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Contemporary Turkish and Western historiography on post-secularisation processes in Turkey

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Abstract: *The assessment of secularisation and post-secularisation processes that took place in Turkey in the 20th century are associated by scholars with internal and global socio-political processes such as collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the course towards Westernisation, the development of capitalism, the confrontation between the West and the USSR, etc. This issue was preferred as the subject of the study as it is topical due to the revival of religious values, despite the secularisation processes that engulfed many countries worldwide. This article examines the representation of post-secularisation processes in Turkey through assessing the works of Western and Turkish scholars. The analysis of these works provides an understanding of the consequences of historical events in the form of the phenomenon of “religious revival”.*

Key words: Islam, Modernisation, Turkey, Post-Secularism, Atatürk, Reforms

Introduction

Modernisation reforms in Turkey are described in the works of some researchers starting from the Tanzimat era. However, the chronological framework of this study

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covers the assessment of the problem by Turkish and Western scholars since the Atatürk reforms.

Although many researchers on secularism are Western researchers and have conducted their research in Europe and the United States, countries that have undergone modernisation, and therefore the stage of secularisation and are currently at the post-modern stage, the example of Turkey is clearly visible in the post-secularisation process. In Turkey religion is kept under the control of the state. For this purpose, the Department of Religious Affairs was established with theological faculties and Imam Hatip schools (lyceums with religious lessons) which are based on the secular ideology of the state. Currently, Turkey continues to debate on reforms of Atatürk, including the ones relevant to religion which has led to the appearance of many works on the consequences of such reforms. Although many Turkish scholars recognise the fact that modernisation began in the Ottoman period, long before the reforms of Atatürk. However, cardinal reforms in relation to religion took place during the Republic period. Thus, the issue of secularisation is a broad field for research in connection with the constant rethinking of the impact of this phenomenon on society.

Regarding the Turkish historiography of the Republican period, which describes secularisation processes, the main difference in the works is the ideological component which leads to conclusions about the positive or negative consequences of secularisation.¹

Besides Turkish scholars in Turkish historiography, there are separate works of Western scholars on the history of Turkey. Some Turkish scholars believe that these works are written within the framework of an Orientalist perspective and reflect their point of view on historical events from Eurocentric beliefs. However, classical works of Western scientists on this topic are included in the literature recommended by universities and Turkish scholars also refer to them in their works.

The paper first describes the concepts of secularism and post-secularism, and then highlights the researchers outlook on Atatürk's religious reforms and historical events that led to the revival of religion. In some cases, sources were translated and quoted directly in order to convey thoughts more accurately.

Secularism and Post-secularism

The issue of secularism has been among the most studied topics since the mid-twentieth century and various concepts and theories have emerged along with theories of modernisation. Researchers performing in the field of sociology of religion and theology believe that secularisation is an inevitable consequence of modernisation which most countries have undergone in one way or another. The concept of moderni-

¹ The discussion in Karabulut, 2019: 1482, 1484.

sation has several meanings as the concept of secularisation is being used in different senses by various branches of science.²

However, the results of long-term researches have shown the fallacy of some statements about secularisation, that is because according to the analysis of secularisation conducted by sociologists with the development of modernisation there should have been a complete rejection of religion. So researches showed that under secular reforms religion does not disappear but changes its function in society and according to Berger secular discourse can coexist with religious discourse.³

Meanwhile, since the 1960s, there have been disputes about the concept of secularisation and its applicability on other cultures other than the West⁴, since the concept of secularisation itself originated in the West and has been known since the mid-17th century.

Secularisation, and how we know it today, in particular emerged and developed in Christianity, but in time it applied to other religions as well.⁵ However, some researchers argue that the laws of the functioning of society are universal and have similar stages of development that all societies go through, regardless of culture and other conditions, and it also plays a role that at this stage of historical development the culture of the West is dominant throughout the world. This is a concept known as the “Westernisation” of cultures.⁶ At the same time, the growing interest in religion in post-Soviet countries, the reinterpretation of religion and the emergence of modernist views on Islam in Islamic countries, and the relentless ethno-religious conflicts in different parts of the world have all called into question the paradigm of linear development of secularisation following modernisation.⁷

Thus, scholars came to the conclusion that with the transition to the postmodern era, there would be a return of religion to public life, the so-called post-secularism. At the same time, scholars characterise post-secularism in different ways.⁸

Opinions on Atatürk’s religious reforms and their consequences

Turkish Islam had always consisted of official and popular religion; as the formal, legal, dogmatic religion of the state, the schools and the hierarchy; and mystical, intuitive faith of the masses which manifested itself in the form of dervish orders, pilgrimage to tombs and mausoleums.⁹ Atatürk’s reforms were conducted on both

² Uzlaner, 2008: 137; Kargina, 2014: 109.

³ Berger, 1973: 113; see also Berger, 2012: 313; Riesebrodt, 2014: 1.

⁴ Casanova, 2013: 38.

⁵ Shchipkov, 2019: 71.

⁶ Uzlaner, 2008: 141.

⁷ Shchipkov, 2019: 66.

⁸ See Habermas, 2010; Casanova, 2013: 44-47; Radugin & Radugina, 2017: 156-157.

⁹ Lewis, 1968: 404-405.

official and popular religion. The reforms assumed subordination to the new regime of the official religion, ensuring its functioning within the framework of the official ideology, and the eradication of popular religion. During the Ottoman Empire, religion was also institutionalised.

Şerif Mardin believes that “contrary to generally spoken opinion, the Ottoman state was not «theocratic»”.¹⁰ Şerif Mardin analyses religious reforms and writes that the reforms were initiated in the Ottoman Empire and “the trends of religious modernisation in Turkey starting with unionists (ittihatçılar) and operated from the point of view that there was only one religion in Turkey. Those who took religion seriously or not have denied that beliefs of population were meaningful within their own context ... For the reformers, considering the folk religion illegal, took a position that Sheikh ul-Islams would have appreciated very much. Ziya Gökalp, Mehmet Akif and Şemsettin Günaltay acted on the same basis in this respect. Their reforms focused on giving a new and «civilized» form to the Orthodox form of Sunni Islam”.¹¹ Consequently, Şerif Mardin claims that during the reforms there was a gap between the people, reformers and intellectuals, because the reformers and intellectuals did not understand the importance of the popular religion. As a result of which the popular religion did not disappear and continued to exist along with religion within the official ideology.

Thus, having carried out reforms in all aspects of religious activities, according to Şerif Mardin, Kemalism pursued the following goal – the continued influence of the Ulema at the state level, even if it had diminished, should be destroyed. Kemalism also wanted to put an end to Ulema’s leadership role in society. Kemalists thought that a person worldview should not be shaped by religion but by positive science. Islam should lose its role in state affairs, and become a private matter for everyone. Islamic civilisation opened up a brilliant era in its time, but today has lost its exemplary feature. Nowadays, Western civilisation and the positive understanding of science that it brought are an example to the rest of the world.¹²

The importance of popular religion and the reaction to measures against it is reflected by Erik-Jan Zürcher in his work *Turkey: A Modern History*. He writes that Kemalists by extending secularisation drive beyond the formal, institutionalised Islam, tried to destroy what were valuable in popular religion such as dresses, amulets, soothsayers, holy sheikhs, saints’ shrines, pilgrimages and festivals. But people’s reaction to these measures and the resistance against them was far greater than reaction to measures on official formal Islam as the abolition of the caliphate, the position of şeyhülislam, or the medreses, which was only important to official “high” religion. Nevertheless, the government destroyed many of the attributes of popular religion, at least in the towns, and popular religion continued to “live” in the countryside and

¹⁰ Mardin, 1990: 193.

¹¹ Mardin, 2012: 145-146.

¹² Mardin, 1990: 183-184.

underground as is the case with the tarikats. As a result of authoritarian and secular regime, the Kemalists politicised Islam and turned it into a vehicle for opposition.¹³

He also notes that the Kemalists like the Unionists before them pursued a modernisation policy in accordance with a positivist world vision; they thought that Islam was the reason for the backwardness of the state and society. However modernisation didn't mean for them a complete rejection of religion, religion was supposed to be part of the state bureaucracy and subordinate to it. During the 1930s and 1940s the one-party regime's attitude towards religion was very suppressive, but the transition to a multi-party system and some relief in relation to religion after the seventh RPP congress in 1947, has made Muslim votes significant.¹⁴

Thus, repressive policy of RPP and religious reforms contributed to the understanding that secularism was perceived by the religious masses as atheism, and Kemalism close to socialism. Nowadays, disputes over the understanding of secularism in Turkey and the necessity of reforms continue.

Dankwart Rustow points out that in the first half of the 20th century Turkey has undergone a rapid transformation of its entire political, social, and cultural life and this transformation has particularly affected the place of religion in Turkish society. The role of religion in society during the 1920s and 1930s declined sharply; but in the 1940s and 1950s its role has been restored partially. However, the reasons for that weren't only religious as Islam was both a polity and a religion in its early history and later doctrine. The collapse of religion's role in society in the early days of the Turkish Republic was perhaps only natural and further changes in political life have made religion important again.¹⁵

As known, during the modernisation reforms, reformers sought to carry out reforms in political, economic, and social life, the source of which was mostly Islam. They believed that with the removal of Islam many issues would be resolved on their own and that the trends of the time required a change in lifestyle and thinking. However, as subsequent historical events proved they were not able to change the people's consciousness through reforms.

Ertuğrul Meşe believes that "as a result of the demands of that time, Islamism could not become the basic ideology of the Turkish Republic and in particular survived a period of neglect between 1925-1945. This process was a period of fermentation that could determine the political and action horizons of later periods. The memory formed during this period strongly influenced the formation of the ideological fuel that Islamism could use in later periods".¹⁶

¹³ Zürcher, 2004: 192.

¹⁴ Zürcher, 2004: 232-233.

¹⁵ Rustow, 1955: 69.

¹⁶ Meşe, 2018: 323.

His point of view on the political trials and tribulations of the 40-50s of the 20th century in Turkey represents the British researcher Andrew Mango in the article *Islam in Turkey*. He states that a certain part of society has changed as a result of the reforms. According to Andrew Mango, cultural change also changes attitudes towards religion and what is also true for Islam. With a change in culture and lifestyle accordingly, basic Islamic obligations such as praying five times a day and fasting during the daytime in Ramadan become difficult to fulfil. As a result, the number of practising Muslims fell sharply in the years following the Kemalist revolution. These cultural changes also had an impact on Westernised urban upper and middle classes, and secularisation continued smoothly as long as these classes retained control of state power. However, political and economic events have changed the situation. The transition to a multi-party system and the course towards democracy raised the status of the non-Westernised part of the electorate which with economic development acquired economic power, and accordingly political strength. In the 1950s, the Republican People's Party was ousted by the winning Democratic Party, which had in its ranks dissatisfaction with secularisation measures. After the elections the Democratic Party had to give some satisfaction to this section of its supporters.¹⁷

The period of achieving the goals of secularisation measures is also a subject of discussion among researchers.¹⁸

Celalettin Çelik has a different opinion on this period and states that “It is clear that the socio-economic and socio-political changes in Turkish society in connection with global processes between 1960 and 1980 were the basis of such transformation. ... This process was actually a stage where traditional religious thoughts and beliefs also became subject to change. Accordingly, the consequences of changes, on the one hand, allowed the popularisation of modernisation in the socio-cultural dimension, and on the other hand, reactive, conciliatory and syncretic interpretations of religion that aimed at transforming it on the axis of their own beliefs and acceptance, also gained strength through organisation in civil and political life”.¹⁹

Consequently, despite small differences in opinions about the success of reforms and their scope, researchers note the impact of secularism on all segments of society and the adaptation of religious consciousness in the new socio-political and economic realities. They note that despite the government's suppression of religion and the imposition of non-religious views from above, the people tried to preserve their religious beliefs, and with the advent of democracy these beliefs were transformed into a political force and returned back to public life.

Davut Dursun indicates that “today in Turkey, religion is gradually increasing its influence in all areas of public life, and there is not much area left independent of

¹⁷ Mango, 1960: 204-205.

¹⁸ Karpat, 2010: 350.

¹⁹ Çelik, 2018: 217.

religion. Religion which was tried to be removed from the social and political spheres at the beginning of the Republic's existence was increasing its influence in these areas, despite the ongoing radical and militant policies. The main element of dynamism in political and public life was religion, while a policy against religion had no chance of success. The growth of social and political influence of religion is not a product of any new rules of the state and changes in the policy of secularism, but the result of social development. In fact, the main religious policy of the 1950th and state control over religion remains".²⁰

However, Serif Mardin notes that "there was a fundamental disagreement in the desire for a «return to religion» which emerged in Turkey since the late 1940th. Those who studied such wishes to return to religion, as well as those who wanted to re-emphasize religion were trapped in this conflict. In fact, the «return to religion» in Turkey has not one, but two forms. One of them is those who adhere to the ideas of the Orthodox, Sunni and Ulema. They wanted to give a broader meaning to the demands of the Islamic religion in society. Others want the broad sections of the population to return to «superstition» and «popular Islam». «Progressive» believers, who are not aware of this duality or neglect it as the «secularists», are as surprised as the «secularists». Because from time to time they saw forms of Islam that they did not know about before".²¹

Thus, it is possible to say that secularism has revealed the existence of popular religion and their supporters, and, accordingly, the goals that they pursue.

Political developments and measures taken to promote a "return to religion" in Turkey

In addition to granting freedom of expression to the people after the transition to a multi-party system, the Turkish government took certain steps to "return to religion".

Along with the desire of a certain part of the society with religious views to return to free religious practices, the government also had its own reasons for easing the harsh reform measures, which were caused by both external and internal motives.

Eric-Jan Zürcher notes that, the economic failures of the government caused popular discontent. As well as events in the international arena pushed the leadership of the Republican People's Party to a partial liberalisation of political life and to the formation of a political opposition as a safety valve.²² He argues that the political and economic changes in Turkey since 1945 have both domestic and international reasons. Deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union and the need for American political, military and financial support under the Marshall Plan forced Turkish leaders to

²⁰ Dursun, 1995: 9-10.

²¹ Mardin, 2012: 149.

²² Zürcher, 2004: 208.

closely follow the political and economic ideals (democracy and free enterprise) that are very important to Americans.²³

One of the major reasons for the return to religion was the fear of the “threat of communism”, which was spread by the US to the Western bloc after World War II.

Ertuğrul Meşe states that the anti-communism that Islamists talk about and took hold of, is a reactionary ideology that is used, firstly, to defend the religious sphere, and secondly, criticise the one-party period. This feature made anti-communism an important source of life for nationalist, conservative, and religious groups which were kept away from the centre during the one-party period, and a way to reconcile these groups with the state / government.²⁴

Thus, in order to solve the identified problems, a political party was created. The Democratic Party which has played a key role in liberalising political life was established after the formation of a multi-party system, and with the establishment of which the transition to a multi-party system was initiated.

The Demokrat Parti (Democratic Party) was officially registered on 7 January 1946 and it was at first welcomed by the RPP and its organs, which took their lead from İnönü.²⁵ The ranks of the Democratic Party were made up mainly by former members of the Republican People’s Party. However, the revision of views on religion began under the one-party system.

Bayram Ali Çetinkaya claims that “the one-party leadership under the pressure of the political environment in Turkey and the world conjuncture was forced to reconsider its religious policy”.²⁶ At the 7th Congress the Republican People’s Party held on December 2, 1947 at which the one-party leadership opened a discussion on religious policy, both within itself and in the party, was given a sign about the religious policy that Turkey would actually follow in a new period.²⁷ “Suggestions and recommendations for meeting people's religious needs composed the main pillars speeches”.²⁸

With the transition to a multi-party system religious activity in education, the media, politics, and in general all spheres of public life began to intensify.

From the point of view of political transformations, the 1950’s in the last century was the most significant for Turkey considering how attitudes to religion changed. Howard A. Reed notes that partly of its own initiative and inevitably in response to the demands of the population, the go-vernment encouraged and sponsored the following measures for religious revival: lifting the ban on calling for prayer in Arabic, reading the Koran on state radio, buil-ding and maintaining mosques, private religious

²³ Zürcher, 2004: 209.

²⁴ Meşe, 2018: 324.

²⁵ Zürcher, 2004: 212.

²⁶ Çetinkaya, 2018: 156.

²⁷ For further information about the Republican People's Party's programme and regulation, see CHP Program ve Tüzüğü, 1947.

²⁸ Çetinkaya, 2018: 161.

education, pilgrimage to Mecca and others shrines, attendance at worship services in the mosque, the spate of publications catering almost exclusively to religious interests, considerable press coverage of events in other Islamic countries, private participation of leading personalities in Islamic congresses abroad etc.²⁹

Following religious activities within the country, the government resumed relations with Muslim countries which after religious reforms in Turkey broke off relations with it. In his speech at the Turkish National Assembly in Ankara on May 29, 1950, Prime Minister Adnan Menderes emphasised the importance of creating friendly relations with the states of the Middle East in order to ensure security in the region and around the world.³⁰

Asım Öz writes that “the analysis of the Islamic world based on the religious-nationalist journals of the period and the priorities of the period after World War II, corresponds to an exceptional concept from the point of view of the idea of Muslim unity which again came to the fore. The magazines emphasized the advantages of close cooperation of Islamic countries, especially with Turkey, as well as the need to create resistance against colonialists and communism by combining national and Islamic elements”.³¹

Previously, restrictions on religious activities also applied to news and articles of religious orientation in magazines and newspapers. However, this situation has also changed with the transition to a multi-party system.

Ali Özcan notes that “However, in 1945 along with the process of transition to multi-party life along with other issues and topics, news/articles on religious issues began to appear in newspapers and magazines, although not much in numbers. ... Revisions showed that the authorities did not approve such news/articles. Following the publication of articles on religious issues in the newspapers, the General Directorate of Press prepared guideline for the press. ... This made a mark in history of the Turkish press as «official censorship before publication». During the one-party period, many publications were banned as a justification for «reactionary propaganda», and the same policy was continued during the DP period, but in a lighter form”.³²

However, as Bernard Lewis points out that following social life changes also affected the education sector. The growing interest in religion, the desire of people to study religion and receive religious education, as well as the lack of those who could perform religious duties in mosques, and at the same time the emergence of illiterates and fanatics in the field of religious education revealed a shortage of men with a higher religious education as for many years there had been no higher religious instruction. As

²⁹ Reed, 1954: 272.

³⁰ Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi. Tutanak Dergisi, 9. Dönem, Cilt 1, Toplantısı: Olğ., 3.Birleşim, 31.

³¹ Öz, 2018: 48.

³² Özcan, 2018: 314.

a result of which the government decided to restore the faculty of divinity, which opened its gates to students in 1949.³³

After the opening of the new Faculty of Divinity at the University of Ankara,³⁴ more than twenty similar faculties were established all over Turkey in subsequent years. The new Faculty aimed at promoting a new type of religious education based on modern scientific thought rather than reviving the medrese tradition and the need of secular regime, also creating a new type of theology working towards an enlightened Islam.³⁵

These faculties have maintained a major position of influence in the Turkish Islamic academic and religious establishment due to their close connection with the national Presidency of Religious Affairs. So graduates of these faculties mainly work in the education system and in the institutions under the Presidency of Religious Affairs which means that the intellectual programme of these faculties directly influences Turkish religious and educational institutions at nearly all levels.³⁶

Bayram Ali Çetinkaya states that “one of the reasons of the need for higher religious education was that after the World War II there were new requirements for democracy and the idea of giving freedom to all beliefs, including religious leaders”.³⁷

Celadeddin Çelik notes that “after the change of government in 1950, the confidence of religious leaders and authorities increased due to religious activities. However, in addition to this, there were many indicators of the development of religious life and, for example, an increase in the tendency to religious practices. Many new publications were made and scientific research began on Islamic thought and history”.³⁸

There has been a sharp increase in the numbers of divinity faculties in Turkey since the 1980s (despite periods of political turmoil, especially the military ultimatum of 1997): at the end of the 1980s, only nine faculties existed; by 2011, there were a total of thirty-six faculties with approximately six thousand five hundred students, thirteen of these faculties had been opened during the past two years. By May 2013, there were eighty-six Divinity Faculties officially opened.³⁹

In addition to changes in the political sphere, and with the return of religious education, changes also began in the cultural sphere. An Islamic intellectual elite was formed.

Ali Çağlar researched the activities of Islamic intellectuals writes that in 1961 Aydınlar Ocağı was founded in connection with the Club of Intellectuals, so that intellec-

³³ Lewis, 1968: 418-419.

³⁴ Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi. Tutanak Dergisi, 8. Dönem, Cilt 20, Toplantısı: 3. pp. 277-284.

³⁵ Wielandt, 2015: 712.

³⁶ Dorroll, 2014: 1039.

³⁷ Çetinkaya, 2018: 173.

³⁸ Çelik, 2018: 218; see also Silverstein, 2005: 141.

³⁹ Dorroll, 2014: 1038-1039.

tuals could discuss the views of nationalists and the religious segment. The main reason for establishing Aydınlar Ocağı was the desire of the generation which was disturbed by the increasing intellectual-cultural hegemony of the West and the left-wing in this context to organize against it. Another reason was the reaction to the rumour which was common in the 1960s, that there will be no intellectuals from the right-wing. The Club was closed in 1965. However, in 1970 in parallel with the popularisation of socialist thought, Aydınlar Ocağı was founded under the chairmanship of İbrahim Kafesoğlu.⁴⁰

Eric-Jan Zürcher also writes that Aydınlar Ocağı, the “Hearths of the Enlightened”, which was founded by influential people from the business world, the universities and politics, influenced many in the Motherland Party, including Özal. Seminars and sponsored publications were among its activities, suggesting solutions to a variety of issues in the fields of culture, education, social life, and economy. Its leading ideologue and chairman İbrahim Kafesoğlu developed the system called the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis (Türk İslam Sentez). Turkish-Islamic Synthesis rely on the idea that Islam held a special attraction for the Turks because of a number of (supposedly) striking similarities between their pre-Islamic culture and Islamic civilisation. Among these similarities were a deep sense of justice, monotheism and a belief in the immortal soul, as well as strong emphasis on family life and morality. According to this theory, two foundations as a 2500-year-old Turkish element and a 1000-year-old Islamic element formed Turkish culture.⁴¹

Ali Çağlar writes it can be said that “contrary to claims the idea of a «Turkish-Islamic synthesis» is not about uniting the Turkish and Islamist wings of the Turkish right and / or to fit Islam into the idea of a nation, but acting as the project of hegemony to affect the worldview of Turkish society more than it was before with the goal of melting subidentities expressing a race – nationality in the Islamic pot”.⁴²

Thus, Aydınlar Ocağı was one of the most important platforms that brought together politicians and scientists, writers and philosophers who worked to shape public opinion within the framework of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis. Aydınlar Ocağı has opened several centres throughout Turkey and continues its activities.

Celalettin Çelik notes that “new Muslim intellectuals who criticize modern political and cultural institutions while calling for the Islamisation of the way of life in Turkey, together with a multi-party life, become influential in the intellectual world. ... These intellectuals represent a reaction to the ideologisation of identity among Turkish youth in the 1960s and 1970s. ... Here Islam is perceived as an alternative to the conflicting structures of modernity. However, Islam which is understood and embraced by Muslim intellectuals and social movements during this period is no longer based on

⁴⁰ Çağlar & Uluçakar, 2017: 125-126.

⁴¹ Zürcher, 2004: 288.

⁴² Çağlar & Uluçakar, 2017: 137.

Turkish and Ottoman heritage in the traditional sense, but rather an Islamic imagination based on revelation and new Salafist interpretations”.⁴³

It follows that there is an increase of religious activity in all spheres of public life while retaining the secular system of the state. Although the political and historical events that influenced the “return of religion” are clearly followed, researchers are interested in the “viability” of religion despite the repressive measures of the reformers.

Celalettin Çelik explains his vision of the situation with religion after the measures taken to secularise it by the state as follows, “religion, on the one hand, compensated for the gaps in the layers of personality and culture, on the other hand, satisfied the need for identity with an ideological mission. The issue of identity which accelerated by the process of modernisation, was gaining a different dimension with religious groups, movements, and communities”.⁴⁴

Conclusions

This article analysed the classical works and articles on the issue of historical transformations in Turkey that led to the revival of religion, and argues that both internal and external political and social reasons contributed to this revival. Secularisation in Turkey had revealed some of the characteristics of religion, the so-called popular religion, and contributed to the emergence of a clear separation of official religion and popular religion, as well as the emergence of an institutionalised religion based on modern scientific thought. The post-secular processes on the example of Turkey have shown the vitality of religion and that its suppression does not lead to rejection of it, on the contrary, to the demonstration of a tough reaction and opposition to secular measures.

Thus, to summarise the opinion of researchers on the Atatürk’s reforms it is obvious that some of the researchers believe that his reforms in relation to religion were not directed against religion itself, but were against its medieval understanding, superstitions that limited the worldview and hindered the development of both Turkey and Muslim countries. This opinion is also based on the speeches of Atatürk who emphasized in his speeches that the reforms were not anti-religious in nature and did not aim to destroy religion. According to researchers, the reforms aimed at creating a new identity based only on nationalism, and imposing a completely independent way of life and thinking on the people. However, they agree that most of the people did not accept secularisation measures and retained the “popular religion” despite its suppression. Some scholars believe that the changes affected the upper and middle classes more.

⁴³ Çelik, 2018: 238.

⁴⁴ Çelik, 2018: 233.

Secularisation reforms laid the Foundation for social transformation which was later provided with political freedom and continued with urbanisation and industrialisation. The government's political and economic priorities also contributed to deepening the transformation.

According to researchers, the desire of the majority of the population to return to religion shows the need to return to their identity inextricably linked with Islam, and the reluctance to change their usual way of life, the fear of losing the values that religion is considered to be the source of, and to become like the West which is seen by Muslim countries as a "spiritless" society based only on material values. Also, the long-lasting opposition to the West causes distrust of innovations coming from the West.

This article illustrates that as a result of the easing, in addition to granting political freedom, religious education returned a cohort of Islamic intellectuals appeared and religious attributes were allowed.

However, as the analysis shows, despite the growing influence of religious figures and intellectuals the free exercise of religious practices, the development of new concepts of Turkish-Islamic synthesis, the strengthening of the role of religion in public life and the revival of religious consciousness, secularism endures its place at the core of political ideology of the state and preserves its dominance in public consciousness.

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