "Kurdish Peace Process", which caused public uproar especially in the ultra-nationalist electorate.²⁷⁴ The party's increasing authoritarianism allowed HDP to increase its vote share significantly by getting support of urban Turks who traditionally voted for center-left parties. As result of the election defeat, the AKP annulled the peace process and grew more nationalist and authoritarian. Moreover, the HDP was stigmatized by being associated with the PKK terrorists, which set in motion a further polarization of the society along the ethnic lines. In the end, the party was able to secure its hegemonic position in Turkish politics once again.

The most significant event that facilitated the authoritarianism and power centralization of the AKP is the July 15 coup attempt in 2016, which was undisputedly the culmination of the bitter conflict between the government and the Gülen Movement. President Erdoğan, as the undisputed sovereign, made use

²⁷⁴ Galib Bashirov and Caroline Lancaster, "End of Moderation: the Radicalization of AKP in Turkey", *Democratization*, 25:7, 1210-1230, (Routledge: 2018), p. 1221.

of various adjectives from his rich repertoire of vocabulary to name the plotters. They were, to Erdoğan, “traitors”, “parallel state”, “heretical” and they were instantly designated as a terrorist organization, FETÖ (the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization). The FETÖ members were collaborators of an international “mastermind” (üst akıl) plotting against Turkey to divide it. Thus, the coup plotters were added to the long list of enemies such as PKK, CHP, DAESH, HDP, the West, which has the common interest of tearing down the country.

The coup was “a gift from God”²⁷⁵, as it became clear later, it provided the rationale for Erdoğan to eliminate his opponents. It also provided “the legal cover to freely suppress all real opposition to his rule, to consolidate his authority and to press ahead with constructing ‘New Turkey’.”²⁷⁶ A state of emergency was declared a few days later to restore the order and a heavy crackdown was employed on Gülenists who “infiltrated” the state, including the judiciary, the army, the bureaucracy and the public sector. Hundreds of thousands public employees were purged, interrogated and arrested and the crackdown was extended to such dissidents as leftist activists, Kurdish politicians and activists, academics and journalists. The target of the government was not limited to the Gülen supporters: secular, Kemalist and Kurdish public officers were dismissed and these posts were filled AKP loyalists who were mostly unqualified, with the government using its extensive power to purge more than 100,000 employees in the public sector, to close opposition NGOs, other organizations and the media outlets.²⁷⁷ Opposition parties in the parliament were harassed, Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, the leaders of HDP, were jailed on terrorism charges, elected HDP mayors in the southeast region were suspended and the posts were

²⁷⁵ “Erdoğan İstanbul’da açıklama yaptı” DW, July 16, 2016, <https://www.dw.com/tr/erdo%C4%9Fan-istanbulda-a%C3%A7%C4%B1klama-yapt%C4%B1/a-19403922> (Retrieved December 10, 2020).

²⁷⁶ Karabekir Akkoyunlu and Kerem Öktem, “Existential Insecurity and the Making of a Weak Authoritarian Regime in Turkey”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16:4, 505-527 (2016), p. 520.

²⁷⁷ Galib Bashirov and Caroline Lancaster, “End of Moderation”, pp. 1222-1223.

taken under government control. Finally, since the government believed that pro-NATO officers in the army were responsible with the coup attempt, almost 40% of the generals were dismissed, these posts were filled by the members of ultra-nationalist Vatan Partisi and radical Islamist SADAT groups to ensure the security of the regime.²⁷⁸ The AKP has managed to subdue not only the dominant Kemalist ideology and all the other opponents forming a dominance over the entire state apparatus over the years, as well. The party loyalists occupy the top echelons of the state bureaucracy, the military, the media, the judiciary and other state institutions. In short, the abortive coup has deepened the authoritarian backslide; the state of emergency was extended seven times at three-month intervals and decree laws were issued. In the words of an observer “in their attempt to foil the coup Erdoğan and AKP have created the legal conditions that make the political regime more similar to a military junta than a democratic government under peril.”²⁷⁹

The AKP regime, under the leadership of Erdoğan, has gradually monopolized the center leaving limited room for other actors. The party has been able to consolidate its dominant political position and increased its power over various state institutions to the extent that these institutions have shared and promoted the ideological principles of the party. Gümüşçü and Keyman explain the political instrumentalization of the state institutions as such:

In resemblance to the Kemalist project, the AKP has set course to create its own “acceptable citizen” with a religious-Sunni identity using the instruments of the hegemonic state, which the party had formerly labelled as undemocratic. Once the party established complete control over such institutions, it preserved and utilized them to pursue its own top-down

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1223.

²⁷⁹ Ali Erol, “Legality and Power: the 2016 Turkish Coup Attempt and the State of Emergency”, *JOXCSSL*, November 1, 2016. <https://joxcsls.com/2016/11/01/legality-and-power-the-2016-turkish-coup-attempt-and-the-state-of-emergency/> (Retrieved December 10, 2020).

social transformation. Accordingly, the AKP government closely monitored the higher education institutions through the YOK, centrally managed Sunni-Islam through significantly empowered Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), reshaped and used the education system to cater to its ideological agenda of raising pious generations, and securitized social opposition and political differences by resorting to heavy police violence whenever people challenged the AKP policies and decisions by diverting from the behavioral norms of “acceptable citizens”.²⁸⁰

In the early years of their rule, the AKP and Erdoğan, in particular, tried to incorporate and represent all the strata of the society. However, the factors listed above facilitated the process of adopting a conservative populist policy which assumed a struggle between the silent/ conservative masses and the secular/ Western sympathizer minority. Therefore, the party evolved into a self-proclaimed representative of the silent masses. To this end, the party stressed the unity of flag, nation, homeland and state²⁸¹ which confined Turkey to an ethnic nationalist and conservative vicious circle. Contrary to Erdoğan and his close allies’ previous emphasis on distancing themselves from the National Outlook, they later recalibrated their ideology and adopted Islamic cause politics. Pragmatic and populist incorporation of themes within the Islamic culture as well as Turkish nationalism demonstrated similarities with the AKP policy making and the Turkish Islamic Synthesis. The AKP advocated an eclectic religious nationalism that could simultaneously accommodate nationalism and Ottoman civilization. The conservative and nationalist policy of the AKP has also been accompanied by a victimhood, resentment and reactionary mood including glorification of the Ottoman era and resentment toward Republican elites.²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Fuat Keyman and Şebnem Gümüşçü, 2014, p. 53.

²⁸¹ “tek bayrak, tek millet, tek vatan, tek devlet”

²⁸² Zafer Yılmaz, “The AKP and the spirit of the ‘new’ Turkey: imagined victim, reactionary mood, and resentful sovereign”, *Turkish Studies*, 18:3, (2017).

According to this victimhood, the policies of one-party, the secular Kemalist bureaucracy, the military repressed and marginalized devout Muslims through bans on headscarf in the universities and public sector and unfair treatment of Imam Hatip School graduates in university admissions. The AKP and Erdoğan, claiming to represent the oppressed Muslims, have effectively “institutionalized this rhetoric in the public domain”²⁸³ and extended victimhood to the whole republican era. The ‘CeHaPe zihniyeti’ (CHP mindset) has been blamed for preventing Muslims practice their religion freely, attacking the sacred including turning mosques into barns and recital of azan in Turkish and many other similar incidents.

4. 3. Empowered DRA under the AKP Rule

Those who do not support AKP have been skeptical about the secularism interpretation and “conservative democrat” identity the party adopted from the very beginning due to its Islamist background. Therefore, the reformists were accused of *takiyye* (dissimulation) and having a hidden agenda of establishing a Sharia regime in Turkey. However, Erdoğan recommended Egypt to have a secular constitution in July 2013:

“The Constitutional secularism in Turkey is defined as the state’s equal distance from all religions. Secularism is not definitely atheism. As Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, I am a Muslim but I am not secular. But, I am the prime minister of a secular country. In a secular regime, people have the freedom to be religious or not. I recommend that Egypt also have a secular constitution. Because secularism is not hostile to religion. Don’t be afraid of secularism.”²⁸⁴

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 483.

²⁸⁴ “Erdoğan laiklik vurgusu yapmıştı”, *Milliyet*, July 4, 2013. <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/dunya/erdogan-laiklik-vurgusu-yapmisti-1731948>. (Retrieved June 16, 2020).

The quote underlines the AKP's loyalty to the core values and characteristics of the Republican state. It also presents what can be called a Western style secularism as opposed to assertive secularism/laicism adopted in Turkey. In fact, the first term of the AKP in office was characterized by democratization and normalization of strict secularism and acknowledging the existence of various Muslim ethnicities. In Yavuz's compartmentalization of AKP's secularism, the party adopted a liberal interpretation of secularism during the first period of the party in the office where "the role of Islam in identity formation and the ethics of society" were recognized.²⁸⁵ During this term, the AKP incorporated religion into the public and political arenas without compromising the tenets of the secular state while acknowledging that religion is a private matter.

While the above statements and commitment of the AKP to democratization suggested prospects for easing the strict state grip on religion, the relationship between the government and the DRA did not deviate from the traditional statist trajectory, which keeps the DRA under state control and instrumentalizes it politically. First of all, the related article of the 1982 Constitution that stipulated the duties and aims of the DRA was still in effect. The DRA was still an administrative unit, attached to the prime ministry with the task of enlightening the society with respect to prayer, worship, places of worship, moral principles of Islam, in accordance with the principle of secularism and "aiming at national solidarity and integrity". The DRA as the official authority monopolizing religious knowledge and practices with a statist and laicist outlook persisted. The speeches of the MPs in the parliament suffice to show that the ruling party did not challenge existing status of the DRA and subscribed to the official practices that did not reflex religious activities outside the oversight of the state. For example, Mehmet Çiçek, representing the AKP, drew attention to the mosques which did not have official DRA staff and stated that:

"This means, the Republic of Turkey is not represented in the 23 542

²⁸⁵ M. Hakan Yavuz, "Understanding Turkish secularism in the 21st century", p. 71.

mosques...This vacancy provides opportunities for our internal and external enemies to degenerate our supreme religion and exploit our differences in religious practices in order to divide and fragment our country.”²⁸⁶

Similarly, Bekir Bozdağ, the Deputy Prime Minister, defined the DRA as “one of the cement institutions” which “fulfills one of the most important duties to strengthen our solidarity, unity and fraternity” adding that “the DRA is equally important as the army for the survival of the country.”²⁸⁷

This view was also embraced by the high-profile DRA staff. For example, in an interview, Necdet Subaşı, member of the High Council of Religious Affairs and advisor to Faruk Çelik who was the Minister of State responsible for the DRA between 2009 and 2011, underlined that the DRA “should be considered a part of Turkish secularism.”²⁸⁸ According to Fikret Karaman, the vice president of the DRA, “the institution was established due to the natural needs of the social and constitutional state.”²⁸⁹ Within this analysis, the DRA has an important function of fighting against possible Islamic fundamentalism and reactionaries with its constitutionally- charged task.

During the AKP era, the DRA maintained its position vis-à-vis the state. In his first message to the DRA staff as the new chairman of the DRA, Ali Bardakoğlu underlined the task and function of the DRA as specified by the Constitution.²⁹⁰ Starting with the first issue of 2004, the *Diyanet İlmi Dergi* stated

²⁸⁶ Mehmet Çiçek, *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 70, 36. Birleşim, December 21, 2004, p. 82.

²⁸⁷ Bekir Bozdağ, *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 8, 33. Birleşim, December 10, 2011, p. 308.

²⁸⁸ VU University Amsterdam and Utrecht University, “Diyanet: The Turkish Directorate for Religious Affairs in a changing environment.”, (January 2011), p. 34.

²⁸⁹ Interview with Fikret Karaman, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, March 2005, p. 34.

²⁹⁰ “Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı’na Prof. Dr. Ali Bardakoğlu Atandı”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, July 2003, p. 4. Likewise, consideration of religion as a public service and assignment of the DRA with this task by the state since the foundation of the republic were justified on the grounds that “sublime religious values would be harmed by vicious rivalries and the society would be fragmented” due to the conditions of the time. Ali Şafak, “Dinin Kamu Hizmeti Boyutu”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, March 2004, pp. 8-9.

that its principles and rules for publishing should be in accordance with the general framework aimed at “Enlightening the Society on Religion.” Similarly, a scholar argued that:

“The DRA institution has an important function in terms of the unity, solidarity and integrity of the society. In this sense, Turkish society is not multi-religious. Although we have citizens of other religions, most of the society belongs to the same religion. This affiliation creates the common ground for the members of the society to unite around the same feelings, thoughts and beliefs. This is a dimension that should be considered in terms of the unity and peace of the society.”²⁹¹

Furthermore, in his comprehensive study on Friday khutbahs, Saçmalı notes that the officials in the committee are under pressure when writing the khutbahs and adopt self-censorship in order to satisfy the demands of the state, the government and the society and not to get involved in a possible conflict.²⁹² He argues that the Khutbah Preparation Committee tend to prepare sermons that reflects the AKP’s understanding of religion. The institution has kept its tutelary function in AKP era; however, it promotes the ruling party’s agenda of Islam due to the change in official Islam and the dominant ideology.

The DRA maintained a consistent trend in its effort to purify Islam from superstitions through its publications. The January and April 2006 issues of the *Diyanet İlmî Dergi* and June issue of the *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* published articles for the purpose of “cleansing religion from geographical filth and historical residue”. Yet, the DRA in the AKP period is different from the former periods in its interpretation of pure positivist religion. Some articles published in its scientific and monthly magazines criticized disestablishment of religion from the

²⁹¹ Ali Akdoğan, “Dini Hayat Açısından İlahiyat Fakülteleri ve Diyanet Teşkilatı’nın Fonksiyonu”, *Diyanet İlmî Dergi*, July 2008, p. 103.

²⁹² Muhammed Habib Saçmalı, 2013.

public life and confinement of it to the conscience of the individual;²⁹³ analyzed the fallacy of the secularization thesis and positivist religious interpretation of Aguste Comte;²⁹⁴ evaluated counter arguments of Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır against positivism, “one of the most important denial trends of modern era”;²⁹⁵ criticized modernity and “old positivist dogmas that interpreted religion as a belief system limited only to superstition or conscience”, and;²⁹⁶ discussed the effects of enlightenment and positivism on our perception of Islam criticizing how “the modernists saw the problem of the Islamic world as if it were a question of religion”.²⁹⁷ In another article, the writer compared rationality in the Qur’an to rationality in positivism:

“The Qur’an referred to rationality not as a name but as an action and encouraged its positive use. This is therefore different from the rationality that positivist rationalism glorifies. While positivist rationality does not accept the truth of anything other than objective knowledge, the reasoning encouraged by the Qur’an is the name of the process of discovering the Creator inspired by existence. For this reason, the function of the mind can only be negative depending on purpose and methods. The authorities that will show and eliminate these negativities are revelation and reason.”²⁹⁸

By the same token, while some topics that reflected the Kemalist tradition persisted, their frequency diminished and later came to a halt, though. For

²⁹³ İzzet Er, “Din Devlet İlişkisi ve Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı”, *Diyanet İlmî Dergi*, July 2009, p. 19.

²⁹⁴ Ali Çolak, “Fert ve Toplum Açısından Din”, *Diyanet İlmî Dergi*, July, 2009, pp. 10-12.

²⁹⁵ İbrahim Coşkun, “Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır’ın Pozitivizme Karşı Dini Argümanları” *Diyanet İlmî Dergi*, July, 2015, pp. 203- 228.

²⁹⁶ Adnan Aslan, “Pozitivist Din Anlayışının Çıkmazları”, *Diyanet aylık Dergi*, July 2007, pp. 9-11.

²⁹⁷ Mehmet Bayrakdar, “Aydınlanmanın ve Pozitivizmin İslam’a Bakışımıza Etkisi”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, March 2009, pp. 4-6.

²⁹⁸ Mustafa Ünverdi, “Kur’an’da Aklın İşlevselliği ve Tahkiki İmanın İmkânı”, *Diyanet İlmî Dergi*, April 2012, p. 62.

example, anniversary of the Republic, religious books read by Atatürk, the Prophet Mohammed according to Atatürk, the national anthem, the conquest of Istanbul and the Victory of Dardanelles were among the recurring topics in the first few years of the AKP era.

However, as the regime has consolidated its power and slid into authoritarianism and conservatism, the DRA has attained a special place in its overall policy. The parliamentary majority of the party has enabled it to establish dominance over many state institutions which function as ideological state apparatuses. Although the DRA has always functioned as a political instrument under different governments since its foundation, it has had radical transformations both in its extent and mission in response to AKP's ideology. Under the AKP rule, the DRA has abandoned its key mission which charges the institution with defending the secular state against threats from religion in line with the principle of secularism. Whereas, under the AKP rule, the religious institution of the state has aimed at enlargening the religious field by propagating the Sunni-Hanefi interpretation of Islam. The separation between religious and state affairs has become blurred particularly in the AKP period, and the institution has become politicized extending its spheres of influence further into the political and social issues.

While the transformation of the AKP has been one factor that emboldened the DRA, the second factor is the approach of the chairmen of the DRA. Ali Bardakoğlu, appointed by President Ahmet Necdet Sezer in 2003 and held the position until late 2010s, had managed to keep a distance between the institution and politics and sometimes openly made statements that contradicted the wills of the ruling party. For instance, he refused to make comments on the headscarf issue when Erdoğan proposed consulting the DRA to abolish the ban. For Bardakoğlu, the DRA as a constitutional institution functions in line with the principle of secularism and the headscarf issue is a political one. He also pointed out that “covering a woman's head is not the only precondition of becoming a Muslim” while acknowledging that it is religious duty for Muslim adult

women.²⁹⁹ Actually, Bardakoğlu's statements show that he acts within the secularism principle as he later adds that abolishing the ban is the responsibility of politicians and the DRA is authorized to declare opinion on the religious matter of headscarf. When the tenure of Bardakoğlu ended, the AKP appointed Mehmet Görmez who is closer to its ideological position. Mehmet Görmez is distinguished from the previous chairmen of the DRA by actively participating and certain taking positions on social and political issues.

There are certain instances that show the AKP favored the DRA. First of all, the budget of the institution was continuously uplifted during the consecutive AKP governments. It should be noted that the AKP restored the budget decreases employed after the February 28 process. The second was the enactment of a law in 2010 which strengthened its bureaucratic and administrative structure. With the new the DRA chairman can be appointed only twice and can serve five years. Furthermore, the chairman candidates shall be chosen by the Higher Council of Religion among its members. The new bill also provides opportunities of promotion for the religious officials through exams, proposes establishment of a radio and TV channel to reach larger audiences, abolishes restrictions on age for attending summer Qur'an courses organized by the DRA and promotes providing religious services outside the mosque.³⁰⁰ The *Diyanet Radyo* and the *Diyanet TV* were opened in 2013 and 2012 respectively, the DRA started to issue halal certificates for food products in 2011, the institution also started to deliver its fatwa through a free telephone hotline service and finally the DRA has been raised in state protocol meaning the chairman of the DRA frequently makes public appearances next to the ruling elites. One other significant change in the DRA during the AKP period is the active role of the DRA chairmen when compared to previous periods. These new officials take initiatives to penetrate the society

²⁹⁹ "Başörtüsü müslümanlığın ön şartı değil", *Sabah*, October 10, 2010, https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2010/10/18/basortusu_muslumanligin_on_sarti_degil (Retrieved November 8, 2020).

³⁰⁰ See the report of University of Amsterdam and Utrecht University, pp. 48-50.

unlike former chairmen who followed the orders and met demands of their superiors.

Clearly Islam, therefore the DRA, hold a significant power base for the AKP in order to legitimize their policies, promote nation building, provide public morality and unite the society around common goals. President Erdoğan's comments on the DRA and its chairman is worth analyzing in order to interpret the status of the DRA. In May 2015, Erdoğan said that "The DRA is the prestigious authority of all Muslims" and "[Mehmet Görmez] is the respected religious leader of this geography."³⁰¹ The AKP politicians and Erdoğan has explicitly made pro-Islamic statements at their speeches such as attending election rallies with the Qur'an, commenting on abortion and introducing restrictions on alcohol consumption. When replying criticisms against the ban on advertisement and consumption of alcohol in public areas, Erdoğan defended the ban on religious grounds in May 2013: "Why does the law dictated by two drunkards become valid for you, but the truth ordered by faith becomes an event that must be rejected?"³⁰² Similarly, Erdoğan complained about mixed-sex student accommodations and promised to prevent such instances in November 2012.

Perhaps one of the most controversial and discussed statement was Erdoğan's promise to "raise pious generations". When answering the criticisms of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, Erdoğan stated in February 2012:

"Do you expect a party that has the conservative democratic identity to raise an atheist youth? You may have such a purpose, but we do not have such a goal. We will raise a generation that is conservative, democrat and upholding its historical

³⁰¹ "Yurtdışına özel uçakla gidecek", *Milliyet*, May 27, 2015, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/yurtdisina-ozel-ucakla-gidecek-2065095>. (Retrieved November 8, 2020).

³⁰² "Erdoğan içki yasağını dini gerekçe göstererek savundu", *Haber Sol*, May 28, 2013, <https://haber.sol.org.tr/devlet-ve-siyaset/Erdo%C4%9Fan-icki-yasagini-dini-gerekce-gostererek-savundu-haberi-73726>. (Retrieved November 8, 2020).

principles. This is what we are for.”³⁰³

The statements by Erdoğan show AKP’s broader project of establishing dominance over the entire state units. It can be argued that the AKP’s education policy aims to shape society morally and create a national identity. Although the party managed to subjugate the Kemalist bureaucracy and tutelary institutions, the party seem to be concerned about threats to its existence and possible challenges to its hegemonic grip over the society. Thus, reminding of Ahmet Kabaklı’s statements about the importance of culture, the AKP pursues achieving cultural hegemony. This new generation, in Erdoğan’s words, “carrying a computer in one hand and the Qur’an in the other”³⁰⁴ could replace the prevalent Kemalist generations.

Having the ability to refashion culture and education, the AKP regime aimed to create a new national identity loyal to Islamic values. Lifting of the headscarf ban in schools was a key step towards this goal. Changes and reforms in the Ministry of National Education were directed by goal of propagating this new identity. With the education reform in 2012, the compulsory education was extended to 12 years and İmam Hatip junior high schools, which were closed after the February 28 coup in order to reduce the appeal of religious education, were reopened. Similarly, with the transformation of general high schools into technical and vocational high schools, the numbers of religious schools increased sharply. As result of this reorganization in the Ministry, the number of these schools opened in 2012-2013 academic year was 1.099.³⁰⁵ The regulations for the Imam Hatip schools had previously been changed and the new regulation stipulated that these schools “prepare students for both higher education programs and the

³⁰³ “Dindar gençlik yetiştireceğiz”, *Hürriyet*, February 2, 2012, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/dindar-genclik-yetistirecegiz-19825231>. (Retrieved November 8, 2020).

³⁰⁴ “Başbakan dan gençlere tavsiyeler”, *İHA*, December 27, 2012, <https://www.iha.com.tr/haber-basbakan-dan-genclere-tavsiyeler-256118/>. (Retrieved November 10, 2020).

³⁰⁵ Elif Gençkal Eroler 2019, p. 151.

profession”.³⁰⁶ Another significant change was introduction of three elective courses on the Qur’an, the Life of the Prophet Muhammed and basic religious instruction in high school curriculum and removal of two elective courses Civic and Democracy Education and Agriculture. The AKP’s project of raising pious generation, which is “infused with social conservatism and religious discourse, including and Islamized version of Turkish nationalism”³⁰⁷ is one of the most critical attempts to challenge and dismantle secular Kemalist education.

The DRA lent its support to the education policies of the government by encouraging children to choose elective religious courses. In the khutbah sent to mosques all over Turkey on February 5, 2016, the institution addressed parents:

“In order for the upbringing of our precious children who are the guarantee of our future, let’s encourage them to choose elective courses the Qur’an and the Life of Our Prophet. We shall not forget that this is religious duty that falls upon us as parents.”³⁰⁸

In 2015, the DRA signed a protocol with the Ministry of Youth and Sports in order to contribute to the spiritual development of young people. The cooperation includes provision of moral support and guidance services in youth centers, youth camps and dormitories affiliated with the Ministry by the DRA upon the request of families and young people.³⁰⁹ The protocol reflected that the

³⁰⁶ Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı İmam Hatip Liseleri Yönetmeliği, Resmi Gazete, No. 27305, July 31, 2009.

³⁰⁷ Demet Lüküslü, “Creating a Pious Generation: Youth and Education Policies of the AKP in Turkey”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16: 4, (2016), p. 645.

³⁰⁸ Friday khutbah by Din Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, “Şimdi Yaraları Sarma Zamanı”, February 5, 2016.

³⁰⁹ “DİB ile Geçlik ve Spor Bakanlığı Arasında İşbirliği Protokolü”, *Diyanet TV*, March 2, 2015, <https://www.diyanet.tv/dib-ile-genclik-ve-spor-bakanligi-arasinda-isbirligi-protokolu> (Retrieved November 11, 2020). The DRA organized many conferences and activities targeting young people and children. For example, Ramadan Camp in four camping sites, conferences on prayer, and the Prophet Muhammad in dormitories, programs on holy nights in Islam for children, summer camps on morals for children in orphanages in Bursa and Karabük, and programs for university and vocational school students in some cities were organized. See, *Diyanet İşleri 2015 Yılı Faaliyet Raporu*, pp. 38-40.

institution was charged with fashioning younger generations morally.

The DRA's role in religiously legitimizing the policies of the AKP has also extended to a wide range of issues including gender relations and family. The traditional role of women as protector of the family and servant prevalent throughout the republican period has gone unchanged during the AKP period and the party policies regarding women prioritize family over women. Erdoğan used every opportunity to emphasize his ideal of a family with three children in order to counterbalance an ageing population. For the AKP policymakers 'the strong Turkish family' is presented as the remedy for possible burdens on the state.³¹⁰ The policies of the DRA with respect to women has transformed under the AKP rule. The most significant change was the increase in the percentage of women employed in the DRA most particularly during Ali Bardakoğlu term. For Bardakoğlu "protecting women's rights was a religious duty" as that half of the population consists of women.³¹¹ He also announced that the institution was employing positive discrimination in the employment of female staff adding that they set up family offices, women and youth desks in order to prevent discrimination. At the same time the DRA challenged the existing cultural practices against women. For example, an article in its scholarly magazine criticized honor killings and furnishing with a legitimate ground from an Islamic perspective.³¹² Another article presented the Prophet Muhammed as a role model in order to stop violence against women.³¹³ The writer gave an account of

³¹⁰ Ayhan Kaya, "Islamisation of Turkey under the AKP Rule: Empowering Family, Faith and Charity", *South European Society and Politics*, 20:1 (2016), p. 61.

³¹¹ "Kadın haklarına sahip çıkmak dindarlığın gereği", *T24*, September 4, 2008, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/kadin-haklarina-sahip-cikmak-dindarligin-geregi,5048> (Retrieved November 11, 2020).

³¹² Yaşar Yiğit, "İslam ve İnsan Hakları Bağlamında Töre Cinayetlerinin Değerlendirilmesi", *Diyanet İlmî Dergi*, January 2011, p. 54.

³¹³ Recep Aslan, "Rahmet Peygamberi Hz. Muhammed'in Kadına Yönelik Şiddeti Ortadan Kaldırma Konusunda Örnek Alınabilecek Söz Ve Uygulamaları", *Diyanet İlmî Dergi*, January 2012, pp. 29-41.

respectful and compassionate behavior, words and practices of the Prophet towards women. Through khutbahs, the institution disseminated similar messages on a wider scale. One such khutbah compared violence against women today to prevalent violence and cruelty in pre-Islamic age of ignorance often referred to Jahiliyya.³¹⁴

In July 2010, Family and Religious Guidance Department attached to the General Directorate of Religious Services was established. The responsibilities of the Department include organizing religious, social and cultural activities in order to create social awareness about the establishment, protection and strengthening of the family, providing religious counseling and guidance services for the settlement of familial problems, providing spiritual support services to family members in order to strengthen the family in the face of new problems and risks faced by social and cultural changes and providing religious guidance services in social service institutions such as affection homes, nursing homes, orphanages, women's guest houses. When the AKP government reorganized the State Ministry responsible for Women and the Family into the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, the DRA signed a protocol with the Ministry in October, 2011. According to the clauses of the protocol, it was aimed to protect the family and its values, to strengthen the family for future generations, to prevent split up of the family and to carry out joint social service projects in order to foster moral, national and religious feelings.³¹⁵ The DRA's activities outside the mosque through these family guidance units play a significant role in protecting the Turkish family which is an important aspect of the government policy. Nil Mutluer argues that the protocol signed between the Ministry and the DRA shaped the gender relations in Turkey, because the DRA mostly reflected the

³¹⁴ Khutbah by the DRA "Kadına El Kalkmaz!", February 20, 2015. For a similar one, see khutbah by the DRA, "Her Can Kutsal Ve Dokunulmazdır!", February 20, 2015.

³¹⁵ <https://www2.diyinet.gov.tr/DinHizmetleriGenelMudurlugu/isbirligiProtokolleri/Aile%20ve%20Sosyal%20Politikalar%20Bakanligi.pdf>. (Retrieved November 12, 2020).

government's approaches.³¹⁶ While pointing out positive developments within the institution including addressing the violence against women, Mutluer also highlights that women preachers downplay the male perpetration in the issue.

Erdoğan's statements about abortion deserve particular attention. In May 2012, Erdoğan said that "abortion is a murder" and he later said "each abortion is one Uludere" referring to killing of 34 civilians by Turkish Air Force strikes.³¹⁷ He made it clear that birth control and abortion were conspiracies

"I know that these are planned and that these are the steps taken to stall the population growth of the country. With this, the population of this country is taken under control. I believe that abortion is a murder."

In this period, Mehmet Görmez supported Erdoğan stating that "parents had no property rights over the embryo nor had the power to give up or end his/her life" and "abortion means ending the right to life."³¹⁸ However, Görmez rightfully reminded that men were equally responsible and women fell victims. Moreover, the Friday khutbah dated February 20, 2015 emphasized the value of human beings in Islam that "it is as if anyone who killed a person killed all people" and made it clear that "killing unborn babies due to worries about hunger/poverty is among major sins".³¹⁹ Another example that shows that the DRA share the outlook of the ruling party is related to feminist movements. On International Women's Day 2008, the DRA declared that "feminism is indecency" and continued:

³¹⁶ Nil Mutluer, "Diyanet's Role in Building the 'Yeni (New) Milli' in the AKP Era", *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, 27, (2018), p. 14.

³¹⁷ "Her kürtaj bir Uludere'dir", *NTV*, May 26, 2012, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/her-kurtaj-bir-uluderedir,z1M5Y2znmwEu6drogItVkiA> (Retrieved November 12, 2020).

³¹⁸ "Kürtaj sınırlamasına Diyanet desteği", *Aljazeera Türk*, June 4, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/kurtaj-sinirlamasina-diyanet-destegi> (Retrieved November 12, 2020).

³¹⁹ Friday khutbah by Din Hizmetleri Genel Müdürlüğü, "Her Can Kutsal ve Dokunulmazdır", February 20, 2015.

“Feminism has very negative moral and social consequences. First of all, the woman drawn in the feminist movement, with the idea of unconditional freedom in general, ignores many rules and values that are indispensable for the family...”³²⁰

In May 2014, Erdoğan said “equality between men and women is against creation”:

“Our religion has granted women with a position, the position of motherhood. It has granted mother another position. It has laid heaven under her feet. It has laid under the feet of the mother, not the father. The mother's feet have to be kissed. You cannot explain this to feminists, they do not accept motherhood.”³²¹

The outlook of the above statements rejects individualism of women and promotes confinement of women into the borders of her house. Furthermore, it reminds women of their reproductive capacity and prioritizes protection and survival of family. Overall, Erdoğan’s remarks about having at least three children and abortion can be evaluated as a social engineering project which is supported on a religious ground by the DRA.

Perhaps, the most significant transformation that the DRA underwent is its understanding of nationalism in the AKP period. Since its establishment the DRA’s approach towards different ethnic identities in Turkey including the Kurdish has been in line with the official policy. During the 1980s and 1990s when the Kurdish demands for recognition increased and armed conflict between the state and the PKK escalated, the DRA nurtured nationalistic and militarist discourse. The publications, khutbahs and the speeches of the high-profile staff of the DRA revolved around Turkish nation, nationalism, love and defense of

³²⁰ “Diyanet, feministleri kızdırdı”, *Hürriyet*, March 3, 2008, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/diyanet-feministleri-kizdirdi-8434696> (Retrieved November 13, 2020).

³²¹ “Erdoğan: Kadın-erkek eşitliği fitrata ters”, *BBC Türkçe*, November 24, 2014, https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2014/11/141124_kadinifitrati_erdogan (Retrieved November 13, 2020).

homeland, patriotism and martyrdom. At the time, the existence of Kurdish ethnicity was simply disregarded in its publications or khutbahs.

During its second incumbency, the government introduced “National Unity and Brotherhood” (Milli Birlik ve Kardeşlik) project.³²² Mostly referred to as the Kurdish Opening, the Democratic Initiative aimed to address the issues of all ethnic and sectarian groups, economic problems and terrorism issues. To make improvements in these problem areas and minimize the problems, the Initiative envisaged to allow courses to be opened in different languages and dialects through a change in the regulation, change the village and town names according to the residents’ wishes, lift bans on highlands, make changes in the political parties’ law in order to make propaganda in different languages and dialects, enact law for the establishment of Human Rights Institution, establish an independent law enforcement complaint mechanism and draw up a civilian and democratic constitution.

The most prominent improvement was made in the regulation of the mother tongue. The government accepted the identity of Kurdish people when TRT Şeş, which broadcasts in Kurdish was opened. It was the first instance of official acceptance of different languages other than Turkish in the history of modern Turkey. The Kurdish name of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality was written next to Turkish, the name of Hakkari Vocational School was changed into Çölemerik Vocational School, which is the original Kurdish name of the city and the first political party with name Kurdistan was formed in Turkey. Regulations in the education enabled opening of private Kurdish language courses, Kurdish language and literature departments in universities were opened and selective courses on Kurdish language were added to curriculum in secondary schools. Moreover, the ruling party with the support of *Bariş ve Demokrasi Partisi* (Peace and Democracy Party) enacted the law that allows defense in mother tongue in

³²² “İşte AK Parti’nin açılım planı”, *Sabah*, January 22, 2010, https://www.sabah.com.tr/siyaset/2010/01/22/iste_ak_partinin_acilim_plani (Retrieved November 14, 2020).

courts.

During that time, Turkey has witnessed a radical rupture under the AKP rule from the previous policies with respect to nationalism. In one of his speech where he disapproved discrimination against race and ethnicity, the Prime Minister Erdoğan stated that “We trample on Kurdish nationalism, Laz nationalism, Turkish nationalism, Arab nationalism. There is no such racial, tribal nationalism. This is from Satan.”³²³ Erdoğan made similar remarks that indicated an inclusive nationalism in Turkey. When he addressed his party in the parliament in January 2013, he told:

“If I say nation, I never mean a race, ethnicity, or faith group. The nation is a community that has a common history for us, looks at the future with the same point of view, and has common ideals. The nation is a total of 75 million people on these lands. It is the community in which Gazi Mustafa Kemal expresses its spirit and essence as ‘Islamic components’ in the First Assembly. We, in our common one thousand-year history, are Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, Laz, Georgian, Circassian, Bosnian, Pomak...”³²⁴

It was clear that the party was trying to incorporate all the different ethnicities which had previously been excluded into the nation. With all these radical changes, the AKP challenged the existing state tradition towards the different ethnicities by officially recognizing and granting their rights.

Under the AKP period, the DRA’s policies with respect to Kurdish ethnicity followed the shifting political atmosphere. For the party, the DRA was a critical institution to support the Democratic Initiative. Thus, in March 2010, Erdoğan stated:

³²³ “Erdoğan: Bu nasıl vampirliktir?”, *NTV*, February 19, 2013, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/erdogan-bu-nasil-vampirliktir.QwDEqlmkj0ezuQqZmjYSPA> (Retrieved November 17, 2020).

³²⁴ “Başbakan Erdoğan: Bu oyuna gelmeyin!”, *Haber7com*, January 15, 2013, <https://www.haber7.com/partiler/haber/977501-basbakan-erdogan-bu-oyuna-gelmeyin> (Retrieved November 17, 2020).

“I request all our institutions and organizations, NGOs, intellectuals, artists, and the DRA and its respectable members to take active roles in our state project of the national unity and brotherhood process.”³²⁵

Saçmalı points out that “the government suggested not mentioning the concept of ‘Turk’ or ‘Turkish’ rather mentioning ‘nation’ or ‘our nation’”³²⁶ during his fieldwork in the Istanbul mufti office khutbah committee. Within the context of peace process the DRA appointed 1000 *meles* in Kurdish-majority cities such as Adiyaman, Diyarbakır, Van, Siirt, Mardin, Batman, Hakkari, Bitlis as well as Black Sea region. *Meles* are equivalents to imams who received their theological training in madrasas. Through this period, publication of Kurdish religious books was witnessed. Kurdish Qur’an translation, Qur’an letters and two books on the life of the Prophet Muhammad were published in 2015 and 2016. The DRA also promoted the process through its publications. The monthly magazine of the institution was critical of discrimination and disseminated the idea of brotherhood and living in harmony. One article, for example, stated:

“While the Prophet preached Islam, he did not discriminate on color, race, gender and social status. He removed all kinds of obstacles in the way to Islamic brotherhood. He declared the believers as brothers.”³²⁷

Another writer argued that citizens in multi-ethnic countries should be able to fulfill their human and cultural rights:

“People cannot determine race, nation, homeland, place of birth, mother and father, gender, eye color etc. by themselves. Therefore, they cannot be held responsible for them. People can neither be exalted nor despised in matters that

³²⁵ “Hedefinde yine medya vardı”, *Yeniçağ*, March 4, 2010, <https://www.yenicaggazetesi.com.tr/hedefinde-yine-medya-var-di-32696h.htm> (Retrieved November 17, 2020).

³²⁶ Muhammed Habib Saçmalı 2013, p. 60.

³²⁷ Ekrem Keleş, Vice President of Higher Council of Religious Affairs, “Müslümanları ateş çukurlarına yuvarlanmaktan koruyan en güçlü bağ”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, February 2010, p. 5.

are not with their will and choice, and therefore do not have responsibility.”³²⁸

The DRA discredited discrimination against ethnic identity in its khutbahs until the peace process stalled. The common message in these khutbahs revolved around such themes as importance of living in peace, fighting against racism, unity and brotherhood.³²⁹ One such khutbah to be recited all over the country stated:

“Due to the crimes committed by murder networks which have no humanitarian and moral values, we shall not blame our innocent brothers whom we share the same qibla, follow the same Prophet, share our joy, sorrow, destitution and prosperity with. We shall not engage in holding our neighbors and relatives responsible with terrorism. We should bear in mind that; when we are driven by provocation and quarrel at streets, we serve the insidious ambitions of murder networks.”³³⁰

Another khutbah stressed that racism and discrimination are manifested in the form of superiority of one’s own race, ancestry, tribe, color, sect and ideology within an Islamic perspective and through the deeds of the Prophet. The khutbah described them as obstacles to Islamic brotherhood and put that:

“Racism is both a crime against humanity and a disrespect for Allah. For this reason, our religion Islam rejected bigotry, irritability and racism with all its elements.”³³¹

³²⁸ Şefaettin Severcan, “Ortak bir vatan oluşturma ve bunu sürdürme-anadolu örneği”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, February 2010, p. 9.

³²⁹ See khutbahs by General Directorate of Religious Services, “Birlik ve Beraberliğimizin Harcı: Kardeşliğimiz”, August 21, 2015; “Gün Birlik Ve Dirlik Günüdür”, July 24, 2015; “Hz. Peygamber Ve Birlikte Yaşama Ahlakı”, April 10, 2015.

³³⁰ Khutbah by General Directorate of Religious Services, “Birliğimizi, Beraberliğimizi, Kardeşliğimizi Muhafaza Edelim”, September 11, 2015.

³³¹ Khutbah by General Directorate of Religious Services, “İslam Irkçılığın Her Türüsünü Reddeder”, June 5, 2015.

While there have been positive developments and proliferation of khutbahs encouraging peace among Muslims, the position of the DRA with respect to martyrdom and military service has persisted. Themes as martyrdom, defense of homeland or military service have been propagated in the DRA discourse.³³² The institution declared its opinion on conscientious objection that “whoever has reached puberty is obliged to his family (alimony, custody, manners, duties etc.), his state (tax, military service, etc.), as well as his worship from a religious perspective.”³³³ By warning against possible threats to the survival of the country, the DRA praised military service through Islamic credentials. With this fatwa the institution seems to have adopted a statist and militarist outlook that had pervaded it throughout the 80s and 90s.

4. 3. 1. The Alevi Issue

The AKP government initially tried to mend ties with the Alevis. The relationship between the Alevis and the state since Ottoman times has been constrained. Due to their differences in practice and belief, they have been subjected to discrimination both socially and politically. Although the new secular republican state disregarded the existence of Alevis as faith in its official institution for religious life, the Alevis still welcomed the republic for the survival of their Alevi identity and distinguished culture. However, together with continuous attacks and discrimination, the Gazi³³⁴ and Sivas³³⁵ incidents that took

³³² See khutbah by General Directorate of Religious Services, “Çanakkale Ve Birlik Ruhu”, March 18, 2016.

³³³ “Diyanet’e Göre Vicdani Ret Caiz Değil!”, *Haksöz Haber*, April 17, 2012, <https://www.haksozhaber.net/diyanete-gore-vicdani-ret-caiz-degil-29135h.htm> (Retrieved November 19, 2020).

³³⁴ The incidents that started as a result of an armed provocative attack by unidentified people against civilians in a coffeehouse which had predominantly Alevi citizens in Gazi district of Sultangazi in Istanbul on March 12, 1995. As a result of the events that spread throughout the city, 22 people died, hundreds were injured and arrested until 15 March. In the subsequent events, the police opened fire on people and a curfew was declared. On March 16, Hayri Kozakçioğlu, the Governor of Istanbul at the time, stated that the incidents had been calmed and the curfew in the

place in recent history intensified the Alevi-Sunni tension. The Alevis formed their own NGOs and have expressed themselves in the form of human rights and group rights especially with the effect of the EU harmonization process since the late 90s. Most Alevi associations demand abolishment of the DRA and compulsory religious courses, recognition and financial support of cem houses as places of worship.

When the AKP came to power, the Alevis were skeptical about it because the party electorate consisted predominantly of nationalists and conservatives and the party was formed by former Milli Görüş politicians. The party program of AKP did not refer to Alevism at all; however, the principle of secularism and religious freedoms were emphasized:

“In fact, secularism enables members of all kinds of religions and beliefs to perform their worship comfortably, to express their religious convictions and live in this direction, but also to organize their lives in this direction. In this respect, secularism is the principle of freedom and social peace. Our party refuses political manipulation of sacred religious values and ethnicity by exploitation. Attitudes and practices that offend religious people and their being subjected to different treatment due to their religious life and preferences are anti-democratic and against human rights and freedoms. On the other hand, it is also unacceptable to exploit religion for political, economic or other interests or to use religion to pressure people who think and live differently.”³³⁶

In fact, the 61st and 62nd government programs of the AKP were the first programs that AKP declared its view on Alevis. The latter stated that “Our Alevi citizens no longer have to hide their identities.”

region was lifted. However, there were nearly 40 dead and hundreds wounded. The autopsy results suggested that 17 people were found to lose their lives due to police bullets.

³³⁵ The burning of the Madımak Hotel by a radical Islamist group during the Pir Sultan Abdal festival held in Sivas on July 2, 1993. 33 writers, 2 hotel staff and 2 dissidents gathered outside died by being burned or asphyxiated by smoke.

³³⁶ AK Parti Programı available at: <https://www.akparti.org.tr/parti/parti-programi/>.

The EU process and as stated in the previous chapter, the EU regular reports on Turkey's progress towards accession which discussed Alevi problems such as compulsory religious instruction, difficulties with opening places of worship and representation within the DRA led the AKP government to engage in openings. 3 Alevi origin politicians, Reha Çamuroğlu, Hüseyin Tuğcu and İbrahim Yiğit, were represented in the AKP government formed after 2007 elections. Çamuroğlu was the counselor of Prime Minister Erdoğan in the opening for 8 months before he resigned his post. He proposed a reform package which demanded establishment of a General Directorate for Alevis in the Prime Ministry, establishment of the Alevi Institute, determining the status of *cemevis* and meeting water and electricity expenses by the state as in mosques, granting Alevi *dedes* with social status and paying them, abolishment of compulsory religious instruction and regulation of school textbooks regarding Alevis. The openings consisted of 7 workshops where members of Alevi associations, academicians, journalists, politicians and members of various NGOs discussed the Alevi issue. The Alevis demanded the same things as Çamuroğlu stated as well as ending discrimination against them and turning Madımak Hotel into a museum.³³⁷ So far, no significant improvement has been recorded with respect to the Alevi demands except expropriation of Madımak Hotel and turning it into a museum later, recognition of *cemevis* as places of worship by a small a number of municipal councils and incorporation of Alevi faith in religious textbooks. The ruling party made symbolic moves such as joining the Alevi fast-breaking or visiting *cemevis*.

The government did not fancy an Alevism marked by heterodoxy and cultural practices. To them, Alevism was a faith system within Islam, which contrasted sharply with some Alevi groups who define Alevism as a philosophy of life or a distinctive culture outside Islam. When replying questions about the

³³⁷ "Alevi Çalışmaları Nihai Rapor", T.C Devlet Bakanlığı- Ankara 2010, available at <https://serdargunes.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/alevi-c3a7alc4b1c59ftaylarc4b1-nihai-rapor-2010.pdf> (Retrieved November 25, 2020).

openings and Alevi fast-breaking dinners, Reha Çamuroğlu pointed out that they were civil initiatives and added

“We, as people who claim and believe that Alevism is within Islam, that we are Muslims -as it has been for a thousand years- of course, we make our invitation based on this criterion.”³³⁸

Erdoğan would liken Alevism to love of the Caliph Ali and state “If Alevism is to love Ali, I am a perfect Alevi.”³³⁹ With respect to the DRA, as early as 2005 when Mehmet Aydın, the State Minister responsible for the DRA, stated that the DRA was not the authority to define the Alevi faith.³⁴⁰ The successive AKP governments avoided restructuring of the DRA along the sects and representation of Alevis. However, it has always been stressed both by the politicians and the DRA authorities that the institution provides religious services to all citizens regardless of their sect or faith. Mustafa Said Yazıcıoğlu, the next State Minister responsible for the DRA, expressed that the new law on DRA did not regard representation of different sects.³⁴¹ The position the AKP as regards representation of different sects within the DRA maintained stability. In 2011, the Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ drew attention to possible “threats” to unity and solidarity “If you structure the DRA according to sects or religious brotherhoods or other structures, it is obvious that a fragmented structure will emerge.”³⁴²

The DRA positioned itself not much different from the established state trends about the Alevi issue. The DRA objected recognition of *cemevis* as places

³³⁸ *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 8, 30. Birleşim, December 5, 2007, p. 105.

³³⁹ “Erdoğan: Alevilik Hz. Ali’yi sevmekse ben dört dörtlük bir Alevi’yim”, *Milliyet*, July 17, 2013, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/siyaset/erdogan-alevilik-hz-aliyi-sevmekse-ben-dort-dortluk-bir-aleviyim-1738091>. (Retrieved November 25, 2020).

³⁴⁰ *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 70, 36. Birleşim, December 24, 2004, p. 100.

³⁴¹ *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 8, 30. Birleşim, December 5, 2007, p. 117.

³⁴² *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, Cilt 8, 33. Birleşim, December 10, 2011, p. 308.

of worship on the grounds that Alevism is a faith system within Islam and their places of worship are mosques, therefore, *cemevis* are not alternatives to mosques.³⁴³ The DRA continued to propagate its own interpretation of Alevism. It was underlined that the institution adopted a non-denominational approach, therefore it cannot attribute a special position to a sect or belief.³⁴⁴ Through the publications of the institution, Alevism was considered within Islam.³⁴⁵ Ali Bardakoğlu, the then chairman of the DRA, compared Alevism to fundamental religious brotherhoods as regards to representation within the DRA, stating that “If Alevis are represented, the Aczimendis can also claim rights.”³⁴⁶ Çakır and Bozan also show that the interviewees in their study do not regard Alevism outside Islam, the DRA does not favor any particular sect and representation of Alevis within the DRA would result in similar claims by other sects, brotherhoods and religions.³⁴⁷ The next chairman of the DRA Mehmet Görmez, for his part, paid a courtesy visit to an Alevi association in 2011 and said “I came here to eat *lokma* with *cans*” referring to a modest meal and humans. He also stated in a TV program, in 2012, that:

“I think the efforts to transform Alevism into a different identity and religion other than Islam is an international engineering operation...The only point we are against regarding *cemevi* is to represent it as a temple of a different religion outside of Islam. *Cemevi* is not an alternative to the mosque. Alevism is a unique way born within the tradition of Islamic wisdom...There should be no legal

³⁴³ Bayram Koca, “Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı ve Aleviler Arasındaki Meseleye Liberal Bir Bakış”, *Liberal Düşünce*, Yıl 19, Sayı 73-74, (Bahar-Yaz 2014), p. 53.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ See *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, March 2003, pp. 5-11; *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, February 2004, pp. 4-7; *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, December 2011, pp. 3-29.

³⁴⁶ Ruşen Çakır and İrfan Bozan 2005, p. 41.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-219.

obstacles to construct *cemevi* and it should be constructed freely.”³⁴⁸

In other instances, the DRA seized the opportunity to reject recognition of *cemevis* as places of worship. For example, The Mufti of Istanbul Mustafa Çağrııcı made similar statements. In 2008, the opinion of the DRA that “*Cemevis* and similar places cannot be considered as places of worship” was included in a letter by the Ministry of Interior sent to the Governorship of Ankara for the removal of two articles in the charter of Çankaya Cemevi Association that defined *cemevis* as places of worship.³⁴⁹ The Court of Cassation overturned the local court's decision rejecting the closure case against Çankaya Cemevi Association emphasizing that it is not possible to accept a place other than mosque and *maşjid* as a place of worship in accordance with the relevant laws and regulations. The Court justified the decision on the law on dervish lodges issued in the name of protecting reforms in the early republican era. In addition, it was stated in the justification that the management of places of worship of the religion of Islam is the duty of the Directorate of Religious Affairs and that mosques and *maşjids* can be opened to worship with the permission of this institution. The *cemevi* issue seemed to reach a deadlock. Erdoğan rejected recognition of *cemevis* as places of worship referring to the related opinion of the DRA. However, according to Mehmet Görmez it was a legal issue and requests, therefore, had to be met within the context of public service adding that recognition of them as places of worship was not a matter of pure theological debate, because the Islamic *fiqh* does not recognize them so.³⁵⁰ To conclude, the government object them referring to the opinion of the DRA and the DRA consider the issue with respect to freedom of religious rights.

³⁴⁸ “Prof Görmez: Cemevi yapmanın önünde engel olmamalı”, *T24*, October 13, 2012, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/prof-gormez-cemevi-yapmanin-onunde-engel-olmamali,215116> (Retrieved October 28, 2020).

³⁴⁹ “Yargıtay’dan cemevi kararı”, *Aljazeera Türk*, July 26, 2012, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/yargitaydan-cemevi-karari> (Retrieved October 28, 2020).

³⁵⁰ Oral Çalışlar, “Diyanet Başkanı’ndan Cemevi görüşü...”, *Hürriyet*, April 11, 2015, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/oral-calislardiyamet-baskanindan-cemevi-gorusu-28706243>. (Retrieved October 28, 2020).

4. 3. 2. The July 15 Abortive Coup

The most striking event that showed the instrumental use of religion, thus the DRA, in the AKP period was undisputedly the July 15, 2016 coup attempt, which was the culmination of the bitter conflict between the ruling elite and the Gülen Movement. In response to the abortive coup attempt the government declared a state of emergency, extending it six times later, suspended the Parliament and engaged in a heavy crackdown. Along with taking legal action to purge plotters, the AKP has tried to foster certain understanding about the coup in citizens through various actions. Attempting to create an official meaning or desired feelings, the government and President Erdoğan engaged in transforming public spaces and constructing a novel history. For example, the Bosphorus Bridge was renamed as July 15 Martyrs Bridge, the largest bus station in Istanbul as Istanbul July 15 Democracy Terminal, a square in Istanbul Kısıklı was changed into the National Will Square, many schools, parks, bus and metrobus stops were renamed after the martyrs. In addition, July 15 was declared a national holiday, Democracy and Freedom Day in order to commemorate the resistance. July 15 Commemoration Notebook was formed in the Presidential Palace for citizens to express their feelings and opinions about the coup attempt. Similar to Kemalist project of constructing a new national identity, the ruling elites have sought to construct a new official ideology based on a leader cult. In 2017, the July 15 coup was incorporated into the high school curriculum, where the incident, the resistance against it, information about the martyrs and personal charisma of President Erdoğan in uniting the nation and suppressing the attempt are presented. Many high schools in Turkey have “July 15 Corner”, where pictures of citizens resisting the plotters and martyrs and their names are pinned. The Turkish Language and Literature Foundation (TED) organized a story and poetry competition on “The History of Coups in Turkey and the July 15 National Will Victory” for high schools.³⁵¹ Similarly, the first lesson after the summer holiday

³⁵¹ See <https://www.tded.org.tr/yarismalar> (Retrieved November 26, 2020).

in 2017 was on the July 15 in primary and secondary education. Students were handed a National Education Ministry- issued pamphlet, which had the address of President Erdoğan, information about the coup attempt, nation, flag, homeland, state, democracy, coup, junta and FETÖ and short video of Erdoğan reading out the national anthem and alongside the footage of the coup attempt.³⁵²

In President Erdoğan and AKP's divisive narrative of "us versus them", the coup plotters were allies of all the enemies of Turkey against whom the heroic *millet* (nation) defended democracy and the homeland. The Gülen Movement, designated as a terrorist organization, FETÖ (Fethullahist Terrorist Organization) or PDY (Parallel State Structure), was called "heretical", which suggested that the AKP and Erdoğan engaged in an Islamic struggle. The organization was accused of exploiting Islam and religious feelings to achieve their criminal plan of taking over the country. The government made use of a nationalistic and conservative narrative and facilitated the Islamization of its response. The DRA, at this point, played a very significant role to legitimize the criminalization of the organization by the ruling politicians. During the night of July 15 all the imams around the country were asked to read the *sala* prayer, which continued all night. *Sala* prayers are read before Friday prayer, for funerals and religious feasts and in the past, it had the purpose of informing people and encouraging people during difficult times. Apart from continuous prayers, imams asked people to flock to the streets. The DRA made a controversial declaration that its staff would not provide Islamic funeral service to the coup plotters. While DRA imams are not officially charged with burial services, Islam stipulates that it is the equal responsibility of all fellow Muslims to provide such religious services to a Muslim.

In its efforts to criminalize the organization, the DRA firstly issued a report named "FETÖ-Organized Religion Abuse in Its Own Language", which

³⁵² "İlk zilde '15 Temmuz Milli İrade Destanı' kitapçığı dağıtılacak", *MEB*, September 15, 2017, <https://meb.gov.tr/ilk-zilde-quot15-temmuz-milli-irade-destaniquot-kitapcigi-dagitilacak/haber/14493/tr>; "Öğrencilere 15 Temmuz kitapçığı", *Haber7com*, September 18, 2016, <https://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/2127699-ogrencilere-15-temmuz-kitapcigi> (Retrieved November 26, 2020).

analyzed “heretical” statements of the FETÖ. The study, prepared by the Higher Council of Religious Affairs over a year, covered the damage caused by the FETÖ leader to Islam by analyzing about 670 hours of audio and video material and 80 books written in Turkish. Mehmet Görmez introduced the report at a press conference held in the conference hall of the DRA noting that the report would be translated into different languages and shared with all religious organizations in the world. Görmez stated that FETÖ abused Allah, the Prophet, the Qur’an, indoctrinated innocent children who accommodated in their dormitories, tried to unite Islam with Christianity through their discourse.³⁵³

Secondly, the DRA held an emergency religious council on August 3-4, 2016. The council gathered with a single agenda item titled “Unity, Solidarity and Future Perspective Against July 15 Coup Attempt and Religious Abuse” in order to evaluate the process after the coup attempt carried out by FETÖ on the night of July 15. Some of the decisions the council took were that FETÖ / PDY cannot be described as a religious structure; adjectives attributed to the leader of FETÖ / PDY cannot be reconciled with Islam; FETÖ / PDY is a movement that openly abuses religion; FETÖ / PDY is a movement of power and interest under the guise of religion; FETÖ / PDY is a fake Mahdi movement; FETÖ / PDY’s religious information sources are questionable; FETÖ / PDY is a friction movement that dismantles the unity of the Islamic Ummah; FETÖ / PDY is an immoral secret movement; FETÖ / PDY is a movement that engages in religious engineering under the disguise of interfaith dialogue and splits monotheism.³⁵⁴ The council listed its actions to discredit and restrain the movement. The destruction the movement caused in Central Asia, the Balkans, Africa and Far East would be shared with the Ministers of Religious Affairs and Chairmen of Religious Affairs

³⁵³ “Diyanet FETÖ Raporu”, *DİYANET TV*, <https://www.diyamet.tv/diyamet-feto-raporu> (Retrieved November 26, 2020).

³⁵⁴ See <https://kurul.diyamet.gov.tr/Etkinlik-Detay/285/olaganustu-din-surasi> (Retrieved November 26, 2020).

of the related countries in the Eurasian Islamic Council, establishing commissions within the High Council of Religious Affairs consisting of academicians from different branches of theology faculties in order to determine the damages caused by the organization and inform the public about them, reviewing religious education in order not to allow such religious structures to deceive society once again, carrying out joint studies with NGOs to avoid similar structures, establishing higher councils within the DRA for religious supervision and guidance, and making efforts addressing the citizens and particularly young people to prevent the moral damages they are subjected to. The decision taken at this council were later published in Albanian, English and Chinese 5.000 copies each.

In its efforts to discredit the organization internationally, the DRA hosted the Eurasia Islamic Council in Istanbul on October 11-14, 2016 under the main title of “Islam in Eurasia, Unity, Solidarity and Future Perspective Against Abuse of Religion” with the participation of 120 representatives from 33 countries and communities. The decisions taken at the emergency religious council previously were reiterated and in the final declaration published, it was clearly stated that the movements mentioned could not be qualified as a “religious group” and a joint struggle was decided against movements abusing religion. Furthermore, the DRA held a workshop on “Religious and Socio-Psychological Dimensions of FETÖ / PDY”, “Interfaith Dialogue, Abuse of Religion and Fethullahist Terrorist Organization” conference, published FETO and DAESH reports in Turkish, English and Arabic and had a documentary called “Heroes of July 15” prepared. The massive crackdown of the government on FETÖ members infiltrated the state took a heavy toll on the institution. Over 3,000 religious officials were suspended and about 1650 were dismissed in 2016.

Lastly, publications and khutbahs by the DRA played an important role in informing the public about insidious deeds of FETÖ. The August and September issues of the *Diyanet Aylık Dergi* extensively covered the abortive coup attempt. The common message given was the treachery of the organization and

instrumentalization of religion for personal interests. For example, one author discussed the West's use of military coups and terrorism as tools of diplomacy in the Islamic world and said:

“Tayyip Erdoğan has begun to voice this project both outside and inside. He drew attention of the world to the command center of the system. With the statement that “the world is bigger than 5 (UN Security Council)”, he has unveiled this structure that legitimizes imperialism. They intensified their attacks. Turkey underwent systematic terrorist attacks, most notably the PKK attacks. While Gezi and December 17-25 December protests were being held inside, perception operations were started in order to overthrow Tayyip Erdoğan through national and international media. When they failed to achieve their goals, they executed the plan of military coup once more.”³⁵⁵

The above excerpt interestingly reverberates the common discourse adopted by the ruling elite, the pro-government media and supporters of the government from different layers of the society. This hegemonic narrative of Westernization of the coup attempt and Islamization of the resistance against has resulted in a surge of nationalistic and conservative feelings. Akin to Mr Erdoğan's populist discourse of “us versus them”, the coup plotters were categorized as allies of Turkey's enemies including the PKK, the West and Turkish people who oppose Erdoğan's policies.

That FETÖ is an organization that engages in “religious engineering” for its own interests was the main theme of the September issue of the same magazine. The authors explain the concept as such that religious engineering refers to situations imposing a particular interpretation of religion and sect on the society. Power concentration which is closely related to the tendency to become worldly is one of the most important factors that lead an individual, society, group,

³⁵⁵ Mehmet Çelik, “Milli İradeye Karşı Diplomasi Aracı Olarak Kullanılan Askeri Darbeler ve Terör Örgütleri”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, August 2016, p. 19.

community, movement, state and political current to religious engineering.³⁵⁶

Previous international organizations held by the movement were also reassessed:

“Inter faith dialogue meetings are primarily a Vatican-based postmodern movement, which include plans to make Muslims doubt about Islam, as well as insidiously Christianize, feature ethnic identities, make Islam Protestant and alienated.”³⁵⁷

In fact, the DRA was also one of the parties that engaged in interfaith dialogue in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Considering heavy criticisms and various publications on missionary activities, culture conflict and efforts at preservation of Turkish-Islamic identity that had previously dominated the institution, the move was promising for the normalization and democratization of the institution. Furthermore, before the fallout of Erdoğan - Gülen, interfaith dialogue organizations were hailed and supported by the government.

Khutbahs played important role in disseminating the message of the DRA on a wider scale. Khutbahs prepared by General Directorate of Religious Services preached treacherous qualities of FETÖ members, exploiting religion for worldly interests, importance of national unity and similar messages for the next four weeks after the coup attempt. The khutbah dated July 22 preached that:

“As a nation, we had one of the hardest, longest and darkest nights in our history on the night of July 15. Our Almighty Lord granted our nation unity and our nation defended the homeland. Undoubtedly, this spirit of unity, solidarity and brotherhood we as nation possess is one of the great blessings. Praise be to God! Thanks to this spirit, we could avoid being plunged into fire and darkness... O Almighty God, do not destroy this nation who challenged the tanks to preserve its

³⁵⁶ See Ejder Okumuş, “Güç Arzusundan Dünyevileşmeye Din Mühendisliği”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, September 2016, pp. 26-29.

³⁵⁷ Lütfi Özşahin, “Dinlerarası Diyalog Gerçekte Nedir?”, *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, September 2016, p. 49.

dignity!... Protect us from any internal and external enemies that harm the survival of our religion, state and nation!”³⁵⁸

Likewise, the khutbah dated July 29 explained that:

As it is stated in the verse, the greatest corruption in the world has been carried out under the name of reform. The biggest corruption is to harm the nation under disguise of religion. The greatest corruption is to deceive people by exploiting the sacred values of religion. In fact, our beloved Prophet said “He who deceives us is not one of us” in the hadith I recited at the beginning of our sermon... However, there are important lessons that we learn from this great calamity we have undergone. We should not forget those who caused this. We should learn our lofty religion from sound sources correctly. We should not surrender our heart, soul, mind and will to others. We should not give credit to those who invite us to serve them rather than Allah. We must protect our unity, solidarity, peace and brotherhood.³⁵⁹

To conclude, for the first time in its history the DRA have strongly raised its criticism against a coup and sided with the elected civilians. As demonstrated previously, the institution had always lent its support to junta members or refrained from delivering its opinion. July 15 coup attempt facilitated active involvement of the institution in current events by mobilizing its all means through its publications and national and international conferences. Khutbahs, in particular, were very useful tools in order to disseminate the message of the institution. Every week, millions of citizens were reached, which enabled indoctrination of the society in the dominant narrative of the government.

³⁵⁸ Khutbah by General Directorate of Religious Services, “Gün, Milletçe Kenetlenme ve Geleceğimizi İnşaa Etme Günüdür”, July 22, 2016.

³⁵⁹ Khutbah by General Directorate of Religious Services, “En Büyük Bozgunculuk, Dinin Muazzaz Değerlerini İstismar Etmektir”, July 29, 2016.

4. 3. 3. The Activities of the DRA Abroad

One important field that shows religion can be transformed into spheres of influence in international arena is the activities of the DRA abroad. As previously mentioned since the 1980s the activities of the DRA have expanded greatly and during the AKP period these foreign activities have been extended to diverse geographies. The importance of DRA as a transnational actor has been proved to be critical for the AKP. This critical role can be understood within the context of change in Turkish foreign policy formulated by Ahmet Davutođlu, who was the former consultant to Mr. Erdoğan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister. According to Davutođlu, it is in Turkey's best interest to take active role in the new international order rather than be a passive observer. He adds that "[Turkey] has the right, experience and power."³⁶⁰ Moreover, in a different speech Davutođlu articulated they charged the DRA with the mission of meeting needs of citizens abroad and Turkic speaking countries such as the Balkans and the Central Asia, playing roles in the Middle East, where sectarian conflicts increased, undertakings in Africa and Latin America and finally establishing relationships with other religions.³⁶¹ Accordingly, the new mission the DRA suggests promotion of Turkish-Islam abroad and a proactive foreign policy of the state through the DRA. The reflection of these views expressed by Davutođlu became visible in the policies of the DRA abroad. The General Directorate for Foreign Relations authorized with the activities of DRA abroad has been charged with the same duties as in the pre-AKP period. Protection of Turkish-Islamic identity of Turkish people residing abroad, carrying out necessary procedures within the scope of Turkish Cultural Heritage Protection Project and providing citizens abroad with religious officials, religious publications and correct religious

³⁶⁰ "Davutođlu: Dünya dzenini deđiřecekse, öncüsü Türkiye olacak", *T24*, January 4, 2011, <https://t24.com.tr/haber/davutoglu-dunya-duzeni-degisecekse-uncusu-turkiye-olacak,120141> (Retrieved November 20, 2020).

³⁶¹ "Diyanete saldırı tesadüfi deđil", *AA*, May 6, 2015, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/diyanete-saldiri-tesadufi-degil/49923> (Retrieved November 20, 2020).

knowledge and such are listed among principles and aims of the Directorate. The role of the DRA in protecting Turkish-Islamic identity was confirmed when an MP from the AKP, Ali Kul, drew attention to efforts of the DRA in contributing to adaptation of citizens abroad without being assimilated and losing their identity.³⁶²

When the AKP came to the office, it reshuffled the leadership of the DRA and academicians from theology faculties became active in the institution. Moreover, more religious consultants and attaches were sent abroad. As of 2016, the institution sent religious officials and attaches to Beijing, New Delhi, Tehran, Kuala Lumpur, Dakar, Cairo, Khartoum, Sanaa, Tokyo, Jerusalem, Belgrade and many other geographies. Other activities of the DRA for the related year included dispatching approximately 580 religious officials abroad for longer and shorter terms respectively; assigning about 300 religious officials and speakers for the celebration of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad and Muharram; establishing sister cities with 205 cities in 95 countries, through which the DRA creates direct collaboration with different Muslim grassroot organizations; education of foreign students in Qur'an courses, International Imam Hatip Schools, theology faculties and postgraduate programs; organizing youth camps and family trainings abroad; free distribution of a total of 257.089 Qur'an translations, catechisms, books on fundamentals of religion and calendars of prayer times abroad in 34 different languages and dialects; participating international religious conferences; and forming religious, official and civil relationships abroad.³⁶³ Within the Turkish Cultural Heritage Protection Program, the institution collaborates with TIKA and Turkish Ministry of Culture to restore mosques and historical buildings constructed at the Ottoman period and construct new mosques, schools, libraries and buildings.

The Eurasian Islamic Council organized by the DRA deserves particular

³⁶² See *TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, 23. Dönem, Cilt 8, 30. Birleşim, December 5, 2007, p. 107.

³⁶³ See *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2016 Faaliyet Raporu*, pp. 65-66.

attention. The first Council under the AKP rule was held in Istanbul on September 5-9, 2005. Religion, culture and identity in Turkey, in the Balkans and in the Central Asia and Muslim identity in modern times were discussed under the title of "Identity". The declaration of the decisions taken at the council emphasized unifying and encompassing character of Muslim identity which rejects gender discrimination and does not exclude geographical, ethnic or national identities; necessity of making an inventory of lost charity properties in the Balkans; protection of religious-cultural heritage; respecting the religious leaders chosen by people; religious, cultural and educational cooperation between the member countries; the need to give the Eurasian Council and international identity; the presence of observers or representative from Muslim countries and Europe; publishing a bulletin called "Eurasia Report"; preparing "family series" booklets about the family which is important for preservation of religious faith and culture; opening a "web page" for communication; organizing a religious and moral TV program that would address Eurasia through the TRT-Int Channel and translating some fundamental publications into local languages. The seventh Council was held in Istanbul between May 12-15 2009 and the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and State Minister Faruk Çelik joined the opening of the Council. The Council decided on publishing the works of great Islamic scholars from the Eurasian geography in multiple languages, establishing "Eurasian Institute of Islamic Studies" within a Turkish university, accrediting the curriculum and scientific approaches in the fields of religious education and higher education of the member states, founding an "International Theology Faculty" in Turkish universities, incorporating religious education, Islam in particular, in formal education in order not to allow the new generations to be misled about religion and cooperating with the Islamic universities, theology faculties, academic research centers, religious administrations in Eurasia in order to create unity of thought and solidarity in the Eurasian region. The eighth Council was held in Istanbul on November 19-22, 2012 with the attendance of the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Vice Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ. The Council declared that they were concerned about wars in the Middle East, unsolved

murders in Eurasia, sectarian conflicts and sectarian identities, Islamophobia and insulting religion especially Islam, should be designated as hate crimes.

The activities of the DRA in the Balkans and the Central Asia, in particular, suggest that Turkey and the DRA act as the symbolic leader of the Muslim communities in these areas.³⁶⁴ The strategic aims of the institution include “creating a perception of objective Islam in the world and spreading this understanding.”³⁶⁵ Offering an interpretation of Islam based on scientific foundations of Islam and leading its spread, collaborating with Islamic countries and Muslim communities to contribute to common working areas and perception of objective Islam are also indicative of this role of the symbolic leader. The institution also organizes meetings in five different platforms apart from the Eurasian Islamic Council to support Muslims around the world in the fields of religious education and services. These organizations are titled Latin American Muslim Leaders Summit, African Muslim Religious Leaders Summit, European Muslims Meeting, Balkan Religious Affairs Presidents Meeting, World Islamic Scholars Peace, Moderation and Common-Sense Initiative. The first Latin American Muslim Leaders Summit, for example, was held in November 2014, in Istanbul with the participation of Latin American Muslims from forty countries including Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay, Cuba, Colombia and Chile. President Erdoğan, emphasizing that they attached great importance to the Summit, wished to consolidate friendship and solidarity between Turkey and Latin American countries and added that Turkey would promote further cooperation between Latin American countries in 2015.³⁶⁶

African continent has been an important geography for the DRA to

³⁶⁴ Kerem Öktem, “New Islamic Actors After the Wahhabi Intermezzo”, p. 35.

³⁶⁵ *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2016 Faaliyet Raporu*, pp. 94-97.

³⁶⁶ “1. Latin Amerika Ülkeleri Müslüman Dini Liderler Zirvesi Sona Erdi”, Dış İlişkiler Genel Müdürlüğü, April 18, 2018, <https://disiliskiler.diyinet.gov.tr/detay/212/1-latin-amerika-%C3%BClkeleri-m%C3%BCsl%C3%BCman-dini-liderler-zirvesi-sona-erdi> (Retrieved November 21, 2020).

establish relationships due to common values, religious unity and historical links. In fact, the Prime Minister Erdoğan had announced their plans to declare 2005 the Year of Africa for cooperation. Turkey established diverse diplomatic, economic and political relations with Africa. The First Turkey-Africa Summit was held in 2008 and then-Prime Minister Erdoğan made a visit to Somalia in 2011. Turkey increased number of its embassies from 12 to 27 and trade volume of Turkey quadrupled from 4 billion U.S dollars to 18 billion.³⁶⁷ Turkish diplomatic expansion in Somalia through the Somalia Initiative entailed the country to deal with political and security issues and state-building.³⁶⁸ Government agencies including TIKA, TUSCON (Turkish Businessmen and Industrialists Confederation), YTB (Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities) have functioned independently in Africa. Scholars argue that Turkish political involvement in Africa is indicative of its efforts to establish new interactions other than the European Union.³⁶⁹ In addition to the above, Turkey has launched diverse relations with the African civil society. It was agreed to form working groups in the fields of fighting poverty, humanitarian and development assistance, activities targeting women, family and youth, infrastructure, health, education, food and water safety, human rights and good governance, science and technology, peace and security issues.³⁷⁰

The DRA's activities and interest in Africa are part of multifaceted Turkish foreign policy. The DRA helps promote Turkish influence in the international arena through religion. Charity activities in the African continent

³⁶⁷ "A Post-2014 Vision for Turkey-Africa Relations", *Insight Turkey*, October 1, 2014, available at: <https://www.insightturkey.com/commentaries/a-post-2014-vision-for-turkey-africa-relations> (Retrieved November 21, 2020).

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ Lotfi Sour, "The Turkish Foreign Policy Dimensions in Africa in AKP Era", *ResearchGate*, April 2019, p. 11, available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333678052_The_Turkish_Foreign_Policy_Dimensions_in_Africa_in_AKP_Era (Retrieved November 21, 2020).

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

facilitate ground level engagement of the DRA. The institution provides humanitarian help through its sacrifice of animals by proxy organization. For example, in 2016 the DRA sent shares of 239, 414³⁷¹ sacrifices to 530 regions where African, Asian, Turkic and Muslim communities live. Within the scope of Sister City Program put into practice in 2006, 31 cities and large-scale districts were matched with a Turkish one and monetary aid of 785, 000.00 liras, 588,970 dollars and 362. 741 euros were sent to spend on mosques, schools and education.³⁷² The DRA activities towards Africa included organization of international summits. Three African Muslim Leaders Summit were organized by the DRA to facilitate communication and aid among the member states. The second Summit, held in Istanbul in November, 2011, focused on changing the negative image of Africa around the globe. It was decided to cooperate in the areas of training religious staff, education, infrastructure, restoration of Ottoman buildings, cultural and religious issues. Formation of a “Afro-Asian Islamic World Religious Leaders Union” that can take initiative to secure peace in conflict regions was recommended.³⁷³ To sum up, religion holds a significant mandate for Eurasian, Balkan and African populations. The DRA activities in the international arena have expanded the spheres of influence in Turkish foreign policy and provided legitimacy. Under the AKP rule, significant improvements in such areas as budget, technology, activities, communication methods and leadership have contributed to transnational expansion of the institution. It has funneled massive resources and capital to engage with grassroots, which has fortified Turkish international presence.

³⁷¹ *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2016 Faaliyet Raporu*, p. 65. Furthermore, 303 and 1.700 students from the Turkic republics, the Balkans, the Caucasia, the Eurasian and African countries were placed in Imam Hatip Schools and undergraduate programs in Turkey. See the same report, p. 97.

³⁷² *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2011 Yılı Faaliyet Raporu*, p. 45. In addition, a mosque was built in the capital city of Mali with the funds raised by Istanbul Eyüp Sultan Mufti Office, *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2013 Faaliyet Raporu*, p. 61.

³⁷³ “Afrika Dini Liderler Zirvesi’nde barış vurgusu”, *Haber7com*, November 24, 2011, <https://www.haber7.com/guncel/haber/809683-afrika-dini-liderler-zirvesinde-baris-vurgusu> (Retrieved November 22, 2020).

4. 4. Conclusion

The analysis of the period between November 2002, when the AKP took office, and July 2016 suggests that the instrumentalization of the DRA in politics increased remarkably. During the first two terms of the AKP rule, the party tried to strike a balance between democratic consolidation and assertive laicism and sought for the gradual loosening of the state grip on religious affairs and institutions. Yet, as the party consolidated its power, it adopted a majoritarian conception of democracy and conservative policy. The policies and discourse of the AKP are indicative of its aims to create an Islamic or conservative society. Thus, massive AKP support for the DRA rests at the center of ideological positioning of the party. Within this juncture, the DRA has attained a special place in the AKP's policy of creating "acceptable" citizen with a religious and Sunni identity like the earlier Kemalist project of similar kind. However, the Kemalists opted for controlling and restricting public manifestations of religion, the AKP incorporated religious elements into the public space to regulate it. Furthermore, the large network that the DRA has throughout the country affords the institution a leverage that no government can ignore. While strengthening the DRA is important for the realization of ideological principles of the AKP, it also mean consolidation of electoral base and social stability.

Under the rule of the AKP, the Directorate has functioned as an ideological state apparatus in restructuring social and political life through its role in moral and religious guidance. It has assumed a key role in family and gender, education, youth and foreign policies of the AKP. The DRA has enjoyed enlargement of its functions, resources and support from the AKP governments, with the Directorate reaching out to greater segments of the public outside the mosque. During AKP's incumbency, there has been a considerable trend to turn "acceptable Muslim" into "active Muslim". Contrary to "acceptable Muslim" who is obedient to the nation-state and laicism and embraces privatized religion with few expressions of religious identity in the public sphere, "active Muslim" coalesces modern lifestyle with Islamism demanding the full recognition of their

rights. Islam has become the definite marker in the identity-formation of the individuals as citizens in AKP policies. Thus, the DRA has facilitated the process where Muslim identity is expressed openly in the public sphere and Muslims negotiate their place and rights in the society. The political establishment infuse religious beliefs into its policies and positions the DRA, by the same token, as one of the key symbols of the government. For instance, its role in family and gender policies reflects the government policy of ‘strengthening the Turkish family’. In its efforts to regulate the gender roles, the Directorate has accessed the private sphere through Family and Religious Guidance Department and its protocol with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. Similarly, its support to the AKP’s crackdown and criminalization of the Gülen Movement helped legitimize the government’s practices. It functioned under the service of the state policies and realized the dominant ideology instilling individual citizens with the hegemonic government narrative by mobilizing its all means.

While state control over the DRA and unofficial forms of religion was dominant both before and under the AKP rule, one significant transformation is the growing autonomy of the Directorate during the AKP period. Unlike previous instances where the DRA timidly challenged the state claims of supervision over Islam, the DRA officials, under the chairmanship of Mehmet Görmez in particular, have become more autonomous who take initiatives on their own. Since then, there has been a considerable effort of the DRA to reconcile modern lifestyle with an Islamic character. To this end, the DRA aims to extend the religious sphere and penetrate the society through its extensive network and rich variety of means. Its endeavors to act as an opinion leader in socio-political issues like family, the Kurdish and Alevi issues suggest that the Directorate has abandoned its traditional role and adopted an active one that instills citizens with certain values.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The development of the relationship between politics and religion in Turkey has always been a sensitive issue because of the exceptional Turkish style laicism which incorporates a constitutional unit charged with the religious service into the state bureaucracy. This shows stark resemblances with the Ottoman tradition of keeping the *ulama* within the state bureaucracy, through establishing the DRA. Religion, like the military, is such important for the state that it cannot afford to allow religious activity oversight of its control. While strict laicism policies imposed by the early republican state aimed at decreasing the public visibility of Islam and rendering religion a private matter, Islam was established in a different way that supported Kemalist program of creating a new national identity consisted of Muslim identity and radical Turkishness. The “official Islam” that the Kemalist modernizers aspired to institute was freed from superstitions and traditions which were prevalent in folk Islam as well as rationalist and apolitical. When it was established in 1924, the main task of the DRA was to control religion and propagate this understanding of Islam, that was in line with the political needs. Since then, it has functioned as an ideological state apparatus which has had *de jure* monopoly on regulating and representing Islam in the public sphere.

Due to the extensive network of the institution and Islam’s being a marker in Turkish politics, the Directorate has been used a political instrument by all governments regardless of their ideologies. Yet, this instrumentalization varies in response to the different state ideologies. The period between September 12, 1980 coup d’état and July 15, 2016 signifies a historical shift in the instrumentalization of the DRA. With the decline of the classical Kemalism, the institution has been strengthened and Islam has been incorporated into the state discourse and policies.

The 1982 constitution charged the DRA with national unity and solidarity both at home and abroad. The institution was authorized to instill the society

morally as well as regulating the material conditions of religious life. The relationship between the DRA and the political leadership evolved into the one that subordinated religion to political demands. The DRA, which had kept a relative distance to politics during the multi-party democracy became increasingly politicized. The official periodical and khutbahs of the institution helped propagate the statist and nationalistic discourse framed by the military rule. The high-profile DRA officials tried to exert their influence on their readers, most notably imams who had direct contact with the society. As a matter of fact, the official periodical operated as a think tank in the first few years of the military takeover rather than a religious institution. Articles that analyzed foreign policy strategically in terms of imperialist struggle, the geographical position and resources of our country aimed at sidelining disputes over the coup.

The DRA increased control over its provincial units and staff through different mechanisms to disseminate official Islam. The chairman of the DRA, Tayyar Altıkulaç, and several state ministers prepared a secret report about some religious brotherhoods which were accused of trying to change the regime into a sharia state. The report gave the state a strong mandate to centralize khutbahs. In 1981, the central body of the DRA banned extemporaneous khutbah recitation in mosques all over Turkey. Imams were to comply with the khutbahs prepared by the DRA and published in the weekly magazine. The move aimed at preventing preaching different interpretations of religion that were deemed ‘harmful’ by the state and using the opportunity to instrumentalize religion for creating consent. Furthermore, imams were banned to engage in politics and had to strictly comply with the instructions published in the magazine.

After the coup, the DRA’s activities extended to European countries with Turkish immigrant populations. Through organizational and financial support of the state, the DRA was charged with the preservation of Turkish-Islam character of Turkish immigrants in Europe, as well as loyalty to the Turkish state. Turkish religious brotherhoods such as Milli Görüş had already organized well at the grassroots, which challenged the Turkish state’s control over Turkish Muslims.

To this end, it sent religious officials to these countries to counterbalance the effect of Turkish and foreign Islamic brotherhoods on Turkish Muslims. Through the imams who were public employees and sent directly by the DRA, the institution could infiltrate Turkish-dominated mosques and propagate official Islam. Thus, the DRA's duty of formulating and regulating 'correct' Islam and supervising religious activity outside Turkey expanded.

Whereas transition to civilian politics in Turkey and the end of the Cold War resulted in a less politicized DRA, instrumentalization of the DRA in "aiming at national unity and solidarity" did not cease in the 1990s. Domestic developments in this decade such as the escalation of the armed conflict between the PKK and TAF reverberated throughout the discourse of the DRA. The khutbahs and publications of the DRA were dominated by such themes as patriotism, nationalism, martyrdom, defense of homeland, military service, important historical events in Turkish history and noble characteristics of the Turkish nation. One thing that these had in common was that they preached a tamed Islam as well as loyalty to the Turkish state.

The coups have always had dramatic effects on the DRA including the February 28 coup. The February 28, was the resurgence of classical Kemalist ideology with radical laicism, nationalism and supremacy of the state. Thus, the DRA was used as a political instrument to propagate officially sanctioned views and practices on religiosity. Religious activity by different actors, namely Islamic brotherhoods, were banned as they were outside of the oversight of the state. Any public visibility of religion and 'unauthorized' religious activity were repressed and criminalized through the support of the media, Higher Education Council and more. Management of all mosques were placed under the jurisdiction of the DRA and a complete centralization of khutbahs were achieved at this period. And as indicated before, the content of the khutbahs were checked by the military staff. The DRA, under the chairmanship of Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz, failed to show strong objections to the smear campaign against religious people.

The activities of the DRA in Europe and Eurasia in the same decade elevated the status of it into an important instrument in Turkish foreign policy. The collapse of the Eastern Bloc in the early 1990s facilitated the penetration of the DRA into these geographies. The DRA has become an important transnational actor that could create spheres of influence for the Turkish state through its operations that reflected a state-sponsored pan-Turkism as a bulwark against Saudi Wahhabism and Iranian Shi'a Islam.

Since the AKP's rise to power in 2002, the relationship between state and religion has become one of the much-debated topics. In its initial years in the office, the AKP characterized itself as a conservative democratic party and tried to strike a balance between laicism and democracy. Yet, as the party consolidated its power and subjugated the judiciary and the military through several reforms over the years, it has grown authoritarian as well as more conservative and nationalist. Hence the reason, the DRA has assumed a central position at this point transforming into one of the most important state institutions that promotes and reflects AKP's ideological position.

Unlike much of republican history where religion had been restricted to the private sphere, the successive AKP governments have emboldened religion. From the perspective of Kemalist-Islamist cleavage, the state ideology has accommodated religion and conservatism marking a watershed in a country where laicism has been implemented for decades. The institution, therefore, has transformed into representing a new version of Islam embraced by the ruling AKP from a secularist tool to control religion and disseminate official-Kemalist version of Islam. It can be argued that the DRA has experienced its most powerful period under the successive AKP governments. Its budget, range of activities, legal and bureaucratic position have improved significantly. Partly due to the personal factor of the new chairman of the DRA, Mehmet Görmez, the institution increased its efforts in providing religious services outside mosques.

However, there is a marked increase in both the strength and the variety of

mechanisms in the reinforcement and promotion of the state ideology particularly after 2010. The institution has extended its services to health institutions, prisons, nursing homes and dormitories, found a TV channel and a radio station, launched a Twitter account, a Facebook account and a YouTube channel, started to issue *halal* certificates to food products and provide *fatwas* on demand through a hotline service. These moves have increased the DRA's weight in society in a wider level outside the mosque and facilitated the role of the institution in regulating the religiosity of the public and disseminating the Sunni-Hanefi Islam. In addition, the activities of DRA abroad have expanded greatly and it has become an indispensable tool in foreign policy. It has become a transnational actor that can create spheres of influence for the state beyond its borders by including Latin America and Africa to its existing areas of operation. It can be argued that the DRA has assumed the de facto leadership of Sunni Islam around the world under the AKP rule.

The DRA has also played significant roles in supporting the government during July 15 coup attempt and afterwards. The institution actively involved in helping the AKP create a new history myth and foster certain understanding about coup. It mobilized all its means to legitimize the dominant government narrative and heavy crackdown on the culprits. Designating the Gülen Movement as terrorist organization, the institution engaged in discrediting the organization nationally and internationally through conferences, workshops and publications. Its reports on FETÖ, emergency religious council, and Eurasian Council helped propagate the idea the FETÖ abuses religion for personal interests. Khutbahs and publications of the DRA facilitated inculcating the citizens with the official narrative. Through its monopoly in representation of Islam, the DRA legitimized the criminalization of the coup plotters.

To sum up, the use of religion to legitimize and reinforce state ideology, generate support and silence critics has been achieved through the DRA by various political authorities with different ideologies. What the AKP and the previous political powers have in common is instrumentalization of the DRA in

political and social debates by both camps and not reflexing the strict control on religious activity outside the oversight of the state. The perception that the DRA has become almost synonymous with the AKP needs to consider the fact that the AKP's ideology is pro-religious, therefore, the institution's promotion of the state ideology is not unique to the AKP period. From the perspective of Kemalist-Islamist cleavage, the state ideology in the AKP period has accommodated religion and conservatism marking a watershed in a country where strict laicism has been implemented for decades. During this time, the institution has transformed into promoting religion from a secularist tool to control religion and disseminate official-Kemalist version of Islam. Furthermore, considering that all the staff of the DRA are public employees, it is a requirement that they follow state directives and fulfill the tenets of the law and the constitution. However, with its extensive network and administrative capacity, the institution has created its own dynamics. In addition to striking a balance between laicism and Islam, the Directorate has challenged the rigid Kemalist laicism from time to time. It has tried to enlarge the religious lifeworld and extend its services outside the mosque.

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APPENDIX: TURKISH EXCERPTS FROM THE KHUTBAHS USED IN THE STUDY

27 Mayıs İnkılabı'nın Önemi Hakkında Hutbe

Fatihlerin, Yavuzların, Yıldırım ve Atatürk'ün izinden giden kahraman bir milletiz. İşte Milli Birlik Hükümeti ve azası bu ulvi milleti temsil etmektedir.... Çünkü millet devletsiz, devlet de milletsiz olamaz...O halde aziz cemaat, biz de millet olarak köylü ve şehirli hepimiz elbirlik Milli Birlik Hükümeti'mize, ordumuza müzahir olmalıyız.

July 1, 1981

Muhterem Müslümanlar

İslam'ın emri olan iktisat ve tasarruf, aynı zamanda memleketimizin her manada ilerlemesi, muasır milletler seviyesine ulaşabilmesi için, uymak zorunda olduğumuz, milli bir görevdir...Vatanın kutsallığına inanan kişiler olarak, tasarruflarımızla ülkemizin kalkınmasına yardımcı olalım. Sevgili Peygamberimiz (s.a.v) in: “Zaman gelecektir ki para olmadıkça ne din, ne de dünya hiçbirini muhafaza edilemeyecektir.” (10) hadisi şerifinde ifade ettiği mananın, günümüzdeki önemini iyi anlayalım.

June, 1983

Kaçakçılıkta her şeyden önce, devlet hazinesi ve milli ekonomi zarara sokulmakta, milli mefaatler zedelenmektedir. Halbuki Hz. Peygamber bir sohbetinde “Vatan sevgisinin imandan bir parça” olduğuna işaret etmişlerdir. Yurdunu ve milletini seven kişi bu gibi davranışların faili olamaz...Milli ekonomiyi düşünmeyerek, milli mefaatleri hiçe sayarak, kaçakçılık yapmanın, dinimizin hedef aldığı hayırla hiçbir ilişkisi bulunmamaktadır.

October, 1983

İslam dinine en uygun olan devlet idare sistemi de Cumhuriyettir. Sevgili Peygamberimiz (S.A.V.), sağlığında, dünyevi işlerde daima ashab-ı kiramla istişarede bulunarak, cumhuriyetin esası olan “meşveret”ten ayrılmamış ve bu konuda müslümalara güzel örnekler vermiştir... Şu halde istiklal ve hürriyetimizi tehlikeye sokmaya çalışan iç ve dış mihraklara karşı uyanık olmak zorundayız.

February 20, 2015

Öyle ki, bizim inancımıza göre bir insanı öldüren sanki bütün insanları öldürmüştür... Neden açlık endişesiyle doğmamış yavruların öldürülmesini büyük günahlar arasında saymıştır?

June 5, 2015

İrkçılık, esasında hem insanlığa karşı işlenen bir suç hem de Allah'a karşı bir saygısızlıktır. Bu nedenledir ki Dinimiz İslâm, bağnazlık, asabiyet ve ırkçılığı tüm unsurlarıyla reddetmiştir.

September 11, 2015

Hiçbir insani ve ahlaki değer tanımayan cinayet şebekelerinin işlediği cürümlerden dolayı, aynı kibleye yöneldiğimiz, aynı peygambere ümmet olduğumuz, sevincimizi ve kederimizi, varlığımızı ve yokluğumuzu paylaştığımız masum kardeşlerimizi suçlamayalım. Komşumuzdan, akrabamızdan terörün hesabını sormaya kalkışmayalım. Unutmayalım ki; biz, tahriklere kapılıp sokaklarda birbirimize düştüğümüzde sadece cinayet şebekelerinin hain emellerine hizmet etmiş oluruz.

February 5, 2016

Geleceğimizin teminatı yavrularımızın yetişmesi için, göz aydınlığı çocuklarımızı, okullarımızda tercihe bağlı olarak okutulan Kur'an-ı Kerim ve Peygamber Efendimizin Hayatı derslerini seçmeye teşvik edelim. Bunun, anne babalar olarak üzerimize düşen dini bir vazife olduğunu unutmayalım.

July 22, 2016

15 Temmuz gecesi millet olarak tarihimizin en zor, en uzun ve karanlık gecelerinden birini yaşadık. Yüce Rabbimiz, bütün unsurlarıyla milletimize kenetlenmeyi nasip etti ve milletimiz emanetine sahip çıktı. Hiç kuşkusuz millet olarak sahip olduğumuz bu birlik, beraberlik ve kardeşlik ruhu en büyük nimetlerden biridir. Hamdolsun! Bu büyük nimet sayesinde ateş çukuruna yuvarlanmaktan ve karanlığa gömülmekten kurtulduk... Geliniz, bu Cuma gününde, bu mübarek saatte hep birlikte el açıp Yüce Rabbimize yalvaralım: Allah'ım! İzzetine sahip çıkmak için tanklara meydan okuyan bu millete zeval verme!... Dinimizin, devletimizin, milletimizin bekasını sarsacak her türlü dâhili ve harici düşmanlardan bizleri halas eyle!

July 29, 2016

Ayet-i kerimede de buyrulduđu gibi tarih boyunca yeryüzünde en büyük bozgunculuk ıslah adı altında yapılmıştır. En büyük bozgunculuk din kisvesine bürünerek millete kötülük yapmaktır. En büyük bozgunculuk dinin muazzez değerlerini istismar ederek insanları aldatmaktır. Nitekim Sevgili Peygamberimiz, hutbemizin başında okuduğum hadis-i şerifte “Bizi aldatan bizden değildir” buyurmuştur... Ancak başımızdan geçen bu büyük badireden elbette millet olarak çıkaracağımız büyük dersler vardır. Bu aziz millete bu kötülüđu reva görenleri unutmamalıyız. Yüce dinimizi, sahih kaynaklardan doğru bir şekilde öğrenmeliyiz. Kalbimizi, gönlümüzü, ruhumuzu, aklımızı, fikrimizi, irademizi başkalarına teslim etmemeliyiz. Bizi Allah’a kulluk yerine kendine kul ve köle olmaya davet edenlere zerre kadar itibar etmemeliyiz. Birlik ve beraberliğimizi, huzur ve kardeşliğimizi korumalıyız.