Chapter 5

Turkish Islam and European values – two irreconcilable concepts?

More than ninety per cent of the Turkish population is Muslim. These are the opening words in many descriptions of Turkey. At the same time, the country is also consistently described, not least in official Turkish publications, as a secular state where religion and state are separated in the same way as in France. Hiding behind these two assertions is a highly nuanced religious panorama.

When the Turks converted to Islam, they adopted one of four judicial traditions within Islam, Hanafitic law, named after Abu Hanifa and considered the most open and tolerant of the four. The first sultans added parts of traditional Turkish law. This applied above all in the case of Mehmet Fatih, the conqueror of Constantinople, and Süleyman I who was also given the additional name *kanuni,* the legislator.

The religious landscape of the Ottoman empire was characterised by its diversity. It was not governed by a theocracy. In reality it had a secular administration. The secular laws that were enacted by the Ottoman rulers were more important than the religious laws and *ulema,* the Islamic jurists, mainly had the task of giving the Sultan religious legitimacy. Through the *millet* system, the monotheistic minorities had extensive autonomy in matters that concerned their own affairs. During the 1850s and 1860s the judicial system was further secularised in that new legislation inspired by Europe was introduced, both penal law and commercial law, and new courts, councils and ministries were created according to a European model.

Growing nationalism among the Christian population groups during the 19th century also led to an ambition to give Ottoman rule a legitimacy with both a national and a democratic dimension. The empire's subjects were to become Ottoman citizens who identified with their state. As 40 per cent of the Ottoman empire at that time was made up of non-Muslims, it also meant that a process of secularisation was necessary.

The Ottoman state was therefore in practice a secular administrative apparatus, whose policies were legitimised in religious terms. Islam came to serve as a cultural and political bridge between the elite and the masses, the majority of whom were Sunni Muslims. Without this religious superstructure the empire would not have been able to retain the loyalty of the Muslim majority and survive for six hundred years.

However, for Kemal Atatürk who, with Anatolia as a base, wanted to create a modern nation out of the remainder of this multicultural empire, Islam appeared to be a reactionary force and a main cause of the decline and fall of the empire. He was therefore deeply convinced that belief in religion must be replaced by a belief in modernity and progress.

Family law, which was the only area of law based on religious law, *shari'a,* was abolished and replaced by Swiss family law and the popular Sufi Orders were banned.

The state Atatürk created is certainly expressly secular in its constitution but this secularism has its idiosyncracies, not least because state and religion were not really separated. Since the founding of the republic all religious matters have been subject to strict control exercised by *Diyanet*, the Directorate for Religious Affairs. It supervises and administers the some 75 000 mosques in Turkey and not only employs and pays the salaries of about 60 000 Imams out of

tax revenue, which consequently makes them public servants, but also controls and issues instructions on the contents of Friday sermons all over the country. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education has a monopoly on all religious instruction and educates all prayer leaders and preachers.

The Turkish state also sends out Imams to immigrant communities in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Germany and France where, as sort of unofficial religious attachés for a period of four years, they are to see to it that these communities maintain contact with their home country and prevent Muslim organisations with an Islamic focus that are not tolerated in Turkey from growing strong. *Diyanet* also provides the general public with religious information material, publishes large editions of the Koran, organises pilgrimages to Mecka, etc.

The religious landscape

Regarding Turkey, three religious cultures within the same belief may be mentioned; a "state Islam" characterised by Kemalism and its secular basic principles, the heterodox Islam of the Alevis and a popular Islam with a Sunni-Hanafitic focus and its base in different Sufi Orders.

The Alevis

The Alevis are the largest religious minority in Turkey today. They account for between 15 and 20 per cent of the population and are spread all over the country. They have no special external characteristics as regards appearance or clothing. Most of them speak Turkish although there are also large groups of Kurdish-speaking Alevis. There is no exact information about their numbers since the Turkish Republic only recognises the religious minorities specified in the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, that is to say Jews, Armenians and Greek Orthodox. The Alevis are therefore registered as Muslims in population censuses.

The history of the Alevis goes back to the Turkic peoples' invasion of Anatolia. During their westward migration, they had not only converted to Islam but also many of them had taken up elements from other beliefs encountered on their journey, chiefly Buddhism and Zoroastrianism, and they also brought with them their ancient central Asian shamanic ideas. The result was a synchretic and undogmatic religion or rather philosophy of life, which is completely different from orthodox Sunni Islam. Even today, for example, mystic letter and number combinations play a certain role.

In Persia, which was a transit country for the Turkic tribes and where many of them, for example, the Azerians stayed, the Shi'ite branch of Islam was predominant. The nomadic Anatolian tribes who had adopted these synchretic heterodox forms of Islam, which also included Christian elements, felt as far as religious belief was concerned that they stood closer to the Shi'ite Safavids in Persia than the resident Ottomans with their Sunni faith.

In a war between Sultan Selim in Istanbul and the Safavid Persian Shah Ismail in 1514, the former massacred 40 000 Alevis as he suspected them of a lack of loyalty on religious grounds. However, they continued to support the Shah against the Ottoman Sultan which led to pogroms that had far-reaching consequences for relations between Ottomans and Alevis in the coming centuries.

Despite outrages and persecution, they were able to retain their faith in the distant and isolated regions of Anatolia where they lived without contact with the Sunni population. The Alevis organised themselves in closed social and religious organisations and networks in order to survive in a hostile environment, in relation to which they practised the Shi'ite *takiye* principle, that is to say the right to hide their real religious affinity from outsiders. This was probably also a contributory reason why Ottoman pressure on the Alevis lessened, which did not mean, however, that they were considered of equal value from a religious point of view. They were viewed condescendingly by the religious majority and many prejudices spread about their mystical, tightly knit community which was considered heretic. Rumours and prejudices about their sex morals still circulate today.

The Alevis succeeded in overcoming prejudice and persecution in that their religion was seen as an ethnicity. They lived in a tribal society and applied strict endogamy, that is to say they only married within their own community, and only members of the community could study the religious doctrines that were passed on to the next generation by a *dede* (grandfather) or *pir* (spiritual leader). This *dede* also served as judge and mediator in conflicts and for this reason the Alevis came to live outside the Ottoman judicial system.

The religion has elements of Sunni Islam also but differs essentially from the latter in such central matters as the so-called five pillars.

The creed, There is no God but Allah and Muhammed is his prophet, is recited by Alevis also but this may be a form of *takiye.* Many Alevis make the addition And Ali is God's representative and Muhammed's confidant. As for the Shi'ites and the Alevis in Syria, Ali, Muhammed's son-in-law and cousin, plays a major role and is regarded as the Prophet's lawful successor who was passed over by traitors after the Prophet's death. There is a certain kinship with the Syrian Alevis but it is not recognised by either party. Syrian Alevism belongs to an Arab context and is characterised more by gnosticism and Christianity while Alevism is a distinctive Turkish-Anatolian phenomenon.

The Alevis do not observe the fast of Ramadan. Instead, they fast for 12 days in the month of Muharram when, like the Shi'ites, they remember how Ali's youngest son Hussein was murdered together with his family in 680.

Nor do they pray five times a day and they do not hold Friday prayers. There have never been any mosques in the Alevi villages alhough during the Ottoman period and during the secular republic, attempts were made to, so to speak, Sunnify the Alevis by building mosques in their villages from state funds.

The Alevis have their own prayer houses and religious meeting places, *cemevi,* where they usually meet on Thursday evenings. The meetings are led by a *dede* who then also listens to people's complaints and endeavours to resolve conflicts. The most severe punishment is exclusion from the community, which in earlier times was the same as a death sentence in the isolated Alevi villages in Anatolia. Joint meals are also held combined with confession of sin which is reminiscent of Christian Communion, in which both men and women participate on equal terms. Over the centuries, the Alevi version of Islam has developed its own art forms, above all popular poetry with hymns and poems that are always recited and sung at meetings accompanied by a *saz,* a kind of lute. The texts often concern the death of Ali and also the murder of Hussein holds a central place in these ceremonies. The tradition of giving alms is also practised by the Alevis but does not follow the detailed rules applied in Sunni Islam.

Nor do they go on pilgrimages to Mecka. Instead, they make pilgrimages to the graves of the holy men in Anatolia. The most well-known of these pilgrimages goes on 16 August to Haci Bekta's grave. He founded the Sufist Bektashi Order that is very close to Alevism.

Alevism and Kemalism

Memories and experience of the centuries-long Sunni oppression to which the Alevis were subjected during the Ottoman period made them natural supporters of the new Turkish Republic. The Kemalist reforms signified an end to Sunni dominance in religious matters and contributed to a dismantling of the hostile image that had characterised the surrounding world's view of the Alevis. In addition to a picture of Ali there is also a portrait of Atatürk in all prayer houses. They themselves were also prepared to accept not being officially regarded as a religious community as long as the state did not give any other group the right to decide what was right and proper in religious matters.

In the new secular Turkish society, social mobility increased and hence their opportunities to escape from rural backwardness. From their original scattered settlement areas in Anatolia they began to spread to cities and population centres but this also meant the external pressure that had kept them together disappeared. From having previously lived in closed communities in close contact with their religious leaders, many now lost contact with their *dede* and became completely secularised.

In Atatürk's endeavours to create a new secular Turkish identity, the Alevis had a clear place and were now described as a people who, in spite of centuries-long influence from Arab and Persian culture, had stuck to the Turkish language and retained their Turkish individuality. The Ministry of Education published an anthology of Alevi poetry which was said to be an example of genuine Turkish culture. The equality between men and women which had traditionally prevailed among the Alevis was also seen as an expression of an old Turkish tradition that would now be resurrected in the new republic. However, everything was not rosy. One of the worst uprisings in the 1930s occurred among Alevi tribes in isolated mountain areas who refused to accept that the state mark its authority.

With the move from rural areas to large cities, Alevi organisations emerged. They were often based on local origin and in most cases came to support the Republican People's Party created by Atatürk because of its expressly secular programme. However, in the 1960s and 1970s many Alevis began to turn to radical socialist organisations and in certain cases to Marxist urban guerrillas. The Alevis were strongly over-represented in many of these which, in its turn, resulted in Alevism becoming synonymous with communism in right-wing circles. Many Alevis saw their own history as one long struggle for justice against oppression with Ali, Hussein and Alevi holy men as revolutionary leaders. Some even described Alevism as a protocommunism.

The attempts made to create an Alevi political party to safeguard the interests of the whole community failed. In 1966, for example, a group of Alevi businessmen founded a unity party, Birlik Partisi, but it only won a few per cent of the votes in the parliamentary elections. For the secularised Alevis the parties on the political left held considerably greater attraction.

On the extreme right wing, the so-called grey wolves in the Nationalist Action Party coined the slogan Alevism is communism and, at the same time, played on all the existing prejudices

and rumours about Alevis. During the tense domestic situation in the 1970s, this led to pogroms against Alevis in several places in Anatolia. In December 1978 these claimed 106 lives, most of them Alevis in the town Kahramanmaras and a state of emergency was proclaimed in 11 provinces.

The military coup in 1980 ended a state of almost civil war but also led to serious oppression of left-wing organisations and socialist movements in which, as mentioned, the Alevis played a prominent part. Despite all talk of their being the true keepers of Atatürk's heritage, Sunni Islam was made an instrument for the generals' policies. Attempts to promote national and social unity through what was called a Turkish-Islamic synthesis came to alienate many Alevis who no longer considered they could rely on the secular state they had previously supported. In order to offset communist and other revolutionary ideologies among young people, the military rulers introduced compulsory religious education in schools with the consequence that Alevi children were in practice forced to study Sunni Islam.

After the return to civil rule, the government was led by Prime Minister Turgut Özal. He implemented a programme for the building of mosques and religious education unprecedented in the annals of the Republic. Mosques were forced on Alevi villages and by means of appointment policies and a purposeful infiltration of the public administration, chiefly in the ministries for home affairs and education, Sunni positions advanced. This Islamisation and Sunnification of Turkish nationalism made the Alevis feel even more alien in their state.

The escalating Kurdish conflict also put the Alevis in a difficult situation as the community consists of both Turkish and Kurdish-speaking members. Many in those parts of the country affected were forced to choose sides and thereby put ethnic identity before religious identity.

The situation was exacerbated in July 1993 when a Sunni mob attacked an Alevi festival in Sivas in central Anatolia where Alevi and left-wing writers and artists had gathered at a hotel in memory of the Alevi poet Pir Sultan Abdal who lived and was murdered there in the 16th century. Sivas is a very mixed region from the ethnical and religious point of view and a traditional centre for both Alevism and Sunni fundamentalism. The hotel was set on fire and 36 Alevis lost their lives. Among those who had a narrow escape was the well known writer and satirist Aziz Nesim who had previously incurred the anger of the Sunni fundamentalists both by translating Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses into Turkish and by having publicly declared that he did not believe in the Koran. The Alevis' distrust of the state further increased after it emerged that the mayor of Sivas had taken part in the demonstration and the police had neglected to intervene against the violent demonstrators. Furthermore, those who were subsequently convicted had their sanctions substantially reduced on the grounds that they had been provoked.

The events in Sivas were followed by other incidents. As a result of the successes of the Islamic Welfare Party (Refah) in the 1994 municipal elections, a number of districts and even big cities, including Istanbul, acquired religiously oriented mayors and social pressure on Alevis was stepped up, and sometimes officially sanctioned. In March 1995, disturbances broke out in a poor district of Istanbul chiefly inhabited by Alevi and Sunni immigrants from the south-eastern parts of the country, who had lived in harmony up until then. Shots were fired from a stolen taxi at Alevi cafés causing a number of fatalities. The Alevis organised a demonstration to the local police station and in the subsequent clash several demonstrators were killed. It later emerged that the police superintendent had previously had a reputation for violent tendencies and the Alevi local population had long had tense relations with the police

who considered them heretics. Calm was restored and all police personnel were replaced. There were later similar disturbances in other parts of Istanbul as well as in Ankara. All in all, tens of lives were claimed.

Tensions abated. The successors of the Refah Party, which was banned in 1997, toned down the religious content of their political programmes, which applies to a great extent to the AK Party in power today (see below). In 1998, money was allocated for the first time in the national budget to Alevi foundations and associations and grants are also given to research on Alevism.

The Alevis now act with greater self-confidence and are demanding official recognition of their religion and their prayer houses. They express open dissatisfaction with their role as tax payers and thereby financiers of the gigantic *Diyanet* bureaucracy which exists solely to serve the Sunnis.

However, internal division and differences in views regarding what Alevism is and is not mean that their political weight does not match the large proportion of the population they represent. Today, there are groups who see the Alevis as an ethnic and religious community, to others Alevism is not a religion but a secular system of values. What the different lines have in common, however, is that they support Turkish membership of the EU since they see in this a guarantee for an opportunity to freely practise their distinctive religion and cultivate their individuality.

The Sufi Orders and popular piety

One of the measures that Atatürk took in his endeavour to modernise and Europeanise the new Turkish Republic was to prohibit the numerous Islamic brotherhoods or Orders (*tarikat)* in 1925 and to transfer their property and meeting places (*tekke)* to the state.

The origins of these Orders are to be found in Islam's early history when religious mystics began to seek a more personal and direct religious experience than that offered by a way of life in accordance with the rules of the Koran. These mystics were called Sufis from the Arab word for wool (*suf)* which in its turn referred to the woollen cloaks they wore. They aspired to a personal experience of God. The path (*tarikat)* that leads to this follows different stages. The god-seeking person is called a traveller (*salik)* who must slowly go through different stages before reaching the final goal, a union with and absorption into Allah. One of the means of achieving this goal is the continual repetition of one of the 99 names of Allah. Itinerant Sufi preachers and holy men played a role in the Turkic peoples' conversion to Islam. Their popularity depended perhaps above all on the fact that they used everyday language and did not convey their message in the High Arabic of the Koran.

As a consequence both of the crusades and the ravages of the Mongols, the Muslim world underwent a serious crisis in the 13th and 14th centuries. A result of this was that the Sufi movements grew in strength. After previously having mainly appeared individually or in small groups these mystics (*mürsid* or *şeyh,* sheikh) now gathered around them larger groups who later came to organise themselves in Orders or brotherhoods whose memberships grew steadily.

Towards the end of the Ottoman Empire, every third male subject belonged to a *tarika* and their influence was as great as that of the national Sunni religion. These brotherhoods also offered an important social community and many were renowned for their social commitment.

Of the large number of Orders, the following are worth particular mention:

The Mevlevi Order goes back to the mystic poet and philosopher Mevlana Celalettin Rumi (1207-1273) who lived and worked during the Seljuk period. The real founder of the Order was his son Sultan Veled. It has always been a pronounced intellectual Order focusing on contemplation and philosophy. The members engaged, *inter alia,* in a mystical dance – *sema.* The Order has become famous above all for its dancing dervishes.

As mentioned above, the Bektashi Order, whose heterodox philosophy derives from Shi'ism, goes back to the 13th century and the holy Haci Bektaş Veli who worked in central Anatolia, and it was interwoven with Alevism.

These two may be said to represent two extremes – an intellectual order and a mystical order with a Shi'ite stamp – and in the range between them there are many others: Kadiris, Nakşibendis, Rifa'is, Ticanis and Halveti dervishes. Alongside these traditional brotherhoods, new Orders were established in the 20th century such as, for example, Süleymanli and Nurculuk.

The Süleymanli Order goes back to Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan (1888-1959), a preacher who came to Turkey from Bulgaria and during the Ottoman period studied in Istanbul at the Süleymaniye mosque. Right from the start he turned against Kemalism in his preachings and as from 1943 he was no longer allowed to preach in public. The following year he was sentenced to one year's imprisonment and was prosecuted again in 1954. With his *Süleymancilik Cemaati* he created an independent branch of the Nakshibendi Order which formed cells all over the country in order to spread anti-secular ideas.

The Nurculuk movement is of greatest importance today. It was founded by Bediüzaman Sait-i Nursi (1879-1960). He came from Bitlis in south-east Anatolia and was a Kurd. He became a Nakşibendi as a young man. After 1900 he lived in Istanbul and sympathised with the young Turks. He also took part in the national liberation movement under Mustafa Kemal, however in connection with the Kurdish rebellion under the Nakşibendi Sheikh Said in 1925, he broke away and he was imprisoned together with other prominent Kurds and deported to the city Isparta in west Anatolia where he lived in internal exile. Between the years 1935-1953 he was arrested repeatedly although he never involved himself in politics but preached social mobilisation and repudiated both nationalism and secularism.

His collected writings were banned but were copied by hand and spread widely among a steadily growing group of supporters. In them, *Risale-i Nur,* (The message about the divine light), which to this day has retained its authority among his supporters, he appears rather as a theological reformist than an Islamic political activist. He did not regard his movement to be a *tarika* and did not see himself as a Sheikh but as an Imam. He had no successor on his death in 1960 which he would have had, had the movement been a *tarika.*

Nursi's message was that Islam must be compatible with modern science and that the scientific description of the world can also be given a religious metaphysical explanation. He spoke of the mechanics of nature in which there is room both for modern physics and

traditional Islamic philosophy. The Nurcu movement therefore aspires to a synthesis between Islam and science, acceptance of democracy, and just government within the framework of *shari'a* law and he stressed in particular the importance of a good education.

Nursi wanted to open Islam to reason and science and interpret the Koran in this new light. In his view, no single theology or religious institution possessed the correct interpretation. Understanding of the Koran's message rather depended on time, place and external circumstances. Several opinions can therefore exist alongside one another and in competition with each other. For him, *shari'a* was not a system of rules determined for all time but a just order adapted to a specific time and the existing circumstances. For Nursi, democracy and freedom were necessary preconditions for a just society.

There has been a constant stream of supporters to Nursi's ideas and there is talk of over a million sympathisers but after his death the movement split up and there are now some ten different Nurcu communions.

The most influential, dynamic and successful is *fethullacilar* which is named after its *hoca* (teacher) Fethullah Gülen. The latter, who regards Nursi as his own *hoca*, first worked as an Imam in Izmir but was later engaged in education issues and built up a network which today consists of more than 200 colleges and 20 universities not just in Turkey but also in the Balkans and Central Asia and in Europe too through the Islamic University of Rotterdam which he founded. These devote particular attention to scientific subjects. Teaching is partly in English. As in the case of Nursi, Gülen also aims to reconcile faith with scientific thinking. He points out that 95 per cent of the Islamic rules apply to private and family life and only five per cent to state affairs. These must be regulated in a democratic manner. Turkey's history and social conditions make an Islamic state impossible and the democratisation of Turkey is an irrevocable process.

In what is known as the Abant Declaration proclaimed in July 1988, Gülen pleads for a new form of modernity that is compatible with Islam's fundamental principles, democracy and respect for individual human rights. The central message of the Declaration is that revelation and reason are not in conflict with each other, that individuals should use their common sense to organise their lives and that the state should be neutral in matters concerning faith and outlook on life and not base their rule on a predominant religious tradition. The aim of secularism must be to strengthen freedom and individual rights and it must not serve the purpose of excluding any group from the public arena.

Gülen supported the 1980 military coup, as a result of which the authorities were favourably disposed to his movement for a long time. With the willing assistance of Prime Minister and later President Turgut Özal, who was himself in close contact with the Nakshibendi Order, he appeared to be a representative of a modern forward-looking Islam that was favourably inclined to Atatürk's modernisation project and politicians across the left-right spectrum expressed their sympathies with him and his movement. Gülen further criticised the Welfare Party and its leader Erbakan for being too radical and supported the soft military coup that led to the latter's fall in February 1997.

However, in June 1999 an organised campaign was initiated against him in the Turkish media. The security police reported that video recordings had been found of sermons claimed to have been given in 1986 in which he had urged his supporters to be patient and make conscious efforts to infiltrate the secular state. The Chief of the General Staff spoke openly of Gülen's

plans to undermine the latter and the State Security Court in Ankara applied for a detention order for Gülen, which was, however, rejected. After a new prosecution had been instituted in 2000, he preferred to depart for the US for medical treatment and he has lived there ever since. However, he still exercises great influence through his supporters, his writings and his media empire which includes, *inter alia,* a TV station and the newspaper Zaman (Time), to which many of Turkey's best known secular political writers contribute.

Supporters of the movement in Turkey are now estimated to number between five and six million and they meet regularly in special premises, *dershanes,* to analyse and interpret Nurcu's texts.

Gülen's movement has acquired many supporters above all from the emerging class of religious small entrepreneurs who have formed their own business associations with active local associations in all major Turkish cities. Through a combination of modern science and technology, hard work, thrift and social commitment based on Islam, a religiously coloured bourgeoisie known as the Anatolian tigers, has emerged.

In recent years, above all the regions around the city Kayseri in central Anatolia have undergone rapid economic development, as a result of which several rapidly expanding industrial centres have been created by Islamic Calvinists as they have come to be called. In Kayseri alone the number of *dershane* grew from 2 in 1970 to 60 in 2000 and they also function as networks for entrepreneurs where they can discuss business opportunities, cooperation projects and financing matters. The small town Hacilar outside Kayseri with its 20 000 inhabitants has developed into a Turkish Gnosjö and harbours nine of Turkey's 500 most successful companies.

According to a study carried out by the European Stability Initiative published in September 2005, the main factor underlying this development is the individualistic and initiative-promoting elements in Turkish Sufi Islam. The sociologist of religion, Hakan Yavuz, claims that in recent decades Turkey has undergone a silent Muslim reformation with clear parallels with the protestant reformation, a process which has, however, been neglected due to more dramatic events elsewhere in the Muslim world. In Turkey this development – *protestanlasma,* to become protestant – is discussed with increasing interest. Does Max Weber's theses on a connection between the growth of capitalism and the Calvinist message that economic success is a sign of belonging to the chosen ones also apply to Islamic Calvinists or has increasing prosperity led to an interpretation of Islam that is compatible with modernity?

Irrespective of the answer to this question, economic and social developments here have created an environment in which Islam and modernity co-exist without problems, a process that undermines the basic Kemalist thesis that economic development and modernisation are only possible if religion is kept at a distance.

The Sufi Orders differ but even so they have common traits. One is a strong group mentality. Members help each other to solve everyday problems and require unwavering loyalty from the others in the group at the same time as they are under the strong influence of a charismatic leader. With few exceptions they meet the demands imposed on an orthodox Muslim, the daily prayers, fasting, pilgrimages to Mecka and giving of alms. They see themselves not only as trustees of the traditional Islamic heritage but also consider they go beyond this by going back to the original faith and the divine revelations of the prophet and his first followers. This

in its turn has led to criticism from orthodox scholars and theologians who accuse the Orders of devoting themselves to superstition and heresy by regarding their leader as a semi-divine being and an intermediary between Allah and man, something which is contrary to the Koran's message.

Each group has its own rituals. These, *zikir,* are usually a repetition of different formula in which Allah is invoked under rhythmic movements in order to cleanse the soul and heart. The members of a *tarika* usually carry out their *zikir* jointly after having formed a circle but it may also occur individually. Through this procedure the individual becomes absorbed in Allah and reaches an ecstatic stage. With the exception of the Mevlevi Order and its dancing dervishes this *zikir* is only undertaken privately. Furthermore, members of the different Orders have different ways of making their Order affiliation known. It may be through manner of speech, different gestures or way of treating members and non-members.

As mentioned above, the Sufi Orders were banned by Atatürk and many Kemalists and secularists consider them to be reactionary forces. However, not least through their social activities, they have become increasingly popular in the religious social strata as an alternative to a state apparatus that has appeared incompetent. Many of the numerous non-government organisations that have emerged in the past decade have their base in initiatives that have come from these Orders which not only, like Fetullah Gülen, started successful schools but also financial institutions, industries, newspapers and radio and TV stations.

The return of Islam as a political factor

When Turkey acquired a multi-party system in 1946, religion gradually became an ever stronger political factor. After the establishment of the Democratic Party, Atatürk's presidential successor, Ismet Inönü, was forced to depart from the secular path of the Republican People's Party, the party of government up until then, in order to prevent a major loss of voters. Voluntary religious instruction was introduced in schools, for example, and in 1949 a Prime Minister was appointed, Semsettin Günaltay, who was considered an Islamist. This did not prevent the Republican People's Party from losing the parliamentary elections in 1950, however. When the Democratic Party assumed power, there was further departure from Atatürk's secular path. The call to prayer in Arabic was again permitted and state funds were allocated to the opening of religious schools to educate Imams and other religious representatives.

The move from rural areas into the cities accelerated and was on a greater scale than the emerging industries and municipal institutions could absorb. Unregulated settlements, known as *gecekondu* (built in a night) emerged on the edges of big cities and these immigrants brought with them into the cities their traditional way of life marked by Islam. This development created a sociological base for Islamic parties. The first steps towards the formation of such parties were mainly taken within *tarikat* and above all the Nakshibendi Order.

The first Islamic party, *Milli Nizam Partisi,* the National Order Party, was founded by Necmettin Erbakan in 1970. The latter, who was a Professor of Mechanics at Istanbul Technical University, was elected to parliament in 1969 as an independent representative of the religiously conservative city of Konya in central Anatolia. He had originally tried to become a member of Süleyman Demirel's Justice Party but despite the fact that they had been fellow-students at university he was refused membership because of his reputation for being a

pious Muslim. Accused of anti-secular activities, the Party was prohibited as early as March 1971 when the Turkish army took power behind the scenes. In 1973, Erbakan became leader of a new party, or rather the same party with a new name – The National Salvation Party – which proved attractive to a large proportion of the traditionally oriented electorate. In the 1973 elections the Party received 12 per cent of the votes and 48 seats.

Erbakan now held a central position on the political stage and surprisingly formed a coalition government with Bülent Ecevit. The latter was chairman of the Republican People's Party whose prime goal was to uphold Atatürk's legacy. Thus, in this alliance two opposite poles of Turkish politics were to cooperate, on the one hand Atatürk's secular party and, on the other, the new self-assured Islamic movement. The only thing that really united them was strong Turkish nationalism which led them to order the invasion of Cyprus in 1974 to protect the Turkish-Cypriot minority in the face of an impending *enosis* with Greece.

Erbakan wanted to go further than Ecevit and occupy the entire island and this and many other political differences of opinion resulted in the fall of the government. Erbakan and his party later returned in two right-wing coalitions during the remainder of the 1970s and when the decade reached an end he had been deputy Prime Minister for over three years, and for almost a further year, Demirel's Justice Party was dependent on his support. During this period, Erbakan had held posts at ministries that were important to his electorate of loyal supporters – above all entrepreneurs with small and medium-sized enterprises.

When the military intervened in 1980, Erbakan's National Salvation Party was banned as well as all other political organisations. Erbakan himself was prosecuted but was later acquitted. The main focus of the party's activities was transferred to Europe, in particular Germany where those who supported Erbakan had considerably greater room for manoeuvre than in Turkey but there too the party was reorganised and in 1983 the Welfare Party – *Refah* – was born. When the old guard was allowed to work politically again in 1987, Erbakan officially became party leader after having previously governed by remote control.

Erbakan's strength lay on the one hand in the fact that he was a good organiser and, on the other, that he was a gifted speaker. Under his leadership, *Refah* became the best organised party in Turkey. It created a network of local branches and carried on much more efficient and active campaigns among supporters than other parties. And demographic developments gave the party a new broad recruitment base. Migration to all of Turkey's major cities exploded during the 1980s and 1990s. The number of inhabitants in Istanbul doubled. In the 1994 municipal elections, for example, there alone the party was able to mobilise 69 000 women party workers. Organised in 600 so-called neighbourhood groups, they called on over two and a half million voters. In order to reach and influence expat Turks in Europe, Erbakan established an organisation, *Milli Görüs,* which became an important financing source for the party in Turkey.

Erbakan describes his ideology as precisely *milli görüs,* the national vision. The programmes for his parties contain typically Islamic points such as the importance of ethics and morals in education, and the fight against usurers and against corruption and also secularism are stressed. Freedom of opinion and speech are said to be fundamental for democracy and for respect for human rights. Erbakan's interpretation of secularism differs from that of the Kemalists, however. By secularism he means total freedom of religion beyond state control. He rejects the Kemalist view as the dictatorship of non-believers.

A concept that has constantly been repeated in Erbakan's rhetoric is a just order (*adil düzen*) but he has never specified what this means. It therefore attracted both radical voters who understood by it that *shari'a* legislation would be introduced and more moderate voters who saw in the concept a promise and hope of a less corrupt political system. Erbakan could rouse his supporters with promises that interest rates would be abolished since they were contrary to Islam, that Turkey would join an Islamic common market and that an Islamic dinar would be introduced but changed his tune entirely if the forum before he was addressing called for a more statesmanlike performance.

With 19 per cent of total votes in the 1994 municipal election, the Welfare Party won mayoral posts in 30 cities, including Istanbul and Ankara and in 327 small municipalities. Erbakan then struck terror into secular Turkey by assembling thousands of supporters at the Sultan Eyüp mosque in Istanbul and proclaiming:

This is a gift from God. Refah will soon be in power. There is no other solution to the crisis we are experiencing than the just order. Our victory does not end here. Our next goal is Islamic unity all over the world. Istanbul is the political capital of the Muslim world.

Prophecies of woe like this and other statements evoked among the secularists were not fulfilled. Both in Ankara and Istanbul, citizens saw how the financial scandals that had been typical of previous administrations decreased although corruption was not eradicated. In Istanbul, trees were planted under the direction of the new, young, dynamic mayor Tayyip Erdoğan, water supplies began to function as well as refuse collection and the city's air improved and it soon became clear that this man had more far-reaching political ambitions.

The established parties continued their intrigues against each other which contributed towards *Refah's* becoming the largest party with 21.3 per cent of the votes in the 1995 parliamentary elections held 18 months after the municipal elections. This breakthrough for the Welfare Party caused panic in the Turkish secular establishment which was further intensified when Tansu Cillar, leader of the True Path Party, fell for Erbakan's offer to stop the parliamentary investigations that were to be initiated against her on grounds of numerous accusations of corruption and economic irregularities. The price for this was a political pact in which Erbakan would assume the post of Prime Minister for the first two years in a coalition government to be subsequently succeeded by Ciller and, after many complicated turnabouts, Erbakan formed a government with Tansu Ciller on 28 June 1996.

Erbakan now quickly forgot all previous talk of Turkey leaving NATO and ending military cooperation with Israel and annulling the customs union with the EU nor did he make any attempts to fulfil his earlier promises of increased cultural rights for the Kurdish minority. None of this rhetoric had been heard in the 1995 election campaign when the Turkish electorate had become more nationalist as the civil war in the south east escalated.

In spite of this restraint, confrontations with the secular establishment soon occurred which, however, were not based on the formulations in *Refah's* party programme where loyalty to the secular system was emphasised or on bills presented by the government. Instead, suspicion of a hidden religious agenda were aroused by statements from different party functionaries with, for example, demands that it should be permitted to pray during working-hours. Women party members wore headcloths in official contexts and, in speeches outside parliament, Erbakan asserted the right of believers to live under the *shari'a* laws. The drop that made the secular

cup run over was an invitation from a mayor from the Welfare Party in a town near Ankara to the Iranian Ambassador to speak at a "Jerusalem evening".

In February 1997 the Turkish military forces started a campaign in which Islamic fundamentalism (*irtica)* was depicted as the greatest threat to Turkey's national security. Through the national security council where the military were in the majority, a catalogue of 18 points was presented which in practice were conditions the Erbakan government must fulfil. The threat was implied but clear. If this did not take place the military would intervene. When Erbakan attempted to play for time, a campaign was set in motion in which the media, the state bureaucracy, the judiciary and also parliamentarians belonging to the coalition partner the True Path Party were mobilised. Trade unions and employer organisations formed their own "secular fronts". As a result of this pressure, the Erbakan government fell on 18 June 1997 in what has come to be called the first post-modern coup d'état.

In January 1998 the Constitutional Court banned the Welfare Party for a period of five years, a ruling that was subsequently approved by the European Court of Human Rights.

This decision in its turn was based on Articles 68 and 69 of the Turkish Constitution which came into being after the 1980 military coup. Under these, no party may be formed that "is in conflict with the principles of the secular republic" (Article 68) or that "exploits religious feelings, symbols or arguments" (Article 69). In its motivation the Constitutional Court stressed that religion shall not play a role in politics and social life and that religion "controls an individual's internal aspects while secularism controls an individual's external aspects". Thus, the court strictly followed the ideas of Kemalism.

As so many times previously, the answer to the ban was the formation of a new party, *Fazilet Partisi* (Virtue Party) and it became the largest faction in parliament with 140 seats. However, the Virtue Party only received a little over 15 per cent of votes in the 1999 parliamentary elections and thereby lost a quarter of its supporters and became only the third largest party.

It was soon accused of being just a direct continuation of the Welfare Party and in June 2001 was banned by the Constitutional Court, which led to an internal debate about its future political path between the conservatives who advocated a strictly conservative Islamic line and the modernists who wanted to reshape and modernise the party, move it to the centre and tone down its religious rhetoric.

AKP takes the European path

The party's younger generation headed by Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül now realised that their party had reached an impasse. Votes could no longer be won in Turkey with a policy of Islamisation à la Erbakan. Only a small minority of Turks wanted an Islamic state. A party characterised by Erbakan's policies would therefore never gain more than the fifteen per cent of votes received in the most recent parliamentary elections. According to electoral analyses, about five per cent of the electorate made up what could be called a hard core, that is to say voters who wanted a religious state that implemented *shari'a* law in all areas and who were totally against a secular state. Another group, around ten per cent, wanted to see a greater role for Islam in society. Religion was important to them for giving them an identity and as a bearer of identity for the Turkish nation while the issue as to whether or not *shari'a* should be applied was considered unimportant.

It is also questionable whether those supporters of Erbakan who voted for a religious state really knew what such a state would imply. Their knowledge of Islamic law was very limited and they were attracted in the first instance by Erbakan's slogan that an Islamic system in Turkey would mean a just order without any detailed explanation. With this rhetoric, he collected votes above all from among those who had lost economically from modernisation policies.

Furthermore, it had clearly proved that the armed forces and the bureaucracy (the deep state) were firmly determined to prevent any Islamisation policies and in this respect had the support of a broad majority. Erbakan's idea of a Turkey that would turn to the Islamic world with the ambition of playing a leading role in it lacked support not just in Turkey but also among the countries that were expected to accept and follow this Turkish leadership. Even Erbakan's Islamic rhetoric cooled down after Egypt's President Mubarak had not had time to receive him as Prime Minister and when Quadaffi used Erbakan's visit to Libya to censure him for oppressing the Kurds.

Fazilet's parliamentary faction was divided and the "modernists" broke away and formed the Justice and Development Party (AKP) under the leadership of Tayyip Erdoğan and Abdullah Gül . It was presented as a broad conservative party that respected Islamic values but without a pronounced religious programme. Erbakan's supporters also formed a party of their own, *Saadet Partisi* (closest translation the Happiness Party!).

This division of the Islamic movement was something the army and the deep state had long aimed for but the result was not as expected.

The AK Party now became the parliamentary counterforce to the ruling three-party coalition under Bülent Ecevit. He had plunged the country into a deep economic crisis. The political reforms that were a condition for negotiations on EU membership had been delayed due to tensions in the coalition whose reputation had reached rock bottom.

When internal conflicts in the government coalition forced new elections to be held in November 2002, the AK Party was able to offer a new credible political alternative. The party had abandoned Erbakan's Islamic line, no one could blame it for the economic crisis, in parliament it had voted for political reforms and hence shown that it was ready to continue along the path to the EU and indeed faster than the Ecevit government.

This election was a political landslide. The AK Party received over 34 per cent of votes and its own stable majority. Due to the ten per cent barrier introduced after the military coup in 1980 – ironically enough precisely in order to prevent religiously oriented parties from getting any seats – only the Liberal Republican Party got back into parliament after previously having been outside. None of the other parties passed the barrier, including the three that had made up the government coalition. They were now punished for their misrule and for the financial crisis they had plunged the country into. Party disloyalty had never previously been so great and the electorate showed itself more inclined than ever before to vote for a party that seemed to offer hope of something new.

In this context, Erdoğan's personality played a major role. He was not just a charismatic leader with a popular background and origin from one of Istanbul's slums where he had made a reputation as a talented football player but, as mentioned above, he had also been a successful mayor of Istanbul between 1994 and 1998. He himself could not stand as a

candidate having been temporarily excluded from the political profession after the post-modern coup but this meant that he was regarded as an outsider and was not associated with political and economic corruption.

The AK Party won massive support not because voters thought it aspired to an Islamic state. The electorate gave this party its votes because they hoped and believed that the party would put an end to *yoksolluk* (poverty) and *yolsuzluk* (corruption). Erbakan's new creation, *Saadat Partisi,* with its Islamic rhetoric was nowhere near reaching the barrier and won only a few per cent of votes.

Since its establishment, the AK Party has moved from being a religiously coloured conservative party to becoming a party more like the Christian Democrats, or Allah Democrats if the expression is permitted.

Prime Minister Erdoğan has defined AKP's political philosophy as democratic conservatism.

A large part of Turkish society wants to embrace a concept of modernity that does not reject tradition, a belief in universalism that accepts local patriotism, a sympathy with rationalism that does not ignore the spiritual meaning of life and an alternative to change that is not fundamentalist. The concept of conservative democracy is in fact an answer to the Turkish people's hopes.

In the party manifesto it says: "Our party sees differences in faith and culture as enriching for the country and believes that people with different languages, religions, race and social status must be able to express themselves freely and take part in politics by being able to rely on the same protection under law ….. the AK Party considers political parties to be essential elements in the democratic system and opposes the prohibition of parties who work within the framework of the constitutional state."

Regarding the EU, the party programme says: "Our party considers full membership of the EU to be a natural consequence of the process of modernisation."

Thus, the Copenhagen criteria are presented not as dictates coming from without but as objective criteria that are necessary for Turkey's process of modernisation and international position. One of the party's leading intellectuals, Professor of theology and philosopher Mehmet Aydin, who is currently Minister for Religious Affairs, wrote in December 2002 in the largest Turkish daily newspaper Hürriyet:

"In the Islamic world, politics have always tended to restrict knowledge and thinking. The result has been a sort of paralysis of reason. Politics also controls education which leads to further restriction of reason. This is in sharp contrast to the Koran according to which one should constantly meditate on the world, history and oneself. Religious knowledge must also be renewed. Membership of the EU would speed up this process.

Turkey – a model for the Muslim world?

In the debate on Islam and democracy and the causes of the Muslim world's general crisis it is often said that the modern Turkish Republic could play a role as a model. As is evident from the above, the situation in Turkey cannot be compared with conditions in Iran and the Arab world for several reasons.

Firstly, both the Kemalists and the political Islamists in Turkey have been deeply influenced by modern European thought and European policies.

Secondly, Turkey has never been a colony. Unlike other countries in the Muslim world, Islam in Turkey has therefore never become an ideological superstructure for opposing colonialism, occupation or western oppression. Certainly, the attempts to colonise and divide up the country after the First World War still play a role through what is known as the Sèvres syndrome but those attempts were repelled by the country's own efforts in the struggle for independence 1920-22. The Turkish Republic has therefore never lost its legitimacy among the population even if many are critical of phenomena in the country.

Thus, the influence the western world exercised on Turkey was a result of the choices of Turkish politicians and not of coercion. When such influence was exercised in the process of modernisation, it came from within and above but not from outside. The west is therefore portrayed as an enemy of Islam to a far lesser extent than in other Muslim countries. Instead, the non-Islamic enemy was first Russia and later the Soviet Union. This led to Turkey's membership of NATO which in its turn meant a common Turkish-European-Atlantic military alliance in the fight against communism which was also the major enemy for a political Islam.

Thirdly, despite recurring economic crises, Turkey has not been afflicted by the socio-economic destitution and frustration that has been a hot-bed for religious extremism elsewhere in the Muslim world.

Fourthly, unlike the situation in other Muslim countries, existing dissatisfaction could be expressed by political means and it has been possible to remove parties in power by means of elections. This is a further explanation why political Islam in Turkey does not have the extremist strain found in so many quarters in the Muslim world. When Erbakan' s Islamic Welfare Party was banned in 1997, for example, he did not mobilise his supporters in mass demonstrations but applied to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. When its verdict went against him, he accepted it.

Fifthly, the different Sufi Orders, although formally banned, have had an essential influence and contributed to the pluralism and moderation that characterises Islam in Turkey.

Sixthly, the rapidly emerging middle class in the cities has contributed to moderation. Many are religious and want to have their religiosity accepted but they themselves are marked by 80 years of secular rule.

As part of the run-up to the parliamentary elections to be held not later than November 2007, more and more warnings are now heard from the secular and military establishment that, by means of a salami tactic, AKP aims to Islamise Turkey step by step. However, a major study published in November 2006 carried out by the distinguished think tank TESEV reaches a completely different conclusion.

Compared with 1999, the proportion of the population that identify themselves as Muslims first has indeed increased from 36 per cent to 45 per cent while those who consider themselves to be Turks first have decreased from 21 to 19 per cent. The proportion that consider themselves to be Kurds first remains unchanged at just one per cent. An overwhelming majority of Kurds see themselves as Muslims first.

This strengthened Muslim identity, however, has not led to increased support for a politicised Islam. Instead, the proportion that answers "yes" to the question "Should there be political parties based on religion?" has decreased from 41 to 25 per cent in the last seven years and support for a religious state based on *shari'a* law has dropped dramatically from 21 to 9 per cent. It should be noted in particular that only 14 per cent of AKP sympathisers want to see a political system of that kind.

Only eight per cent consider suicide attacks against a foreign occupant are justified while 85 per cent definitely dismiss such actions. Support proved to be greatest – 14 per cent – among supporters of the nationalist MH Party and even the Kemalist and putative social democratic CHP have more advocates of these violent methods than AKP – 11 and 9 per cent respectively.

70 per cent of those who described themselves as secular or left oriented considered that use of the headscarf – *türban* – had increased and saw this as a threat to the secular state. However, TESEV's study shows the opposite applies in reality. Between 1999 and 2006 the proportion of women who wear a headscarf has decreased from 16 to 11 per cent and the custom of wearing a full-body black *çarşaf* has decreased from three to one per cent.

On the other hand, the number of women wearing headscarves in public environments has increased but this is not a result of an Islamisation of Turkish society but of its modernisation which has resulted in an increase in the participation of these women in professional life and the fact that they no longer hesitate to drive a car or go to cafés.

To sum up, there is no Turkish model that can simply be copied in other parts of the Muslim world. Turkish Islam has its special character shaped by different historical factors and political realities. Nor is Turkey a country the Arab world is setting its sights on. Instead, Ankara is seen as a representative of the former Ottoman colonial power and as an ally of the imperialist western world, a view that is strengthened by Turkey's good relations with Israel which also include military cooperation. After independence the Arab world has traditionally had better relations with European states such as Spain, Italy and Greece.

Ingmar Karlsson