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# ACCEPT PLURALISM

## Comprehensive Report on Turkey:

### The Myth of Tolerance

Ayhan Kaya  
Istanbul Bilgi University

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**5. New Knowledge  
Country Synthesis Reports**



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ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

# **Comprehensive Report on Turkey: The Myth of Tolerance**

**AYHAN KAYA**

**ISTANBUL BILGI UNIVERSITY**

**DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**



**Work Package 5 – New Knowledge on Tolerance  
and Cultural Diversity in Europe**

**D5.1 Country Synthesis Reports on Tolerance and  
Cultural diversity - Concepts and Practices**

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## ***Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion: Responding to the Challenges of the 21st Century in Europe (ACCEPT PLURALISM)***

**ACCEPT PLURALISM** is a Research Project funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Program. The project investigates whether European societies have become more or less tolerant during the past 20 years. In particular, the project aims to clarify: (a) how is *tolerance* defined conceptually, (b) how it is codified in norms, institutional arrangements, public policies and social practices, (c) how *tolerance* can be measured (whose *tolerance*, who is tolerated, and what if degrees of *tolerance* vary with reference to different minority groups). The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium conducts original empirical research on key issues in school life and in politics that thematise different understandings and practices of *tolerance*. Bringing together empirical and theoretical findings, ACCEPT PLURALISM generates a State of the Art Report on *Tolerance* and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Handbook on Ideas of *Tolerance* and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a *Tolerance* Indicators' Toolkit where qualitative and quantitative indicators may be used to score each country's performance on tolerating cultural diversity, and several academic publications (books, journal articles) on *Tolerance, Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in Europe*. The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium is formed by 18 partner institutions covering 15 EU countries. The project is hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and co-ordinated by Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou.

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**Ayhan Kaya** is a Professor of Political Science and Jean Monnet Chair at the Department of International Relations, and the Director of the European Institute at the İstanbul Bilgi University.

### **Contact Details**

Istanbul Bilgi University, European Institute  
Dolapdere Campus, Kurtuluş Deresi Cad. No:47  
34440 Dolapdere / İstanbul, Turkey

Tel. +90.212.3115306, Fax. +90.212.2508748  
[ayhan.kaya@bilgi.edu.tr](mailto:ayhan.kaya@bilgi.edu.tr)  
<http://eu.bilgi.edu.tr>, <http://www.bilgi.edu.tr>

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## Executive Summary

The concept of tolerance has a very long history in the Turkish context that can be traced back to the Ottoman Empire. It also has a very popular usage in everyday life. Turks are usually proud of referring to the *Millet System* of the Ottoman Empire, which is often portrayed in the popular imagery as the guarantor of tolerance, respecting the boundaries between religious communities. Such an official discourse is still vibrant in contemporary Turkey. However, this study argues that tolerance is nothing but a *myth* in Turkey. *The myth of tolerance* has been functional in concealing the mistreatment of ethno-cultural and religious minorities other than the majority of Sunni-Muslim-Turks in Turkey. Those remaining outside the boundaries of the *holy trinity* of *Sunni-Muslim-Turks* are bound to be subject to the patronizing and tolerant gaze of the majority nation.

The work claims that there is no problem of (in)tolerance in Turkey as long as those non-Sunni, non-Muslim, and/or non-Turkish minorities accept being second-class citizens. The celebration of the Armenian millet in the Ottoman Empire as the “*millet-i sadika*” (loyal nation) is actually a confirmation of the fact that loyalty to the Empire paves the way to toleration for the non-Muslim minorities. On the other hand, those non-Turks (Kurds, Circassians, Laz, etc.) and non-Sunnis (Alevi), who claim to be the constitutive elements of the modern nation in Turkey, are not in search of tolerance from the majority nation. The Turkish nation-building process based on the collective acts of various constitutive elements (mainly Muslims) *vis-a-vis* Christians (mainly Greeks and Armenians) and their European allies in the course of the Independence War in the early 1920s became more exclusionary in the course of time, and it excluded Kurds, Circassians, Alevi, Arabs, Laz and several other Muslim-origin minorities in a way that ethnicized the nation. Ethnification of the nation is a common practice in Turkey since the early 1930s, alienating the non-Turkish and non-Sunni groups of Muslim background who are still engaged in the discourse of ‘constitutive element of the nation’ and who do not want to be considered ‘second class citizens’. This is still an unresolved issue.

The term tolerance has become more viable in the aftermath of the Helsinki Summit of the European Union in 1999. The study also claims that there is a parallel between the neo-liberal form of governmentality and the rhetoric of tolerance, both of which lead to culturalization of what is political and social. Against this background, it is maintained that Turkey’s European integration process as undertaken by the Justice and Development Party rule seems to go in line with this neo-liberal form of governmentality, underlining that Turkey’s moderate Islamic character can be used as a bridging element between the so-called Christian and Islamic civilizations at the expense of reducing civilization to religion.

### Tolerance in Education: Alevi Claims for a more inclusive curriculum

This study illustrated the discourses and practices of accommodation of cultural diversity in Turkey with a special focus on the response of the Alevi to the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality (*Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi*). For this purpose, this study investigated public policies and political initiatives proposed for the resolution of cultural diversity challenges with respect to *tolerance* and/or respect/recognition in school life. It was found out that the attempts made for the revision of the curriculum in the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality do not necessarily bring about respect and recognition for the Alevi culture as a distinct and peculiar identity in school life. However, it means to some Alevi groups that the participation of Alevi children is tolerated, and religious differences of the Alevi are accepted by means of incorporating Alevi belief into the curriculum and textbooks. This initiative cannot be regarded as a public policy, which effectively responds to the Alevi claims along with the respect and recognition of the Alevi identity in

the framework of more rigorous problems/issues arising from the religious difference of Alevis such as places of worship (*cemeevi*) and the alleged legal status within the Directorate of Religious Affairs. Furthermore, the issue of education on Alevi belief should be discussed more in the public space with respect to the freedom of faith in general.

### **Lifting the Ban on Headscarf in Universities: Right to Education**

It was revealed that most of the interlocutors regard the public policies and political initiatives proposed for the resolution of the headscarf issue in universities by making new legal changes or by reinstating and enforcing the laws to re-assure the right to education, as palliative solutions. However, it was mostly claimed that in order to resolve this issue with an address to *tolerance*, respect and recognition, a more structural solution should be found on the basis of right to freedom of religion. Accordingly, those interviewed have expressed their willingness to see a constitutional reform to clearly make sure that headscarf ban will no longer be an obstacle before the right to education of individuals, to precisely highlight the right to religious difference, and to prevent the politicization of the headscarf issue.

### **Laicists vs. Islamists: Polarization of Politics in Everyday Life**

It was found out that both issues have been squeezed in dichotomy of laicist and Islamist, which has always been visible in political, social and cultural spheres of life throughout the republican period. It seems that the most crucial impact of strict laicism in Turkey is that it polarizes and diffuses the society between *laicists*, who comply with the state's principles and interests, and *Islamists*, who challenge the state and the regime with their social and individual preferences. In fact, this study has found out that the state-centric process of secularization divides the society between citizens and non-citizens. Since the state discourse of laicism is imposed on individuals, the individuals have internalized the state's control over their religious claims. It is also likely that top-down simple modernization run by the state has created believers of Laicism on the one hand, and believers of Islam on the other. This research has partly revealed that both laicist and Islamist discourses have so far been used by Turkish political elite as two different forms of ideology in order to conceal social, economic and political issues prevalent in the society by means of institutions, procedures, analyses, debates, and reflections.

### **Tolerance in Political Life: Political Participation of Circassians**

This study also investigated the way the regime of tolerance has been implemented in Turkey as far as the political participation of the Circassians is concerned since the late nineteenth century. The study first scrutinized the political and cultural claims raised by the Circassians, and then explored which claims have so far been tolerated by the state, what political practices are considered to be tolerant, or intolerant, and what values/norms are considered to promote, or undermine, tolerance in Turkish political life.

Since the deepening of the European integration process in the early 2000s, the Circassians have become more vocal in raising their claims to the recognition of their right to education in their mother tongue, recognition of their ethno-cultural identity, their right to dual citizenship, recognition of the contribution to the foundation of the Republic made by the politicians, military officers and bureaucrats of Caucasus origin, and the removal of the descriptions of *Çerkes Ethem* as a "traitor" from school textbooks. Circassian claims for constitutional citizenship, recognition and respect, along with the government's initiative for constitutional reform and legal arrangements to secure political and cultural rights, can be categorized as a good example of accommodation of the ethno-cultural diversity challenge regarding tolerance in political life.

This study found that the current state policies generated to respond to the Circassian claims cannot be considered as a discourse and practice of *respect* and *recognition*. On the contrary, the policies of the contemporary government (Justice and Development Party, AKP) spring from a discourse of toleration towards the Circassians, who are actually in search of constitutional citizenship, equality and respect with regard to their ethno-cultural differences. The study revealed that cultural and folkloric forms of representations demonstrated by ethno-cultural minorities are tolerated by the Turkish state. However, the state actors are not yet tolerant of the politicization of minority claims, as in the case of the Circassians. It was also found out that the growing links and affiliations of the Circassians with their homelands in the North Caucasus have provided them with a transnational capital, which they are tempted to use to absorb the negative impacts of the Turkish state. The research also reveals that the transnationalization of the Circassian social movements and the use of the social media impact the ways in which their claims are currently being raised in a way that challenges the traditional patriarchal structure of the Circassian communities.

## **Conclusion**

This research reveals that Turkey is going through a social, economic and political transformation, which results in the enlargement of the political centre with the inclusion of previously excluded groups such as Islamists, Kurds, Circassians, and non-Muslim minorities. However, it is not possible yet to see if the state actors and the ruling government are in a position to accommodate the conflicting interests of the newcomers and the former insider groups (laicists) without causing a societal clash. It seems that the revitalization of an Islamist and neo-Ottoman discourse by the AKP government is likely to alienate the laicists, Kemalists, and traditional middle class and upper-middle class groups as well as the Alevi and non-Muslim groups. Some segments of the Kurds, Circassians, and other ethno-cultural minorities are also expressing their concerns about the way in which the Turkish society is being reislamized in a way that essentializes the holy trinity of the Turkish nation, prioritizing Sunni-Islam-Turkish identities over the others.

This work argued that the definition of tolerance, or toleration, is limited with the acceptance of Sunni Muslims and their secular counterparts featured with the holy-trinity of the Turkish state tradition, i.e. Sunni-Muslim-Turkish nation. The act of toleration does not embrace all different kinds of ethno-cultural and religious minorities. Toleration in the Ottoman context as well as in the modern Turkish context refers to the absence of persecution of people but not their acceptance into society as full and welcomed members of community. In this sense, I argued that toleration is actually nothing but a form of governmentality, designed to maintain peace and order in multi-ethnic and multi-nominational contexts. The Ottoman imperial experience and the Turkish national experience approve that the Turkish nation tolerate those non-Muslims, non-Sunni-Muslims and non-Turks as long as they did not disturb or go against the Sunni-Muslim-Turkish order. Alevi and Circassian cases reveal that when ethno-cultural and religious minorities did transgress, their recognition may turn into suppression and persecution.

Against this background, this study concludes that the regime of tolerance is far from resolving the problems of the contemporary Turkish society. What is actually happening now in Turkey and elsewhere is the rise of the discourse of tolerance in a way that leads to the culturalization and depolitization of what is social and political in the age of neo-liberalism, which is primarily shaped by the reduction of materialist civilizational discourse into post-materialist, culturalist and religious form of civilizational discourse. Hence, the policy makers should not only be limited with the use of the notion of tolerance (*hosgörü*) in settling the societal, political, economic, cultural and religious conflicts. They should also give credit to the notions of respect, recognition, pluralism and equality in order to create a cohesive society by means of underlining the social and political nature of problems faced in everyday life.

**Keywords:** Alevis, headscarf, Circassians, laicism, republicanism, secularism, freedom of religion, Turkey, political participation, democratization, European integration, citizenship, transnational space, tolerance

## **Introduction**

Bearing the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, modern Turkey, with more than 72 million inhabitants, is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country housing approximately 50 different Muslim and/or non-Muslim ethno-cultural groups including Sunni Turks, Alevi Turks, Sunni Kurds, Alevi Kurds, Circassians, Lazis, Armenians, Georgians, Jews, Greeks, Arabs and Assyrians (Andrews, 1989). However, leaving aside the attempts made for democratisation of the country in the last decade, the Turkish state has been far from recognising the ethnically and culturally diverse nature of the Turkish society. Ethno-cultural and religious minorities in Turkey have been subjected to homogenising state policies.

As Turkey is a republican country, one could not find official figures about the numbers of ethno-cultural and religious minorities. The draft report is designed to portray the ways in which ethno-cultural and religious diversity has hitherto been managed by the modern Turkish state within the framework of the discourse of tolerance. Explicating the construction of the Turkish national identity and the modern Turkish state, the report will primarily delineate the constitutive elements of the state machinery as well as the technologies of citizenship. Turkey's process of Europeanization will also be scrutinized in order to pave the way to a detailed analysis of the transformation of the Turkish polity from the Cold War years to the Post-Cold War years. In doing so, major challenges to the traditional Kemalist nation-state building process will be scrutinized, such as political Islam, Alevi revival, Kurdish revival and Europeanization/globalization.

Subsequently, the regime of tolerance in school life and political life will be delineated in reference to three different case studies. In the first case study, Alevi claims and the response of the ruling party, Justice and Development Party (AKP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) will be addressed with regard to the curricula of the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality at the primary and secondary levels, which is believed by the Alevi-Bektashi minority to be only promoting Sunni Islam, and to be excluding the Alevi-Bektashi belief and practices. Second case study will concentrate on the ways in which the state actors have so far dealt with the headscarfed female university students. Eventually, the third case study revolves around the political and cultural claims of the Circassian diasporic minority, who are recently becoming politically more active due to the European integration process. In the final section of this study, the regime of tolerance in Turkey will be critically discussed with reference to the case studies as well as to the theoretical debates on the notion of tolerance and toleration. This section will underline that what is called tolerance in the Turkish context is nothing but a myth.

## **Methodology**

This study makes use of policy documents, public statements, newspaper articles, NGO reports, academic works, blogs and websites which a textual discourse analysis of the claims of the Alevi-Bektashis, headscarfed female university students, and the Circassian diaspora is instigated. Besides the textual discourse analysis, around thirty-five interviews were held with the community leaders of the Alevi-Bektashis and of the Circassian diaspora as well as with the headscarfed university students, policy makers, politicians, bureaucrats, academics, practitioners and other stakeholders such as teachers, students, and parents. In addition to analyzing the secondary literature, I also investigated the official documents to reveal the ways in which ethno-cultural minorities and headscarfed women have been defined by the Turkish state. The fieldwork on the Alevi-Bektashi claims and the headscarfed women was conducted in the winter of 2011, and the following fieldwork on the Circassians was held between December 2011 and late January 2012. Most of the interviews were conducted in Istanbul and

Ankara, where the Alevi-Bektashi and Circassian associations are very active. The first field work was finalized with a focus group discussion held in July 2011. A group of journalists, civil society leaders, practitioners and headscarfed lawyers had a heated debate on both cases. The focus group discussion was very constructive in revising our arguments and conclusions.

The data collected through the interviews were evaluated on the basis of the interlocutors' reflections on some common denominators, such as tolerance, laicism, secularism, religion, pluralism, political participation, political representation, respect, identity and transnational linkages. These interviews were analyzed using the discourse analysis method (Wodak et al., 1999; and Wodak, 2002; 2010). Discourse analysis focuses on the investigation of the relations between discourse and social/cultural developments in everyday life. It views discursive practices as an important form of social practice contributing to the constitution of the social and cultural world, including social identities and relations.

## Chapter 1. Nation, State and Citizenship in Turkey

Since the beginning of the nation-state building process, the primary goal of the main constituents of the Turkish Republic had been the establishment of a homogenous nation and a unitary state. In order to achieve this goal, Mustafa Kemal and the military/political elite equipped the state with a superior power over the civil society. Şerif Mardin (1975) puts special emphasis on the statist and centralist character of the Republic in its founding years. He underlines that the Republic was ‘diffident’ in integrating the social forces into the central political system, although the local notables, who took part in the National Independence War and formed a significant component of the first Grand National Assembly, were incorporated into the Republican People’s Party (RPP) and the bureaucracy (Mardin, 1975: 22-27). To this end, some religious, ethnic and local claims, such as the Kurdish *Sheikh Sait* rebellion (1925) and the Islamist *Menemen* revolt (a district of Izmir), were suppressed by the state elite on the grounds that the social forces were regarded as the sources of decentralisation and political rivalry (Mardin, 1975: 23). Therefore, Mardin argues that rather than integration of the social forces into the centre through mobilisation of the masses, the Republican idea of restructuring the society was confined to bureaucratisation and regulation. Hence, the Kemalist elite preferred to achieve the goal of forming the unitary state and a homogenous nation by means of preserving the state’s *raison d’être* and adopting policies to suppress, assimilate and exclude diverse societal groupings along religious, ethnic and cultural lines.

In order to maintain the dominance of the state in political and social structuring over its social rivals, Mustafa Kemal and the state elite adopted policies and programmes to homogenise linguistic, historical and cultural features of the Turkish society and to construct a ‘new national identity’. Atatürk defined the Turkish nation as “the Turkish people forming the Turkish Republic”. By this statement, he elucidated that every individual who participated in the establishment of the Republic and took a share in the future of it is a Turk (Özbudun, 1981: 18). Atatürk’s definition of the Turkish nation embraces all the people who live in the lands of Anatolia and Thrace, and feel a part of the past and the future of the Republic. That is why his conception of the Turkish nation avoids the distinction of any social segment along with religion, ethnicity and sectarianism. In this sense, the republican Kemalist elite were difference-blind, and did not recognise the ethno-cultural diversity of the Turkish nation (Kaya, 2007).

The defining distinctiveness of the early Republic was its Turkification policies, which sought the dominance of Turkishness and Sunni Islam as the defining elements in every walk of life, from the language spoken in the public space to citizenship, national education, the trade regime, the personnel regime in public enterprises, industrial life and even settlement laws (Aktar, 1996). Having an imperial legacy, many such new regulations and laws referred to a set of attempts to homogenise the entire nation without any tolerance for difference. It is highly probable that the underestimation of ethno-cultural diversity among the Muslim population of the Republic was due to the preceding Ottoman *Millet* system borrowed by the republican political elite. The *Millet* system did not consider ethnic differences among Muslims. All Muslims, regardless of their other differences, belonged to one and the same ‘Muslim nation’. Paradoxically, the successful nature of the Turkish revolution/rupture lies in the continuity of the Ottoman notion of *millet*.

In the years following the formation of the Republic, assimilationist and/or exclusionary policies of the state elite, which sought to erase social and cultural diversity, continued to provide the national identity based on Sunni Islam and Turkishness with a dominant role in social and political spheres. The social forces affiliated with diverse religious, ethnic and cultural values were frequently faced with, and suppressed by, homogenising policies such as the nationalist Turkish history thesis of 1932, the Sun Language Theory of 1936, the unitarian nationalist education policies (Tevhid-i Tedrisat

Kanunu,1924), banning the use of the mother tongue and of ethnic minority names, discriminatory settlement policies put in effect on the exchange minorities and new migrants (*İskan Kanunu*, 1934), discriminatory citizenship laws granting citizenship exclusively to Muslim-origin migrants, the imposition of the Wealth Tax in 1942, especially on non-Muslims, and the forced migration of Kurds in the east and southeast of Turkey (Kaya, 2007). Ethno-cultural minorities adopted different means to cope with the challenge of the state's homogenising policies. They generated their own individual identities in accordance with these assimilationist and/or exclusionary policies. Within the framework of the majority nationalism, ethnic and cultural minorities chose to be involved in the project of the construction of a homogenous Turkish nation, disguised their ethnic identities in public, and identified themselves as a constitutive element of the Turkish nation.

Subsequent to the primary goal of the formation of a homogenous nation and a unitary state, the state elite pointed to the modern and secular character of the state.<sup>1</sup> Without a macro socio-economic transformation, a total cultural change through the adoption of the Kemalist version of Westernisation and secularism required the state elite to construct 'an imagined Turkish nation' in line with the interests of the unitary and bureaucratic state (Sakallıoğlu, 1996). In its configuration of secularism, the Kemalist elite not only accommodated the Islamist identity of the individual but also dispersed the individual identity under the banner of the modern and secular Turkish nation. In doing so, they ensured that the individual will was secondary to national will, and also precluded that Islam as a social power could be organised as a challenge to the unitary and bureaucratic state. Relying on the 'bureaucratic code', the state elite instrumentalised secularism, which was conceptualised as the separation of politics and religion both in public and private spheres, in order to consolidate the central state power against the potential threat of social forces affiliated with Islamic values and aims.

It should be noted that there is a debate over the definition of Turkish citizenship, for instance "while some argue that the formal definition of Turkish citizenship is based on territoriality rather than ethnicity (Kirişçi 2000), for some, Turkish citizenship oscillates between political and ethnicist logic (Yeğen 2004; Kadioğlu 2007). The historical evidence shows that the citizenship policies of Turkey were civic republican in rhetoric. The first citizenship law of 1928 gave citizenship to all those residing within the boundaries of the republic on the basis of the *jus soli* principle. However, it has gradually become ethno-cultural in nature, embraced by the principle of *jus sanguinis*. Retrospectively speaking, ethnic groups in Turkey such as Kurds, Circassians, Alevis, Armenians, Lazis and Arabs have developed various political participation strategies vis-à-vis the legal and political structure and delimitations.

Turkey's Europeanization process has also brought about various challenges to the prescribed definitions of the nation and citizen, a point to which we will return shortly. However, the process of modernization and Europeanization of Turkey dates back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The journey has always been full of impediments, as the process was a rather politically-oriented one leading to the emergence of social divides/faultlines within the nation. The rise of the AKP in Turkey has made some remarkable changes in the western oriented-civilizational discourse of the Turkish political establishment. Having a pro-Islamist discourse, the AKP is now trying to generate a multi-level governance in both domestic and international platforms, and is willing to become a soft-power in her region embracing all the countries in the Middle East, Caucasus, Balkans and North Africa. It seems that such an attempt, which makes the Islamic inclinations of the AKP very apparent, is also appreciated by the European Union circles. However, it is uncertain if such inclinations of the AKP are destined to make Turkey a member of the EU in the end.

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<sup>1</sup> For the Kemalist mode of secularism as a means to the project of modernist nationalism, see Göle (1997), Keyman (1995), and Cizre (1996).



Turkey had experienced one of the steadiest periods in the history of the Republic between 1999 and 2005. At the Helsinki Summit in December 1999, the European Heads of State and Government for the first time offered Turkey the concrete prospect of full membership in the European Union, more than four decades after its application for association with the European Economic Community (EEC) in July 1959. Subsequently, in 1963, Turkey had signed the Ankara Agreement, which foresaw the establishment of a Customs Union between Turkey and the EEC. Although the Customs Union was an economic cooperation model, Article 28 of the Agreement stipulated Turkey's membership as a long term goal. Accordingly, this stipulation had reflections in the political realm; the economic interests of the elites had a "conditioning effect" on democracy (Keyman and Öniş, 2007: 61). In 1987, Turkey applied for full EEC membership. Although Turkey was deemed eligible for membership, in 1989 the Opinion of the Commission stated that there were several economic and political difficulties that needed to be addressed before membership, "such as the expansion of political pluralism, the state of democracy, the persistence of disputes with a Member State (namely Greece), the lack of a viable solution to the Cyprus problem, relative economic backwardness, especially in macroeconomic terms, the Kurdish question, and problems related to human rights (Müftüler-Baç, 2000: 23). However, the official reason for this rejection was the internal dynamic of the EEC, namely the undergoing process of establishing a single market.



Table 1: The Main Minority Groups in Turkey and their Dimensions of Difference

| Dimensions Of Difference                                  | Indigenous people of Anatolia | Ethnically Different from Turks | Religiously Different from Sunni Muslims             | Linguistically Different from Turkish |
|---|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Non-Muslim Minorities</b>                              |                               |                                 |  |                                       |
| Armenians   | √                             | √                               | √ (Gregorian Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant)         | √                                     |
| Jewish  |                               | √ (the Sephardic Jews)          | √  | √ (Ladino)                            |
| Greek   | √                             | √                               | √ (Greek Orthodox)                                   | √                                     |
| Assyrians   | √                             | √                               | √ (Syriac Christians)                                | √                                     |
| Protestants   | diverse                       | diverse                         | √  | diverse                               |
| <b>Muslim Minorities and Immigrants</b>                   |                               |                                 |  |                                       |
| <b>Arabs</b>  |                               |                                 |  |                                       |
| Sunni Arabs   | √                             | √                               |  | √                                     |
| Alevi Arabs (the same minority as Arabic-speaking Alevis) | √                             | √                               | √  | √                                     |
| <b>Alevis</b>   |                               |                                 |  |                                       |
| Azarbaijani speaking                                      | √                             |                                 | √ (similar to Shia)                                  | √(Azerbaijani dialect of Turkish)     |
| Arabic speaking (the same minority as Alevi Arabs)        | √                             | √                               | √ (the Alevi belief of the Syrian Nusayri community) | √ (Arabic)                            |
| Turkmen Alevis (Turkish speaking)                         | √                             |                                 | √  |                                       |
| Zazas (Zaza and Kurdish speaking)                         | √                             | √                               | √  | √ (Zaza or Kurdish)                   |
| <b>Kurds</b>  |                               |                                 |  |                                       |
| Zaza Kurds (the same minority as Zaza Alevis)             | √                             | √                               | √ (Alevi)  | √ (Zaza and Kurdish speaking)         |
| Kurds speaking Kurmanci                                   | √                             | √                               |  | √ (Kurmanci dialect of Kurdish)       |
| <b>Balkan Immigrants</b>                                  |                               |                                 |  |                                       |
| Bosnians  |                               | √ (Slavic)                      |  | Bosniac-Turkish                       |
| Pomaks  |                               | √ (Slavic)                      |  | Bulgarian-Turkish                     |
| Torbes  |                               | √ (Slavic)                      |  | Turkish                               |
| Albanians   |                               | √ (Slavic)                      |  | Albanian-Turkish                      |
| Roma community  |                               | √                               | Diverse  | Roma-Turkish                          |
| <b>Caucasian Immigrants</b>                               |                               |                                 |  |                                       |
| Circassians   |                               | √                               |  | Adigey, Abkaz                         |
| Georgians   |                               | √                               |  | Georgian                              |
| Laz   | √                             | √                               |  | Laz                                   |



## **Cultural Diversity Challenges**

In the aftermath of the 1980 military coup, Kemalist ideology encountered various challenges originating from ethno-cultural and religious groups. This was the time when the Kemalist rhetoric of nationalism, which was based on a retrospective narrative holding the Muslim-origin nation together against the syndrome of the common enemy of imperialist European powers, was challenged by its major taboos: Islam, Kurds, Alevis, globalization and liberalization. In what follows, these challenges will be scrutinized.

### ***The Rise of Political Islam in the 1980s: Islamist Forces becoming integral parts of the regime***

The state-centric Kemalist regime was confronted with the challenge of ethno-cultural and religious groups in the aftermath of the military coup of 1980 (Keyman and Önis, 2007:16). The military coup and the policies undertaken by the military government up until 1983 revealed that the military elite made a profound attempt to eradicate the sources of social strife emerging from the conflict between the rightists and leftists, and between diverse ethno-cultural communities in the 1970s, and to rebuild the social-political cohesion (Cizre, 1996: 245-246). For this purpose, the military elite began to pursue a project of restructuring the society in such a way that the conservative and Islamist sources of culture were accommodated into the homogenous modern Turkish national identity.

In parallel with the invocation of the Islamist aspects into the national culture, the policy of economic liberalisation was regarded as a necessary means to structure a new social and economic order. Both the accommodation of the Islamist forces and the economic liberalisation were expected to avoid the polarisation and fragmentation among the political parties supported by the diverse social forces contesting to obtain resources and to shape the social order. It is in this political context after the 1980 coup that it became possible to see the Islamist forces, values and themes more pervasively involved in various areas of formal political and social spheres. For instance, the Islamist orders and communities (*sufi tarikats*) infiltrated into the political parties, government, civil service and the business and banking sectors. Moreover, the Prime Minister, Turgut Özal, who was backed by the military in the formation of the new conservative and economically liberal order, met the leaders of some *Sufi tarikats* for the Friday prayer. Mandatory religious instruction in primary and secondary schools was introduced by the military regime led by Kenan Evren (Cizre, 1996: 244).

However, the state's project of restructuring the political society was embedded in an implicit 'double discourse'. One aim of the military government in the project of reorganising the society was the integration of social forces into the political system, and the other was the enhancement of the state's role in politics. To put it differently, the military government undertook a macro socio-economic transformation, whereby it attempted to create a homogenous and cohesive society unified in Islamic and nationalist identity under the circumstances of liberal economy, on the one hand, while on the other, it was committed to strengthening the state's control over the political and social realms. That is to say that, although the introduction of free-market economy in both economic and social spheres (such as the privatisation of mass media) stimulated the mobilisation of social forces and the proliferation of civil society, it also impeded the democratic consolidation by containing the political activity of the civil society within the channels of political participation (Toprak, 1988:126-127).

In order to enhance the state's role in politics, the military government initiated the enactment of an electoral law, by which it adopted the 10 % national threshold in order to preclude the participation of the ideologically oppositional parties in competitive politics (Özbudun, 2000: 75). The military government also enacted some articles of the 1982 constitution and other laws, whereby it outlawed

cooperation between political parties and other civil society institutions aiming at demobilising the working class and depoliticising the civil society (Özbudun, 2000: 27). Therefore, it can be argued that the enhanced state control over the political and social spheres eliminated a civil society autonomous from the state, in which social forces could be mobilised into major oppositional groups organised along ethno-cultural lines as a challenge to the unitary state and the republican regime.

The Islamist forces were incorporated into the new socio-economic order in which the big business circles in the centre and the peripheral Anatolian petite bourgeoisie circles integrated and coexisted within the structure of liberal economy (Shambayati, 1994: 316). Hence, they were used by the new state elite to counterbalance the leftists and the highly mobilised urban working class (Özbudun, 2000: 26-27). The Islamist forces did not emerge as a challenge to the secular and republican regime, they rather became an integral part constituting and maintaining the status quo of the liberal and capitalist order, which enabled the military and state elite to sustain the political regime.

### ***New Challenges in the 1990s: Ethno-Religious Claims***

The political context of the 1990s displayed a different character from the 1980s, whereby the enhancement of the state's role in politics proved to be counter-productive. While the state's control over the political and social realms prevailed, ethno-cultural and religious minorities mobilised a politics of identity in reaction to the state's restriction of political participation. Ethno-cultural and religious communities, which were already integrated into the regime in the 1980s, could not participate in the political process to the extent that they could manifest their dissidence against the inequality and injustice in the distribution of resources within the restricted liberal system.

Due to the lack of the political will and capacity of the coalition governments of the 1990s in the management of the economic liberalisation in technological and organisational terms, the opportunities of the open and free market economy did not assure sustained economic growth and were not equally allocated to every segment of the society (Keyman and Önis, 2007: 136). Both the rapid integration into the world economy and the poor management of the economic liberalisation gave rise to economic crises and problems of inequality and poverty (Keyman and Önis, 2007: 244). Social segments which were marginalised and deprived by the unjust features of the liberal economy protested against such deteriorating effects of the socio-economic structure as poverty, unemployment, corruption, social injustice and 'the moral decay' (Kaya, 2007).

Another factor which played a significant role in the rise of the politics of identity by which political mobilisation was stimulated and formed along ethno-cultural and religious lines was the process of globalisation. The transformation to the free market economy and broader interaction with the world societies also created an impetus for the proliferation of liberal, democratic and pluralistic ideas in the political realm, as well as to the cultivation of social mobilisation in civil society.

However, the Turkish political regime based on the priority of the state and restricted political participation was not able to respond to the demands for fostering a political system promoting democracy, pluralism and civil society required by the liberalisation process. Fragmentation embedded in the globalisation process provided the marginalised and oppressed social groups with an informal social-economic structure by which they were able to mobilise in the political context of restricted participation and devalued left-right axis and to fight against the inequalities of the liberal economy and the complexities of the urban life (Özbudun and Hale, 2009:35). Hence, it is crucial to articulate that this period has witnessed three major social movements challenging the authority of the traditional political centre: political Islam, Alevi revivalism, and Kurdish nationalism.

### ***Political Islam as a Challenge to the Kemalist Regime***

The emergence of the Welfare Party with an Islamic social base and political agenda posed a profound challenge to the state-centric, republican and secular regime in both political and cultural terms. The Welfare Party (WP, *Refah Partisi*) and the broader social network of the Islamist movement sought to respond to the inequalities of the global and liberal system by transcending the state and mobilising the marginalised and underprivileged social groups within an expanding Islamic civil society (*umma*) and the framing structure of identity politics. The WP tried to generate its electoral support from a broad Islamist social network both by supporting the socio-economic opportunity structures for the social integration of the Islamist forces into the growing liberal economy and competitive urban life and by channelling their interests and demands to national politics through political parties. Like the Islamist movements in the other Middle Eastern countries, Islamist communities, Sufi orders (*tarikats*) and Islamic welfare associations provided a network for the marginalised classes, in which they were provided with sources of social services including employment, religious and secular education, health services, food, clothing and coal supplies, which the nation-state failed to provide to a large extent thanks to the unmanaged transition to the liberal economy (Özbudun, 2009: 16-18).

It should be noticed that the Islamist political mobilisation appealed both to the winners and losers of the global and liberal economy in the sense that the newly emerging Islamic bourgeoisie, which had undergone a continuous integration into the liberal system since the 1980s, distributed to the poor the wealth raised from the publishing houses, private media channels, university preparation courses, Islamic banks and financial institutions and holding companies (Özbudun, 2009: 13). Through its connections with these Islamist communities, the WP attracted the votes of the Islamic bourgeoisie, the upper middle class and the marginalised lower class and also stimulated political mobilisation of the conservative and Islamist social forces, which dramatically challenged the republican and secular segments.

In regard to the unacceptability and intolerance of the dominant regime towards the Islamist forces, the military elite and the coalition government led by the WP in 1997 confronted some crises. The WP posed some challenges to the secular regime with its demands articulating Islamic values and purposes in the political life involving the exercise of Islamic law, the segregation of sexes in social life, religious education and the headscarf issue. Analysing the demands of the WP for the incorporation of Islam into formal politics, it should be underlined that what the WP was seeking was the acquisition of state power and the formation of an Islamic social order from above rather than mere toleration for the recognition of freedom of religion and conscience and the protection of religious rights such as the wearing of headscarf and religious clothing in public places (Özbudun, 2009: 7-9).

Within the legal and institutional framework, the military/bureaucratic state elite made it explicit that the WP's Islamist demands could not be tolerated, as the military gave a harsh ultimatum to the party in the meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) on February 28, 1997, and the party was closed down by a Constitutional Court decision in the following year on January 16, 1998 (Özbudun, 2009: 4). The WP and the Islamist forces constituted a religious and cultural challenge to the republican and secular dominant regime and segments of the society. Their challenge was manifested in the legal and institutional frameworks, in that the WP suggested the introduction of a new legal implementation, whereby each legal community would be governed in accordance with its own religious rules. In doing so, it asserted a return to the *Medina Covenant* of the Prophet Muhammed's time, the 'age of happiness' (*asr-ı saadet*), whereby a kind of multiculturalism based on religious differences was experienced (Özbudun, 2009: 7-8).

In the social and economic spheres as an everyday practice, the WP also attempted to undermine the secular and Western order and to alter it in such a way that it could also embrace the social forces that had a religious and Islamic way of living. Therefore, the WP and Islamist forces posed a religious and

cultural diversity challenge both in their attempt to stimulate social integration and political participation of the Islamist segments into the republican and secular establishment and to Islamize the society and culture in the legal and institutional framework and everyday practices. However, the state elite and dominant secular segments reacted to this challenge of the WP immediately, and displayed their intolerance towards the Islamist forces by purging them from the formal political sphere.

### ***Alevi Revivalism***

The other challenge to the republican state and the myth of the homogenous nation arose from the Alevi community. After the adoption of the institution of the caliphate by the Sublime Porte in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Sultan, Yavuz Sultan Selim, imposed the dominance of the Sunni Islamic tradition over various religious groups in Anatolia (Erman and Erdemir, 2008). As a consequence of these assimilationist and suppressive policies, Alevi were compelled to develop a protective attitude towards their own community and identity by living in small social enclosures in rural areas. In the *Millet* system of the Ottoman Empire, Islam was the main constitutive element (Yıldız, 2001). The *Millet* system did not distinguish between the Muslim subjects of the Ottomans with regard to ethno-cultural differences. All Muslims, regardless of their differences, belonged to one and the same 'Muslim nation'. Thereby, Alevi were also considered the integral subjects of the 'Sunni Muslim nation' (Kaya, 2004a).

Throughout the nation-state building process, the state elite also followed the Ottoman heritage of the 'Millet system', imposing the dominance of Sunni Islam. In order to achieve the goal of the Kemalist mode of modernisation, the republican political elite implemented policies for the secularisation of political and social life (Göle, 1997). One of these policies was the abolishment of any kind of place for religious communion and practice other than mosques, without taking into consideration the *Cemevis*, dervish lodges and special places for Alevi communion (Erman and Erdemir, 2008). For this reason, Alevi communities were deprived of the places where they could be organised into a religious community as an alternative to the Sunni communities.

Moreover, by the entitlement of all the religious affairs to the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) accountable to the Prime Minister's Office, the Alevi were subject to the decisions made by this institution on all matters of religious life. It is also worth noting that the Directorate of Religious Affairs gradually turned into a state institution instrumented to impose and diffuse the values and practices of the dominant Sunni Islam. The transition to multi-party politics did not bring about a radical challenge to the dominant republican and secular regime based on the homogenous Sunni-Turkish nation. Rather, the Democrat Party that emerged as the opposition to the Kemalist Republican Peoples Party had embraced the dominant Sunni Islamic discourse, mobilised Sunni conservatism, made connections with Sunni Sufi sheikhs and returned to the call to prayer in Arabic in the 1950s. Thus, we can draw the argument that throughout Republican history, both the state and the society regarded Alevi as intolerable or difficult to tolerate or accept, as they posed a challenge to the dominant Sunni Muslim order.

In order to overcome the marginalising discourses and practices of the dominant classes of the urban life, Alevi who migrated to the big cities attempted to reproduce their communities and to build solidarity networks through '*hemsehrilik*' (fellowship) associations and affiliations, and became intensely engaged in identity politics (Erman and Aydemir, 2008). Furthermore, in the 1990s, a slight change in the state discourse towards re-alignment with the Alevi against the emerging political Islam and Kurdish nationalists also contributed to the 'awakening of the Alevi', who mobilised through social networks, solidarity associations and identity politics. In parallel with the shift in the state discourse, one case to show the rise of tolerance is that Alevi and Sunni intellectuals signed a 'declaration of being Alevi', which was published in the daily *Cumhuriyet* (Yavuz, 1999:180-199).



Similarly, in the 1999 local elections, the Alevis took an initiative to form a 'Democratic Peace Movement' led by a businessman, Ali Haydar Veziroglu, and later, a political party called 'the Peace Party' (Erman and Erdemir, 2008).

Despite the state discourse for the re-alignment with the Alevis and the common initiatives of the Sunnis secularists and Alevis to accommodate cultural and religious diversity, during this decade one could also find obvious examples illustrating the cases of intolerance and conflict. As an ethno-class group, the Alevi community living in the squatters of the shanty town Gazi at the periphery of Istanbul emerged as a resistance grouping which considered their Alevi identity superior to the Turkish national identity, as opposed to the moderate Alevis seeking a democratic, pluralistic and peaceful movement (Kaya, 2009a). The Alevi community of the Gazi neighbourhood identified themselves with aspects such as distrust and scepticism of the bureaucracy, the state authorities, the politicians and the municipal governments, which ignored the grievances and the lack of social services there as a result of their 'Othering' the 'poor and different' Alevis.

This conflict between the dominant classes and the culturally and religiously different underclass Alevis of urban life took place in an armed clash in the Gazi neighbourhood. In March 1995, an unknown person fired at the people in three coffee houses; one of them died and 20 of them were seriously injured. The neighbourhood people were involved in an armed conflict with the police forces, which were late to intervene and thus seen as responsible for the attack. At the end of the clash between the Alevis and the police in the neighbourhood, 15 people were killed by the policemen (Kaya, 2001). This case of armed conflict between the security forces and the marginalised Alevis revealed that the level of social intolerance, suspicion and hatred increases when the dichotomy between Sunni-Muslim-Turkish majority and the ethno-religious groups and minorities such as the Alevis was re-emphasised, and the gap between the rich and the poor was widened.

### ***Kurdish Revivalism***

At the end of the 1980s, political parties which represented the Kurdish identity and defended the Kurdish cultural and political rights began to enter the formal political sphere. Under the Özal government, the abolition of the articles of Law 765 of the Turkish Penal Code, which restricted the freedom of expression, laid the ground for the formation of legal ethnic and religious parties (Sahin, 2008:134). In addition, departing from their alliances with the leftist parties of the 1970s, the Kurdish political and intellectual elite abandoned the old communist slogans, the socialist economic programmes, and the aim of forming an independent Kurdistan, and replaced them with the seizure of cultural rights for the Kurdish people and the democratic consolidation of the democratic republic (Sahin, 2008: 134). During the 1990s, the attempts of the Kurdish political elite to represent Kurdish cultural and political rights by participating in national politics through political parties were undermined by closure judgments of the Constitutional Court and the public debates on the legitimacy of a party that was founded on the basis of the recognition of ethnic identity (Şahin, 2008: 138-139).

Ever since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the state has never been tolerant of the expression of Kurdish identity in the public sphere. The Kurdish population was considered by the Kemalist elite as the most formidable threat to the formation of a nation-state based on the republican, secular, modern and bureaucratic principles as well as on the homogenous Turkish national identity (Kaya and Tarhanlı, 2008). First, as it was evidently revealed in the Sheikh Sait Rebellion (1925), the Kurdish tribal leaders and religious leaders, sheikhs, who maintained control over the local community, constituted a potential source of rivalry to the central political authority.

Second, the Kurdish people were also perceived as a rigorous impediment to the project of the Kemalist mode of modernisation and Westernisation due to their 'backward, pre-modern and

unprogressive' communal and primordial life style based on Sufi order (*tarikats*), tribes, sheikhs, landlords, warlords and rebels (Sahin, 2008). Consequently, the increasing affiliation of the Kurds with the PKK, the Kurdish Workers Party (*Partia Kerkeran Kurdistan*), was making them even more intolerable for the majority Turkish nation and the state<sup>2</sup>.

Since 1984, the PKK had been leading an armed struggle against the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) in the Southeastern region. In order to defend Turkish territorial integrity and national security, an urgent implementation of excessive military and authoritarian control over the governance of some cities (Martial Law) in the Eastern and Southeastern regions was introduced in 1987 and was extended 57 times, until its abolition in 2002. Moreover, since 1985 the military had adopted another strategy, whereby they supported and armed the village guards of some Kurdish tribes, allying with them to counterattack the tribes involved in armed attacks.

The rise of the Kurdish ethnic nationalism, which involved the attempts of Kurdish representation in national politics on the one hand and the armed struggle on the other, was perceived as 'a low-intensity war' between the Kurdish minority and the Turkish state. The armed conflict has resulted in an increasing tension between the Turks and the Kurds in a way that leads to the mental division among the Kurds. Kurds are now willing to stay in their home cities despite the difficulties in getting jobs. Racism and institutional discrimination towards the Kurds in the big cities and in western Anatolia is growing day by day. Since the mid-1980s, the Kurds have been coupled by the majority of the Turkish public with separation, division, disintegration, terror, violence, drug trafficking, informal economics and the gun industry.

### **The 2000s: European Integration and Euroscepticism**

As stated earlier, Turkey was granted the right to candidacy in the Helsinki Summit of the European Union in December 1999. Later, in 2002, the Copenhagen Summit introduced new concerns and discussions regarding the nature of European identity, the notion of Europeanization and the borders of Europe, which led to identity-based concerns regarding Turkey's place in Europe and the situation of Islamic identity in European societies. According to Keyman and Öniş, the main concern was whether the EU aspired to become a global actor or, rather, preferred inward-oriented integration. Subsequently, while the former aspiration was accommodating towards Turkish membership, the latter perceived Turkey as a liability, given the social, political and economic disparities between the EU member states and Turkey (Keyman and Öniş, 2007: 48-50). For the first time, the Copenhagen Summit and the subsequent discussions linked the question of culture with European enlargement and the EU's capacity to embrace cultural differences. "The discussions over Turkish accession reveal yet another dimension of 'absorption capacity', that of 'cultural' and 'social' absorption, which are directly related to the 'identity' of the Union. Jean-Louis Bourlanges, an MEP from a French centre-right party vocal on Turkish accession, has argued that the accession of Turkey will not only have a huge economic impact on the EU, but will also introduce a great deal of cultural and social heterogeneity that will endanger the formation of a solid and democratically organised political community" (Emerson et al., 2006: 3.)

In the course of European integration, the AKP adopted a conservative democratic ideology with an emphasis on secularism, social peace, social justice, the preservation of moral values and norms, pluralism, democracy, free market economy, civil society and good governance (Cinar and Duran, 2008: 31). By using such a pragmatist discourse, the AKP aimed to mobilise socially and economically marginalised classes which reacted to the inequalities deriving from the processes of globalization and urban life (Kaya, 2004a: 16-17). Moreover, the AKP also became attractive for the

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<sup>2</sup> For more information about the Kurds, see Appendix.

liberal and secular bourgeoisie, upper middle and middle classes, who were disenchanted with the political system because of the political and economic instability (Özbudun and Hale, 2009: 37). The AKP immediately took an initiative to raise toleration and respect for the freedom of religion and conscience, and for the protection of religious rights such as the right to practice religion in public and private space.

Whether the AKP's discourse on conservative democracy and Islamic liberalism achieved transformation of the society into a more tolerant one with respect to the recognition of religious freedom and rights is not certain. However, it is clear that the AKP government made profound attempts to force the state and the society to recognise cultural and religious differences. The protection of religious freedoms and rights became a heated debate between the Islamist and secular segments of society. One of the cases, where the AKP sought to increase the tolerance *vis-a-vis* the social integration of Islamist forces and to foster the respect for religious freedom is the AKP government proposed of a draft-law that enabled the *Imam Hatip* (clergy high-school) graduates to study not only in the faculty of Islamic theology but also in other faculties (Özbudun and Hale, 2009: 86). By doing so, it made an attempt to eradicate the constraints that had given rise to the social and economic segregation of religious and conservative segments.

Moreover, between 2002 and 2008 the AKP made several attempts to initiate amendments and decisions in the legal and institutional framework for lifting the ban on the headscarf (Kaya, 2009b:18). The AKP government proposed to the Constitutional Court an amendment to the articles of the Constitution concerning the ban on wearing the headscarf in universities, with the expectation that this amendment would lead to the lifting of the ban in 2008. Following the constitutional amendments, the newly elected head of the Board of the Higher Education (BHE), Yusuf Ziya Özcan, made an announcement to the universities and stated that according to the constitutional change, the ban on wearing a headscarf in the Turkish universities was lifted. However, the Court ultimately repudiated the lifting of the ban.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, the appearance/ existence of conservative and Islamist segments in the socio-economic sphere was recognised/accepted as an everyday reality although (in)tolerance/(dis)respect for the expression of faith and wearing religious clothing still remained a highly debated topic in the public sphere.

On the other hand, it should be thoroughly questioned whether the quest of the AKP for the recognition of religious freedom and rights through the adoption of the discourses on conservative democracy was equally carried out in every social cleavage, and particularly in the case of religious minorities. Before the 2007 elections, even though the AKP took an initiative to accommodate the Alevi in the Sunni-dominant order, the party was primarily concerned with gaining more votes from the Alevi (Kaya, 2009b: 17). The Alevi were not equally treated in the AKP's policy to transform the society to become more tolerant of the expression of faith and religious rights. The AKP failed to accommodate the Alevi in the social sphere and continued to retain the Sunni-dominant social order, since it did not recognise the *Cemevis* (Alevi communion houses) as places of worship in addition to mosques, and insisted on the inclusion of the Alevi children in the assignment of the compulsory courses of religion in secondary school education (Kaya, 2009b: 18). Therefore, one should contend that the AKP's policies to stimulate the social sensitivities for the toleration and recognition of the religious minorities and the protection of religious rights were confined to the Sunni conservative and Islamist segments.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis of the headscarf debate see the *Turkish Daily News* webpage, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=95065>, access date 8 May 2010.

<sup>4</sup> For further information on this initiative see the *Turkish Daily News* webpage, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=80103&contact=1>, accessed 10 May 2010.

In the legal and institutional framework since February 2002, it is also possible to find various reform policies for the recognition and protection of ethnic minority rights, which manifested a great shift in the discursive position taken by the political elite. Since the Accession Partnership Programme and the National Programme (March 2001) addressed at the recognition of ethno-cultural diversity, the former coalition government and the AKP government enacted and enforced reform packages and policies to accommodate ethno-cultural diversity, and in a broader sense, to secure the individual rights, liberties and human rights within the framework of the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law. With the initial reform packages put into force between 2002 and 2004, first, they reduced the role of the military in politics by removing the judges of military origin from the State Security Courts and eventually abolishing these courts, removing the military members from the High Audio Visual Board (RTÜK) and the Board of Higher Education (BHE), weakening the military impact on the judiciary, civilianising the National Security Council (NSC) and restricting its role to a consultative body, and by bringing the extra-budgetary funds of the military under the general budget of the Defence Ministry (Kaya, 2009; Sahin, 2008).

Secondly, they reinforced individual rights, liberties and human rights versus the authoritarian and unitary state by loosening the law on the freedom of association and demonstration, abolishing the death penalty and all means and practices of torture by the security forces, revising the Penal Code, abolishing the term of ‘forbidden language’ from the Press law, permitting limited broadcast in Kurdish on the private radio and TV channels, introducing limited broadcast in Arabic, Circassian, and various dialects of Kurdish such as Kurmançî and Zaza on the national radio and TV channels, and by allowing the ethnic languages and dialects to be taught in private courses. Consequently, the reform packages, which were adopted to raise the social awareness of tolerance and acceptance of ethno-cultural minorities, encouraged ethno-cultural groups to vocalise their claims through legitimate political channels.

Since 2001, the government has taken initiatives to remedy the civil and cultural rights of non-Muslim minorities through legal amendments. In accordance with the Copenhagen Political Criteria, the constitutional amendments expanded the individual rights and liberties to every citizen and provided the structural arrangements for democratic consolidation and the enhancement of the rule of law and human rights (Oran, 2004). The EU Reform Packages partially and gradually restored civil and cultural rights conceded to the non-Muslim minorities with the Lausanne Agreement.

In the nation-state formation process, the state elite of the Republic inherited from the Ottomans the discourse and practices of the homogenous nation based on Sunni Islam and the exclusion of the non-Muslim minorities. The Kemalist definition of nationalism was also discriminative against the non-Muslim minorities, since it incorporated the element of Islam into the so-called modern secular national identity. The configuration of the majority and minority elements of the Turkish nation were also inscribed in the Lausanne Agreement (1923) during the foundation of the Turkish Republic. According to LA, the non-Muslim minorities<sup>5</sup> were officially categorised and recognised as ‘minorities’ based upon their ethnic and religious differences, whereas Kurds, Alevis, Circassians<sup>6</sup> and other Muslim elements belonged to the Turkish nation (*Türk Uyraklu*) constituting the majority (Oran, 2000).

With the EU Reform packages, the ban on establishing associations for the preservation and diffusion of languages and cultures other than Turkish and traditional to minorities was abolished; the use of the ‘forbidden language’ was re-legalised in the law of associations; the restrictions on learning and publishing in different languages and dialects other than Turkish were abandoned; the right of the foundations belonging to non-Muslim minorities to acquire intangible property was restored by a

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<sup>5</sup> For more information about Greek, Jewish and Armenian and other non-Muslim minorities, see Appendix.

<sup>6</sup> For more information about Circussians, see Appendix.

change in the law on foundations and was initially subjected to the decisions of the cabinet and later to the General Secretary of Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*), and the limitation on names other than Turkish was abolished by a change in the law on population. Furthermore, recently the European Union General Secretariat in Ankara has decided to drop the use of the term ‘non-Muslims’ in identifying officially recognized minorities in Turkey. Seeking to update the government’s terminology for the 21st century, Turkey’s chief negotiator for European Union affairs has announced a decision to use the term “different belief groups” instead of “*gayrimüslim*” (non-Muslim) in official EU correspondence. The decision was taken after the Chief Negotiator Egemen Bağış received a letter from the Vice-Patriarch of the Ancient Syriac Orthodox Church, Yusuf Çetin, who pointed out that “*Muslim*” means “believer” in Aramaic, a northwest Semitic language used in ancient times as the everyday speech of Syria. As such, the term “*gayrimüslim*,” which has been the preferred term for non-Muslims in Turkey, implied “nonbelievers.”<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, the discursive shift from ‘majority nationalism’ to ‘diversity as an ideology’ fostered by the governing party created an incentive for a change in every-day life for the social motivation toward toleration of ethno-religious rights of non-Muslim minorities. The political elite, the Turkish and Armenian intellectuals and civil society organisations were induced to open public discussion on the taboo issues involving the Armenian ‘genocide’, Armenian ethnic minority rights, Armenian-Turkish diplomatic relations and the impact of the Armenian Diaspora on the problems related to the Armenians<sup>8</sup>.

On the other hand, it should also be pointed out that the EU Reforms on civil and cultural rights of non-Muslim minorities could not be brought into practice in an immediate and effective way because its application was obstructed and delayed by bureaucratic obstacles and the interference of the National Security Council, the intelligence agencies and the Security Forces. Since 2004, none of the applications for the approval of non-Muslim foundations have been approved, and 18.66% of the applications for the acquisition of intangible properties belonging to the existing foundations have been approved.<sup>9</sup> By looking at the constraints in bringing the EU reforms on non-Muslim minorities into practice, one could maintain that the dominant discourse of ‘non-Turkish’ and ‘foreign’ non-Muslim minorities is still prevalent, and therefore, the Turkish state is still reluctant to accommodate tolerance, recognition or acceptance in everyday life.

## Discourses and Practices of (In)Tolerance in the age of Euroscepticism

From December 17, 2004 to October 3, 2005, when EU state and national government leaders decided to start negotiations with Turkey, tensions began to rise between nationalist, patriotic, statist, pro-status-quo groups on the one hand and pro-EU groups on the other hand. This was the time when the *virtuous cycle* of the period between 1999 and 2005 was replaced with the *vicious cycle* starting from the late 2005. A new nationalist and religious wave embraced the country, especially among middle-class and upper middle-class groups. The actual start of the accession negotiations in 2005 was a turning point towards Euroscepticism. This was also observed in several previous cases during the accession negotiations of the 2004/2007 entrants. Political elites and the government come to realize that accession negotiations are not in fact “negotiations” but rather a unilateral imposition from the EU. The only “negotiable” matters that would benefit the candidate are generally some minor exceptions and hardly bargained transition periods. Furthermore, this reality of actual accession negotiations is often abused by politicians to unfoundedly blame many governmental actions on the

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=gayrimuslim-replaced-by-8220different-belief-groups8221-2010-06-27>, accessed on 30 June 2010.

<sup>8</sup> For more information about Armenians, see Appendix.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the developments of the establishment of non-Muslim foundations approved by the government, see Oran (2004:133-134).

EU. Be the “blaming of Brussels” honest or not, the overall impact on public support is almost surely negative.

Euroscepticism, nationalism and parochialism in Turkey were triggered by the disapproving sentiments towards the American occupation of Iraq, the limitations on national sovereignty posed by EU integration, the high tide of the 90th anniversary of the Armenian “deportation”/“genocide” among the Armenian diaspora (2005), the “risk of recognition” of Southern Cyprus by Turkey for the sake of the EU integration, anti-Turkey public opinion in the EU countries (e.g., France and Austria) framed by conservative powers, and Israel’s attacks on Lebanon in 2006. Against such a background the state elite has also become very sceptical of the Europeanization process. The best way to explain the sources of such scepticism among the state elite is to refer to the “*Sèvres Syndrome*”, which is based on a fear deriving from the post-World War I era, characterized by a popular belief regarding the risk of the break-up of the Turkish state (Öniş, 2004: 12).<sup>10</sup>

Against this background, the AKP immediately stepped back from its pro-European position, as it was perceived by the Party that the EU no longer paid off. Actually, it was not the nationalist climax in the country which turned the AKP into a Eurosceptical party, but the decision of the European Court of Human Rights vis-à-vis the headscarf case brought by Leyla Sahin v. Turkey, challenging a Turkish law which bans wearing the Islamic headscarf at universities and other educational and state institutions. In 2005, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) heard a particularly monumental case called *Leyla Sahin v. Turkey*. It was monumental because the Grand Chamber agreed to hear Sahin’s case at all, and two previous admissions to the European Human Rights Commission concerning the Turkish headscarf issue were ruled inadmissible. In Sahin’s case, however, the outcome equalled temporary defeat for headscarf supporters. The court ruled that there had been no violation to Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (freedom of thought, conscience and religion); Article 10 (freedom of expression); Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) and Article 2, Protocol No.1 (right to education) (ECHR, 2004). In short, the Grand Chamber concluded that the interference/violations of fundamental rights concerning the headscarf were acceptable and legitimate. In addition to these rulings, the Grand Chamber stated that the interference to her education triggered by her wearing a headscarf was found to be necessary for protecting the rights and freedoms of others and maintaining public order. While the Chamber recognized that the ban interfered with Sahin’s right to publicly express her religion, it stated that the ban was acceptable if it was imposed to protect the rights of third parties, to preserve public order, and to safeguard the principles of secularism and equality in Turkey. Since the ECHR is an institution within the framework of the Council of Europe, of which Turkey has been a member since 1949, it could be difficult to see how its judgment could have an impact on the support for EU membership. The only way, then, could be that Euroscepticism is understood as a general perception and attitude towards Europe, not only towards the EU and the prospect of membership. This is actually a remarkable phenomenon indicating that Europe and the European Union are often used interchangeably in Turkey.

The Eurosceptic attitude towards the EU-accession was found not only in the AKP government and among Turkish nationalists and pro-status quo groups. Rather, after 2005, the Kurdish people also became arduously critical of the EU reforms with the growing sentiment of Euroscepticism (Kaya, 2009b). In parallel with suspicion of the sufficiency and the efficiency of the AKP attempts to recognise the Kurdish identity, the revocation of the concept ‘minority’ in the Progress Report in 2004 provoked some of the Kurdish nationalists to reemphasize their position against the Turkish majority nationalism. A considerable fraction among the Kurds claimed that they denounced the concept ‘minority’ because it gave them a ‘degrading’, ‘inferior’ and ‘unequal’ status versus the Turkish people (Sahin, 2008:144). Rather, this fraction defended their claim that the Kurdish people were one

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<sup>10</sup> Sèvres Syndrome derives from the Sèvres Peace Treaty signed by the Allied powers and the Ottoman Empire in 1920 in the aftermath of the World War I, leading to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.

of ‘the constitutive elements’ of the Turkish Republic, and therefore, had a status equal to that of the Turks. Considering themselves as a ‘constitutive element’ rather than a minority, the Kurds fervently alleged that their characteristics that distinguish them from other minorities should be recognised, and equality to the Turkish majority in living conditions should be secured. In other words, even though this demand gives the Kurds a distinctive status in comparison to the other ethnic and religious minorities, it is sound in the sense that it remarkably denotes the right of ‘equal citizenship’.

It has also been suggested that although the EU reforms on the protection of ethnic minorities culminated in an open public debate, they did not achieve a concrete and significant step towards the settlement of the Kurdish problem (Somer, 2010). The Kurdish Democratic Society Movement (DTH) declared in 2004 that the objectives of the movement involved support for the EU accession, the resolution of the Kurdish problem by peaceful and democratic means and with respect to territorial integrity, and the adoption of a new democratic and universal constitution ([hurriyetim.com.tr](http://hurriyetim.com.tr), 22.10.2004).<sup>11</sup> The DTH, which abandoned the secessionist and federalist claims, put forth its demands for the adoption of ‘constitutional citizenship’, the abolition of the 10% national threshold in the electoral law, the liberalisation of equal participation for all political parties, and social and economic development in the Kurdish-populated regions (*Radikal*, 26.05.2004)<sup>12</sup>. Thus, considering the definition of ‘minority’ in the Turkish political context and on the Kurdish political party, one should carry on debating whether the EU reforms adopted by the AKP government aim to merely tolerate cultural and individual rights of the Kurdish minority, or are designed as an initial stage drifting towards a national project for the resolution of the Kurdish issue and the respect/recognition/acceptance of the difference of the Kurds.

It was possible to find examples of intolerance influenced by the upsurge of radical nationalism in the practices of everyday life. In March 2005, two Kurdish children allegedly burnt the Turkish flag during the Newroz celebrations ([hurriyet.com.tr](http://hurriyet.com.tr), 21.03.2005).<sup>13</sup> Six months after Prime Minister Erdogan’s visit to Diyarbakir in 2005, where he declared his full support for the solution of the Kurdish problem with respect to democracy, the Kurdish people in this city rioted at the funerals of four PKK members (Somer, 2010). In the following months, the casualties caused by PKK attacks increased.

It should also be underlined that the Turkish majority nationalism increased as a response to the rising Kurdish nationalism as well as to Euroscepticism. In retaliation to the issue of flag burning in Mersin (21 March 2005), some public figures started flag campaigns in the name of ‘responsible statesmanship’ ([Hurriyet.com.tr](http://Hurriyet.com.tr), 21.03.2005)<sup>14</sup>. The ‘waved and unwaved flags’ (Billig, 1995:10) obviously indicated cases of the rise of intolerance, where the nationalist and sceptic attitudes of both Kurdish and Turkish people were provoked in regard to the national and ethnic conflict. Hence, the intolerance, ethnic conflict and violence increased at the time when the Kurdish people became increasingly critical of the suitability and the sufficiency of the AKP government’s EU reforms for the recognition of ethno-cultural identity and the resolution of identity-related issues, and the sceptical and nationalist attitude towards the ‘Other’ was strengthened by both the Turks and the Kurds.

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<sup>11</sup> For more information about the declaration of the DTH see “Eski DEP’lilerden Demokratik Toplum Hareketi (The Democratic Society Movement from former members of the DEP) <http://hurriyetim.com.tr>, 22 October 2004 accessed on 13 June 2010

<sup>12</sup> For more information on the demands of the Kurdish civil society activists and intellectuals, see Y. Alataş “AB Eşiğinde Kürt Sorunu Yazı Dizisi” (The Series on the Kurdish Question on the Verge of the EU Accession), *Radikal* (27 May 2004).

<sup>13</sup> For more information about the incident of burning flags, see <http://webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/2005/03/21/616617.asp>, accessed on 14 June 2010

<sup>14</sup> For more information about the flag campaigns, see <http://webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/2005/03/21/616617.asp>, accessed on 14 June 2010

Finally, it is also possible to find striking cases where the social intolerance, non-acceptance, non-recognition and even hatred towards the Armenians reached its peak and even involved violent conflict. The most conspicuous of these cases was the assassination of the prominent Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in January 2007. It was claimed by some journalists in the media that the assassination of Hrant Dink could be linked to a reaction of ultranationalists, who were agitated by the verdict of guilty for Hrant Dink on the denigration of Turkishness in one of his articles. In 2005, Hrant Dink was sentenced to six months' conditional imprisonment on account of 'insulting Turkish national identity' according to article 301 of the Penal Code. Article 301 of the Penal Code considers it criminal to publicly denigrate Turkishness, the Republic or the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, and the sentence is imprisonment for between six months and three years. Moreover, the rise of Euroscepticism and the reinvigoration of national identity as a response to the upsurge of identity politics based on ethnic and religious difference after the articulation of the concept of 'minority' in the 2005 Progress Report also aggravated intolerance and conflict between the Turkish nationalists and the Armenian minorities. For example, in March 2005 the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gallipoli Victory was celebrated in an exaggerated manner in retaliation to the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary activities of the Armenian exodus ([hurriyet.com.tr](http://hurriyet.com.tr), 17.03.2005)<sup>15</sup>.

Hence, it is argued that the shift in the discourse from 'majority nationalism' to 'diversity as an ideology' through the EU reforms and the attempts of the AKP did not result in a substantial change in the attitude of the Sunni-Turkish majority towards the toleration and acceptance of ethno-cultural and religious diversity for non-Turks and non-Muslim minorities such as Armenians.

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<sup>15</sup> For more information on the celebration for the 80th anniversary of the Gallipoli Victory on 19 March 2005 see <http://webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/2005/03/18/615296.asp>, accessed on 14 June 2010



## Chapter 2. Embodiment of Tolerance in School Life

Kemalist education has certainly made a radical change in the mind-set of the Turkish citizens, who were before the members of the Ottoman *umma* (community of Muslims). However, scientific studies reveal that Kemalist Turkish secularism has been used to reinstrumentalize Islam in the service of secularist nationalism to foster a holistic citizenship instead of liberating individual subjects (Davison, 1998; Mardin, 1973, 1989; Türkmen, 2009). Turkish secularism and its relationship to Islam indicate that there is continuity between the Ottoman state and modern Turkey in the sense that the temporal authority supersedes the religious authority (Inalcık, 1958). Turkish modernity is certainly based on secular premises. However, the aim of the Turkish form of secularism has never become to accommodate the political authority and Islam, it has rather become to maintain the religious authority under the reign of secularism (Türkmen, 2009; Bayar, 2009; Gürbey, 2009). The place of religion in Turkish national education has always been evident since the very early days of the Republic in the 1920s.<sup>16</sup>

The emphasis on religion in the Turkish national education has never changed. The integration of secularism and religion was perceived to be the main goal of the curriculum by the nation-builders. However, the objectives of citizenship education show some differences in the history of the Republic. Drawing upon Üstel's work among others, Çayır and Gürkaynak (2008: 51) argue that the objectives of citizenship education have gradually changed:

“In 1926 the new primary school program stated its objective as ‘raising good citizens’, the 1929 program as ‘raising people, physically and psychologically fit to be Turkish citizens’, the 1936 program as ‘raising republican, statist, secular, revolutionary citizens’.”

The Turkish national oath, which is still being repeated at the primary and secondary levels, is a great example of this constant process of indoctrination. Since it was written by Resit Galip in 1933, the oath is ingrained in the back of the minds of the Turks with the last sentence "How happy is the one who calls himself/herself a Turk!" (*Ne mutlu Türkiüm diyene!*).<sup>17</sup> Üstel argues that one of the most significant changes in citizenship education was held in the late 1930s, with the primary school program introduced by the ruling single party, Republican People's Party (CHP). Accordingly, primary schools became the production sites for '*milli yurttaş*' (national citizen) leading to the production of a homogenous nation (Üstel, 2004:138).

The Turkish national education curriculum has always promoted a civic education based on the celebration of the Sunni-Islam-Turkish culture. It has been very difficult for the non-Sunni-Muslim-Turkish students to publicly express their identities in school as well as getting their practical claims about their ethno-cultural and religious difference accommodated by the state. Research on the minorities reveals the difficulties experienced by non-Muslim, non-Sunni, and non-Turkish students in everyday life (Yıldız, 2001). Although ethno-cultural and religious identities are now being expressed rather freely in the public space, there are still barriers before the expression of one's ethno-cultural

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<sup>16</sup> For the embeddedness of religion in the modern Turkish national education since the very early days of the Republic see Bayar (2009). Bayar very eloquently explains the debates undertaken in the Turkish Grand National Assembly in the 1920s and 1930s concluding that Turkish Ministry of National Education was always tempted to religious and secular teaching together, but not to secularize the social and political system. Emphasizing the importance of the Islamic character of the modern Turkish nation, Gürbey (2009) gives several examples from the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. For instance, while during the Turkish-Greek population exchange Turkish speaking Christian Karamans were forced to emigrate in the 1920s, the immigration demands of Turkish speaking Christians in Moldova denied. Religion but not the language and ethnicity was the main driving force behind the making of the nation.

<sup>17</sup> The oath has recently become very problematic for the ethno-cultural and non-Muslim minorities in Turkey as the last sentence seems to have strong ethnic connotations with an assimilationist undertone.

and religious identity. To illustrate this problem, in September 2010, the Kurdish origin Democratic Society Party (DTP) decided to boycott the first week of the primary and secondary school education in order to make their point about the right to education in their own language that is other Turkish.

The Ministry of National Education introduced new reforms, in the last decade, in order to redesign the whole curriculum on the basis of a *constructivist paradigm* as opposed to *didactic education*, and to develop new textbooks with a 'student-centered' approach (Avenstrup, 2005; Aşkar et.al., 2005; Sahlberg, 2005). According to the Ministry of National Education, the new curriculum "draws on our country's cultural, historical, and moral tenets, and aims to maintain the Turkish Republic," And the new curriculum adopts "the norms, aims and educational stance of the European Union" (TTKB, 2009). The terms 'tolerance', 'human rights', and 'Europeanization' are also explicitly stated in these reforms as well as the revitalization of the *Ancien Regime* of the Ottoman Empire as in the historical figure of Sultan Mehmet II, who is portrayed as someone *tolerant*, protective and just *vis-a-vis* non-Muslim minorities of the Empire (Çayır, 2009).

Essentializing the term *tolerance*, the term was specifically mentioned in the textbooks of religious culture and morality courses with reference to the Medina Constitution, formulated by Prophet Mohammad to regulate relationships with non-Muslims, and Mohammad's 'tolerant attitude' towards the Christians of Yemen (Türkmen, 2009: 91).<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, in September 2010, the Ministry of National Education released a public statement in the first week of the school year 2010-2011 to underline the need for the 'education of values'. Accordingly, the education of values such as citizenship, hospitality, solidarity and *tolerance* aims at empowering individual students against the challenges posed in everyday life by the processes of globalisation (MEB, 2010).

In the mean time, the curriculum change made in 2007 and 2008 brought about some changes with regard to Alevism. The new curriculum focussed on different sects and diverse mystic interpretations of Islam. Alevism was mentioned among mystic interpretations as the main constitutive other of the course's syllabus and was integrated into what is called 'Turkish Sunni Islam' in the book. This implies that Alevism was perceived and exposed by the authors of the book as a part of the Sunni Islam with some deviations. This intervention in the textbook was interpreted by several Alevi parents as a form of assimilation, and it was taken to the courts (Türkmen, 2009: 92), as will be explicated below in more detail.

In this report, we investigate two case studies in order to illuminate the examples of public policy implemented for the resolution of cultural and religious diversity challenges and the extent to which notions of *tolerance/acceptance* and/or *respect/recognition* are used. In the first case, we focus on the government's initiative to widen the curriculum of the compulsory (REC) to include Alevi belief and practices. In the second case, we examine the public policy and the political initiatives undertaken for the lift of the ban on headscarf in higher education. The two case studies presented in this report are *not illustrated as good examples of managing cultural/religious diversity in education and school life; but rather as examples of how the government seeks to resolve cultural diversity tensions in school life through palliative and situational solutions*. We argue that although the government's initiative may be regarded as an attempt to tolerate religious differences of the Alevis in school life, the inclusion of Alevi belief in the curriculum of the compulsory REC does not lead to the recognition of Alevi culture as a unique entity. Similarly, we contend that even though the public policy and political initiatives for the lift of the ban on headscarf in universities intend to tolerate the self-presentation of headscarfed

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<sup>18</sup> Türkmen (2009) successfully reveals the changes made in the curriculum of the courses on religious culture and morality between 1995 and 2007-2008. Referring to the changes made such as Islamization of the human rights concept, religionization of education, exposition of marriage as not only a precondition to establish a family but also as a remedy to adultery, and presentation of Atatürk as someone seeing seeing secularism as the basis for living the real Islam, she concludes that the new curriculum is designed to reislamize the Turkish society in a neo-liberal fashion.

women in higher education and to assure their right to education, they are far from resolving the headscarf issue with reference to the freedom of religion.

### **Case 1: Alevi Claims on the curricula of Compulsory Courses on Religious culture and morality**

It is estimated that Alevis constitute more than 15 percent of the population in Turkey. Alevism demonstrates a variety of differences from mainstream Sunni Islam. Alevis were silenced until recently due to the ongoing and unresolved historical animosity with the Sunnis due to various stereotypes. Alevi identity became publicized in the 1990s as a kind of response to the rising political Islam in Turkey, and there are signs indicating that Alevism was embraced and promoted by the laicist military and state bureaucracy in order to balance the growing impact of the sunni-based political Islam. Accordingly, Alevis started to raise their cultural and religious claims revolving around four basic issues: a) compulsory courses on religious culture and morality in the primary and secondary education, which is believed to be promoting Sunni Islam; b) asking the state to recognize the Alevi communion houses (*Cemevi*) to be equal to the mosques as holy worship places; c) asking the state not to discriminate the Alevis in allocating the sources to the Directorate of Religious Affairs attached to the Prime Ministry (employing all the Imams in Turkey and abroad), which is believed to be only serving the interests of the Sunnis in Turkey; and d) fighting against all kinds of stereotypes mostly expressed by the Sunnis. In this section, the issue of the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality will be analysed. Prior to that, some basic information about the Alevis and Alevism will be delineated.

Alevism is a heterodox religious identity peculiar to Anatolia. It is practised by some Turkish and Kurdish segments of Anatolian society. Turkish Alevis used to be concentrated in central Anatolia, with important pockets in the Aegean and Mediterranean coastal regions and the European part of Turkey. Kurdish Alevis were concentrated in the north-western part of the Kurdish settlement zone between the southeast Anatolia and the rest of the country. Both Turkish and Kurdish Alevis have been leaving their isolated villages for the big cities of Turkey and Europe since 1950s.<sup>19</sup> Alevis have started to publicly declare their religious identity after some tragic incidences in Turkey, like the massacre of 37 Alevi artists in a central Anatolian city, Sivas (July, 1993), and of 15 Alevi people in an Alevi neighbourhood of Istanbul (Gaziosmanpasa, March 1995).

When Pir Sultan Abdal association organised a cultural festival in Sivas, which is historically divided between Sunnis and Alevis- in July 1993, numerous prominent Alevi-origin artists and authors, including novelist Aziz Nesin (not an Alevi), attended. The festival was picketed by a large group of violent right-wing demonstrators who were clearly keen on killing Aziz Nesin who had previously provoked the anger of many Sunni Muslims by announcing his intention to publish a translation of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. Throwing stones and burning rags through the windows of the hotel, where the participants of the festival were staying, the demonstrators succeeded in setting fire to the hotel. Thirty-seven people were killed in this fire, due to the indifferent attitude of the police forces of the 'Sunni' Turkish state. This was a very crucial incident which has led to the radicalisation of the Alevi movement in relation to the sluggishness of the state apparatus.

Relations between Alevis and the Turkish state reached even lower depths with clashes between the police and Alevi demonstrators in the Gazi neighbourhood of Istanbul in March 1995. *Gazi* suburb is a ghetto which is dominated by Alevi residents. The hostilities started when an unknown gunman in a stolen taxi fired a number of shots against a group of men sitting in a café, killing one Alevi. Police were remarkably slow in taking action, and the rumour soon spread that the local police post might

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<sup>19</sup> For further detail about the Alevi transnational networks see Erman and Erdemir (2005).

have been involved in the terrorist attacks. The day after, thousands of Alevi people from the Gazi neighbourhood went on to the streets to protest about the murder. The police and the demonstrators clashed, and fifteen Alevi demonstrators were killed by the police (Kaya, 2001: Chapter 3; Bruinessen, 1996b: 9-10). These incidences have opened a new era in Alevi revivalism both at home and in diaspora in a way that has prompted Alevis to become more vocal in raising their claims about the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality, the recognition of communion houses as warship places, the allocation of resources from the Diyanet, and struggling against stereotypes.

### ***AKP's Alevi Initiative***

From June 2009 to January 2010, the AKP government organised seven Alevi workshops under the auspices of the Ministry of State in order to deepen the dialogue between Sunni intellectuals and the Alevi civil society leaders.<sup>20</sup> These workshops were held to hear the claims of Alevis on the religious and cultural based issues. In every workshop, Alevis raised their complaints and demands that compulsory courses on religious culture and morality should be annulled, and an elective course on the Alevi belief and practices should be introduced.<sup>21</sup> They further suggested that the content of the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality should not include stereotypes regarding the Alevi belief and practices. After the workshops were completed, the Ministry of State released a preliminary report concluding that all the citizens were in need of religious instruction (ERG, 2011). Although some Alevi representatives articulated their demands on the abolishment of the compulsory REC, the government representatives stressed that it was not possible and appropriate to respond to this demand in short-term under the existing social and political circumstances (Alevi Workshop Report, 2011). Thus, it was decided that the curriculum of the compulsory religious culture and morality courses should be re-designed with a perspective, which does not degrade any religious belief, and with an encompassing language, which is recognised by all social groups (ERG, 2011).

Having concluded the debates on the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality in the workshops, the Directorate General of Religious Instruction (DÖGM) was assigned with the revision of the curriculum to include the Alevi belief (ERG, 2011). The DÖGM formed a commission of 15 people consisting of Alevi saints (*Dedes*), intellectuals, civil society representatives, and academics, Sunni theologians and specialists from the Ministry of Education (ERG, 2011). In October 2010, the Minister of State, Faruk Çelik, who supervised the Alevi workshops responded to the Alevi claims, and stated that an expert commission has been working on the re-designation of the textbooks used in compulsory courses on religious culture and morality in a way that would include the teaching of Alevi belief and practices.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, some Alevi civil society actors, who did not support the negotiations with the government, continued to have protests/boycotts against the compulsory courses.<sup>23</sup> Eventually, in December 2010, a meeting was held in order to present the revised curriculum prepared by the DÖGM to the Alevi representatives.<sup>24</sup>

Compulsory courses on religious culture and morality was introduced in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup. The aim of the army was to consolidate the role of the state in everyday life and to depoliticise the civil society. 1982 Constitution was also designed in the same manner to unite the

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<sup>20</sup> For more information for the last workshop held on 31 January 2010, <http://www.cnnturk.com/2010/turkiye/02/01/alevi.calistayi.bitti.uzlasma.saglandi/561722.0/index.html> , accessed on 19.10.2010

<sup>21</sup> *Sol website*, <http://haber.sol.org.tr/devlet-ve-siyaset/alevi-acilimi-ilahiyatcilara-soruldu-haberi-17116> accessed on 19.10.2010

<sup>22</sup> *Newspaper Radikal website*, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalHaberDetay&Date=09%20Ekim%202010&ArticleID=1022834>, accessed on 19.10.2010

<sup>23</sup> *Webhaber*, <http://www.webhaber.com/haber/06-10-2010/aleviler-zorunlu-din-dersinin-kaldirilmesi-icin-2-2268512-haberi>, accessed on 19.10.2010

<sup>24</sup> *Hurriyet website*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/16521327.asp>, accessed on 10. 02.2011

nation through a nationalist and Islamist ideology. Considering the fact that the national unity was threatened by the social strife between the rightists and leftists in the 1970s, the military government (1980-1983) adopted a political project to enhance the role of the state in public realm demobilising and depoliticising civil society (Özbudun, 2000; Arat, 2005). For this end, the military on the one hand emphasized the laicist discourse, and on the other hand adapted a kind of state-run political Islam indoctrinating the young generations through compulsory courses on religious culture and morality in schools. Hence, the new constitution after the coup indicated the obligation of the state to ensure the religious education of its citizens. From the very beginning, the content of this new course (REC) revealed a Turco-Islamist spirit, reflecting the new political and social concerns (Türkmen, 2009: 86).

A similar approach was embraced by the successive government of the Motherland Party (ANAP) under the leadership of Turgut Özal in the mid-1980s (Akbulut and Usal, 2008). According to the Article 24 of the 1982 Constitution introduced by the military regime, "Education on Religious culture and morality shall be conducted under state supervision and control. Instruction on religious culture and morality shall be compulsory in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Other religious education and instruction shall be subject to the individual's own desire and, in the case of minors, to the request of their legal representatives" (Goner, 2005). Article 12 of the Basic Law of National Education states that "Secularism is fundamental in education in Turkey. Instruction on religious culture and morality is included among compulsory courses to be taught in primary and secondary schools and their equivalents". The compulsory religion courses were called "Education on Religious culture and morality" and made mandatory for all Turkish students. Although the title of the course sounds neutral towards all religions, its content involves the teaching of a homogenous way of life based on Sunni-Islam. Therefore, Alevi citizens felt that they were explicitly indoctrinated through Sunni Islam. Non-Muslim minorities could abstain from these courses.

Considering the attempts to meet the needs and demands of Alevi citizens with regard to the compulsory REC, one should draw attention to the fact that the revision of the curriculum did not start with the Alevi workshops. The process actually goes back to the programme of the Directorate General of Religious Instruction (DÖGM) for the re-arrangement of the curriculum in 2006 and 2007. The DÖGM revised the curriculum of the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality for secondary schools in 2006 and for primary schools in 2007 (ERG, 2011). By these reforms in the curriculum, the DÖGM aimed to bring a more objective, pluralistic and critical perspective in the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality (Kaymakcan, 2007). To put it differently, the DÖGM attempted to eliminate the Sunni-based content of the course, and to make it equally distant to all religions and beliefs. On the other hand, it was argued that the theological approach was still prevalent in the content of the course, and should be replaced with a comparative approach to concentrate on the history of religions. Therefore, it was believed that the curriculum still maintained some elements prioritising one religion over the others (Gözaydın, 2009).

Eventually, Alevi citizens continued to bring the issue to the court on the grounds that the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality do not respect and recognise the Alevi belief (ERG, 2010). The parents of Alevi children claimed that the programme and the textbooks of the course conflict with their own religious beliefs and practices, and asked the court to exempt their children from the 'compulsory' courses on religious culture and morality. In order to acquire the right to be exempted from the courses, they appealed first to the administrative courts, second to the regional courts, and finally to the State Council (ERG, 2011). In some of the cases, the court decided that the family should be granted the right to have their child to be exempted from the course on the grounds that the curriculum does not accord the goal of the Article 24 of the constitution and does not respect the objectivity and plurality in the courses on religious culture and morality. In contrast, some other courts decided that the curriculum revised in 2006 and 2007 does not violate human rights, uses a language beyond particular religions, and provides sufficient room for Alevi belief.

### ***Winning Ground in the European Court of Human Rights***

One of the court cases, which became decisive on the drift towards policies and initiatives for a change in the national discourse to accommodate the Alevi belief in compulsory REC, is the case of *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*. In this case, the Alevi citizens brought their objections to the compulsory religious education to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 2009. The ECtHR found the claims of the Alevi citizens rightful since mandatory religion education was considered to be in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Kaya, 2009). The ruling in the ECtHR urged that Turkey should come into conformity with Article 2 of Protocol No. 1, which covers the right to education. It should be underlined that two of the judgements made by the court arduously required the national discourse on the non-acceptance and *intolerance* towards Alevi students in school life to be changed immediately. First, the subjection of all children to compulsory courses on religious culture and morality clash with principle of secularism and the right to education (Akbulut and Usal, 2008). Therefore, the course on ‘Religious culture and morality’, cannot be made compulsory if it does not teach different religious beliefs and practices. Second, the curriculum of the course is not objective, critical and pluralistic since it does not respect religious and philosophical conviction of the parents as it was claimed. In accordance with the judgements of the ECtHR, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) revealed that “if the course indeed covered different religious cultures, there should be no reason to make it compulsory for Muslim children alone; conversely, if it was essentially designed to teach the Sunni Islam, it should not be compulsory in order to preserve children’s and parents’ religious freedom” (ECRI, 2011: 27).

While the AKP government employed policies to manage ethno-cultural and religious diversity through the EU reforms in the first half of the last decade,<sup>25</sup> the claims and objections of Alevi citizens with regard to the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality were aggravated, and the number of court cases increased at both domestic and international courts in the late 2000s. Therefore, both the external factors involving the EU accession process, along with the ECtHR’s decision, and the internal dynamics framed by the rising claims to freedom of faith brought about a stimulus for a remarkable shift from the national discourse of non-acceptance and *intolerance* towards religious differences of Alevi to the acceptance of the Alevi claims on the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality.

### ***Diversification of Alevi Claims***

The government’s initiative for the revision of the curriculum to include the Alevi belief and practices was regarded by some Alevi groups as a change in the dominant Sunni-Muslim discourse and as a new practice of tolerating religious differences of Alevi. In order to respond to the claims of the Alevi citizens, who invoked their arguments in the courts at different levels, the government initiated the Alevi workshop, and decided to revise the curriculum with an objective, critical and pluralistic perspective. Those Alevi groups such as the Cem Foundation favouring the government’s initiative raised their expectations for the weakening of the Sunni dominance in public life, so that it could be easier to incorporate the Alevi-Bektashi claims into the established structure of education through the existing instruction on religious culture and morality. These groups were highly encouraged to expect some degree of *tolerance* and cultural integration in the courses on religious culture and morality as the government claimed that the revised course was to deploy an all-encompassing language, and to teach Alevi belief and practices.

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<sup>25</sup> For more information, see the *ACCEPT PLURALISM First Report of Turkey*, “Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in Turkey,” <http://www.eui.eu/Projects/ACCEPT/Documents/Research/wp1/ACCEPTPLURALISMWP1BackgroundreportTurkey.pdf>

*The AKP government achieved something, which nobody could achieve before. It has managed to include the Alevi belief in textbooks of the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality. The Alevi belief is referred to in different pages of the textbooks. The steps taken by the AKP government are very important. Ten years later, a child who finishes the high school would be familiar with the Alevi's existence and identity. The Alevi culture will become more visible, heard of and familiar to the others. What is more important than the feelings of the Alevi children is that the Sunni children would be familiar with the Alevi culture, and would be able to perceive it without any prejudice (a top level figure in the Federation of Alevi Associations).*

One of our main research questions was whether the AKP's Alevi initiative could be regarded as an approach to cultivate *tolerance* vis-a-vis the Alevi community and their different cultural practices in the society as well as in school life. In the interviews conducted we found out that some Alevi groups and leaders evaluated this initiative as a serious attempt to tolerate Alevi children, and raise social awareness towards different cultural practices of Alevis in schools. Furthermore, the proposal of the government to include Alevi belief and practices into the content of the compulsory religion course was interpreted by some Alevi representatives as an indicator of the toleration of the Alevi existence and participation in the school life. These groups identify themselves within Islam, and therefore, consider the initiative as a genuine attempt of the Sunni-based state to accept and to tolerate the cultural differences of Alevis.

In this sense, we can mark out the discourse of '*tolerance*' inscribed in the viewpoints of the respective Alevi groups narrating that there is a relationship of toleration between the political elite and these groups based on the accommodation of cultural differences of Alevis. In this relationship of toleration, the tolerator (Sunni-based government) desires to remedy the grievances of Alevis resulting from the 'centuries-old oppression' and to show their willingness to embrace Alevis. The tolerated (proponent Alevi groups) intends to 'transcend the adverse effects of exclusion and assimilation' and to 'be involved in a process of negotiation' for cultural integration.

The arguments of the proponent Alevi groups and the relationship between the government and these groups can be interpreted in a conceptual structure of toleration. Within this structure, the reasons for acceptance and objection are reconsidered and articulated, and the reasons for acceptance balance out the reasons for rejection by both parties (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011). "...Acceptance is sufficient for non-interference without invalidating the reasons for objection... The forbearance of toleration is motivated by reasons that override *but do not cancel out reasons for rejection*" (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011: 10, emphasis by the authors). In this respect, toleration becomes relational in the sense that both majority and minority groups reciprocally prioritise the reasons for *acceptance*, but do not remove the reasons for *objection*. Accordingly, the AKP government appropriates the reasons for the acceptance that are identified as alleviation of the repression imposed upon Alevis, and the allowance of the practice of 'individual Alevi belief' in school life.

The specific discourse of tolerance that was implicitly referred to in this relationship of toleration is the 'allowance conception of toleration'. However, the government preserved the reasons for objection that are articulated as the refusal to recognise a legal status for *cemevi* (Alevi communion houses), and to secure the right to practice religion for Alevis as a 'collective and public practice'. These groups want to have a course on the history of religions embedded in the formal system of education, in which Alevi belief would be taught under the banner of Islam together with the Sunni belief. In addition, they also adhere to the proposition of having an elective religion course on teaching Alevi belief and practice in more detail. In this regard, what the supportive Alevi groups argue for is not only *acceptance*, but also *respect*.

In order to understand the reasons behind the dominant discourse on the non-acceptance of, and *intolerance* to, Alevi claims on religious rights and freedoms, particularly in the primary and secondary education, one should have an insightful analysis of the arguments made by the government. Initially, the government justifies its policies and practices towards Alevis' 'intolerable and unacceptable' demands on the religious rights in compulsory courses on religious culture and morality arguing that some Alevis are inclined to produce a social and political conflict through their request for the abolition of the 'compulsory' courses on religious culture and morality (Final Report, 2011). This point of view of the government can be classified as a discourse of *communal intolerance* of perceived illiberal cultural practices, which are harmful for the society (Dobbernack and Modood, 2001).

The discourse embedded in this view is that of *intolerance* towards the Alevi groups opposing the government's initiative in their claim for the abolition of religious culture and morality course, which presupposes to maintain integration of culturally and religiously diverse social groups. The government's position regards the Alevi groups in question as intolerable on the basis that those groups are intolerant towards other social segments, and offense them in their pursuit for cultural integration. Furthermore, the government tends to justify its *intolerance* towards some of the Alevi claims as the Alevis ask the state to exempt their children from the compulsory courses, and aspire to remain outside the public policies regulating the religious affairs. The government also substantiates its intolerant position against the anti-initiative Alevi groups with the assertion that there is an inevitable social need for an informative course for teaching religion for the sake of social cohesion (Kaymakcan, 2009).

Some Sunni intellectuals and theologians also support the revision and the widening of the curriculum to include the Alevi belief and practices as opposed to the assertions of secularists and some Alevi leaders that the religion course should be entirely lifted, or made optional. From this perspective, the government's initiative is very positive and beneficial since it intends to secure social cohesion by bringing children from different faiths together and fostering the cultural interaction between them:

*Alevis are diversified. Alevi intellectuals are not engaged in a serious search for the Alevi roots, and the traditional Alevi groups do not have strong connections with the modern world. Alevi culture is so diversified and complicated that teaching Alevi belief and practice to students in courses and applying it to the everyday-life is a very challenging task. Therefore, the state undertakes the duty of adjusting to Alevi belief to the modern times, re-organising and rendering public visibility to it. Alevi culture does not have a formal and official chain of representatives which the state can correspond to. Nor does it have a formal cadre for clergy. Therefore, the state has to think in the name of Alevi families as well (the Moderator of the Alevi Workshops and the coordinator for the Centre of Strategy Development at the Directorate of Religious Affairs, DİB)*

Similarly, a Sunni origin Secondary school teacher teaching courses on religious culture and morality also underlines the need for a compulsory courses on religious culture and morality with reference to the cohesive nature of such a course:

*Generally, I believe that there should be a compulsory religion course entitled 'Education on Religious culture and morality', because religion is a sociological phenomenon, whether it involves pious people or non-believers. A course on different religious cultures contributes to the foundation of social peace in our country and peace in the world. If this course is not taught in schools, people who do not know each other can become enemies. This course should teach about various religious cultures as the name suggests, and it should not promote only Sunni Islam. The curriculum of this course should be revised, and Sunni and Alevi children should be able to receive objective information about each other in a way that could*



*lead to the strengthening of social cohesion in the coming years (a teacher of the course 'Religious culture and morality').*

Drawing upon the viewpoints raised by these interlocutors, one could argue that the Alevi groups and Sunni intellectuals who are in favour of the initiative refer to a discourse of *acceptance* vis-a-vis Alevi in the sense that they retaliate Alevi's grievances, encourage their participation, and stimulate cultural integration through 'pluralistic' version of the course. Claiming that "the state thinking on behalf of the Alevi", the moderator of the Alevi Workshops places an emphasis on a specific discourse of *acceptance* that is founded on the political will of the government to respond to the needs of some Alevi citizens and to integrate diffused, informal and personal networks of Alevi into the majority society. Hence, Alevi parents and their children are granted an opportunity for social and cultural integration into the modern Turkish society by means of *acceptance* in school life, although Alevi are not accommodated into a truly pluralistic environment of education where they can interact with students of other religions on the basis of their own free will.

However, from the perspective of the Alevi groups such as Hacı Bektas Veli Anadolu Kültür Derneği opposed to the Alevi initiative of the AKP, the government's policies to reinvigorate the compulsory religious culture and morality course through its revision and the accommodation of Alevi belief into the curriculum is not a genuine attempt to stimulate the acceptance of, or *tolerance* towards, the Alevi and Alevi belief. The resistant and dissident attitude of these groups mainly rests upon the argument that the political elite, in line with the republican discourse, aims to interfere with religion, and to control it through the Islamisation of the public sphere. Thus, these groups assume that the government attempts to assimilate Alevi into the Sunni social and cultural order by containing Alevi belief and practice (Final Report, 2011). In this sense, the government initiative merely reproduces the dominance of Sunni Islam and the assimilation of Alevi by revitalizing Sunni Islam in public life and incorporating Alevi belief into the official curriculum. Hence, these groups desire to abstain from REC, and also assert that the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality should be abolished to ensure that neither the state nor the government intervenes in religion as far as the laicist character of the state is concerned.

Drawing upon the arguments and the critiques of the opponent Alevi groups, we analyse that the embedded discourse here is that of *intolerance* that is attributed to the approach of the government towards Alevi in its claim to promote the teaching of Alevi belief and to remove the repressive and discriminative practices. According to the interpretation of these oppositional groups, the government actually implies a discourse of *intolerance* towards Alevi since it does not secure the 'non-interference principle of liberal toleration' (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011). Although this initiative is alleged to be a practice of interference with the religious instruction in order to assure limited cultural rights to practice Alevi belief, it can still be regarded as an act of interference on the grounds that the government is involved in religious affairs and teaching of a particular religious culture in a prescribed structure of education. In the AKP's approach towards Alevi, the tolerated minority group does only remain 'subject to interference', but also the relationship between the tolerator and the tolerated is of 'domination and subordination'. In this case, the tolerator, the dominant Sunni elite still holds the power to constrain the teaching of Alevi belief and to impose Sunni Islam. The tolerated, Alevi groups, are, on the other hand, still subordinated because the religion course is still compulsory and its pluralistic nature still needs to be secured.

### ***Incomplete discourses of respect and recognition: unfair conditions of cultural integration***

Considering the potential of attaining respect and recognition towards Alevi identity and belief through the government's initiative on the revision of the compulsory REC, one should also raise the question whether the inclusion of Alevi belief in the content makes a substantial difference for Alevi

in terms of enhancing their self-respect and self-esteem. In order to be able to talk about an institutional change driven by the government, which aims to break apart the prejudices and to eradicate stigmatisation and discrimination against the Alevis, the revision of the courses on religious culture and morality is supposed to assure respecting and recognizing Alevis' differences in and out of school life. Toleration as respect and recognition considerably differs from the traditional liberal conception of toleration (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011). Whereas liberal toleration is confined to a legal and institutional change led by the intervention of the state or political elite, and toleration as respect and recognition requires a more complicated set of social and attitudinal changes. Toleration as recognition goes beyond the minimalistic principle of liberal *tolerance* defined as non-interference, and opens up a space where ethno-religious minorities could ask for public recognition. In what follows, we will scrutinize the discourses of various individual actors regarding the role of the AKP's initiative to change the dominant perceptions about the Alevis.

The field research reveals that for some Alevi groups, who are opposed to the compulsory courses and to the revision of the curriculum as well as to the additional content about the Alevi belief inserted in the textbooks. It is raised by some critical voices among the Alevis that the selected topics to teach Alevi belief and practices do not truly reflect the very essence of the Alevi culture, which is very syncretic and heterodox combining pre-Islamic, shamanist, sufist, pantheist, and even Christian elements:

*If we investigate the textbooks from the fourth grade to the ninth grade, we do not see anything related to the Alevis. For example, as for the Pilgrim Hacı Bektaş Veli [a 13<sup>th</sup> century Alevi saint], the book suggests that he used to fast, and became a pilgrim because he fulfilled the commitment of pilgrimage. However, there is no evidence to show that he committed pilgrimage. For this reason, we certainly think that the curriculum has nothing in relation to the Alevi belief as the Alevis experience it... Alevi culture consists of features, which are inherited from the pre-Islamic era. It also contains elements deriving from the natural life (an executive member of the Hacı Bektas Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation).*

Moreover, the opponents of the initiative criticised the attempt to include Alevi belief in the curriculum and pointed out to the constraints of teaching Alevi belief in relation to the complex, mystic and diversified character of the Alevi culture. It should be acknowledged that through centuries, Alevi belief evolved as an oral tradition and has become highly syncretic and eclectic (Subaşı, 2009).

*It should be questioned which variation of the Alevi belief would be taught in the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality. There is a notion in Alevi belief implying that the pathway of Alevis is the same but leading through that pathway differs widely in tradition (Yol bir, sürek binbir: Destination is the same, paths differ). Which one of these variations will be inserted in the textbooks? Thus, the inclusion of Alevi belief will solely trigger the conflict and distinctions between religions (an executive member of the Hubyar Sultan Association of Alevi Culture and an Alevi parent who won the case in the State Council with regard to the exemption of his child from the compulsory religion course).*

By the above mentioned propositions put forward in the interviews, the representatives of the opponent Alevi associations underline that this initiative leads to the reproduction of the nationalist discourse on the dominance and oneness of Sunni Islamic belief, and exacerbates the social conflict arising from the religious and cultural differences of the Alevis. According to these Alevi organisations, since the Alevi belief is supposed to be taught in the compulsory courses only as chapters explaining different Sufi interpretations within the mainstream Sunni Islam, this initiative may also be perceived as an attempt to teach Alevi belief as 'an indispensable part of Islam' in order to

eliminate the contesting discourse that ‘Alevism deviates from the mainstream Islam’. Hence, these groups perceive the attempt of the AKP as a way of Islamizing Alevism.

In their account, the initiative is denounced because it does not prove to be a genuine and serious step to understand what Alevism is all about. For this reason, the government’s willingness to approach the Alevis and to remedy the mistakes of the past is not convincing and sincere. Should the government contain Alevi belief within a religious culture and morality course, which is primarily designed to teach Sunni Islam, the revision of the course is unlikely to drive and motivate a substantial change in majority-minority relations. These groups perceive the acts of the AKP as a practice of ‘toleration without respect and recognition’. They argue that the government should propose more egalitarian policies vis-a-vis Alevis in order to generate a respect ethics with regard to the Alevis.

Furthermore, these Alevi groups critical about the AKP’s initiative underline the point that some Alevis are completely against the idea of teaching Alevi belief in schools in the first place. They maintain that the teaching of Alevi belief should be left to the parents and families, and the state should not intervene in it at all as it is categorised as a private matter:

*Religious education should be left to the private sphere. My child can learn Alevi belief and practices from me or from the saints (Alevi dedes) from whom we have traditionally acquired our knowledge for years. Today, Alevi belief can also be learnt in Alevi communion houses (cemevi) in the cities. Alevi belief can be provided in the places of worship, which is an essential element of the Alevi civil society. If you incorporate religion in schools, religion may have a disuniting impact on students (an executive member of the Hubyar Sultan Association of Alevi Culture and an Alevi parent who won the case in the State Council with regard to the exemption of his child from the compulsory religion course).*

This point of view demonstrates that their demands and claims did not include the inclusion of Alevi belief into the curriculum. Rather, they asked the government to abolish the religious culture and morality course, or to be exempt from it on the grounds that it contradicts their own religious belief and practices. It should be also noticed that the first choice of the opponent Alevi groups is to eliminate compulsory courses on religious culture and morality. If that is not possible then they express their willingness to see the changes in the curricula of the compulsory courses, turning the course into a critical and pluralistic one in which Alevism is also accepted, recognized and respected as a distinct faith with its own peculiarities.

The fact that the demand for the termination of the religious culture and morality course was declined has a significant implication on the means and terms of the negotiations. It implies that the initiative for the inclusion of Alevi belief is determined by the upper hand of the government and without achieving an agreement between all the actors involved in the process. One should also take into account the fact that the representatives of some of the opponent Alevi groups did not participate in the workshops other than the first one (Focus Group Discussion). As a result, the decision on the inclusion of Alevi belief was made with the dominant role of the government and did not rely on the agency of the Alevis in general. Therefore, those Alevi groups, who are critical to the AKP’s initiative, argue that the government’s tolerance vis-a-vis the Alevis is far from generating an ethics based on respect and recognition. In contrast to the discourse of ‘tolerance’ as suggested by the moderate Alevi groups adhering to the initiative, the dissident Alevi groups portray this initiative as an attempt to foster cultural integration, the terms of which are designed and identified by the government and the political elite without consulting the Alevis through a fair negotiation process.

*This policy perplexes the knowledge about Alevism and the attitude of our children towards the Alevi culture... In the meeting, which was held to present the revised curriculum to the Alevi representatives, I asked the Minister of State whether our children would still be*

*compelled to learn Arabic verses, Islamic prayer and fasting. Inserting some sections about Alevi belief does not mean that it is taught properly (an executive member of the Hubyar Sultan Association of Alevi Culture and an Alevi parent who won the case in the State Council with regard to the exemption of his child from the compulsory religion course).*

In this respect, it is perceived that any effort to incorporate Alevi belief into the courses on religious culture and morality would lead to the cultural integration of Alevis in inegalitarian terms since this course is neither critical nor pluralistic. The prerequisite for the accommodation of Alevi belief into the religious culture and morality course is that the course should be taught from a comparative, critical and pluralistic perspective even if it is compulsory. Therefore, in the view of dissident Alevi groups, the *tolerance* towards religious differences of the Alevis in school life through the inclusion of Alevi belief in the curriculum may also lead to the reproduction of the dominance of Sunni Islam and of the prevailing indoctrination of its norms and practices.

On the other hand, the pro-initiative Alevi groups agreed on the point that the Alevi Workshops did not constitute an egalitarian and fair process of negotiations for the revision and the widening of the curriculum of the courses on religious culture and morality. As a top level figure of the Federation of the Alevi foundations argued in the Focus Group discussion that the Alevi groups supporting the workshops had some reservations on the revision of the programme: “At first, the government formed a small commission composed of fifteen Alevi-Bektashi saints (*dedes* and *babas*), intellectuals, academics, and Sunni theologians. However towards the end of the workshops, Alevi-Bektashi saints and Alevi representatives were expelled, and specialists of education, who were senior bureaucrats within the DÖGM were included.” In other words, none of the Alevi representatives were included in the negotiations regarding the REC, and the commission formed for the preparation of the new curriculum extended to Alevi belief was closed to the deliberation and argumentation of Alevis. The Alevi representative from the Federation also raised the point that the content of the revisions is still not clear to them as they were only informed about the titles of the changes at the meeting organized by the government on 12 November 2010.

Drawing upon the arguments and positions of the proponent Alevi groups, we analysed that the perception about the government’s initiative is related to a ‘discourse of tolerance’. More precisely, the discourse of tolerance embedded in the toleration of the government towards the Alevi groups can be identified as ‘the allowance of conception of toleration’ since the government took a friendly approach to remedy the previous repressive policies caused by the Sunni dominance, and also ‘allowed’ Alevis to practice or teach their individual beliefs in school life. On the other hand, the view of the *proponent* Alevi groups address at the discourse of tolerance in search of acceptance of their cultural differences in the public space. In particular, the discourse of *tolerance* they inscribe in their arguments also points to their desire for cultural integration in school life through the revision of compulsory courses on religious culture and morality.

In contrast, the *opponent* Alevi groups are likely to perceive the AKP’s initiative as a discourse of ‘toleration without respect and recognition’. They put forward two main reasons for this perception. First, they assert that the initiative is not a genuine attempt to understand Alevi belief as a unique and distinct identity with its peculiar aspects outside Islam. Second, they see all the issues related to the practice of Alevi belief as a private matter. Hence, they demand the abolition of the courses on religious culture and morality. If it cannot be abolished they ask for exemption, and they protest against the inclusion of Alevi belief in the courses on religious culture and morality. In order to avoid cultural integration/assimilation reproducing the Sunni dominance and to be in favour of an initiative to accord more ‘egalitarian and substantive respect conception’, this course should be thoroughly transformed into a critical, objective and pluralistic course.

Against this background, we draw the conclusion that the government's initiative could not achieve to accommodate the cultural diversity of Alevi in the field of education since the divergent Alevi groups position themselves at the two poles of the spectrum ranging from cultural integration to cultural segregation. Thus, we argue that the only possible solution, which responds to the demands of the disparate Alevi groups, is that the government gives priority to the teaching of a course based on the history and sociology of religions from an academic and comparative perspective; and that the teaching of Alevi belief should be left to the private sphere.

The analysis presented here about the ways in which various Alevi groups perceive the Alevi initiative of the AKP government in general opens the way to consider that not only the final outcome, or the specific policy measure, is important, but also the way it is implemented. Thus although including elements of the Alevi tradition in the textbook is an act of acceptance, the way this was negotiated in due course and the textbook change designed without the actual voice of the minority points to a *minimal tolerance approach* and paying lip service only to *acceptance*. This actually refers to the difference between toleration and tolerance. Toleration is the activity of enduring, while tolerance is the virtue (attitude) itself (Cohen, 2004: 77). This study reveals that the Turkish government shows *toleration* towards Alevi even if the salutation adopted is about acceptance, but not about respect though. But then the question is if toleration is enough on the part of the government without showing any sign of tolerance, recognition and respect.

To recapitulate, it seems that what the Turkish government did with regard to the Alevi claims on the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality is to *accept*, but not necessarily *respect*, the minority claims. In other words, the governmental action regarding resolution of the Alevi claims is not just a question of *tolerance*. Because, tolerance would probably be to prepare the legal and moral ground in schools in order to allow them not to participate in the compulsory courses. On the other hand, acceptance is about modifying the content of these courses. However, the acceptance was done unilaterally without truly including all the relevant partners from within the Alevi. As this is the case practiced, the government has not performed well in fully respecting the particularities of the Alevi culture. What some of the Alevi actually claimed was full respect and recognition. This case reveals that while the actual solution proposed by the government points to acceptance, the way it was presented by the government and bureaucracy was an act of toleration, but not of tolerance. Because, tolerance is a virtue, which needs to be internalized by the tolerator as Cohen (2004) eloquently put it. In the case of the Alevi Initiative held by the AKP government, it seems that it was the transnationalization of the Alevi claims through the decision of the European Court of Human Rights (2009) as well as the electoral concerns which made the AKP act upon the resolution of the Alevi claims on various issues including the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality.

## **Case 2: Public policies and political initiatives for the lift of the headscarf ban in universities**

Between July and September 2010, the headscarf issue reached its climax when the head of the Higher Education Council (YÖK) claimed in his statement that the right to education is a fundamental human right secured by the Constitution and the European Convention of Human Rights. His public statement was sent to Istanbul University as a reply to the petition of complaint by a medical faculty student, who was compelled to leave the lecture room due to her headscarf.<sup>26</sup> The YÖK also enunciated that expelling a student from the classroom on the ground of his/her clothing is an act of committing a crime of discipline. The leaders of both the leading Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the main opposition party, CHP, reacted to this incident with rigorous attempt to resolve the headscarf

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<sup>26</sup> *Haberaktuel.com*, "Üniversitelerde Başörtüsü Özgürlüğü Belgesi", <http://www.haberaktuel.com/universitelerde-basortusu-ozgurlugu-belgesi-haberi-312491.html>, accessed on 17.10.2010

issue. The main opposition party, CHP, made a claim on the resolution of this issue by initiating a change in the Laws of Higher Education with respect to the right to education, although this issue is bound with the principles of secularism and freedom of religion, and requires a constitutional and structural reform. Therefore, it was debated between the two political leaders to establish a commission with a joint initiative and to discuss the alternative strategies for an immediate solution to the headscarf issue.<sup>27</sup> However, from October 2010 on, the CHP, refrained from making an alliance with the governing party, AKP, in resolving the conflicts in the universities arising from the headscarf ban, and consequently, the initiative taken by the politicians reached a deadlock.<sup>28</sup>

Another landmark in tackling the problems in higher education caused by the headscarf ban is the abolishment of legal arrangements restricting the entry of veiled candidates to the Academic Personnel and Postgraduate Exam (ALES).<sup>29</sup> However, the State Council (*Danistay*) made a decision in January 2011 to cancel the enforcement of the new legal arrangements, which made no restriction regarding the dress code in attending the aforementioned exam, on the ground that the new legal arrangements violate the decisions of the Constitutional Court and of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on the headscarf issue.<sup>30</sup>

The public debates and the literature on the headscarf issue in Turkey predominantly focus on the Secularist-Islamist divide apparent since the founding years of the Republic. Social scientists in Turkey often take this political cleavage as the central unit of analysis in their work. Their main argument is that the dichotomy between secularism and Islamism is an unintended consequence of the Turkish modernisation. The reasons behind the emergence of the headscarf issue were mainly ascribed to the political project of the founding state elite in search of the establishment of a modern and secular state, and to the ethno-culturally and religiously motivated opposition of the centrifugal civil forces vis-a-vis the top-down simple modernization of the state elite (Giddens, 1994). In this view, the central themes embedded in the headscarf issue are the making of the Turkish nation-state, modernisation, secularisation, Islamisation, and identity-formation at national, communal and individual levels. However, in the search for a more insightful understanding of the headscarf issue, one should examine the nature and characteristics lying behind the modernisation project leading to the secularist -Islamist divide.

In order to understand the linkage between the secularist ideology and the headscarf issue within the framework of top-down simple modernisation process (Giddens, 1994), one should look at the political context bringing about the headscarf issue. The emergence of secularist and Islamist divide is historically rooted in the political discourse of the founding elite of the Turkish Republic aiming at the establishment of a secular and homogenous nation. The Kemalist state elite established a modern and secular nation-state breaking up with the Ottoman state.<sup>31</sup> For this purpose, the Kemalist elite undertook structural reforms securing a new political order separating the state from religion. However, the structural and institutional changes were not sufficient to build a modern Turkish state, which would presumably constitute its relations with the nation through a secular social ethos and reason. In order to form the state-society relations resting upon rational-secular form of power and

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<sup>27</sup> *ZamanOnline website*, . <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=1037458> , accessed on 16.10.2010

<sup>28</sup> *Internethaber website*, <http://www.internethaber.com/iste-chpdeki-basortu-savasinin-arka-yuzu-300769h.htm>, accessed on 10. 02.2011

<sup>29</sup> *Memurlar.net website*, <http://www.memurlar.net/haber/179304>, accessed on 10.02.2011

<sup>30</sup> *Hurriyet Gündem website*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/16799756.asp>, accessed on 10.02.2011

<sup>31</sup> Referring to the writings of Ernest Gellner (1994) and Joseph S. Szyliowicz (1966), we assume that the main shortcoming of the Kemalist revolution was rather not to try hard to reach out to the rural population. Both civil and military bureaucracy established clientalist relations with the local elite in the periphery without an attempt to reach out to the rural people in general. This is why the elements of a modern state such as secular education, justice and security have not really been institutionalized in the periphery; instead the state made itself visible there through an alliance with the local, patriarchal and semi-feudal big landowners.

legitimacy, the Kemalist elite pursued a modernisation project to transform the Turkish nation affiliated with religious, traditional and ethnic identities into a modern and secular nation based on Turkishness. The Kemalist elite adopted significant reforms for the cultural transformation involving the adoption of the dress code in 1924, which rejected the veiling of women and any kind of religious symbols, and introduced the modern-Western style of clothing (Göle, 1997). The political project of modernisation and the state-led policies for secularisation partly were not completely successful in transforming the traditional and religious society into a modern and secular one.

The state-centric secularisation and modernisation project imposed from above created a society with modern-Western-looking and rational-secular-thinking in the public space without dismantling the religious forms of social interactions. The strict separation of religion from the state as well as ‘the constitutional control of religious affairs by the state’ led to the generation of a laicist national ethos rather than a secular social ethos (Keyman, 2007). Following the French model of *laïcité*, the choice of the early Republicans on the integration of the principle of Laicism into the Turkish Constitution in 1937 indicates that the Kemalist elite was not preoccupied at all with the elimination of religion from public space. On the contrary, they affirmed the fact that Turkish society was religious in essence. The main rationale behind the principle of Laicism was not to wage a war against Islam, but to provide the people with the power to challenge the rising authority of the Islamic clergy since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Laicism derives from the French word *lai* (or *laïque*, in contemporary usage, lay people in English), meaning “of the people” as distinguished from “the clergy”. Hence, laicism underscores the distinction between lay members of a church and its clergy (Davison, 2003). In other words, as Davison (2003: 341) put it very well:

*“[Laicism] ‘rescued Islam’ as a matter of ‘belief’ and ‘conscience’ by institutionally supporting, financing, and promulgating a different version of Islam and its view of relation to power and social life. The separation of religion from its previous position of influence [in the Ottoman Empire] constituted a shift in Islam’s institutional and legitimation position, not its formal, full elimination.”*

In this sense, rather than antagonizing Islam, laicism simply means to empower the individual believers vis-a-vis the clergy. Furthermore, laicist ideology has also made it possible that the Kemalist elite politically and culturally instrumentalised Islam to unify the nation through the institutions of the Ministry of Education and the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*). The perception that Laicism (Laiklik in Turkish) was “antireligious secularism” ignores the regime’s religious policy, and fails to consider the existence of different versions of political Islam in Turkey, one of them enshrined in power until very recently and others outside it.

The terms laicism and secularism are often interchangeably used in Turkey. Both terms rather have different etymologies, institutional histories, and normative theoretical implications. Secularism derives from the Latin *saeculum*, meaning generation or age, and originally meant “of the world” as opposed to “of the church”. Hence, the term “secular” differentiates between matters of religiosity and matters of the world. In this sense, secularization of a society simply refers to the “diminution of the social significance of religion” and “the growing tendency to do without religion” (Bruce and Wallis, 1994; Davison, 2003). A secular state then refers to a “religion-free” state - a kind of state that does not apparently comply with the modern Turkish state. Davison (2003: 344) draws attention to Laicism as an obstacle to secularization as it has so far made the state to instrumentalise religion as a tool to control the masses.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Niyazi Berkes is one of those Turkish scholars who used the term secularism in its correct form. In his book *Secularism in Turkey* (1978), Berkes defines secularism as an ideology used to differentiate the matters of this world and of the other world.

Against this background, in this study it is argued that Turkish laicism employs religious semantics in a way that actually constitutes impediments before the secularization of the state and society. This is why the debates about the headscarf issue have so far been held on a very ideological ground, in which the so-called Laicists and Islamists have been misrepresented as if they are in a constant binary opposition. To begin with, we seek to understand how and why the dominant national discourses and practices on the headscarf issue in higher education were produced and reproduced. In order to do that one should look at the political context of the 1980s and 1990s, a period in which strict laicist policies were implemented.

Considering the fragility of social cohesion and national unity in the 1970s, the military government undertook structural changes for the enhancement of the state's role in public realm in order to demobilise and depoliticise the civil society (Özbudun, 2000; Arat, 2005). A crucial policy of the military government for strengthening the state's role in public realm is the establishment of the Higher Education Council aiming at the control over the politicisation of thoughts and debates motivating the left wing and right wing groups in universities, and at the eradication of the conflicts arising between them (Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu, 2008). In parallel with the suppression of the political orientations of both right and left wing groups, the Council was established to control the politicisation of cultural and religious symbols in universities. For this purpose, the Council took some measures restricting the way students dressed up in higher education institutions. In 1982, the YÖK banned wearing headscarf and having beard as they were perceived to be the symbols of religious and political identities manifested by Islamist as well as leftist and extreme-right wing students. It is also essential to note that in the same year, a general regulation was made with regard to the dress code of the personnel employed by the public institutions (Cindoğlu, 2010). According to this regulation, wearing a headscarf for the employees working in public institutions was banned.

### ***A Short History of the Headscarf Issue***

Between 1984 and 1987, the government run by the Motherland Party (ANAP) pursued a practice of *tolerance* towards religious differences as a way of self-presentation, and the dress code was loosened up to include wearing a special headscarf, so-called modern *Turban* (Cindoğlu, 2010; Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu, 2008). Nevertheless, the practice of the ANAP government, which put a claim on the modernity of the turban versus the traditionality of the headscarf, does not considerably differ from the discourse of the state elite on the national identity intertwined with the Islamic aspects of the Turkish society. In order to restore the social cohesion, the military initiated a political project for restructuring the national unity by incorporating conservative and Islamist sources of culture into the modern and homogenous Turkish national identity (Cizre, 1996: 245-246). In this respect, the social forces reflecting the new Turkish identity could have Islamic features as long as they did not clash with the secular and modern national identity. Thus, female university students with religious convictions and practices could be tolerated as long as they did not challenge the modern and secular public realm of the Turkish society. Hence, it is pointed out that the headscarf issue could be tolerated in line with the political discourse of integrating the Islamist social forces into the regime, although the management of this issue could never transcend the framing of the dominant state discourse of strict laicism.

Between 1987 and 1997, the laws regulating the headscarf ban in universities were changed. In 1987, the president of the republic, Kenan Evren, the former Chief of Staff, who initiated the 1980 military coup, intervened in the issue, and the Higher Education Council annulled the article about the freedom of wearing the 'modern turban' (Arat, 2005). Yet in 1991, relying on the liberal political context, the political elite made an attempt to change the law, and the supplementary article 17 of the Higher Education Law recognising the freedom of choice for dress code in higher education institutions was



ratified (CEDAW, 2010). Thus, in the early 1990s, discriminative policies and practices against students wearing a headscarf in universities were not often practiced.

Considering the shifts in the national discourse on the headscarf issue in universities in a specific period, the political context in the aftermath of the 28 February 1997 semi-military coup brought about a turning point in the sense that the state elite and the republican -secular segments of the society firmly agreed on the marginalisation of the headscarf issue, which was regarded as intolerable and unacceptable. The reasons for the marginalisation of the headscarf issue lie in the association of wearing a headscarf with the politicisation of religious symbols in parallel with the rise of political Islam. It should be underlined that in 1987, the pro-Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP) established the ladies' commissions<sup>33</sup> to replace women's branches, which were outlawed by the military government under the 1982 Constitution in order to constrain the mobilisation of the political parties (Arat, 2005). The ladies' commissions provided a frame of social network for Islamist women, who could find a community to share their discontents about the modern urban life and to struggle with the deprived neighbourhoods at the outskirts of the big cities.

On the other hand, it should also be noticed that the ladies' commissions provided educated and qualified young women wearing headscarf with an opportunity to participate in the reshaping of the public space (Arat, 2005; White, 2002). In 1991 election campaigns, the party leaders attempted to transform the party from a traditionalist religious party into a mass party by changing its public image (Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu, 2008). In order to create a new image, the party used seven women to give the impression to the public that the Welfare Party was inclusive for everybody including the women. One of these women was a young headscarfed woman, who could not complete her university education due to the headscarf ban. Since a young headscarfed woman participated in a political party's election campaign and publicly articulated her aspirations to challenge the republican and secular regime, her wearing a headscarf was perceived by the public as an attempt to politically instrumentalise a religious symbol and as an ideological threat to the republican regime. Frustrated by the policies and practices of the Welfare party government in coalition with the liberal-conservative True Path Party (DYP) and the growing Islamist social movement, the military intervened in politics to bring an end to the rise of political Islam seen as a rigorous threat to modern and secular Turkey.

On 28 February 1997, the National Security Council (MGK) gave an ultimatum to the Welfare-True Path coalition government to refrain from the Islamist politics, and this warning led to the collapse of the coalition government (Cizre and Çınar, 2003). Furthermore, the MGK meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February gave rise to a new period, in which the MGK took significant measures to exclude the conservative and religious individual citizens from political, social and economic spheres of life and to restore the 'laicist' regime. In this period, the MGK held meeting with the Higher Education Council and the university presidents/chancellors, and warned them not to allow the female students with a headscarf to get into campus (CEDAW, 2010). Hence, it should be stated that the measure of the MGK in the aftermath of the 28 February coup opened up a new period, known as 28th February Process, in which the concept 'public sphere' was dramatically constrained and the state-centric secularism became restrictive towards religious activities with fundamentalist tone.

In 2005, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) made a decision on the headscarf case between a Turkish citizen, Leyla Sahin, and Turkey. In this case, the conflict between Şahin wearing a headscarf in a Turkish university and the Turkish state was discussed in relation to both the right to publicly express religious belief and the right to education. Drawing on the principle of fundamental rights, the Court decided that the interference of the Turkish state with Şahin's education was rightful

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<sup>33</sup> The commissions formed to mobilise women by Welfare Party in 1987 were deliberately given the name, Ladies' Commission instead of Women's Branch since the Political Parties Law, which was put in force after the 1980 coup, outlawed women's branches.

and legal, since the state intended to protect the right of others to education and to maintain public order (Kaya, 2009; and Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu, 2008). It was a monumental development that the Grand Chamber of the EctHR agreed to hear Şahin's case at all, since two previous applications concerning the Turkish headscarf had been ruled inadmissible. In Şahin's case, however, the outcome was a temporary defeat for headscarf supporters. The court ruled that there had been no violation of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (freedom of thought, conscience and religion); Article 10 (freedom of expression); Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) and Article 2, Protocol No. 1 (right to education). In short, the Grand Chamber concluded that in the case of the headscarf, the interference/with fundamental rights might be necessary to protect the rights and freedoms of others and maintain public order. While the Chamber recognised that the ban interfered with Şahin's right to publicly manifest her religion, it stated that the ban was acceptable if it was imposed to protect the rights of third parties, to preserve public order, and to safeguard the principles of secularism and equality in Turkey.

Three years after the Sahin vs. Turkey case, in 2008, the AKP government in cooperation with the right-wing party MHP (Nationalist Action Party) proposed a constitutional amendment concerning the ban on wearing headscarf in public places with the expectation that this amendment would lift the ban in universities (Kaya, 2009). Following the constitutional amendments, the newly elected head of the Higher Education Council (YÖK), Yusuf Ziya Özcan, made an announcement to the universities and stated that according to the constitutional change, the ban on wearing a headscarf in the Turkish universities was lifted. However, the Court ultimately repudiated the decisions regarding the lift of the ban with the consideration of the secularist main opposition party CHP's objection to the amendment.

Since July 2010, the Higher Education Council released a public statement to avow its decision that the right to education is a fundamental right secured by the Constitution and the European Convention of Human Rights, and that enrolling a university for a student with headscarf should be considered as a right to education. However, some public universities still persist on the suspension of the students with headscarf before their entry to the university campus or buildings, although most of the Turkish universities have recently abandoned the exercise of the headscarf ban on campuses. Furthermore, the headscarf issue is not sufficiently debated with respect to secularism, freedom of faith, individual rights, and freedom of self-identification in the public sphere. Another important point is that all the public policies and political initiatives regarding the solution of the so-called headscarf problem are confined to the lift of the headscarf ban in universities. So far no single serious attempt or initiative has been directed towards the lift of the ban in public institutions. Therefore, this work argues that the headscarf issue in universities remains as a challenge to the national discourses on modern and secular Turkey, and has to be resolved with an address to the re-configuration of the concept of 'public sphere' where religious and cultural differences of individuals are tolerated and accepted. This work also claims that it will be highly difficult to resolve the headscarf issue without dismantling the perception of the laicist groups about the headscarfed women posing a societal challenge is resolve.

### ***Reproduction of Binary Oppositions between Islamism and Secularism***

The state-centric laicism and the restriction of the public sphere are the central themes for our research, which has enabled us to understand why the headscarf issue has become so intolerable and unacceptable in a diverse society. One of the most fundamental questions of our research is to find out what lies behind the emergence of the headscarf issue. What is repeatedly narrated by the interlocutors during the field research is that the strict secularism of the state and the barriers before the freedom of religion erected by the state lead to the emergence of the headscarf issue. All the interlocutors stated that the state's strict form of laicism is not equally distant to all religions, and aims to control religion while it separates state affairs from religious affairs:

*Similar to the case in France, the Turkish state does not conceive secularism as the delineation of religion from politics but also it replaces the religion with another form of belief. Because religion is a source of power, the state aspires to use that power in order to control its citizens. If you are a woman, who is well-educated, lives in a city and has a middle or upper socio-economic status, the state wishes you to be a modern woman and dress in the 'modern and Western' style. If you do not comply with the requirements of the state, then you are compelled to concede your right to education (a former executive member of the Association of Women's Rights and Struggle Against Discrimination, AKDER, and a lawyer on women's rights)*

However, what is more important in our findings is that the most crucial impact of strict secularism in Turkey is that it polarises and diffuses the society between secularists, who conform with the state's principles and interests, and Islamists, who challenge the state and the regime with their social and individual preferences. In fact, we find out that the state-centric process of secularisation divides the society between citizens and non-citizens. Since the state discourse of laicism imposed on the individuals, the individuals have internalized the state's control over religious claims of individuals and groups. It seems that top-down simple modernization run by the state has created believers of Laicism on the one hand, and believers of Islam on the other.

Public sphere is the main instrument of the state elite to impose the state-centric secularisation. In the aftermath of the 28th February, the most influential strategy that the state elite adopted to consolidate the state-led laicism and social groups was the designation of the public sphere by the ban on headscarf in universities. Since the self-presentation using a religious symbol in the public sphere contradicts the principle of laicism, wearing a headscarf in universities was stigmatised as an act of dissidence against the modern and secular state. Public sphere has so far been defined as the sphere of the state in Turkey; those who insisted on entering these places with a headscarf were not allowed to do so, and they were reduced to the second class citizens:

*The public sphere in Turkey is perceived as a space belonging to the state. Throughout the republican history, we have called hospital, university and school 'the public sphere'. However, public sphere has to be a common space of negotiation for different groups and actors coming from the civil society. As Habermas put it very well, the language of the public sphere should be rational rather than ideological. If the language of the public sphere is ideological, the public sphere turns to be hierarchical (Professor of Theology in a public university in Istanbul).*

A similar line of thinking was displayed by another scholar teaching in a foundation university, underlining the fact that the public space is constructed in Turkey as a neutral and abstract category. She claims that the public space should be an unprescribed, democratic and inclusive space open to all the individuals:

*The public sphere in Turkey is designed as an abstract space to which you enter after you are refined from all your differences and identities. However, the individual carries his/her baggage of identity with while entering the public sphere. In fact, public sphere is a space where all individuals can produce policies by bringing all their differences in (Professor of Sociology in a foundation university in Istanbul).*

In what follows, we shall scrutinize the discourses on *tolerance* at the societal level towards headscarf as a form of self-presentation and self-identification in the public sphere. We shall also explore the discourses on the recent public policies and political initiatives brought up for the solution to the headscarf issue.

The question at the level of social *tolerance* towards the headscarf issue is dramatically important in understanding whether individuals and social groups approach the headscarf conflict between secularists and Islamists with respect to *tolerance* and acceptance. The majority of the interlocutors replied to the question in a positive way. Aggregating the replies to this question, the most obvious finding we achieved is that at societal level, there is no such problem as *intolerance* and non-acceptance between veiled and unveiled women in terms of self-presentation, peaceful co-existence, and social-cultural interaction in everyday life. According to a research on the social conflict stemming from the headscarf issue, 71.1 percent of the research sample supported the freedom for wearing a headscarf in universities (Toprak and Çarkoğlu, 2006). In other words, there is no social tendency and attitude indicating the non-acceptance and *intolerance* towards the existence and involvement of headscarfed women in everyday life including the universities. A member of the Humanitarian Relief Foundation refers to the potential of the Turkish society to resolve those ossified problems such as the headscarf issue:

*Turkish society could be a model for the European societies in terms of the promotion of cultural interaction between different religions, sects, sufi communities, and ethnic groups. In recent years, the civil society organisations, academics, intellectuals and women rights' activists drew a remarkable attention to raising awareness for the incorporation and existence of headscarfed women in social life (a female executive member of the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, and of the Association of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People, MAZLUMDER).*

Similarly, some of the interlocutors brought forward that one could easily observe the cultural interaction between veiled women and unveiled women among the lower and middle classes of the society. On the other hand, they further argued that we cannot talk of the same interaction at the higher levels of the society. One of our interlocutors addressed at the members of the military bureaucracy, judicial bureaucracy and the high-ranking public administration who have had a vested interest in the reproduction of the state-centric laicist discourse in their everyday life, which prevents them from interacting with the so-called lower and marginalised segments of the society:

*As the level of education and socio-economic status rises, the cultural interaction between different sectors of the society declines. For those people who attain a higher level of socio-economic status, the space of everyday life diverts from that of people with a lower socio-economic status. As a consequence, individuals begin to approach and treat each other with perceptions and judgements they create in their own life world (Professor of Theology in a public university in Istanbul).*

We claim that the problem which is deeply embedded in these contesting discursive positions is the lack of awareness about freedom of religion in public sphere rather than the degree of tolerance among different segments of the society. The definition of the freedom of religion in public sphere is highly contested.

### ***Tolerance, Respect and Recognition vis-a-vis Headscarfed Students***

This section deals with the ways in which the interlocutors propose to resolve the headscarf issue with reference to *tolerance*, recognition, or respect. The interlocutors we interviewed were asked what they think about the public statement sent by the Higher Education Council to Istanbul University in July 2010 underlining the right to education secured by the Constitution and the European Convention of Human Rights. We were also interested in inquiring the views of the interlocutors on the initiatives of the political parties vis-a-vis the public statement of the YÖK made in July 2010. Major political parties publicly pledged their claims on the resolution of the headscarf ban in universities by fortifying

and enforcing the laws to reemphasize the legal respect/recognition for the right to education for everybody, and to eliminate the discrimination against headscarfed women in practice.

It was found out that most of the interlocutors perceive the political parties' initiatives and the policy document of YÖK as a commitment made by the political leaders and policymakers to solve the headscarf issue in universities. To corroborate this position, they stress that AKP is very much committed to solve the headscarf conflict with respect to the right to education. They believe that the constitutional amendment of 2008 is an indication of this determination. We assume that this argument evokes the discourse of 'toleration as an allowance concept' (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011) in a minimalist sense. The discourse of *tolerance* deployed here reveals that the public institutions in alliance with the ruling party see the grievances of headscarfed students, who have been deprived of the right to higher education. In this sense, the ruling elite and the political parties involved in the process accept that headscarf cannot be an impediment to the right to education of female students, and thus, they 'allow' these students to publicly present their religious symbols and clothes. In other words, they achieve the minimalist principle of liberal *tolerance*, which is defined as 'the absence of interference' (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011). Thus, we argue that the positions displayed in the interviews with regard to the perceptions about the public policy and political initiatives to lift the ban on headscarf, address at the allowance conception of toleration expressed by the government to comply with 'the principle of non-interference' with regard to the right to education.

However, none of our interlocutors believed that the solution to this problem lies in the political will. They mostly stated that they do not believe that the political parties can resolve the problem. The common answer we received to the question was that they do not want the political parties to get involved in solving the headscarf issue:

*I can tell for all the political leaders that they do not grasp the essence of the issue. They consistently debate about the headscarf issue in the public space along the lines of appearance, symbols, images and signs, but not on the grounds of ethical and moral communication. Even if the headscarf ban is lifted in universities, the debate would go on. This time they would begin to debate whether they should allow the students to wear a headscarf in high schools or in primary schools or to veil in different ways in accordance with different sects of Islam. The political parties do not discuss the issue in terms of freedom of religion. I do not believe that issues related to religion are freely debated in Turkey today. The state should recognise a space where the public can freely discuss the headscarf issue on the grounds of ethics. (The former director of the Women's Activities at the Directorate of Religious Affairs, DİB and a delegate of the Democratic Party)*

So what she asks is respect for people. They should be respected and recognised in their capacity to solve this issue, and they should not be simply tolerated in the liberal sense by the state, which imposes rules banning (or not) the headscarf. Similarly, an MP from the Republican People's Party (CHP) has stated that the headscarf issue has become politicized. She claims that the issue could be resolved if only it is depoliticized:

*The politicians should not be involved in the headscarf issue and other issues concerning the clothing of women. The issue became so inflated because it has been overwhelmingly debated since the 1980s. In fact, this issue could have been eliminated in the 1980s if it had not been talked about so much. This issue can only be solved if we let it go on its own way (an MP from the Republican People's Party).*

It is worth noting that the arguments mentioned above underline that the public policy and the political initiatives to solve the headscarf issue in universities through legal and institutional changes are very limited and palliative. Furthermore, these solutions cannot eradicate the headscarf conflict with respect

to freedom of belief. The arguments concerning the social attitude towards the public policy and the political initiatives also imply that there is a lack of the discourse of 'respect and recognition'. The 'respect/recognition conception of toleration' or 'toleration as public recognition' (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011) is not relevant here to account for the perception of our interlocutors about the public policies and initiatives. We argue that the initiatives for the lift of the ban in universities cannot be explained as a process of shift in the discourse from 'toleration as allowance' to 'toleration as public recognition' since the stigmatisation and discrimination against headscarfed women still prevails although headscarf as a part of Islamic belief is no longer seen as a reason for objection to the right to education.

A headscarfed woman who is a graduate from a private university in 2005 stated that unless there is a permanent and fundamental solution to the issue, she does not believe in the initiatives taken by the political leaders:

*In Turkey, such attempts have been made in the political context of elections or specific favourable situations. However, what I demand is that a structural and radical solution should be brought not only to this issue but also to the other issues related to the freedom of religion. The headscarf issue is a problem of everybody, not only ours (a professional working as an export manager at a trading company).*

One of the most significant findings we drew from these interviews is that our interlocutors believe that as long as the political parties are involved in resolving the headscarf issue in general, this issue is bound to be hijacked by the debates and conflicts revolving around the ideology of laicism. As in the case of the closure case of the ruling party, AKP, in which the party was accused of violating the principle of laicism, every attempt of a political party would face the risk of contravening the state's constitutive elements, and thus, of being labelled as Islamists. Therefore, it seems to be more conceivable to claim that the political actors should refrain themselves from proposing legal and constitutional arrangements on their own to resolve the issue, rather they should contribute to the preparation of a convenient ground to open up a public debate around the idea of freedom of religion and diversity.

### Chapter 3. Embodiment of Tolerance in Political Life

This study aims to investigate the meaning and practices of tolerance when it comes to the issues of political participation of the Circassians (*Çerkes* in Turkish) residing in Turkey since the late nineteenth century. It will scrutinize the political and cultural claims raised by the Circassians. The work will then explore which claims have so far been tolerated by the state institutions, what political practices are considered to be tolerant or intolerant, and what values/norms are considered to promote, or undermine, tolerance in Turkish political life. Furthermore, the research will also study how the embodiment of tolerance in political norms and practices relates to concepts such as multiculturalism, respect, recognition, pluralism and transnationalism.

The contemporary ethnic and cultural resurgence in the Circassian diaspora does not necessarily correspond to an ethno-cultural essentialism generated by the Circassians living in exile. Despite the fact that Circassians are Sunni Muslims who were given the opportunity by the Sublime Porte (Istanbul) to flee to Anatolia, the Balkans and the Middle East upon the Russian atrocities that began in the mid nineteenth century, Circassians have always felt themselves to be guests in Turkey (Pinson, 1972). Furthermore, they were convinced at the very beginning of the Kemalist Revolution in the early 1920s that they were one of the constitutive elements of the newly-established Turkish nation, but they have been subject since the mid 1930s to various forms of political, social and cultural acts of exclusion that accompanied the racialization and ethnicization of the Turkish nation *vis-à-vis* not only non-Muslims but also non-Sunni and non-Turkish elements of the Muslim-origin population.

When ethno-cultural and religious minorities are not permitted by the dominant political and legal structure to express their claims through legitimate political institutions such as parliament and political parties, these groups are then inclined to produce a *politics of identity* by highlighting their cultural, ethnic and religious particularities (Macintyre, 1971). Today, it is estimated that there are around 2.5 million Circassian-origin inhabitants residing in Turkey with quite a few diverse sub-identities, such as Adygei, Kabartay, Abkhaz, Ubikh and Chechen. The linkages between these communities and their counterparts in the homeland (North Caucasus: Adygei, Kabartay-Balkar, and Karacay-Cerkesk Republics in the Russian Federation) have increased remarkably since the dissolution of the USSR.

After being subject to a long period of structural, political and social-economic exclusion, Circassians have become outspoken in the aftermath of the Helsinki Summit of the European Union in December 1999 when Turkey was given the right to be a candidate for the Union. Their vocal political participation was interrupted after 2005 when the democratization and Europeanization process in Turkey was hijacked by parochial Turkish nationalism and Kurdish minority nationalism. The period between 2005 and 2012 corresponds to an interval when minorities were silenced by the hegemonic discourse of Turkish nationalism. Turkish politics has been through a tremendous change since the beginning of the accession negotiations in December 2005.

The landmarks of this change are as follows: the assassination of the Armenian origin journalist Hrant Dink in 2007<sup>34</sup>, the failure of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to incorporate the

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<sup>34</sup> Hrant Dink was a prominent journalist of Armenian origin, who was assassinated on 19 January 2007. He had earlier been sentenced to six months' conditional imprisonment on the charge of 'insulting Turkish national identity'. In an article published in early 2004, Dink had called for Armenians to "renounce the hatred towards the Turks that poisons their blood". Consequently, protests ensued under the mottos "We are all Hrank Dink" and "We are all Armenians", which

Kurds and the Alevis, the constitutional change to lift the headscarf ban in public institutions, the Constitutional Court's rejection of the lifting of the headscarf ban, the prosecution of the AKP with the aim of closing the party down, and the *Ergenekon* case (a paramilitary plot). All these landmarks seem to reveal that the AKP leadership has so far instrumentalised the European cause in a way that has led the liberals and EU circles to question the AKP's commitment to the European Union. However, prior to the constitutional Referendum in late 2010, minorities had become outspoken again with the intention of being more attentive to the idea of creating a completely new and democratic constitution to be prepared in the new parliament to summon after the general elections of 12 June 2011.<sup>35</sup> This research reveals that the Circassians have become very much engaged in this process.

### **Case Study 3: Circassian Claims on Equal citizenship in Turkey: Institutionalizing Political Participation**

This case is very relevant to measure the impact of the transnational communities on the democratization process of Turkey along with the European integration process. Circassians have also recently become very active at the European level, making their voices heard in Turkey through the European Parliament and other relevant circles such as the Council of Europe. Circassian associations' claims concentrate on the recognition of their right to education in the mother tongue, recognition of their ethno-cultural identity, the right to dual citizenship, recognition of their contribution to the foundation of the Republic by politicians, military officers and bureaucrats of Caucasus origin, and removal of descriptions of *Çerkes Ethem*<sup>36</sup> as a "traitor" (*hain*) from school textbooks. Ethem was described as a "traitor" by the Grand National Assembly led by Mustafa Kemal, despite his great contribution to the Turkish War of Independence, suppressing revolts in both the Marmara and Central Anatolia regions (1919-1920) in which his co-ethnic Circassians were heavily involved.

Circassian claims for constitutional citizenship, recognition and respect, and the government's initiative for a constitutional reform and legal arrangements to secure cultural rights can be categorized as a good example of accommodation of the ethno-cultural diversity challenge with reference to tolerance in political life. Since the founding principles of the Turkish Republic do not recognize politics of identity based on ethno-cultural differences, the Kemalist state elite attempted to incorporate ethnic minorities, including Circassians, Kurds and Alevis, into the political space by maintaining their status as 'constitutive elements'. This work argues that the current state policies employed to respond to the Circassian claims cannot be considered as a discourse and practice of *respect* and *recognition*. On the contrary, the policies of the contemporary government (Justice and Development Party, AKP) can be perceived as loaded with a discourse of toleration towards the Circassians, who are actually in search of constitutional citizenship, equality and respect with regard to their ethno-cultural differences.

#### ***Global and Local Political Context: Growing Eurocepticism and Nationalism***

Despite all the reforms and good will, the public in the EU countries remained unconvinced concerning prospective Turkish membership. For instance, the Eurobarometer 69 (November 2008) public surveys indicated that only 31 percent of the European public supports Turkey's entry into the Union, while 55 percent are against. It is needless to emphasize that the decisions made by the EU countries concerning Turkey's membership have had a strong impact on the democratization process in all walks of life within the country. Since the military coup in 1980, Turkey has never been so

(Contd.) \_\_\_\_\_

were employed by Armenians and Turks. The media paid specific attention to these protests. Subsequently, the Armenian community's presence in the political and social spheres became more visible. See Kaya (2009).

<sup>35</sup> For a detailed analysis of this process, see Yılmaz (2011).

<sup>36</sup> For more detailed information about Çerkes Ethem see footnote 10.



politically polarized. Especially since 1999, the main fault-line dividing Turkey in all spheres of life has been the EU debate. The debate has taken place between pro-Europeans (liberals, social democrats, moderate Muslims, ethno-cultural and non-Muslim minorities) and Eurosceptics (nationalist right, nationalist left, patriots, Kemalists and fundamentalist Islamist groups). One should note that every time any negative or pessimistic statement has been made in EU circles or by individual EU countries, it has strengthened the position of the Eurosceptics. The debates on Cyprus, the Armenian ‘massacre’/‘genocide’/‘deportation’, Islamophobia, Kemalist values, decentralization and devolution have always reinforced the position of the Eurosceptics in one way or another.<sup>37</sup>

Euroscepticism, nationalism and parochialism in Turkey have been triggered by popular disapproval of the American occupation of Iraq, limitations on national sovereignty posed by the EU integration, the wave of feeling aroused by the ninetieth anniversary of the Armenian ‘deportation’/‘genocide’ among the Armenian diaspora (2005), the perceived risk that Turkey would recognise Southern Cyprus for the sake of European integration, anti-Turkish public opinion in the EU countries (e.g. France and Austria) instigated by conservative elements, and Israel’s attacks on Lebanon in 2006. All these external factors were strong enough to revive a Eurosceptical and Occidentalist discourse in Turkey. On the other hand, some internal developments also played a role in triggering this parochial reaction. For instance, the summer of 2005 was marked by debates about the sale of the country, piece by piece, in the form of real estate to foreigners, especially Israelis and Syrians. The Constitutional Court subsequently issued a decree banning the sale of real estate to foreigners. It did not then take long for the pro-Islamist Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*) and similar groups to make a correlation between the sale of real estate to foreigners and the ‘sale of the country’ or the so-called “Second Treaty of Sèvres”.<sup>38</sup> This is why many Turks, demoralised by poverty, insecurity, unequal political representation, uncertainty and ambiguity about the future, could not resist drifting back into the ‘Sèvres syndrome’, i.e., the perception that they are surrounded by enemies attempting the destruction of the Turkish state (Öniş, 2004: 12).

Debates and even offensive disputes took place within the framework of the assessments of the Progress Report before the EU summit of 17 December 2005, which identified the Kurds and the Alevis as ‘minorities,’ and the vicious public debates revolving around the critical report of the Human Rights Commission delegated by the Office of the Turkish Prime Minister brought the discourse of ‘external enemies trying to divide our country’ to the forefront once more. It is possible to say that the concept of ‘minority’ that is occasionally used in the EU Progress Report to identify the Kurds and the Alevis was misunderstood by the public. Not only were non-Alevis and non-Kurds attracted by the nationalist, parochial and Eurosceptical discourse, but the Alevis and Kurds also rejected their “alleged minority status”, and they underlined “their being a constitutive element of the Republic”.

The latest general elections held in July 2011 consolidated the power of the AKP with a landslide victory of more than 50 percent of the vote. Economic prosperity, growing Turkish Lira nationalism, strong political determination against the traditional legacy of the Turkish army, becoming a soft power in the region, developing friendly relations with the Middle Eastern countries, Caucasus, Russia and North African countries, creating a political climate to receive the claims of several different ethno-cultural groups in the process of preparing a new constitution and similar factors were decisive in the consolidation of the AKP’s power in Turkey. Circassians’ claims should then be analyzed within the parameters of the kind of global and local context summarized above. The question is

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<sup>37</sup> For a detailed account of the Eurosceptics see Güneş-Ayata (2003), Bilgin (2005).

<sup>38</sup> The Treaty of Sèvres (10 August 1920) was the peace treaty between the Ottoman Empire and Allies at the end of World War I. The Treaty was designed to colonize the remaining boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. In the end, the Treaty was not implemented, but always remained as a tool to be used by Turkish nationalists obsessed by the fear of the partition of the country and the nation.

whether the changing Turkish state apparatus is going to allow Circassians as a community to raise their claims, or whether it is going to go on allowing them to raise their claims as individuals only.

### ***General Outlook of the Circassian Diaspora in Turkey***

Circassians constitute one of the largest ethnic groups living in Turkey. They were not, hitherto, considered by the majority society to be facing any major obstacle since their arrival in Anatolia in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. However, recent studies carried out in Turkey demonstrate that it is not only the non-Muslims, Kurds and Alevis who were subject to a kind of structural exclusion with regard to having equal access to political and cultural rights. The common belief in Turkey concerning the Circassians is that they are more privileged than the other ethnic groups. This belief may be correct to a certain extent, but there is not enough scientific data to confirm such a belief. Scientific research indicates that Circassians have also been subject to various exclusionary acts in the nation-building process, the details of which will be given below (Bilmez, 2011; Şener, 2001; Ülker, 2007; Kaya, 2004, 2005) . Hence, the basic premise of this study is that Circassians have been exposed to some acts of discrimination by the Turkish state, and that while having a strong orientation towards their homeland, most of the Circassian population in Turkey still feel themselves to be guests. The fact that the voices of the Circassians have not been heard so far in the public space reflects to some extent the power of both the formal and popular-majority nationalism to which they have been subjected.

Once the Russian expansion started in the North Caucasus in the early nineteenth century, Circassians had to find refuge to escape from Russian atrocities. As the gateway to the resources of Transcaucasia and a springboard to the Middle East, the northern Caucasian lands greatly attracted the Russian state, which was eager to establish a great Asiatic empire that included the fertile settled heartland of old Turkistan in Central Asia. The peoples of the North Caucasus waged a desperate struggle against the Russians with insignificant external support. Pacification of the region occurred only after overwhelming force was used following the humiliations of the Crimean War in 1856 and after the capture of the heroic leader of the greatly weakened *Murid* movement, Imam Shamil, in 1859.

The eventual result of the Russian success in the region was a series of waves of refugees in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, by boats, carts and on foot, from northern Caucasia to the Ottoman Empire. The Circassians considered Istanbul, then the centre of the Muslim world, to be the safest place in which to seek refuge; this is how thousands of Circassians began to flee to the Ottoman Empire. The refugees arrived in waves between 1860 and 1865 and, again following the Russian–Turkish war of 1877–78. The number of refugees is a matter of contention, with figures ranging from 500,000 to two million (Berkok, 1958; Karpat, 1985, 1990; Jaimoukha, 2001). It is estimated that approximately 20 per cent of this number died of malnutrition and disease. Those who remained in the Caucasus, between 150,000 and 200,000, were compelled to resettle on the northern plains of the Caucasus where they were easier to control (Jaimoukha, 2001: 69).

Map 1: Circassians Migration Routes in Exile



The Ottoman government faced immediate problems in integrating its new subjects, along with the Crimean Tatars and Nogai who preceded them and the Muslims from the Balkans who followed. Nevertheless, these newcomers constituted a valuable source of human capital for a country that had been ravaged by successive wars, economically impoverished and increasingly overwhelmed by separatist movements in the Balkans, the Middle East and southeast Anatolia. The new human capital primarily served the Ottoman government in two ways: *as a source of manpower for the Ottoman army* and *as a buffer against the separatist powers in the country*. The Ottoman government accommodated the refugees in selected places where there had already been separatist centrifugal forces in opposition to the centre, such as the Kurdish, Balkan and Arab nationalists. Therefore, the Circassians were at first considered by the Ottoman political elite to be a kind of balancing instrument and a new stock of military potential for the stability of the empire. They were often used as security detachments and pioneers in remote and uncontrollable areas (Dündar, 2001: 130–4; Ülker, 2007). As a reliable, countervailing force used to interdict and discipline Kurds, Turkomen, Druze, Bedouin and other nomads, they were an asset for the empire from a demographic and military standpoint.

### ***Circassians' Political Participation in the Republican Period***

Throughout the ideological confrontation of the Cold War period, the relations between the Circassian diaspora in Turkey and the northern Caucasus remained minimal. Circassians developed strong anti-Soviet sentiments due to the propaganda pervading Turkey. The diasporic subjects (especially those inhabiting the northern regions of Turkey) were only able to receive news from their homeland by means of Soviet radio broadcasts in the Adygei language. Nevertheless, in the post-communist era the northern Caucasus has developed strong links of communication and transportation with the rest of the world. I shall now discuss the political participation strategies developed by the Circassians in Turkey since the early 1970s. In explaining these strategies, I will refer to the 'institutional channelling theory' developed by Patrick R. Ireland. Why do migrants withdraw from 'host-society' political life? By which means do they politically mobilize themselves? Patrick Ireland (1994, 2000) has drawn our attention to the legal conditions and political institutions of the receiving counties in mapping out the nature of immigrant political mobilization. He states that 'certain immigrant communities have withdrawn voluntarily from host-society political life in the face of institutional indifference and hostility' (1994: 8). Ireland also claims that the reason why migrant groups organize themselves politically along ethnic lines is primarily because 'host-society' institutions have nurtured ethnicity through their policies and practices.

I argue that Circassians have so far organized themselves politically in Turkey along ethnic lines principally because the institutional context in which they have found themselves has made them do so. Looking at the Circassians in Turkey through the prism of this theory, one can understand why Circassians have so far developed an ethnicity-oriented political participation strategy. The legal and political structure that excludes non-Turkish and/or non-Muslim ethnic minorities from political participation may lead these ethnic groups to mobilize themselves along ethnic lines. However, their move to search for another form of politics in the 2010s indicates that they are willing to become more decisive in the consolidation of the Turkish democracy along with the European integration of Turkey.

The common perception of the interlocutors interviewed is that Circassians have been made weaker by the Republican regime in comparison to the way their ancestors were treated by the Ottoman political and military establishment. It seems that this perception has made them generate a less conspicuous visibility in the public space, at least until the 1950s and onwards, when they started to become more and more urbanized. One of the interlocutors made such an interpretation in defining the difference between the ways in which the Circassians were treated by the Ottoman and Republican states:

*“During the Ottoman Empire, the Circassians were rather privileged compared to their political status in the Turkish Republic. The modern Turkish state excluded and marginalized the Circassian elite through the nationalist assimilation policies. These kinds of exclusionary policies of the state were very decisive until the time when at least some of the Circassians started to accumulate an economic power through the newly emerging process of urbanization in the 1950s and onwards. Despite the fact that our ancestors became relatively stronger in economic terms throughout the republican history, they remained politically inactive and incapacitated”* (Personal interview, Istanbul, 19 December 2011).

This does not necessarily mean that Circassians were completely inactive in politics. On the contrary, they were rather mobile in politics as well as in the military and civil bureaucracy. However, they had to conceal their Circassian identity in these processes of political participation, and underline their loyalty to Turkishness. One of the interlocutors stated that Circassians started to get engaged in politics in the 1960s by means of the Turkish Labour Party (TIP, *Türkiye İşçi Partisi*) in a way that made it possible for them to timidly use their ethnic identity in public space:

*“Circassians have always been active in politics, from the extreme right to the extreme left, at the expense of concealing their particular ethnic identity. They were heavily engaged in extreme right-wing Turkish nationalist movements... We have only started to do politics in the Turkish Labour Party in the 1960s explicitly but still timidly using our Circassian identity. And then we became more occupied in the 1970s with the cultural associations, where we started to celebrate our Circassian identity, folklore and culture”* (Personal interview, Istanbul, 24 December 2011).

Circassians became more outspoken in the 1970s in expressing their claims regarding their identities, cultures, political engagements, ideological positions and orientations to the homeland. In what follows, these engagements will be delineated. It will be argued that since the 1970s Circassians have so far generated various forms of political engagement with regard to their orientation to Turkey and their homeland: a) revolutionaries and returnists of the 1970s; b) Turkish nationalists and Circassian nationalists of the 1980s; c) activists of minority politics of the 1990s; d) activists of diasporic politics of identity of the 2000s; and e) bearers of democratic political claims of the 2010s.

1970s, Devrimci and Dönüşücü:

The Circassian ethnic revival first became publicly apparent in the 1970s. Due to ideological confrontation and related political changes within the country, Circassians had developed some political organizations along with two opposing dominant formulations: the *Devrimci* (revolutionaries) and the *Dönüşücü* (returnists). The *Devrimcis* argued that the betterment of Circassian rights would be achieved through a socialist revolution in Turkey, while on the contrary, the returnists advocated return to the homeland. They accused the revolutionaries of being too naïve in believing that a socialist revolution was possible in Turkey. They developed a platform in Turkey by means of Circassian ethnic associations through which rural migrants and young people maintained a strong orientation towards their homeland. The returnists are still active in Turkey. A number of them actually went back to the Caucasus after 1989; some stayed and some returned to Turkey.

1980s, Circassian-Turk and Circassian nationalist:

The military *coup d'état* of 1980 silenced the Circassian associations as well as many other civil society organizations. Under the new constitution of 1982 with its metaphysical-theological discourse and a Turkish-Islamic synthesis, Circassians carried on developing two new antithetical political participation strategies in the 1980s: the discourse of *Circassian-Turk* and the *Circassian nationalist*

discourse. Right-wing conservative Circassians followed the Turkish nationalist historiography that, by then, had a strong Turkish-Islamic orientation and subsumed northern Caucasians under the category of 'Circassian Turk' or 'Caucasian Turk'. Nevertheless, starting with the 1989 ethnic war in Georgia between the Georgians and the Abkhaz groups and the break-up of the Soviet Union, communal concern arose, ethnic resurgence came into play and national press and media coverage of the Circassian peoples, cultures and histories proliferated. By then, the Circassian difference was hardly ever expressed as an opposition that would directly challenge the hegemonic Turkish majority nationalism. This is the time of the rise of Kurdish nationalist sentiments, which also encouraged the resurgence of other ethnic groups such as Alevis and Circassians. Thus, as opposed to those who were engaged in the Turkish nationalist discourse that considered the Circassians to be of Turkish 'racial' stock, there were also Circassian nationalist intellectuals who challenged this discourse. Yet neither discourse was embraced by the masses owing to the restrictions imposed to counter the formation of ethnic associations.

#### 1990s, Minority Politics:

Since the early 1990s, with the politics of ethnicity, identity and culture gaining global momentum, Circassians have developed a new form of political participation strategy: *minority politics*. Minority politics becomes visible when formal and popular majority nationalism poses a detrimental challenge to diverse cultural and/or ethnic groups. The 1980s in Turkey was characterized by the ascendance of the neo-liberal form of governmentality based on Turkish-Islamist nationalism. Restrictive nationalist policies in the country caused uproar among various ethnic and cultural groups, such as the Kurds, Alevis and Circassians, in a way that brought about a kind of *ontological warfare* (Levinas, 1987) between the majority and minorities. Thus, Circassian ethnic associations as well as many other ethnicity-based associations became subject to surveillance by the state. These groups could not raise their voices during the repressive political regime of the 1980s. It was the newly emerging democratic political climate of the 1990s that encouraged such groups to raise their demands. The ways in which Circassians, Kurds, Alevis and Laz raised their voices were also ethno-nationalist in nature. Ethnic associations then started to use an ethnic minority discourse in reaction to the previously held formal state nationalism and newly emerging popular Turkish nationalism. Popular Turkish nationalism was again the reaction to the politicization of the Kurdish issue in the country. Within the context of a relatively more democratic political and legal structure in the 1990s, the Circassians established many different associations, which were mainly mobilized around the idea of an eventual return to the homeland. The ethnic elite emphasized that their ancestors had been expelled from their homeland and had been tools in the political machinations of the Russian and Ottoman empires; they concluded that a return to the homeland was inevitable (Shami, 1998).

#### 2000s, Diasporic Identity

Nowadays it is likely that minority politics is challenged from within the Circassian diaspora itself. The elder generations primarily developed the above-mentioned political participation strategies as a set of survival strategies. Conversely, the new generations followed different patterns, depending on the changing notions of time and space. This new strategy is constituted by the construction of modern diasporic identity, which is facilitated by contemporary means of transportation and communication, making it easy to simultaneously live on both banks of the same river, 'diaspora' and 'home', or in other words 'here' and 'there'. The construction and articulation of diasporic identity occurs through the interplay of diasporic nationalism and diasporic transnationalism. While diasporic nationalism refers to the process of ethno-cultural reification in diaspora, diasporic transnationalism refers to the process of globalization experienced by diasporic formations.

Circassian ethno-cultural resurgence in Turkey has recently become apparent especially in the urban space. The rise in the number of ethnic associations (*derneks*) in the urban space is an indicator of this tendency. Ethnic associations provide diasporic subjects with a safe haven from capitalist urban life. All associations in every city are alike. Each has similar aims, such as organizing language courses, cultural evenings, folk dances and trips to the homeland. Ethnic associations play an instrumental role in the processes of construction and articulation of Circassian diasporic identity. Historically speaking, *Dost Eli Yardımlasma Derneği* (1946), *Kuzey Kafkasya Kültür Derneği* (Northern Caucasia Culture Association, 1964), *Kafkas Derneği* (*Kaf-Der*, Caucasian Association, 1993), *Kafkas Vakfı* (the Caucasian Foundation, 1995) and *Birleşik Kafkasya Derneği* (the United Caucasian Association, 1995), and *Kaf-Fed* (*Kafkas Dernekleri Federasyonu*, Federation of Caucasian Associations, 2004). Nowadays, there are approximately 80 different associations throughout the country.

However, the replacement of minority politics by a modern diasporic identity highlighting the cultural and ethnic element has also been reinforced by some other recent social and political developments in Turkey. It is apparent that many ethnic minority groups in Western Europe have been trying to bypass the nation-states to which they have been subject by bringing their concerns directly to European Union (EU) bodies. Basques, Corsicans and Catalans, for instance, have taken their demands on a transnational basis into the European Commission to be resolved. Circassians as well as Alevis and Kurds are also engaged in similar political manoeuvres. In fact, they have rational reasons to do so. The European Union has recently declined the use of the minority discourse due to the escalation of the minority problem in Europe. As could be clearly seen in the Accession Partnership text, which maps out the requirements of Turkey in the integration process into the EU, the term ‘minority’ has been replaced with the term ‘cultural diversity’ in order to celebrate *unity in diversity*. Circassian associations such as *Kaf-Der* and *Democratic Circassian Platform* abandoned minority politics in the early 2000s to contribute to the democratization process of Turkey on the way to the European Union. As known, the post-Helsinki period was very decisive in the expansion of societal movements ranging from employers’ associations to labour unions, or from ethnic groups to religious groups. Kurds, Alevis, Circassians, Armenians, Romans and Assyrians are some of these groups that vocalized their concerns in the aftermath of the Helsinki Summit. Such attempts were consequential in weakening the oppressive hegemony of the Turkish state *vis-à-vis* non-Sunni, non-Turkish, and/or non-Muslim groups.

Following the political and cultural claims of different Muslim-origin minority groups in Turkey, the Turkish government started to enact some important reforms such as broadcasting in languages other than Turkish. On 7 June 2004, Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), the public broadcasting organisation, started television and radio programs named “Our Cultural Affluence” on weekdays in Bosnian, Arabic, Circassian, Zaza and Kirmanchi. The content of the programs and audience profiles are determined by public opinion research conducted by TRT. These broadcasts continue. From Monday to Friday everyday the TRT broadcasts in the following languages for two hours each, respectively Bosnian, Arabic, Kurmanchi Kurdish, Circassian (Adygei) and Zaza Kurdish. In the official discourse, this reform was explained to the public within the framework of tolerance in line with the international covenants and agreements such as the related documents of the UN, EU, OSCE and the Council of Europe.<sup>39</sup> However, the period of democratization between 1999 and 2005 was interrupted after the accession negotiations started. This was the time when Turkey became more parochial, nationalist and defensive against the destabilizing effects of both globalization and Europeanization. This was also the time when the EU itself ceased to be the lighthouse for Turkey, lighting her road towards democratization, liberalization and peace.

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<sup>39</sup> See the relevant online presentation of the European Union General Secretariat in Ankara, a state department which recently became a Ministry in 2011, [http://www.abgs.gov.tr/tarama/tarama\\_files/23/SC23DET\\_Minority percent20Rights.pdf](http://www.abgs.gov.tr/tarama/tarama_files/23/SC23DET_Minority%20Rights.pdf), entry date 15 October 2011.

It seems that the vicious circle between 2005 and 2010 has now been left behind as the Turkish public is now likely to test a new process of consolidation of democracy. One notes that several different ethno-cultural and religious groups are recently becoming more and more visible and vocal again, as in the immediate aftermath of the Helsinki Summit of 1999. For instance, the leaders of the Circassian associations are gathering in two weeks' time to discuss the future of their communities in Turkey and their relations with the homeland. However, there is one substantial difference between the two. The former was partly mediated by the European Union, whereas the recent move made by several different ethno-cultural and religious groups including the Circassians, Kurds, Alevis, and Armenians is lacking the EU anchor. I argue that recent ethno-cultural and religious claims raised by various minorities are likely to constitute a kind of test for the consolidation of Turkish democracy. I personally believe that the recent move is a much more valuable indicator for the consolidation of Turkish democracy, as it is taking place in a time characterized by the political and economic turmoil within the European Union.

### 2010s: A Quest for Politics

The Circassians have now become more vocal in raising their claims to see a more democratic and inclusive constitution, which should be prepared with the inclusion of all the segments of the society. They express their willingness to see a country in which rights are granted to all communities in Turkey without having to resort to violence or racism. In the meetings held by the Caucasian Federation in different cities of Turkey in 2010 and 2011,<sup>40</sup> it was commonly agreed that the constitution should be renewed to better ensure individual rights and to remove any mention of ethnicity, specifically referring to their wish to see a change in Article 66 of the Constitution, defining Turkish citizenship: "Everyone bound to the Turkish state through the bond of citizenship is a Turk."<sup>41</sup> The other claim raised in these meetings was to make sure that rights are granted in Turkey on the basis of citizenship, but not on ethnicity favoring the Sunni-Muslim-Turks. The introduction of the Circassian language in the high schools and universities as an optional language is another claim raised by the Circassians. One of the Circassian-origin intellectuals who is engaged in the Circassian Research Network ([www.cerkesarastirmalari.org](http://www.cerkesarastirmalari.org)) states that he does not consider himself an equal citizen in Turkey:

*"I consider myself as an equal citizen with regard to civil and social rights granted to me. But, as a Circassian-origin person, I am not an equal citizen as far as cultural and political rights are concerned"* (Personal interview, Istanbul, 30 January 2012).

As stated earlier, the Turkish political elite has been struggling with the construction of equal citizenship for several decades. It is obvious that Turkish citizenship is inclusive for those who fall into the category of Turkish-Sunni-Muslim, and exclusive for those outside this category. Another intellectual and activist of Circassian origin refers to the limitations of Turkish citizenship in recognizing ethno-cultural differences constituting contemporary Turkish society:

*"I see myself as an equal citizen as long as I deny my identity, culture and language. But this would be a self-deception. I know that I can't practice politics through my own identity; I can't call my child with an Abkhazian name and can't use my tribal name as my surname; I*

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<sup>40</sup> The first meeting was held in Bolu on 4-5 December 2010, and others followed in Istanbul, Ankara, İzmit, and Kayseri ([http://www.kafkasfederasyonu.org/haber/federasyon/2012/280112\\_oat.htm](http://www.kafkasfederasyonu.org/haber/federasyon/2012/280112_oat.htm)).

<sup>41</sup> It is quite interesting to note that Emir Marshan Pasha (1860-1940), a Circassian origin MP from Sivas in the first Turkish Grand National Assembly, was the first person who openly expressed his concerns in the general assembly in 1921 about the overuse of the term "Turk" in the Parliamentary meetings. It is because of this intervention that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had to make his famous speech in Parliament to underline that the Parliament is not only composed of Turks, or Circassians, or Kurds, or Alevis (Karadaş, 2010; Aydemir, 1991).



*have no right to education here in my mother tongue, no radio, no TV, and no newspaper. These are all the limitations of the last 80 years. There are recently some timid changes, but still Turkishness dominates everything... Nowadays, there is a popular demand for the preparation of a modern democratic and inclusive kind of constitution. Now, the 'identity genie' is out of the bottle, and it will change our lives"* (Personal interview, Istanbul, 24 December 2011)

Circassians recently also claim that all the discourses that falsely accuse communities including Circassians should be removed from history textbooks and official history, including the allegations about Ethem Bey, once a national hero during the early days of the Turkish War of Independence, then declared a traitor by the Turkish nationalists in the late 1920s. Members of the Circassian community often complain that Circassians have been depicted in textbooks as a rebellious community, which has undermined their contribution to the nation-building process and to the culture of Turkey. It is also often stated within Circassian circles that it was the Circassians who published the first magazine in Turkey with the Latin alphabet and launched the first sports club in Turkey.

It is commonly known that Circassian militias played a very important role in the War of Independence that led to the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. However, the Kemalist government did not trust the Circassians or the other so-called constitutive elements of the nation-state such as the Kurds and the Alevis. The Circassian militia leader Ethem Bey (1886-1948) was accused of treason by the Kemalist elite, and he was sent into exile.<sup>42</sup> Like other ethnic minorities, the Circassians were placed under strong pressure to assimilate into a culturally homogeneous Turkish nation. In the period between 1922 and 1924 all Circassian committees, schools and newspapers were closed down; Circassians were forced to change their surnames; 14 Circassian villages were forcibly relocated from western to eastern Anatolia; 150 persons, 86 of them Circassians, were deprived of citizenship and expatriated as "potential rebels" (Şener, 2001; Bilmez, 2011). The pressure continued for many years. The names of Circassian villages were changed. Many families were prosecuted for giving their children non-Turkish names and the names were altered. Following the language law of 1932, campaigns were organized with the slogan: "Citizen, speak Turkish!" and notices prohibiting speaking Circassian were displayed in Circassian villages.

Circassians believe that Ethem Bey was mistreated by the Kemalist regime. In the last decade, there have been several campaigns initiated by the Circassians to convince the ruling political elite to return his dignity. An activist woman working in the administration of the Federation of Caucasian Associations based in Ankara refers to the way Ethem Bey has been represented as a traitor in the national curriculum, and how this kind of representation has actually shaped and strengthened her Circassian identity:

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<sup>42</sup> He then founded *Kuvva-i Seyyare* (Mobile Military Forces) which was the only organized military force in Anatolia during 1919-1920, the period between the Armistice of Mudros and the Treaty of Sévres. He coordinated his military operations with Ali Fuat Pasha in Ankara and harassed the invading Greek armies with his fast cavalry. He was instrumental in putting down various rebellions against the authority of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Eventually he turned against the new central government in Ankara, refusing to join the ranks of the newly established regular army derived from *Kuvva-i Milliye* (National Military Forces) established under the command of İsmet Pasha. The newly reconstituted Turkish Army had to put down his rebellion while also fighting the Greeks. His alleged subsequent surrender to and cooperation with the Greek army resulted in his citizenship being revoked on the grounds of treason and his being declared a *persona non grata* by the Turkish Grand National Assembly. He first went to Greece with his 400 gunmen, and then settled in Jordan until his death. In the official Turkish historiography he was then named *Cerkes Ethem* (Circassian Ethem) rather than *Ethem Bey*. His ethnic identity has been used to distance him in the imagery of the Turkish public from the founding national myth (Berzeg, 1990; Şener, 2001; Kutay, 2004; and Bilmez, 2011).

*“My whole primary and secondary education passed with the repetitions of “I am Turkish, correct and hardworking”.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, I was always told until high school years that Circassians were just the most noble branch of the Turks. This kind of Turkish nationalist indoctrination was first damaged when I was exposed to the way Ethem Bey was portrayed as a traitor in the History of the Turkish Revolution course in the high school in a way triggered my Circassianness”* (Personal interview, Ankara, 1 February 2012).

The Circassian identity has been imprisoned in the private space of the Circassians. The tension between the repression of Circassian identity and culture in the public space and its celebration in the private space has always been experienced by the members of the Circassian diaspora in Turkey. An active member of one of the Circassian websites refers to the fact that his Circassian identity was mainly shaped by this ongoing tension:

*“As someone who was exposed to the homogenizing curriculum of the national education reducing everyone to a Turk, and as someone who was raised with the narratives in his family revolving around the Circassian identity, I can say that I have been through a great traumatic experience. The fact that I was exposed to the tension between my imposed Turkishness and my own Circassian identity reveals the misery of the Turkish education”* (Personal interview, Istanbul, 3 January 2012).

As Charles Taylor put it very well in a Hegelian form of dialectics, our identities, be they individual, political, communal, ethnic or national, are shaped by the *recognition*, *non-recognition* or *mis-recognition* of the ‘others’ (Taylor, 1994: 25). The genesis of the human mind develops in a dialogical sense. We construct our identities only if we are able to experience others’ reactions to our attitudes and behaviour. Unless we are defined by others and/or majorities we cannot represent ourselves. Thus, it is impossible to build an identity without a dialogue with the ‘other’. One of the Abkhazian intellectuals defined the Circassians’ state of mind in comparison to the other minorities in the following terms:

*“We have never been suppressed as much as the Kurds were suppressed in this country. The reason for this is that we surrendered to the leading ideology and culture, or it is because we have so far experienced our identity in our own private space, at home, in the village, or in the cultural associations. We have not made a lot of fuss, trying to make our identity visible in the public space. Whenever we tried to speak a bit loudly, we were called ‘traitor Circassians’ like Ethem Bey”* (24 December 2011).

Circassian identity in Turkey has been constructed by the members of the Circassian diaspora in a constant process of denial by the homogenizing state. A former president of the same association also refers to the impact of the official narrative of “*traitor Circassian Ethem*” on the construction of his peculiar Circassian identity (Personal interview, Ankara, 10 January 2012). The number of campaigns organized by the Circassians regarding Ethem Bey has recently increased. A Circassian-origin journalist, Fuat Uğur, one of the members of the Circassian Rights Initiative (*Cerkes Hakları İnisiyatifi*), expressed their determination to make their claims heard in public by means of engaging

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<sup>43</sup> The Turkish national oath is still being repeated at the primary and secondary school levels, and it is a great example of the constant process of nationalist indoctrination. Since it was written by Resit Galip in 1933, the oath is ingrained in the back of the minds of the Turks with the last sentence, “How happy is the one who calls himself/herself a Turk!” (*Ne mutlu Türküm diyene!*). The oath has recently become very problematic for the ethno-cultural and non-Muslim minorities in Turkey as the last sentence seems to have strong ethnic connotations with an assimilationist undertone. Üstel argues that one of the most significant changes in citizenship education took place in the late 1930s, with the primary school program introduced by the single ruling party, Republican People’s Party (CHP). Accordingly, primary schools became the production sites for ‘*milli yurttaş*’ (national citizens) leading to the production of a homogenous nation (Üstel, 2004:138).

the non-Circassian intellectuals in Turkey in their cause. He pointed out that the only way for the Circassians to become equal citizens in Turkey is to politicize the Circassian social and cultural movements (Personal interview, 4 April 2012, Ankara).<sup>44</sup>

### ***Transnational Circassian Movement***

It is also remarkable to note that the Circassians are becoming politically more active and outspoken along with the rising presence of their European companions of Circassian origin in European space. Similar claims are also now being raised in the European Circassian diaspora through the annual Circassian Days held in the European Parliament with the support of the Social Democrats and the Greens. The last one was held on 30 November 2010 with the participation of scholars, politicians and NGO leaders residing in Turkey and Europe.<sup>45</sup> Referring to what Benedict Anderson (1998) called “long-distance nationalism”, or what Ernest Gellner (1983) called “diaspora nationalism”, or what Arjun Appadurai (1996) called “a community of sentiments”, one could see the efforts of the Circassian diaspora in Europe to contribute to the development of the homeland in the Caucasus as well as to the democratization of Turkey using modern technologies of communication. A large part of the political work of the Circassian diaspora aims at building awareness of their grievances through information and education. Thereby, the community also hopes to influence the political agendas of the host nations in Europe and elsewhere, and to pressure the respective governments to act on behalf of the Circassian populations residing both in Turkey and in the homeland. This tactic has been particularly employed in the debate over a possible admission of Turkey into the European Union. The potential European Union membership of Turkey is the “key leverage” of lobbying for the Circassian diaspora in Europe, since it represents an issue the Turkish government cannot ignore and where the stakes are very high for Turkey. Every year, the Progress Reports prepared by the European Commission address similar issues.

European Circassians’ state of mind is somewhat identical to what W. E. B. Du Bois (cited in Gilroy, 1987) calls ‘double consciousness’, which refers to individuals’ awareness of being simultaneously ‘home away from home’, or ‘here and there’. The feeling of being simultaneously ‘home away from home’ or ‘here and there’ reveals a form of ‘double consciousness’ and ‘awareness of multilocality’ in the imagery of the transnational subjects. What does it mean to be German, Circassian, Muslim, European, nationalist, female, young, migrant, transnational and working class? How do all these relationalities enter into the political consciousness of the subject? The state of the European Circassians is even more complicated, as they have generated a multiple form of engagement to more than two places. In their case, their allusion is to at least three places: Caucasus (homeland), Turkey, and their locality in Europe. This, in a way, leads to a kind of ‘triple consciousness’ or ‘multiple consciousness’. They are concerned about impacting not only their homeland societies, but also the Turkish society in which they were born, raised and educated.

David Harvey (2006: 128) proceeds further to inquire how transnational individuals internalize this whole world of relational experience and information boosted by the contemporary global circuitry of communication and transportation. Internalization of images, identities, roles, positions and localities by border-crossing individuals in the age of late modernity is not likely to happen in physical space, which is what Harvey calls *absolute space*. This could only happen in what Harvey (2006: 123) calls *relational space*, which is symbolically constructed through relations, interactions, dialogues, links,

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<sup>44</sup> For the activities of the Circassian Rights Initiative see the website <http://www.cerkeshaklariinisiyatifi.com/> (accessed on 8 April 2012).

<sup>45</sup> For further information on the celebration of Circassian Day in the European Parliament see <http://euroxase.com/circassianday/index20111107.php> (entry date 15 October 2011). The next one is planned to take place on 7 November 2011.

fantasies, expectations, transportation and communication among those residing in remote places across physical borders.

New forms of media from blogs to satellite television to SMS have multiplied the places where political agendas are set, strategies and tactics developed, and leaders identified. Many transnational political movements like the Circassian movement strategically use segments of their constituencies located in different places to advance a common agenda through different actions. The growing number of blogs, websites, and online events disseminate news all around the world in the blink of an eye. The quality of the Circassian-origin websites is impressive in terms of their intellectual, scientific, cultural and folkloric content. Several of them originate from Turkey, the USA, Canada, Caucasus and Germany. They all have the same mission: to generate a transnational community of sentiment ranging from the homeland to the remote corners of the diaspora.<sup>46</sup> Those in Europe, summoned under the umbrella organization of the Federation of European Circassians, for example, may take advantage of specific opportunities embedded in the European Union framework, such as using the European Parliament as a venue to publicize their claims. In this sense, lobbying activities of the Circassian diaspora in Europe are becoming visible in the European Parliament, where the Social Democrats and Greens have organised an annual “Circassian Day” since 2007.<sup>47</sup>

The *Nosochi2014.com* is a remarkable website operating from Turkey and reaching out to millions of Circassians residing all around the world outside the North Caucasus. The site claims to represent all the Circassians, both in diaspora and in the homeland, and describes the Circassian exodus from the North Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire in 1861 as “genocide”. The Circassian community is currently undergoing a process of politicization in Turkey as well as in other localities through their resistance to the Russian advocacy of the Sochi Olympics 2014. Circassians, in a way, constitute what Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff (2012) calls “transnational digital diaspora”. The *Nosochi2014.com* portal was set up in 2010 by a Circassian Turkey-based diaspora organization, but has supporters and contributors among Circassian organizations in the Middle East, Western Europe and the United States. K., one of the webmasters of the website, states that they have already succeeded in accomplishing what they envisaged. Their target was to make the vulnerability of the Circassians *vis-à-vis* the Russian hegemony throughout history known to the rest of the world (Personal interview, Istanbul, 3 January 2012).<sup>48</sup> The site includes articles about environmental issues and contains a lot of links to other sites critical of the Sochi Olympics. The main language being used is English, but there are a number of links to articles in Russian and Turkish. One of the activists operating *Nosochi2014.com* as well as the Caucasian Forum referred to the importance of such websites in generating a transnational Circassian movement in a way that provides the young generations with opportunities to transcend the power of the hegemonic nationalist discourse of their countries of settlement:

*“The transnational Circassian movement is different from traditionally organized social movements, and it is more horizontal and informal. That is why it is hard to control, discipline and manage in comparison to the traditional forms of movements, which are locally defined. This movement is actually a Turkish-origin movement trying to disseminate information about the problems of the Circassians to the rest of the world.*

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<sup>46</sup> Examples of the Circassian websites are as follows: Federation of European Circassians ([http:// euroxase.com/](http://euroxase.com/)), Circassian World (<http://www.circassianworld.com>), Caucasian Federation (<http://kafkasfederasyonu.org>), Circassian Studies (<http://www.cerkesarastirmalari.org>), Caucasian Association (<http://www.kafkas.org.tr>), Circassian Center (<http://www.circassiancenter.com>), Circassian Initiative for Democracy (<http://www.cerkesgirisimi.org>), Circassian US (<http://www.circassian.us>), Circassian Diaspora (<http://www.circassiandiaspora.com>), Circassian Portal (<http://circassianportal.com>), and etc.

<sup>47</sup> The Federation of European Circassians is composed of six different Circassian associations based in Berlin, Zwingenberg (Germany), Lyon (France), Basel (Switzerland), Antwerp (Belgium), and Almelo (Holland).

<sup>48</sup> The website *Nosochi2014.com* is administered by the Turkish origin Circassian youth who also operate the website called Caucasian Forum, <http://www.kafkasyaforumu.org>. Circassian organizations from Turkey, Israel, Germany, Switzerland, France and the Netherlands are also affiliated with the site.

*And I believe that this movement substantially contributes to the politicization of the Circassian cause in the global world. Through these transnational channels in cyberspace, we can mobilize the Circassian diasporic communities all around the world to organize protests and demonstrations in a simultaneous way, and make the claims of the Circassian diaspora in Turkey more decisive” (Personal interview, Istanbul, 3 January 2012).*

Transnational networks provide the members of the Circassian diaspora with a great strength in handling the difficulties of everyday life stemming from the hegemony of the nation-states in which they reside. As Clifford (1994: 310-311) rightfully states, transnational connections with the homeland, other members of diaspora in various geographies, and/or with a world-political force break the binary relation of minority communities with majority societies and also give added weight to claims against an oppressive national hegemony. Another member of the transnational Circassian movement generated in cyberspace also draws attention to the fact that Turkish-Circassians are very active in contributing to the emergence of such transnational networks:

*“Although the movement originates from Turkey, it is now widespread all around the world. The movement comes back to Turkey like a boomerang, gaining a global quality in a way that empowers our cause in the eyes of the Turkish Circassians. This boomerang effect has the capacity to strengthen the Circassianhood of the members of the diaspora vis-a-vis the hegemony of the homogenizing Turkish state” (Personal interview, Istanbul, 19 December, 2011).*

Transnational connections lead to the construction of new communities of sentiment across national borders away from homeland. These digitalized communities are not bound to remain virtual, they become real:

*“Circassians meet in the same blogs, forums, and they communicate about their experiences in Facebook and Twitter. They stay very much up-to-date through such social media. Maybe, most importantly, they are organized by means of such cyber venues and then they protest against what they find inappropriate. Last year, for instance, on 21 May 2011, several protests were organized in front of the Russian embassies all over the world through such digital networks. Previously, such protests used to be organised by Circassian associations. And now Circassian youth who have never been engaged in the activities of those associations are taking their part in these protests. Nosochi2014.com is one of the sites organizing protest in action” (a male member of the Circassian Research Group, 30 January 2012).*

Through the agency of these connections, diasporic subjects have the chance to create a home away from the homeland, a home which is surrounded by symbols, causes, rhythms, figures and images of the homeland provided by internet, TV, video cassettes, tapes and radio. Increasing connections, transactions and relations with the homeland also shape the institution of citizenship in a way that makes the claims of dual citizenship possible. Circassians have not yet been granted the right to dual citizenship by either Turkey or the Russian Federation. Circassians often raise such claims. Some of the interlocutors even draw attention to the claims of the Turkish diaspora in European countries towards the right to dual citizenship. One of the activists draws our attention to the fact that there is *de facto* dual citizenship at the moment:

*“The right to dual citizenship is one of our priorities. It is actually de facto working now. I don’t think that the Turkish state is indifferent to these claims. Once we raise our claims more loudly, then the Turkish state will have to respond positively. What is essential here is the official Russian response. Russia doesn’t see any problem at the moment in accepting those who already have de facto dual citizenship despite the fact that it is not legal. We don’t know how*

*Russia will react once the number of Circassians claiming dual citizenship increases further”*  
(Personal interview, Istanbul, 24 December 2011).

Most of the websites are being operated from Turkey. Those youngsters who are engaged in these activities are very much aware of the fact that their popularity that crosses national borders is also shaping the ways in which traditional forms of Circassian and Caucasian associations try to mobilize their clientele. These are the youth who challenge the patriarchal power of *thamate*, elderly people who are believed to be respected at all times. They experience the limitless freedom of cyberspace and challenge the patriarchal structure of Circassian society. However, their popular success in terms of disseminating their ideas and the Circassian cause to the rest of the world is somehow appreciated by the *thamate* who are actively involved in the Circassian associations and networks. One of the webmasters of these sites draws attention to this transformation:

*“I am not really involved in the activities of the Circassian associations, which I believe are stuck in folkloric facilities in a way that is far from producing political and cultural claims. I am personally involved in a politically engaged platform in cyberspace. I believe that my platform is much more proactive and efficient than the classical forms of associations in generating politics about the North Caucasus and cultural rights of the Circassian diaspora in Turkey”* (personal interview, Istanbul, 3 January 2012).

It seems that transnational connections constitute new forms of communities of sentiments, which are mainly shaped by the involvement of the Circassian-origin youths residing in Turkey. Their perception of tolerance in the Turkish context also seems to be decisive for the construction of the debates regarding ethno-cultural diversity. In what follows, Circassians’ changing perceptions of tolerance will be delineated.

### **Debating Tolerance: A Search for Equality by the Circassians**

What is scrutinized in this work is the positions taken by the Circassians in Turkey with respect to the recent efforts to write a new Constitution, and question if there is an attempt on their part to challenge the historically loaded official discourse of tolerance (*hoşgörü*) and to replace it with a more political discourse of equality, respect and recognition. There is recently quite some anecdotal evidence indicating that the Circassians have started to criticize the official discourse of tolerance of the Ottoman and Turkish states, and they are taking a critical position *vis-à-vis* the notion of tolerance, defining it as a form of governmentality which has been successful on the part of the state to contain Circassians and others, such as non-Sunni and non-Muslim minorities. When the Ottoman Empire gave their great-grandparents shelter in the second half of the nineteenth century, the action of the state towards the Circassians escaping from the Russian atrocities was officially portrayed as an act of tolerance to those in immediate need.

However, one should not forget the fact that the Ottomans were in immediate need of fresh man-power to fight in wars against foreign powers in the nineteenth century, such as the Balkan nationalists, Russians, French and British. The discourse of tolerance was an embedded discourse in the everyday life of the Sublime Port. The same discourse was also visible in the late fifteenth century when the Sephardic Jews were given refuge to save them from the brutal oppression of Catholic Spain. The Moors, Spanish Muslims who faced the same atrocities as the Jews, could not get the support of the Ottomans despite the fact that they had a religious affinity with Istanbul. Apparently, the Ottomans favoured the Jews, who were materially, economically and professionally much more prosperous and advantaged than the poor Moors (Lea, 1968). Masking its main intentions, the Ottoman political elite successfully exploited the discourse of tolerance in both cases.

The field research reveals that those Circassians who were interviewed have a strong perception of what is being tolerated and not tolerated by the majority society in Turkey. The Europeanization process of Turkey has certainly made some changes, such as the rising threshold of tolerance towards ethno-cultural identity claims in the public space raised by various groups in Turkey including the Kurds, Alevis, Circassians, Armenians and Assyrians. However, the Circassians are also very much aware of the fact that some of their acts are being tolerated by the majority more than others. An Abkhazian intellectual made the following statement in referring to the attitudes of the majority society towards the Circassians' claims:

*“The fact that Kurds suffered so much in their effort to raise their identity claims has also opened up room for us to make our relevant claims heard in public. This is why, for instance, our claims regarding the right to education and broadcast in the mother tongue are not belittled or untolerated by the state. The most tolerated claim we have so far generated is our strong willingness to generate relations with the homeland Caucasus. I think this is because the political elite expect us to do whatever we want in relation to the homeland, and not to bother them with other claims in Turkey”* (Personal interview, Istanbul, 24 December 2011).

Furthermore, it is also perceived by those interviewed that folkloric claims are subject to more tolerance by the majority society. One of the members of the Circassian Research Group based in Istanbul states the following:

*“It is often believed by the majority society that Circassians are mostly tolerated. Yes, this is correct as long as they behave like a ‘good citizen’. They are being tolerated as long as they identify themselves a folkloric group. When they raise political and cultural claims they are likely to become subject to a kind of nationalist reflex. In such cases they are treated like ‘separators’: ‘it was the Kurds, and now Circassians trying to divide our country’, ‘Circassian Ethem’ etc.”* (Personal interview, Istanbul, 30 January 2012).

It is often stated by the interlocutors that Circassians still perceive themselves as guests living in Turkey. One of the interlocutors addressed the strong state of *ethnophobia* generated by the majority society *vis-à-vis* ethno-cultural minorities residing in Turkey:

*“Circassians are being tolerated in Turkey as long as they don’t use an ethnocentric discourse. They are safe if they comply with the assimilationist character of the state. Whenever there is an ethno-cultural solidarity among the Circassians, we are subdued by the state”* (personal interview with the former president of one of the umbrella associations of the Circassians in Ankara, Ankara, 10 January 2012).

Those who were interviewed mostly claim that the regime of tolerance to which their ancestors were subjected during the time of exodus in the second half of the nineteenth century has also made them see themselves as permanent guests. One of the TV producers summarized how this kind of tolerance is now hurting them:

*“Whenever the Circassian identity represents itself in the public space, it encounters various responses. Roughly speaking, this response is often phrased as, “You, too!” with a tone equating us with the rebellious Kurds. And then follows, “We opened up our doors for you in times of turmoil”, reminding us of our constant state of being guests. This kind of feeling is the main obstacle for us to become more politically engaged in the public space”* (Personal interview, Istanbul, 3 January 2012).

There is a growing resentment among the Circassians regarding the traditional regime of tolerance prevailing since their arrival at the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. Most of those interviewed were openly opposed to the benevolence of the regime of tolerance and favoured the notions of pluralism, respect, recognition and the right to be different.



## Conclusions: The Myth of Tolerance in Turkey

There have been several different scientific works ranging from John Locke (1689)'s *Letters concerning Toleration* to Wendy Brown (2006)'s *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* debating the notion of tolerance. Some of these works praise the notions of toleration and tolerance, some find them inadequate to remedy the social-economic and political problems of the contemporary societies. Michael Walzer (1997) defines toleration as a continuum stretching from a minimum to a maximum: 'resignation, indifference, stoicism, curiosity and enthusiasm'. Rainer Forst (2003: 42-48) proposes four conceptions of toleration along a similar continuum, from less to more demanding motivations, grounded on permission, coexistence, respect or esteem. Forst, however, is concerned to retain the balancing of reasons of rejection and acceptance that marks toleration and thus qualifies the extent to which *esteem* can be seen to support a position of tolerance. Esteem needs to be constrained and qualified as it would otherwise run the risk of exploding toleration and substituting its conceptual core with that of unqualified and enthusiastic endorsement (Forst, 2003: 47-8). Hence, according to Forst (2003), tolerance is the space between affirmation, rejection and indifference.

Andrew Jason Cohen (2004) defines an act of toleration as "an agent's intentional and principled refraining from interfering with an opposed other in situations of diversity, where the agent believes that she has the power to interfere" (Cohen, 2004: 69). Cohen actually tries to define what toleration is not: Toleration is no indifference, no moral stoicism, no pluralism, no noninterference, no permissiveness, no neutrality, and no tolerance. Toleration is the activity of enduring, while tolerance is the virtue (attitude) itself (Cohen, 2004: 77). Agreeing with Cohen on the difference between *toleration* and *tolerance*, however I will use these terms interchangeably for the sake of simplicity. On the other hand, distinguishing *negative* or *weak* toleration from *positive* or *strong* toleration, Amy Gutmann (1994) goes beyond mere toleration by separating toleration from respect, where the latter performs the proper, positive role that some ascribe to positive toleration. Those who define toleration in deliberative democracies such as Habermas (1998), argue that toleration should be extended to all persons as bearers of human rights, including rights of self-expression.

Other theorists have been concerned with a more wide-ranging redefinition that indeed goes into the core of the toleration concept as a balancing act. Their aim is to respond to the challenge of post-immigration diversity. For instance, Elisabetta Galeotti (2002:193-194) has come out to argue for an understanding of toleration not as non-interference but *as recognition*:

"[P]eople marked by differences which are tolerated in the private sphere but which are invisible or marginalized in public life, and subject to prejudice, stigmatization, and discrimination in social interactions, cannot be fully participating members of social and political life on the same footing as the majority. ... Public toleration should reverse the invisibility and marginality of different identities which public blindness, far from dispelling, in fact reinforces."

This idea of public toleration, which is at the core of Galeotti's argument, refers to the public recognition of identities. Tariq Modood (2007) suggests that identities and cultures are important because they are important to the bearers of those identities, people who are members of our society, fellow citizens, and so have to be included into the polity in ways consistent with respect and equality. As Galeotti (2002: 104) puts it: "[d]ifferences should be publicly recognized not because they are important or significant per se, though they may well be, but because they are important for their bearers and because expressions of public contempt for them, on the grounds that they depart from the social 'norm,' are a source of injustice."

Jürgen Habermas (1998), on the other hand, draws attention to the fact that the nation should not be prescribed as it should tolerate the attempts of those culturally and religiously different from the majority to enter into the public space. We need to redefine what is social, which was prescribed earlier in a way that excluded the others. The redefinition of what is social requires the members of the given society to recognize, respect and accept ethno-cultural and religious differences of those as free and equal citizens so that the addressees of this egalitarian form of society are able to understand themselves simultaneously as its responsible bearers. In other words, redefining the society in an inclusive and egalitarian manner is expected to generate a Levinasian ethics of responsibility and respect among those who were previously excluded from the public space.<sup>49</sup> This is what Habermas (1998: 228-232) calls political acculturation. In this respect, Habermas finds toleration as one of the main pillars of modern inclusive society.

However, tolerance involves an asymmetrical paternalistic relationship between a sovereign party and a subaltern in a way that the former unilaterally grants tolerance on the latter as an act of benevolence. Habermas (1998) seeks to ground tolerance in the symmetrical relations of public deliberations. For some scholars, there is a paradox imbedded in toleration, which requires the drawing of boundaries between what is tolerated and what is intolerable and, as such, fashions positions of evaluative authority that place the tolerator in a position of power. This has led political theorists to consider toleration as a device that not only resolves moral conflict but also produces social arrangements, defines agents and groups. The concern is, as Wendy Brown puts it, to “reveal the operations of power, governance, and subject production entailed in particular deployments of tolerance” and to puncture “the aura of pure goodness that contemporary invocations of tolerance carry” (Brown, 2006: 10). Brown, in particular, makes suggestions on the practices of *boundary drawing* that she sees at the core of such deployments of tolerance: “Its invocation involves drawing spatial boundaries of dominion and relevance, as well as moral boundaries about what can and cannot be accommodated within this domain” (Brown, 2006: 29).

It does not seem to be accidental that in most languages in which tolerance has been historically debated, the words *tolerance* (or its synonym, *sufferance*) and *suffering* have the same source. The Latin word *tolerantia* comes from *tolere*, to bear, and tolerate, to suffer, endure; the same link exists in English (through the synonym, *sufferance*), in French (*souffrir*), Italian (*soffrire*), and even in Hebrew (*sevel-sovlanut*). This etymological fact happens to be philosophically significant. It indicates that there is no tolerance without suffering and its overcoming. Tolerating someone means recognizing an irreducible difference, a gap of unfamiliarity separating us, which is nevertheless accepted (Yovel, 1998). This implies a concealed hatred or contest between the tolerating and the tolerated parties. By this very otherness, the other represents a challenge to the self in the form of a potential competition over goods, power, moral values, and so on.

The concept of tolerance has a very long history in the Turkish context tracing back to the Ottoman Empire. It also has a very popular usage in everyday life. Turks are usually proud of referring to the Millet System of the Ottoman Empire is often known to be the guarantor of tolerance, respecting the boundaries between religious communities. Such an official discourse is still carried out in contemporary Turkey, although it is evident that it is just a myth. *The myth of tolerance* was functional to conceal the mistreatment of ethno-cultural and religious minorities other than the majority of Sunni-Muslim-Turks in Turkey. The term tolerance has become more viable in the aftermath of the Helsinki Summit of the European Union in 1999. Whether a cultural diversity challenge is tackled in relation to the concept ‘tolerance’ or other concepts such as ‘recognition’/‘acceptance’ or assimilation, expulsion and persecution, depends on the historical form of a particular state.

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<sup>49</sup> Emmanuel Levinas (1998) draws our attention to the sacredness of face-to-face relationship, which is based upon respect and responsibility vis-a-vis the other.

Ottoman multiculturalism was usually coupled with the term ‘tolerance’. The concept of tolerance has a very long history in the Turkish context tracing back to the Ottoman Empire. It also has a very popular usage in everyday life. Turks are usually proud of referring to the Millet System of the Ottoman Empire is often known to be the guarantor of tolerance, respecting the boundaries between religious communities. The equivalents of the term tolerance in the Turkish language are *tolerans*, *hoşgörü*, *tahammül*, *müsamaha*, *görmezden gelme*, and *göz yumma*. The meaning of the term *hoşgörü* is depicted in the Dictionary of the Turkish Language Association (Türk Dil Kurumu) as follows: “the state of tolerating everything as much as possible.” *Hoşgörü* literally means “seeing (the other) in a good way”. The term ‘*tahammul*’ is derived from the Arabic root word ‘*haml*’, which literally means ‘to pick’ or ‘to bear’ or ‘to carry’. For example if one picks a book, or carries a load or a burden, etc. the word ‘*haml*’ would generally be used; but if one patiently bears a turmoil, or an affliction, or a humiliation, or an indignity, or an oppression, etc...the term ‘*tahammul*’ would be used. The word *musamaha* literally means to forgive, and it is even claimed that the word *Masih* derives from this word in Arabic. Additionally, in Arabic, the word *tasamuh* transcends the realm of political toleration and connotes personal virtues such as patience and generosity. On the other hand, “*görmezden gelme*” means “pretending not to see”, and “*göz yumma*” literally refers to “to close one’s eyes”, or to condone, excuse.

The definition of tolerance is confined to the acceptance of Sunni-Muslims and their secular counterparts under the banner of the Sunni-Muslim-Turkish nation. However, it does not mean to embrace all different kinds of ethno-cultural and religious minorities. As Karen Barkey (2008: 110), a famous Ottoman historian, stated earlier, toleration in the Ottoman context as well as in other imperial contexts refers to the “absence of persecution of people but not their acceptance into society as full and welcomed members of community”. Toleration is actually nothing but a form of *governmentality* (Foucault, 1979), designed to maintain peace and order in multi-ethnic and multi-nominational contexts. The Ottoman imperial experience and the Turkish national experience approve that the Turkish nation tolerate those non-Muslims, non-Sunni-Muslims and non-Turks as long as they did not disturb or go against the Sunni-Islam-Turkish order. If ethno-cultural and religious minorities did transgress, their recognition could easily turn into suppression and persecution. Against this background, this work shall claim that ‘tolerance’ is nothing but a myth in Turkey as in other countries such as the Netherlands, the Balkans (Walzer, 1997; and Brown, 2006).

Thus, the Europeanization of Turkey has become a major phenomenon since the 1999 Helsinki Summit of the European Union leading to the consolidation of Turkish democracy. However, the revitalization of the discourse of tolerance does not bring about a better treatment of ethno-cultural and religious minorities, who have always been stigmatized and problematized in Turkey due to the fact that they do not fit into the definition of nation (*millet*) prescribed on the holy trinity of Sunni-Muslim-Turk. For instance, Kurds, Alevis, Circassians, Georgians, Lazis, non-Muslims and Romas disrupt the unity of the nation as they are neither ethnically Turkish, nor religiously Muslim, nor Sunni. Similar to the modernization process of the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the recent Europeanization process of Turkey has not yet challenged either the conventional definition of the Turkish nation. What has happened so far is the restigmatization of those ethno-cultural and religious minorities through their differences. As long as these groups pay their tribute to the Turkish state and accept their subaltern and secondary position, they are tolerated. Otherwise, those groups will be inclined to encounter further ontological challenges. It seems that the revitalization of the discourse of tolerance in contemporary Turkey contributes to what Wendy Brown (2006, Chapter 1) calls the *depoliticization of the social*.

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Turkey has been through a social, political, economic and legal transformation in the last decade paving the way to the official recognition of ethno-cultural and religious diversity, which has always

been the reality of this geography. However, this positive mood fundamentally changed after 17 December 2004 when the EU state and national government leaders decided to start negotiations with Turkey. Following the decision of the European Commission as well as various internal and external developments, tensions began to rise between nationalist, patriotic, statist, pro-status-quo groups on the one hand and pro-EU groups on the other hand. This was the time when the *virtuous cycle* of the period between 1999 and 2005 was replaced with the *vicious cycle* starting from the late 2005. A new nationalist wave embraced the country, especially among middle-class and upper middle-class groups. The electoral cycle of presidential and general elections, witnessed militarist, nationalist and Eurosceptic aspirations coupled with rising violence and terror in the country.

The fight between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the other statist political parties, backed by the army, crystallized during the presidential election in May 2007. The AKP had nominated the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Gül, as presidential candidate, but Mr Gül did not fit the expectations of Turkey's traditional political and military establishment and he failed to reach the required two-thirds majority in the assembly sitting. This failure resulted from the fact that the presidential post has a rather symbolic importance in Turkey since it was first occupied by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. However, the establishment argued that, as someone with pro-Islamist values and a wife who wears a headscarf, Mr Gül was inappropriate for the office of president. The conflict even led to military intervention in politics on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2007, an intervention notoriously labelled "e-intervention" because of the way it was announced on the web page of the Chief of Staff. However, the nationalist and militarist alliance against the AKP was unsuccessful in the general election and on 22 July 2007 the party won a landslide victory, with 47 percent of the votes cast. Following the elections, Abdullah Gül was also elected for the Presidential office.

However, prior to the constitutional Referendum in late 2010, minorities had become outspoken again with the intention of being more attentive to the idea of creating a completely new and democratic constitution to be prepared in the new parliament to be summoned after the general elections of July 2011, which consolidated the power of the AKP with a landslide victory of more than 50 percent of the vote. Economic prosperity, growing Turkish Lira nationalism, strong political determination against the traditional legacy of the Turkish army, becoming a soft power in the region, developing friendly relations with the Middle Eastern countries, Caucasus, Russia and North African countries, creating a political climate to receive the claims of several different ethno-cultural groups in the process of preparing a new constitution and similar factors were decisive in the consolidation of the AKP's power in Turkey.

Minorities have now become more vocal in raising their claims to see a more democratic and inclusive constitution, which should be prepared with the inclusion of all the segments of the society. They express their willingness to see a country in which rights are granted to all communities in Turkey without having to resort to violence or racism. In the meetings held by various ethno-cultural and religious groups in different cities of Turkey between 2010 and 2012, it was commonly agreed that the constitution should be renewed to better ensure individual rights and to remove any mention of ethnicity, specifically referring to their wish to see a change in Article 66 of the Constitution, defining Turkish citizenship: "Everyone bound to the Turkish state through the bond of citizenship is a Turk." The other claim raised in these meetings was to make sure that rights are granted in Turkey on the basis of citizenship, but not on ethnicity favoring the Sunni-Muslim-Turks.

It was found out that the attempts made for the revision of the curriculum in the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality do not necessarily bring about respect and recognition for the Alevi culture as a distinct and peculiar identity in school life. However, it means to some Alevi groups that the participation of Alevi children is tolerated, and religious differences of the Alevis are accepted by means of incorporating Alevi belief into the curriculum and textbooks. This initiative cannot be regarded as a public policy, which effectively responds to the Alevi claims along with the respect and

recognition of the Alevi identity in the framework of more rigorous problems/issues arising from the religious difference of Alevis such as places of worship (*cemeevi*) and the alleged legal status within the Directorate of Religious Affairs. Furthermore, the issue of education on Alevi belief should be discussed more in the public space with respect to the freedom of faith in general.

The research also revealed that most of the interlocutors regard the public policies and political initiatives proposed for the resolution of the headscarf issue in universities by making new legal changes or by reinstating and enforcing the laws to re-assure the right to education, as palliative solutions. However, it was mostly claimed that in order to resolve this issue with an address to *tolerance*, respect and recognition, a more structural solution should be found on the basis of right to freedom of religion. Accordingly, those interviewed have expressed their willingness to see a constitutional reform to clearly make sure that headscarf ban will no longer be an obstacle before the right to education of individuals, to precisely highlight the right to religious difference, and to prevent the politicization of the headscarf issue.

Furthermore, this research finds that the current state policies generated to respond to the Circassian claims cannot be considered as a discourse and practice of *respect* and *recognition*. On the contrary, the policies of the contemporary government (Justice and Development Party, AKP) spring from a discourse of toleration towards the Circassians, who are actually in search of constitutional citizenship, equality and respect with regard to their ethno-cultural differences. The study also reveals that cultural and folkloric forms of representations demonstrated by ethno-cultural minorities are tolerated by the Turkish state. However, the state actors are not yet tolerant of the politicization of minority claims, as in the case of the Circassians.

This work explicitly maintained that the definition of tolerance, or toleration, is restrained with the acceptance of Sunni Muslims and their secular counterparts featured with the holy-trinity of the Turkish state tradition, i.e. Sunni-Muslim-Turkish nation. The term toleration does not mean to embrace all different kinds of ethno-cultural and religious minorities. Toleration in the Ottoman context as well as in the modern Turkish context refers to the absence of persecution of people but not their acceptance into society as full and welcomed members of community. In this sense, I argued that toleration is actually nothing but a form of governmentality, designed to maintain peace and order in multi-ethnic and multi-nominational contexts. The Ottoman imperial experience and the Turkish national experience approve that the Turkish nation tolerate those non-Muslims, non-Sunni-Muslims and non-Turks as long as they did not disturb or go against the Sunni-Muslim-Turkish order. Alevi and Circassian cases reveal that when ethno-cultural and religious minorities did transgress, their recognition may turn into suppression and persecution.

Against this background, this study concludes that the regime of tolerance is far from resolving the problems of the contemporary Turkish society. What is actually happening now in Turkey and elsewhere is the rise of the discourse of tolerance in a way that leads to the culturalization and depolitization of what is social and political in the age of neo-liberalism, which is primarily shaped by the reduction of materialist civilizational discourse into post-materialist, culturalist and religious form of civilizational discourse. Hence, the policy makers should not only be limited with the use of the notion of tolerance (*hosgörü*) in settling the societal, political, economic, cultural and religious conflicts. They should also give credit to the notions of respect, recognition, pluralism and equality in order to create a cohesive society by means of underlining the social and political nature of problems faced in everyday life.

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## **Annex: Profile of Interlocutors**

All interviews are tape recorded and transcribed, unless otherwise stated below.

### ***Case Study 1. Alevi Claims***

#### **2 Civil Society Leaders:**

D. B., male, engineer, 50-55 years old, the president of the Federation of Alevi Foundations, Istanbul, February 2011

K. A., male, 50-55 years old, the president of the Hacı Bektas Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation, Istanbul, March 2011

#### **Policy Maker:**

N. S., male, professor of sociology of religion, 50 years old, the Moderator of the Alevi Workshops and the coordinator for the Centre of Strategy Development at the Directorate of Religious Affairs, DİB, Ankara, March 2011

#### **Bureaucrat:**

İ. A., male, professor of theology, 50 years old, the Directorate General of Religious Instruction (DÖGM) at the Ministry of National Education, Ankara, March 2011

#### **Parents of Alevi Students:**

A. K., male, accounting and finance manager at private companies, 41 years old, the president of the Hubyar Sultan Association of Alevi Culture and an Alevi parent who won the case in the State Council with regard to the exemption of his child from the compulsory religion course, Istanbul, April 2011

D. Ö., male, 39 years old, an executive member of the Haci Bektas Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation and a father of an Alevi student, Istanbul, March 2011

**Teachers of the Compulsory Religion Course ‘Religious culture and morality’:**

İ. Ü., male, 45 years old, a primary school teacher, Erzincan, Eastern Turkey, March 2011

M. Y., male, 40-45 years old, a high school teacher, Istanbul, March 2011

**Case Study 2. The Headscarf Issue in Universities:**

**2 Civil Society Leaders:**

F. B., female, a lawyer on women’s rights, 30-35 years old, the former vice president of the Association of Women’s Rights and Struggle Against Discrimination (AKDER) and, Istanbul, March 2011

G. S., female, a lawyer, 40 years old, an executive member of the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation and of the Association of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People, MAZLUMDER, Istanbul, March 2011

**Policy Maker:**

A. S., female, a theologian, 45-50 years old, the former director of the Women’s Activities at the Directorate of Religious Affairs, DİB, and a current delegate of the Democratic Party, Ankara, March 2011

**Politicians:**

G. E., female, professor of chemical engineer, 61 years old, an MP from the Republican People’s Party, Ankara, April 2011

A. B., female, a journalist, 47 years old, an executive member of the Justice and Development Party and, May 2011 (no tape)

**3 Academics:**

A. Y., female, Professor of Sociology, 45-50 years old, in a foundation university in Istanbul, Istanbul, March 2011

T. K., male, Professor of Theology, 45 years old, in a public university in Istanbul, Istanbul, April 2011

Ü. M., female, Professor of Sociology, 65 years old, (retired from a public university in Istanbul and became a devout Muslim), Istanbul, April 2011

**Students:**



V. E., female, a graduate of Bilgi University, 29 years old, export manager at a trading company, Istanbul, April 2011

Z. S. D., female, a postgraduate student in European Studies programme at Bilgi University, 20-25 years old, Istanbul, April 2011

A. Ö., female, a headscarfed woman who declined in her studies at an undergraduate programme at Istanbul University due to the ban on headscarf in the 28 February Process, 32 years old, Istanbul, April 2011

**Focus Group Discussion:**

The Focus group discussion was conducted at Santral Campus of Istanbul Bilgi University on 9 July 2011 and fully tape recorded.

**The Participants:**

A. K., male, accounting and finance manager at private companies, 41 years old, the president of the Hubyar Sultan Association of Alevi Culture and an Alevi parent who won the case in the State Council with regard to the exemption of his child from the compulsory religion course

D. B., male, engineer, 50-55 years old, the president of the Federation of Alevi Foundations

F. B., female, a lawyer on women's rights, 30-35 years old, the former vice president of the Association of Women's Rights and Struggle Against Discrimination (AKDER) and a lawyer on women's rights

H.K., female, journalist and columnist at a private newspaper, 25-30 years old

Z.Ü.B., female, radio and TV programme producer, radio speaker at a private radio channel, 31 years old

S.C., male, a postgraduate student in European Studies at a private university and a columnist at an online newspaper,

B. Ç., female, a PhD student in political science at a private university in Istanbul, 25-30 years old

H.D., female, founding partner of a private business on speaker agency, conference organisation and global publishing, 55 years old, president of a speakers bureau in Istanbul.

**Case Study 3. Circassians:**

A.K. Male, 35 years old, single, an activist of the Circassian youth associations, webmaster of various websites, actively involved in transmitting the Circassian claims to the rest of the world, he is from Istanbul, recently residing and working in Ukraine. Interviewed on 19 December 2011.

S.B. Male, 55 years old, single, a left-wing activist, Abkhazian, actively involved in the Circassian associations, one of the founders of the Democratic Circassian Platform in the 1990s, residing and working in Istanbul. Interviewed on 24 December 2011.

K.K. Male, 35 years old, single, an activist of the Circassian youth associations, TV producer, webmaster of various websites, actively involved in transmitting the Circassian claims to the rest of the world, he is from Istanbul. Interviewed on 3 January 2012.

Ş.E. Male, 56 years old, married with two children, academic, actively involved in Circassian associations, formerly executive member of the Circassian associations in the USA, he is living in Istanbul. Interviewed on 9 January 2012.

C.C. Male, 64 years old, married with three children, former president of one of the leading umbrella Circassian associations, residing in Ankara. Interviewed on 10 January 2012.

F.Ö. Male, 65 years old, married with one child, a public servant, following Circassian associations' activities and actively involved in the executive committees of these associations. Residing in Istanbul. Interviewed on 16 January 2012.

Y.T. Male, 55 years old, married with two children, businessman, president of one of the Circassian associations in Ankara, residing in Ankara, one of the founders of the Democratic Circassian Platform in the 1990s. Interviewed on 23 January 2012.

K.A. Male, 32 years old, single, lawyer, working in a university as an administrator, actively involved in the Circassian associations' activities. Residing in Istanbul. Interviewed on 27 January 2012.

M.P. Male, 47 years old, married with one child, researcher, PhD candidate, one of the founders of the Caucasian Research Group, one of the founders of the Democratic Circassian Platform in the 1990s. Residing in Istanbul. Interviewed on 30 January 2012.

B.D. Female, 40 years old, married with one child, lawyer, executive member of one of the leading Circassian associations in Ankara, residing in Ankara. Interview held on 1 February 2012.

F.U. Male, 48 years old, married, journalist, a member of the Circassian Rights Initiative, residing in Istanbul. Interview held in Ankara on 4 April 2012.

H.D. Female, 50 years old, married with one child, a member of KAFFED, residing in Istanbul. Interview held in Istanbul on 6 April 2012.

**Active Participant Observation**

The researcher was also actively involved in the brain-storming sessions of various Circassian-origin groups working on the new constitution proposals.



