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## Atatürk's Balancing Act: The Role of Secularism in Turkey

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## Introduction

Following decades of decline, the once-great Ottoman Empire was dismantled in the aftermath of World War I by the victorious Triple Entente. In the Turkish War of Independence, Turkish nationalists under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk defeated the occupying forces from the Triple Entente and created the Republic of Turkey in the heart of what was once the Ottoman Empire. The new government rejected the Ottoman fusion of Islam and politics and established a policy of secularization known as *laiklik* based on the French model of *laïcité* which aimed to completely separate religion and politics in Turkish society.<sup>1</sup> The resulting ideology developed into what became known as Kemalism and was codified in the Turkish constitution to become the civil religion of Turkey followed by subsequent political leaders and used by the military on multiple occasions to remove governments deemed to be Islamist.<sup>2</sup> Given the role which civil religion plays in the development of the values and political culture of a society, Turkey provides an interesting case in examining the way in which national values are created and advanced. This paper will argue that the secular civil religion of Turkey is primarily an instrument used by the state to advance national interests, rather than any commitment to women's rights or democratic ideals.

The first section of this paper will provide a brief history of the study of national civil religions and develop a working definition, which can be applied specifically to Turkey. The second section will review the literature on the role secularism plays in Turkish society and report on the role that various groups have had in supporting or opposing its influence. The third section will analyze the role of secularism in Turkish society and bring in additional research about how secularism is used by the state. The final section will bring together the research and analysis to determine whether the thesis of this paper is supported or not.

## I. Civil Religion

The concept of civil religion was first described by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *The Social Contract* in which he described evidence of its existence back to the earliest of human societies. The earliest human rulers controlled theocratic systems of government, which granted legitimacy to the ruler by the divine will of a deity or pantheon of deities. The presence of many distinct societies with their

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<sup>1</sup> James W. Warhola and Egemen B. Bezci, "Religion and State in Contemporary Turkey: Recent Developments in Laiklik," *Journal of Church and State* 52, no. 3 (July 2010): 427-428.

<sup>2</sup> Tolga Köker, "The Establishment of Kemalist Secularism in Turkey," *Middle East Law and Governance* 2, no. 1 (2010): 20-26.

own rulers, religious systems and legal systems led to a proliferation of gods over each of those societies, each serving to unify a group of people. Rousseau argued that the presence of a civil religion in every society raised obedience of laws to the level of a moral duty, venerated those who died in service of the society as martyrs and strengthened national cohesion as well as skepticism of outsiders. With the rise of Christianity, however, civil religion took on a new quality by enabling different nations within a larger state to unify behind a common belief system.<sup>3</sup> In his essay “Civil Religion in America”, sociologist Robert Bellah argued that civil religion plays a vital role to the functioning of societies today, and that understanding how it interacts in the society is as important as understanding the role of any other religion.<sup>4</sup> Bellah drew much of his evidence from the way in which presidents of the United States have always referred to “God” as an abstract entity without any connection to a specific religious sect or creed, and that this usage of quasi-religious rhetoric is especially important in addressing the nation during important ceremonial events.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast to ethnically and religiously homogenous European societies which had a long history of religion underpinning and legitimizing secular rulers, the United States was a pluralistic society of immigrants founded on the idea of a separation between church and state which required a new conception of civil religion to develop national unity.<sup>6</sup> Bellah contrasts the character of civil religion in the United States with the civil religion developed in France after the French Revolution. In the United States, it took on general elements from the dominant Protestant religious heritage and grew to include many different groups whereas in France it radically rejected the country’s Catholic history in favor of a purely secular model.<sup>7</sup> Civil religion is based around the sacralization of secular concepts and ideas, but the civil religion which developed in post-revolutionary France expanded that to a concept of *laïcité*, a general term bringing together various universal and abstract values such as liberty, equality and tolerance which should be upheld by all people identifying as French.<sup>8</sup> Due to its radical secularism which bans religious symbols and teachings in public or political life, the French model of civil religion provides the best comparison to that which exists in Turkey.<sup>9</sup>

The French idea of *laïcité* exists at the center of the French national consciousness today, but went through a long period of struggle before achieving

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Amsterdam, 1762), 103-112, accessed November 10, 2013, [http://www.ucc.ie/social\\_policy/Rousseau\\_contrat-social.pdf](http://www.ucc.ie/social_policy/Rousseau_contrat-social.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 134, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 40.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-46.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.

<sup>8</sup> Silvio Ferrari, "Civil Religions: Models and Perspectives," *George Washington International Law Review* 41, no. 4 (2010): 751-752.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 752-753.

dominance, in much the same way as the Turkish idea of *laiklik* is struggling to maintain its influence over Turkish society today. While ideas of radical secularization began with the French Revolution, the term *laïcité* didn't appear until the 1880s as one of a number of competing views.<sup>10</sup> As a push for secularization, *laïcité* was more than simply a rejection of any state religion. Its connection to the revolutionary ideals which broke the monarchy in France gave it moral equivalency with a crusade against oppression, and allowed it to take on a mythic dimension in French society as a quest for the "promised land" where society could advance and freely progress.<sup>11</sup>

The foundations of Turkish civil religion were laid when Turkey separated itself from its Ottoman history from May 19, 1919 to July 24, 1923 during the Turkish War of Independence. After leading nationalist Turkish forces and establishing the new government, Mustafa Kemal was given the surname *Atatürk*, meaning "Father of Turk" to highlight his role as the central mythical figure in the new civil religion.<sup>12</sup> He established the modern Republic of Turkey based on a secular Western model and secularism took a similar role in Turkey as it had in France in distancing the society from the theocratic monarchy which preceded it and created a new national identity. The new secular civil religion aimed to undermine Islam's role as the foundation of the state, education and law. Further, by removing references to Islam from public life and "Turkifying" all societal and cultural aspects, the new civil religion was to become the central element uniting Turkish society.<sup>13</sup>

Kemalism, the cult of personality and ideology named after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was developed as the cornerstone of the new Turkish identity as a modern secular society and shows its namesake in public monuments, on currency and as a popular figure whose sayings and ideas are still used today.<sup>14</sup> Though Kemalists have held leadership roles in Turkish society for most of Turkey's history, there have been opposition voices. The role of Kemalists in shaping the development of *laiklik* in Turkish civil religion has been similar to how intellectual elites in France were essential in the development and implementation of *laïcité* in order to overcome societal resistance.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Blandine Chelini-Pont, "Is *Laïcité* the Civil Religion of France?," *George Washington International Law Review* 41, no. 4 (2010): 768.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 771.

<sup>12</sup> Talip Kucukcan, "Sacralization of the State and Secular Nationalism: Foundations of Civil Religion in Turkey," *George Washington International Law Review* 41, no. 4 (2010): 963-964.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 963-965.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 966.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 973.

## II. Secularism in Turkish Society

Karaveli explains in detail the makeup of Turkish political and civil society by examining the similarities and differences among Kemalists, liberals, and Islamic conservatives in order to gain a deeper perspective of the forces at work on the civil religion.<sup>16</sup> He argues that the secular Kemalist leadership has ostracized both liberals and Islamic conservatives since the Republic of Turkey was established in the Turkish War of Independence. He argues that especially during the past decade, this alliance has served to lend legitimacy to Islamic conservatism as a democratic and liberal alternative to the state-centric secularism supported by Kemalists. This legitimization of religious conservatism has also delegitimized the liberal reformist credentials of the secular order due to increasing concerns about individual rights in Turkish society.

The primary charge Karaveli identifies against Kemalists by liberals is that the supposedly enlightened and modern ideology of Atatürk was being forced on Turks by the government rather than existing as a movement in society pushing for greater reforms and rights.<sup>17</sup> The military's use in the 1970s and 1980s of the cult of personality surrounding Atatürk to support their repression and intervention in society left behind a societal association between secularism and state repression. Where Atatürk took significant inspiration from Western intellectuals of the Enlightenment, later Kemalists refused to acknowledge these outside influences on the ideology or pursue them deeper, instead comparing Atatürk to authoritarian rulers claiming that Kemalism was the only one of those to succeed. By refusing to acknowledge the intellectual ties between Atatürk and the Western Enlightenment, Kemalists attempted to use Turkish nationalism to build up a secular state in opposition to Western secularism.<sup>18</sup>

Karaveli cites sociologist Serif Mardin in identifying the root of the problems with Turkish liberalism and secularism. Mardin noted that while Western secularism advanced through the Enlightenment due to the contributions of a number of different thinkers and reformers, the Turkish project begun under Atatürk lacks further philosophers and advocates pushing to reform society and religion.<sup>19</sup> Karaveli notes several ways in which this development was hindered including active removal of philosophy and other Western influences from the educational curriculum, and the refusal of the Turkish government to implement the educational vision and plans of Atatürk to this day. By refusing to create a free-thinking generation of citizens, the Kemalists hoped to develop citizens who

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<sup>16</sup> Halil M. Karaveli, "An Unfulfilled Promise of Enlightenment: Kemalism and its Liberal Critics," *Turkish Studies* 11, no. 1 (2010): 85-86.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 97-99.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 89-93.

would obediently serve the state without question, content in the rights which had been granted to them by the state.<sup>20</sup>

Without the bottom-up push for reforms of society and religion as happened in Christianity during the Enlightenment, Karaveli argues that citizens were unsure of how to proceed in developing the society further, preventing the tolerance of differences of opinion and diversity of beliefs which aided in the organic secularization of Western societies. This failure of Islam to evolve alongside secularism allowed religious conservatives to be painted as a liberal and democratic alternative to Kemalism. The three groups which were created as a result of these processes continue to dominate Turkish society and play an important role in developing and interpreting the civil religion.<sup>21</sup>

In many ways paralleling the development of Kemalists, liberals, and Islamic conservatives in Turkish society, Eslen-Ziya and Korkut describe the development of feminist movements since the 1923 establishment of the current Republic of Turkey.<sup>22</sup> They divide the feminist movement into several main groups, which arose through processes of westernization and modernization. They identify early feminist movements in the Ottoman Empire to have started in the second half of the nineteenth century with the push for full recognition of the rights of women continuing into the republic.

The establishment of the republic was a break from the state's Islamic religion of the past in favor of a new secular order. Instead of promoting that secular order through the lens of democratic participation and equal rights, however, they argue that it was a top-down project to forcibly remove the previous state religion in favor of a set of ambiguously defined ideals of secularism and Europeanization without the history and cultural context which allowed the West to develop.<sup>23</sup>

The first phase of women's movements in Turkey after independence was represented by a group identified as "republican feminists". The new Turkish state sought to demonstrate its modernization by setting up a strict standard of women's rights in the model of European and Western states, while also mandating Western norms of dress and restricting religious expression. This model of feminism has been called "state feminism" due to the reliance of women on the state as the guarantor of rights in society, especially against the old civil religious order which had been replaced by republicanism.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 99-100.

<sup>22</sup> Hande Eslen-Ziya and Umut Korkut, "Political Religion and Politicized Women in Turkey: Hegemonic Republicanism Revisited," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 11, no. 3-4 (2010): 311-313.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 315-316.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 316-319.

With the transition of Turkey from a single-party state to a democratic society, republican state-feminists transitioned to holding allegiances for a specific party and advocating planks of the party platform rather than a strictly feminist agenda, still remaining reliant on the power of the party and state to guarantee rights. As society continued the process of modernization, however, liberal feminist movements developed in opposition to state apparatuses and policies in the 1980s. The liberal feminists engaged in social activism and street protests before moving on to organizing on university campuses and using NGOs to affect change in issues such as domestic violence, marriage, divorce, and abortion laws which republican feminists hadn't been able to touch.<sup>25</sup>

The main split between liberal and republican feminists took place when Islamist women's movements began pushing for the right to wear the hijab in public spaces. Republican feminists saw any return to traditional religious ways as a threat to the secular society which had been built by the state, while liberal feminists saw it as another opportunity to advance women's rights, allowing women to choose what to wear or not without having to worry about state-imposed regulation.<sup>26</sup>

With the major divisions identified within Turkish society and the feminist movement, it is important to examine the external factors contributing to the unique Turkish identity which binds them all together. Haynes argues that the core of Turkey's national identity is a xenophobic fear of outsiders, rather than Islam or secularism specifically, and that the country's unique position between the western and eastern worlds has worked to accentuate this xenophobia.<sup>27</sup> The secular character of the Turkish republic has been guaranteed throughout its history by the military, and it is unlikely that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) or any other Islamist-influenced political group will be able to successfully bring Islam back to the forefront of national policy.<sup>28</sup>

The importance of the military in the Turkish state goes back to Atatürk who, after rising to prominence as a military hero, used the military to impose modernization and secularization on Turkish society during his rule. Combining the Ottoman centralized bureaucratic state with secular military authority created a precedent which shaped Turkey's development to this day. Only recently have democratic values begun to establish themselves with any sort of consistency. Through its institutional influence, the military has sought to restrict extremist, Islamist, or separatist parties from gaining power in government. In spite of the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 320-322.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 323-326.

<sup>27</sup> Jeffrey Haynes, "Politics, identity and religious nationalism in Turkey: From Atatürk to the AKP," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 64, no. 3 (2010): 313.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 314-315.

military's efforts, Turkey has developed a split between secularists and those who would be in favor of more Islamization of the society.<sup>29</sup>

Alongside the secular/Islamist split in Turkish society is the division over membership in the EU, in which Turkey is extremely critical of the West but desires the opportunities for economic development which association gives. Haynes cites a 2006 Pew Research study which shows Turks to be wary of most groups outside of Turkey, including Westerners and Arabs as their immediate neighbors. Among the other societal splits which are presented, Haynes cites extremely unequal gender relations and overall ambivalent beliefs about democracy as being contributing factors to the insular dynamics of the Turkish state.<sup>30</sup>

Haynes argues that Turkey can't be classified as a conservative religious country due to its unique circumstances and history which have created deep internal divisions and skepticism of foreigners. In the aftermath of World War I, the division of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire among the victorious European powers left Turkey in fear of foreign intervention over its internal ethnic tensions with the Kurdish minority. The long history of Islam in Turkey has also divided society between the religious population and the secular military and political elites. Even as it is engaged in holding together the careful balance within Turkey, the secular government has attempted to strengthen its political and economic ties with the West while simultaneously upholding the conservative Turkish cultural history.<sup>31</sup>

As a result of this unique historical background, Haynes concludes that attempts to label the AKP as an Islamist party within Turkey are influenced primarily by the Turkish fear of Islamist governance. Foreign perspectives hope to label the AKP as an Islamist party in order to paint Turkey as being fundamentally in conflict with Western and European values necessary to join the EU. In spite of the many divisions in Turkey, however, Haynes believes that Turkey is slowly progressing toward a democratic system of governance and another military takeover is unlikely. So long as its security is ensured, the Turkish people will continue confronting internal and external pressures through democratic means, necessitating cooperation and competition between the three primary ideological camps in Turkish society.<sup>32</sup>

In providing a fuller explanation of the ways in which internal and external pressures have combined to create public policy and affect the development of Turkish civil religion, Arat examines the many intersections between religion and politics during the past decade under the AKP, pointing out

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 314-316.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 317-321.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 322-323.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 324-325.

the problems inherent to democratic society in Turkey, mainly threats to gender equality, even as huge strides are being made with regard to religious liberty and freedom.<sup>33</sup> The specific area of gender equality that she looked at was the opportunities available to women in society outside of the home. In broadening her analysis beyond simply the lifting of the headscarf ban at universities, she hopes to uncover ways in which state bureaucracy is being used to disenfranchise women with patriarchal religious values in Turkish society.

Arat points to the secularization of Turkey as the initial event allowing women's liberation by adopting Western norms and a new civil code modeled after the Swiss Civil Code prohibiting polygyny, placing marriage under secular rather than religious law, and placing men and women on equal footing for inheritance. Further, the secular revolution established secular control over education and religion in Turkey to promote the interests of the new state. Under the new order, women in positions of authority took the opportunity to adopt Western dress and customs until the rise of democracy in the 1950s presented a new and significant religious influence on society. With increasing democratization, she points to a return to old Islamic norms such as prayers being held in Arabic and the establishment of religious schools teaching traditional Islamic values.<sup>34</sup>

In their rise to power, the AKP moderated their Islamist influences to build a broader coalition until they achieved almost 50% of the vote in July of 2007. With a larger power base built on more moderate votes, the party was able to attempt to push through constitutional changes which returned to Islamic values such as allowing headscarves to be worn publically.<sup>35</sup> Arat also identifies many other instances where AKP politicians and bureaucrats have used positions of authority to strengthen Islamic norms. This is of concern to her because of the role the state plays in socializing the youth. She argues that the patriarchal norms being taught attribute a secondary status to women, depriving them of many of the liberties they have under the secular system.<sup>36</sup>

Arat concludes by clarifying the difference between Islamist parties reestablishing patriarchal societal norms and secular and feminist groups pushing for freedom of religious practice. Where state-established religious norms are a step backward for secularism and liberalism in Turkish society by disenfranchising women and forcing them back into the home, freedom of religion as supported by many feminists and secular groups helps to advance Islam without patriarchal values. By encouraging free practice of religion and

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<sup>33</sup> Yesim Arat, "Religion, Politics and Gender Equality in Turkey: implications of a democratic paradox?," *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 6 (2010): 869-870.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 870-872.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 872.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 872-873.

resisting patriarchal domination, religious heritage and equal rights can both be preserved and strengthened.<sup>37</sup>

In examining the way those intersections play out in Turkish society, Hassan looks at the role secularization has had to play in creating a class of state-sponsored female preachers by successively expanding access to education and limiting the options available with certain education. Ever since the declaration of the Turkish Republic, the Directorate of Religious Affairs has handled religious matters in Turkey and at the present time one-third of its preachers are women who take part in religious duties.<sup>38</sup>

The surprising number of female preachers can be traced back to the initial efforts to secularize Turkey by promoting equal educational opportunities for boys and girls, while simultaneously cutting out huge sections of the religious education which had been common under the Ottoman Empire. Closing all religious schools, the new secular regime set up a few new religious schools to train prayer leaders and preachers through high school and university levels. Initially open only to males, these schools were closed down over the next few decades as religious instruction across the country also declined significantly from 23% of classroom time at all levels to only 2% of classroom time in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades.<sup>39</sup>

As Turkey democratized moving into the 1940s and 1950s, opportunities for religious education were once again provided to gain popular support for the government and its alliances with Western powers. As enrollment in religious schools was extended to female students, their enrollment numbers increased dramatically, as well as their continuation to the university level to study theology. With further reforms of the educational system, limitations were put in place restricting students of religious schools from studying subjects other than theology at the university level, decreasing the number of males who enrolled in religious schools, increasing the proportion of females.<sup>40</sup>

Women graduating in theology were left with possible career choices of either teaching at a religious school or working for the state bureaucracy at the Directorate of Religious Affairs, where they were often given jobs as female preachers with responsibilities of leading services for women at mosques, or giving more informal talks to mixed-gender audiences at community centers and other public settings. The number of female preachers has remained stable but low, and their work is often unknown even to other employees of the Directorate

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 878-882.

<sup>38</sup> Mona Hassan, "Women at the Intersection of Turkish Politics, Religion, and Education: The Unexpected Path to Becoming a State-Sponsored Female Preacher," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2009): 111-113.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 113-114.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 114-120.

of Religious Affairs or to community members at a mosque that doesn't have a female preacher on staff.<sup>41</sup>

Though their position in Turkish society may seem to go against the central tenets of Islam and the secularization of Turkey, female preachers are an important piece in the state's control over religious practice, ensuring that the state's version of Islam is taught to and understood by the population, rather than popular and unauthorized religious beliefs. Though they have come to play an important role in Turkish society, these positions for female preachers were created as a result of policies aimed at secularization of society, rather than expanding educational access.<sup>42</sup>

### III. Analysis

Whereas France was influenced by the Enlightenment ideas during the French Revolution and development of *laïcité*, the Turkish experience was characterized by lacking those same intellectual influences. The resulting civil religion, while central to Turkish society, was not used as the justification of broad social reforms in the same way as *laïcité* was in France. The military's role in supporting *laiklik* has created divisions in society as a whole as well as in the feminist movement, resulting in varying prescriptions for how Turkey should advance into the next century as the next generation comes to power and the time of Atatürk becomes more of a memory.

In the past decade, the tide of public opinion in Turkey has begun to swing away from supporting the active secularization policies of the state, and the rise of more religious parties such as the AKP has placed external pressure on the system to adapt.<sup>43</sup> The military is perhaps the most important institution to understand in studying Turkish civil religion, as it has served as the guardian of the secular constitution, and has been the most stable institution since the time of Atatürk. Due to its insular nature, the military has long been the stronghold of Kemalist ideals and has a strong dedication to *laiklik*. While the military has actively overthrown the government on three separate occasions, it seems its "soft coup" in 1997 when it called for the resignation of the sitting government indicates that it is taking a step away from actively affecting political life. While the AKP government which has ruled since 2003 has claimed to support democratic values, its history as an Islamist party has the military and other secular groups worried.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 120-126.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>43</sup> Warhola and Bezci, 428.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 430-433.

The military's role as an outside defender of secularism has always caused tension with the sitting civilian government, but reforms pursued by the AKP and the coalition government which preceded it have weakened the power the military can exert over society.<sup>45</sup> In attempting to meet the conditions for membership in the EU by exerting greater civilian control over the military, elected governments have pushed back against the military at the same time as Islam is going through a popular resurgence among the greater population. In cracking down on military plans for a coup and weakening the military's authority in society, the AKP government has moved to shift the definition of *laiklik* within Turkish civil religion to include an element of popular democracy while still respecting the fundamentally secular character of the system.<sup>46</sup> The argument can also be made that with most Turks accepting secularism at a fundamental level, it is possible to advance toward a more prosperous society which may participate in religion at a personal level rather than at the behest of the state.<sup>47</sup>

Another vital element to understand in evaluating the recent evolution of Turkish civil religion is the EU accession process, which requires Turkey to broadly accept and implement the canon of EU law, including the need for a robust democracy.<sup>48</sup> By classifying Turkey as an official candidate for EU member status, the conflict between Kemalism in Turkey and liberalism has come to light in Turkey's attempt to gain membership where Kemalism favored secularism as an end and European liberalism used it as a means to an end.<sup>49</sup> The combination of those internal and external pressures is creating an environment in which the state has stepped back from an active promotion of secularization to a passive support of secularization. The government's control of political, educational and religious outlets within Turkey has enabled it to shape the character of the Turkish population according to its wishes, leading to the present situation where the population seems to be pushing to maintain the fundamental character of *laiklik* even as they push for greater religious liberty.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 435-436.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 438.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 442-444.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 448-449.

<sup>49</sup> Kivanc Ulusoy, "The European Impact on State-Religion Relations in Turkey: Political Islam, Alevi and Non-Muslim Minorities," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 3 (September 2011): 411-412.

<sup>50</sup> Warhola and Bezci, 452-453.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In examining the way civil religion has been used in Turkey, the evidence appears to support the hypothesis that forces of secularism have been used to advance state interests rather than due to any particular concern with democratic ideals or the promotion of women's rights. Early developments of secularism helped to equalize Turkish society, but the state's secularization efforts have been directed not at further equalizing the society and expanding the rights of citizens, but toward building a population which agrees with its secular ideals. While Turkish civil religion shares many structural and doctrinal similarities with French civil religion, the latter's inclusion of enlightenment ideals allowed it to progress further and advance the society as a whole. By taking on the autocratic character of Kemalism, Turkish civil religion has divided the society and created odd alliances between conservative Islamists and liberal democrats in opposing blanket secularization.

Recent electoral success by conservatives has led many to speculate that reforms put in place during the process of secularizing Turkey might be rejected. While attempts have been made to roll back some reforms, the largest impact of the governing AKP has been to increase civilian control over the military and promote an ideology of soft secularization in order to continue on the path to EU membership. Even in this endeavor, however, secularization efforts are being undertaken in the interest of improving state cohesion by using the education system to shape coming generations, and in the interest of gaining EU membership and all of the political and economic benefits that would come along with it.

While some educational opportunities have been afforded to women, educational achievement for women has been more difficult in comparison to the system under the Ottoman Empire. In the model promoted by secular civil religion, religious schools were steadily closed, and women were only able to attend them as they reopened as a side-effect of government policies to train state-sponsored preachers and clerics to continue the process of educating the public with the approved version of Islam. As feminist movements continue to change Turkish society however, the goals and effects of the civil religion are likely to adapt to the new realities.

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