

SECULARISM AND ISLAMIC MODERNISM IN TURKEY

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This paper focuses on the institutionalization of secularism in Turkey through the establishment of a Directorate of Religious Affairs as a state office, vested with full authority over Islamic thought and practice. It explores the ways in which the state promoted this Directorate as the only legitimate Islamic authority in Turkey and how, in the 1990s, alternative voices representing Islamic thought and practice gained salience and challenged the authority of official Islam. It is in such a context that the "Islamic modernizers" emerged as a new political movement around AK (Justice and Development) Party, which broke off from the former Islamist party Refah/Fazilet, and won a major victory at the 2002 general elections. The paper addresses the emergence of AK Party and its policy toward secularism, political Islam and nationalism.

KEYWORDS: Islam in Turkey; political Islam; nationalism; Islam and modernity; secularism; AK Party.

The AK Party government that came to power following the November 2002 general elections marked the beginning of a new era not only in Turkish history but globally in terms of the place and status of Islam within modern secular systems.¹ These elections wiped off from politics all of Turkey's main political parties that have ruled the country since early 1980s. Parties including Turkey's first female prime minister Tansu Ciller's party DYP (True Path Party); ANAP, (the Motherland Party) that stayed in coalition governments almost all through the 1990s; the nationalist MHP that had managed to increase its support base as a result of veering toward the center-right; Bulent Ecevit's DSP (Democratic Left Party) that had emerged as the leading party in the 1999 elections and had led the DSP-MHP-ANAP coalition until 2002, and finally Saadet Party which is the continuation of the Islamist Refah/Fazilet under Necmettin Erbakan's vicarious leadership all receiving less than the 10% threshold, faced a daunting defeat. The certain victor of these elections was without a doubt the AK Party under the leadership of Istanbul's former Mayor Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, which had separated from the Islamist Refah/Fazilet Party only a year before. Obtaining 34 % of the general vote, AK Party won a majority of the seats in the parliament, allowing it to form the government on its own. In fact, AK Party's victory was so substantial that it was only 4 seats away from the 2/3rd-majority requirement

¹ This essay is a shorter and revised version of a chapter from Alev Cinar, *Modernity, Secularism and Islam in Turkey: Bodies, Places and Time* (2005).

for making amendments to the constitution. In August 2003 with the transfer of 5 MPs from other parties, AK Party now has the necessary majority (368) to make constitutional amendments on its own. In other words, for the first time in the history of Turkey, a political party with Islamist origins had come to power with a sufficient majority so as to change the constitution. Hence, it is possible, at least hypothetically, for AK Party to remove, say, the secularism clause from the constitution. However, such an option was never even uttered within the ranks of AK Party, and its leader, Prime Minister Erdoğan has stated at every opportunity that they are a secular party and are adamantly against the use of religion for political purposes. As soon as AK Party came to government, the first task they undertook was advancing Turkey's long-held dream to become a member of the European Union.

The global significance of the AK Party government was that this was going to be the first time experience of an Islam-based political movement coming to power with an overwhelming majority in an adamantly secular system, without facing a military intervention or other restrictions to its performance. Hence, not only secularist circles in Turkey but the whole world would be watching the outcome of this genuine experiment in what an Islam-based political party can do with a modern-secular system when it can enjoy unrestrained power.

This paper examines the unique way in which secularism was institutionalized in Turkey, and makes the argument that political Islam in Turkey is a *product* of this secular system. In other words, Islam was politicized and turned into a political ideology because secularism was institutionalized as state monopoly over religion. This paper also argues that the AK Party's political line, which can best be described as an "Islamic modernism," was also made possible by the unique way in which secularism was understood and implemented.

Throughout this paper I use the terms secularism and Islamism as ideologies, or political projects that seek to transform and establish a socio-political order on the basis of a set of constitutive norms and principles. Islamism, is used to refer to a political ideology, which uses selective postulates from Islam so as to constitute and justify itself. Not all Islamist ideologies are fundamentalist in the sense that they seek to resort to the fundamentals of Islam or seek to retrieve doctrines and practices from a sacred past. Nor do all Islamist ideologies seek to overtake state power and establish an Islamic rule based on the shariat (Islamic law). The Islamism of Turkey's main Islamist movement that formed around the Refah Party of the 1990s is neither fundamentalist in this sense, nor do they seek to change the secular constitutional system to form an Islamic state.

The surest way to assess the ideological stance and political priorities of a party would be to look at their deed when in power. Refah Party had a very short term in government in 1996, and that was a coalition government with a secular center-right party. The more telling experience is the performance and

policy implementations of the Refah-ruled city administration of Istanbul after 1994. When the activities of Istanbul's city administration under Refah are examined, it becomes quite evident that Refah Party's Islamism is concerned not so much with changing the basic structure and main institutions of the secular system, but rather is preoccupied with Islam's role in defining Turkey's national identity. In the 1990s Refah Party started to propagate a counter-discourse to official secular national identity. Since official ideology had defined Turkey as West-oriented, the Islamist discourse identified itself as an East-oriented project. In contrast to the official ethnic-based Turkish nationalist ideology, the Islamist alternative promoted an essentially Ottoman-Islamic identity. Hence, the Islamism of Refah Party was much more concerned with reclaiming what they believed to be Turkey's true identity and culture, than with changing the basic institutions of the state.

Refah Party was the main Islamist political party in Turkey that increased its support base geometrically within a decade, a trend that brought the party to government in 1996. After a decree issued by the National Security Council against the rising threat of political Islam in 1997, Refah Party was forced to move out of government, and it was closed in 1998. It reemerged immediately after, under a new name, Fazilet Party, which became the main opposition party in the parliament after the 1999 general elections. In 2001, Fazilet Party was closed again by the constitutional court after which the party split into two. While the older more conservative generation organized around Necmettin Erbakan's vicarious leadership (vicarious, because Erbakan was banned from politics at the time) taking the name Saadet (Felicity) Party, the moderate wing representing the younger generation found the *Adalet ve Kalkınma* (Justice and Development) Party under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who came to power as a majority government following the November 2002 elections.

Secularism as monopoly on Islam

Secularism in Turkey is not just a policy but is in fact one of the basic principles of the founding ideology of the state. Soon after secularism was established as the founding ideology of the Turkish Republic, it transcended the realm of ideology within the public sphere, and became common sense dictating and framing the norms and standards of public life. Secularism in Turkey is distinctively unique in that rather than follow the common pattern where all religious affairs are separated from formal political affairs, the new Turkish state in its founding years brought all religious activity under the direct control and monopoly of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, a state institution. Thus, Islamic authority, practice, and knowledge were placed under the strict and direct control of the *secular* state. This institutionalization of secularism also involved a tight

control of the public visibility and presence of Islam. While official Islam was given a limited and tightly controlled place in the public sphere, autonomous Islamic discourses were suppressed and kept out.²

In order to understand the politicization of Islam in Turkey, secularism as a foundational principle needs to be examined more closely. Secularism has been the most essential part of the founding ideology, because it was to replace Islam as the single most important guiding principle around which social, political, cultural life under the Ottomans were organized. Serif Mardin writes that in Ottoman society, heterodox Islam that consisted of a wide range of sufi orders scattered around the Empire was deeply ingrained in daily life not only regulating ordinary daily activity but also serving as a system of meaning and a buffer between the imperial state and the common folk.³ Since Islam played such a constitutive role in Ottoman society, the foundational ideology that was to replace it had to serve a similar function and act as a guiding principle that would organize the public as well as the private spheres. As such, secularism emerged not only as a principle governing formal political affairs of the state, but also as a norm that would reshape the public and private lives of citizens.

For this reason secularism in Turkey has acquired distinctively unique characteristics. Rather than following the common pattern where all religious affairs are separated from formal political affairs, the institutionalization of secularism involved the bringing of all religious activity under the direct control and monopoly of the *secular* state. In 1924 a Directorate of Religious Affairs was formed to act as the ultimate authority on the knowledge and practice of Islam. The Directorate would operate directly under the Office of the Prime Minister, and its chair and board would be appointed by the president. Simultaneously with the establishment of the Directorate, all other practices and authorities of Islam were outlawed, including the Caliphate, which had been the institutional ruler of Islam all over the world since the 16th century. Autonomous religious lodges (*tekke* and *zaviye*) and sufi orders (*tarikât*) were banned. A secular civil code was adopted from Switzerland to replace the previous codes based on Islamic law (Shariat) outlawing all forms of polygamy, annulling religious marriages and granting equal rights to men and women in matters of inheritance, marriage and divorce. The religious court system and institutions of religious education were abolished. The “use of religion for political purposes” was banned under the new secular Penal Code; the Ottoman dynasty was expatriated; the article that defined the Turkish state as “Islamic” was removed from the Constitution; and the alphabet was changed, replacing Arabic letters with Roman ones.

While autonomous Islamic authorities were dissolved one after the other, the Directorate of Religious Affairs was authorized to oversee the knowledge

² For an account of the visibility of official Islam in the public sphere, see Öncü (1995).

³ Mardin (1971).

and practice of Islam, which included the supervision of all mosques and the public sermons given there, the appointment of imams and the production and dissemination of Islamic knowledge.

State control over Islam also involved the strict regulation of its public visibility and presence. The Hat Law of 1925 outlawed the wearing of religious garb and the turban *except for* the staff of the Directorate of Religious Affairs and the imams of mosques. The unauthorized wearing of religious garb was severely penalized, not so much because secular authorities were against Islam per se, but because such “imposters” were confused with government-appointed religious officials and thereby “undercut the authority of the authorized personnel.”⁴ In other words, what the secular state was against was the presence of Islam that was beyond its control.

One of the most controversial attempts to bring Islam under the control of the secular state was the changing of the call for prayers (*ezan*) from Arabic, the sacral language of Islam, to Turkish. In this case, “control” was attempted by the nationalization of a prevailing Islamic ritual. The first call for prayers in Turkish, translated into “pure Turkish” by the Turkish Language Association founded by Atatürk, was chanted in 1932 in the Ayasofya Mosque in Istanbul, and then standardized throughout mosques around the country upon the orders of the Directorate of Religious Affairs.⁵ Since the *ezan* is chanted five times a day from atop minarets scattered around cities, intended to be heard by everyone, it is a highly salient mark of the undeniable presence of Islam in the public sphere. By chanting the *ezan* in Turkish, the secular state not only brings under control Islam that has gained a unique presence in public through sound, but also submits it to nationalist discourse. This intervention, however, never became popular, could not be institutionalized, and was abolished by the populist Democrat Party regime in 1950.

As such, the institutionalization of secularism involved not exclusion, but a tightly controlled inclusion of Islam in the public sphere. In order to establish secularism as the dominant national ideology, the discourses, practices, and institutions of secular nation-building included rather than excluded religion as a presence within the public sphere. This gesture of public inclusion is the means by which the authority of the secular state is realized and consolidated. In other words, the formation of the nation-state involved the creation of a secular-national public sphere, where, contrary to the common understanding that secularism excludes religion, religious practices, knowledges, and movements were monitored and given a specific public presence. While official Islam was given a limited and closely monitored place in the public sphere, autonomous Islamic practices were disallowed.

⁴ Cited in Kezer (1999: 212).

⁵ The Turkish *ezan* did not become a law until 1941, which was then annulled in 1950 and Arabic was resumed. *Diyanet Aylık Dergi*, September 1991, No. 9, 502-504.

Until the late 1980s, neither secularism nor the tight control over Islam in Turkey were debated or discussed in the public sphere. Alternative Islamic discourses continued to exist outside the public sphere, mostly in the form of gatherings around mystical religious orders (*tarikât*), which survived due to their traditions of secrecy and covertness. Islamism as an ideology and Islamic intellectual activity survived around such informal social networks maintained through personal connections and communal gatherings around literature, music and poetry that escaped public visibility, and thereby avoiding the disciplining gaze of the state. Secularism was omnipresent and invisible, and only “official” Islam was present.⁶

However, toward the end of the 1980s, starting with the spreading practice of “new veiling” and later the expansion of the activities of the Islamist city administrations of the Refah Party in Istanbul and Ankara, autonomous Islamic discourses started to gain presence in the public sphere.⁷ With the emergence of such autonomous discourses and new Islamic identities that challenged the authority and invisible power of secularism, this founding state ideology became visible and once again a matter of contestation, debate and negotiation. Islamist interventions also attempted to normalize Islamism as a new national ideology, but this project was cut short as a result of pressures and protests by secularist circles, particularly the military that culminated in the National Security Council decree against political Islam in 1997.

Islamic modernism and the emergence of AK Party

Under Refah Party, Islamic discourse turned into an Islamist political project, which contested the authority of secularism, but retained the nationalist, homogenizing and authoritative systems of state control intact and uncontested. It is this fusion of Islamic discourse with modern systems of control that became a concern not only for secularist circles, but also for some Islamist circles as well. In this respect, it is significant that Islamist intellectuals such as Ali Bulaç have been warning the Islamist movement against the dangers of nationalism and modernity, and suggesting that it remains a social movement that works toward the expansion of democratic rights and freedoms in civil society.⁸

As Refah Party became a mass party more than doubling its support base during the early 1990s, it also found it necessary to veer its ideological

⁶ For a more detailed account of the institutionalization of secularism as a founding ideology in Turkey, see Cinar (2005).

⁷ “New-veiling” is a term used by Arlene MacLeod to describe the type of Islamic attire that developed in the early 1980s in Egypt—a specifically urban and middle class phenomenon and not a continuation of a traditional Muslim dress style; see MacLeod (1991).

⁸ Bulaç (1993).

stance toward the center of the political spectrum. However, this resulted in increasing tensions within the party, mostly between the conservative and fundamentalist line that took an antagonistic and uncompromising stance toward secularism and the Republic, and the moderate line that endorsed compromise and dialogue with secularist circles. This latter movement, organized around the Istanbul city administration under the leadership of Mayor Erdoğan, grew more powerful during Erdoğan's incumbency as his popularity soared in Istanbul. In order to facilitate dialogue with secularism, the Istanbul city administration under Erdoğan diverted substantial resources to organize forums, panels, conferences and seminars to publicly debate secularism and the role and status of Islam within the current constitutional system with other social forces and particularly secularist circles. The response of secularists to these invitations has been marked by a consistent and stark rejection. An adamantly secularist journal, *Devinim* published a special issue on this topic, titled "Compromise is Not Possible with Reactionaries!" The author of the lead article noted that "they use terms like Islamic intellectual and ask us to go into dialogue with them. There can be no such thing. An intellectual cannot be Islamist, and an Islamist cannot be an intellectual. The reason is very clear. An Islamist wants the state to be governed according to the principles of Islam, whereas an intellectual is secular."⁹

This reasoning, which has resonated through secularist discourse, refuses to acknowledge Islamism as a legitimate political contender with whom constitutional norms may be negotiated. Secularist circles were convinced from the onset that Islamist interventions in the public sphere could only serve the goal of forcefully taking over the state and establishing an Islamist regime based on the Shariat, similar to Iran. Within this secularist discourse, a mere piece of headscarf comes to be perceived as a direct threat to the security of the state and the existence of the secular system.

Islamist interventions may not have reached their goal to transform society as they envisioned, but their overall effect has been to open up the principle of secularism to negotiation. The advancement of an alternative nationalist ideology that projected a different sense of nationhood with a radically different understanding of national history resulted in the unsettling of the power and normalized status of secularism in the public sphere and forced it to be perceived as just another ideological position. In other words, Islamist interventions served to reveal that secularism is neither natural nor a fact of public life but indeed another forged and partial principle that is quite negotiable and contestable. It is particularly this effect of Islamist interventions, which unsettled the authority of secularism that the state responded to with an ultimatum issued on February 1997.

⁹ Gülen (1994).

On February 28, 1997, the National Security Council (NSC) issued a decree calling for measures to be taken against “reactionism,” the enforcement of secular principles and a tighter control on religious institutions and organizations. During the following month, the NSC held meetings with various bureaucrats, politicians, representatives of non-governmental organizations and the media, briefing them on the current threat posed by Islamic fundamentalism and the necessary measures that needs to be taken against this threat. Basically, the military was instructing “civil society” how to carry out the vision and objectives of the military so as to crush the rise of political Islam, but without directly intervening itself. For this reason, the February 28 decree has been referred to as the “mild intervention” or “post-modern coup.”¹⁰ It is important to note that a majority of these civil society associations more than enthusiastically complied with the requests of the military.

The indirect intervention of 1997 was the closing of all venues to the formal negotiation of constitutional principles. The military explicitly established itself as the ultimate overseer of the secular system, which would not be opened up to negotiation or contestation. The ban on the headscarf, which was enforced under the tutelage of the military, was the articulation of intolerance toward the contestations of secularism.

What was particularly unacceptable for secularist circles and the military leading up to the February 1997 decree was that the leaders of Refah/Fazilet Party were frequently making antagonizing statements against the founding ideology of the Republic, particularly secularism, and resorted to a rhetoric that used Islam as a mobilizing force. The party leadership around Necmettin Erbakan went so far as to make public statements where they told the electorate that voting for Refah Party was a precondition to becoming a true Muslim. Note that this call is an outright defiance of the authority of official Islam and therefore a stark rejection of the basic postulate of secularist ideology that only sanctions the Directorate of Religious Affairs to speak on behalf of and represent Islam. These statements of the Refah leaders were later used against them when they were tried and sentenced, resulting in the closure of Refah Party by the Constitutional Court in 1998 and the barring of both Erbakan and Tayyip Erdoğan from active politics until 2003.

Even though Erbakan and Erdoğan shared such a common fate, there were important differences in their views. While Erbakan represented the conservative, older generation of leaders within the party, Erdoğan was the leader of the younger moderate wing that was in power at the Istanbul city administration, which later separated to found the AK Party in 2001. During his Mayoralty in Istanbul, Erdoğan frequently stated that their duty was to serve not just their supporters but the larger public regardless of their political opinions.

¹⁰ This term was coined by Cengiz Çandar in his columns in *Sabah*.

Erdoğan presented their cause as one of democratization and autonomy to civil society, instead of resorting to claims to being the only true representative of Muslims in Turkey as the Refah leadership was doing. In stating their policy objectives and their justifications, rather than turning to the Koran and the sacred sources of Islam, they invariably resorted to a liberal discourse demanding from the secular state a recognition of basic individual rights and liberties, particularly the freedom of conscience that involved more autonomy for the practice and knowledge of religion in Turkey.

This difference in the rhetorics of Refah leadership and the moderate wing around Erdoğan became more pronounced after the NSC decree of February 28, 1997. This decree set off a soul-searching phase among the ranks of Refah/ Fazilet Party especially among the younger generation. After February 28, the anti-secularist remarks of Refah leaders toned down substantially, and instead they started to openly endorse secularism. They claimed that it was the state that was actually anti-secular because it was directly meddling in religious affairs and was not recognizing freedom of conscience. They claimed that the Fazilet was the truly secular party since it was in favor of a true separation of the affairs of the state from religious affairs. However, this rhetorical maneuver was not sufficient to ease down the growing dissatisfaction from within the party. The growing discontent toward the old-fashioned undemocratic methods of leadership and policies that unnecessarily antagonized the secular state and the military culminated in the separation of the moderate wing from Fazilet to establish the AK Party.

The AK Party's electoral success during the November 2002 general elections only a year after it separated from the Fazilet Party marked the beginning of a new era not only in Turkish history but also globally in terms of the place and status of Islam within modern secular systems. The certain victor of these elections was without a doubt the AK Party under the leadership of Tayyip Erdoğan. The Refah/ Fazilet Party's continuation, the Saadet Party under Erbakan's leadership only received 2.5 % of the vote. Obtaining 34 % of the general vote, AK Party won a majority of the seats in the parliament, allowing it to form the government on its own. In fact, AK Party's victory was so substantial that it had the two-third-majority requirement for making amendments to the constitution. In other words, for the first time in the history of Turkey, a political party with Islamist origins had come to power with a sufficient majority so as to change the constitution. Hence, it is possible, at least hypothetically, for AK Party to remove, say, the secularism clause from the constitution. However, such an option was never even uttered within the ranks of AK Party, and its leader, prime minister Erdoğan has stated at every opportunity that they are a secular party and are adamantly against the use of religion for political purposes. As soon as AK Party came to government, the first task they undertook was advancing Turkey's long-held dream to become a member of the European Union

(EU). Of course, since the EU membership process necessitates that the military ceases to interfere in politics, it is a most reliable guarantee that the military would not be taking any action against the AK Party government.

The global significance of the AK Party government was that this was going to be the first time experience of an Islam-based political movement coming to power with an overwhelming majority in a strictly secular system, without facing a military intervention or other restrictions to its government. Hence, not only secularist circles in Turkey but the whole world would be watching the outcome of this genuine experiment in what an Islam-based political party can do with a modern-secular system when it can enjoy being in power without the restraints of a coalition partner or the fear of a military intervention.

The founders of AK Party under the leadership of Erdoğan left Refah/Fazilet in order to pursue a more liberal, less confrontational political line by endorsing secularist ideals, downplaying Islamism and giving priority to economic liberalization and development. They refused to be associated with political Islam in any way and frequently made public declarations stating that the worst damage to Islam is brought about by its politicization, thereby indirectly condemning the policies of former Refah/Fazilet Party. They even rejected labels such as “Muslim Democrat” or “Islamic Democrat” that were ascribed by the secular media, because they wanted to project a new public image that is dissociated from Islam as far as possible. The headscarf again emerged as a symbol of political ideology, but this time AK Party used it to mark its difference from Refah/Fazilet Party who had used it as the banner of their political movement. On numerous occasions Erdoğan openly stated that the headscarf issue was not AK Party’s concern, Turkey had much more pressing problems and that they refused to be distracted by such trivial matters.

AK Party’s political lineage reaching back to Refah Party’s moderate wing partially explains why the AK Party government had no difficulty in continuing some of the important economic and foreign policies initiated by previous secular governments, such as economic liberalization, membership to the European Union, and fighting with corruption. In fact, the AK Party government has been putting more effort into the implementation of these policies than their predecessors, mainly because they want to prove to secularist circles in Turkey and to the rest of the world that an Islam-based political party can be equally efficient, if not more, in solving Turkey’s main economic, political, social problems. They are deeply motivated to prove wrong accusations brought to Islamists for being backward, uncultured and hostile to Western ideals such as democracy, individual rights and liberties or economic liberalism. Motivated with such a cause, the AK Party government has been working doubly toward advancing modernist and liberal ideals such as economic liberalization, privatization, putting a break on populist and clientalist policies that has been one of the main causes of the crisis in the public sector, decentralization of the

state, democratization and most importantly, furthering Turkey's candidacy for membership to the European Union.

This public repositioning of the AK Party has certainly played a key role both in its electoral success winning them a considerable amount of secular votes, and especially in the cautious acceptance of its position by the military. The military not only acquiesced in AK Party's government and program but actually declared an unconditional support for its policy toward advancing Turkey's pending candidacy to the European Union.

These being said, however, the AK Party's unofficial newspaper, *Yeni Şafak*, continues to endorse a liberal-Islamist perspective where economic and political liberalism is combined with conservative social values and a sense of national identity and culture that takes Islam as its essential defining value.¹¹ In other words, even if the AK Party has publicly disassociated itself from political Islam, Islamism still dictates the intellectual foundations of its ideology, especially evident in the understanding of national culture and identity projected in *Yeni Şafak*. Furthermore, the wives of a majority of AK Party parliamentarians and cabinet members are wearing the Islamic headscarf and attire including the first lady as well as Erdoğan's daughters. This has caused some tension in official receptions where the presence of veiled women caused some unrest among secularist circles. This unrest culminated in a more serious crisis during the official Annual Republic Day Reception held on October 29, 2003 hosted by the President Ahmet Necdet Sezer when he refused to issue invitations to the wives of AK Party parliamentarians because he would not accept the presence of the Islamic headscarf in public spaces. Even though a majority of the AK Party parliamentarians refused to attend the Reception in protest, all members of the cabinet and Prime Minister Erdoğan attended without their wives. This incident demonstrates that the issue of secularism and the place and status of Islam in Turkey is far from being resolved in the near future.

It is possible, therefore, to interpret the AK Party's full incorporation into the secular political system as another victory of secularism in successfully assimilating a rival political ideology. Indeed, secularism still enjoys an unchallenged status in the public sphere. After all, what made Erdoğan, who was, only a couple of years before the election removed from office as Istanbul's Mayor and sentenced for conspiring against the secular principles of the state, turn around and publicly endorse the principle of secularism was no doubt the repressive and assimilative measures taken against political Islam not only by the military but also by civilian forces including university administrations, intellectuals and the secular media. Such measures seem to have made it clear to

¹¹ This Islamist discourse was developed mostly in *Yeni Şafak* daily around the mid 1990s, whose columnists and writers were also working as consultants or aides at the Refah Party's Istanbul city administration under Tayyip Erdoğan's Mayoralty, some of whom later became AK Party parliamentarians after the 2002 elections.

Islamist circles that they would have to find ways to operate and advance their ideology within the parameters of political conduct set by official secularist ideology. However, it also seems that these restrictions motivated some Islamist circles to find innovative ways to merge Islamic thought and practice with secularism and modernity, hence further advancing the emergence of Islamic modernism.

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Este texto aborda a institucionalização do secularismo na Turquia, promovida através da implantação de uma Secretaria de Estado dos Assuntos Religiosos, investida de completa autoridade sobre o pensamento e prática islâmica. Exploram-se as formas através das quais o estado promoveu esta secretaria como a única autoridade islâmica legítima na Turquia e como, nos anos 90 do século XX, vozes alternativas do pensamento e prática islâmica ganharam visibilidade e desafiaram a autoridade do Islão oficial. É neste contexto que emergiram "modernizadores islâmicos" como um novo movimento político afecto ao partido AK (Justiça e Desenvolvimento), que se desligou do antigo partido islamista Rafah/Fazilet e obteve uma importante vitória nas eleições gerais de 2002. O texto descreve a emergência do AK e as suas políticas relativamente ao secularismo, Islão político e nacionalismo.

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