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**Turkey between Secularism and Islam:  
the Justice and Development Party  
Experience**

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## TURKEY BETWEEN SECULARISM AND ISLAM: THE JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY EXPERIENCE

*Umit Cizre and Menderes Cinar*

### *1. What Is New About the Justice and Development Party*

Turkey completed the 1990s with the slogan “the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Will Be the Turkish Century”. It made progress in many areas, not least of all coming to terms with globalisation. But the same decade witnessed no less than 10 different coalition governments, all steeped in inefficiency and corruption; one military intervention in 1997 against a government led by a pro-Islamic party; steady decline of centre left and right; rise of radical nationalism and a spiral of economic crises the last of which in February 2001 brought the country to the brink of collapse. The series of coalition governments that came to power were drained of self-confidence and popular support. It seemed that the repeated criticisms and warnings of the military top brass about government excesses, misjudgements and corrupt practices accorded well with the reality of the 1990s.

The military and civilian protagonists of the 1997 intervention saw the roots of political problems in the “irresponsible” use of Islam for partisan purposes by the political class since the beginning of the multiparty period in 1946<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, they attempted to marginalize the forces of political Islam by manipulating the technical rules of the game, disciplining representative institutions, strengthening the centre and implementing security-minded public policies<sup>2</sup>. The establishment’s single-minded concern to secure the regime against potential threats originating from Islamism and Kurdish nationalism led to the closure of public debate on key issues and to the existing political class subcontracting the resolution of crucial problems to the civil-military bureaucracy<sup>3</sup>. In sum, all political persuasions adopted a new rendition of the “politics of inertia” which can be defined as a kind of politics that was characterized by “the absence of political

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<sup>1</sup> The military in the 1997 intervention directly addressed the selected sectors of the society like the media, judiciary and top bureaucrats by a series of well publicized briefings in which the military’s view on the *Spread of Political Islam* was transmitted. See *Silah Kullanırız*, in «Hurriyet», June 12, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> U. CIZRE – M. CINAR, *Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism, and Politics in the Light of the February 28 Process*, in «South Atlantic Quarterly», 2003, 102, pp. 309-332.

<sup>3</sup> M. CINAR, *Rebuilding the Center: Mission Impossible*, in «Private View», 1997, 1/2, pp. 72, 76, 78.

synergy or a credible parliamentary alternative, and the officials' abject disregard for the concerns of those they represent"<sup>4</sup>.

Against this domestic backdrop and at a juncture when Islamic terrorism was widely perceived as a major threat to transatlantic security, Turkey's Islam-sensitive Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi* – JDP), the offspring of a banned Islamist party<sup>5</sup>, won the overwhelming majority seats in the parliament in the November 2002 general elections. The critical lesson the Justice and Development Party drew from the failed decade of the 1990s was “to change the status quo and demonstrate some performance”<sup>6</sup> on the basis of two positions: Firstly, a discursive denial of its Islamist pedigree and the adoption of a moderate and non-religious discourse in its place<sup>7</sup>, and secondly, securing Turkish inclusion into the EU not just as a reform strategy but also as a realistic acknowledgement of the historical roadmap of Turkey and as a way of transforming the domestic power balance. As a party of reformists splintered from the traditionalists in the Virtue Party (VP), the successor party of the Welfare Party (WP), the JDP, soon realized that repudiating the WP legacy was not a constraint on its chances of survival, but a prerequisite for renewal. It saw that the WP-led government had squandered power, resources, opportunities and hopes and had created disenchantment amongst the party faithful. The founders of the JDP wanted to establish a party that would refrain from employing a rhetorical discourse; that would not restrict its political horizon to Islamic issues only; that would pay special attention to pluralism by building a dialogue with non-Islamist sectors of the society; and that would be predictable, dynamic and open to change with no hidden agenda on critical issues<sup>8</sup>. In this way, the trust of the people would be gained and a possible tension with the secular establishment could be managed<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> U. CIZRE – M. CINAR, *Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism, and Politics in the Light of the February 28 Process*, cit., p. 318.

<sup>5</sup> The grand-predecessor of the JDP was the Welfare Party (Refah Partisi – WP) which was founded in 1983 and closed down by the Constitutional Court in January 1998 on the grounds that it had become a focal point of anti-secular activities. With this closure, a five-year ban on the political activities of its leader, Necmettin Erbakan, and five other top policy makers was imposed. It was succeeded by the Virtue Party in 1997 which, again, was closed down on June 22, 2001 for its anti-secular activities and for violating the Constitutional stipulation that a permanently closed party, the WP, cannot be opened again. In August 2001 the movement was eventually split into a traditionalist wing, Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*), founded on July 20, 2001 and a reformist wing, the Justice and Development Party, founded on August 14, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> M. CINAR, *The Justice and Development Party in Turkey*, in «IDEAS: International Development Economics Associates», <[http://www.networkideas.org/themes/political/jan2003/po29\\_Turkey.htm](http://www.networkideas.org/themes/political/jan2003/po29_Turkey.htm)> (accessed on December 12, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Yurdagül Erkoca's interview with Bulent Arinc, *FP'li Arinc Buyuk Konustu*, [Arinc Spoke Rigorously], in «Radikal», May 25, 1998; Nese Duzel's interview with Abdullah Gul, *Ben 28 Subati Imzalamazdim* [I Would Not Have Signed the February 28 Decisions], in «Radikal», June 5, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Rusen Cakir's interview with Abdullah Gul, *Seriatcilar Marjinal* [Reactionists are Marginal], in «Milliyet», February 9, 2000.

With regard to its policy shift towards genuine reform, the policy of Europeanization gave the party three windows of opportunity: first of all, in the wake of the disenchantment that characterized the 1990s, the flagship project of EU accession introduced an energizing message for building a new Turkey from the bottom up. Secondly, the leadership thought that the democratic changes that were encouraged by the EU preconditions would help reduce the establishment's role in the system and also dramatically alter the political power balance that had sustained the military's political influence. The party was well aware that because of the military's prominence in politics, civilian power wielders lacked the clout necessary to embark on a reform process. Instead, they constantly guarded themselves against the possibility of a military intervention by indulging in rent-gathering activities that elicited only short-term gains in their power base<sup>10</sup>. By correcting the civil-military imbalance in favour of constitutionally elected organs, the democratic reform requirements for entry into the EU provided the JDP with the means to break that stagnant pattern. Finally, the JDP realized that if the traditional powerlessness of the civilian politicians could be overcome, its conservative voter base could enjoy increased religious and personal freedoms.

The promise of "effective governance" became the JDP's election-winning narrative. Once in power it took pains to drive home the image that it was not one of those weak governments of the 1990s floating above society, unable to solve any of its problems and yet closely integrated with the secular establishment and corporate interests. Priority placed on entry into the EU and reformist policies at home have served to provide a single coherent policy platform. Effective problem solving by definition has meant prioritizing democracy over security concerns and, inevitably, dismantling the influence of the traditional centres of power, most notably the Turkish Armed Forces' (TAF).

Another global trend the JDP leadership took up was the personalization of politics. With the decline of the ideological functions of political parties, strong personalistic leaders became the main source of appeal to voters during the 1990s. In Erdogan's case, he was the leader "who went from a jail cell to leadership of his country in less than four years"<sup>11</sup>. While the pro-establishment commentators questioned his calibre to govern in an elitist manner<sup>12</sup>. Erdogan cultivated the image of himself as a man of the people by emphasizing his poor background and by addressing people directly rather than by way of organizational channels. Rhetorically he stressed how the average voter had been short-changed by the

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<sup>10</sup> U. CIZRE, *Tansu Çiller: Lusting for Power and Undermining Democracy*, in M. HEPER – S. SAYARI (eds.) *Political Leaders and Democracy in Turkey*, Lanham/Boulder/New York/Oxford, 2002, pp. 199-216.

<sup>11</sup> S. KINZER, *Will Turkey Make It?*, in «The New York Review of Books», 2004, 51, p. 5 online: <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles17240>>.

<sup>12</sup> See for example T. TURENC, *Tayyip bey'in Kuması*, [The Texture of Mr. Tayyip], in «Hurriyet», July 4, 2003; and Editorial entitled *Cap* [Calibre], in «Cumhuriyet», July 9, 2003.

populist policies of his predecessors. Thus, politics of heart replaced politics of aloof institutions.

## *2. JDP's Deliberate Policies for Changing the Political Environment*

The election victory of the JDP really alarmed the politically active and powerful “secular establishment” headed by the Turkish military which has considerable civilian support. The president of the republic, the main opposition Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – RPP*), the segment of the judiciary dealing with national security issues (i.e., public prosecutors and the Constitutional Court), some elements of the civilian bureaucracy and especially the foreign ministry which has historically formulated and conducted foreign policy in close coordination with the Turkish general staff are other constituents of the secular establishment. This spectrum has continued to perceive the JDP government’s discourse with suspicion with regard to its true intentions. True enough, there is a historical animosity between the westernising idea of the republic, which the military zealously guards, and Islamic ideas and parties. The TAF redefined and intensified its “guardian” mission in the last decade in stronger terms to lock out Islamic and Kurdish “threats” from public life. In other words, during the 1990s, the armed forces identified internal security threats with the growing visibility of political Islam and the Kurdish question. These key political issues were considered to be a matter for the National Security Council, general staff and senior command, rather than being subjected to the democratic decision-making process by the constitutionally elected authority. As these issues had multiple dimensions, the political effectiveness of the Turkish high command in terms of initiating and structuring policies was further entrenched and secured in the period.

In the new strategic context created by external circumstances after 9/11, however, the JDP government made deliberate attempts to create more space for its own administration and defy those policy preferences of the establishment that have stood in the way of Turkey’s integration into the Western bloc. Two instruments of opportunity, the JDP’s embrace of a full portfolio of political reform to achieve integration with the EU and its commitment to a negotiated settlement for Cyprus have, in more ways than one, helped this cause.

### *2.1 The EU and the JDP*

In its formal Report on Turkey’s progress toward accession, published on October 6, 2004, the European Commission recommended that the country “sufficiently fulfils the political criteria” for the accession negotiations to open. Subsequently, in the European Council meeting on December 17, 2004 the 25 member countries cleared the way for formal accession talks to begin on October 3, 2005. The

decision alarmed the European right at the prospect of a large Muslim nation neither “European” nor rich enough to join the bloc. Nevertheless, it was historic. The United States has also been keen to see Turkey join the European Union’s U.S.-friendly handful of countries.

On June 12, 2006 the examination and assessment of the *acquis communautaire*, i.e. the screening process began. Nevertheless, it soon became clear that formidable obstacles remain on the road to Turkey’s accession. One issue is Turkey opening its ports and airports to vessels from Cyprus which, if fulfilled, Turkey feels, carries the implication of Turkey’s de facto recognition of the Greek Cypriot administration as the Republic of Cyprus. The other problems are the infringements on freedom of expression, especially court cases against writers and journalists which seemed to have risen in the last 2 years, as well as the Muslim and non-Muslim minority rights. On November 29, 2006 the Commission recommended to partially suspend membership negotiations with Turkey due to lack of progress on the Cyprus issue. The EU foreign ministers decided to follow suit and suspended talks with Turkey on eight of the 35 negotiating chapters on December 11, 2006.

National Plan for the Adoption of the *acquis* was adopted in 2001, revised in 2003 and readopted in 2006. With the EU accession process in mind, the government’s reform initiatives which included 8 legislative packages between February 2002 and July 2004 have introduced expansion of freedom of expression; abolition of anti-terrorism provisions that authorized punishment for verbal propaganda against the unity of state and the death penalty; retrial rights for citizens whose court decisions are overthrown by the European Court of Human Rights; education and broadcasting in the Kurdish language, not to mention some softening of the intransigence of Turkish foreign policy towards the Cyprus question.

As part of the reforms to meet the entry requirements of the EU, on August 7, 2003, the government took the momentous step of passing legislation (7<sup>th</sup> Harmonization Package) which radically civilianised the functions and profile of the National Security Council (NSC), the centrepiece of the TAF’s prowess in politics, and converted it into an advisory body with less “legal” influence over national policy. Driven by the concern to protect its corporate and political interests in the long run, the TAF can be said to have taken a step back from the prioritisation of its security-first discourse over an agenda of democracy and peace promoted by the government’s commitment to integration with the EU. It is true that throughout the last two decades the policies and strategies of the military establishment with regard to the EU has been ambivalent: its commitment to Europeanization – its own historic project for Turkey – lessened as it put greater weight on securitizing the regime against Islamic activism and Kurdish separatism. Even after the three rounds of legal reforms that were implemented throughout 2002, the public statements of senior members of the military revealed the belief that such “compromises” were too high a price to pay for being included

in a bloc which would dilute Turkish self-determination and which is biased against Turkey<sup>13</sup>.

However, since the August 2003 reform bill, which formally cut down the power of the military in politics considerably, the TAF high command has continued its assertive role in public space and politics. Doubts and insecurities of the public around the EU issue, which are encouraged if not totally constructed by the establishment, is one chief source of the TAF's political clout. A series of "illiberal" and Islam-sympathizing statements and policy intentions by the government - like wanting to grant local governments the right to regulate the consumption of alcohol and the charges brought against a number of prominent writers and intellectuals of "denigrating Turkishness" on the grounds of the article 301 of the Penal Code- also cause misgivings on the part of the more liberally inclined secularists and help them join causes with the establishment to some extent. But another source of the escalating anti-government politics by the TAF is the democratic reforms which shook some planks of the status quo. It is clear that beginning from 2003, there was genuine progress on the EU issue in tandem with resolute international support for the JDP. Upon visiting Turkey, then EU President Romano Prodi praised the government's adoption of radical reforms and expressed his surprise at the decisiveness and rate of the reform process<sup>14</sup>. Similarly, Gunter Verheugen, then the EU Commissioner for Enlargement, referred to the speedy reforms carried out by the JDP government as the second revolution after the establishment of the Republic by Ataturk<sup>15</sup>.

Progress has definitely been made in Turkey's integration with the EU, i.e., its Europeanization. In fact, Speaker of the Finnish Parliament and the co-president of the High Level Advisory Group of the European Socialist Party, Paavo Lipponen, has recently commented that the real reformist party in Turkey is not the leftist RPP but the JDP, which has made a true contribution to the development of Turkish society<sup>16</sup>. There is, however, much to be done for Turkey's transformation into a liberal democratic state. The European Commission's 2005 Enlargement Strategy Paper, published in November 2005, quite explicitly puts a list of reforms still waiting to be implemented<sup>17</sup>. The EU's

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<sup>13</sup> G. JENKINS, *Context and Circumstance: The Turkish Military and Politics*, in «Adelphi Paper», 2001, 337, pp. 57-82. See also, S. ARAT, *AB ile Tokalaşınca Parmakları Sayalım* [Count Your Fingers after Shaking Hands with the EU], in «Hurriyet», October 4, 2005 for the statement of the Commander of Naval Forces Yener Karahanoglu; and E. OZKOK, *Komutanların Dikkatine* [To the Attention of Commanders], in «Hurriyet», March 14, 2006, calling the attention of the top brass to anti-EU indoctrination of conscripts.

<sup>14</sup> U. ÇAKIRÖZER – A. KARAKUŞ, *AB'ye Çok Yakınsınız* [You are very Close to the EU], in «Milliyet», January 16, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Mehmet Ali Birand's interview with Gunter Verheugen, *Muzakereler Pek Yakında Baslar*, [Negotiations Starts Soon], in «Radikal», 8 October 2004.

<sup>16</sup> *Avrupalı Solculara Gore AKP Solcu*, [JDP is leftist according to European Leftists], in «Radikal», October 11, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> "...significant further efforts are needed as regards fundamental freedoms and human rights, particularly freedom of expression, women's rights, religious freedoms, trade union rights, cultural



Common Position Paper issued after the Turkey-EU Partnership Council meeting on June 12, 2006 also maintains that progress has been made but “the pace of change has slowed in Turkey in the last year.” Therefore, the Position Paper recommends significant further efforts regarding the implementation of reforms in: human rights; civil-military relations; security affairs; fundamental freedoms; torture and ill-treatment of detainees; non-violent expression of opinion; freedom of religion; cultural rights; protection of minorities; domestic violence and honor killings and normalization of relations between Turkey and EU members including the Greek Cypriot government<sup>18</sup>.

## *2.2 Significance of Cyprus and the Kurdish Issue for the JDP*

Turkey’s secular establishment instrumentalize the Cyprus issue to keep a status quo that is dependent on the primacy of national security considerations and conservative-nationalist politics. However, the JDP government’s commitment to the EU has made it clear that there is a positive correlation between Turkey being accepted as a full member of the Union and a solution for the Cyprus issue. As the accession of a new member state can only be unanimously decided by the EU member states, according to the respective positions of the EU Treaty, Greek and Greek Cypriot consent are separately necessary for Turkish membership. It is highly unlikely that the Greek Cypriot government would agree to the Turkish accession whilst Cyprus remains a divided island and Turkish troops remain stationed in the north. The fact that the JDP addresses the Cyprus issue by supporting the Annan Plan for the peaceful reunification of the island is evidence of its recognition that zealously continued division of the island remains a constant obstacle to the success of Turkey’s efforts to join the EU. The Annan plan was simultaneously taken to referendum on both parts of the island on April 24, 2004, just a week before the Greek Cypriot administration joined the EU as the Republic of Cyprus. With the encouragement of the JDP government Turkish Cypriots accepted the plan, while the Greek Cypriots rejected it by 76% under the influence of an officially sponsored “no” campaign. Turkey’s positive commitment to the resolution of the conflict was also acknowledged by the European leaders who met on December 17, 2004 and set October 3, 2005 as the date to begin formal accession negotiations with Turkey.

On the Iraqi issue, prevention of the emergence of a splinter Kurdish state in Northern Iraq, as part of the US’s anti-Saddam strategy before and after the war against Iraq, has been the predominant consideration shaping the JDP government’s policies. Parliament’s decision on March 1, 2003 not to grant US troops access to Iraq via Turkish territory, surprising though it may have been

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rights and the further strengthening of the fight against torture and ill-treatment”. *Communication from the Commission, 2005 Enlargement Strategy Paper*, Brussels, November 9, 2005, p., 5.

<sup>18</sup> The EU Common Position Paper’s online address is: <<http://www.turkishpress.com/news.asp?id=128408>>.

against a backdrop of time-tested strategic and political ties between Washington and Ankara, did chime well with the popular reluctance to play an instrumental role in waging war on a Muslim neighbour. Since then, despite a number of ceasefires the separatists have offered to Ankara, US-supported Kurdish Authority in Iraq has provided a safe haven for Turkey's Kurdish separatists to launch their attacks. This situation has highlighted the external dimension of the Kurdish question and strengthened the hand of hardliners in the establishment. On the other hand, the US's reluctance to take action against the bases of separatist groups in Northern Iraq has led to a rising anti-American sentiment on a popular level which is encouraged by the secular establishment. Domestically, in a bid to win the nationalist support ahead of parliamentary elections in November 2007, the JDP government has also converged with the establishment on the need for a "military" solution to all facets of the Kurdish question and foreign policy in the region.

The government's frustration with the USA manifests itself in its constant calls for the US forces to launch cross-border military attacks to root out the Kurdish terrorists from their enclaves in Northern Iraq. Having been tied up elsewhere in Iraq, the US does not seem to be inclined to open another front to stop the conduct of terrorist activities in the North. Since the Kurdish dominated north is the most peaceful part of Iraq and since the Kurds are the staunchest, if not the only US ally in Iraq, the US does not seem willing to allow a cross-border military action on the part of Turkish forces. In order to tame the increasing anti-US sentiment and to weaken the hands of the proponents of a cross-border movement, the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, paid a visit to Turkey in April 2006. It was in this meeting that a decision was reached to institute a mechanism to coordinate the struggle against armed Kurdish separatist groups in Northern Iraq. Hence, Iraq, Turkey and the US have appointed Amir Ameer Hassun, retired general Edip Baser and retired general Joseph Ralston respectively as the so-called "anti-PKK coordinators"<sup>19</sup>. General Baser, known for his views that the PKK is a problem created by the Europeans<sup>20</sup>, was nominated by the general staff and appointed by the government. Since his appointment, he has made a number of public statements stepping beyond his capacity as coordinator. For example, he warned the elected mayors in the Kurdish dominated south-eastern region not to abuse the tolerance and patience of citizens with their acts and discourses; and asked for their removal from office<sup>21</sup>. Erdogan recently commented that since the beginning of its operation in October 2006, the coordination mechanism has not

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<sup>19</sup> The PKK (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* – Kurdish Workers Party) has been conducting terrorist activities for a Kurdish homeland in the southeast of Turkey since 1984.

<sup>20</sup> *Başer: Avrupa PKK Konusunda İki Yüzlü Davranıyor* [Baser: Europe is Double-Faced on PKK], in «Hürriyet», December 7, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> *Baser'den Baydemir'e Sabırları Zorlamayın* [Baser to Baydemir: Do not Push Patience to the Limits], in «Hürriyet», October 11, 2006; and *Baser: PKK'ya Destek veren DTP'li Başkan Görevden Alınmalı* [Baser: DTP Mayor Supporting the PKK should be Removed], in «Hürriyet», October 20, 2006.

produced any concrete results<sup>22</sup>. His comments were interpreted as a criticism of the work of coordinators as well as calling for the resignation of Ret. Gen. Baser.

### *3. Is Turkey's Secularism Threatened by the Policies of the JDP Government?*

It is correct to say that the post-1997 attempts to stem the tide of the Islamic threat have failed and that the establishment regards the JDP's advent to power through democratic means as evidence that the threat has grown in size. That is why it regards the EU project of the ruling party as a piece of simulation intended to disguise its anti-secular Islamic agenda. It should also be noted that while the era of military interventions is past, the TAF retains a significant degree of leverage. It has strong civilian allies to protect the officers' vision of democracy and to help counter any threats to the regime. The opposition RPP, for example, believes that the JDP is abusing Turkey's EU-membership project as a cover for its own Islamist ends<sup>23</sup>.

The ruling party has adopted a double-track strategy towards the secular establishment: while it has stepped back from some of its reform plans in the face of strong criticism by the establishment<sup>24</sup> and has opted for a policy of seeking consensus with the secular establishment on many fundamental issues, it has also taken steps designed to reduce the secular establishment's sphere of influence. Through a series of reforms in civil-military relations, the judiciary, parliamentary procedures, minority rights, national security, macroeconomic management, and the public sector, the JDP government has endeavoured to improve political and economic life in a more democratic manner.

#### *3.1 The JDP's Designs on Secularism*

What prompted the party leadership's appropriation of this new wave of Europeanization is, in part, a strategic choice: "if the JDP begins to challenge secularism, it will lose its political battle to govern Turkey by alienating most of its voters as well as the secularist bloc"<sup>25</sup>. This is so because by pulling the country towards European norms and standards of democracy, the government both deflects any possible opposition that might come from secular quarters and also supports the social and political aspirations of those who are not averse to the Islamic perspective: "The only way for this party to survive in power... is through a liberal transformation of the Turkish polity and its civilianization. This explains

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<sup>22</sup> *Erdogan: Koordinatorluk Sonucuz* [Erdogan: Coordination is Ineffective], in «Radikal», January 4, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> For a statement by the RPP's leader Baykal see *AB'yi Hedeflerine Kilif Yapiyorlar* [They are Abusing the EU], in «Cumhuriyet», June 4, 2003.

<sup>24</sup> A good example came in May 2004 when the government dropped its higher education reform bill which was intended to cut the secular establishment's authority over universities.

<sup>25</sup> S. OZEL, *After the Tsunami*, in «Journal of Democracy», 2003, 14, pp. 80-94, p. 92.

why the JDP does not just pay a token attention to EU accession: it is a matter of enlightened self-interest, and the party clearly knows it”<sup>26</sup>.

The secular establishment rejects the Islamic-democratic model on the grounds that the secular character of the Republic and a “moderate” Islam are incompatible. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Prime Minister, while starting from a point of reference that is completely at cross purposes with that of the high command’s, agrees on the meaninglessness of the emphasis on “moderate” Islam. For him, any division between radical and moderate wings within Islam is redundant as Islam is unitarian in nature. He therefore affirms the importance of secularism on the grounds that it is an absolutely necessary concept in order to ensure the state’s neutrality between Muslims and non-Muslims. It is this understanding of secularism which underlines the prime minister’s pro-EU rhetoric. In this regard, he employs the orientalist “clash of civilizations” discourse of Samuel Huntington in reverse and maintains that even though in Turkey, cultures of Islam and democracy have merged together, there is, in fact, a dichotomic civilizations existence of Muslims and non-Muslims and that Turkey’s inclusion in the EU will bring civilization harmony. At the Davos World Economic Forum in January 2005, the prime minister was extremely explicit about the conveyor belt role of Turkey in the region, or as he puts it, “transmitting the EU’s point of view to the region and vice versa”<sup>27</sup>.

The “bridge” metaphor can also be viewed as simply an opportunist discourse which relies on the alleged clash between the West and the East in order to mobilize western support for the government’s flagship project of being part of the EU. Similarly, it is an argument the leadership uses in trying to convince the hard-line nationalist and Islamist elements in the party who are suspicious of the deal struck with Brussels: “Turkey feels that our relations with the EU is a project of civilization of peace and of cooperation... it is not a union of economics, it is not a Christian club. It is a union of values”<sup>28</sup>.

The JDP-led democratization via Europeanization is marked by a concern to refrain from clashing with the guardians of the republic. In order to minimize the risk of a direct collision with the establishment, the JDP equated Europeanization with the Kemalist project of “reaching the level of contemporary civilizations”<sup>29</sup>. In this way, the JDP portrayed its democratizing agenda as a “technical” readjustment to European standards and hoped to “neutralize” the political/ideological implications of Turkey’s Europeanization. In the meantime, the JDP itself failed to grasp the “political” nature of the Europeanization as well. Consequently, it carried out the reforms in an elitist manner, without raising the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> M. SEIFF, *Turkey can be EU’s Bridge to Mideast: PM*, in «United Press International», January 30, 2005, <<http://www.upi.com/archive/view.php?archive=1&StoryID=20050130-092704-1091r>>.

<sup>28</sup> N. WATT – D. GOW, *Deal Lets Turkey Go For EU Membership*, in «The Guardian», December 18, 2004. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/eu/story/0,1376516,00.html>>.

<sup>29</sup> Erdogan’s Speech to the JDP’s Parliamentary Group on November 2, 2004.

awareness of people about the challenging (and rewarding) aspects of democratization and liberalization. As will be seen below, the JDP was therefore unable to produce a political strategy for a sustainable Europeanization process.

### *3.2 External Factors Impeding the JDP's Adoption of an Anti-Secular Agenda*

Turkey is a long time NATO member and a major US ally with a geography that sits astride Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East and the Transcaucasus. That coupled with the Islamic credentials of the JDP government and Turkey's "strong and secular" military power<sup>30</sup>, now offers the transatlantic alliance a chance to exert some leverage in the region, as well as the strategic means to counter the Islamic threat. In trying to understand the role of external factors in impeding a radical agenda for the JDP, it is essential to understand the strategic environment that arose in the aftermath of September 11. In this environment, sympathy and support for what is considered to be a moderately Islamic government of Turkey is by no means irreconcilable with the prevailing moral sensibility that gives primacy to secular forces in international politics. As a reliable Muslim NATO ally, located strategically along trans-regional fault lines, a militarily strong Turkey is considered a bulwark against the spread of radical Islam. The European Commission's 2005 Progress Report on Turkey underlines Turkey's potential influence on Muslim countries, the Caucasus and Central Asia in urging them to face the necessity of democratic reforms. Syria and Iran are cited as examples where Turkey is said to use its influence to convince the leadership of these countries to abide by the requests of the international community on several occasions<sup>31</sup>.

However, even after the 1991 Gulf War there were some factors that clouded the perceived value of Turkey for the transatlantic alliance. Since 1998, many of the European Commission's annual progress reports on Turkish accession have stated that Turkey fell well short of meeting the requirements for accession<sup>32</sup>. This was primarily because of Turkey's record on freedom of expression, cultural rights, human rights, retention of the death penalty and the TAF's political role.

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<sup>30</sup> Turkey apportions twice the amount of its national income to its defense budget than any of the other NATO members.

<sup>31</sup> EUROPEAN COMMISSION, *Turkey 2005 Progress Report*, p. 130, available on line at: <[http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key\\_documents/2005/package/sec\\_1426\\_final\\_progress\\_report\\_tr\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key_documents/2005/package/sec_1426_final_progress_report_tr_en.pdf)>.

<sup>32</sup> The membership criteria were standardized in the 1993 Copenhagen European Council meeting. The "Copenhagen Criteria" require that candidate countries achieve a functioning market economy, stable democratic institutions, the rule of law, human rights and the respect and protection of minorities.

Moreover, many Europeans remained sceptical about Turkey's capacity to genuinely be part of the culture, politics and economy of an "alien" continent<sup>33</sup>.

Turkey now presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the EU because of its military prowess, vast market and "moderately Islamic" yet doggedly "secular system of government"<sup>34</sup>. Proponents of a superpower EU predict that Turkey is central to the EU's drive for global status and emphasize the fact that "Ankara's forces are greater than those of France and Britain combined, with 514,000 men under arms and 380,000 in reserve, plus a robust air force with American fighters"<sup>35</sup>.

This new state of affairs seems to account for the more favourable light that is shed on Turkey's long-held aspiration of being European in a region of "backward" religious beliefs, poverty, underdevelopment and democratic shortfall. The relationship is mutually advantageous because Turkey is both useful to the West and has "a vision of the future anchored in the West"<sup>36</sup>. Indeed, the secular regime refuses to define Turkey's identity in terms of Muslimness or to countenance any public role for Islam. But its definition of a secular identity is also unfixed or open to debate: The TAF suspects that the JDP has a hidden Islamist agenda despite its moderate façade. On the other hand, the military bureaucracy has, in the past, also consistently raised the same doubts for the non-Islamist centre-right political parties and leaders with regard to their alleged support for unsecular activities as well. This means that it has been very difficult for Turkey's civilian political structures and leaders to accommodate the military's fuzzy definition of secularism.

#### *4. Is the JDP Regressing from Its Democratic-Reform Agenda?*

The open signals emitted by the EU that Turkey's admission into the EU will be delayed for an indefinite period have helped draw the government closer to the secular establishment on the management of key policy issues led by the Cyprus question and the Kurdish problem. Indeed, the balance sheet of the JDP since October 3, 2005 -the date when the formal accession negotiations with Turkey started- shows a consensus between the general staff, the Foreign Ministry and the other decision-making echelons of the secular establishment and the government on the fundamental that "it would be unjust to ask Turkey to make gestures after

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<sup>33</sup> See for example, J. CARREYROU – D. BILEFSKY, *Turkey's Readiness for EU Meets Scepticism in France: Prime Minister Raffarin Cites Gap Between Norms of Muslim Society, the West*, in «Wall Street Journal», September 23, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> P. GORDON – O. TASPINAR, *Turkey's European Quest: The EU's Decision on Turkish Accession*, in «The Brookings Institution, US-Europe Analysis Series», September 2004, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> A. EVANS-PRITCHARD, *Turkish Army Crucial to EU Power Hopes*, in «The Age Australian» online: <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/World/Turkish-army>>.

<sup>36</sup> K. KARPAT, *Turkey's Long Journey to Europe*, in «BBC News», online: <<http://newsvote.bbc.co.uk/impapps/pagetools/the>>.

the referenda in Cyprus”<sup>37</sup>. The secular establishment including the opposition leader Deniz Baykal, an ardent supporter of Kemalist policies and the intransigent line on Cyprus, also joined forces with the establishment in characterizing the path of entry into the EU as a “dead end” and warning the government not to sign the supplementary protocol on Cyprus and “sacrifice Cyprus” for a redundant goal<sup>38</sup>. In January 2006, the JDP government issued an Action Plan for Cyprus, which proposed opening Turkish ports to vessels from Cyprus in return for lifting some of the blockades on the Turkish Cypriot community. Although it was welcomed by the UN, the US and the EU, this plan was not implemented due to its rejection by Greek Cypriots. Since then, while emphasizing its goodwill, the JDP waits for the EU to fulfil its promise of relaxing the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community before taking any unilateral step towards unification of the island<sup>39</sup>.

In a historic speech he delivered in the southeastern town of Diyarbakir on August 10, 2005, Erdogan apologized for the past mistakes committed by the state in dealing with the Kurdish issue. He also recognized that hindrances to the public expression of the Kurdish identity are an aspect of the problem. This anti-status quoist stance has come under attack by the pro-establishment forces including the main opposition RPP which accused the JDP of turning Turkishness into an ethnic sub-identity. Implying that the issue does not fall into the government’s area of discretion, a National Security Council statement issued after its August 2005 meeting warned Erdogan that the duty of the Republican governments is to fulfill the tasks set out in the constitution in accordance with the fundamental philosophy of the regime<sup>40</sup>. Since then, while claiming that security can only be achieved with democratic maturity<sup>41</sup>, the JDP has, in practice, steadily aligned with the establishment and reduced the Kurdish issue to a matter of armed separatism only<sup>42</sup>. So much so that, when a JDP deputy from the region tried to draw Erdogan’s attention to the fact that cases of torture and political killings are eroding citizen’s trust in the state, the Prime Minister accused the deputy of

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<sup>37</sup> From the Deputy Chief of General Staff General Ilker Basbug’s press conference on January 26, 2005. *General Basbug: If Results of Elections Cause Serious Problems in Kirkuk, It May Create a Serious Security Problem for Turkey As Well*, in «TurkishPress.com», <[www.turkishpress.com7news.asp?ID036622](http://www.turkishpress.com7news.asp?ID036622)>.

<sup>38</sup> *Main Opposition: Path to EU Is a Dead End*, in «Zaman», English edition, June 29, 2005, <[www.zaman.com/include/yazdir7php?bl=politics&alt=&trh](http://www.zaman.com/include/yazdir7php?bl=politics&alt=&trh)>.

<sup>39</sup> After the Greek Cypriot community’s rejection of the Annan plan for the unification of the island, the EU foreign ministers decided to end the isolation of Turkish Cyprus by encouraging its economic development in April 2004. A recent International Crisis Group report comments that “[a]lmost two years on, this resolution appears to be worth less than the paper it was written on.” See *The Cyprus Stalemate: What’s Next?*, «International Crisis Group Report» n. 171», March 8, 2006.

<sup>40</sup> N. IFLAZOGLU – T. ISIK, *Kurt Sorunu Sorun Oldu* [Kurdish Issue became the Issue], in «Radikal», August 24, 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Erdogan’s Speech to the JDP’s Parliamentary Group on May 24, 2006.

<sup>42</sup> *Sorunun Adi Boluculuk* [The Name of the Issue is Separatism], in «Radikal», December 7, 2005.

speaking like the mouth-piece of the PKK and said: “do not talk about these issues”<sup>43</sup>. Erdogan also refused to meet with the co-chairman of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi* – DSP, November 11, 2005-), Ahmet Turk, on the grounds that the DSP does not recognize the PKK as a terrorist organization nor condemn it. The DSP criticized Erdogan’s attitude by pointing out that sons and daughters of his voters are in the ranks of the PKK and that the issue is so complex that it cannot be resolved simply by condemning the PKK<sup>44</sup>. Recently, Aysel Tugluk, the other DSP co-chair and a former lawyer of the PKK’s leader Abdullah Ocalan, issued a written statement blaming Erdogan for being inconsistent and insincere in his approach to the Kurdish issue and calling on him to implement a realist policy<sup>45</sup>.

The JDP’s turn to statist-nationalist politics can further be seen in the amendments to the Anti-terror law. In June 2006, to meet the Turkish general staff’s criticism that as a result of Europeanizing reforms, the TAF was forced into fighting against terrorism with limited means<sup>46</sup>, the JDP amended the Anti-terror law in such a way that a wide range of criminal offences became punishable as acts of terrorism. In addition, verbal “propaganda” by way of shouting slogans and carrying banners during demonstrations in favor of terrorist groups was turned into a crime carrying a penalty of up to three years prison<sup>47</sup>. This retrograde trend resulted in the failure of the JDP to amend article 301 of the Turkish Penal Law, which hinders freedom of expression by criminalizing “denigrating Turkish identity,” the crime itself being defined vaguely. The opposition RPP fully supports the article on the grounds that although similar articles exist in European countries, no cases are filed against intellectuals because they commit no denigration of their national identity. By implication, the RPP expects Turkish intellectuals to respect Turkish identity as their European counterparts respect their own national identities. The RPP’s leader Baykal rather rhetorically claimed that “we have almost reached the point at which we apologize for being Turkish!” and portrayed Erdogan as “looking for someone else to take the responsibility for lifting obstacles to insulting and humiliating Turkish identity”<sup>48</sup>.

There are, however, divisions within the JDP government as well. The Justice Minister Cemil Çiçek, for example, is critical of the EU and averse to any prospect of amending the article. The JDP could not amend the article, therefore,

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<sup>43</sup> N. IFLAZOGLU, *Erdogan’dan Vekile Furca* [Erdogan Snarls at MP], in «Radikal», April 13, 2006.

<sup>44</sup> *Turk: Tabanimiz PKK ile Ortak* [Turk: We share the same Constituency with the PKK], in «Milliyet», April 22, 2006.

<sup>45</sup> *Turkey Deserves a Better Prime Minister, claims DTP’s Tugluk*, in «The New Anatolian», January 8, 2007, <<http://www.thenewanatolian.com/tna-20814.html>>.

<sup>46</sup> *Kısıtlı Yetkilerle Mücadele Ediyoruz* [We are Struggling with Limited Means], in «Hurriyet», August 6, 2005.

<sup>47</sup> *Sevimsiz Yasa İtirafı*, [Unpleasant Law Confession], in «Milliyet», June 30, 2006.

<sup>48</sup> *Başka Kapıya* [Knocking the Wrong Door], in «Milliyet», September 27, 2006.



and could do no more than put the blame on public prosecutors who filed cases against writers and journalists and emphasize the need for a change in mentality.

This loss of momentum in the reform process and the tendency to leave the issues to time while adopting a nationalist stance actually signifies a new trend in the JDP government. In this new trend, the approval of the establishment is sought not only for secularism-related issues but also for democratization-related problems. There are a number of reasons for the JDP's new approach. First of all, increasing terrorist activities and PKK orchestrated intifada-like riots, which lasted 3 days in spring 2006 in Diyarbakir, have prompted a nationalist reaction in Turkey. These events also provided a pretext for the pro-establishment institutions like the universities to launch an attack on the JDP government by publishing announcements in dailies calling the JDP to take legal precautions to protect the indivisible integrity of the country, to re-evaluate the relations with the EU in this light and to reconsider selling property to foreigners.

Secondly, the criminalization of the denial of Armenian genocide claims by the French parliament in October 2006 and the British anti-terror law, which retreats from civil liberties in the name of combating terrorism, have strengthened the hands of the nationalist-conservative forces in Turkey. The claim that the EU is trying to undermine powers of the state, and thereby Turkish unity, by asking for freedoms that the EU countries themselves lack has resonated with more people. Thirdly, despite the start of accession negotiations, the half-hearted European support for Turkey's full membership has weakened the pro-reform circles and the reformist aspects of the JDP policies vis a vis the establishment. Finally, especially after the approval of the ban on wearing the headscarf on university premises in Turkey by the European Court of Human Rights and the silence of the Progress Reports with regard to rights and liberties of Islamic identity, the JDP feels that its constituency has been discriminated against by the EU. As it stands, in the pluralist public sphere envisioned by the EU, there is no room for the representation of Islamic identity. The EU therefore does not provide the JDP with the practical wherewithal to redefine secularism as a matter of democracy and pluralism.

However, the impact of these developments would have been less had the JDP been a less instrumentalist and pragmatic party with a clear vision of democratization. In other words, in the absence of an opposition that gives effective expression to the language of democratization and liberalism, the JDP appears as the only pro-democratization reformist force. But, the JDP's own understanding of democracy has its own defects and therefore its susceptibility to nationalist rhetoric is high. The JDP's democratization drive via Europeanization was informed by instrumental reasons, i.e. to strengthen the elected political class vis a vis the non-elected state elite. Moreover, the JDP carried out its reform programme by de-emphasizing ideology as a left-over from the cold war era and by portraying it as a technical readjustment to global trends, discord with which will result in the disintegration of the country. Since political alternatives on

thorny issues have often been charged by the state elite with being separatist or reactionary threats to the republican regime, the JDP hoped to find a safe haven in presenting reformist policies as technical/non-ideological necessities of an ongoing Westernization program.

The JDP's de-emphasis on ideology, however, resulted in a rather naïve understanding of "politics as harmony". Such an understanding neglects the conceptualization of "politics as conflict and consensus". It thereby hinders the JDP's capacities to play leadership roles by taking initiatives and to make choices at critical junctures. Moreover, since pragmatist political parties throughout the democratic history of the Republic have been unable to transform Turkey's electoral democracy into a liberal one, establishing a positive correlation between pragmatism and better prospects for further democratization is misleading. Those who claim that opportunities and demands created by the ballot box combined with pragmatist politics will produce Muslim democrats/democracy<sup>49</sup>, for example, overlook the fact that further democratization in Turkey and elsewhere in the Muslim world necessitates rule-making and institution-building to regulate and channel political conflicts. Conceptually, intellectually and theoretically, the JDP's approach to political activity falls short of the qualities needed to achieve such a task.

The roots of the JDP's instrumentalism can also be linked to its understanding of politics. The JDP restricts power relations to the formal sphere of politics between the political class and the state elite. In this way, it misses power relations between the various groups in society and thus the substantive societal dimensions of democratization. In this respect, the EU project, which calls for public representation of societal groups like Alevis, Kurds and non-Muslim minorities, poses challenges to the JDP itself. The JDP's "harmonious unity of differences" discourse does not allow for a politicization of power relations at societal level. "Bringing our differences to a political level", Erdogan warned the pro-Kurdish Democratic People's Party, "will be the biggest damage one can make to this country"<sup>50</sup>. The JDP's instrumentalism has further reinforced Turkish public opinion that democratization in Turkey is not an end itself, but a means to the bounty of full membership in the EU. Hence, the dispensability of the Europeanization/democratization project under circumstances of uncertainty in reaching the bounty.

##### *5. Is the JDP an Islamist Party*

Islamism has been represented in the Turkish political arena by the National Outlook Movement (*Milli Gorus Hareketi-NOM*), which has established five successive political parties under the formal or informal leadership of Necmettin

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<sup>49</sup> V. NASR, *The Rise of "Muslim Democracy"*, in «Journal of Democracy», 2005, 16, pp. 13-27.

<sup>50</sup> *DEHAP'a Sert Tavir* [Tough on Democratic Peoples Party], in «Radikal», June 16, 2004.

Erbakan since 1970: National Order Party (1970-71), National Salvation Party (1971-1981), Welfare Party (1983-1998), Virtue Party (1997-2001) and Felicity Party (2001-). With the exception of the Virtue Party period, in which the division within the movement between the young “reformist” and elder “traditionalist” generation was crystallized under the extraordinary circumstances of the 1997 military intervention, the political parties of the NOM have represented Islamism *par excellence* in Turkey. A brief comparison of the political stances of the WP and the JDP is therefore essential for assessing whether or not the latter is Islamist. One must also bear in mind that it is not the problematization of the political system in itself, but the particular angle of the problematization that makes a party Islamist. Therefore, especially in a context where further democratization requires a systemic transformation, equating a pro-Islamic party with anti-systemic activities is a misleading characterization.

The WP was an Islamist party, as its diagnoses of and prescriptions for societal/political problems were all religious in essence<sup>51</sup>. It narrated history as a process of clashes between “just” religious and “unjust” secular civilizations, the latter being represented by the West, whose fundamental characteristic was said to be oppression against Muslims. In its struggle to revitalize the Islamic civilization, the WP equated itself with Islam and portrayed all its followers as its believers who by working and voting for the party would reach salvation. The WP aimed at eradicating the “degenerating” effects of Turkish Westernism by instrumentalizing state power to implement a top-down project of Islamization. This resulted in a power-oriented and state-centered institutional conservatism, which problematized the “secular” qualities of the personnel filling the ranks of state, but not the quasi-democratic form of state-society relationship. In so doing, the WP portrayed itself as the representative of “the truth” and as the spearhead of Islam vis a vis the “alienated” Westernizing elite, secular sectors of society and other Islamic groups like religious orders and communities, which have a different understanding and practice of religion. By implication, the WP disregarded the heterogeneous nature of society, attributed to it a certain Islamic identity, and failed to see the importance of consensus-building and self-limitation in ruling. Hence, the WP’s government experience between 1996 and 1997 showed that it was more ready to mobilize Islamic values to conserve the existing system than to reject it by giving effective expression to individual rights and to the expansion of the political sphere<sup>52</sup>.

The JDP as a splinter of the NOM, however, does not associate itself with religion, rather it defines itself as a political party to be distinguished from a religion-party. Religious politics or a religion-party, Erdogan maintained on many

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<sup>51</sup> A. YILDIZ, *Politico-Religious Discourse of Political Islam in Turkey: The Parties of National Outlook*, in «Muslim World», 2003, 93, pp.187–210

<sup>52</sup> U. CİZRE SAKALLIOĞLU, *Rethinking the Connections between Turkey’s ‘Western’ Identity versus Islam*, in «Critique», 1998, 12, pp. 3-18.

occasions, is detrimental to democracy, peace, religion and pluralism<sup>53</sup>. As a corollary, the JDP refrained from employing a religious discourse and exclusively focusing on issues related to rights and liberties of Islamic identity in Turkey. When it took up such issues as the ban on wearing a headscarf on university premises, the JDP government framed them in terms of civil liberties and wanted the other political actors to conceive the issue similarly so as to reach a consensus. It also emphasized the importance of maintaining the consensus of all state institutions for, without such a consensus any attempt at redefinition of secularism, they believe, would result in further restrictions on the liberties of Islamic identity as happened during the rule of the WP. In this way, the JDP hoped to avoid the curse of the secular establishment.

The JDP differs from the WP also in its positive assessment of globalization as the changing context of politics to which Turkey should adopt. As such, it does not employ an anti-Western rhetoric. It rather employs the language of pluralism and consensus and aims at limiting the domains of state control to overcome the bureaucratic-statist structures, which, it maintains, hinders Turkey's further modernization, development and democratization. Hence, while the WP focused on the cultural (westernist) aspects of the Turkish political system and aimed at altering it without changing the basic institutional set-up, the JDP focuses on the institutional aspects (state-centered nature) of the political system. In doing so, the JDP hopes to expand the spheres of existence for its own Islamic constituency.

The secular establishment, however, fears that once the grip of the state loosens, a process of Islamization will inevitably start. Thus, the JDP is said to have a hidden Islamist agenda aiming at releasing the Islamist forces in society. Nevertheless, Turkish secularism is likewise a religious phenomenon, because it involves the promotion of an official Islam subservient to the state<sup>54</sup>. In this respect, the Turkish practice of secularism has been unable to individualize religion; rather it expects Turks to believe and practice Islam in a certain way. As such, one function of secularism has been to draw lines of demarcation between tolerable and intolerable religious practices as well as between politics and politicians. Moreover, by virtue of promoting an official religion, even when it is confined to individual conscience, Turkish secularism has pointed at the potential politicization of personal beliefs and blurring of the distinction between public and private. As a corollary, the power struggle between the secular establishment and Islamists takes place also in the realm of life-styles and cultural codes<sup>55</sup>. Hence, the secularism debate revolves around the question 'who and what life-styles will be visible in the Turkish public sphere'.

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<sup>53</sup> *Dini Siyaset Barısı Bozar* [Religious Politics Breaches Peace], in «Radikal», July 7, 2005.

<sup>54</sup> For a detailed discussion of Turkish secularism and its impact on democracy see H. GULALP, *Enlightenment by Fiat: Secularization and Democracy in Turkey*, in «Middle Eastern Studies», 2005, 41, pp. 351-372.

<sup>55</sup> N. GOLE, *Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites*, in «Middle East Journal», 1997, 51, pp. 46-58.

It could be argued that, after the crackdown on Islamic identity during the 1997 intervention, the JDP's accession to political power resulted in the flourishing of the Islamic sectors of society at the grass roots level. Consequently, in the autumn of 2006, key figures of the establishment – the president, the chief of the staff, the commanders of forces and top members of the judiciary – drew attention to the increasing reactionist threats to the republican regime. In response, Erdogan accepted that there were extremists threatening the Republican values since long ago, and he held the establishment responsible for failing to rehabilitate them<sup>56</sup>. His stance on Islamist extremism, therefore, can be said to deal with the issue within the framework of law and order and with a view to rehabilitate, rather than impose a crackdown on them. Obviously, the JDP does not share the same views as the establishment on what constitutes Islamist reactionism, it finds the establishment's claims exaggerated and asks for evidence of reactionism to take action against it. Does this mean that the JDP encourages Islamism?

Some of the JDP-run municipalities, for example, have verified the secularist fears of Islamization by publishing and distributing book(lets) propagating Islamist views. One such publication by Istanbul's Eyup (a township in Istanbul) municipality claims that failing to wear the headscarf is a sin and those who ban wearing it are the enemies of Islam. A similar publication by the JDP-run Istanbul's Tuzla municipality discourages handshaking between men and women; it disapproves of contraceptives and justifies on religious grounds polygamy and marriage for girls once they reach the age of nine. Finally, the municipality of Istanbul's most cosmopolitan quarter, Beyoglu, endorsed that there is nothing humans can do about traffic accidents for they occur as a result of one's (predetermined) fate. The JDP headquarters reacted to these publications by issuing an internal memorandum warning that it is not the business of the municipalities as public institutions to issue *fatwas* and calling the municipalities to stop publishing religious books<sup>57</sup>. Bearing in mind that most of the rank and file of the JDP is recruited from the Islamist WP, the JDP headquarters' attitude towards the municipalities is important. In fact, this strategy stands in stark contrast to the WP leadership's, which had never disapproved or criticized rhetorical statements such as that made by the mayor of Sincan (a suburb of Ankara) when he declared in 1997 that they would inject *sharia* into the seculars<sup>58</sup>. The JDP has also been criticized from within for encouraging the consumption of alcohol<sup>59</sup> and from the Islamist constituency for failing to resolve

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<sup>56</sup> *Sosyal Restorasyon Donemine Girdik* [We have entered into the Social Restoration Era], in «Yeni Safak», October 11, 2006.

<sup>57</sup> T. YILMAZ, *Gömlek Genelgesi* [Shirt Memorandum], in «Hurriyet», June 1, 2006; see also A. KARAKUŞ, *Dini Tartışma Açmayın* [Do not Open Religious Debates], in «Milliyet», January 1, 2007.

<sup>58</sup> *Yıldız: Basortusu Sancagımızdır* [Yıldız: Headscarf is Our Banner], in «Sabah», February 2, 1997.

<sup>59</sup> *AKP'ye İceriden İcki Eleştirisi Geldi* [Alcohol Criticism to the JDP from within], in «Vatan», January 1, 2007.

the headscarf issue. That the JDP's rank and file comes from an Islamist background and that the party fears losing control and becoming an outlet for their excessive Islamist demands can be a reason for the JDP's retreat from its original promise of intra-party democracy.

Yet there are instances of the JDP's conservative bias. The JDP's views on compulsory religious education, Alevi minority, and alcohol consumption reveal the illiberal aspects of the party and the limits to its understanding of democracy. Owner of a famous brand of swimsuits in Istanbul complains that since 2003 he has been unable to get access to Istanbul billboards to advertise his products for women<sup>60</sup>. The Minister of Education, Huseyin Celik, is against the idea of amending the constitution, promulgated by the 1980 coup administration, to make religious classes optional even for the students from the Alevi sect in Turkey<sup>61</sup>. Similar views are endorsed by Erdogan as well, who argues that memorizing verses cited in the daily prayers cannot be considered as religious education, which, for him, entails a detailed study of the Qur'an<sup>62</sup>. The Alevi belief however does not necessarily require the practice of daily prayers, and therefore forcing them – as well as the children of non-practicing Muslims – to memorize verses for daily prayers cannot be a part of their religious education. Erdogan practically rejects the existence of Alevis as a distinct group with their own prayers and rituals by claiming that “if it is following the path of Prophet Ali, I am more Alevi than the Alevis”<sup>63</sup>.

Another instance of the JDP's conservative bias can be seen in Erdogan's approval of municipalities tightly regulating the issuing of licenses to sell and serve alcohol. Erdogan defines the issue as fulfillment of the constitutional stipulation that the youth must be protected from alcohol, drugs and gambling. For him, drinking alcohol must not be permitted in places controlled by the public authorities. This, however, is nothing more than a reproduction of the same mentality that bars Islamic visibility from public institutions. After all, it is a constitutional stipulation to protect the secular and westernist nature of the republic as well. Erdogan, however, categorizes the headscarf issue but not the choice for drinking alcohol as a matter of rights and liberties beyond the domain of state regulation.

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<sup>60</sup> Elif Ergu's interview with Zeki Baseskioglu, *Istanbul Belediyesi'nden Zeki Triko'ya Gizli Sansur* [Censor on Zeki Triko by Istanbul Municipality], in «Vatan», October 8, 2006.

<sup>61</sup> *Alevilerin Din Dersi Almiyorum deme Lüksü Yok* [Alevis do not have the Comfort of Dropping Religious Classes], in «Hurriyet», July 6, 2006. Upon the case filed against Turkey by an Alevi citizen, the European Court of Human Rights decided in June 2006 that the compulsory religious education violates the fundamental freedoms. The Courts decision was also heavily criticized by the Minister of Justice, Cemil Çiçek, see *AIHM Kansere de Care Bulacak mı?* [Will the ECHR find a Cure for Cancer as well], in «Hurriyet», July 6, 2006.

<sup>62</sup> *Bu Tezgahtan Gecenden Bu Ulkeye Zarar Gelmez* [Graduates of this Order Make No Harm to the Country], in «Yeni Safak», June 18, 2005.

<sup>63</sup> T. SOYKAN, *Erdogan Niye daha Alevi* [Why Erdogan is more Alevi], in «Radikal», October 9, 2004.

The JDP came to power rather prematurely, i.e. only 14 months after its foundation and when its political identity was still in the making. It could be argued that even after four years in government, the JDP's political identity is yet to be stabilized. It takes up the issues relating to Islamic identity without prioritizing them. As some of these issues can be understood within the framework of liberalization and strengthening of individual civil liberties, the JDP cannot be defined as strictly Islamist on the grounds of its problematization of, for example, the ban on wearing the headscarf. On the other hand, the JDP employs a liberal language only when it comes to rights and liberties of Islamic identity. Erdogan criticizes the monist (i.e., secular/Kemalist) conceptualization of the public sphere on the grounds that it is closed to societal differences and it inhibits freedom to criticize the ban on wearing the headscarf on university premises. But when it comes to such societal differences as Turkish Alevis, Kurds, Armenians, Greek Orthodox and so on, the JDP recognizes their existence but forecloses their political representation by conceptualizing society as a harmonious unity of differences without any power relations between, for example, Kurds and Turks, men and women, labor and capital and so on. The normative bias of the JDP against a pluralist-liberalizing discourse can further be seen in its failed attempt to criminalize adultery in the autumn of 2004. By categorizing the issue of adultery as a matter of morality and by aiming to criminalize it, Erdogan has clearly shown that there are conservative exceptions to the principle of restricting the domains of state intervention.

## *6. Conclusions*

A “Europeanist” posture in foreign policy and a “reformist” one internally seem to make up the two simultaneous strategies which underpin the first leg of the JDP's effective governance. The other leg of its strategy has been to employ a defensive and low-keyed tone and substance in its discourse regarding the key issues which have been securitized since the 1990s. This second component of its strategy represents its accommodative strategy towards the establishment. These strategies operate against a background which is widely thought to be responsible for the JDP's rise to power: the structural and moral disintegration of dominant power relations in Turkey. The 2002 elections, in other words, made clear the rejection by vast sectors of the population of the existing political framework and of political inertia. This situation offered the JDP government the chance to embark on its “change/reform” mandate in order to focus on easing the daily life of ordinary people in an economy reeling from the effects of the gravest slump (February 2001) in the country's history, prioritize democracy over security concerns and diminish, reduce or dismantle the influence of the traditional centers of power.

The questions we have tried to address in this paper include how is it possible for the ruling party to cope with the historical tension with the secular establishment

and restore some sense of well-being to a nation which seemed to have completely lost it in the previous decade. In other words what are the “deliberate” attempts and policy designs of the government to challenge, contain or undermine the powerful modus operandi set against itself by the secular establishment? Likewise, another central concern is about the secular establishment’s position and measures to counter the government’s attempts to alter the power balance in its favour.

Can the secular establishment led by the Armed Forces cope with the changing balance of forces and what are the assumptions that underpin its position? It is fair to suggest that the combination of internal and international forces has reduced the choices available to the TAF high command to either accepting a shift in the power equation away from the military as part of the conditions of entry into the EU, or risk some loss of its autonomy. The new factors that shape the high-command’s strategic calculus can be traced to two trends: one is the tradition of politics in Turkey wherein a premium is placed more on the legitimacy of electoral results than on the rule of law and the protection of individual rights. The military risks its long-term survival if it ignores the JDP’s electoral popularity or obstructs the JDP’s democratic reform and EU-accession agenda that it itself shares. The other factor is the military’s remarkably broad reading of what is required in order to guard the republican ideology, or Kemalism as it has come to be known.

The lessons the Islam-friendly JDP drew from its earlier political incarnations and from the failure of the civilian political class in the 1990s seem to have strengthened its resolve to adopt an efficient and effective problem-solving approach to the key political problems. At the same time, the party’s newfound calling was assisted by its commitment to the democratic reform requirements of integration with the EU and by the strategic significance of Turkey in the region following September 11. Turkey’s geopolitical significance for the west arose because of its “moderately Islamic” yet stringently secular character of government, its possession of the second largest military force of any NATO member state; its record of having fought a successful civil war against separatism; and its location in a highly unstable region that includes two members of President Bush’s so-called “axis of evil” (namely, Iran and Iraq).