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TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN TURKEY

Islamist Welfare Party's Pro-EU Turn

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ABSTRACT

The recent changes in the Islamist party's ideology and policies in Turkey are analysed in this article. The Islamist Welfare Party (WP) was ousted from power in June 1997 and was outlawed by the Constitutional Court (CC) in March 1998. After the ban, the WP elite founded the Virtue Party and changed policies on a number of issues. They emphasized democracy and basic human rights and freedoms in the face of this external shock. The WP's hostile policy toward the European Union (EU) was changed. This process of change is discussed and it is argued that the EU norms presented a political opportunity structure for the party elites to influence the change of direction of the party. When the VP was banned by the CC in June 2001, the VP elites split and founded two parties which differ on a number of issues but have positive policies toward the EU.

KEY WORDS ■ European Union ■ party change ■ political Islam ■ political opportunity structure ■ Turkey

Introduction

The Islamist Welfare Party (WP) in Turkey recently changed its decades-old policy of hostility toward the European Union (EU) and began strongly to support Turkey's accession to the Union, thereby raising doubts about the inevitability of a civilizational conflict between Islam and the West. [1] This change was part of the party's broader image transformation which took place after its leader, Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan,[2] was forced by the Turkish political establishment to resign from a coalition government in June 1997. The Constitutional Court (CC) later banned the party in January 1998. The same party elite immediately founded another party that adopted

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a fundamentally different image from the old one. The new Virtue Party (VP), formed by the same elite and with the same organizational structure, no longer viewed the EU as a 'Christian Club', but as an institution embodying universal democratic values. When the VP was outlawed by the CC in June 2001, the VP elite founded two new parties, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) and the Felicity Party (FP). Although they differ on several issues, so far both parties support Turkey's membership in the EU.

In reviewing the extant theories of party change, I seek to identify the factors that can account for the magnitude and occurrence of this change and its direction. Specifically, I look at whether the change was a result of environmental stimuli or of factional and leadership changes. The image change of the party resulted from an external shock affecting the Islamist party's primary goals. It occurred in the absence of any leadership and significant factional changes. Although the WP's banned leader Erbakan could not lead the VP, he had the power to determine who was going to be the new party's leader. Arguments about party change are of limited use in determining the direction of the Islamist party's transformation. We need to look at the existing political opportunity structure (POS), defined in this article as international normative structure, to discover what direction the party will take in transforming itself. The EU constituted a normative POS for the party at the time of the environmental shock. The party elites have been able to use the EU and the norms it represents as a resource in its new identity, and in its efforts against the establishment.

Sources of Party Change

Broadly defined, party change may include 'any variation, alteration and modification in how parties are organized, what human and material resources they can draw upon, what they stand for and what they do' (Harmel and Janda, 1994). As Harmel and Janda argue, it is unrealistic to expect that any single theory of party change can deal with such a broad definition. Instead, they formulate a theory explaining changes that come directly from the decisions and actions of the party actors (groups or

Table 1. Islamist parties and their EU policies since 1970

Party	*Leader*	*Year founded*	*Year banned*	*EU policy*
MNP	Erbakan	1970	1971	Anti-EU
MSP	Erbakan	1971	1980	Anti-EU
RP (WP)	Erbakan	1983	1998	Anti-EU
FP (VP)	Kutan*	1998	2001	Pro-EU
SP (FP)	Kutan	2001	–	Pro-EU
AKP (JDP)	Erdogan	2001	–	Pro-EU

* Elsewhere in this article I argue that Kutan's leadership represented a nominal rather than a genuine leadership change.

leaders). These include party rules, structures, policies, strategies and tactics. In this article, I consider one of these aspects, namely ideological and policy change.

In contrast to the literature on party systems, the literature on party change is underdeveloped. Recent studies have criticized the dominant assumption that parties simply adapt to changes in their environments. These studies (Burchell, 2001; Harmel and Janda, 1994; Muller, 1997) emphasized the importance of internal factors as a necessary condition for change to occur even in the presence of an environmental stimulus. For example, Panebianco in his seminal work argues that party change is 'related to an elite turnover catalyzed by unresolved environmental challenges' (1988: 250). The displacement of what he calls a 'dominant coalition' (i.e. a coalition of leading groups who have the power resources) in the party is crucial for change. Others regard leadership change among the crucial internal factors in explaining change (Harmel et al., 1995; Muller, 1997). Wilson, too, considered the actions of leaders within parties as the key factor in bringing about change. 'Parties change primarily because their leaders and members see the need to change and work within the parties to change them' (1994: 280). Burchell finds both external and internal factors (factional and leadership changes) significant in explaining organizational changes in European Green parties (2001).

Harmel and Janda, expanding on Panebianco's hypotheses, recently developed an integrated theory of party goals and change (1994). Viewing parties as conservative organizations resistant to change, they specify leadership change, a change in dominant faction within the party and/or external stimulus for change as independent variables explaining party change. One of their contributions to Panebianco's argument is to clarify the concept of external stimuli. Environmental changes are social, economic, political changes and events that take place outside the party. They also suggested that these external stimuli become environmental shocks if they prevent the party from achieving its primary goal. Environmental shocks cause a party elite and/or its leader to re-evaluate the party's effectiveness in meeting its primary goals. According to Harmel and Janda, a party's primary goals can be gaining executive office, advocating issues/ideology and implementing party democracy as well as winning votes.

I argue that policy-related changes in the WP were catalysed by an environmental shock impinging on the party's primary goals and were carried out by the same faction and leadership without any factional turnover in the party.[3] The WP was primarily an ideology-seeking party, which also aimed at gaining office to implement its policies.[4] The WP was harshly criticized for its anti-secular ideology and policies, and the secularists did everything to oust the party from office. After experiencing an environmental shock in 1997, being specifically driven out of power in June 1997 and the ban on the party in January 1998, the same party elite had to change policies on a number of important issues.[5]

In a regular monthly National Security Council (NSC) meeting on 28 February 1997, the military leadership demanded from the leader of the WP and prime minister at the time, Erbakan, that his government implement a number of measures that would prevent Islamization of Turkey. After that meeting, the military elite closely followed the implementation of these decisions and started a campaign that included some societal organizations, the media and the opposition parties, and led to the removal of the government.[6] This process of de-Islamization continued after Erbakan was ousted from power. It became known as the '28 February Process', which included being ousted from power, a ban on the party and a total campaign against religious social forces. The question for the Islamists was no longer how to come to power to create an Islamic state and society, but how they could survive and live religiously in a society under repression.

Direction of Change

The literature on party change deals only with the occurrence and magnitude of the change, not the direction in which it will go. I argue that the direction of change will depend on the existing POS. Kitschelt defines POS as:

> specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilization, which facilitate the development of protest movements in some instances and constrain them in others.
>
> (1988: 58)

POS as institutional arrangements received the most attention from scholars, while the other elements in Kitschelt's list were ignored. Kitschelt stated that the coercive, normative, remunerative and informational resources a social movement can gather from its environment and can employ in its protest are crucial for its success:

> If movements can appeal to widely shared norms, collect adequate information about the nature of grievance against which they protest and raise money to disseminate their ideas and information, the chances of a broad mobilization increase.
>
> (1988)

I define POS along these lines: existing normative structures/resources that actors can utilize for their purposes.

The concept of POS was recently extended to the international arena. Domestic social actors often circumvent a repressive state in order to find international allies who can bring pressure on their own state. National groups, domestic NGOs and social movements interact with international NGOs, which then establish bonds with intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) or other states to put pressure on norm-violating states. 'IGOs loosen up or relax the POS of the state in question' (Martens, 2001). Daniel Thomas recently showed how the Helsinki Final Act transformed 'the

normative structure of East–West relations' (1999: 205), which paved the way for the mobilization of transnational networks, which in turn enabled societal forces in Eastern Europe to challenge authoritarian regimes the way they could not do before the Act. 'How relevant actors understood the normative structures around them at various points in time, and the arguments they offered to reinforce or change those structures' (Thomas, 2001: 19) is central to understanding change in his analysis.

In the 1990s, for eastern aspirants the EU has emphasized the existence of democracy, pluralism and the norms of human rights as the most important conditions for membership. This emphasis created a new normative opportunity structure for societal and political groups in the candidate countries. I suggest that the direction of change in the WP was affected by the party elite's understanding of the existing international and domestic normative structures. The party leadership realized that it could employ these normative structures and the institutions they are embodied in, particularly the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) and the EU, as resources in their arguments to change domestic state identity/ideology bringing pressure on the state elite.

The Turkish Political System and Secularism

> The history of Turkey's democratic transition and consolidation after its turn to a multiparty parliamentarian system following World War II has been a history of societal development and emancipation from a state elite that was reluctant to give up its tutelage of the masses and that still tends to justify its reluctance with the need to preserve the principles of the republic's founder.
>
> (Kramer, 2000: 1)

The Turkish republic founded in 1923 was a successor to the Ottoman Empire. Although the Ottoman 'millet' system provided autonomy for religious groups in their internal dealings, Islam was the source of legitimacy for the Ottoman state. Structurally, the Ottoman system did not allow any autonomous aristocratic or bourgeois class to emerge. There were only the rulers, the military and bureaucratic state elite, and the ruled, mostly peasantry. The rulers' main concern was to figure out how to save the declining Ottoman state. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk led the national resistance movement against the foreign armies of occupation after World War I and established a government in Ankara, blaming the Ottoman government in Istanbul for its collaboration with the occupation forces. Ataturk rejected the Ottoman legacy and implemented radical institutional and cultural reforms to modernize the traditional Turkish society through his Republican People's Party (RPP), the only political party in Turkey until 1946. These reforms included the abolition of the sultanate and caliphate, the banishment of the Ottoman royal family, the disestablishment of Islam as the official state religion, the adoption of nationalism as a source of identity,

and the adoption of a series of Westernizing reforms among others. Ataturk believed that the masses in the rural Anatolia could be turned into a secular Turkish nation by the state through these reforms. The principles of republicanism, secularism, populism, statism and nationalism were later incorporated within the RPP programme and have been known as Kemalism since.

After World War II, when the international environment induced the state elite to initiate multiparty politics, a new party (Democratic Party), founded by a few RPP elite, appealed to the traditional values of the masses and won a clear victory over the RPP in 1950. The military and the RPP elite feared that the DP would make changes in the secular character of the state and the military intervened in 1960. The new constitution created checks and balances against the possible excesses of a majoritarian government, establishing a constitutional court and adopting a proportional representation system. The party system experienced polarization and fragmentation as a result of the PR electoral system and the socio-economic transformation in the 1960s and 1970s. Extreme leftist and rightist groups and parties emerged and the level of violence between these groups increased in the late 1970s. Distrusting the political party leaders, who could do nothing to stop the violence, the military intervened again in 1980 and closed all parties and civil associations until the parliamentary elections in 1983.

To explain Turkish politics, several scholars (Mardin, 1973; Tachau, 1984) used a centre–periphery framework that portrayed an organized state elite bearing nationalist, centralist and laicist characteristics against a periphery, including ethnic, religious and regional groups, that identify with traditional values. Historically, Turkey did not have an aristocratic class, but the centre elite, composed of military and bureaucratic officials, has fulfilled a 'false' aristocratic role in Turkey. These elites established a mechanism by which to control the selection and socialization of new elites. In particular, the defence and foreign policy establishments protect most of their ranks from the intrusion of peripheral values and agents by means of their recruitment, socialization and promotion procedures (Kalaycioglu, 1994: 408).

Secularism is the most important item defining this centre–periphery cleavage in the Turkish political system. The founders of the republic and their elite followers were influenced strongly by the French Revolutionary Jacobinism and they intended to remove all manifestations of religion from the public sphere and put religion under the strict control of the state. This form of secularism is different from that of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, where the emphasis is on religious tolerance and pluralism. 'In reality, Turkish secularism, which carries overtones of irreligion and atheism, is not as democratic as it appears to some Westerners, and Turkish Islam is not as fundamentalist as it is portrayed' (Candar, 2000). Any religious understanding outside the official definition and any religious formation outside state control have been regarded as deviant and threatening. With this

understanding of secularism, the state elite does not allow any manifestations of political difference that can run counter to the official ideology. Women students are not allowed to attend college and women lawyers, doctors and nurses are not allowed to work if they wear headscarves. In the economic arena, the state discourages state enterprises from doing business with companies it regards as Islamic. These companies cannot survive in Turkey and some establish factories abroad.

Political Parties in Turkey

'Turkish politics are by and large party politics' (Ozbudun, 2000: 99). Highly institutionalized political parties differentiate Turkey from other new democracies. The dearth of civil societal organizations in Turkey has made parties more important to individuals. However, in the 1970s the Turkish political party system began to show the characteristics of electoral volatility, party fragmentation and ideological polarization. For a brief period in the 1980s, the centre–right Motherland Party received enough votes to form a government by itself. Fragmentation in the party system re-emerged to a much greater extent in the 1990s. Coalition governments have governed Turkey from 1991 until the present.

The centre–right and centre–left tendencies are fragmented, with each group represented by two different parties. Furthermore, these moderate tendencies became weakened in the 1990s. The salience of ethnic and religious issues increased among the electorate, so increasing ideological polarization in the party system (Ozbudun, 2000: 78).

The WP's organization and intra-party political process is very much leader-oriented, similar to that of all Turkish parties. Open debate, dissenting views and competitive elections for leadership positions are not the typical practice in the party. When confronted with demands for intra-party democracy, the party leaders offer a method of consultation limited to a process described by a sarcastic observer as 'the leader's declaration of his opinions and the confirmation from the others by nodding without speaking a word'.[7] At the same time, the WP has avoided the organizational decline that has plagued the other parties and approximated the mass party model most. The WP has a strong grassroots organization. One of the leading figures of the party, Yasin Hatipoglu, summarized their approach to grassroots 'who remains with the people, who understands the people and feels with them, receives the trust and the support of the people' (quoted in Kramer, 2000).

The Welfare Party in Opposition and the European Union

Political Islam emerged in the nineteenth century as a reaction to Westernization and colonialism in Muslim countries. Among the first Islamists were Ottoman intellectuals who argued for Islam's superiority over Western decadence. These elites claimed that Islam could provide alternative solutions to modern social and political problems (Turkone, 1991). The republican Turkey adopted a Jacobin, 'militantly secular' religious policy and subordinated religion under the state, eliminating religious forces that could oppose these policies. Until the transition to the multiparty democracy in the 1950s, the religious groups could not have a voice in the political system. The rapid modernization and urbanization enabled the religious masses to be active participants in the system and the salience of political Islam increased in the 1960s. In 1970, the first explicitly Islamist party was established, but was closed by the Constitutional Court the next year. The decision of the Court was based on the 1961 Constitution.[8] The same leadership founded a second party, which was banned after the military coup in 1980. The WP, established in 1983, was a successor to these two parties. All parties emerged from a broader movement called the 'National Path Movement'.

Basic characteristics of this tradition have been anti-Westernism, anti-Europeanism and the promise of a community and state based on national and Islamic sources (Erbakan, 1975, 1991). The Islamists regarded the EU as a 'Christian Union'. After studying the WP's attitude towards the West, Ihsan Dagi concludes that this anti-Western and anti-European element was central and constitutive in the party's identity (1998). The criticism of the two hundred years old process of Westernization and the resultant Western-oriented foreign policy in Turkey is central in the WP's ideology (Dagi, 1998: 131). Europe constituted the party's other in a sense. Anti-Europeanism is so central to its identity that the party, despite some moderation in the 1995 elections, remained the political party that had the highest local/traditionalist views in the Turkish party system throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Carkoglu, 1998).[9] The party has kept its anti-European stance despite the fact that more than any other party it emphasized the civil society issues such as democracy, freedom and human rights in the 1995 election.[10] However, the WP's emphasis on freedom and human rights is concerned more with religious freedoms than anything else, with overtones of oppressive attitudes for other belief systems and minority groups (Carkoglu, 1998: 569).[11]

Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of all three Islamist parties, wrote in 1991: 'I regard the application of Turkey for the full membership in the EC as a treason to our history, civilization, culture, and sovereignty' (1991: 27). It is useful to look at the attitude of Abdullah Gul, who was the vice-chairman of the WP, a Minister of State, the government's spokesperson in the 54th

Government, and the foreign affairs adviser to Prime Minister Erbakan, to get an understanding of the party's stance on the EU issue. Gul was regarded as the 'crown prince' and foreign affairs authority in the WP and its successor Virtue Party until recently when he declared that he was a candidate for the party leadership in the May 2000 Party Congress.[12] He has also been a member of the Council of Europe parliamentary assembly for several terms and the WP leadership chose him as its representative to explain the party's policies to the US audience in 1997. Before the WP's experience in power and the 'February 28th Process', Gul had criticized the EU harshly. He referred to the Union as a 'Christian Club' and an organization of rich countries.

In 1995, Gul praised his party as being the only party against Turkey's customs union with the EU, which came into effect in January 1996. At the time, Gul identified the EU as a 'Christian Club' and pointed to the existence of Turkey's other foreign policy options, such as increasing ties with Islamic and Turkic countries.

He argued that if Turkey became a member of the Union, which was a 'club of the rich', foreign capital would invade the country and would buy up all the industry. He believed that Europeans wanted to divide the country and would support the Kurdish militants, but that when it came to religious rights these same Europeans would point to the danger of an Islamic radicalism. Therefore, he claimed 'the understanding of freedom for Europe reflected its self-interest'[13] and 'the EU would want Turkey to be only a "third-world" democracy'.[14]

Alternative Explanation for Change: Constraints of Being in Government?

In the 1994 local elections the WP gained 19.1 percent of the vote and won mayorships in Istanbul, Ankara and 400 other cities and towns. In the December 1995 parliamentary elections, the WP won the most votes and the largest representation in parliament with 21.4 percent and 158 of 550 of the seats. This share of votes was important, both because the Islamist party's votes had never before exceeded 12 percent and because the Turkish party system was as fragmented as ever (see Table 2).

After the experience of a short-lived coalition between two centre–right parties in the early months of 1996 – the Motherland Party (MP) and the True Path Party (TPP) – one of these centre–right parties (TPP) and the WP formed a coalition.

It could be argued that its experience in power changed the WP's stance toward the West and the EU, since the Customs Union was already in effect and the TPP was a strongly pro-EU party. Katz and Mair (1994) claim that party actors are more likely to appreciate constraints and limitations on policy-making when the party is in office. The fact that to be effective party

Table 2. Percentage of votes in Turkish parliamentary and local elections (1983–99)

	Elections								
Party	*1983 parliamentary*	*1984 local*	*1987 parliamentary*	*1989 local*	*1991 parliamentary*	*1994 local*	*1995 parliamentary*	*1999 local*	*1999 parliamentary*
DLP	–	–	8.5	9.0	10.8	8.8	14.6	18.7	22.2
MP	45.1	41.5	36.3	21.8	24.0	21.0	19.7	15.0	13.2
NAP	–	–	2.9	4.1	–	8.0	8.2	17.2	18.0
NDP	23.3	7.1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
PP	30.5	8.8	–	–	–	–	–	–	8.7
RPP	–	–	–	–	–	4.6	10.7	11.1	–
SDPP	–	23.4	24.7	28.7	20.8	13.5	–	–	–
TPP	–	13.3	19.1	25.1	27.0	21.4	19.2	13.2	12.0
WP	–	4.4	7.2	9.8	16.9a	19.1	21.4	–	–
VP	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	16.5	15.4

Sources: Center for Education and Research in Local Administrations web page: http://www.yerelnet.org.tr/secimler and Turkish Grand National Assembly web page: http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/secim_sorgu.genel_secimler.

a. Together with two other right-wing parties, the NAP and the RDP.

WP, Welfare Party; VP, Virtue Party.

elites need to work with coalition partners, civil servants and officials at other levels of government also limits and moderates their behaviour.

Indeed, a process of change began after the party came to power, which hinted at moderation. The concept of 'just order'[15] was used rarely. In the new period, the party's central concept 'national path' was also going to be purged from the party discourse (*Aksiyon*, 24–30 January 1998). In the party's first convention in power in October 1996, its leader, Erbakan, drew a moderate image. He made sure that there was no show of extremism at the convention and even the slogans were carefully selected not to give the wrong expression. He claimed that his party was a loyal Kemalist[16] and secularist organization and expressed great respect for the army. There seemed to be a de-radicalization and centrization of the discourse in this convention (Ergil, *TDN*, 18 October 1996).

Moreover, the WP–TTP coalition government did not deviate far from Turkish mainstream politics. In foreign policy, there were no radical reversals and the WP accepted the status quo with regard to the customs union with the EU, the EU membership and NATO issues. As foreign policy expert and vice chairman of the party, Gul generally did not comment on European affairs or the customs union during this period. When he talked about European countries he seemed neutral toward the EU and balanced his arguments by mentioning Turkey's relations with other countries. In October 1996, he responded to a claim from opposition parties that the coalition was following a two-headed foreign policy:

> Turkey wants to strengthen its ties with both the Western powers and other countries in the world. The party's interest in the countries in the east did not mean they would cut relations with Europe and Turkey's Western allies nor did it imply a response to those countries.[17]

According to Gul, Turkey followed a credible foreign policy by balancing the West and the East.[18] Erbakan's refusal to attend a dinner in December 1996 between the EU member and the candidate countries constituted the only WP action against the EU.

However, it is difficult to argue that the party changed its policy toward the EU and the West during this period. Although the WP could not demand any re-evaluation of the conditions of the customs union, the coalition government programme stated that it would try to achieve the aims established in the Ankara Association Agreement signed between the EC and Turkey in 1963 without any concessions on 'sovereignty of the Turkish state and the crucial national interests'. This was a principle that could be invoked by the WP in the case of full membership (Dagi, 1998: 97). Dagi argues that the WP's moderation on the issue of customs union was partly a result of the recognition of the economic importance of the Union for Turkey on the part of the party elite. The central role of the European countries in Turkey's foreign trade forced the party to accept a free trade union with the EU without any integration on the political area. Also, the EU's hesitant attitude toward Turkey was exemplified in a Christian Democrat meeting[19] which highlighted a 'civilizational difference' between Turkey and Europe. Christian Democratic party leaders (except Italian Prime Minister Prodi) agreed on the inappropriateness of Turkey's membership at this meeting. The EU's negative attitude toward Turkey saved the WP from a damaging practice–discourse gap during this period (Dagi, 1998).

Despite the WP's moderation on the issue of customs union, we cannot see any significant indication of a discourse and practice change toward the EU during this period. The WP emphasized Turkey's ties with the Muslim countries and took steps to establish an economic Union of these countries. Erbakan's first visit abroad was to Eastern countries such as Iran, Pakistan Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. He included Iran in his trip despite intense criticism from the USA. He initiated the WP's Developing-8 project during these visits. This new organization was basically concerned with cooperation in economic matters and included Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, Egypt and Nigeria. Dagi argues that the WP, and particularly Erbakan, envisaged the project as a first step towards a cultural and political union among Muslim countries. He quotes Erbakan stating, 'it is time for a new world order . . . the culture of D-8 elevates justice above raw force (in international affairs)' (Dagi, 1998: 119).

Although being in a coalition government constrained the WP and limited its anti-EU policies, the party nevertheless tried to take steps in accordance with its basic ideology and did not change its attitude toward the EU significantly while it was in power.

The 28 February Process and its Aftermath: External Shock or Factional Change?

> Islamist circles used to talk about an Islamic state in the 1970s and 1980s a lot. Now they talk about concepts like democracy and human rights not only in their public statements but also in their private gatherings. (Akyol, 1997a)

During its time in power, the WP was strongly criticized for its radical[20] discourse, with some of its policies seen as anti-secular. Even some Islamist intellectuals, the military, the head of state and the opposition parties were uneasy about the anti-systemic discourse of the party (Sazak, 1997a). The WP continued acting radically because the party elite feared the reaction of a group of party members at the level of party grassroots. These members wanted the party to implement what it had preached in opposition (Akyol, 1997b). Partly to respond to the demands of its ideological constituency, the WP while in power tried to establish policy proposals such as allowing female university students and female teachers in schools to wear head-scarves and the rearranging of working hours of government employees in accordance with Islamic prayer times during the month of Ramadan. These could be regarded as an effort at furthering the silent Islamization of Turkey (Kramer, 2000: 73). At a monthly meeting of the Council on 28 February 1997, the National Security Council (NSC) secretary[21] presented the prime minister with a programme of 18 proposals designed to prevent what the Council saw as Islamization of the country. Erbakan had to resign when the pressure on his coalition partner, the centre–right TPP, was increased by the resignation of 15 of this party's deputies.

The period after this meeting of the NSC is called the '28 February Process'. After orchestrating the WP's ouster from the government, the state elite also tried to root out any social manifestation of Islamization and deviations from the Kemalist ideology. It arranged regular briefings to inform the public officials and the media about the dangerous development of Islamist movements in the country. The state prosecutor of the Ankara Court of Appeals filed a petition to the Constitutional Court in May 1997 demanding the WP's closure on the grounds that it was a centre of anti-secular activity. The Court closed the party in January 1998. Erbakan and five other party members lost their parliamentary immunity and their seats in parliament. However, predicting a closure, one of Erbakan's close friends had founded the Virtue Party in December 1997. With the exception of the banned Erbakan and the other five party members, all former WP deputies joined the new party. This was followed by the entry of former WP mayors and elected members in the local assemblies to the VP.

After the party was banned in February 1998, the leadership decided to change its discourse radically. The Virtue Party programme stated that the party believed in real democracy, human rights and freedoms in the broadest sense, and the superiority of the will of the people (*Fazilet Partisi*, p. 3). The

party regarded basic rights and freedoms as inalienable rights of individuals and declared that realization of these rights depended on the complete implementation of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, European Convention on Human Rights, the Final Act of the Conference on European Security and Cooperation, the Paris Charter for a New Europe, and other international legal norms (*Fazilet Partisi*, p. 5). The party elite came to the conclusion that some aspects of Western democracy would be a solution to their problems and would only be realized if Turkey became a member of the EU (Howe, 1998: 19).

It could be argued that despite the magnitude of the shock, without any change in the dominant faction there would not have been any change in the party. Indeed, there had been signs of a reformist faction in the party even before the party came to power. The faction members, mostly younger MPs in the party, demanded intra-party democracy and transformation of the WP to a mass party. However, their effect was minimal in the establishment of the new party (VP) and in the process of formulation of its new discourse and image. Moreover, on the issue of the EU, both factions shared the same opinion.

The reformist group was composed of relatively young MPs of the party. Since it was not clear who was leading the group and the fact that they tended to act individually, the reformists' influence was limited. Some reformists stated on several occasions and also told Erbakan that they wanted the new party to be integrated into the world not isolated from it (*Zaman*, 17 February 1998). One of the leading reformists, Bulent Arinc, stated that in the new party religion would not be dominant. 'We will accept that religion is a private matter and will not use an Islamic discourse.'[22] The most important reformist demand was intra-party democracy. Despite these statements, the direct effect of the faction on the party programme is in doubt. The members of the reformist faction joined the new party late. Later in the process, the reformist group claimed that Erbakan did not take the manifesto they prepared as the new party's programme into account. However, the group decided to stay in the VP and to postpone their opposition until the first party congress (*Zaman*, 26 February 1998).

Erbakan closely and carefully orchestrated the creation of the new party's programme and the selection of its leader. He consulted the party MPs and local party officials in groups about the future of the movement at the time of the WP's closure. He conducted surveys among these groups asking them about their preferences for the leadership, the name of the new party and its programme (*Milliyet*, 17 February 1998). At the end, Recai Kutan, Erbakan's close friend from university years, a minister in the coalition government and the newly founded VP's parliamentary group leader, was elected as the leader of the new party. Even those who founded the new party in the last months of the WP's existence expressed their surprise with the result and confessed they were not involved in the selection. When asked if he would consult with Erbakan, the new leader, Kutan, responded positively.

The conservatives realized the need to change the party's discourse and policies in order to survive in the new repressive environment. Kutan emphasized on several occasions that the new party would have a new image. The state prosecutor, who had applied to the Constitutional Court for the WP's closure, declared publicly that the new party was a successor to the WP and that it, too, would be banned. Kutan, however, stressed the originality of the new party and its programme, its statutes and its activities (*Zaman*, 22 February 1998). On the issue of secularism, the party elite emphasized the understanding of secularism as religious tolerance and pluralism. The party even hired three public relations companies to give it a new image. They included women members in the party's central decision-making and executive committee (*Milliyet*, 7 March 1998).

Kutan stressed the necessity of Turkey's EU membership. He talked about the universal values of the West with no indications of the WP's anti-Westernism (Unal, 1998). The VP seemed to want genuinely that Turkey become an EU member as soon as possible (Karakus, 1998).

The changes in the party image and discourse in the end did not result from the rise of a new faction in place of the old one. Although the reformist group was willing to go faster and further in the direction of change, it was the old leadership that initiated the changes it saw as necessary with some feedback from both the conservative and reformist wings.

European Union as a Political Opportunity Structure

In the process of the Islamist party's shift from an Islamist and state-centred discourse to a democratic, society-centred discourse, the EU as an international normative structure became a strategic instrument for the party elite. The EU was also seen as a space in which Muslims could live their religion more freely than they could do in the domestic arena. This was possible because the EU actively promoted human rights, the rule of law and democracy (known as political conditions in the Copenhagen Criteria) in the aspiring countries, and set these as preconditions for membership in the 1990s (Whitehead, 2001).

The Copenhagen European Council stated that 'membership requires that the candidate country has achieved stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the respect for and protection of minorities'. Turkey's internal political problems become visible obstacles preventing Turkey's accession to the Union (Muftuler-Bac, 2000). For example, the EU in a presidency statement declared that it,

> notes with regret the decision of the Turkish Constitutional Court on 16 January 1998 to order the closure of the Welfare Party, to confiscate its property, and to ban certain present and former members of that party from being members of the Turkish Parliament or from further political activity for five years.
> (Bulletin of the European Union, January/ February 1998, pt 1.4.23)[23]

When Erdogan, the mayor of Istanbul from the WP, received a prison sentence for reading a poem which allegedly incited religious hatred, the Union again showed concern.

The WP first turned to the West when it needed Europe most for its survival. While preparing a defence against the closure case at the Constitutional Court during the summer of 1997, the legal experts (all MPs and lawyers) of the WP and the leadership drew arguments exclusively from the Western democratic literature. The practice in the West became their reference point. Erbakan's press conference in October 1997 marked the turning point. At this conference, Erbakan announced: 'We have become Westernist (Batici) now'. He continued:

> [T]hose who called themselves westernists until today (when it comes to the closure of the WP) say that Turkey has unique conditions. Now we have become westernists. We want secularism as it has been implemented in the West. We became pro-western because we do not want Turkey to go back to a repressive regime.
>
> (*Zaman*, 9 October 1997)

After trying unsuccessfully to convince other parties to change the constitution and the laws to not allow any political party bans in the future, the WP leadership took the case to the ECHR (*Zaman*, 11 February 1998). The party leadership also decided that a group of party members led by Abdullah Gul, and also the National Path Movement leaders in Germany, would conduct lobbying activities in Europe in favour of the WP case (*Zaman*, 6 February 1998). Erbakan liked to emphasize that European countries were concerned about his party's situation. He was hopeful that the ECHR would decide in favour of the WP.

After the Helsinki Summit in December 1999, the Islamist elite intensively and consistently used the EU as a resource in their arguments. Erbakan stated after the Helsinki Summit that the Turkish government had to accept the human rights criteria the EU had established (*Milli Gazete*, 13 December 1999). The VP leader Kutan also commented that Turkey had to end human rights violations and realize the Copenhagen criteria as soon as possible. He was reported as saying: 'Once (Turkey) complied with the universal norms, everybody would live in freedom as they believed without any interference from the state' (*Milli Gazete*, 14 December 1999). Similarly, Erbakan argued that the EU had changed greatly in recent years and that human rights principles were incorporated into the EU's foundation. After his party's experience in power and with the military, the image and the meaning of the EU changed for Abdullah Gul, too. Now the Union was an organization representing human rights and democratic standards. Gul often stated that Turkey had to comply with the Copenhagen criteria to be a member.

In Luxembourg in December 1997, when the EU members gave the other aspiring 11 countries candidate status and omitted Turkey, their decision was harshly criticized even by strongly pro-EU parties in Turkey. However, Gul stated that the EU decision was justified because Turkey had not

improved its political conditions since it signed the Ankara Association treaty in 1963. Gul considered the EU as a community of countries with established democratic standards and human rights norms.[24]

He now seemed to want Turkey to be oriented toward the West. He claimed that what his party wanted was to see Turkey integrated into and to live together with a world that was developed, democratizing, modern and valued civil society.[25] When commenting on why traditionally anti-EU groups, including his party, were now strongly supporting membership, Gul stated that these groups saw the EU as a safer and more reliable political environment than Turkey. The VP and many intellectuals therefore viewed EU membership positively because they did not believe that the internal dynamics of the Turkish political system could establish a pluralist democracy, a civilian regime, universal values, human rights and religious freedom without EU membership (Gul, 1999). In his writings, Gul often mentioned the Copenhagen criteria as his reference point. For him, the post-war era witnessed a pluralist, multicultural, tolerant Europe embracing people from different backgrounds (Gul, 2000).

Conclusions

The process that began with the 28 February 1997 NSC meeting which included the unprecedented pressure of the state elite over the religious social, economic and political groups and the outlawing of the party shocked the Islamist party elite in Turkey. The elite re-evaluated its discourse and ideology during this process and tried to change it drastically. The first explicitly articulated faction emerged in the Islamist party after the shock. Although there were differences of opinion between two factions on the extent of the change, they both agreed on the necessity of Turkey's membership in the EU. The change in the WP's ideology was not unlike the post-war ideological transformation of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in Germany. Schellenger tells us that:

> [P]ost-war ideological development of the SPD was initiated by Kurt Schumacher and watched over by his and his successors' executives. At no point was the evolution of the Godesberg program significantly influenced by a generation or faction new to the principles or the organization of the SPD.
>
> (1968: 96)

The change in the SPD programme was caused by the reaction of the party's leaders to external stimuli such as the outcome of the Russian revolution, their experience with the danger of an all-powerful Nazi state and their study of Western countries (1968: 102). Similarly, the WP elite has learned enough from the '28 February Process' to change their stance on a number of issues.

The direction of change was not determined by the external shock. Instead, the existing political opportunity structure, i.e. the European

Union, together with the normative structure it represented and its demands from Turkey, influenced the direction of the Islamist party change. The anti-EU image of the WP was gone and the same elites in the new party embraced the EU as a resource in their new identity.

Although it is too early to conclude that the change in attitude of the Islamist elites toward the EU is not a short-term opportunistic and strategic move, there are a number of indications that they will not readily modify their positive view. For example, when the ECHR ruled that the Turkish CC's decision to ban the party does not violate human rights laws, the VP elite did not show any indication of their old anti-EU attitude. Both parties that were established after the VP was outlawed have Turkey's membership in the EU among their most important priorities.

The Felicity Party's election manifesto for the 3 November 2002 elections emphasizes that the party is against the dominant neoliberal international economic system and the IMF policies. It also criticizes the US foreign policy after the terrorist attacks of September 11. However, there are not any negative statements about the EU in it. The manifesto, noting that the party does not see membership as a Turkish modernization project, states:

> Turkey's membership in the EU will contribute to the development of democracy and the extension of the standards of human rights in Turkey. It will also improve Turkey's economic condition and contribute to the creation of a multi-cultural and multi-religious EU, which is an EU ideal and challenge. The achievement of all of these is an opportunity to establish peace and to improve the standards of human rights in the world at a time when there is talk of a risk of a clash between civilizations.
>
> (Saadet Partisi Secim Beyannamesi, 2002)

The Justice and Development Party's manifesto shows the real extent of change among the former Islamist elite. The JDP sees:

> Turkey's membership in the Union as a natural result of Turkey's modernization process. The realization of the political and economic criteria will be an important step toward the modernization of the Turkish state and nation together.
>
> (Ak Parti Secim Beyannamesi, 2002)

The JDP sees the EU norms, such as the Copenhagen critera, as crucial for the realization of basic human rights and freedoms in Turkey and the party will take the necessary steps to comply with these criteria.

Despite their differences on a number of issues, the elites in both parties have similar views on the importance of democracy, basic human rights and freedoms, and on the role of the EU in the realization of these in Turkey.

Notes

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1 The direction of Turkey's modernization and civilizational project, which was implemented in the last 150 years of the Ottoman rule and formed the core of the Republican ideology, is referred to as the West. Europe is the operationalization of this concept of the West in the Turkish mind and now the EU is the institutional reflection of it. Cengiz Candar, 'Musluman Kimlik ile AB'ye Dogru' (Toward the EU membership with Muslim Identity). Yeni Safak (22 December 2001).
2 A mechanical engineer who received his PhD from the University of Aachen in Germany, Erbakan served as President of the Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Maritime Trade and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey before actively engaging in party politics.
3 The Turkish political system is regarded as a military democracy, reflecting the military's powerful influence in the system. Since the concept of external shock is broad enough to include dramatic events as well as election defeats, its application in understanding changes in political parties in systems which are not fully democratic is justified in my view.
4 'Policy pursuit is typically presented as a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, office seeking' (Muller and Strom, 1999: 8) since parties seek office as a means toward policy influence.
5 The changes in some of these policies (such as the party's policy toward the EU) might affect the party's Islamist ideology, however. Islamists in Turkey now have to figure out how to remain Islamists without being hostile to the West.
6 The WP was in government in coalition with Tansu Ciller's centre–right True Path Party (TPP).
7 See A. Faruk Ozgur, FP'yi Bitiren Birlik-Beraberlik Ruhu (The spirit of brotherhood and togetherness that ruined the VP), Acik Toplum, E-Dergi, from http://www.liberal-dt.org.tr/at/at-afo8.htm.
8 The first constitution of the Turkish republic was replaced by a new one after the military intervention in 1960. This, in turn, was replaced by another constitution after the military intervention in 1980. None of the constitutions explicitly banned the establishment of religious parties, but they did not allow any political party against the principle of secularism.
9 Carkoglu reached these conclusions after quantitative study of the election manifestos of all parties in Turkey since the 1950s. The most important item in his local/traditionalist scale is anti-Europeanism.
10 Carkoglu states that 'the Welfare party's emphasis on freedom and human rights is concerned more with religious freedoms than anything else, with overtones of oppressive attitudes for other belief systems and minority groups' (p. 569).
11 I am assuming that Carkoglu implies the WP's attitude toward the Alawite minority (an Islamic sect regarded as deviant by Orthodox Islamic sects) in Turkey.
12 For the first time in the party's history there were two candidates for the leadership post. Gul received almost half of the delegate votes but lost to Kutan, a close friend of Erbakan.
13 Speech in Parliament on 2 May 1995.
14 Speech in the parliamentary assembly on the Customs Union on 8 March 1995.
15 Just order corresponded to a future idealized Islamic order in the party's ideological discourse.
16 Kemalism is the official ideology of the republic after Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish republic.

17 Parliamentary speech, 16 October 1996.
18 Parliamentary speech, 20 May 1997.
19 This meeting was a Christian Democrat leaders' summit about the EU eastward enlargement and took place in Brussels on 4 March 1997. Among the participants were the prime ministers of Germany, Spain, Belgium, Ireland and Italy (*Milliyet*, 4 March 1997).
20 'Radical' here means being against the existing system.
21 The National Security Council consists of top military and civilian officials, including the head of state, the prime minister and several other ministries. A high-ranking military officer serves as the secretary in the Council. Although the NSC has only an advisory constitutional role, there has not been an instance in which governments refused to implement its decisions.
22 Nilgun Cerrahoglu, interview with Bulent Arinc, 'Supermen lider istemiyoruz' (We do not want a superman-like leader). *Milliyet* (22 February 1998).
23 Bulletin of the European Union, January/February 1998, pt. 1.4.23.
24 Parliamentary speech, 20 December 1997.
25 Parliamentary speech, 28 January 1998.

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