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BIOGRAPHY OF PROF. DR. NERMIN ABADAN-UNAT

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SECULARISM AND THE DISCUSSIONS ON THE SECOND REPUBLIC

Prof. Dr. Nermin ABADAN-UNAT

We shall celebrate the 70th anniversary of the secular Republic of Turkey on 29 October 1993. Although the constitutional characteristic of our state was inscribed in our constitution only in 1937, the process of westernization and secularization the Ottoman Empire by with the *Edict of Tanzimat*, reached it climax at the War of Independence which was based on the concept of national sovereignty. While the political authority representing the Istanbul government was collaborating, also using its religious title, with the occupation forces, the people of Anatolia unified around the national force –“Kuvayı Milliye” for the victory of national sovereignty “Hakimiyet-i Milliye” This thrust was not only a glorious struggle which the Turkish people undertook for their independence, but at the same time it was representing the ideological basis on which the new state emerging in Ankara was intended to be established. This basis was a secular one deriving its power not from a **divine** authority but from the **national** will. This power which found its legal expression with the establishment of the Turkish Grand National Assembly on 23 April 1920, enabled the full independence of the Turkish nation, as well as alming at lifting it to the top of “contemporary civilization”

In this new state established along secular thinking the involvement of religion and of the armed forces in politics was stopped through the abolishment of the Caliphate as well as the Ministry of Sheriah and Religious Foundations and the office of the General Staff, and the initial steps for a civilian rule were taken. In order to secure a non-religious education system, the Law on the Unification of Education (Nr. 430) was passed, giving an end to the dual education system which had been implemented since the Ottoman Empire, thus completing the roof of the secular state.

Thanks to these substantial changes, Turkey surely had been placed in a unique position in the Islamic world. Through the formation of a secular government, it was intended to separate state affairs and religion, to protect the religious beliefs which are a

natural outcome of the freedom of conscience, and to leave matters of faith to the free will of the citizens through respecting it. In other words, Turkey had undertaken a social experiment unprecedented in the Islamic world: to create a society formed by **secular Muslims**!

Discussions on this revolution during the last seventy years concentrate itself the success of, its necessity, and its compatibility with democracy. The reason is clear: the concept of secularism emerged in the West. The implementation of this concept in Islamic countries gives rise to certain problems, because the Islamic religion is essentially different. Both Islam and Christianity are monotheistic religions. They regulate the relationship between the creator and the created. However in Christianity, the relationship between the creator and the created is maintained by God personified with Jesus and, after his death, by the church which represents his human adventure on earth. The church is represented by the clergy which is recognized as "god's attorney."¹ In Islam there is no mediator which corresponds to Jesus. The instrument in Islam is the Holy book, i.e. the Koran. The Koran is ephemeral and eternal, it is a-historical. While both the Old and the New Testament are considered of being Gods words, they tell a "holy history" Therefore, Christianity is based on a consciousness of history. In this respect, it constitutes a source of the western philosophy. Islam, on the other hand, is a non-history entity and, therefore, is based on a different concept of "time" The essence of Islam is to worship only God, and to expect everything only from God.² In addition to the fundamental source of Islam, the Koran, other sources such as Sunnet and Icma were added later and several schools of law have emerged. Since there was no clergy in Islam, conflicts gave rise within the Islamic community after the demise of the Prophet, and this led to the birth of various sects.³ These sects are so numerous that one is ought to talk about more than one Islam.⁴ However, there is only one single holy book as their source: the Koran.

1. Taner TİLMUR, *Türk Devrimi ve Sonrası*, 1919-1946, Ankara, 1971, p.143.

2. J.M.ABDÜLCELİL, *İslam: Religion et Civilisation*, Paris, 1965, p.12.

3. J.M.ABDÜLCELİL, *Ibid*, p.14.

4. Henri LAOUST, *Les Scismes dans l'Islam*, Payot, Paris: 1965, p.v.

The Koran is a unity of ethical, legal and political principles.⁵ In Christianity, secularism has developed in the form of state's expansion of its authority in struggle between the latter and the church.

Sayings such as "Caesar's right to Caesar, God's right to God" constituted the basis of the struggle for secularism. In any of the sources of Islam, however, there is no current of thought corresponding to this concept.

The Turkish revolution confronted Islam in two areas: (a) Official Islam as represented by the Caliph Sultan, b) Islam as represented by various sects.⁶ Atatürk, as suggested by Taner Timur, with a radical attitude of being revolutionary, looked for a definitive solution against both of these. The caliphate was abolished and religion was brought under the authority of the government through the Directorate of Religious Affairs. It was intended, on the other hand, to shake the foundations of sectarianism through prohibiting tekke's and zaviye's.⁷ In Atatürk's view, the final and the perfect religion, Islam, is national, logical and realistic.⁸ Despite this fact, an Islam based on superstition and void of convictions had been the target of Atatürk's severe criticisms. He says the following in one of his speeches: **"Considering of the present state of science and civilization, and I shall never accept the existence in the civilized Turkish society of such people who seek material and moral happiness in the enlightenment of this or that sheich. Be it known that the Republic of Turkey cannot be a land of sheichs, dervishes, murits. The true and real sect is that of civilization."**⁹

In short Kemalist positivism had adopted a dual attitude vis-à-vis religion: interpreting Islam with a positivist approach and separating religion from government affairs at the official level, while trying to remove religious sects.

5. J.SCHACHT, *Esquisse d'une Histoire du Droit Musulman*, Paris, 1952, p.19.

6. Taner TİMUR, *İslamiyet ve Siyaset, Türkiye Örneği. V Yayınları, Ankara, 1987, p.44-49.*

7. Taner TİMUR, *Ibid*, p.146.

8. Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK, *Söylev ve Demeçler*, Cilt II, p.94.

9. Mustafa Kemal ATATÜRK, *Ibid*, p.218.

At present some Turkish writers and opinion leaders of the political scene have joined on an incomprehensible hostility front against the principles of Kemalism. According to the supporters of different ideologies ranging from communism to Islamic fundamentalism, also known as the “supporters of the Second Republic”, the ideological heritage of Atatürk, i.e. Kemalism, is no longer valid. A supporter of this thought, Cengiz Çandar, says: “Today the Kemalists became conservatives, defenders of the status quo, and are representing out dated powers resisting progress. They became a crowd resisting against any civil society institution, supporting an outdated etatist (planified) economic understanding, sympathizing with military rules which will guarantee the ruling power of a bureaucratic elite without people and nation... The funeral ceremony of Turgut Özal was like that of Kemalism; the coffin belonged to Turgut Özal, but the event itself was the funeral of Kemalism...”¹⁰

Another thinker, Ali Bulaç, does not regard democracy as the final stage of the political culture of mankind. Bulaç wishes to appeal to a new vigorousness of Islam. According to him there are a number of drawbacks in democracy: “In the end, democracy is an administrative mechanism, an instrument. When we look at democracy as an instrument, we see that it possesses major defects. There are two major handicaps: First, it is based on representation, and secondly it is a majority regime... I believe that in the modern world, the individuals are social puppets. What empowers the state is science and technology and the authority to legislate. Let the government leave me alone. I am a Muslim and I want to live like a Muslim.” Ali Bulaç maintains the idea that Islam contributes to the enlargement of the civil zone vis-à-vis the government. He is in favor of a participative system in wider sense. According to him, larger participation can be secured through Islam, rather than democracy.¹¹ A proponent of Islamic sharia, Abdurrahman Dilipak, defends its restoration. According to Dilipak, “religion is the knowledge of truth.” Secularism spoiled the religion by giving religious education

10. Metin SEVER, Cem DİZDAR, eds., 2. *Cumhuriyet Tartışmaları*, Başak Yayınları, Ankara, 1993, p.96.

11. Metin SEVER, Cem DİZDAR, eds., *Ibid.*, p.370-371.

in the hands of the government. The only solution is to withdraw from secularism and to return to sharia.¹² Discussions on the concept of secularism goes on like this.

One and a half centuries have passed since the Edict of Tanzimat during which Turkey's secularization efforts had emerged. Atatürk's dream of reaching the "contemporary civilization" has not yet been fully realized. Nevertheless, after an unprepared transition to a multi-party system, followed by three consecutive military interventions, the initial tutelage styled single party regime oriented itself towards democracy, as described by Duverger, and has turned into a dynamic, outspoken and participative society which is trying to be more transparent, despite its shortcomings in human rights and its authoritarian political culture.¹³ Different opinions and ideas will naturally clash in an increasingly free climate. However, in this atmosphere of freedom the Islamist political circles attack the principle of secularism as their prime target and intend to take the Turkish society back to the rule of the Sharia. While putting forward their claims, they have formulated a new ideology of sovereignty and legitimacy. According to this Islamist ideology, all laws should be in conformity with the Sharia which indicates the will of God and which is valid for all Islamic societies. The Sharia, or the true Path, may not be discussed since it is a law indicating the will of God. The most important matter for which we have to search solution today lies in this very view. In today's multi-party system enabling free expression of political opinions, certain political party spokesmen, writers/thinkers, making use of the fundamental democratic rights for the purpose of advocating their systems of faith, defend a social order which would create a social apartheid, in which the smallest detail of private lives are regulated, relations between the sexes are organized on an unequal basis.

The individual of our age is a person thirsty for the largest freedoms and wanting to be protected against the autocratic power of the state more than ever. These individuals are feeling themselves

12. Abdurrahman DİLİPAK, *Devlet Şeriatı Korunmalı*, *Cumhuriyet*, 2 Feb. 1993, p.8.

13. Nermin ABADAN-UNAT, "Patterns of Political Modernization and Turkish Democracy", *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, 28, p.1-27.

squeezed under the wheels of the market economy created by a globalizing economic system, as well as being depressed by the frustration brought along by unlimited sexuality. Therefore, individuals' search for peace and happiness in religious faith is something to be respected. Yet seeking refuge in a holly religion in this world and in the other world does not mean the acceptance of an order which would limit individuals' freedoms in a comprehensive way. Thus, one of the major problems faced especially by Turkey is the following: How shall we guarantee individual's freedom, including protecting one's own religious understanding, in secular political order which implies an absolute freedom of conscience? No doubt that, this guarantee lies in the uncompromising protection of the principle of secularism.

In order to provide a detailed answer, first of all more information is needed. Social sciences and political science are currently undertaking extensive research on Islam. Only a small part of these are known to the Turkish public opinion. The questions which should be discussed in the first place are the following: Is the Sharia a standard, uniform government model? Are the regimes in certain countries which adopt the Sharia as their official ideology such as Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Sudan, Iran and Pakistan identical, or does the implementation of the Sharia in such countries varies greatly? If there are significant differences among them, would it be explained by the fact that two of them are kingdoms and the remaining three are republics? Likewise, looking at the practices in countries that partially adopted secular legal system, such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Malaysia, one should ask the question of "in what fields Islam is more influential?" Contemporary political scientist identify differences between a) **official** Islam-determining the basic characteristic of the state, b) **peoples'** Islam-based on sufism and local conditions, c) **nationalist** Islam-offering solutions to identify problems, d) **fundamentalist** Islam-adopting violence, too, as a power for political organization, e) **political** Islam-making religious orders and sects as elements of political organization.¹⁴ Non of these could be able to institutionalize Islam

14. Alain Gerard MARSOT, "Political Islam in Asia", *ANNALS, AAPSS*. 163-169.

with pluralist competitive democratic order. The uniqueness of the Turkish model is due to its success in making secularism which secure absolute respect to religious faith, a fundamental element of the constitutional order. It is thanks to this system that the Turkish people could create a democratic order, and maintained its aspiration to be a modern society respectful to human rights.

That is why secularism is an indispensable element of the Turkish democracy. We shall not let it be undermined through various practices and legal regulations. Apart from having secularism taken under constitutional guarantee by the state in the last twenty years, the Turkish civil society has proven that there could be a democratic struggle against fundamentalism. The protest arisen from all over the country after the assassination of Uğur Mumcu, demonstrated that the Republic of Turkey has strong guards.

As rightfully indicated by Ali Kazancı, when we look at the political history of Turkey in the last forty years, the Kemalist doctrine-let alone being defeated as claimed to be-has made a long term breakthrough.¹⁵ Today, modern Turkey which is industrialized, democratic and unwilling to compromise over secularism, is very close to the universal civilization model to which Mustafa Kemal wanted to lead his country. There are many other important steps to be taken in this regard. The first one is to make our constitutional order more in line with modern thought, more democratic, participative and respectful to human rights. The amendment of the 1982 Constitution is inevitable. However, once Turkey adopts a new constitution, it would be nave to expect that the principle of secularism would be withdrawn, as desired by the supporters of the second republic or the New-Ottomans. For modern Turkey, secularism is not an empty concept based on imitation, but a vital tissue whereby the society freely respire to keep its democratic life going. Young generations are cognizant that secularism, which is the guarantee of democracy and freedom of conscience, is a whole. We have full confidence in the guards of our state.

15. Ali KAZANCIGİL, "Le Kémalisme à l'épreuve du pluralisme" *Peuples Méditerranéens/Mediterranean Peoples*, No.60 Juillet-Septembre 1992, p.8.