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**‘The Justice and Development Party: Towards a Reconciliation  
of Islam and Democracy in Turkey?’**

by

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**The Justice and Development Party: Towards  
Reconciliation of Islam and Democracy in Turkey?**

It seems to me that in a discussion of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey with a view to figuring out whether Turkey has been making progress towards a reconciliation between its Islam and democracy it is necessary to keep in mind under what kind of circumstances the religiously-oriented political parties in Turkey were set up, how they have conducted themselves, and why almost of them banned from politics by the Constitutional Court. I thus would like to start the story in the Ottoman period and bring it up to the present as quickly as possible.

From the Ottoman times to the present, Turkey increasingly evinced a secular face. As early as the fifteenth century, the Ottomans came up with secular codes. These codes drawn up during the reigns of Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror and Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent were not informed by the Shari'a. In fact, the cognomen of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent was *Kanuni*, which meant Law-maker. Then in the nineteenth century, the Ottomans came to the conclusion that Islam was incompatible with changing circumstances. While in some other Islamic lands, efforts were made to render Islam compatible with the changing circumstances, Ottomans made the rather critical decision that they should secularize their government. Thus, during the nineteenth century, rather than trying to reform their Islamic institutions, they introduced secular institutions alongside the Islamic ones. When they founded their Republic in 1923, Turks took another momentous step; they now opted for total Westernization. They decided to replace the Ottoman Islamic community with the Republican secular nation.

As Professor Kemal Karpat has put it, the ultimate goal of the so-called cultural revolution was to create a 'new Turk who would think logically'. The founders of the Republic thought that when deciding about anything Turks should use their reasoning faculties, and not turn to their religion. What role was Islam going to play under these circumstances? According to the founders of the Republic, Islam was going to be a system of belief and ethics only at the level of the individual. Islam was not going to provide a prescriptive set of norms at the level of polity.

The cultural revolution in question turned out to be a success story, having had, among other things, a major impact upon the

identity of the people. In the early 1960s, a survey in a textile factory in western Turkey found that when the workers were posed the question of "How do you see yourselves", 50.3 per cent of them considered themselves as Turks and 37.5% as Muslims. This inquiry was replicated in a 1994 a nation-wide survey. This time 69 per cent of the respondents considered themselves as Turks, 21 per cent as Muslim Turks, and a mere four per cent as Muslims.

The cultural revolution in question also had a strong impact on the secularization of the people. In a 1999 nation-wide poll, it was found that only one per cent of the respondents thought that those who commit adultery should be punished according to what the Koran stipulated.

It was in such a context that religiously-oriented parties began to be formed in Turkey, the first one being the National Order Party, which was founded in 1969. Its successor parties were the National Salvation Party, Welfare Party, Virtue Party, and the Felicity and Justice and Development Parties, in that order. The both of the last two parties are successor parties to the Virtue Party. The Felicity Party was formed by the Orthodox faction within the Virtue party, and the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*-AKP) set up by the reform faction in the Virtue Party. The latter called themselves the Innovators.

It was interesting that that the initiative for the formation of political parties in 1969 came from the then leader of the Nakshibandi religious order in Turkey, Sheikh Esat Zahit Kotku. Sheikh Kotku thought that Turkey needed first and foremost had been moral development. He conceived of moral development as a prerequisite for material development and political stability. In his view, moral development could take place if some values derived from Islam were internalized by the people. In a sense Sheikh Kotku's goal was starting a vitalizing movement in Turkish Islam. The Sheikh was not toying with the idea of creating or initiating a political party which would try to set up a state in Turkey based on Islam. He was only interested in the moral development of the people.

However, some isolated members of the political parties, which were formed from 1969 onwards, came up with statements that sounded very much like an effort to set up a state based on Islam. Necmettin Erbakan who had been the leader of the National Order Party, the National Salvation Party and the Welfare Party did not stop such statements because he was afraid of losing the political support of the marginal groups within those parties that these members represented. Moreover, at times Erbakan too made similar

statements. In one instance, he said, 'We will definitely come to power; however, whether it will be through the shedding of blood or not is an open question'.

It was basically as a consequence of such statements that three of the post-1969 religiously oriented political parties—the National Order Party, Welfare Party, and Virtue Party--were banned by the Constitutional Court and the fourth one—the National Salvation Party—was closed by the junta of the 1980 military intervention along with all other political parties of the time.

In other words, although the initial impetus for the establishment of political parties was that of trying to bring about a moral development in Turkey, which was considered seen as a prerequisite for economic development and political stability, the religiously oriented political parties from time to time gave the impression that they were drifting towards political Islam and thus they were closed. Was the impression in question a valid one? Did these political parties indeed aim at setting a state based on Islam? Did Turkey face the threat of political Islam in recent decades?

It is difficult to respond to these queries in the positive. When you look at the programs and the discourse of the leaders of these religiously-oriented political parties what you see is a gradual progress on the part of these political parties towards becoming pro-system rather than anti-system political parties. When the National Order party was around (1969-1970), the prevalent discourse was that Islam was not compatible with secularism. During the times of the Virtue Party (1997-1999), the discourse in question had radically changed. It was now argued that the state and Islam should not interfere in each other's affairs. Now both the state and Islam were to recognize the legitimacy of the other. Similarly, earlier women were not allowed to take part in any of the party activities; by the time the Virtue Party was founded those women who not only did not cover their hair but also publicly consumed alcohol were started to be elected Parliament on the tickets of the religiously-oriented political parties.

This particular development towards what you might call a liberal conception of Islam was opposed by the orthodox Islamists led by Erbakan. It was the Innovators who encouraged the transformation these political parties had gone through. The Innovators were led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, presently prime minister.

Erdogan entered politics in 1969. He was the successful and popular mayor of Istanbul between 1994 and 1998. Erdogan was banned from active politics in 1998 for a speech he had made in the city of Siirt in south-eastern Turkey. The courts judged the speech to

be against national unity. Erdogan was sentenced to 4.5 months in prison on the grounds that he had tried to divide Turkey between the pious and the non-pious. As its leader he led his Justice and Development Party to victory on the 3 November 2002 the national elections though he himself was still legally barred from running for Parliament. After an extended legal battle it was only recently that Erdogan's political rights were returned; he was elected to Parliament in a by election; and became prime minister.

What are some of his personality characteristics that contributed to his challenging the Orthodox faction within the Virtue party? I studied him A graduate student of mine I recently wrote a paper on Erdogan, which will be published in the April 2003 issue of the *Muslim World*. I would like to mention some of the points we have made in that article.

Erdogan graduated from the Economics Department of Istanbul University. But before that he was a graduate of the prayer leaders and preachers middle-cum-high school (grades six to eleven) in Istanbul. The latter schools were established in Turkey at the end of the 1940s when the secularly- oriented Republican People's Party was in office. The original aim was to train enlightened religious personages. Since then there has been a great deal of controversy in Turkey concerning these schools. Some view these schools as schools that produce students who are inclined towards political Islam; others think these schools are no different from the secular secondary lower and secondary high schools because their curricula are the same as those followed in secular middle and high schools except that in the former students also take courses on the Qur'an, Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet), and related subjects on Islam.

Erdogan in once said that the prayer leaders and preachers school that he had attended left a great imprint on him. He elaborated on this matter as follows: 'My life was pre-destined in that school. There I have learned patriotism, sympathy for fellow human beings, service for the country, worship of God, environmental sciences, a spirit of solidarity, and wishing for others what I want for myself.' As it is patent some of those imprints sound Islamic but most others are secular, like patriotism, sympathy for fellow human beings, serving for the country, environmental sciences, and wishing for others what one wants for himself/herself are obviously secular, and liberal I must add.

Erdogan also attended the Iskenderpasa Seminary of the Sheikh of the Nakshibandi religious order, Mehmet Zahit Kotku. Historically the Nakshibandis aimed at establishing the reign of Sufi morality in this world. In the Ottoman Empire they did not question

the legitimacy of the sultanic government. Erdogan has pointed out that the Iskenderpasa Seminary too had great impact on him.

Erdogan values education. He once said, 'There are two persons whose hands should be kissed; first is the teacher who conveys knowledge to others; the second is one's father'. Erdogan also has a conception of a cosmos that may change for the better. In that same speech that I have just quoted, he added, 'Babies' hands too should be kissed because they are the symbols of hope'. Being interested in education, Erdogan is an avid learner himself. When he was a candidate for mayor of Istanbul, he took private courses on urban affairs from staff members at Istanbul University and Istanbul Technical University. He did this at a time when very few people thought he would be elected mayor. Nevertheless, he carefully prepared himself for that post.

Erdogan freely admits that he made mistakes in the past, and he tries to take lessons from past experience. Admitting one's past mistakes is not a widespread pattern of behaviour in Turkey. In this sense, Erdogan is quite exceptional. Ismet İnönü used to behave in a similar manner. However, as I have pointed out, not many politicians act like that.

Erdogan values authenticity. However he is not against Turkey's joining the European Union. His motto is 'a local oriented stance in a globalizing world'.

As a Sufi Erdogan, thinks every individual carries in his or her heart a part of God; so, in his opinion every individual has some God-like characteristics. Thus, in his opinion, every individual is equal and, consequently, one should not discriminate against any individual. Having such a world view, when he was mayor, Erdogan did not pursue discriminatory policies. He did not even discriminate against non-Muslims. His municipality helped renovate not only mosques but also churches and synagogues. One should note here that his secular predecessors had not set aside funds for the repair of churches and synagogues. One point he made in the past well reflects his thinking on the matter that I am presently discussing, which was, "a person who is a genuine believer would not harm community no matter what his religion is." As a Sufi Muslim, Erdogan too has been interested in the moral development of the people and he too has had no interest in political Islam. He once said: 'My reference is Islam at the personal level; politically speaking, my reference is the constitution and democratic principles.'

In the last analysis, Erdogan takes both democracy and Islam as a means to provide for the happiness and welfare of the people. So he

has always kept his distance from political Islam. However, the bulk of the secularists in Turkey have not believed him. They accused Erdogan of being engaged in (Islamic) dissimulation (*taqiyya*), or hiding one's true intentions until the time is ripe to disclose them. In order to persuade the secularists that he is not after a state based Islam in recent years Erdogan began to stay away not only from Islamic sounding discourse but also from Islamic terminology. This was a very important change as far as Erdogan is concerned. In the past, he had used Islamic terminology when discussing not only Islamic matters but secular ones too. In the opening of the first session of Istanbul Municipality's administrative council, he had the *Fatiha* verse of the Qur'an chanted. As expected, the secularists heavily criticized him. His defence was: 'Why are you criticizing me? *Fatiha* is the opening verse of the Quran; it fits very well with the occasion.' When nevertheless the secularists kept on criticizing him, as I have pointed out, he came to the conclusion that he should not make resort even Islamic terminology.

What is more, right after the elections, as the chair or leader of his party - but not as prime minister, because he was not elected to Parliament at the time - he toured quite a number of countries in Europe. He talked to prime ministers of various European Union countries; he also went to the United States and had a meeting with President George W. Bush. And Erdogan recently even started to use some words in English, e.g. 'to check [something]' in a Turkish sentence (*Bunu Check edelim*)!

As I have already mentioned, on 3 November 2002, national elections were held in Turkey, and Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) obtained 34.2 per cent of the vote and 363 seats in Parliament. The only other political party that passed the ten-per cent election threshold was the Republican People's, which received 19.5 per cent of the vote and got 178 seats. Consequently, the AKP was able to form a majority government. The 3 November 2002 elections turned out to be a great disappointment not only for the three coalition partners – the Democratic Left Party of Bülent Ecevit, Nationalist Action Party of Devlet Bahçeli, and Motherland Party of Mesut Yılmaz - but also for the main opposition True Path Party of Tansu Çiller. The votes of all these parties remained below ten per cent. Rather high unemployment rates, an outcome of the two recent economic crises Turkey faced, played a critical role here. Today in Turkey there is a two-party Parliament, with nine independents MPs.

On the eve of the November 2002 elections, the AKP defined itself as a 'conservative democratic modern party'. According to its

program the party supports market economy, takes foreign capital as the motor of economic growth, wishes Turkey to become a full member of the EU, perceives secularism as a guarantee for all beliefs and religions, and longs for a merger of indigenous values with global ones. In the elections the party received votes from all cross-sections of the electorate who, in the past, had voted for other political parties, that is, for the secularly-oriented political parties on the Right and the Left.

On the evening of 3 November 2003, as it became clear that the AKP was going to have the majority of the votes Erdogan made significant statement. He said in quite categorical terms that the AKP was going to remain respectful to the secular premises of the Republic and as such, among other things, it had no intention of interfering with the preferred life-styles of people, the party wanted to integrate Turkey with the rest of the world, and the AKP had decided to formulate economic policies in cooperation with the IMF. That same night, when supporters of the party began to celebrate the AKP's victory the party leadership came with a firm warning to the supporters. They pointed out that the victory should not be celebrated by chanting such Islamic formulas as 'What God has willed' (*Mash'allah*) or 'God is the Greatest' (*Allah hu-Eqbar*). Erdogan explained the rationale behind this instruction from the party head quarters as follows: 'People expect change from us; we have to bring about change without creating tension. We will not perceive any group in this country as "the other"'.

As at the time Erdogan was still banned from active politics, he designated Abdullah Gül as a caretaker prime minister. Gül was the second fiddle in the 'Innovators' movement within the Virtue Party. He shares with Erdogan the same world-view. Until Erdogan took over prime ministry from Gül, two men displayed almost a collective leadership. When in exceptional situations they came up with statements that seemed to clash with each other, they quickly made it clear that there was no disagreement between them.

Erdogan and Gül assigned critical ministries in the cabinet to former members of the secular center-right Motherland party. The ministers in question had joined the AKP before the elections. They now held the posts of deputy prime minister and minister of justice, minister of justice, minister of interior affairs, minister of Education and minister of industry and trade.

How did the AKP government act after they came to power? Let me mention some developments which I consider significant for the present purpose. The AKP government left intact the office responsible for monitoring the exercise of measures against political

Islam within the prime ministry intact. During the month of Ramadan, cafeterias and restaurants at the party headquarters remained open. Erdogan did not fast during his visits to several countries in Europe as well as the United States. Let me indicate in passing that, in contrast, the leader of the secularly oriented opposition Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi-CHP*), Deniz Baykal, fasted during his official visits to several European countries. Traditionally the CHP has been the staunch guardian of secularism in Turkey; the party claims that it still is.

One issue that became rather controversial had to do with the speaker of Parliament, Bülent Arinç. Arinç was and still is number three man within the AKP. When Erdogan decided that Aptullah Gül rather than Arinç should be the caretaker prime minister, it seems, Arinç was rather offended by this choice. It is probably for this reason that although as speaker Arinç is obliged to maintain absolute neutrality vis-à-vis all political parties so far he has acted as if he was against the AKP. During the recent Iraqi crisis when the government sent a motion to Parliament seeking the government's approval of the deployment of US forces in Turkey and their transit passage Iraq Arinç said he did not look with sympathy to the motion. Then as the president of the Republic was leaving for a state visit Arinç went to the airport with his turbaned wife to see the president off. His 'challenging the secular premises of the Republic' by acting in this manner caused quite a controversy in Turkey. When ten days later Arinç himself left for India on an official he did not take along his wife.

Turning to Erdogan, in the post-elections period, as the leader of the AKP Erdogan sought to develop harmonious relations with the military; the media, the European Union, and the USA

As far as the military is concerned, Erdogan has so far been very careful: he had good words for the military while he gently he reminded the military that military that the government has the last word. On one occasion he said, 'Our military has played a very important role in the modernization of Turkey. Today it gives full support to the accession of Turkey to the European Union as a full member'. Then he said: 'The military performs its duties within the limits of the Constitution.' Similarly, on another occasion he first said, 'When there is a weakness in government, the military enters the picture'. Then he added: 'We now have a strong government. In Turkey there is a clear division of labor between institutions. The military is in a subordinate position to political government.'

Concerning Turkey's relations with the EU and the USA, as I have already pointed out, right after the elections Erdogan made

strenuous efforts Turkey's getting an early date for the start the accession negotiations with the EU. At the expense of repeating myself let me again note that he visited several countries in Europe for this purpose. He went to the United States too for the same purpose. In the European countries he visited Erdogan made some statements about European Union (EU) and 'Turkey's place in that Union'. One of those statements was the following: 'We perceive the EU as a symbol of the merging of civilisations and forming an integrated entity.' Implicitly challenging Samuel Huntington, Erdogan was arguing that civilizations could manage a successful marriage. When Turkey was not able to obtain an early date for the start of the accession negotiations, Erdogan was not bitter. He said there was no need for Turkey to reciprocate; rather it should try harder to comply with the Copenhagen criteria. Erdogan also tried to do his best to solve the Cyprus question as quickly as possible. Of course the solution to that problem is one of the prerequisites for the European Union setting a date for the start of the accession negotiations. Erdogan also paid attention to the question of with which political parties in Europe the AKP should cooperate. His first priority was the Christian Democrats in Germany. He must have thought that the AKP is both a religiously-oriented and a democratic party, the Christian Democrats ideal partners. However, when it became clear to him the Christian Democrats were against Turkey's joining the EU, or at least not granting Turkey a relatively early date for the start of the accession negotiations Erdogan changed his mind. He toys with the idea that the AKP should work with either Liberals or Social Democrats in Europe, but not Socialists.

Finally let me make some remarks concerning Erdogan's views on the Iraqi crisis. When the crisis started Gül and Erdogan made efforts to persuade Iraq that it should comply with the Security Council resolution 1442. When they came to the conclusion that they will not be able to persuade Iraq, they decided that they should support the USA thus their motion to Parliament for the deployment of the US troops in the southeast and the transit passage to Iraq of some other US troops. Upon the submission of the motion to Parliament, Erdogan said, 'We should act in rational manner. Some refer to Turkey as the leader of the Muslim world [and imply that Turkey should act in accordance with the maxim that Muslim countries should not fight with each other]'. We should not pay attention to such arguments'. Erdogan added, 'You would either make history or merely read it. When it comes to vital matters there is no place for populism'. Upon the defeat of the motion in Parliament Erdogan and Gül did not rule out a substitute motion.

Let me conclude by making some general remarks. The Republican Turkey initiated and successfully carried its project of a secular Turkey before it allowed its Islam to play a role in politics. It therefore became impossible for the religiously-oriented political parties to resort the strategy of 'one man, one vote, once' for coming to power through free elections and then attempting to set up a state based on Islam. The Turkish electorate did not in the past and does not today vote for a political party just because it was/is a religiously-oriented party. I have just pointed out that Turkey also allowed its Islam to play a role in politics only after the consolidation of democracy in Turkey. By the consolidation of democracy I mean that everybody who is anybody comes to the conclusion that there is no political regime better than democracy. Consequently unless there was an attempt at setting up a state based on Islam, religiously-oriented political parties were allowed to participate in politics, take part in coalition governments and even come to power all by themselves as happened recently.

Since Islamists too have gone through the same secularisation process that others experienced, in Turkey attempts at setting up a state based on Islam remained at the level of (isolated) discourse and were not translated into action. It is true that some marginal members of these parties talked of capturing powers through use of force. And Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of the first three religiously oriented parties of the post-1969 period, too once said, 'We will definitely come to power; only whether by shedding blood or not is an open question.' However, none of the religiously oriented political parties have ever tried to come to power through a non-democratic means. And finally, even the isolated discourse about capturing power through force were not tolerated, the relevant party was closed by the Constitutional Court. Because of such an eventuality but also because of their upbringing today Islamists in Turkey aim at no more than the moral development at the level of individual and community. Some secularists in Turkey whom I and some students of Turkish affairs call 'radical secularists' think the AKP leaders other hidden agendas. What I and the company call 'moderate secularists' think are inclined to give the AKP leaders the benefit of the doubt and thus see no problem in their forming a government all by themselves and ruling the country. On the other hand, not only the radical but also the moderate secularists would tolerate a clear-cut drift towards an Islamic state and would not refrain from taking all the necessary measures at their disposal and in their capacity.

Now returning to the very title of my presentation, The Justice and Development Party: Towards a Reconciliation of Islam and Democracy in Turkey, my response to the question raised in the subtitle is a virtually unqualified 'Yes': From 1969 to the present, there has been a gradual but considerable progress towards a reconciliation of Islam and democracy in Turkey.

**Prof. Susser:** Thank you very much Prof. Heper for a masterful overview - social scientist, historian, with a taste for the biographer as well: from your biography of İnönü I can see the biography of Erdogan perhaps coming some time later. We have some time for questions.

**Q:** Regarding the impending US attempt to invade Iraq, when Turkey came to invade the northern Kurdish region - and if that is so, without the legal and international implications - what would be the .....

**A:** International relations and foreign policy of Turkey is not my cup of tea, but let me try my best. Turkey would prefer that the United States and Turkey act together in northern Iraq. The US Ambassador in Ankara and several leading members of the Administration in Washington pointed out more than once that their government was not going to be instrumental in the setting up of an independent Kurdish state. Turkey's priorities are those of preventing large numbers of refugees from crossing its borders and discouraging the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. The state and political elite in Ankara would not like Turkey to remain outside of the efforts to persuade Saddam to give up weapons of mass destruction or else. They think that if they do not contribute to such efforts, undesired developments may take place outside of their control leading perhaps to the worst case scenario—a confrontation between Turkey and the US: things may get out of hand, and there might be development towards the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. If Turkey does not make a contribution Turkey may also find it rather difficult to justify such a unilateral intervention on legal grounds, as has been implied in the question. On the other hand, we should keep in mind that nowadays all countries are justifiably interested in what is going on beyond their borders for humanitarian and other reasons.

**Q:** .... Theoretically, and practically the British had the ability and given the situation - the possibility to establish a Kurdish state at the end of World War One which could have taken parts of today's Syria, Iraq, Iran and Turkey. That might have changed the whole history and a lot of problems and difficulties would have been prevented - perhaps the Kurds would have got the rights they are fighting for.

**A:** Let me once more indicate that I would rather prefer questions along the lines of my lecture. Let me nevertheless point out that what happened in those times has not been forgotten in Turkey For the last couple of months I would not have liked to be in the shoes of the British Ambassador to Ankara!

**Q:** You have talked about a unique Islamist movement and one of the things that was most interesting to me was .... what exactly is meant by Innovators and in what way specifically do they see themselves as innovators?

**A:** They were resolved not to make the mistakes Erbakan had made; for that reason they call themselves 'Innovators'. I don't think that they load into that word any specific Islamic meanings. I toy with the idea that Erbakan was a confused leader. I am not sure whether he really wanted to set up a state in based on Islam. He is an engineer with a Ph.D. from Germany; he is not an Ayatollah. In Turkey those in the leadership cadres of the religiously oriented political parties have had a secular education On other the hand, Erbakan is an unpredictable person. All of a sudden he could up with statements some times outrageous sometimes out right funny. He came up with 'dangerous' statements when he felt that he might have lost the political support of the members of the Orthodox group and/or marginal radicals in the parties he led--the National Order Party, National Salvation Party, and Welfare Party. He could have no other purpose agendas appeasing the Orthodox and the radical within those parties. Whatever was in his mind, he misjudged the reaction that would have come from the secularist establishment. All three political parties he led were closed--two of them by the Constitutional Court ( National Order Party and Welfare Party), and the third ( National Salvation Party) in the aftermath of the 1980 military intervention. Even if the 1980 military intervention had not taken place in all probability the National Salvation Party too would have been closed by the constitutional court.

**Q:** Two questions that arise out of your presentation of Erdogan as trying inclusively; I was very struck by that particular word. I have two different aspects to ask about; one is to what extent does that inclusiveness extend to reach out to other Sufi groups? And to what extent is there communication between the Justice and Development Party and Allawi groups? We hear generally they constitute something between 10 and 20 percent of the population.

My other question: I apologize for this - I want to take you back to the Kurds for a moment but domestically: again following on your characterization of Erdogan as an inclusivist, in the past few days we have read in the newspaper there is a movement to close the largest Kurdish party.

**A:** It has been closed.

**Q:** And I wondered - it seems to me that that is not exactly in keeping with the spirit of inclusiveness, and I wondered if you could give us a little bit more explanation of the dynamic particularly as it seems that the Kurds who are involved in political activity within the party structure might be engaged in an ongoing political conflict and trying to set up contacts between Kurds in Turkey and outside.

**A:** The Kurdish-oriented party was closed by the same Constitutional Court that closed religiously oriented parties. That court has autonomy vis-à-vis the executive and legislature. Erdogan could have played no role in the closure of the Kurdish oriented political party. In recent years, banning of political parties by the Constitutional Court has been made more difficult. When the National Order Party and the National Salvation Party were closed, it was enough for a marginal member of the political party to make a statement which sounded like an advocacy of political Islam. Since then, particularly as part of the efforts to further democratize politics in Turkey so that Turkey can become a full member of the EU the law has been amended. Now a political-Islam sounding statement by a marginal member does not constitute grounds for closure of a party; there must be evidence that the party as a whole adopted the ideas expressed in such a statement. The exact wording is that the party should not become a focus of yearning for a state based on Islam.

Does Erdogan act as a Sufi and what is his relationship with other Sufi groups in Turkey? Erdogan does not refer to himself as a Sufi. Others in Turkey too do not talk of him as a Sufi. We in

our article argue that he is a Sufi. He shows some signs of being a Sufi; we take his inclination to treat everybody as equal, his tendency to frequently reciting poems, his interest in the moral development of the people and not going further than that and the like as evidence of his being a Sufi. On the other hand to our knowledge he has no systematic contacts with the Sufi groups.

**Q:** You have described in certain ways the differences that in Turkey exist with respect to the separation of religion from the state or ... from the state, and I wonder whether you would give us some comparison of that philosophy of separation with parallel notions of separation of Church and State in the western world.

**A:** There has been a historical contrast between Turkish secularism and western European secularism. In the West, in France in particular, what I have called call secularism is called laicism rather than secularism. Historically, religion and state were separate in Western Europe. The Church had its autonomy from the state and the state had its autonomy from the Church. The development of laicism in the French context meant that the state gradually took over some of the functions that the Church had performed, such as education. As I have pointed out earlier the Church was primarily, if not solely responsible, for providing education. When that function was taken over by the state education was provide by lay people, hence the word 'laicism'.

In the Ottoman Empire, there was no separation between the religious institution and the state. The highest religious dignitary (the Sheikh-ul-Islam) was appointed by the Sultan. In turn, that same religious dignitary justified by his religious decrees the critical decisions that the sultans made. The sultan was also responsible to protect religion and Islam and to spread it. In other words in the Ottoman Empire one did not come across laicism in the sense that one observed it in Western Europe. Thus, in the Ottoman Empire and later in the Turkish Republic the problematique was not that of transferring certain functions from the religious institution to the state; the problematique was that of substituting a secular thinking pattern for a religious one. It was for this reason that the primary goal of the founders of the state was that creating a Turk who would think logically. The founders of Turkey thought it was necessary to free the mind of the individual from the hold of religion, i.e. Islam. For the founders thought Islam did not allow critical thinking, but only dogmas. It was for this reason that As Serif Mardin has pointed out the

Turkish revolution was a 'cultural revolution'. And it was for the same reason that late Niyazi Berkes has drawn our attention to the difference between laicism and secularism and has argued that secularism was a better term to explain the Ottoman-Turkish case.