

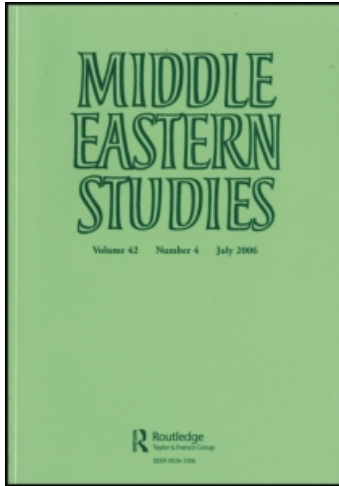
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The Power of the Devout Bourgeoisie: The Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey

SEBNEM GUMUSCU & DENIZ SERT

The first political party with an Islamic orientation emerged on the Turkish political scene with the establishment of the National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi*, MNP) in 1970 by Necmettin Erbakan. A year after its establishment the Constitutional Court outlawed the MNP due to its religious orientation. However, the same cadre soon after the closure of the MNP established a new political Islamic party, the National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi*, MSP) with a new ideological framework, *Milli Gorus*¹ (National Outlook, MG), which would serve as the basis for all the political Islamic parties that would succeed the MNP: *Milli Selamet Partisi* (1972–80), *Refah Partisi* (1983–98), *Fazilet Partisi* (1998–2001), and *Saadet Partisi* (2001–present). The MSP, unlike its predecessor, found the opportunity to join coalition governments established by parties of centre-left and centre-right respectively. These partnerships in coalition governments enabled the MG movement to further its goals of increasing the role of religion particularly in education. However, the MSP's political life ended like other political parties when the military intervened and took over in 1980.

With transition back to civilian politics in 1983, the MG established its new party, the Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP). With Erbakan's return to politics as the head of the party, the RP enjoyed an increasing level of popularity from 1987 onwards. In 1994 the RP managed to win the municipalities of metropolitan areas such as Istanbul and Ankara in the local elections, and a year later, in 1995, it won the general elections with a plurality of the seats in the parliament, totalling 21 per cent of votes. In 1996 the RP and the True Path Party (*Dogru Yol Partisi*, DYP) formed a coalition government, which faced a 'post-modern coup' during a National Security Council meeting on 28 February 1997. During this meeting the generals presented a document to Prime Minister Erbakan detailing several steps to be taken against rising political Islamism in the country. Erbakan signed the document yet waited until June 1997 to resign.

The NSC meeting on 28 February initiated a new period, popularly known as the 'February 28 Process',² that was characterized by a major crackdown on political Islam by the secular establishment. During this process the Constitutional Court shut down the RP and banned several politicians, including its leader Erbakan from politics, while succeeding coalition governments reinstated the headscarf ban in the universities and increased the duration of compulsory education to eight years in

order to undercut demand for the shorter timespan religious vocational schools. Soon after the closure of the RP, the MG movement established a new party called the Virtue Party (*Fazilet Partisi*, FP) with slight deviations from the MG line, particularly on the issues of human rights and democracy. These differences were in fact the signs of an emerging schism within the MG movement. This schism surfaced when a group emerged within the party known as *Yenilkciler* ('those who seek novelty'), which defended democracy, respect for human rights, and pluralism. The *Yenilkciler* formed an opposition movement against the old cadre in the party, and they nominated a candidate, Abdullah Gul, during the party congress to run against the candidate of the old cadre, Recai Kutan, Erbakan's proxy. This incident was a first in the history of MG movement. Abdullah Gul lost the race to Recai Kutan, who won almost half of the delegates' votes. Although the *Yenilkciler* failed to capture the leadership of the party, it was apparent that the group had commanded a significant support base within the MG movement. The schism within the party engendered two new political parties when the Constitutional Court banned the FP, based on the conviction that it was a continuation of the Islamist RP. The old cadre of traditionalists sustained the MG tradition and established the Happiness Party (*Saadet Partisi*, SP), while the *Yenilkciler* abandoned the MG line to establish a conservative democratic party, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*, AKP).

Since its inception there have been debates on the differences between the AKP and the MG line and many sceptics argued that AKP is in fact a continuation of the political Islamic tradition. It was partly due to this belief that the recent court case against the AKP was undertaken. However, the decision of the Constitutional Court showed that changes have emerged in the dynamics of the Turkish political structure. This article argues that the case of AKP is different from its precedents, due to the party's extended business network and newly defined conservative base. The decision of the court in the recent case against AKP reflects this political change within the foundation of Islamic parties of Turkey. While the court acknowledged the political legitimacy of the party by taking a decision *against* its closure, it has revealed the general discontent regarding the AKP's non-adjusted conservative/pro-Islamic policies by cutting its financial means. This decision of the court shows that the party has yet to define and consolidate its conservative identity and how exactly this identity remains aloof from Islamism.

The following section details the MG movement and its position on issues such as democracy, human rights, and religion. Then the article analyzes AKP's position on these issues with the contention that the AKP presents a clear break with the Islamist line of the MG with its economic, political, and foreign policies as well as the constituency that it represents. The final section surveys the controversial issues raised by the AKP that have generated concern in the secular establishment while indicating that the AKP has yet to consolidate its conservative identity.

The Milli Gorus movement has used Islam as the reference for its political, economic and social projects. As religious parties are proscribed in the constitution and law of the political parties, the MG has never explicitly declared that its ultimate goal is the establishment of an Islamic state in full compliance with Shari'a. Instead, it has

implicitly used Islam as its main reference and employed Islamic notions and symbols to communicate its Islamist identity. For instance, to distinguish its line from other political parties, the RP claimed that its cadres were pious, clean, faithful, and serve people with the love of worship.³ However, in late 1970s Erbakan hosted the second Siret-i Nebi Conference which had an explicit Islamist agenda and called upon all governments in Muslim countries to establish Shari'a as the fundamental law, to accept Friday as a holiday, and use Arabic as the language of communication in the Islamic world.⁴

The Islamist nature of the MG parties is further revealed in their vision of and distance from democracy, human rights, freedoms, and pluralism. The conception of democracy in MG ideology is closely connected to the ideal of establishing an ethical order where community comes before the individual. The first component of the MG's perception of democracy concerns the instrumentality of democracy for achieving the greater objective, which is bluntly stated by Erbakan: 'One should not forget that democracy is not an end in itself, instead it is a means to a greater end. That end is the establishment of the Order of Happiness',⁵ which refers to the time of the Prophet Mohammed. This Order of Happiness is in fact the name of the ethical order that the MG seeks to establish.

The second component concerns the conditions under which a true democracy exists according to the MG ideology. These conditions are in fact the depictions of the ethical order in which individual rights and freedoms are no longer relevant, for it is the community that matters. The first condition is that the politicians that rule the country should be pious and religious since 99 per cent of Turkish society is composed of Muslims.⁶ Such a condition demonstrates the tendency of the fundamentalist MG to totalize society by discounting the differences and pluralism within the nation. Moreover, the MG contends that democracy should be understood as the development of virtuous individuals and not as people's futile efforts to attain rights and freedoms. The second condition follows: democracy could only be practised in societies where ethics and virtue dominate. In societies where virtue and ethics do not play a part in establishing the social order, democracy degenerates into anarchy, i.e., individuals come before the community. Individuals in this ideological framework are expected to submit to the ethical order of the community, a primary characteristic of fundamentalist movements.

The prerequisite to a well-functioning democracy is a virtuous society composed of ethical individuals, which can be created by broad societal reform. This reform precedes the establishment of the ethical order. The primary instrument for gradual reform of society is education. The MG's education policy aims to raise pious, hardworking, and virtuous generations, devoted to ethics, family order, and discipline. Needless to say, Islam is at the centre of the MG's education and reform programme. In line with this programme, as a coalition partner during the National Front governments,⁷ the MSP managed to use the state budget to finance 1,000 new mosques, 5,000 new imams and Qur'an teachers. The party also reopened the secondary school sections of the Imam-Hatip schools (vocational schools that educate prayer leaders). Finally, the MSP added mandatory ethics and religion classes to the curricula of elementary and secondary schools.⁸

The MG's approach towards human rights and freedoms complements its instrumental and illiberal understanding of democracy. Its understanding of human

rights is strictly confined to the freedom of belief and conscience and dismisses other freedoms that are essential for a democratic regime. Freedom of belief and conscience is important for it is critical for the advancement of the movement's agenda. The human rights and democratization section of the RP election manifesto, for instance, discussed only the problems that devout Muslims faced in their encounters with the secular establishment.⁹ The party emphasized the importance of freedom of religion and conscience, but did not mention other rights and freedoms, or violations of human rights from which other parts of society beyond the constituency of the MG movement may frequently suffer. The fact that the party demanded human rights and democratization exclusively for its own constituency further reveals the instrumentalism in MG's perception of democracy and how the movement is far from internalization of democratic norms.

This instrumentalism is evident in MG's hypocritical demands for freedom of expression. Even in his defence of the freedoms of thought, belief, and expression, Erbakan often violated basic democratic norms of pluralism and liberty. Accordingly, there is no harm in allowing people (communists and anarchists) to express their ideas since the MG ideology is powerful and compelling enough to show the right path and prescribe the right mode of behaviour to the people and isolate the 'wrong ideas'¹⁰ in society. In other words, when everyone expresses his or her ideas there could and would be only one winner, because there is one single truth, and that is the message of God.¹¹ This indicates the conviction of the MG parties that they are the ones who convey *the truth*, and this truth, which happens to be God's message, would be accepted by all when it is freely expressed by the party. The instrumentalism is apparent; the party calls for freedom of expression so that it can propagate its own message (*the truth*), and once this message is delivered there will be no need for freedom of expression (for other ideas) since other ideas could hardly compete with the truth delivered by the MG. In other words, the MG demands freedom of expression not for the sake of pluralism but to eradicate that pluralism and replace it with the message of God.

A political party's view regarding pluralism is equally telling about that party's conception of democracy. As already indicated in its perception of human rights and freedoms, the MG's conception of pluralism is narrow and shallow. This shallowness is further evident in the MG's approach towards other political parties. Erbakan, on several occasions, claimed that the MG is above other political parties and their politics because only the MG represents *the truth*.¹² The conception that the MG parties are of divine justice renders other political parties 'vain' (*batil*), so that by definition they cannot be equal with the MG. Thus the MG movement communicated to the electorate that the only Islamic party was theirs and voting for the RP meant voting for Islam and obeying God's rules. The RP leaders often promised their voters places in heaven if they followed Allah's message by voting for the RP. In other words, the MG movement has equated religion and politics, manifested by its political party. Erbakan, in a speech addressed the members of his party, stated:

If you do not serve the Welfare Party your prayers would not be accepted [by God] because there is no other way to be a Muslim. Welfare Party is an army and you have to fight to make this army larger and stronger. This party is an army of Jihad. Are you a Muslim? Then you should be a soldier in this

army ... Those who work for the party goes to heaven because to work for the party means to fight for the establishment of the Quranic order.¹³

Such an understanding naturally rendered pluralistic competition between the MG parties and others meaningless. Such statements demonstrate the fusion of utopianism and instrumentalism embedded in Islamism. As Azmeh explains,

Islamist political discourse always insists that the Islamic party is not a political party on a par with other political parties, but it is distinguished by being consonant with an ontologically privileged history ... It represents the element of continuity, and is therefore above and beyond political dissent.¹⁴

Pluralism is not only shallowly conceived through the MG's perception of other political actors, but it is also absent within the MG parties themselves. The organization and internal operations of these political parties are far from democratic, and in fact are greatly influenced by religion. Erbakan on several occasions summarized the nature of his parties succinctly: 'other parties have members but we have believers'.¹⁵ Identification of the party members as believers means that members are not to discuss or question the leadership and the party policies. Instead, they are supposed to express unconditional and continuous 'obedience' (*biat*) to their leader, Erbakan. In fact Necmettin Erbakan was perceived as a religious figure, a master, and the party members were his disciples. Under Erbakan's unquestionable leadership and the members' unconditional obedience to the leader, the parties of MG remained undemocratic in their inner organizations, clearly indicating the absence of commitment to democracy within the movement.

The MG movement and its parties have manifested Islamism with their emphasis on the ethical order and gradual Islamization of the society, which will deliver the Islamic state as a consequence. The MG entailed a project of rebuilding an Islamic society and rendering an Islamic state inevitable as an extension. The principles engrained in the MG movement and ideology take Islam as its reference point and share a political vision that is sceptical of secularism, democracy, freedoms, and pluralism.

When the *Yenilikciler* established the AKP in 2001, the group defined it as a conservative democratic party that promotes a free market economy with minimal state intervention in the economic realm, democratization and liberalization in political life, and conservatism in social life. The leaders of the new party claimed insistently that they had taken off the MG 'shirt' and at every opportunity denounced their Islamist background.

This article contends that the AKP has indeed departed from the MG line. The party programme and statements draw a very different path with respect to the role of religion in politics, perception of democracy, and human rights and freedoms from that of the MG. For the last seven years it has been in power, the AKP has also pursued, designed, and implemented significantly different economic, social and foreign policies. The primary factor behind this change has been the socio-structural transformation of the Islamist constituency. The AKP has been the party of the

rising devout bourgeoisie, which has vested interests in economic liberalism, democratic politics, and social conservatism. Of all the three elements that compose the AKP's identity (economic liberalism, democracy, and social conservatism) the least contested has been the economic element. Indeed the party's insistence on economic and democratic reforms attracted secular bourgeois and middle class support as well. The most problematic of these elements has been the conservative side. The steps it has taken in the contested issues of headscarf and religious vocational schools have shown that the AKP has yet to clarify its position on the role of religion in social life and what it understands of the implementation of social conservatism. It is the AKP's yet to be consolidated conservative identity that has brought the case for closure before the Constitutional Court and the court's final decision.

The discourse of the party as laid out in its programme and official statements strongly rejects Islamism as a social, economic, and political project.¹⁶ For the AKP, Islam is a religion that comprises norms and values that render life meaningful for devout Muslims, and yet it is not an ideology, and thus cannot be offered as a solution for the economic, political, and social problems that society faces. The party programme states that its central political project is composed of two main goals: 1) economic development and growth, and 2) expansion of human rights and freedoms and consolidation of democracy.¹⁷ In attainment of these goals religion has no role to play.

Denouncing the MG ideology Erdogan proclaimed that the AKP would not be a religiously oriented party, which treats party and religion as an amalgamated whole.¹⁸ A former Virtue Party MP and columnist, Nazli Ilicak, asserts that by rejecting the presentation of Islam as an ideology, the AKP 'set secular objectives' for itself as opposed to ones dominated by religious concerns; the party prefers to live Islam as a religion in the private sphere of life rather than carrying Islam over to power.¹⁹ Along these lines, the AKP programme states that secularism is a central component of democracy that allows people to declare and practise their faith and live in accordance with their beliefs as they wish.²⁰

The difference in the approaches of MG parties and the AKP towards democracy is another significant indicator of the extent to which the AKP differs from the MG. The AKP programme states that in a democratic polity, sovereignty lies with citizens alone, and only they write the rules by which they will abide. In the party's political viewpoint, there is no place for any system that may overshadow the people's will. Executive power is in the hands of those who are elected by the citizens, and the decisions that affect communal life are solely taken by the elected. The AKP, by accepting that the people have the authority to legislate the laws, announces that Shari'a has no role in determining the legal structure of society. Moreover, the AKP demands a liberal democratic system that does not place any conditions upon society or individuals. In contrast to the MG, which puts community before the individual, the AKP programme declares that the main goal of the party is to consolidate democracy and to protect human rights and freedoms by placing the individual at the centre of the political process.²¹ The primacy of community and the ethical order leave their place to the individual and his/her rights in the AKP ideology.

Accordingly, the AKP approaches the issue of human rights and freedoms from a liberal perspective. In its central motto, 'No one is free unless everyone is free', the

AKP communicates the message that it is concerned with all the freedoms and rights of every citizen. In line with liberal understanding, the party urges the adoption of internationally accepted standards of human rights stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Helsinki Final Act.²² The party aims to reach international standards, particularly in freedom of thought and expression, freedom of conscience, freedom to acquire information, freedom to seek justice and the right to a just trial, women's rights, children rights, and labour rights. Moreover, the AKP, unlike the MG parties that do not even mention freedoms unrelated to Islamic practices, claims that torture, death during interrogation, disappearing persons, or unsolved murders are unacceptable in a democratic country, and the party would take all the necessary steps to eradicate such practices.²³

The AKP is also clear in its approach towards political pluralism and political competition among parties. For the AKP, political parties are civil organizations that communicate individuals' demands to the state while competing for power to address these demands.²⁴ Political parties are furthermore an integral part of a well-functioning democracy; they compete for power, and democracies function as healthy systems only in the presence of this competition. Moreover, success in this competition does not deliver absolute power to the winners. The parties have to respect the freedoms and rights of the minorities and these rights should be brought under constitutional guarantees.²⁵

In addition to changes that it has adopted in democracy, pluralism, and human rights discourse, the AKP has also diverged from the MG line in terms of policy. The AKP has emerged as an ardent supporter of Turkey's accession to the EU, presenting a stark break from the MG, an overt critic of the EU. Moreover, the AKP adopted economic and political liberalism and aimed to reduce the size of the state so that it only fulfils very basic functions such as defence, basic education, and provision of law and order while it leaves economic, political, and social realms to free markets and the private sector, local governments, and civil society organizations. This is another clear break with the statist line of the MG that promotes state interventionism in several aspects of economic, social, and political life. Thus, the AKP programme and election manifestos indicate a clear break with the MG tradition. The performance of the governments that the AKP established in the aftermath of the 2002 and 2007 elections further supports the contention that the AKP is indeed a distinct party from other MG parties.

The AKP has shown great success at the elections in November 2002 by receiving 34.6 per cent of the votes and 366 of the seats in the National Assembly. This success at the polls facilitated the establishment of the AKP government, which would stay in office for four and a half years until the next election in July 2007. In the July elections the AKP brought about an exceptional political success by increasing its share of the vote to 47 per cent. This time the party won 340 seats,²⁶ a majority of the 550 seats in Parliament, and managed to establish a new government. This unusual electoral success and consequent establishment of the AKP governments allow for a closer analysis of the extent of the party's divergence from the MG line by examining its performance in power.

Particularly in its first term in office, the AKP government acted in conformity with what it has promised in its party programme. The government has taken several

steps to consolidate democracy, improve human rights and expand freedoms, and thus take Turkey closer to European Union membership. In its first term in office, the AKP government passed two constitutional amendments (in 2002 and 2004) and five harmonization packages that include several legislative changes that would harmonize Turkish law with EU standards. To 'civilianize' and consolidate democracy in the country the AKP government abolished the controversial State Security courts and made changes to the organization of the National Security Council²⁷ and its responsibilities in some state institutions,²⁸ and narrowed down the scope of the military courts. To safeguard human rights and freedoms, the government accepted the supremacy of the European Court of Human Rights over domestic jurisdiction, thus acknowledging the citizen's right to a retrial in cases where ECHR could rule that a penalty given by the Turkish courts conflicts with the European Convention on Human Rights.

In a further expansion of basic rights and freedoms, the AKP government abolished the death penalty for all crimes, lifted the ban against broadcasting in languages other than Turkish, and facilitated instruction in native languages other than Turkish. To further freedom of expression, the government repealed a controversial clause in the law against terrorism, made it harder to ban political parties, and broadened freedom of association by lifting the obstacles to establishing and joining associations. To enhance gender equality, the AKP government amended the Constitution and introduced the clause that 'women and men have equal rights before the law' and increased the penalties in the penal code for 'honour' crimes committed against women. Finally, to coordinate further steps to improve the human rights regime, the prime minister appointed a minister who would oversee improvements in human rights. All these steps taken by the AKP in its first term in office delivered Turkey's candidacy status to the EU, and in 2005 the accession talks officially began.

Soon after the 2007 elections, the AKP started its second term in office with an ambitious project of preparing a democratic and civilian constitution to replace the existing one prepared by the military junta in 1982. Before the public debates about the new constitution started, the government proposed an amendment to the existing constitution to lift the ban on headscarves in the universities. This move has initiated an intense debate about veiling, the role of religion in public sphere, and most important of all, the AKP's 'hidden' agenda about establishing an Islamic state. The debates culminated in the submission of the case against the AKP to the Constitutional Court. The prosecutor claimed that the AKP has been the base of anti-secular activities, evidenced by Erdogan's speeches, the statements of AKP MPs and actions of the municipalities. The court decided to cut the financial means of the party rather than closing it. This court decision confirmed that the AKP is not an Islamist party like other MG parties, while indicating that the AKP has yet to consolidate its conservative identity and clearly formulate its understanding of the role of Islam in public life.

Those who argue that the AKP has departed from the Islamist MG movement attribute this moderation to the 28 February process and its learning and psychological effects on political Islamists. Atacan argues that the 28 February process is the main reason behind the split within the MG movement, because it turned the coalition of different Islamic and conservative groups within the RP into a

source of schism when the party faced a crisis in 1997.²⁹ The party closure for Atacan exerted extra pressure on the party members and forced some groups to follow an integrationist line with the secular establishment. Cizre and Cinar agree on the causal role played by the 28 February process, which forced the reformist wing within the MG movement (*Yenilikciler*) to derive some lessons from RP policies and its past mistakes.³⁰ The fact that the RP did not seek consensus and dialogue and did not address a broader public was a mistake according to the *Yenilikciler*. Furthermore, the 28 February process led this reformist group to recognize the heterogeneous nature of society and forced it to moderate its political stance. Although Saban Taniyici agrees that the 28 February process effected a change within political Islam, this process itself did not determine the direction of the change.³¹ Taniyici contends that the RP cadres have changed their policies in response to an external shock (referring to the 28 February process) which forced them to change their stance on a number of issues, and the direction of this change – in this case towards democracy – was determined by the political opportunity structure (existing normative structures/resources) provided by the European Union. Accordingly, the political Islamist actors realized that the democratic normative structures of the EU could be employed as resources in response to state pressure. Ziya Onis adds other factors to the 28 February process in his explanation as to why Turkish political Islam has changed: the learning process during democratization, economic transformation during liberalization that produced a substantial middle class of entrepreneurs, and the role the EU played as a safeguard against the long-established state elites.³²

With the exception of Onis, many scholars point to the changes in the political context as the cause of the AKP's break with the MG line. These explanations miss the fact that neither military intervention nor party closure is a new experience for the Islamists. The parties of the MG movement were outlawed twice in 1971 and again in 1980 because they were functioning on the basis of religion. Therefore, the arguments that put emphasis on party closure and the 28 February process and their learning and psychological effects are limited in their explanatory power since they do not explain why the Islamists did not moderate much earlier, in the 1970s or 1980s. Again these arguments might explain why the MG cadres in the aftermath of the 28 February process have made more frequent references to democracy, human rights and freedoms (still in areas where devout Muslims suffer) but they cannot explain why the movement gave birth to two new parties, one of which claims to be a conservative democratic party with a much clearer pro-EU stance and liberal policies.

The major factor behind the emergence of the AKP and what sets it apart from other MG parties is indeed the new social base that has been developing since 1980 as a result of economic liberalization. The MG movement had long been divided between moderate pragmatists (*yenilikciler*) and traditionalist hardliners (*gelenekciler*). This divide widened further when the emerging devout bourgeoisie equipped the *Yenilikciler* within the MG with economic, social, and political power vis-à-vis the hardliner traditionalists. In this respect the 28 February process did not generate new schisms within the Islamists, but rather rendered the existing divisions between the moderates and the hardliners more visible and provided the *Yenilikciler* with opportunities to defeat them. From 28 February 1997 onwards the coalition between the moderates in the party and the devout bourgeoisie increasingly tightened, culminating in the establishment of the AKP in 2001. The next section

discusses the roots of the division between the moderates and the hardliners within the MG, dating back to the late 1980s and how and why the devout bourgeoisie aligned with the moderates over the course of the 1990s.

The division between the *Yeniliciler* and *Gelenekciler* dates back to the late 1980s when a group within the party emerged and insisted that it embrace a mainstream political vision which would allow it to reach the wider populace. The *Yeniliciler* asserted that the RP should drop its Islamist line and transform into a conservative-nationalist centre party³³ through changes in ideology and organization, because its Islamist ideology meant that the MG parties remained marginalized and radical. Nureddin Nebati, current vice-chair of AKP's Istanbul branch, and a MUSIAD³⁴ member, claims that the division between *Yeniliciler* and *Gelenekciler* existed from the 1980s, and he was one of the moderates known as the *Yenilikci* leader of a local RP branch in the early 1990s. As early as 1992, Nebati penned an article on RP's future, arguing that the RP would either become a conservative democratic party or become increasingly marginalized and disappear.³⁵ A core group within the MG movement, including Erbakan himself, insisted that the RP should stay as an Islamist ideological party and resisted the centrist tendencies of the *Yeniliciler*.³⁶ One of the leading students of Turkish political Islam confirmed the divisions within the MG movement and claimed that those who grew weary of being in a marginalized Islamist party looked upon Erdogan as a leader who could carry the MG line much closer to the centre and improve relations with the state and the secular establishment.³⁷

Tayyip Erdogan, the most prominent name in the party organization leading the *Yeniliciler*, took several steps to transform the RP's Istanbul organization into a real political party rather than a proselytizing religious sect, through highlighting its political rather than its spiritual side. Erdogan's style of political propaganda was active in all parts of society – including clubs, pubs, and even brothels – and has increasingly diverted from the traditional line over the years since he served in the Istanbul branch. Due to this difference in political vision, Erdogan often clashed with Erbakan and his close associates in party affairs. Erdogan rejected the notion of unconditional obedience to the leader of the party and questioned the decisions and strategies of the ruling cadre when he felt the politburo was erroneous.³⁸ Particularly after he was elected the mayor of Istanbul in 1994, Erdogan resisted pressure from the politburo and started running the RP Istanbul organization and mayoralty independently from the party centre. Accordingly, he selected centre-right bureaucrats and avoided hiring radical Islamists. He often stated that what mattered for him was a person's merit rather than his ability to recite the Qur'an or his Islamist attire and outlook. Due to such divergences in opinion, the party centre distanced itself from Erdogan, and in many instances Erdogan himself confirmed the existence of this distance by claiming that the party has treated him as a stepson, and he did not receive much support while he was the mayor of Istanbul.³⁹

The division between *Yeniliciler* and *Gelenekciler* surfaced during the process following the NSC meeting on 28 February 1997. The political ban on Erbakan and the closure of the RP provided the prominent names within the party in the *Yenilikci* camp with opportunities to raise their voice in the new MG party. Abdullah Gul,

Bulent Arinc, and Abdullatif Sener, who would be among the founders of the AKP along with Tayyip Erdogan, increased their demands for the FP to become a centrist political party without an Islamist agenda. In order to carry out this change, the *Yenilikciler* challenged the authority of the traditionalists in the party congress of 2000 by nominating Abdullah Gul for the party's presidency. Although the *Yenilikciler* lost the party congress, the fact that it had garnered almost half of the delegates' votes, despite traditionalists' heavy reliance on Erbakan's charisma, indicated that the MG movement had been divided for good. The party congress was a last attempt at transforming the movement from within. For the *Yenilikciler*, when it realized that the democratic routes to change were closed, it established its own conservative-democrat party that was distinct from and independent of the MG movement, following the closure of the FP by the Constitutional Court.

It was the changes that had taken place within the political Islamist constituency that caused the emergence of a successful moderate wing within the MG movement in the early 1990s. The traditional social coalition behind the MG movement was composed of the marginalized provincial middle classes and the lower class immigrant urbanites. Following the economic liberalization of the 1980s, components of this social coalition began to change as the upper and middle classes in the provinces started to enjoy greater wealth and integration with the global economy. This process was coupled with embourgeoisement. The so-called 'Just Order' of the MG line that highlighted social justice, redistribution, and heavy state intervention through an economic programme alienated the emerging devout bourgeoisie. Erol Yazar, the founding president of MUSIAD, stated that the organization was highly sceptical of Erbakan's Just Order Economic Program and rather preferred a political cadre that could deliver a well-functioning free market.⁴⁰ Erbakan's backing of greater state presence in the economy did not match well with what the expanding devout bourgeoisie asked for. Seyit Mehmet Buga, a MUSIAD member from Konya, contends that the main factor behind the separation of RP was its insistence on the state's dominance in the economy. Buga argues that the age of etatism was long gone along with economic liberalization and yet the RP could not realize this. The devout businessmen longed for a leader like the former president of the Republic, the late Turgut Ozal, who was economically liberal and socially conservative, rather than a leader like Erbakan.⁴¹

The Refah Party's tense relations with the secular establishment after it came to power as the senior partner of a coalition government also played a role in this alienation. The troubled relations with the state institutions considerably increased business risks for the devout entrepreneurs who would naturally wish to curtail political costs. Finally, following economic liberalization and the Customs Union in 1996 the devout bourgeoisie established close business relations with the EU countries and the distance of the RP to the West and the EU turned into a major concern for these entrepreneurs. The *Yenilikciler* realized that a transformation had been going on within the social basis of the MG movement. In 1998 Erdogan indicated this change and claimed that the MG has gradually distanced itself from its constituency and failed to respond to their demands.⁴²

A pact between the devout bourgeoisie and the moderates within the MG movement began to develop even before 1997, but it grew in strength after 1997, when the devout bourgeoisie supported the *Yenilikciler*, which became increasingly visible in the aftermath of the 28 February process against the hardliners. The devout bourgeoisie delivered the reformist wing financial, human, and political resources, and thus played an active role in the emergence of a new conservative democratic political party. In terms of financial support, the Albayrak Group, a MUSIAD member company, took the lion's share and became one of the chief financiers of the *Yenilikciler*.⁴³ In addition, through its daily newspaper, *Yeni Safak*, the group strongly promoted *Yenilikciler* before and after the FP party congress in 2000 when it openly confronted the traditionalists.⁴⁴ Traditionalists were frustrated with the support that the devout bourgeoisie, particularly MUSIAD, has given to the *Yenilikciler*, and in response Erbakan urged the establishment of an alternative businessmen's association, ASKON.⁴⁵

The fact that the devout bourgeoisie joined with the *Yenilikciler* became ever more evident when the Constitutional Court shut down the FP. Following the closure of the FP, the *Yenilikciler* decided to establish a new party, while traditionalists remained within the MG line and founded the SP. The MPs in the ranks of the FP had to decide which side they would join: 28 of the 31 of former FP MPs who were businessmen joined the *Yenilikciler* and its new political party.⁴⁶ The support of the devout bourgeoisie continued as the *Yenilikciler* started setting up the local branches of the AKP. Thus, the support was not confined to Parliament. MUSIAD played a critical role at the organizational level as numerous members of the association joined the AKP to complete the organization of the local offices of the party in Anatolian cities. Ahmet Sekeroglu, a MUSIAD member and a member of the Konya Chamber of Industry Executive Board, asserts that the AKP substantially benefited from the MUSIAD base as it built its organization in Konya.⁴⁷ Moreover, several MUSIAD members ran in the 2002 elections on the AKP lists and 20 MUSIAD members were elected as AKP MPs.⁴⁸

The contribution of MUSIAD to the new party was not limited to the support of its members in the form of financial or human resources. According to Ali Bayramoglu, the second president of MUSIAD and currently an AKP MP, the association and its policy recommendations equipped the new party with innovative ideas and formed the basis of AKP policies.⁴⁹ In fact, the AKP party programme has significant parallels with MUSIAD's economic and political reports. For example, the MUSIAD report on Democratization and Constitutional Reform published in 2000 clearly inspires the AKP, which, like MUSIAD, demands a more civil and democratic constitution, extension of human rights and freedoms, decentralization of administration, and greater compliance with the EU Copenhagen Criteria.⁵⁰

Leaving the MG line aside, the AKP followed Ozal's Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi, ANAP) and its economically liberal, socially conservative, and politically democratic discourse,⁵¹ while Erdogan took Ozal, whose style is just what the devout bourgeoisie has been longing for, as his role model rather than Erbakan. As Insel argues, the AKP continues the American-style liberal-conservative development that had started with Ozal's ANAP⁵² by giving the economy a central role in its programme and policymaking. An important reason for the prominence of the

economy in the programme, for Insel, is the fact that the identity of the devout bourgeois class it represents is shaped primarily through economic activity.⁵³

Since it came to power in 2002 the AKP has clearly shown that it is indeed a party of business.⁵⁴ With its emphasis on macro-economic stability, economic growth, and expansion of private investment, the AKP made it clear that it represents foremost the interests of business. The way the AKP government has dealt with labour further strengthened the pro-business image of the party. The success that the AKP has achieved in constructing a pro-business party identity is yet to be achieved in filling in its newly defined conservative democrat identity. The recent case for closure has shown that the AKP is yet to define and clarify the role Islam plays in its political identity and what role the party wants Islam to play in the public sphere.

Since its establishment in 2001 the AKP leaders have consistently claimed that they were no longer following the MG line. The party put extraordinary efforts into explaining what it is not (Islamist), but it has not devoted as much effort to define what it is (conservative). Several publications by the party on conservative democracy defined conservatism as evolutionary perception of change and a stance against revolutionary change as well as top-down projects of social engineering. Accordingly, traditions, norms, and social values of the society are valued and should be protected and gradual change should be immersed in the already existing social and cultural system.⁵⁵ It is clear that the AKP defines its conservative identity vis-à-vis Kemalist republicanism. The emphasis on the will of the people, evolutionary change, protection of social and cultural norms and values and rejection of social engineering reminds us of the centre-right tradition in Turkish politics that constructs its discourse around the centre-periphery dichotomy.

Elites of the centre contend that the AKP's conservatism is indeed concealed Islamism. In his indictment against the AKP the prosecutor made note of such instances that strengthen this contention. For instance, following the decision of the ECHR on Leyla Sahin's case in 2005 on veiling, Erdogan claimed that the courts do not have the authority to rule on veiling, and that this decision is within the confines of the *ulama's* (clerics) expertise. Likewise, several AKP MPs claimed that the real authority on the issue of the headscarf resides in the Directorate of the Religious Affairs and not in the courts. Other AKP MPs claimed that there is no distinction in Islam between public and private spheres; Islam exists in all spheres of life, therefore, when there is a case before the court regarding a religious issue the judge has to study the Qur'an and rule accordingly. Similarly, soon after the AKP proposed an amendment to the constitution to lift the headscarf ban Erdogan again stated that the ban should be lifted even if the headscarves are political symbols. Some prominent members of the party claimed that lifting the ban in universities is a start and soon the headscarf ban in other public institutions will be lifted. The prosecutor has also noted the activities of AKP mayors in the indictment. Many AKP mayors in different parts of the country distributed proselytizing publications to their constituency for free. Another AKP mayor set a certificate from a religious vocational school as a criterion for employment in the municipality.⁵⁶ In addition to these, some municipalities started a project of isolating alcohol consumption to streets located on the outskirts of the cities.

Based on this evidence, the court decided to cut the financial means of the party but ruled against the closure of the AKP. This decision confirmed that the AKP is a

right-wing party representing business interests and conservative values. The decision has also shown that while the AKP is consistent and successful in constructing its economic liberal identity, its conservative identity is inconsistent and 'fuzzy', and the AKP has yet to draw the boundary between social conservatism, as it understands it, and Islamism.

This article has tried to show that the AKP is indeed different from its forerunners of Islamist parties that had followed the MG line of thought. This difference has manifested itself in the AKP's treatment of democracy, individual rights and liberties, and most importantly in its economic policies. Although the literature cites the 28 February process, the EU impact, and the learning effects of democratization as explanations for this difference, here it is claimed that the case of the AKP is in fact different due to its extended business network and newly defined, or rather to-be-defined, conservative base.

Unlike its predecessors, the AKP has succeeded in gaining the support of a devout bourgeoisie that has emerged concomitant to the economic reforms of the 1980s. The AKP's relationship with the MUSIAD business organization demonstrates this connection very well. The AKP's liberal economic orientation and its ideology on democracy, human rights and freedoms have provided MUSIAD members who define themselves as devout businessmen the political base that they were longing for. Despite its success in establishing a well-defined business relationship, the AKP has been rather shallow in defining its conservative line. The acts and statements of the party on the issue of the veil have been rather controversial, creating unrest among secular circles of the state establishment, and thus leading to the case for the party's closure.

The decision of the court in the case against the AKP reflects these structural political changes within the foundation of Islamic parties of Turkey. While the court acknowledged the political legitimacy of the party by taking a decision *against* its closure, it has revealed the general discontent regarding AKP's conservative/pro-Islamic policies by cutting its financial means.

Notes

1. Although *Milli Gorus* is translated as National Outlook in English, the adjective *Milli* carries the double meaning of national and/or religious. The National Outlook movement has never specified which meaning it refers to, but uses whichever meaning is more suitable depending on the context. Often, the leaders of the MG refer to the religious connotation and mean Muslim/Islamic when they use the term '*Millî*'.
2. For a detailed analysis of this process see U. Cizre and M. Cinar, 'Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism, and Politics in the Light of the February 28 Process', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol.102, No.2/3 (2003), pp.309–32.
3. *Welfare Party Election Manifesto* (1995), p.5.
4. A.Y. Sarıbay, 'Millî Nizam Partisinin Kuruluşu ve Programının İçeriği', in *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce: İslamcılık* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2004), p.583.
5. N. Erbakan, *Türkiye'nin Meseleleri ve Çözümleri* (Istanbul: Semih Ofset, 1991), p.46.
6. R. Cakir, *Ne Seriat Ne Demokrasi* (Istanbul: Metis, 1994), p.206.
7. Governments established in 1975 and 1977 by the right-wing parties in the parliament (Justice Party, National Salvation Party, Nationalist Action Party, Republican Trust Party) to prevent the formation of a leftist government by the Republican People's Party.

8. Sarıbay, Milli Nizam Partisinin Kuruluşu ve Programının İçeriği', p.584.
9. *Welfare Party Election Manifesto* (1995), pp.20–22.
10. Erbakan here refers to communism and anarchism trying to convince those who fear that communism may spread if such freedoms are acknowledged. N. Erbakan, *Milli Gorus* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayinlari, 1975), p.33.
11. *Ibid.*, p.55.
12. Erbakan's speech in Bingol on 25 Feb. 1994.
13. Erbakan's speech in a party meeting in Sivas on 13 Jan. 1991.
14. Cited in D. Brumberg, 'Rhetoric and Strategy: Islamic Movements and Democracy in the Middle East', in M. Kramer and D. Brumberg (eds.), *The Islamism Debate* (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1997), p.20.
15. Erbakan's opening speech at RP's 4th Party Congress, 11 Sept. 1993.
16. U. Tekin, *Ak Partinin Muhafazakar Demokrat Kimligi* (Ankara: Orient, 2004), p.111
17. *Ibid.*, p.143, and the AKP Party Programme, Introduction.
18. M. Karaalioglu, *Hilal ve Ampul* (Istanbul: Bakis, 2001), p.146.
19. N. Ilicak, in *Yeni Safak*, 29 June 2001.
20. AKP Party Programme, pp.14–15. An ongoing debate about secularism and its application in Turkey has occupied the political agenda since the establishment of the AKP. Kemalists insist on the application of Jacobin secularism (or more appropriately laïcité), which seeks control of Islam and banning all of its visible manifestations in the public life. Interpretation of the public sphere is another significant dimension of the issue since the Kemalists reject a distinction between those who give and those who receive service in the public institutions. Along these lines a university student and a professor should both be the object of the headscarf ban. The AKP, on the other hand, demands a reinterpretation of the secularism principle of the state along the Anglo-Saxon tradition of freedom of conscience and religious practice and protecting religion from state intervention.
21. AKP Party Programme, pp.7–8.
22. *Ibid.*, p.14.
23. *Ibid.*, pp.15–16. It is often leftists who are victims of such violations. The MG parties have never mentioned these violations of human rights in their party manifestos.
24. *Ibid.*, p.17.
25. *Ibid.*, pp.25–6.
26. Despite the fact that the AKP increased its vote share in the 2007 elections, the seats it won in the parliament slightly decreased compared to 2002 elections because in the 2007 elections four parties passed the national electoral threshold (10 per cent) as opposed to two parties in 2002 elections.
27. One such step was to appoint a civilian secretary to the NSC.
28. For instance, before these changes the NSC had a right to appoint a member in the board of the Higher Education Institute and the Higher Board of Radio and Television Broadcasting.
29. F. Atacan, 'Explaining Religious Politics at the Crossroad: AKP-SP', *Turkish Studies*, Vol.6, No.2 (2005), pp.187–99.
30. U. Cizre and M. Cinar, 'Turkey 2002: Kemalism, Islamism, and Politics in the Light of the February 28 Process', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol.102, No.2/3 (2003), pp.309–32.
31. S. Taniyici, 'Transformation of Political Islam in Turkey: Islamist Welfare's Pro-EU Turn', *Party Politics*, Vol.9, No.4 (2003), pp.463–83.
32. Z. Onis, 'The Political Economy of Islam and Democracy in Turkey: From the Welfare Party to the AKP', in D. Jung (ed.), *Democracy and Development: New Political Strategies for the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), pp.103–28.
33. R. Cakir and F. Calmuk, *Recep Tayyip Erdogan: Bir Donusumun Hikayesi* (Istanbul: Metis, 2001), p.56.
34. MUSIAD, established in 1990, is the largest voluntary businessmen association in Turkey with more than 2000 members spread across 28 cities. The Association represents conservative businessmen owning small to medium enterprises.
35. Nureddin Nebati, personal interview, November 2005.
36. Bulent Arinc, one of the leaders of *yenilikciler* and a founder of AKP, complains that a core group in the RP did not allow it to become a center party (quoted in Cakir and Calmuk, *Recep Tayyip Erdogan*, pp.130–33).

37. Ibid., p.145.
38. Ibid., p.98.
39. Ibid., pp.60, 65.
40. Personal interview, 14 March 2007.
41. Personal interview, 6 September 2007.
42. Cakir and Calmuk, *Recep Tayyip Erdogan*, p.154, also see Karaalioglu, *Hilal ve Ampul*, n.14.
43. Cakir and Calmuk, *Recep Tayyip Erdogan*, p.151.
44. For details see the issues of *Yeni Safak* in May and June 2000.
45. Personal interview with Nazli Ilicak, a former Fazilet Party MP and a columnist, 16 Feb. 2007. Of course ASKON has attracted little attention and could never become as popular as MUSIAD.
46. Based on the information provided by the Grand National Assembly on MPs in the official website at <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr>.
47. Several MUSIAD members, during the interviews conducted in September and November 2007, reported that they have served in AKP Konya organization.
48. Reported by Nihat Alayoglu, The General Secretary of MUSIAD, personal interview, 25 Sept. 2006.
49. 'Muhafazakar MUSIAD, Metroseksuel olabilir mi?' *Milliyet*, 4 April 2004.
50. For details see MUSIAD report 'Anayasa Reformu ve Demokratikleşme' (2000) and AKP Party Programme (2001).
51. E. Ozbudun, 'From Political Islam to Conservative Democracy: The Case of the Justice and Development Party in Turkey', *South European Society and Politics*, Vol.11, No.3-4 (2006), pp.543-57.
52. For further details see A. Insel, 'The AKP and Normalizing Democracy in Turkey', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol.102, No.2/3 (2003), pp.293-308.
53. Ibid., p.306.
54. Cakir and Calmuk, *Recep Tayyip Erdogan*, p.203.
55. Y. Akdogan, *AK Parti ve Muhafazakar Demokrasi* (Istanbul: Alfa, 2004).
56. The Indictment against the AKP, available at http://www.netbul.com/superstar/ozeldosyalar/siyaset/Akpye_kapatma_davasi/akp_kapatma_davasi_18.asp (accessed 22 September 2008).