



Freedom of Religion in Turkey between Secular and Islamic Values The Situation of Christians

Anna Maria Beylunioğlu Atlı

Ph.D. thesis defence on 26 January 2017

Abstract

Freedom of religion has been a delicate issue since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, despite the principle of secularism stated in the country's constitution since 1937. This is especially evident in considering the status of non-Muslim minorities. After decades marked by assaults aimed at the non-Muslims of Turkey and confiscation of properties belonging to their communities, several reform packages were adopted by the Turkish government in order better to secure their religious freedoms. Recent developments signalled a change may be underway with regard to state's approach to religion in general, and non-Muslims in particular.

Despite the growing body of literature focusing on the recent democratization process in Turkey, only a few studies found the case of non-Muslims worthy of including in their analysis, as they are often perceived to be insignificant due to their small share among the general population. In accounting for recent developments visible in various fields such as civil-military relations, Kurdish issue and religion-state relations, a vast majority scholarship has perceived the European Union accession process as the main anchor of this democratization process. Considering, however, that the recasting of freedom of religion has continued even after the stagnation of EU conditionality, alternative explanations must be explored.

I argue that the recent process of recasting the parameters of religious freedoms can be solely explained by neither the role of EU conditionality nor the reading of developments through separate alternative models. Though recent years have witnessed several significant attempts combining various models in explaining the democratization process, no analysis to date has paid particular attention to religion and religious preferences, and I believe this leads to an insufficient understanding of recent developments in relation to freedom of religion.

In order to gain a comprehensive perspective, I have adopted an analytically eclectic approach benefitting from External Incentives, Social Learning and Lesson Drawing models and demonstrated how together they have interactively shaped the parameters of freedom of religion throughout different time periods in the Turkish state. I have employed a within-case-comparison methodology of three time periods (1999-2005/ 2005-2010/ 2011-2015), embracing a process-tracing

method. Taking the results generated by applying these models to the context in Turkey, I contend that EU conditionality was the initial motive behind the reform process in the first time period analyzed, while growth of social dynamics has been observed only during the second period. Finally, the lesson drawing model, aka the AKP's preferences, have played a decisive role throughout all of the time periods examined.



Jury: Olivier Roy (EUI/RSCAS) (Supervisor), Anna Maria Beylunioğlu Atli (Ph.D. candidate) Nilüfer Göle (EHESS, Paris), Sahin Alpay (Emeritus, Univ. Bahcesehir, Istanbul) (in absentia), Donatella della Porta (SNS, Firenze) (in absentia)

Bio

Anna Maria Beylunioğlu is a PhD candidate at the Department of Social and Political Sciences of the European University Institute (EUI), Florence and a member of Arabic-speaking Rum Orthodox minority community in Turkey. After receiving a B.A. degree in Political Science and a minor degree in Economics from Bahcesehir University in Istanbul in 2006, she received her M.A. degree on International Relations with a particular focus on Turkish-Greek Relations and completed her master thesis on "A Comparative Study of Religion-State Relations In Greece And Turkey: The Identity Cards Controversy", which then published as a book. Apart from her academic studies she worked as student advisor and Erasmus coordinator at Bahcesehir University, and organized several conferences and events in her capacity as the coordinator of the Religion and Politics Working Group at the EUI. She concentrated on religion-state relations, freedom of religion and religious minorities during her PhD studies. Her latest publication "Recasting the Parameters of Freedom of Religion in Turkey: Non-Muslims and the AKP" will appear as a book chapter in the edited volume "Authoritarian Politics in Turkey: Elections, Resistance and the AKP" to be published by IB Tauris in May 2017