

## Rethinking Human Rights, Democracy and the West: Post-Islamist Intellectuals in Turkey\*

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A decade ago Michael Meeker stated that “the notion of an alternative social discourse is perhaps a unique feature of the Muslim intellectual”<sup>1</sup> who “sets himself apart from earlier Islamist thinkers by rejecting the question of how an accommodation is to be reached between Islam and the West”.<sup>2</sup> “Muslim intellectuals” continued to be portrayed as anti-modernist and anti-Western.<sup>3</sup> In the search for an “alternative paradigm” and “against corrupting influence of Western modernity” Islamist intellectuals were to “redefine Islamic ‘authenticity’ without being apologetic to Western modernity” according to Nilufer Gole.<sup>4</sup> Being accurate observations in the early 1990s such descriptions do not correspond to the current positions of ‘Muslim intellectuals’ who, experiencing the failure of political Islam in Turkey as displayed by the 2002 general elections in which the Justice and Development Party with its ‘liberal agenda’ despite Islamist background of its leaders, won an outstanding victory by capturing 33% of the votes while the Felicity Party of pro-Islamic Erbakan line could get only 2%, seemed to have engaged in ‘rethinking’ their fundamental ideas. Some “Muslim intellectuals” whom I call “post-Islamists” appear to have abandoned the ideas for the construction of an alternative social and political order that in effect enabled them to seek a rapprochement with

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\* This article is based on a research I conducted as a Human Rights Fellow of Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs.

<sup>1</sup> M. E. Meeker, ‘The New Muslim Intellectuals in the Republic of Turkey’, in R. Tapper (ed.), *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State* (London: I. B.Tauris, 1994) p.196.

<sup>2</sup> M. E. Meeker, ‘The New Muslim Intellectuals in the Republic of Turkey’, p.190.

<sup>3</sup> H. Gulalp, ‘Globalizing postmodernism: Islamist and Western Social Theory’, *Economy and Society*, Vol. 26, No.3, 1997, pp. 419-433; A. Gunes-Ayata, ‘Islamism versus Authoritarianism: Political Ideas in Two Islamic Publications’, in R. Tapper (ed.), *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion, Politics and Literature in a Secular State*, pp.254-279; B. Toprak, ‘Islamist Intellectuals: Revolt against Industry and Technology’ in M. Heper, A. Oncu and H. Kramer (eds.), *Turkey and the West: Changing Political and Cultural Identities* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> N. Gole, ‘Secularism and Islamism in Turkey: The Making of Elites and Counter-Elites’, *Middle East Journal*, Vol.51, No.1 (Winter 1997), pp.53-54.

the West, Western ideas and institutions.<sup>5</sup> The alternative to the established political regime is not any longer searched in Islam but in modernity and its political architecture . This article, after exploring the content and the context of this change, argues that there has emerged a new brand of Islamism that does not propose an alternative social and political order. Intellectual leaders of post-Islamism have been in search for a rapprochement with the West, it is claimed, not out of necessity for forming a temporary alliance in confronting the Kemalist state apparatus but out of an effort for re-thinking modern political notions like democracy, human rights and integration into the globalization process.

### **Islamism as an Alternative Discourse and the Question of the West**

Islamist intellectuals emerged in the 1980s as a new group who, with a background both in Islamic literature and Western social theory, attempted to prove the possibility of thinking in Islamic terms and to produce solutions for social and economic problems.<sup>6</sup> As such it was a new social occurrence for the Islamists who used to read the writings of traditional Islamic scholars and the radical Islamists abroad like Sayyid Qutb, Abu al-Ala Mawdudi and Ali Shariati. Ali Bulac, born in 1951 in a South Eastern town of Mardin and educated in Islamic sciences and sociology, was one of the pioneers of a new generation Islamism in Turkey. In his first book published in 1987, *Modern Concepts and Orders*, Bulac proposed Islam not as a religion but the very basis of an alternative order that organizes social/political, cultural and economic domains as well as being an analytical tool to understand the modern experience.<sup>7</sup> Bulac's classical statement was that 'Muslim intellectuals have tried to understand their own society with the concepts and terms borrowed from the west... Thus they have likened Islam to that of modern ideas and systems'.<sup>8</sup> For Bulac the concepts like modernity, democracy,

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<sup>5</sup> The term 'post-Islamist' refers to those who are known for their Islamic views that do now not prescribe construction of an Islamic society by means of state power. The same applies to the term 'new Islamism'. For a debate on 'new Islamism' see A. Harputlu, 'Bir Politik Durum Olarak Musluman Demokrat' (Muslim Democrat as a Political Stand), pp.13-16; Yalcin Akdogan, 'Yeni Islamciligin Sosyal Boyutlari' (Social Dimensions of New Islamism), *Bilgi ve Dusunce*, Vol.2, No.5, 2003, pp.21-23. Yalcin Akdogan recently published a book *Muhafazakar Demokrasi* (Conservative Democracy) (Ankara: AK Parti Yayinlari, 2003) forwarded by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of ruling Justice and Development Party, who hailed the book as an attempt to theorize the JDP's claim to be a conservative democrat despite its Islamic origins.

<sup>6</sup> Among the first such comprehensive attempts were A. Bulac, *Modern Kavramlar ve Duzenler* (Modern Concepts and Orders) (Istanbul: Pinar Yayıncılık, 1987). (Its 17<sup>th</sup> print came out from Iz Yayıncılık, 2001); R. Ozdenoren, *Musulmanca Dusunme Uzerine Denemeler* (Essays on Thinking With a Muslim Perspective), (Istanbul: Insan Yayinlari, 1985); and I. Ozel, *Uc Mesele; Teknik, Medeniyet, Yabancilasma* (Three Issues: Technology, Civilization, Alienation) (Istanbul: Dergah Yayinlari, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> For Bulac Islam was "an alternative way of thought, system of belief and the way of life'. See his, *Cagdas Kavramlar ve Duzenler*, p.199.

<sup>8</sup> Bulac, *Cagdas Kavramlar ve Duzenler*, pp.133-134.

progress and liberties all came from the West, thus alien to Islam and Islamic order; 'the concepts originated in the West have caused turmoil in our thought and spirit.'<sup>9</sup>

Thus the duty of a 'Muslim intellectual' was to replace these concepts/ideas by Islamic ones which were not to justify their presence in Islam but to refute them in order to open up the way for the development of an alternative terminology based on Islam. Explain modern concepts and orders, criticize and falsify them, and then propose alternative ideas and concepts derived from Islam; this was the intellectual position of the young Islamist intellectuals like Ali Bulac in the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> This was indeed a novelty in the development of an Islamist intellectual language in Turkey; questioning the terminology used by the secularists and the Islamists alike, highlighting that the terminology used was embedded in modernity that is profane and secular, product of an alien culture and civilization.

This was part of an attempt in the 1980s by 'Muslim intellectuals' to 'cleanse' the minds of the Muslims polluted by the western ideas, westoxification in a Qutbian terminology. Muslim intellectuals should resist to the intrusion of western notions, concepts, ideas, values which were presented as a threat to Islam and Islamic way of life, and more essentially Islamic way of thinking that was to be revived.<sup>11</sup> In his *Intellectual Problems in the Islamic World* Bulac explained the intellectual crisis in Islamic world in modern times in relation to the state of western civilization, or in other words the hegemonic position of the west over the Islamic world.<sup>12</sup> To overcome this, to resist and break this domination the first thing to do was to challenge the very basis of western domination; that was western 'concepts and orders' that had led an intellectual confusion among the Muslims.

The Islamists were also critical of republican westernization as a result of which Islam has been excluded from the legitimate centers of political and intellectual activities.<sup>13</sup> In the process of westernization and secularization during the early years of the republican era the caliphate was abolished, religious orders and institutions were closed down, western civil law was adopted, religious schools and education were banned. The republican project of westernization seemed sweeping Islam to individual/private sphere making it socially invisible that meant the use of the (modernized) state apparatus to suppress the roles of Islam in social and political realms. For the Islamists therefore the republican reforms made it clear that it was not only the west as such but the westernizers and the westernization program that

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<sup>9</sup> Ali Bulac, *Cagdas Kavramlar ve Duzenler*, 1987. p.177.

<sup>10</sup> R. Ozdenoren, *Musulmanca Dusunme Uzerine Denemeler*; I. Ozel, *Uc Mesele*.

<sup>11</sup> Bulac, *Cagdas Kavramlar ve Duzenler*, pp.13-19.

<sup>12</sup> A. Bulac, *Islam Dunyasinda Dusunce Sorunlari*.

<sup>13</sup> Meeker, 'The New Muslim Intellectuals in the Republic of Turkey', p.189.

excluded and marginalised Islam's social, political and intellectual representation. As a result the west was viewed as reflected/represented by the westernizers and the westernization program legitimizing an identity based on an objection to the west and westernization.<sup>14</sup> Thus Islamists' rejection of the West and westernization was to some extent a rejection of the Kemalist design to re-form society and politics along a secularist line eroding influence of Islam in social and political formations.

In the writings of the young Islamists Islam was conceived as an ahistorical social theory with a claim for re-ordering life in modern times not a religion derived from the revelation of God: a move to re-construct an Islam for a re-imagined Islamic community. The Islamists of the 1980s believed in the possibility of re-forming an Islamic way of life and thinking that would eliminate the ills of modernity. Their rejection of modern concepts and ideas were total; they had to be criticized, falsified and rejected in favor of an Islamic alternative.

The Islamist intellectuals of the 1980s did their ambitious claims not only for Islamization of politics and society but 'knowledge' too at a time of growing self-confidence when they thought that they knew the causes of social problems which they could cure, that they had the knowledge of social/political sciences and philosophy, that they could engage in intellectual debates particularly with secular-leftists who took the Islamist intellectuals seriously granting recognition which in turn boosted the Islamists' self-esteem.<sup>15</sup>

However the Islamist intellectuals of the late 1990s lost their self-confidence and hope for the possibility of Islamization of politics and society let alone knowledge referring to the reproduction of modern terms and concepts. They encountered the power of the Kemalists/secularist establishment during the so-called February 28 process during which all forms of Islamist expression in public sphere were severely oppressed; social, political and intellectual representatives of Islamism were pressurized, traumatized and marginalised.<sup>16</sup> Striving not only for protection but also recognition from secular intellectuals as well as the public at large the post-Islamists, born partly in reaction to the policy of exclusion and elimination, could not present their *uniqueness* by sticking to an Islamic explanation of current issues with a constructed Islamic terminology, but seek alliance with their secular/liberal counterparts by making references to modern concepts and values like

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<sup>14</sup> Mehmet Dogan, *Batılilasma İhaneti (Tresaon of Westernization)*, (Istanbul: Beyan Yayinlari, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> A. Gunes-Ayata, 'Islamism versus Authoritarianism: Political ideas in Two Islamic Publications', pp.254-279.

<sup>16</sup> Hakan Yavuz, 'Cleansing Islam From the Public Sphere', *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.54, No.1 (Fall 2000), pp.21-40; U.C. Sakallioğlu and M. Cinarlı, '

democracy and human rights.<sup>17</sup> They do not any more see themselves as challengers of modernity and modern political values and institutions but instead demanded the formation of a genuinely liberal democratic regime in Turkey. That no proposition for an alternative to liberal democracy, used to be denounced as a western construction with no relevance to Islamic communities, was expressed but rather a complain that a western style democracy did not exist.

The opposition of the post-Islamists to the Kemalists regime continues but this is done not in the name of Islam *per se* any more but of pluralism, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. While traditionally these notions are seen alien to Islam and as such denounced<sup>18</sup> we now see even an advocacy of secularism along the Anglo-Saxon tradition deemed leaving space for freedom to religious groups in the matters of organizations, activities, fund-raising and social engagements.<sup>19</sup> Pro-Islamic point of view seems replaced by an accommodationist/conservative thinking as well as political prudence. That is to say that 'new Muslim intellectuals' who emerged in the early 1980s with sharp views of Islam conceived as an ideology capable of forming a new society have made seemingly a radical shift both in their views and missions. Meeker once described the new 'Muslim intellectual' as one who "sets himself apart from earlier Islamist thinkers by rejecting the question of how an accommodation is to be reached between Islam and the West".<sup>20</sup> The post-Islamist intellectuals, however, despite the remains of disappointments, fears, suspicions, accusations of double standards and hypocrisy, have made attempts at reconciling with the west now seen as an occasional ally in the face of Kemalists pressures at home.<sup>21</sup> It is not any more the case that Islamist intellectuals are "sensitive to any attempt to justify Islamic principles from the standpoint of a western perspective".<sup>22</sup> On the contrary the post-Islamists defend their position not by referring to Islam, Islamic values and civilization but western/modern notions like democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and institutions like the European Union and the European Court of Human Rights blurring ideological differences with their secular counter-

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<sup>17</sup> Some Islamist intellectuals regard the neo-Islamism as defeatist. See Y. Kaplan, 'Yeni Islamcilik Uzerine' (On new-Islamism), *Yeni Safak*, Feb. 20, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> See the sample writings of Turkish Islamists like Nurettin Topcu, N.Fazil Kisakurek, Sezai Karakoc, Ismet Ozel in I. Kara, *Turkiye'de Islamcilik Dusuncesi* (Islamist Thought in Turkey), (Istanbul: Pinar Yayinlari, 1994).

<sup>19</sup> In a speech delivered at Ambrosetti Forum in Italy Recep Tayyip Erdogan an ex-Islamist and current Prime Minister strongly objected to the idea of referring to the common Christian heritage of European nations in the draft EU constitution on the ground that Europe stands for secular values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, plurality, see 'AB'ye laiklik dersleri' (Lecturing secularism to the EU) *Radikal*, 7 Eylul 2003.

<sup>20</sup> M. E. Meeker, 'The New Muslim Intellectuals in the Republic of Turkey', p.190.

<sup>21</sup> A. Harputlu, 'Islamcilarin Bati Tahayyulu' (Islamists' Imagery of the West), *Bilgi ve Dusunce* Vol.1, No.1, 2002, pp.23-27.

<sup>22</sup> Meeker, 'The New Muslim Intellectuals in the Republic of Turkey', p.190.

parts. Being locked in the rules of the game set by the Kemalists, now guarded by the army and the judiciary, they even put up a brave face rethinking the perennial issue of westernization in the process of Turkey's EU membership quest calling on the state authorities to carry on westernization to its logical end, i.e. the EU membership.

### **Democracy and Human Rights: The Language of Post-Islamists**

In response to the events described as the "February 28 process" the Islamist intellectuals along with the politicians and the leaders of Islamic social networks engaged in a process of rethinking their identity and discourse ending up with a prudent call for democracy, human rights and the rule of law, which has become the characteristics of the new language adopted. Relying on a 'modern' instead of an Islamic terminology as opposed to their original endeavor the post-Islamists seek refuge not only in the west and western institutions like the European Court of Human Rights and the European Union but also in the discourse of 'modern/western' values i.e. democracy and human rights.<sup>23</sup>

In recent years the Islamists have seen how Islam's social bases with its educational, commercial and solidarity networks were disrupted by the politicization of Islam, which exposed Islamic networks to the assault of the Kemalists. The visibility and power of Islam in the political realm did only justify the counter-attack of the Kemalists, the threatened Islamists became more interested in keeping Islam's social and economic base intact as the ground for a social 'conservatism'. So the ideas for a 'social' not 'political' Islam has gained ground<sup>24</sup> perfectly displayed by the acknowledgement of the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP) with its Islamic roots that all ideologies including Islamism have died in the age of globalization.<sup>25</sup> The JDP, realizing that the rise of political Islam was detrimental to Islam's social and economic influence in Turkey, defined itself as 'conservative-democrat' in an attempt to escape from the self-defeating success of political Islam.

Observing this rather paradoxical occurrences led if not all but certainly some influential Islamic intellectuals to adopted a radically different public stand on issues like

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<sup>23</sup> M. H. Yavuz, 'Search for a New Social Contract in Turkey: Fethullah Gulen, the Virtue Party and the Kurds', *SAIS Review*, Vol.XIX, No.1, 1999, pp.114-143. The WP leader Erdogan lodged a file against Turkey in the ECHR complaining that the closure of the party breached the convention.

<sup>24</sup> For a study on 'social Islam' see M.H. Yavuz, 'Towards an Islamic Liberalism?: The Nurcu Movement of Fethullah Gulen', *Middle East Journal*, Vol.53, No.4, 1999, pp.584-605. Politicization of religion came to be seen as a problem by the Islamists in response to the way in which the secularists/Kemalists debated Islam in public. Also see K. Canatan, 'Cagdas Siyasal Islam Dusuncesinin Gelism Seyri' (Development of Islam's Contemporary Political Thought), *Bilgi ve Dusunce*, Vol. 1, No.3, 2002, pp.31-38.

<sup>25</sup> For the Party Program and the election declaration see the AK Party web page at [www.akparty.org.tr](http://www.akparty.org.tr).

democracy, human rights, the EU membership and globalization. In their changing discourse one sees not a rejection of modernity as would be expected given their earlier positions but instead an engagement with the modern discourse and institutions. Their demands are no longer grounded on Islam, Islamic civilization, values, the uniqueness of the Muslim society but on the universality of political modernity, i.e., human rights, democracy and the rule of law.<sup>26</sup> Especially after February 28, 1997, the Islamists have realized the need to speak a broader language of political modernity which would bring legitimacy that they lack and also enable them to form a wider coalition both at home and abroad against the Kemalist state. In this context that the west is not rejected as imperialistic and materialistic as well as anti-Islam but has been embraced as an ally in keeping the Islamic self intact.

This is so because universal norms and values have been discovered to be protective of Islamic groups and their identity. Paradoxically, to preserve the *particularities* of Islam and Islamic identity they need to refer to the *universal*. The dilemma they face is that Islamic self-reference does not explain much, it does not justify any demand, and it does not bring about any result. Thus they need to speak with modern notions/concepts of rights. As a result they depart, inevitably, from an Islamic self-referentialism to a universal language with a transformation of discourse and language, and probably identity.<sup>27</sup> The new Islamism is therefore not self-referential as political Islam used to be in the 1980s but has increasingly become west/modernity-referential.

An example of how the Islamists adopted the new language in response to real problems is that of the headscarf which is portrayed by the secularists as a symbol of jihad against the Kemalist regime. In the 1980s Islamic scholars and intellectuals, engaging in a debate with the secularists and then President Kenan Evren who in a public speech claimed that headscarf was not obligatory in Islam, used to argue that Muslim women's covering of their heads was an Islamic obligation. But in the late 1990s, particularly after the February 28 post-modern national security coup, the Islamists could no longer defend the right to wear headscarf in universities and Imam Hatip High Schools on Islamic ground. It is instead

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<sup>26</sup> A new monthly journal, *Bilgi ve Düşünce* (Knowledge and Thought), published under the editorship of Ali Bulac, is now representative of the new thinking on Islam that they call 'neo-Islamism'. The articles published in the journal critically re-evaluate the past ideas and activities of political Islam, theorize the new language of democracy and human rights. See Y. Akdoğan, 'Değişimin ve Donuşumun Teorik Zeminini' (Theoretical Ground of Change and Transformation), *Bilgi ve Düşünce*, Vol.1, No.4, January 2003, pp.12-14. By February 2003 the 5<sup>th</sup> issue of the journal has come out.

<sup>27</sup> H. Karaman, 'Çağdasi, gerici rektor ve yardımcısı' (Non-modern, reactionary rector and his deputy), *Yeni Safak*, 31 Jan. 2003; 'Ayrımcı YOK ve Rektor' (Discriminatory Higher Education Council and the Rector), *Yeni Safak*, 2 Feb. 2003; H. Karaman, 'Basortusu Yasasını AIHM Onaylamadı' (The ECHR did not approve the ban on headscarf), *Yeni Safak*, 31 March 2002; 'Basortusu Yasası ve AIHM' (The ban on headscarf and the ECHR), *Yeni Safak*, 14 October 2001.

defended by references to the idea of 'universal human rights' and international human rights conventions. The right to education, the principle of non-discrimination, the European Convention of Human Rights and other international human rights conventions are often referred in defense of headscarf not that of Islam which used to be asserted as the absolute source of reference.<sup>28</sup>

Headscarf, becoming a major source of tension between the secularists and the Islamists, is suggested by the latter to be resolved through a "social consensus", which is a modern political device.<sup>29</sup> The search for a social consensus though can only be sought on a non-religious/secular ground that is liberal rights theories not that of the language of obligation within Islam. Some, including the wife of current foreign minister Abdullah Gul who could not continue their higher education due to the ban on headscarf, applied to the European Court of Human Rights on the ground that their fundamental rights had been breached by the state policy in Turkey. The search for justice in a European/Western institution on the right of Muslim women to wear 'Islamic attire' symbolizes the predicaments of the Islamists as well as their new 'orientation'.

The case of civil-military relations too displays the changing public language of 'Muslim intellectuals' in recent years. The army's role on its own or through the National Security Council has been criticized not from an Islamic perspective but by a reference to liberal democracy in which the military is supposed not to exercise an autonomous political power. The phrase like "this is against democracy and human rights" is in very common usage by Islamist intellectuals when commenting on daily political issues showing that modern political values have deeply penetrated into their minds and argumentations.<sup>30</sup> Ali Bulac's remark in the 1980s as '(f)or us struggling against the west is not divorced from our struggle against western concepts and terms that have invaded our world'<sup>31</sup> has totally lost its relevance. He is now calling for full implementation of political modernity departing from his

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<sup>28</sup> H. Karaman, 'Imam Hatipli Kizlar' (The girls from Imam Hatip High Schools), *Yeni Safak*, 2 Dec. 2002; H. Karaman, 'Baskanin Aciklamasi' (The Chairman's statement), *Yeni Safak*, 22 Dec. 2002; . Karaman, 'Basortusu Yasagini AIHM Onaylamadi', *Yeni Safak*, 31 March 2002; H. Karaman, 'Basortusu Yasagi ve AIHM', *Yeni Safak*, 14 October 2001; H. Karaman, 'Cagdasi, gerici rektor ve yardimcisi', *Yeni Safak*, 31 Jan. 2003; H. Karaman 'Ayrimci YOK ve Rektor', *Yeni Safak*, 2 Feb. 2003.

<sup>29</sup> A. Bulac, 'CHP, Anadolu solu ve basortusu' (the Republican People's Party, Anatolian left and headscarf), *Zaman*, 3 July 2002. This is the exactly the same answer the current prime minister Erdogan gives as to resolve the headscarf problem.

<sup>30</sup> For example see H. Karaman, 'Edebi ve Demokrasiyi Rafa Kaldirmak' (Shelving morality and democracy), *Yeni Safak*, 9 August 2002. He criticizes some secularists for not being democrat, not being sincere about democracy and human rights. He even 'invents' a term to call them, "demo-totaliter"; 'Demo-totaliter siyasiler' (Demo-totalitarian politicians), *Yeni Safak*, 25 Oct.2002.

<sup>31</sup> -, Ali Bulac, *Cagdas Kavramlar ve Duzenler*, 1987, p.177. -



earlier fundamentalist/essentialist stand about modernity, modern ideas, values and institutions.

The post-Islamists have been responding to the challenges posed by the social and political circumstances of Turkey in recent years<sup>32</sup> by which intellectual fantasies of the 1980s to Islamize modern terms, life styles and polity have come to an end. Abstract theories about an Islamic society, polity and economy found no relevance to their real problems in the late 1990s. References to Islam, Islamic model of governance have lost both its intellectual context and popular appeal due to the pressures the Islamic groups faced in every aspects of their activities, and political prudence. The continuation of an Islamic language could have only justified and intensified repressive policies implemented by the secularist/Kemalists center.

As the army and the judiciary increased their pressure the Islamists noticed the degree of liberties enjoyed by the Turks living in the Western countries numbering around 3 million who have close relations with the pro-Islamic National View Movement. In this, liberal attitude of western governments to the headscarf issue and activities of Islamic associations formed in Europe has been particularly effective.<sup>33</sup> This experience contributed to 'rethinking' the west and western values/institutions as a possible framework for the survival of Islam as a social if not political force.

In the face of pressures originating from the military's adamant opposition, which influences attitudes of the judges, high state bureaucracy as well as mainstream secular media, the Islamists realized the legitimizing power and the virtue of democracy. Popularity of Islamist politics displayed through elections is considered to be the most valuable 'asset' in their quest for 'recognition' from the secularist forces.<sup>34</sup> No doubt the new language of democracy and human rights provides a *discursive legitimacy* and supremacy over their opponents who can not categorically reject these apparently 'modern' notions. Moreover democracy is a source of strength because through democratic means that the Islamists could display their *popular legitimacy* provided however they denounce Islam as a political project. As they felt the pressures of the 'state power' (i.e. the military and judiciary) opposing them the Islamists turned to 'people power' they knew they enjoyed. They came to see that they

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<sup>32</sup> For such an attempt from a post-Islamist perspective see Y. Akdogan, 'Degisimin ve Donusumun Teorik Zemini', *Bilgi ve Dusunce*, Vol.1, No.4, January 2003, pp.12-14.

<sup>33</sup> H. Karaman, 'AB ve Islamcilar' (the EU and the Islamists), *Yeni Safak*, 15 March 2002.

<sup>34</sup> Even the notion of "Muslim democrat" is indicative of such a search for legitimization to be acquired through a 'western experimentation in "Christian democracy"', see the special issue of *Bilgi ve Dusunce* (Vol.1, No.5, February 2003) on "Muslim Democrats".

could survive only in a country that is democratically oriented, respecting civil and political rights, and moreover integrated into the western world, particularly the EU.

The Islamists went through similar experiences concerning the value of human rights and the rule of law as they saw their political parties closed down, leaders banned from political activities, and associations and foundations intimidated.<sup>35</sup> In response they moved to embrace the language of civil and political rights that provided both an effective leverage against the pressures of the state and a ground to build international coalitions in realization that western demands for democratization and human rights overlap with their search for protection against the Kemalist establishment including military and the judiciary. The shift from anti-westernism to Europhilia is therefore based on an observation that the more Turkey were distanced from the west and the EU in particular the stronger would be the tutelage of the army that treated the Islamic groups as an anomaly and threat. They understood it pretty clear that one of the ways by which the power of the army in Turkish politics could be curbed was to push Turkey into the EU that set out preconditions for Turkey's membership including a model of civil-military relations in accordance with the principles of liberal democracy. In this context the expectation is that a Kemalist state ideology guarded by the army would not be sustainable in an EU member Turkey. It therefore seems that the Islamists came along the liberals' position that Turkey's integration with global dynamics and actors is likely to encourage political reforms that would widen the political space in which the Islamic groups could exist too.<sup>36</sup> The Islamists have understood that the continuation of Turkey's democratization process is tied to international dynamics particularly the EU integration.

### **Ali Bulac: A Post-Islamist on Globalization, Democracy and the EU**

The change in the ideas of Ali Bulac, an Islamist intellectual who had a great influence on setting the agenda of Islamic politics as well as the mind-set of the Islamists in Turkey, is worth examining. He set out his intellectual quest in the late 1980s to cleanse the mind of the Islamists from western concepts and ideas, and to develop ways of thinking in Islamic terms. He did these in many respects yet in the recent years he stands out as an intellectual rethinking not only Islamic politics but his own intellectual career. He is now calling for full

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<sup>35</sup> For the impact of these events on the thinking of post-Islamists see A. Harputlu, 'Bir Politik Durum Olarak Musluman Demokrat', *Bilgi ve Dusunce*, Vol.1, No.5, 2003, pp.13-16; Canatan, 'Cagdas Siyasal Islam Dusuncesinin Gelism Seyri', pp.31-38.

<sup>36</sup> I. D. Dagi, 'Human Rights and Democratization: Turkish Politics in the European Context', *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, Vol. 1, No.3, 2001, pp.51-68.

implementation of political modernity departing from his earlier essentialist rejection of modernity, modern ideas, values and institutions after declaring that “the project of an Islamic state is dead”.<sup>37</sup> His recent views on globalization, human rights, democracy and the EU integration, that stand at a sharp contrast to his earlier reductionists views display how a post-Islamist has developed a new language engaged in modern debates.

### *Globalization*

Bulac argues that republican modernization project that envisages homogenization of the people, languages, ideas, culture and the life styles against the wishes of the people violates the basic rights of the citizens. Against this globalization poses 'new opportunities'<sup>38</sup> the most important of which is the 'possibility of a non-authoritarian universalism' provided by the constraints of such global concepts like human rights, democracy and participation.<sup>39</sup> Like others the Turkish nation-state under the pressures of global processes is forced to give up some of its sovereignties to the supranational bodies weakening the ability of the state to carry on with its authoritarian modernization project. Bulac finds globalization process that puts tremendous stress over the nation-state limiting the scope and content of its power/authority as a way out from the Kemalist nation-state of Turkey.<sup>40</sup> In this way, he seems to endorse globalization as emancipatory, at least to get rid of the “yoke of the Kemalists state”. On the other hand globalization provides new avenues for those who are suppressed because of their identities, beliefs, ethnic origins now wishing to participate in political processes, to be represented in public sectors, to be able to express their views and identities. Thus people too are in favor of globalization.<sup>41</sup>

Bulac does not endorse a statist economy, closed to the outside world and controlled by the state, but regards opening up national economy to international competition as a must to generate welfare; 'integration with the world economy' is an economic necessity for Bulac.<sup>42</sup> Given his severe criticism of global capitalism an approval of integration into global markets is a significant shift that can not be grounded on Islam, Islamic sensitivities or stand,

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<sup>37</sup> 'Islam devleti projesi cöktü' (The project of an Islamic state has collapsed', interview with Nese Duzel, *Radikal*, 21 Aralık 1999.

<sup>38</sup> A. Bulac, 'Kuresellesmenin tanimsal çerçevesi' (Conceptual Framework of Globalization), *Zaman*, 16/7/2002; Abant Platformu 5, *Kuresellesme*, Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı, İstanbul, 2002, p.90.

<sup>39</sup> Abant Platformu 5, *Kuresellesme* (Globalization), 2002, p.92 and 297.

<sup>40</sup> A. Bulac, 'AB'ye üyelik bir Batılılaşma mı?' (Is the membership in the EU Westernization), *Zaman*, 8 January 2000; Abant Platformu 5, *Kuresellesme*, pp.90-91.

<sup>41</sup> Abant Platformu 5, *Kuresellesme*, p.90.

<sup>42</sup> A. Bulac, 'AB dışı seçeneklerin eleştirisi' (Critique of non-EU options), *Zaman*, 13 March 2002.

but transformative power of globalization that is expected to change established economic and political networks in Turkey.

### *The European Union*

Contrasting the Turkish polity with contemporary trends in Western democracies Bulac finds the Turkish state anachronistic with its emphasis on the nation state in the process of integration into the EU which is a supra-natural structure. The Turkish state does not fit in such a new structuralization of the nation state in a supra-national body-politik. Therefore for Bulac Turkey's EU membership presents a crisis of the Turkish nation-state which is authoritarian, disrespectful for the differences (ethnic and religious) and intolerant.<sup>43</sup>

The EU has competing claims over sovereignty held so dearly by the republican elites and therefore presents an alternative/a rival for the republic's claim for absolute sovereignty.<sup>44</sup> In fact the EU demands a share in sovereignty, not that of the people's but power elite's sovereignty.<sup>45</sup> Thus the republican elites are hesitant because the process requires fundamental reforms in political, administrative, legal and economic systems prevalent in Turkey. The republican paradox of national sovereignty being held and implemented by the monopoly of the state elites is expected to be overcome by disintegrative impact of the EU integration. That is also the very reason for his support for the EU; speeding up the reforms that would eliminate the Kemalist/authoritarian state.<sup>46</sup>

Criticizing the Kemalist/secularist center for not adopting the Copenhagen Political Criteria, set by the EU as a precondition for membership, Bulac argues that 'on the one hand Turkey is pushed to be a Middle Eastern country ruled by repressive measures, on the other internal and *external* dynamics lead it to a direction of more liberties'.<sup>47</sup> Written over the acceptance by the Turkish Parliament of a major political reform bill Bulac likens the reforms undertaken by the government to meet Copenhagen political criteria to the ones introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries under the pressures of the European powers.<sup>48</sup> Looking at Turkish history of democratization Bulac attributes a special importance to "external

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<sup>43</sup> A. Bulac, 'AB ve egmenlik kavrami' (the EU and the concept of sovereignty), *Zaman*, 20 March 2002.

<sup>44</sup> A. Bulac, 'AB tartismasi' (the EU debate), *Zaman*, 19 March 2002.

<sup>45</sup> A. Bulac, 'AB Tartismasi', *Zaman*, 19 March 2002.

<sup>46</sup> A. Bulac, 'Turkiyenin ev odevleri' (Turkey's homeworks), *Zaman*, 16 Feb. 2000.

<sup>47</sup> Emphasis is mine. A. Bulac, 'Uyum Yasalari' (Harmonization laws), *Zaman*, 9 Feb. 2002. Assessing Turkish insistence to start accession negotiations with the EU Bulac finds the reasons the EU put forward for not starting the accession negotiation before December 2004 justified. Referring to democracy, liberties and the rule of law he argues that Turkey had not fulfilled the EU standards and therefore the EU is right in demanding further reforms and insisting to see their implementation. A. Bulac, 'Incinmis Gurur' (A broken honor), *Zaman*, 17 Dec. 2002.

<sup>48</sup>

dynamics" that eased Turkey's march toward democratization.<sup>49</sup> Bulac does not denounce, in contrast to his earlier writings, 'international circumstances/dynamics' as imperialistic, exploitative or crusade-like but a factor positively contributing to the evolution of Turkish democracy. The recent reforms, particularly the one that abolished death penalty and allowed learning and broadcasting in Kurdish for Bulac were taken against the resistance of bureaucratic center with the support of international circumstances, i.e. Turkey's membership quest to the EU.<sup>50</sup> Then he comes to the conclusion that if democracy is needed, desired by "Muslims" they had to view "international dynamics (read it western interference) positively". In this context that traditional attitude of the Islamists and particularly Bulac himself towards the West/western ideas, institutions comes to an end:<sup>51</sup> unable to break the resistance of 'bureaucratic center' on their own without international dynamics they support the EU membership process that forces the Turkish state to change its historical formation which is problematical for the Islamists.<sup>52</sup>

Bulac recognizes that in the past Islamist intellectuals including himself and pro-Islamic political parties like National Salvation Party and the Welfare Party led by Necmeddin Erbakan opposed Turkey's EU membership. They, the Islamic political and intellectual groups, then formed in fact the leading anti-EU (broadly speaking anti-western) political front. But as the country went through the 1990s "the events that turned many people's life into an nightmare led the people to see the EU as a savior".<sup>53</sup> Islamic groups' support for the EU process, Bulac admits, is due to the February 28 measures that brought a wave of pressures over the Islamic political, social and economic networking by which the "muslims" realized that to get a share of welfare and liberties some radical reforms had to be carried out in political, administrative, economic and legal fields that could only be brought about by the EU membership process and the membership itself.<sup>54</sup> The Islamists turned pro-EU simply because they believe that it will do justice to them, their thoughts and life styles according to

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<sup>49</sup> A. Bulac, 'Cumhuriyet ve Demokrasi' (Republic and democracy), *Zaman*, 10 Sept. 2002. On a statement made by Marc Grossman who argued for more democracy and liberties to solve Turkey's problems Bulac asks "are they contrary to the interest of the people of Turkey?". Such an approval would be unthinkable just a few years ago when the Islamists intellectuals would find some hidden plans of the West to destroy or at least control the Islamic world. A. Bulac, 'FP, 312 ve demokrasi' (the Virtue party, 312 and democracy), *Zaman*, 25 March 2000.

<sup>50</sup> The EU membership process itself has a significance for Bulac in bringing about domestic dynamics for reforms. He values the process itself that forces the Turkish state to change its historical formation which is problematical. A. Bulac, '2005 iyidir' (2005 is a good date), *Zaman*, 11 Dec. 2002.

<sup>51</sup> Bulac, in his earlier writings, often referred to pro-western groups, intellectuals and politicians who were despised, denounced, downgraded and accused of collaborating with the west for the exploitation of their own countries. See *Cagdas Kavramlar ve Duzenler*, p. 133, 175-176.

<sup>52</sup> A. Bulac, '2005 iyidir', *Zaman*, 11 Dec. 2002.

<sup>53</sup> A. Bulac, 'Nicin AB' (Why the EU), *Zaman*, 11 Dec. 1999.

<sup>54</sup> A. Bulac, 'Nur topu gibi', *Zaman*, 10 Dec. 2002.

Bulac. "To enjoy basic rights and freedoms, and the rule of law the EU membership is a necessity... We need a state that adheres to the rule of law and respects basic rights and freedoms of its citizens".<sup>55</sup>

Evaluating alternative integration paths for Turkey Bulac strongly argues that only the EU holds the means that would improve the state of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Turkey in a reaction to the secretary general of the National Security Council, General Tuncer Kilinc who, instead of the EU, argued for an alternative that would include Russia and Iran. It was ironic that a Kemalist general holding such a high post suggests a new foreign policy orientation that looks to the East in opposition to the traditional commitment of the Kemalist/republican establishment while an Islamic intellectual criticizes the East option including an integration with the Islamic world, and favors the EU as the only viable direction.<sup>56</sup> The changes in the attitudes of Islamic groups towards the EU and their call for democracy human rights and the rule of law concludes Bulac 'let us see the real opponents of the EU integration; the Kemalist westernizers who will be harmed most'.<sup>57</sup>

#### *Democracy, Human Rights, Liberalism*

Legitimate political regime for Bulac is modern plural democracy that guarantees human rights and the rule of law that neither prescribe intervening in the way people dress (referring to the ban on headscarf) nor impose a particular way of life by the state apparatus and attempt coup, direct or indirect, to enforce such measures.<sup>58</sup> There should be no double standards for Bulac on the exercise of freedom of expression. He notes that 'everybody should be able to express his views disregarding whether they approve us or not'. If their views are wrong or bad they will disappear in time anyway. It is just like the good money/bad money metaphor; good ideas would replace the bad ones. He seems believing in the free market of ideas. More important is that Bulac calls on the Islamic groups to internalize their call for democratic freedoms including freedom of expression.<sup>59</sup>

It is understood from his recent writings that the new Bulac welcomes democracy as a value even if it is brought about by international/western compellence. He favors the political

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<sup>55</sup> A. Bulac, 'Nicin AB', *Zaman*, 11 Dec. 1999. Bulac admitting the change of attitude on the parts of islamists towards the EU also adds that the EU has also changed its policy toward Turkey and even Islam in general. Bulac attributes this change to the acquisition of accurate information about Islam and Islamic groups in recent years that was made possible by proliferating objective research undertaken in the West. A. Bulac, 'AB'yi ne kadar tanıyoruz' (How much we know about the EU), *Zaman*, 26 Oct. 2000.

<sup>56</sup> A. Bulac, 'AB disi secenegin kritigi', *Zaman*, 13 March 2002.

<sup>57</sup> A. Bulac, 'Nicin AB', *Zaman*, 11 Dec. 1999.

<sup>58</sup> A. Bulac, 'AB uyesi musliman Turkiye' (Turkey, muslim and member of the EU), *Zaman*, 6 Jan. 2000.

<sup>59</sup> A. Bulac, 'FP, 312 ve demokrasi', *Zaman*, 25 March 2000.

vis-a-vis the non political forces, i.e. the military that intervened several times directly or indirectly in Turkish politics.<sup>60</sup> No longer does he refer to democracy as a western invention rooted in the unique history of the west but values it as a virtue that enables the people to express themselves; it is something demanded by Turkish people since at least 1950 when Democrat Party won the first competitive free elections in Turkish history.<sup>61</sup>

Bulac tends to approach democratic theory with an eye on the Turkish experience concluding that democracy is lacking in Turkey despite its centuries old claim to westernize its policy in line with Western European model. He explains lack of democracy by reference to the Kemalist notion of republicanism which was used by the Turkish power elite as a discursive tool to exclude and suppress the Islamists as well as other peripheral forces. While republicanism in its essence requires the transfer of power to the people who are seen as equal citizens, those who exercise power in the name of people did not always reflect the will of the people. To make the will of the people effective upon the exercise of power, for Bulac, democratic theory provides such means as participation, representation and provision of basic rights.<sup>62</sup> From this it can be inferred that democracy/democratization is deemed as something good, desired and demanded independent of whether it complies with Islamic notion of governance.

Bulac called on the government to take necessary steps for "harmonization of Turkish legal system with the European standards". Criticizing article 159 and 312 of the Turkish Penal Code he refers to the "European Convention on Human Rights" which does not include articles that restrict freedom of thought and expression. As a candidate country to the EU "Turkey should wholeheartedly reform its political and legal order in accordance with the European standards".<sup>63</sup> This is a radically 'westernized' attitude on the part of Bulac who now criticizes governments for not taking decisive steps into 'westernization' of the legal system, a theme and direction he used to reject as alienation from its own values and civilization. He accused some circles in Turkey of not wanting the scope of freedoms expanded. So he claims to be in favor of basic rights and freedoms all defined not by reference to Islam but modern/secular concepts/terminology against which Bulac set out his intellectual endeavor almost two decades ago by writing his book *Modern Concepts and Orders* in search of an Islamic alternative.

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<sup>60</sup> For the role of the military as an autonomous actor in Turkish politics see Umit Cizre Sakallioğlu military and ...the new one.

<sup>61</sup> A. Bulac, 'Cumhuriyet ve Demokrasi', *Zaman*, 10 Sept. 2002.

<sup>62</sup> A. Bulac, 'AB tartismasi', *Zaman*, 19 March 2002.

<sup>63</sup> A. Bulac, 'Uyum Yasalari', *Zaman*, 9 Feb. 2002.

Terms like plural democracy, multi-culturalism, human rights, the European Convention of Human Rights or even the Council of Europe and the EU are told in recent years without any 'historically unique to the West' or a genealogical approach searching for 'Western/Euro-centric' origins. However this old habit visits him from time to time as in the case in which he refers to the historical context of the formation of the state-religion relations in the west described as fundamentally different from that of Turkey.

But overall in the recent writings of Ali Bulac the uniqueness of the Islamic communities/civilization/world view has been replaced by the universalism of the values like human rights, plural democracy and the rule of law, in a way in which the post-Islamist position is displayed.

## **Conclusion**

The Islamists in their search for a polity in which they could survive have ironically realized the effectiveness of the linkages between Turkey and the west established over the years of westernization and western-oriented foreign policy. They have encountered with a new west where numerous human rights NGOs, the European Union, European Court of Human Rights and individual states are critical of the level of democracy and record of human rights in Turkey. At this juncture the Islamists have found themselves in the same side with the westerners demanding further democratization and guarantees for civil and political rights in Turkey. The effect of this was significant; for the first time the Islamists have had a common cause with the West concerning the need for political reform in Turkey. They thought that transformation of an authoritarian regime into a democratic one was in their interest, and realized that the west with its call for democracy, human rights and pluralism could be a possible partner in bringing down the authoritarian tendencies in the state apparatus. Instead of capturing and Islamizing the state through mass mobilization under the banner of a political party they have come to prioritize democratization of the state by all means including western interference through the EU process that would enable the continuation of social and economic networking of Islamic groups, and guarantee respect for freedom of religion and recognition of the difference.

Intellectual representatives of Islamism too seem to have understood that speaking the language of plurality, rights and democracy in current domestic and international (read it western) circumstances would present a powerful and legitimate alternative to the Kemalist



establishment within the secular setting of Turkey and the western world.<sup>64</sup> Therefore instead of presenting an Islamic alternative to secular/Kemalist regime the post-Islamists propose a secular/modern/western alternative out of conviction that the Kemalist order can hardly be approved by modern political values, principles and institutions. It seems that a new alliance out of circumstances and historical coincidences is in the making between the post-Islamists, both their intellectual and political representatives, and the modern/western concepts as well as the Western world at large.

Then a fundamental question emerges; what is to be left of Islamism? Since the rejection of the west and westernization in both political and intellectual domains were the basis on which modern Islamist identity was built the rapprochement with the west/modernity shakes its very fundamentals. To escape from an ideological state the post-Islamists now see the integration into the western institutions like the EU and the European Court of Human Rights as a leverage. This stand however puts the whole Islamist project in question; once integrated fully in the EU the possibility of not only maintaining an already existent ideological state (the Kemalist regime) but also setting up another ideological state anew (the Islamic state) would be highly reduced. In other words the dynamics of globalization in general or the EU integration in particular, expected to dissolve the Kemalist state, would not permit an Islamic state either. Therefore by asking the help of globalization and the EU integration to get rid of the Kemalist state the post-Islamists effectively give up their Islamic utopia too.

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<sup>64</sup> Y. Akdoğan, *Muhafazakar Demokrasi*; Y. Akdoğan, 'Degisimin ve Donusumun Teorik Zemini', *Bilgi ve Dusunce*, Vol.1, No.4, January 2003, pp.12-14; A. Harputlu, 'Turkiye'de Islamciligin Donusumleri ve Yeni Politik Durum', *Bilgi ve Dusunce*, Vol.1, No.4, January 2003, pp.15-18; A. Harputlu, 'Islamcilarin Bati Tahayyulu', *Bilgi ve Dusunce*, Vol.1, No.1, October, 2002, pp. 23-27.