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The Case of the Turkish
Religious Right**

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Globalisation as an Agent of Party Ideological Change: The Case of the Turkish Religious Right

Hakan Köni

Abstract

This paper investigates the impact of globalisation on the transformations in the ideological orientation of the Turkish religious right. Studies on such changes often trace the causes of party change to three different variables, these being: leadership change, dominant party coalition change, and change in the party environment. As an example of change in party environment is arguably globalisation - which could be identified in short as economic and political liberalisation, democratisation, multilateralism, and intensification of individualism - bringing pressure to bear for party change. While the Turkish religious right was a substantially conservative movement in the past, thanks to a growing interest in economic development and prosperity, political rights and liberties offered by globalisation, it has acquired considerable liberal tendencies particularly in the second half of the 1990s.

Introduction

It is commonly argued by specialists of Turkish politics that the Turkish religious right has gradually abandoned its uncompromising ideological stance, particularly in the second half of the 1990s. The change is often attributed to a multiplicity of factors among which we could cite the pressures applied by the secularist state elites,¹ prevention of Necmettin Erbakan from carving a durable role for himself in national politics, the rise of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as a credible Islamist leader,² the emergence of a moderate group in the movement,³ and of course the impact of globalisation.⁴ Globalisation is argued to be associated with the process of change with its contribution to the birth of a prosperity-seeking middle class of entrepreneurs, intellectuals,⁵ and civil society organisations; and most importantly with its channelling of the movement towards the adoption and accommodation of those global values which promise greater prosperity, rights and liberties.⁶

The main goal of this paper then is to scrutinise the Turkish religious right's embrace of mainstream global norms and institutions as agents of ideological moderation. An in-depth empirical research is conducted for this reason covering the examination of the publications, party programmes, interviews and speeches, newspaper reports, produced by or on the Turkish religious right from National View parties of 1970s, 1980s and 1990s to the rise of the Justice and Development Party until the mid-2000s. The analysis is conducted with the help of a set of theoretical tools to explain the causes of changes that the parties experience, particularly those which help explain the influence of environmental factors on party ideological change. The main argument of the paper is that while aiming to give a substantially 'Islamic' shape to Turkish political and socioeconomic life, in the second half of the 1990s the Turkish religious



right began the process of incorporating into its ideological profile such global norms and institutions as democracy, rule of law, secularism, human rights, gender rights, market economy, multilateralism, and ultimately to embrace global integration. While this change was often linked with the goal of maximising the benefits from the rights, liberties and wealth offered by the processes of globalisation, it was also the result of a process of learning that the Turkish religious right has experienced in its assessment of global norms and institutions.

Defining the Nature and Causes of Party Change

Harmel and Janda describe party change as “any variation, alteration or modification in how parties are organized, what human and material resources they can draw upon, what they stand for and what they do”; understanding it more generally as any change in party organisation, programme, goals and strategies.⁷ Janda similarly studies the processes of party change with a look at the variations in six specific factors which include political tactics, organisational structure, issue orientation, organisational identity, goal orientation, and organisational death.⁸

As to the causes that produce party change, a very rich inventory of variables is offered. Often the changes in a party’s behaviour and policies is argued to be a product of changes in one or some of three variables which include leadership change, dominant coalition change, and environmental change. Leadership change, first, is believed to carry a significant potential for party change for the reason that different leaders could have differences in their abilities, personal characteristics, and their orientation and willingness to engage with issues, and thus transition of party leadership from one person to another is commonly accepted to bring about many changes.⁹ Gilmore takes the differences in party leadership for granted and argues that leadership change stands as a critical occasion in the lifespan of parties for the reconsideration of the party agenda, past strategies, and future plans.¹⁰ Thus Harmel *et. al.*, based on their examination of a large pool of cases, maintain that leadership change could produce party change no matter how a party performs in elections, and that change could be more substantial if the party has a strong leadership structure.¹¹

Concerning dominant coalition change, secondly, Harmel and Janda, by making an analysis of some selected party change examples, detect that party change could occur only with an imposition from the dominant coalition.¹² Similarly, Harmel and Tan argue that for all the efforts that such large organisations as political parties resist change, there must be a power group that facilitates change.¹³ Based on a study of seven cases of dominant party coalition change, they observe that if there is an intense factional rivalry originating from some ideological, strategic and organisational preferences, and if the traditional party faction is defeated, it is very likely to see a substantial party change. And they maintain that if dominant coalition change is accompanied with leadership change, then party change could occur even more substantially.¹⁴

As to the environmental change, thirdly, which could be defined as any change originating from the exterior of the party, a sophisticated analysis is offered by Harmel and Janda with regard to its influence on party change.¹⁵ Harmel and Janda examine the effect of the environmental change on party change with regard to the abilities of the parties to achieve their primary goals.¹⁶ Accordingly, for parties identified as vote-maximising, a major decline in the electoral share of the party is observed as the main environmental change stimulating party change.¹⁷ For office-maximising parties, furthermore, the leading external stimulus could be anything that impedes the party’s participation in the government. For policy/ideology-advocating parties, thirdly,



which are distinguished with their concern for policy purity, external stimuli may include major ideological transformations in the world, domestic constitutional changes, globalisation, a rise in environmental concerns, among many others.¹⁸ And finally, for intraparty-democracy maximising parties which are concerned with a broad representation of the views of the party members, changes in party membership numbers, change in the character of party members (e.g., from agrarian to industrial classes), or general changes in the views of party members could be the type of changes that could produce party change.¹⁹

Environmental Change as a Cause of Party Ideological Change

In a comprehensive study of over 25 parties, Harmel and Janda try to explore the set of environmental factors which apply and impact on the prospects of party ideological extremism.²⁰ Grouping parties as rightist and leftist in ideological terms, Harmel and Janda contend that party ideological extremism is closely linked with the absence or presence of a number of factors. These factors include the nature of the electoral system (correlation value: -0.33),²¹ number of political parties (0.50),²² possibility of rule by a coalition government (0.50), degree of regime opposition (-0.12), affluence (-0.20) and sectorial inequality (0.32).²³

In compliance with Harmel and Janda's findings regarding the first two variables, which is the nature of the electoral system and the number of political parties, Downs argues that parties are indeed all motivated to maximise their votes and that is often the only thing they consider when the party ideology is formulated.²⁴ Accordingly, if a party senses that it would lose in the elections, it quickly reformulates its ideology to increase its chances in the next elections. Yet Robertson maintains that parties cannot move in an all-pragmatist fashion having the goal to enter the parliament with the highest ratio of seats only.²⁵ A party's chances to enter the parliament also depend on its ability to maintain ideological consistency towards the public and to follow its promises when it is in the government.²⁶ Classifying parties as mainstream and niche parties, Adams *et. al.* argue, based on research conducted over eight European party systems, that niche parties like the communists and extreme nationalists are less responsive to shifts in their electoral share whether it changes positively or negatively and that they often get penalised by the electorate when they change their policy programmes while the picture is often the reverse for mainstream parties.²⁷

The correlation value of 0.50 measured between the possibility of rule by a coalition and the level of party ideological extremism tells us that the higher the possibility of coalition, the more extreme the parties could become no matter what rate of the votes they obtain. Accordingly, major parties will need the support of minor parties to establish a government, minor parties could survive with all their ideological extremism. This proposition is contested, however. Lipset and Rokkan, for instance, argue that the possibility of a rule by coalition could rather bear a moderating effect because even if there could be a possibility of coalition, minor parties with less ideological programmes are more likely to be approached. According to Lipset and Rokkan, this was the most important reason behind the moderation of Western labour parties in the 20th century.²⁸

Regarding Harmel and Janda's last two variables, affluence and sectorial inequality, a parallel study draws attention to a similar set of findings. In a research covering over 65 societies and 75% of the world's population, Inglehart and Baker observe a remarkable correlation between degree of economic development and adoption of liberal values. They argue that as societies transition from agrarian to industrial, as the income level reaches above a certain level, and as



the income disparity declines, they acquire a strong tendency to adopt liberal, rational, tolerant and trusting values. Economic development is seen to bring about a rise in the level of education, and improvements in communication technologies too enable the people to become more knowledgeable about the ways that things are done in other parts of the world, which tends to lead them to adopt features that appear more efficient and effective. This in turn facilitates a process of moderation, affinity and sympathy among the people, causing a decline in the appeal of ideological extremism sponsored by parties and other political groups.²⁹

In line with this, Wilson maintains that as a result of tremendous socio-economic changes taking place after the Second World War, which included prolonged economic prosperity and growth, decline in the intensity of social class distinctions, communications revolution, etc., parties have been compelled to minimise their ideological profile for reasons of survival.³⁰ Ideologies were losing their appeal because societies were now more in favour of broad-based social and political consensus. In line with this, Mair maintains that the Democratic Party in the United States and Fianna Fáil in Ireland underwent a remarkable change in reaction to rising national wealth and income levels. While these parties were characterised as the parties of the poor in the past, they began to pay more attention to the demands and the votes of the affluent. For Mair, the electoral success of the Likud Party in Israel in 1977 was the result of the failure of the Labour Party to adapt to changing socioeconomic conditions which included in the Israeli case the increasing ratio of Afro-Asian people in the population, changing age structure and growing importance of the cities.³¹

Globalisation as a Driver

Defining globalisation is not an easy task. In the realm of economics, to start with, globalisation is often understood as a process which reinforces economic liberalism. In the domestic sphere, the pursuit of globalising trends often means the minimisation of the state and the transfer of key economic activities to the free forces of the market. And in the international sphere, it is generally understood as the removal of barriers against international trade to facilitate cross-border mobility of goods, services, technology and capital.³² The main driving force behind economic globalisation is of course the production of wealth. But the main agent of economic globalisation, trade, is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, it is one of the oldest and most enduring human occupations. But it was in the course of the last century that globalisation really took hold and in the 20th century the volume of trade increased so substantially as to render it an even more important phenomenon. Trade has been easier than the developments achieved in science and technology which have led to increases in the type and variety of goods being traded as well as the vehicles to transport them between distant regions.³³

Economic globalisation was greatly facilitated with the establishment of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank after the Second World War with their major goals to minimise barriers to international trade such as tariffs, quotas, and fees, and with the mandate to correct international and domestic market failures. This process accelerated with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its state-led economic model, and of course the end of the Cold War. These important obstacles to economic globalisation were removed in one swift move in 1991.³⁴

In politics, secondly, we can generally talk about two different trends of globalisation - one in international politics and the other in domestic politics. In international politics, globalisation is often said to refer to a process of strengthening multilateralism among countries. It is argued



that countries are strongly motivated to cooperate in regional and international agreements because of an entrenched and enduring set of problems whose solution is commonly agreed to require international cooperation. Among these problems one could cite terrorism, proliferation of WMDs, drug trafficking, organised crime, human trafficking, environmental disasters, and poverty.³⁵ In domestic politics, secondly, the term globalisation is generally understood as the widespread adoption of the norms and institutions of democracy, human rights, rule of law, secularism, good governance, and gender rights. As in international relations, pragmatism appears as a leading motivation here for it promises political participation, rights and liberties for the people as opposed to totalitarianism and dictatorships.³⁶

Political and economic globalisation could occasionally be facilitated with foreign intervention and pressures. It is well known that liberalisation of the developing world was a leading foreign policy goal of the US after the end of the Second World War. Since the mid-1950s, most countries have encountered pressures from the US, and from the EU and other Western actors too, to introduce reforms at home as a precondition for economic, diplomatic and military support. Wallerstein argues that what we call globalisation is little more than a relationship of dependency by which the West exploits the rest for its own development, leaving the rest in a cycle of underdevelopment. Accordingly, benefits offered by globalisation could sometimes be ensured with the service of the countries to the interests of major powers only.³⁷ These are ripe for the discussion in the Middle East of course, not just for it being seen as the main reason for the war in Iraq, but also for the West's conditional support for the democratic revolts in the region.

In sociological terms, finally, the term globalisation often denotes the replacement of collective, authoritarian, and close social structures with individualist, pluralist, democratic and open ones as often enjoyed in the West. Social globalisation is thought to be facilitated through the widespread use of communications networks (television, radio, telephone, internet, etc.) which shorten the distances and bring the people closer. Societies get introduced to an intense process of observation and dialogue and they often adopt those values that appear to be more emancipatory and liberalising.³⁸ The background of some developments could lead to a similar trend in cultural terms too, contributing to the emergence of cultures of synthesis among countries. As a result, dress styles, cuisines, social manner, festivals all come to share notable commonalities.³⁹

Turkey's Globalisation

From the establishment of the Turkish Republic to the end of the Second World War and transition to democracy in 1950s, the Turkish economy was characterised by a substantially state-led regulated economy. Due to the lack of a developed industrial sector and a powerful entrepreneurial class, state regulation and control was deemed to be a necessity in the management of the economy. With such factors as the Great Depression in 1929 and then the Second World War in 1939, state control grew substantially in Turkey.⁴⁰ That was the case until after the War and the arrival of a new force in Turkish politics. The Democrat Party which came to power in 1950 and held office for the next 10 years had developed plans to restructure the Turkish economy according to liberal economic principles. The party had trust in the potential of economic liberalism to generate wealth while also expecting to benefit from the funds provided by the US via the Marshall Plan. The funds provided by the United States were invested in agricultural mechanisation to produce a substantial growth in the volume of agricultural outputs. With the rise in the prices of agricultural products, the DP government



was able to show remarkable progress in the economic development of the country in the 1950s.⁴¹

Liberalisation of the economy had its drawbacks, however. The economy was now more susceptible to fluctuations in world markets and Turkey was exposed to serious crises from time to time with a rising volume of public debt. The most serious crisis was the 1973 oil price rises which was prompted by the Arab-Israeli War of 1973 during which the price of the oil quadrupled in less than two years. Turkey's economic crisis was exacerbated with the Iranian revolution which added the price of oil to well over the 1975 price. As a consequence, the Turkish economy entered a long period of recession, and with unsuccessful devaluations introduced, the economy was in ruins.⁴²

The 1980 military intervention in Turkey brought an economist, Turgut Özal, to the attention of the public. A champion of free market economies, Özal was appointed by the military-guided government as the minister of economy. Özal would be provided with greater powers for leading economic reforms when he became prime minister in 1983. In an attempt to boost the economy, Özal decided to replace the long-followed import substitution strategy with an export-led growth strategy. He put in place a major campaign to privatise publicly-owned economic enterprises, introduce flexible exchange and interest rates, facilitate capital mobility, and promote competition. The process was further invigorated with the repatriation of immigrant workers and their investments in Turkey. During Özal's premiership, Turkey achieved remarkable economic development, and major rises in the volume of foreign investments which in turn boosted the country's manufacturing sector.⁴³

In the same period, the state monopoly on media outlets and communications - television, radio - was ended and the country's universities and schools became exposed to a great communication revolution which in turn fuelled an educational revolution in the country's leap forward. This period witnessed a drastic surge in the number of private media corporations, educational institutions, and civil society organisations. The consumption of television, radio, cinema and video products rose tremendously to be further multiplied by the arrival of the internet and mobile telephony in the 1990s. These developments were instrumental in the familiarisation of Turkish society with Western approaches to dealing with political, social and economic issues of the day. In a sentence, Turks were now able to better observe and understand how the people benefited from such norms and institutions as democracy, human rights, equality, gender rights, individualism, with a greatly enhanced degree of awareness.⁴⁴

Turkish Religious Right in Transition

National View Ideology

The National View⁴⁵ was a highly religious conservative movement in ideological terms.⁴⁶ The scale of its conservatism can be demonstrated through an analysis of its views in a number of policy areas, such as foreign policy, economy, education, and law. In foreign policy, the movement was opposed to the establishment of close ties with the US, UN, the European Community, NATO, IMF and similar states and organisations in the West. The reason for that was generally the idea supported by Erbakan and his close associates that the West was primarily concerned to promote Christian and Jewish interests often to the detriment of the Muslims. It was believed that the West, and particularly the US, was secretly supporting the



Serbs, Armenians (against the Azeris in 1991), PKK with a goal to weaken, divide or occupy the Muslim lands.⁴⁷

For the National View, the Customs Union and European Economic Community were structures and institutions used by the Christian European states to reinforce the unity and cooperation among the Christians. Turkey's integration process with Europe would then be a process of Christianisation of the Muslim country. And closer cooperation with Christian Europe would also weaken Turkish sovereignty and independence.⁴⁸ The ideal, from their perspective, was the development and deepening of the ties with the Muslim world. Religious and historical commonalities were a precondition for the establishment of international associations for this camp. Turkey, therefore, had to lead the establishment of an Islamic UN, economic community and military partnership.⁴⁹

In terms of the economy, the movement was in support of a kind of Islamist corporatism. The state was given a very substantial role in the economy to serve as the leading agent of economic development. The state would prepare the necessary infrastructure for the development of a powerful industrial sector. Turkey would then somehow move up from an agricultural to an industrial society, as facilitated through substantial state involvement in the economy. While trying to carry out this goal, the people were expected to assume a feeling of responsibility, morality, service and honesty. The economy would not be left in the hands of a group of profit-seeking individuals, as in the Western free market economies. The state would play an important role in eliminating income disparity too. The source of many illnesses ravaging societies in our century was the free market, in their view, with the habits of extravagance, luxury, self-preservation and gratification that they bring with them. The interest, the sine-qua-none of free market economies, was an institution of oppression and it had to be removed.⁵⁰

In politics, generally, the movement often argued that Islamic political ideals were much superior to their counterparts in the West with its style of government, laws, rights, and liberties. Islamic law had been applied for over centuries and its virtues were proven. They were the source of many great Islamic empires and civilisations. The movement was thus on occasions propagating the Islamisation of the state and legal system. On 13th January 1991, in one of those extreme but still rare cases, Necmettin Erbakan was quoted as saying:

If you don't serve the Welfare Party, your prayers are not accepted. One cannot be a Muslim without serving the Welfare... This party is an army of Jihad... If you are a Muslim, you have to be a soldier of this army...⁵¹

The movement was at least in favour of the introduction of a multiple system of law by which the religious people would be allowed to benefit from judicial services according to Islamic law while the secular laws would be preserved for the others.⁵²

Education of religion and morality occupied an important place in the National View agenda. According to Erbakan, Imam-Hatip Schools had to be improved in number and capabilities. Every university had to incorporate faculties of theology and students studying at normal public schools had to be given greater hours of education in the study of religion and morality. For the National View, morality, respect, dignity, integrity and wider traditional (conservative) values were important both for normative and pragmatist reasons and education was the most important instrument for their transmission to the generations.⁵³



The Welfare Party: From Government to Its Closure

A substantially modernist approach evolved with the introduction of the Welfare Party (WP) to government. The WP was the victorious party of December 1995 general elections with 21.38% of the votes. To form the government, it had to agree on a coalition with the True Path Party, however, which had taken 19.18% of the votes. Once in government, facing the realities and the necessities of rule at first hand, the party rapidly adjusted its perspectives to take stock of the situation on the ground.⁵⁴ In foreign policy, thus, an attempt to change the orientation of the country from the West to the Muslim East was deemed to be counterproductive. The party began to appreciate the potential contribution of West-dominant international trade, finance and investment to the Turkish economy. The import of technological and industrial infrastructure was an equally important necessity. To this end, the WP's perspectives on such matters as EU membership, strategic relations with the United States, cooperation with such global economic organisations like IMF and World Bank was fully revised.

The turn of the party towards the West was also manifest in the emergence of favourable thinking about Western political values and principles such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law. These values and principles were now being seen as part of a universal culture which transcended religious considerations to which all countries had to pay respect. Turkey's NATO membership and strategic partnership with the US was critical in this context which had to be preserved without any change.

In February 1997, thus, the Minister of State Abdullah Gül joined in an official visit to the US during which he emphasised the friendly and multidimensional nature of Turkish-American relations and his hope to improve them further.⁵⁵ Hearing US officials' support for and belief in democracy, pluralism, free and fair elections, and open society, at first hand Gül openly expressed his happiness to believe in the same political values.⁵⁶ Accordingly, the WP remained only critical of some secularist dimensions of public life in Turkey but only because they were inhibiting freedom of belief and conscience contrary to what was the case in the US.⁵⁷

Further to this common understanding of the potential US contribution to Turkey's political and economic development, the government showed deference to a number of warnings and advice by the US officials. Accordingly, for instance, Turkey was expected to downgrade its relations with Iran.⁵⁸ American officials expressed their concerns about religious radicalism in Turkey too, stating that Turkey would be accepted in the Western community only if it remained secular. In a meeting between US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and deputies of EU Commission in February 1997, the deputies reported that the meeting was held "to emphasize the importance given by the USA and the EU to secular Turkey, to express the rising concerns against the problems".⁵⁹

In his visit, Gül expressed the resolution of the Turkish government to become a member of the EU. In response to concerns that Turkey was slowly moving away from the West, Gül said that "This concern is groundless. If there is such a concern, let Turkey become an EU state immediately".⁶⁰ The desire of the party to lead Turkey into EU membership was better understood with Gül's warnings to veto NATO's expansion attempts in case of a motivation by EU to close the gates to Turkey.⁶¹ Gül's attempts were supported by Erbakan too for he was also now emphasising the importance of establishing an atmosphere of understanding and communication with the US. In their view, America was a global power, and Turkey must not omit this factor in formulating its domestic and foreign policy.⁶²



The Israel policy of the party also became surprisingly flexible. Pressure from the military was only one of the reasons that could explain this change. Equally influential was the pressures applied by the US. The government was advised by the US to maintain friendly relations with Israel or to risk the loss of US economic, political and military support. In its demand for advanced US military and technological items, the US sometimes urged Turkey to buy them through Israel to consolidate Turkish-Israeli friendly relations.⁶³ Apart from these asymmetric calculations, the idea of benefitting from Israeli intelligence, particularly against the PKK also had some impact on the development of relations which had proved very useful indeed as it was seen in the capture of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999.⁶⁴ The government was encouraged to approach Israel for one more reason: to benefit from the influence of the Jewish lobby in America to solicit favourable US decisions about Turkey.⁶⁵ For all these reasons, Gül indicated that WP was certainly not an enemy of Israel.⁶⁶

When the WP was closed on 16th January 1998, the leading party member Bülent Arınç, while referring to some careless actions committed by the party, explained the plan of the reformists like himself to establish a new party closer to the centre and open to the world. The new party would cherish democracy and human rights and it would not try to monopolise religion.⁶⁷

The Virtue Party

Established on 17th December 1997 by Ismail Alptekin as a precaution, the Virtue Party (VP) quickly gathered all the members of the WP in its organisation. The closure of the WP did not mean that its elected representatives would abandon politics. Apart from Erbakan and a number of other party members who were banned from politics, all the rest moved en masse into the VP. The modernist approach taking form during the service of the WP in government acquired a more solid shape in VP's policy perspectives. As soon as things settled down, a team of party members were given to the task of formulating that drew clear differences with the traditional National View line. It was stated in the outset that the VP would not follow the oft-promoted Just Order⁶⁸ and National View ideas and the priority of the party would be democracy, human rights and the rule of law.⁶⁹

In the first party congress held in May 1998, Recai Kutan was elected as the new party leader after a fierce competition with Abdullah Gül. The more popular Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was not a candidate for he was serving a prison sentence imposed on him by the Constitutional Court for 'violating secularism'. Erdoğan and Gül were the leaders of the reformist coalition together with Bülent Arınç in the VP with their calls for a more democratic and liberal party.

The party programme was introduced by Kutan with a slogan of "change". Kutan was saying that "We don't use the concept of Just Order. It has been deleted. Just Order was an academic debate indeed". Accordingly, even Erbakan had not tried to put it into action when he was the prime minister.⁷⁰ For Kutan, what was required was the transfer of democracy, human rights and freedoms to Turkey, for it was such matters that had made the West superior.⁷¹ The necessity of this process of adaptation was explained as follows by Gül:

It is inevitable to have such vivid political discussions in our country for we are introduced to a rapid process of change together with the world... By time and experience, people learn to think more realistically and in a healthy way. It is without question that - as the leaders of societies - the political parties, politicians and thinkers cannot stay outside of this development... The relationship between politics and



religion must be limited to measures taken for freedom of religion and religious education.⁷²

In the party programme, it was indicated that the party was in support of economic liberalism. The major goal of the party in the economy would be the minimisation of the role of the state, promotion of entrepreneurialism and foreign investment, reduction of taxes and privatisation.⁷³ In line with this, Kutan stated that: “We are not a party isolated from its environment. We are in favour of the freedom of enterprise”.⁷⁴ Arınc was similarly pressing for liberal reforms: there was a need to reformulate the economic policy of the movement. The Just Order discourse sounded well in rhetoric but it was very difficult to put it into practice.⁷⁵ The difficulty of removing interest from the economy was recognised by Kutan also. Kutan indicated that “The economic system in hand is programmed according to an economy of interest. It is not possible to change it. An interest-based economy can remain, but there could be a space for interest-free economic applications together with it”.⁷⁶

EU membership was also given a priority in the VP party programme. The notion of the EU as a Christian club, Jewish tool or a contemporary type of imperialism was abandoned.⁷⁷ The reason for this change was explained by Kutan as follows:

Circumstances are changing in the world. Conditions of the day are not the same as those in the past. We have made an assessment according to the conditions of the day and we revised our old EU policy. We now say that Turkey must enter the EU.⁷⁸

The US was given a special importance in VP foreign policy. In recognition of the US prominence in world politics, Arınc went so far as to say that they would not do politics without taking the US into account as a global power but also because of its advocacy of global political values.⁷⁹ In line with this, while in a visit to the US, Kutan emphasised how important democracy was for the VP. Accordingly, the VP was certainly in support of secularism but Turkey had to take some lessons from secularist applications in the US which were liberating rather than repressive. While meeting with various Jewish lobbies, Kutan indicated that the VP was in favour of improved relations with Israel as well.⁸⁰

The Justice and Development Party

Despite all the care demonstrated by the VP to shun its old Islamist image and the ideological profile of the movement, the party was still accused of violating secularist ideals and principles as its predecessor, the WP, had done. The party was taken to court and the case starting in May 1999 took two years until June 2001 to complete. The outcome: the Constitutional Court ruled in favour of the closure of the VP. After the closure of the party, the intraparty splits emerged, leading to the establishment of two new parties. While the traditionalists led by Kutan united in a party named as *Saadet Partisi* (Felicity Party), the reformists led by Gül and Arınc established *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party), later to be headed by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

The very popular Erdoğan was an active member of religious conservative movements since the 1970s. He was a member of the National Turkish Student Union known for its opposition to communism and Zionism. In 1976, he became the head of the Istanbul youth branch of the party. In 1984, he was appointed as the party head in Beyoğlu to be promoted as the party head of Istanbul in 1985. In 1994, Erdoğan was elected as the Municipal Governor of Istanbul



where he had built much of his reputation and credibility with his distinguished service to Istanbul.⁸¹

Gathering all the reformists in its organisation, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) came up with a programme in greater deference to global socio-political and economic values. It was frequently indicated that the party would be a resilient proponent and protector of democracy, human rights, rule of law, gender rights and market economy at home, with a goal to spread these values to its near abroad as well. The major tenants of its foreign policy were specified as multilateralism, multidimensionality, liberalisation, and regional and global integration.⁸² These were the set of ideal norms that had to be adopted and respected by all world countries. These were indeed the core of a global political culture which incited the world communities to act in cooperation and partnership.⁸³

In September 2000, Erdoğan said that, “I am behind a campaign for a new formation devoted to the development of a new political mentality and new approaches to domestic and international problems of our country”.⁸⁴ In Erdoğan’s words, Turkey was in need of an “intellectual change”. The new formation that he was advocating would lead to an awakening of Turkey to recapture its past glorious civilisation.⁸⁵ Erdoğan indicated that radicalism was not the appropriate response to dealing with problems, these had to be dealt in a peaceful way.⁸⁶ In line with this, Erdoğan stressed that they had put off the National View dress and advised the party members to forget that programme. He went on to say:

There is no space in JDP for political and ideological ghosts which shadow the horizon of the people or for unrealistic political and ideological dreams... It is not possible for ideological considerations or shallow world views to find space in JDP.⁸⁷

Gül expressed in similar terms the irresistibility of global trends.⁸⁸ Despite all the changes, Gül was still critical of VP policies. Gül was saying that attempts to make politics with a religious discourse were more harmful than beneficial. Political parties were not instruments of teaching and spreading religion. Gül was portraying himself as well as Erdoğan as rational, realist and modernist politicians. Dervish lodge-like parties where members leave their shoes in front of the doors of the party centres had to be got rid of.⁸⁹

Thanks to advances in science and technology, people were brought closer together to contribute to the emergence of a global culture. Relations between societies were now more closely defined with trust, cooperation, interdependence and interest. Elements of cultures inhibiting the progress of societies had to be abandoned and those of them promoting the above processes were to be brought to the forefront.⁹⁰ In line with this, Gül argued that the JDP was established to prove that “a Muslim society is capable of change and renovation to adapt to the necessities of the age while preserving its traditions and identity”.⁹¹

In foreign policy, multilateralism was to be at the core of the party’s outlook. It was believed that the economic and political progress of the country was dependent on the ability to work in cooperation and partnership with other countries.⁹² That was also the key to the resolution of a list of problems troubling the countries with a global reach. The type of problems identified by JDP deputies included terrorism, proliferation of WMDs, environmental disasters, organised crime, drug trafficking and human trade. The trans-border character of these problems meant that the countries were supposed to act in coordination for their resolution and the JDP was prepared for that.⁹³



The motivation to improve relations with the US was also preserved by the JDP. Turkey would maintain its military alliance with the US, keep its membership to NATO, but also augment relations in the political, diplomatic and economic domains.⁹⁴ The two countries were said to share common views on the contemporary political and economic values, and they jointly encouraged others to adopt them, particularly those in the Middle East and Eurasia. In doing this, the JDP was also expecting greater support from the IMF and the US government to help Turkey recover from its structural economic difficulties.⁹⁵

In line with this, the JDP undertook a major mission in the Middle East to introduce reforms in the areas of democracy, human rights, rule of law, good governance, gender rights and the enhancement of free market economies.⁹⁶ JDP was particularly pleased to receive US endorsement of Turkey serving as a model and partner country for this purpose with its ability to reconcile Islam and contemporary political values.⁹⁷ Regarding such strategic issues as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the party expressly supported the implementation of the 'Road Map' prepared by the Quartet. The party was also willing to play a mediator role in the process between Israel and the neighbouring Arab countries. For the JDP, the resolution of the Palestinian issue was a key to regional and global peace.⁹⁸

Conclusion

Political parties are argued to be conservative organisations that resist change. Only a change in a number of categories – party leadership, dominant coalition, and party environment – is said to produce party change. Taking its guidance from the studies devoted to the analysis of the impact of changes in party environment on party ideological change, this paper has explored how economic liberalism, democratisation, political liberalisation and multilateralism, globalisation in short, generate a strong tendency on the part of political organisations like political parties to change their ideological appeal. The reason behind this tendency often appears to be pragmatic: the search for greater wealth, political participation, rights, liberties, and domestic and international peace. Sometimes for concerns to maximise their electoral gains and sometimes because they also learn and adapt to changing circumstances, political parties could also reformulate their ideological profile.

It has been argued in this paper that the above concerns have been very influential in the change of the ideological profile of the Turkish religious right. Until the mid-1990s, the Turkish religious right was a characteristically conservative movement. It supported a kind of Islamic corporatism in the economy, introduction of Islamic norms in public life, greater disciplinary and moral measures in the society, minimisation of relations with the West and integration with the Islamic world. With the country getting economically more developed, channels of communication strengthened with the West and the benefits of globalisation becoming more apparent, the movement recast its political line towards a more liberal one. From the introduction of the WP into the government in 1996 to the establishment of the VP in 1998 and JDP in 2001, the movement has been in a trend of increasingly greater support for global norms and institutions, such as economic liberalism, democratisation, human rights, the rule of law, and multilateralism.

While focusing on the impact of globalisation on the change of the Turkish religious right, the paper does not reject the importance of other variables in the equation. And, in fact, for many scholars, the pressures of the state elites were more influential than any other on the process. To illustrate, the National Order Party led by Erbakan was closed down in 1971 by the



military-led government on account of violating secularism. The successive National Salvation Party was again closed down in 1980 by the military for the same reason. The WP established in 1985 was first forced by the military to resign from the government in 1997 and then closed down by the Constitutional Court in 1998 with the charge of being a hotbed of anti-secular activities. In addition to that, the party leader, Erbakan, was prohibited from engaging in politics. The successor party, the VP, led by Kutun, was also brought to the court with the charge of violating the constitution. It too was closed down in 2001. The latest JDP has not been immune to the attacks of the secularists either, for it too has been brought to court twice. Though the JDP was not closed down, half of its budget was cut. This has meant that the members of the movement have had to be careful about the sensitivities of the state elites so as to avoid similar problems occurring again.⁹⁹

The rise of Erdoğan was not less of an important factor in the process. Compared to Erbakan, Erdoğan is often portrayed as a more democratic, open, pragmatist and intelligent person. Erdoğan has had a very good sense of the developments taking place in the world and has proved to be quick in reformulating the party profile accordingly. For Erdoğan, democracy, human rights, rule of law, secularism, economic liberalism, minimal state role were more ideal and productive compared to what was defended by the movement previously. Erdoğan has also proved to be very successful in persuading the masses to his ideas by also appealing to the concerns of the centre-right to help the electoral share of his party increase substantially. Erdoğan's influence on the movement is thought to have been accelerated by Erbakan's prohibition from re-entering politics forcing the movement to appoint a new leader quickly.¹⁰⁰

Finally, another factor playing a significant role in the process was the secular desire to govern, either as a single party or as a coalition partner. In both cases, it could be said that the successive parties of the movement (WP, VP or JDP) have had to shape their programmes in ways that would make them appeal to the broadest electoral base. This pragmatism has arguably rendered the party more amenable as a coalition partner. For many, the turn of the movement to a pro-EU, pro-US and pro-globalisation party soon after the elections was closely related to the goal to establish and sustain a coalition government with the True Path Party.

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- ²² In two-party systems where the winner must obtain more than 50% of the vote, the parties are compelled to appeal to a broader profile of electorate in terms of their beliefs and ideas.
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- ⁹⁷ B. Aras and R. Karakaya-Polat, 'Turkey and the Middle East: Frontiers of a New Geographic Imagination', *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 61, No. 4, 2007, p. 478.
- ⁹⁸ Gül, *Türk Dış Politikasının Ufukları*, pp. 79-443; B. Aras and A. Görener, 'National Role Conceptions and Foreign Policy Orientation: The Identity Bases of the Justice and Development Party's Foreign Policy Activism in the Middle East', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2010, pp. 85-86.
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- ¹⁰⁰ For a detailed study of Erdoğan's distinguishing political traits, leadership capabilities, and other merits, see Heper and Toktaş 'The Case of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan', pp. 160-173.



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