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**Compulsory religion education and religious minorities in Turkey**

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## **Chapter 3**

### **Education policies with respect to religion education (1918-1980)**

This chapter examines the history of Turkish education policy between 1918 and 1980, paying particular attention to compulsory religion education. My objective is two-fold. First, I conduct a detailed study of the various debates surrounding the religion course, tracking discussions in parliaments or in prominent journals of the time. I survey the changing discourses about secularism, showing that it was interpreted differently by various political camps and that discussions about the topic of religious education tended to end in deadlock. By analyzing these debates, I hope to show that even when compulsory religion education was opposed on the grounds that it was against freedom of conscience as guaranteed by a secular state, only a few intellectuals reflected on this matter from a minority rights perspective.

My second aim is to show how the views of non-Muslims and Alevites remained largely peripheral to religion education that catered only to the interests of Sunni Muslims in state schools. The ostensible reason for this disregard was the fact that non-Muslims had their own minority schools and so, theoretically, they could get their religion education there. In practice it was different. The project of Turkification (from the beginning of the Republic) proved so strong that, over time, it eliminated the minority schools or rendered them functionless. Though their numbers were already decreasing for many other reasons, the students of these minority schools began to enrol in foreign or common state schools. This meant that they had no real opportunity to learn their religion, as did the Sunni Muslims.

This material in this chapter is divided according to three identifiable, historical periods. The first period, from 1918 to 1923 saw the advance of numerous ideas about the potential quality of the new Republic's education system. There were debates between those MPs who thought that education should be nationalistic and those who thought it should be religious. These debates demonstrated a shift towards the nationalistic education of the Kemalist, one party period, which only later and for pragmatic reasons, would incorporate Islamic elements.

The second period, from 1923 to 1950, was that of the single party regime under CHP (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi / Republican People's Party).<sup>1</sup> Marked by its secularist policies

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<sup>1</sup> Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi or CHP is the oldest political party in the Republic of Turkey. Its original name was Halk Fırkası (People's Party), *fırka* meaning 'party' in old Turkish. The party was established during the Congress of Sivas as a union of resistance groups against the invasion of Anatolia. The union represented

during this period the newly established state declared education to be of paramount importance. The state distanced itself from Islam, passing reforms such as the abolition of the Caliphate and, until 1938, of religion courses offered at all levels of education. At the same time, the state aligned itself with Islam as a marker of Turkishness. All education policies were shaped by this understanding, which had negative consequences for religious minorities. Moreover, former members of *millet*s were now defined as 'religious minorities' through the Lausanne Treaty (1923). In sum, this was a period during which the state sought firm control over religion and simultaneously worked to homogenize the population, at the expense of non-Muslim and non-Turkish speaking people. This period also saw the passage of the “Law of Unification of Education” (1924), which liquidated the minority schools. The growing hostility to non-Islamic elements of society further showed itself in the Thrace Pogrom (1934) and after World War Two, in the Capital Tax (1942) for non-Muslims.

The third period covers the years from 1950 to 1980, during which there was a multi-party regime. In this period, strict secularization policies came to an end. This was mainly due to public pressure and the tactics of the DP (Demokrat Partisi / Democratic Party) regime which used the “religious” sentiments of the population to take power. The regulations governing religious affairs were loosened and the meaning of secularism was widely debated. Many argued, in overt criticism of former leaders, that secularism should not be equated with atheism. Religion courses gradually returned to school curricula, despite opposition from CHP members and certain portions of society. In many cases, these courses were seen as antidotes to the existing communist threat. Fierce debates raged, especially in the media, about the compatibility of the course with the constitution, arguments that recur in today's debates. In any event, the societal role of Islam increased in importance during this period. The pressure on religious minorities and on their rights as citizens became more palpable toward the end of this era. The 6-7 September Pogrom<sup>2</sup> revealed deep hostility towards non-Muslims, the “others” of Turkish society, whose numbers sharply decreased during this three-decade period.<sup>3</sup>

Each of the three sections of this chapter opens with an introduction to the main

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Turkish people as a unified front during the Turkish War of Independence. On September 9, 1923 Halk Fırkası (*People's Party*) officially declared itself a political organization and on October 29, 1923 announced the establishment of the Turkish Republic. On November 10, 1924 the Halk Fırkası (People's Party) took the name Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası, to be later known as Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, in 1935.

<sup>2</sup> This was a pogrom directed primarily at İstanbul's Greek minority on 6-7 September 1955. See pages 93-94 for more detail.

<sup>3</sup> In 1927, there were 378.664 non-Muslims, making up 2.78 percent of the whole population; in 1955, this number decreased to 260.715, 1.08 percent of the population. (See: *Devlet İstatistik Enstitüsü İstatistik Yıllığı 1959* [*Statistics Yearbook: 1959*]. Ankara: Başbakanlık İstatistik G. D, 1959.)

political events of the historical period under discussion. In order to contextualise education (and religion education) policies, I examine relations between the state and its religious minorities, taking particular note of the situation regarding minority schools. Unlike the previous chapter, I do not address each *millet* separately, for the simple reason that in this era, the *millet* system ceased to exist. In official circles, a new argument broke out after the abolition of the caliphate and the Muslim religious courts, and especially after the public announcement of plans to adopt a new legal system modelled on Swiss, Italian and German codes.<sup>4</sup> According to this view, since the new legal codes of the state would no longer be based on Muslim religious law but on secular Western statutes, then the need for separate laws in matters concerning personal and family status of non-Muslims had disappeared.<sup>5</sup> With these developments, the last vestiges of the old *millet* privileges came to an end. Non-Muslim communities became strictly voluntary confessional organizations. The heads of the major religious communities (the Chief Rabbi and the Ecumenical Orthodox Patriarch) became gradually officially government employees and pious endowments (wakfs) were administered by the government, as is all religious real property. This meant that in state discourses, Jews, Greeks and Armenians were grouped as “non-Muslims” and consequentially, state policies, especially with regard to education, targeted all three groups. The Alevis never constituted an organized community such as that of the Jews, Greeks or Armenians. They were geographically dispersed throughout Anatolia, and socially marginalized by the Sunni structure adopted by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Thus, the Alevis had a different and highly complex experience of religion education, one that must be elaborated separately from that of the Jews, Greeks and Armenians. In the eyes of the state, they were not seen as a minority group and yet they carry distinct characteristics that the state generally denies or ignores.

### **3. 1 Turkey after war (1918-1923)**

Immediately after the Balkan War, the Ottoman Empire was once again engaged in conflict. “The Balkan War had shown that the Empire's diplomatic isolation would mean the end of the empire and so the government was already ready to accept any alliance rather than hold a continued isolation”.<sup>6</sup> In the end, the Unionist government of the Ottoman Empire allied itself with the central powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary against the Entente: the

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<sup>4</sup> Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990, p. 165.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey, A Modern History*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1998, p. 111.

Russian Empire, British Empire, Italy and the United States. The War, which was fought not only on Ottoman territories but also in many other regions, ended with the defeat of the Central Powers. The armistice, signed by British and Ottoman delegations at Moudros on 31 October 1918, had devastating consequences for the Ottoman Empire.<sup>7</sup> Following the armistice, most of the Unionist leaders fled to European cities, leaving a power vacuum in Istanbul, although the remaining Unionists still controlled the parliament, army, and police force. Moreover, the Unionist underground movement managed to smuggle a number of Unionist officers to Anatolia - Mustafa Kemal being one of them. Thus, as early as 1919, a resistance movement had started in Anatolia, in defiance of the authority of the Sultanate and the cabinet of Istanbul who had given in to the demands of the Entente. Eventually, Mustafa Kemal became leader of the National Resistance movement that ended with victory in the Independence War of 1921-1922.

There were prolonged peace negotiations between the Entente and the Ottoman Empire, which finally ended with the Treaty of Sevres, signed on 10 August 1920. Although never fully enforced, the terms of the treaty were so severe that its long lasting effects were later referred to as the *Sevres Syndrome*. This syndrome may be described as a feeling of 'distrust of outsiders' and 'fear of abandonment and fear of loss of territory'. In other words, there was general trepidation that the country would again be subject to partition as a result of collaboration between its minorities and their foreign allies.

The treaty divided the Empire into many parts, leaving it only a small state in northern Asia Minor, with Istanbul as its capital. Eastern Thrace and the area around Izmir were given to Greece, while the Straits were internationalized. An independent Armenian republic was created in eastern Anatolia. France established mandates in Syria and Lebanon, and a sphere of influence in southern Anatolia. Britain established mandates in Palestine, Southern Syria and Iraq, including the oil-rich province of Mosul.<sup>8</sup> The treaty, which the Ottoman delegation refused to accept, was only signed after Istanbul sent a new and more compliant delegation. However, the Treaty of Sèvres was annulled during the Turkish War of Independence; the parties signed and ratified the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. Through this later treaty, Turkey attained the goals of the National Pact and emerged as a completely sovereign state.<sup>9</sup> Thus the

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<sup>7</sup> Article 7 and 24 were especially perceived as dangerous because while article 7 gave the Entente the right to occupy any place in the Ottoman Empire if it considered its security to be under threat, article 24 gave it the right to intervene militarily in the Armenian provinces if law and order should fall apart there.

<sup>8</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey, A Modern History*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1998, p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> National Pact (Misak-i Milli) is a manifesto adopted on 28 January 1920, which was the resistance movement's official statement of aims, consisting of six articles. (For the content of the Pact, see: Zürcher, Erik Jan. Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey, A Modern History*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1998, p. 138.)

military battle was won, and the political program of the nationalists had been achieved and recognized in an international treaty.<sup>10</sup>

The Treaty of Lausanne was hugely important, especially because it included clauses that would affect the legal and social status of minorities in Turkey. Baskin Oran, who has written extensively about minority issues in Turkey, argues that

When the League of Nations was formed after the First World War, a tripartite criterion was employed to define minorities in racial, linguistic and religious terms. Minorities fitting into any of these three categories were granted not only equal rights with the majority but also internationally guaranteed rights that did not apply to the majority (e.g., building their own schools and using their own language). This “positive discrimination” was justified by the conviction that minorities, having lived in disadvantageous, or even hostile, environment, could not keep their cultural identity without any supportive measures. However, the Turkish delegation in Lausanne did not accept the full criterion as applicable to Turkey; it recognized only “non-Muslims” as constituting a minority and had this position accepted at the Conference.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Oran notes that the definition of minorities in the Lausanne Treaty was not based on an inclusive parameter of “religion”.

Even the ‘religion’ criterion was reduced to a ‘non-Muslim’ reference. Had the parameter of religion been accepted, as noted by Dr. Rıza Nur, the Deputy Head of Ankara Delegation at the Lausanne negotiations, the Alevis, whose religious practices are very different from Sunni Muslims, would have been also recognized as a minority and therefore covered by international guarantees.<sup>12</sup>

By employing a very narrow definition of ‘minority’, the Treaty gave minority status only to members of former *millet*s (Armenians, Greeks and Jews), and used it to limit the applicability of the rights articulated in it. The rights of many other ethnic groups, including non-Muslims (such as Assyrians) and Muslims (such as Kurds, Lazs and Roma), were not recognized by this treaty.<sup>13</sup> The Treaty of Lausanne makes it legally correct for Turkey to consider only non-Muslims as minorities, and as Oran argues, this legal inference corresponds to the general conviction in Turkey that only non-Muslims should be considered as minorities. This conviction is the deeply embedded result of historical, political and ideological factors, including the 19<sup>th</sup> century *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire.

Demographically speaking, due to mortality rates and large scale migrations at the end of the Turkish independence war, Anatolia was a completely different place in 1923 than it

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<sup>10</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, London: Oxford UP, 1961, p. 255.

<sup>11</sup> Baskin Oran, “Minority Concept and Rights in Turkey: The Lausanne Peace Treaty and Current Issues.” *Human Rights in Turkey*. Ed. Zehra F. Kabasakal Arat. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Rıza Nur, *Hayatım ve Hatıratım [My Life and Memoirs]*, Istanbul: Altındağ, 1967, p. 1044.

<sup>13</sup> Whether Kurds can be classified as minorities or not is a highly debated topic in Turkey. For a summary of the arguments, see Oran, Baskin. “Minority Concept and Rights in Turkey: The Lausanne Peace Treaty and Current Issues.” *Human Rights in Turkey*. Ed. Zehra F. Kabasakal Arat. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007.

had been in 1913. Some 2.5 million Anatolian Muslims had lost their lives, as had 600,000-800,000 Armenians, and up to 300,000 Greeks.<sup>14</sup> Before the War, Muslims constituted eighty percent of the Anatolian population; after the War, this figure rose to ninety-eight percent. The Armenian community shrank to 65,000 and the Greek community went from two million to 120,000.<sup>15</sup> The fact that the Ottoman Empire, having once sheltered countless numbers of ethnicities and religions, evolved into a more homogenized nation-state, only strengthened the idea that it was the ethnic Turks who should own this new country.

As for education, one can argue that the ideology of national education in Turkey was formed in the 1920s, during this period of conflict including the War of Independence and foundation of the Grand National Assembly, and later, the proclamation of the Republic and the establishment of single party rule by the Republican People's Party (CHP). As later sections show, the political experiences and memories of these turbulent years, especially the Sevres Treaty and the independence movements of former *millets*, were influential in determining the ideology of the new Republic and its national education system.

Before the Republic was founded in 1923 and Kemalism became the dominant state ideology, there were numerous debates about the prospective quality of education in the emerging nation. These debates took place in Unionist circles, in prominent journals and in the newly established parliament. They deserve further examination for, as it will be shown, the ideas proved to be more open to 'religion' per se, than the reforms that took place in the new republic of Atatürk.

### **3.1.1 Deciding on the character of education: religious education vs. national education**

Before the "Law of Unification of Instruction and the Law of Basic Education" was signed in 1924, there was widespread agreement that the future of state education needed to be determined. Parliamentary debates had revealed substantial ambiguity on the topic. As early as 1917, while the Ministry of Education (*Maarif Vekilliği*) budget was being discussed, Hilmi Bey (an MP from Basra) posed the problem of which kind of an education was desired, a religious or national one.<sup>16</sup> This was a question posed by many people.

At the time, there was a consensus that moral corruption was widespread and that it might be addressed by improvements to education. Indeed, some people in government saw moral corruption as a direct result of the absence of religion education in previous years.

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<sup>14</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey, A Modern History*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1998, p. 164.

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

<sup>16</sup> Beyza Bilgin, *Eğitim Bilimi ve Din Eğitimi*. 2nd ed. Ankara: Gün, 1997, p. 51.

These people argued that giving renewed importance to religion education would ameliorate the situation. Hamdullah Suphi, a very active MP during the first parliamentary sessions and known for his competence in the field of education, stated (in 1920), that “all nations receive religious education and our children too will get religious education”.<sup>17</sup>

During these early years, before the proclamation of the new republic, when there was still a clause in the constitution declaring Islam the state religion, there was sympathy in parliament for pro-religious education in schools. The first Minister of Education, Rıza Nur, not only supported the idea of religion courses, he even argued for school prayers.<sup>18</sup>

However, there were others who thought that a uniquely religious education was undesirable and that in order to enhance civic morality, formal education should be comprised of both religious and nationalist elements. One of the fervent proponents of this idea was the influential sociologist, Ziya Gökalp, whose seminal ideas about society and education remain highly regarded in Turkish political thought.<sup>19</sup> Ziya Gökalp pointed to the formation of two camps which he characterized as “Western fanatics”, who thought that religion should have no place in education, and “Medrese fanatics” who thought that Islam was the essence of Ottoman culture and should remain a required subject in schools. Rather than align himself with one of the camps, he argued that these two positions were not incompatible.<sup>20</sup> Gökalp was supported by prominent journalist Ahmet Cevdet who wrote in the *İkdam* journal that these two kinds of education, religious and national, could be given together in schools. Cevdet pointed out that this was being done in German schools at the time.<sup>21</sup>

On May 3, 1920, amidst these ongoing discussions, the First Council of Executive Deputies took office. That same month, Rıza Nur presented the Council program to the National Assembly.<sup>22</sup> The program contained an important paragraph in which education was identified as the most important factor for the survival and existence of a nation. The purpose of education was specified in clear terms:

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<sup>17</sup> Turkey. T.B.M.M. Zabıt Cenderesi [“Journal of Proceedings of the Turkish Grand National Assembly”]. Term 1. Vol. 1. 26 Apr. 1336: 71-78.

<sup>18</sup> Mustafa Çapar, *Türkiye’de Eğitim ve ‘Öteki Türkler’* [Education in Turkey and the ‘Other Turks’]. Ankara: Maki, 2006, p. 306.

<sup>19</sup> Ziya Gökalp was greatly influenced by the ideas of the French sociologist Emile Durkheim who saw the main social function of religion as unifying society and stimulating social development by raising ideals; and in whose understanding religion becomes synonymous with ideology. In agreement with Durkheim Gökalp also looked at the religious ideas and cults which the Turkish ethnic group created or identified with over the centuries of its existence, from a similar point of view.

<sup>20</sup> Halis Ayhan, *Türkiye’de Din Eğitimi* [Religion Education in Turkey]. Istanbul: Dem, 2004, p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Ahmet Cevdet, “Terbiye-i milliye ile Terbiye-i Diniye’nin Telifi” [“The conciliation of national education and religion education”]. *İkdam* 27 Eylül 1340 [27 Sept. 1921].

<sup>22</sup> İsmail Kaplan, *The Ideology of National Education in Turkey and Its Implications for Political Socialization*, Dissertation submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences, Boğaziçi University 1998, p. 151.

“Our goal in affairs of education is to provide our children with education which is religious and national in all senses and to elevate this education to a high level so that it may grant them qualities such as power of enterprise and self-confidence which will guarantee their success in the struggle of life, orient them toward self-reliance, and arouse in them productive ideas and consciousness”.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, this first official program of the modern Turkish nation-state, “calls for an all-round religious and national education combined with training which will guarantee material success in life”.<sup>24</sup> Kaplan rightfully argues that this formulation brings together education of character/spirit (here defined as both religious and national) and instrumental training.<sup>25</sup> In sum, the program sets out a clear objective to inculcate youth with nationalist and religious values, and to take an instrumentalist-utilitarian approach to teaching. From here, it can be argued that the modern Turkish state has been characterized by a synthesis of nationalism, Islamism and capitalism in the sphere of education and culture.

On 8 May 1921, a decree (*Medaris-i İlmiye Nizamnamesi*) was passed that proposed the improvement of *medreses*. Ayhan notes that in March, 1923, Atatürk and his wife made a trip to Konya to visit schools and *medreses*. Atatürk approved of the program he found at the Darulhilafe *medrese*, even donating three thousand lira to it.<sup>26</sup> Given the clear evidence of parliamentary support for the maintenance and improvement of *medreses*, Ayhan finds it bewildering that after three years, all *medreses* were abolished. However, a closer look at the policies of the time reveals that as Atatürk and his circle gained in confidence, they sought to push Islam to the margins of the public sphere, including the education system. An example of this can be found in a 1925 speech given by Atatürk at Samsun Ticaret Mektebi. After acknowledging the different types of education prevalent in different countries such as religious or international (*beynelmilel*) education, he states: “I will today only talk about *national* education which the Turkish state exclusively aims to give to its coming generations.”<sup>27</sup>

By 1924, the various debates had ended with the determination, expressed by some educators and by the more Kemalist secular circles, that education in Turkey should be national in character. Initially, education policymakers tried to reconcile nationalism with religion, precisely because religion was deemed useful to the formation of national character. However, with the advent of Kemalist reforms, religion was dismissed from political life and

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Halis Ayhan, *Türkiye’de Din Eğitimi [Religion Education in Turkey]*. Istanbul: Dem, 2004, p. 39.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

education. Religious elements in education were now considered unacceptable for a program in which national character formation was to be based on the teaching of “pure Turkish” moral and political precepts.<sup>28</sup>

Parallel to debates about the prospective character of education in the new Turkey, there were also discussions about which institution should hold jurisdiction over its organization. The idea that state had to control the content of all education was one that was shared by different camps in Turkey. For instance, M. Şemseddin wrote an article for the *Sebilurreşad Journal* (which was known for its Islamist line), in which he concluded that the provision of education was a state duty.<sup>29</sup> The Committee of Union and Progress, which constituted another opposing camp to Islamists, in its education program posed the following question: Which institution should pursue educational matters, state or religious denominations (*cemaat-i mezhebiye*)? In their conclusions, they stated that- it should be the state that should be controlling these affairs on the condition that it did not impose religion as a dogma.<sup>30</sup>

In order to pursue state affairs effectively, after the opening of the Parliament, TBMM (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi) on 23 April 1920, it was decided to establish special committees at the parliament. As yet, under which committee educational matters should be dealt with remained undecided for a period of time. While deciding on the responsibilities of the Pious Foundations Committee (*Şer’iye-Evkaf Vekaleti*), five MPs presented proposals in which they implied that education matters could be handled by this committee. On behalf of the committee, Müfit Efendi, claimed that it was appropriate for its members to manage education, provision of which was twofold: religious education (*tedrisat-ı diniye*) and secular education (*tedrisat-ı dünyeviye*). His views were opposed by Necati Bey, MP from Erzurum, on the basis that the people working for the Pious Foundations (*Şer’iye and Evkaf*) Committee were not sufficiently experienced in matters relating to education. Hamdullah Suphi, on the other hand, argued that education and religion should not be handled together. He proposed that the Ministry of Education (*Maarif Vekaleti*) retain overall responsibility, on condition that the Pious Foundations (*Şer’iye and Evkaf Vekaleti*) Committee take specific responsibility for religion in schools. By April 1920, with opinion so divided, it was decided to establish two separate committees. The Ministry of Education (*Maarif Vekaleti*) managed education, while

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<sup>28</sup> İsmail Kaplan, *The Ideology of National Education in Turkey and Its Implications for Political Socialization*, Dissertation submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences, Bogazici University 1998, p. 161.

<sup>29</sup> M. Şemseddin, “Programların Tanziminde Hükümetin Hakkı ve Vazifesi” [“The fight and the duty of governments while determining programs”]. *Sebilurreşad* 15 Şevval 1330 [15 Oct. 1911]: 79-80.

<sup>30</sup> Yurdagül Mehmedoğlu, *Tanzimat Sonrasında Okullarda Din Eğitimi [Religion Education in Schools in the Aftermath of the Tanzimat]*. Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi, 2001, p. 224.

the Pious Foundations Committee (*Şer'iyeye ve Evkaf Vekaleti*) took care of religious matters (which can be seen as the first form of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Foundations that was established in 1924). The distinction was a clear sign that the state wanted to monitor closely all education policy and provision, including religious studies. This strategy became even more apparent with the passage of the Law of Unification of Instruction in 1924.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.1.2 The situation of minority schools before 1923

Minority schools managed to function more or less regularly throughout the war years. The state proceeded with its policy of taking control of private education institutions, as well as those belonging to the non-Muslim minorities. As already seen, a 1915 regulation had allowed thorough supervision of these establishments. However, in the immediate years after the victory of the Entente in 1918, there was an “unhindered revival of foreign educational establishments in defeated Turkey.”<sup>32</sup> These institutions utilized whatever curricula they wished due to absence of the central government under allied control. There were also accusations of foreign and missionary schools collaborating closely with Western powers. In a fervently applauded speech to parliament, İsmet İnönü stated that American schools in the Antep region were being used as military bases to attack the local Turkish population.<sup>33</sup> His speech was fervently applauded by other MPs. Thus, after the Independence War in 1922, things began to change, and the schools were not immune to the reigning atmosphere of xenophobia.

Despite the fact that the educational rights of minorities were respected and guaranteed by the Lausanne Treaty, Turkish officials remained reluctant to honour these rights in practice. This reluctance can be seen in a statement given by Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, Minister for Education two times during 1920-1925, to a newspaper on 10 March 1921.<sup>34</sup> He stated that minority schools were sites of political propaganda, with catastrophic effects for the country. According to him, these schools harbored rebels who were trying to stir hostility between ethnic groups. He concludes that in order to prevent minority schools from operating as centers for these rebels, the schools must be closely monitored.<sup>35</sup> After this statement, a series

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<sup>31</sup> Halis Ayhan, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi [Religion Education in Turkey]*. Istanbul: Dem, 2004, pp. 28-32.

<sup>32</sup> Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews The Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925*, Indiana Univ. Press: Indiana, p. 160.

<sup>33</sup> Mustafa Çapar, *Türkiye'de Eğitim ve 'Öteki Türkler'* [Education in Turkey and the 'Other Turks']. Ankara: Maki, 2006, p. 302.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 289.

<sup>35</sup> “Maarif Vekili Hamdullah Suphi Beyefendi ile mülakat” [“An interview with the Minister of National Education Hamdullah Suphi Bey”]. *Hakimiyeti Milliye* 10 Mar. 1921.

of new regulations were passed for non-Muslim schools.<sup>36</sup> On 20 May 1923, the government announced, based on the previous law regarding the regulation of minority schools (Mekاتب-i Hususiye Talimatnamesi 1915), that in all minority schools, courses were to be given by teachers of Turkish nationality, and that Turkish, Geography and History would be taught in Turkish language, again by ‘Turks’ appointed by the Ministry of Education. According to Rodrigue, this was a clear sign that non-Muslims did not qualify as “pure Turks” and hence were excluded from these teaching positions.<sup>37</sup> In addition, the schools must pay the salaries of ‘Turkish’ teachers (which were higher than the usual teacher salaries).<sup>38</sup> Several Greek schools had to close down because they could not afford to pay these salaries.<sup>39</sup> In fact, the 41<sup>st</sup> article of the Treaty of Lausanne declared that the state should support the minority schools financially; this article seems to have been ignored.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, the Greeks, Jews and Armenians did retain the right to their own schools and saw some of their rights guaranteed by international treaty. This gave them relatively more advantages than other non-Muslim minorities (such as the Assyrians) or members of other denominations of Islam (such as the Alevis).

### **3.2 The foundation of the Republic (1923-1950) and single party regime**

On the 29th of October 1923, Mustafa Kemal came to the National Assembly (TBMM) and proposed constitutional amendments regarding the form of the government and political system. In brief, he proposed that Turkey become a republic. After hours of debate, despite the fact that in the Assembly there were members who saw the Caliph as the legitimate sovereign and head of state, the resolution was passed by a majority vote. At the same meeting, Mustafa Kemal was elected President and he appointed İsmet İnönü as his first Prime Minister. The meeting also marked the beginning of a single party regime which would last almost three decades.

The new government passed a series of reforms that radically changed the outlook of the country.<sup>41</sup> After the abolition of the caliphate in 1924, there was an acceleration reforms

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<sup>36</sup> Rıfat Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni 1923-1945* [The Jews of the Turkey during Republican Age, A Turkification Adventure 1923-1945]. Istanbul: İletişim, 1999, p. 187.

<sup>37</sup> Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990, p. 163.

<sup>38</sup> Rıfat Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni 1923-1945* [The Jews of the Turkey during Republican Age, A Turkification Adventure 1923-1945]. Istanbul: İletişim, 1999, p. 187.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> There were 3061 primary schools (employing 3033 teachers), of which 581 closed during the War of Independence. After the Republic was established, there were 4894 primary schools with 1054 teachers and 341,941 students. (See: Sezgin, R.A., Aslan, G., Küçükler, E. *Sekiz Yıllık Kesintisiz Zorunlu Eğitim II*

passed in order to secularize Turkey under Atatürk rule. For example, the state shut down the Ministry of Islamic Law and Pious Foundations, as well as the *medreses*. In addition, the Sufi Dervish lodges were closed; the *fez* was declared illegal and men had to wear western-style hats; and the lunar calendar and clock were dropped and replaced by the Gregorian calendar and solar clock. In 1926, further secularization occurred when the TBMM approved a secular civil code to regulate matters of marriage, inheritance, divorce and adoption. In the same year, Sharia courts were annulled and Islamic law was declared null and void. In 1928, the parliament eliminated any declaration of Islam (as state religion) from the constitution. Finally, in 1929, the Arabic alphabet was dropped and replaced with the Latin based alphabet.

At first glance, these secularist developments in the 1920s and 1930s appear to ease the oppression of religious minorities that had started in the Tanzimat era. Yet a close look reveals that this was not the case. It is true that secularisation eliminated many religious elements from the public domain. For example, not a single mosque was built during the 27 years of CHP rule in Ankara.<sup>42</sup> Yet, according to Çağaptay, “an analysis of the relations between the state and minorities in the 1920s demonstrate that despite its commitment to secularism as well as territorial-voluntaristic-linguistic forms of citizenship, to a large extent, Kemalist nationalism was still molded by Islam.”<sup>43</sup>

Islam had united the Anatolian Turkish Muslims in the Empire. After removing Islam from the public domain in 1924, the government soon realized that Kemalism was needed to fill the gap. So, the regime envisioned a modern nation-state and an all-inclusive identity for the country’s inhabitants. Kemalism came up with a ‘Turkishness’ idea, that had important elements. The first element was the emphasis on Turkish territory (Anatolia and Thrace) as the base of the nation. Atatürk summed this up as “the people of Turkey, who have established the Turkish state are called the Turkish nation”.<sup>44</sup> The second element was the stress on a shared past, interests and the desire to live together as the common denominators of the

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[*Compulsory primary education that lasts for eight years*]. Ankara: Plaka, 1999.) As a result of the government efforts, the number of schools in the country doubled between 1923 and 1940, from 5,062 to 11,040; the number of teachers increased by 133 percent, from 12,458 to 28,298; and the number of students increased by slightly less than 300 percent, from 352,668 to 1,050,159. In 1927 only 10.6 percent of the population (17.4 percent of men and 4.7 percent of women) could read. By 1940, this had improved to just 22.4 percent (33.9 percent of men and 11.2 percent of women), with rates in Istanbul much higher than the national average. (Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume II*, Cambridge Univ. Press: New York, 1977, p. 387.)

<sup>42</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*. New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 92.

<sup>43</sup> Soner Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?* London: Routledge, 2006, p. 14.

<sup>44</sup> Afet İnan, *Medeni Bilgiler ve Atatürk’ün El Yazıları*, Ankara, TTK, 1969, p. 351.

nation.<sup>45</sup> The third element of the Kemalist concept of Turkishness was language.<sup>46</sup> This posed an unavoidable problem because it made the Turkish language a prerequisite of citizenship. The overall blend of territory, voluntarism and language as markers of Turkishness was not viable, given the country's ethnic and religious diversity.<sup>47</sup> For instance, as late as 1927, in a country with a population of 13,542,795, only 86.42 percent of the people spoke Turkish, while 13.58 percent spoke other languages.<sup>48</sup>

Çağaptay argues that all of this pointed to a dilemma for Kemalism, since the territorial nationality suggested by Anatolia, and the ethnic nationality indicated by the Turkish language did not converge. In other words, “political membership of the state and ethnic membership of the nation were not the same.”<sup>49</sup> While preparing the 1924 Constitution, politicians engaged in heated debates about what name should be given to the inhabitants of Turkey. Two camps immediately formed. One camp approached the topic from a universal perspective, suggesting that the constitution should declare all people in Turkey as Turks—by nationality. The other group argued that although non-Muslims could be citizens, they should not be called ‘Turkish’ unless they abandoned their “Armenianness and Jewishness.”<sup>50</sup> It followed that the constitution needed to recognise Armenians, Jews, and other non-Muslims as Turks-by-citizenship, but not as Turks-by-nationality. After all the debates, TBMM acknowledged this last notion, making it clear in the final version of article 88 that “The people of Turkey, regardless of religion and race, are Turks as regards to citizenship.”

Çağaptay convincingly argues that through this definition, a distinction was made between citizenship and ethnicity. First, it recognized all those in Turkey as Turks-by-citizenship. Second, the state asserted that only some citizens were members of the Turkish nation. This inevitably institutionalized a gap between Turks-by-citizenship and Turks-by-nationality.<sup>51</sup> “Thus, notwithstanding its secularism, Kemalism was compelled to sanction such nominal Islam as a marker of Turkishness.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 379.

<sup>46</sup> It should be noted that the policy of trying to impose the Turkish language on non-Turkish subjects of the Empire was one that had been pursued during the Young Turk era. In this respect, there is some continuity between the late Ottoman and Kemalist periods.

<sup>47</sup> Soner Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?* London: Routledge, 2006, p. 14.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. The same point was also made by Rıfat Bali. Rıfat Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni 1923-1945 [The Jews of the Turkey during Republican Age, A Turkification Adventure 1923-1945]*. Istanbul: İletişim, 1999, p. 542.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

In the 1930s, with the advent of the *Turkish History Thesis*,<sup>53</sup> ethnicity and race joined religion and language as markers of Turkishness. Ottoman Christians, in particular, were perceived to be outside Turkishness. Thus religion created an ethno-national boundary between Ottoman Christians and Muslims. It is interesting to note that all Muslims, regardless of their ethnicities, were considered to be “Turks”, although with a nuanced difference.<sup>54</sup>

To summarize, it can be said that during the 1920s, Islam’s pivotal role in the formation of Turkish national identity and Turkey’s demographic diversity clashed with Kemalism’s understanding of the Turkish nation. While the Kemalists increasingly saw the nation as an organic culture, defined through language and culture, this meant that the only way Kemalism could deal with those who were non-Turkish was through denial and assimilation. Between 1920 and the 1930s, a nationalist and statist ideology tended to exalt the “Turkish nation” and “Turkishness”, while no longer welcoming religious minorities in Turkey. As this study will show, the xenophobic ideology of those times impacted on education policy in ways that have repercussions even today.

The 1930s witnessed a political period of “Kemalism *par excellence*”, or in other words, authoritarian nationalism. The policies of this era, such as the “Citizen Speak Turkish!” campaign and the “Law of Last names”,<sup>55</sup> were assimilatory policies specifically aimed at non-Muslim citizens. The “Citizen Speak Turkish” campaign was launched in 1928 by a group of students at Istanbul University’s Faculty of Law. As part of the campaign, posters were hung on walls, bulletins were distributed on the streets and public declarations were made advocating that all citizens speak Turkish. The rise of ethnic nationalism threatened violent consequences for the non-Muslim population, with the Thrace Pogrom

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<sup>53</sup> The Turkish history thesis was built on the idea that Turks had contributed to civilization long before they had been incorporated into the Ottoman Empire. They had originated an urban civilization in central Asia from which many other civilizations had sprung. They had maintained their cultural identity even after becoming a minority in a multi-national empire. It was this identity that would ‘source’ the citizens of the Turkish Republic. In sum, this thesis gave the Turks an important role in the development of world civilizations, and it follows from there that the legitimacy of the Republic of Turkey could be thus proven by historical fact. For more information on this topic, See: Copeaux, Etienne. *Tarih Ders Kitaplarında (1931-1993) Türk Tarih Tezinden Türk-İslam Sentezine [From the Turkish History Thesis to the Turkish Islamic Synthesis in the Turkish History Textbook 1931-1993]*. Trans. Ali Berktaş. Istanbul: Doruk, 2002:159-175. See also : Akman, Ceren. *The Launching of The Turkish Thesis of History, A Close Textual Analysis*. Submitted to the Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences in Partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in History, Sabancı University, February 2006.

<sup>54</sup> During the High Kemalist period, although the state sought full assimilation of non-Turkish Muslims, such as Kurds, Circassians and the Arabs, it also exercised caution toward these groups. Thus *ethnically*, a Turkish Muslim and a Kurdish Muslim did not enjoy the same level of state accommodation.

<sup>55</sup> On November 24, 1934, Turkey introduced the surname act. In Turkey, this law is called “Soyadı Kanunu”. The purpose of this law was to force all people, regardless of their ethnicity or religion, to assume a Turkish last name. This law is still applied today, and it is strictly forbidden for Christians or any ethnic minorities to assume “non-Turkish names”. These names are by law prohibited in Turkey.

being one example of this threat. In July 1934, an anti-Semitic campaign that began with unsigned letters and extreme right publications escalated into physical violence against Jews. Jews living in the various provinces of Thrace, such as Çanakkale, Edirne, Kırklareli and Tekirdağ, were attacked and beaten, their houses and shops destroyed and their goods stolen. Afterwards, most Jews fled to Istanbul and some to Palestine.<sup>56</sup>

Çağaptay rightfully argues that there is a tension between Islam as a religion and Islam as an identity. This is, according to him, due to the overlapping processes of secularism and nationalisation in the recent past.<sup>57</sup> Starting in the 1920s, nominal Islam became a marker of Turkishness, whereas Islam as a faith was cast outside the public sphere. It is through this perspective that one has to judge the ambivalent relation between the Turkish state and religion. The fact that all religious elements were eliminated from the school system in the 1930s was the result of this latter conception of Islam.

In the mid-1930s, secularism became controversial because of the dominance of militant secularists who criticized practicing Muslims as clericalists and counter-revolutionaries. Thus the state grew even more radical in its attempts to eliminate all Islamic elements. Some even talked of the need for a reformation in Islam, in order to bring it in line with modern times.<sup>58</sup>

During the 1940s, İnönü was President of the Republic (1938-1950) and two major crises dominated the political scene. These were World War II and the increasing demand for liberal reforms that followed the war.<sup>59</sup> Turkey managed to maintain its neutrality until just before the end of the war, at which point it joined the Allies. İnönü did his best to keep Turkey out of the war, despite pressure from Nazi Germany and the Western Allies. Although Turkey was neutral for most of the period, its internal economic situation deteriorated rapidly as a result of the war. Due to imminent threats of invasion by Russia and then Germany, İnönü had to mobilise the Turkish Army, putting over one million men *under arms* and doubling military spending. In order to pay for this mobilisation, İnönü introduced various measures, including the Capital Levy (*Varlık Vergisi*) of 1942, which was designed to tax the (previously untaxed) commercial wealth in the Republic and to curb the inflationary spiral. Two groups had made substantial profits from the war: the large farm owners who had gained from the rise in

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<sup>56</sup> Şule Toktas, 'Citizenship and Minorities: A Historical Overview of Turkey's Jewish Minority', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol.18, No. 4, December 2005, p. 402.

<sup>57</sup> Soner Çağaptay, *Islam, Secularism, and Nationalism in Modern Turkey: Who is a Turk?* London: Routledge, 2006, p. 162.

<sup>58</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*. New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 63.

<sup>59</sup> Stanford J. Shaw & Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume II*, Cambridge Univ. Press: New York, 1977, p. 396.

agricultural prices, and the merchants and middlemen of Istanbul who had benefited from the high value of Turkish exports and the shortage of necessary imports. The farmers consisted almost entirely of Muslim Turks; the merchants were still largely, although not entirely, members of the three minority communities, the Greeks, Jews, and Armenians.<sup>60</sup> The taxation of people belonging to the second group showed that the most important data determining a taxpayer's assessment were his religion and nationality. "The arbitrary nature of these laws and brutal way in which they were implemented undermined the citizens' confidence in the state and in the ruling party."<sup>61</sup> This was particularly true of the big farmers and the Muslim and non-Muslim bourgeoisie. Both had accumulated great wealth during the war and they may have been grateful to the state for providing the opportunity to do so.

In this period, there was growing opposition to the CHP's autocratic rule. After the war, the party split between the conservatives, who wished to retain their privileged position as the instrument of modernisation, and a more liberal group arguing that further democratisation and liberalisation were essential if Turkey was to take its place among the other advanced nations. Thus, as Feroz Ahmad states, the uneasy political alliance between the bourgeoisie, landlords and military-civilian bureaucracy that had come into existence during the war of liberation had finally broken down as a result of wartime pressures.<sup>62</sup> In January 1946, four former members of the CHP formed the Democratic Party, in order to advocate their ideas. However, the Democrats were unable to develop a systematic program of their own in time for the national election of 1946. With little to offer voters beyond simply promising to do better, they lost the election.<sup>63</sup> After this defeat, the Democrats worked to build their program and organisation, with a view to competing more successfully in the next elections, scheduled for 1950. In the interim, they continued to criticise the CHP, demanding an end to government monopolies, encouragement of private enterprise, a balanced budget and tax reduction. Along with these policies addressing the nation's economic problems, the Democrats campaigned for the introduction of religion courses in formal education. The results of the 1950 elections astonished even the Democrats. With 90 percent of the voters going to the polls, Democratic candidates received 53.3 percent of the vote, the CHP only 39.9 percent, the Nation Party 3 percent, and various independents 3.8 percent.<sup>64</sup>

In sum, between 1920 and 1940, education policy was shaped by these specific

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<sup>60</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Oxford Univ.Press: London, 1961, p. 297.

<sup>61</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*. New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 71.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Stanford J.Shaw & Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume II*, Cambridge Univ. Press: New York, 1977, p. 405.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

political events but showed, in general, a continuation of the principles set out by the early Kemalist policies. It was not until after the 1940s that, as part of its liberalisation program, the CHP relaxed its position on religion education in schools. This was largely due to the government's acknowledgement of rural, conservative discontent with the existing situation. In the next section, I turn my attention directly to the problem of religion education during this same period.

### **3.2.1 'Law of Unification of Instruction' and developments in religion instruction, 1920-1950**

The Law of Unification of Instruction (1924) was one of the first legislative acts of the new Turkish republic, following the demise of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire in 1922.<sup>65</sup> A highly important reform of education, the law was passed alongside the expatriation of the Ottoman dynasty, and the abolition of the Caliphate and Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Foundations.<sup>66</sup> Under the new law, all religious schools managed by the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Foundations were transferred to the Ministry of Education. In addition, all science and education institutes—except for military academies—were brought under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education.<sup>67</sup> Henceforth, the state would supervise all personnel, policies and curricula. According to Kaplan, these moves reflected the government view that the Ottoman Empire had lacked a unified system of education. The Ottoman system had conflicting ideological and pedagogical goals, and prevented the Turkish people from realising themselves as a nation. In other words, “only a single educational system could articulate those cultural and moral characteristics that distinguish one people from others”<sup>68</sup> while at the same time, securing the unity of the nation itself.

As a result of this particular law, subsequent reforms tended to marginalise Islam in school curricula and/or reconfigure it as a modernising faith that stood against fanaticism. The first direct consequence of the law occurred when the Ministry of Education took over 479 *medreses* (religious schools), which, until then, had been administered by the Sharia and Pious Foundations Ministry. These schools were closed in 1924 and replaced by 29 Pastor and Preacher Schools (*İmam ve Hatip Mektepleri/Okulları*). Kaplan notes that the number of these

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<sup>65</sup> Sam Kaplan, *Education and the Politics of National Culture in post-1980 Turkey: The Pedagogical State*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006, p. 39.

<sup>66</sup> İsmail Kaplan, *The Ideology of National Education in Turkey and Its Implications for Political Socialization*, Dissertation submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences, Boğaziçi University 1998, p. 156.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Sam Kaplan, *Education and the Politics of National Culture in post-1980 Turkey: The Pedagogical State*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006, p. 39.

*İmam Hatip* schools dropped to 20 by 1926 and in 1927 only two schools remained. By 1930, they had been completely abandoned.<sup>69</sup> It was argued at the time that these schools were closed down due to the very little interest of the public in getting education in these schools. However, Ayhan argues that although it was partly true, another major reason was due to the non-existence of the secondary level of the school and of course the limited amount of job possibilities after graduating these schools.<sup>70</sup> Ayhan goes on to suggest that the closing of *İmam ve Hatip Mektepleri* should be related to the alphabet reform in 1928 and to the general secularization of society.<sup>71</sup> Thus a second major consequence of the Law occurred in 1928, when Latin characters and Western numerals were officially mandated, while Arabic and Persian courses were eliminated from the curriculum by the 1929-1930 school year. In spite of these developments, the government established a Faculty of Theology in Istanbul Darülfünun; it closed in 1933, to be replaced by Istanbul University. The new law's third consequence was the removal of religion courses from primary and secondary schools in 1927, with the exception of village primary schools where religion courses (for one hour each week) continued until 1940.<sup>72</sup>

In 1924, a primary school religion course titled "Kur'an-i Kerim and Religion Courses" had been taught in classes (except for the first grade). The plan for one such course, given for two hours each week, was described as follows: "After teaching the students the Kur'an alphabet, Kur'an is going to be taught in the courses. The teacher will try to enliven the spirit of Islam through telling episodes from Muhammed's life."<sup>73</sup>

From 1926, religion courses were offered from the third grade onwards and reduced to one hour per week. The aim of the course was revised as:

Where possible, teachers will work to eradicate incorrect religious ideas and superstitious beliefs. Children will learn to appreciate Islam and Islamic authorities through accounts of Islamic stories and good deeds. But there will be no Islamic fanaticism in the teaching or course materials. In true religion, there is no place for seeing the temporal life as worthless and therefore living in a state of dependence and idleness. There is nothing wrong, from a religious point of view, in pursuing the joy, well-being and wealth.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> İsmail Kaplan, *The Ideology of National Education in Turkey and Its Implications for Political Socialization*, Dissertation submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences, Boğaziçi University 1998, p. 158.

<sup>70</sup> Halis Ayhan, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi [Religion Education in Turkey]*. Istanbul: Dem, 2004, p. 64.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> İsmail Kaplan, *The Ideology of National Education in Turkey and Its Implications for Political Socialization*, Dissertation submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences, Boğaziçi University 1998, p. 158.

<sup>73</sup> Recai Doğan, "Cumhuriyetin İlk Yıllarında Tevhidi Tedrisat Çerçevesinde Din Eğitimi ve Öğretimi ve Yapılan Tartışmalar" ["The discussions revolving around religion education and instruction during the first years of the Republic"]. *Cumhuriyetin 75.Yılında Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi ve Öğretimi [Religion Education and Instruction in the 75th year of the Republic]*. Ankara: Türk Yurdu, 1999, p. 273.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

Analysing the religion courses in the 1924 curricula, Doğan concludes that the state aimed to abolish opinions that were deemed (in official discourses) to be ‘erroneous’, and to enlist the courses in overall efforts to modernize Turkish society.<sup>75</sup>

By the 1930s, religion education had become an optional course that was offered to students whose parents gave consent. The course was designed for fifth graders in urban schools, and taught for half an hour per week.<sup>76</sup> However, the government suspended this course in 1933. In 1939, it ceased to be offered in village schools, 1930 in high schools, and 1931 in teacher schools. Thus by 1939 religion courses were completely left out from formal education system.

In light of these developments, many Turkish intellectuals and politicians expressed their personal views on the matter. An examination of these views shows that two questions recurred. Was secularism compatible with any kind of state religion education? And did religion education present an obstacle to modernization? There was little or no mention of issues relating to religion education and religious minorities. Most likely, this was because the Lausanne Treaty had guaranteed special arrangements for religious minorities in Turkey. The state was required to meet all the possible demands made by these minorities. For instance, according to article 40, non-Muslim minorities could, theoretically, open schools and other establishments for instruction and education, with the right to use their own language and freely practice their religion in the classroom.<sup>77</sup> Thus, non-Muslims could send their children to the minority schools or teach them their religions through other means, such as *wakfs* or other schools established under the terms of the Treaty of Lausanne. Effectively, this meant that the interests of non-Muslim students were not taken into account in state-delivered education. Politicians did not stop to reflect on the fact that some non-Muslim students *did* attend state schools and therefore might be disadvantaged by a voluntary religion course that catered only to the interests of Muslims. Contrary to the Tanzimat modernisation program, state efforts to secularise Turkey did not aim to incorporate non-Muslims into society. It was nationalism, rather than secularism, that structured society.

Against the background of secularization efforts, the view that religion had caused the Muslim world to lag behind Western civilizations gained some currency. Ahmet Cevdet strongly opposed this view, arguing that this ‘lag’ was due to the poor quality of education in

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> “Lausanne Treaty”, *The Treaties of Peace 1919-1923, Vol. II*. New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1924.

general, and did not require a ban on religion education.<sup>78</sup> Another person who agreed with Cevdet on this topic was Hamdullah Suphi. At the 7<sup>th</sup> CHP Conference, Suphi argued that Turkey should have reformed their *medreses*, just as England, Germany and France had reformed their seminaries, citing the examples of Oxford, Cambridge, The Sorbonne and Heidelberg universities, all of which had originally been seminaries. Moreover, he viewed the Ottoman *medreses* to be equal to the European seminaries and therefore, likely to succeed as reformed higher education institutions. In sum, Suphi was very much against the secularization efforts in the educational field, which he thought to be irreligionism.<sup>79</sup> As though proving Suphi's thoughts, the last minister of education of the single-party regime, Tahsin Banguoğlu said in his memoirs that the education in those times was not secular but more of a materialist/positivist kind, where any concept associated with religion was harshly put aside although it was being constantly said that secularism was not irreligionism.<sup>80</sup> Another point that took attention was the state control over Islam. Halide Edip Adivar also commented on the topic, asserting that the religion education of children could be better left to an autonomous authority like the non-Muslims foundations (*wakfs*) in Turkey. But it seems that this idea was not seen as a viable option for that time.

The fourth and a last consequence of the Law of Unification of Education was that minority and foreign schools, previously run according to international treaties and agreements, were placed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and forced to remove religion courses from their curricula and to include Turkish language, Turkish History, Geography and Civics courses.<sup>81</sup> In other words, the government sought to nationalize and 'Turkify' the schools attended by non-Muslim minorities.

Kaplan argues that all of these developments; the abolition of the Caliphate, the separation of schools from religious institutions, the exclusion of religious content from school curricula, together with the 1928 amendment to the Constitution which removed the clause "The religion of the Turkish State is the Islamic religion", were basic steps to the realization of secularism.<sup>82</sup> Taken together, these developments, whether intentionally or unintentionally, brought about the elimination of religion courses from formal education.

In 1942, the Second Educational Congress addressed the question of whether morality education (*ahlak eğitimi*) should be taught from the first grade onwards. Some members

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<sup>78</sup> Halis Ayhan, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi [Religion Education in Turkey]*. Istanbul: Dem, 2004, p. 78.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> İsmail Kaplan, *The Ideology of National Education in Turkey and Its Implications for Political Socialization*, Dissertation submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences, Boğaziçi University 1998, p. 156.

argued for it, on the grounds that moral corruption was sweeping the Turkish youth. The Education Minister, Hasan Ali Yücel, opposed claims that moral corruption was rife. However, he did acknowledge the potential of such training to create a model of ideal citizenship and bring citizens together for that purpose. At the end of the congress, a report was published and distributed. Titled “The principles of individual and societal Turkish morality”, the report listed twenty-three articles, setting out the ideal characteristics that each citizen should have.<sup>83</sup> However, there was no information or structured method as to how these ideals were to be implemented in schools. The report recommended that these ideals should be transmitted to students at every phase of education, implying that this was a generic problem for the whole of education, rather than a separate concern or program. Moreover Parmaksızoğlu notes that “morality”, as conceived by this Congress, was more of a lay term than a religious one.<sup>84</sup>

Towards the end of the 1940s, however, a more positive attitude was adopted towards the incorporation of religion courses into the education system. In July 1947, the Ministry of Education decreed that religion education could be conducted in private *dershanes* that would be monitored by the state. The instruction had to be in Turkish and all children who had completed five years of primary education were eligible to attend the *dershanes*. However, it soon became apparent that there was a legal problem about the compatibility of private *dershanes* with existing laws. Therefore, the *dershanes* could never start education.

The debates that took place at the CHP Seventh Gathering (1947) illustrated the changing approach to religion education albeit the existence of some enduring oppositions. MPs such as Vehbi Dayıbaş, Abdülkadir Güney, Sinan Tekelioğlu and Şükrü Nayman spoke fervently of the need to incorporate voluntary religion courses into the curricula.<sup>85</sup> In the minutes of the General Meeting, Karpuzoğlu noted the rumours circulating in various groups that if religion instruction were to be granted, then the Alevi would make further demands.<sup>86</sup> Karpuzoğlu condemned such thinking, and his remarks remain important in two respects. First (and in fact, as the rumours indicate), his remarks suggest that religion education was actually designed for Sunni Muslims. Secondly, we learn that there was at least some concern about the audience of the religion education by some circles. This second point can be seen

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<sup>83</sup> *İkinci Maarif Şuurası, 15-21 Şubat, 1943, Çalışma Programı, Raporlar, Konuşmalar* [Second Education Congress, Reports, Summits] Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, Tıpkı Basım, 1991(1943), p. 107.

<sup>84</sup> İsmet Parmaksızoğlu, *Türkiye’de Din Eğitimi* [Religion Education in Turkey]. Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1966, p. 27.

<sup>85</sup> *CHP Yedinci Kurultayı Tutanağı* [Records of Sessions of CHP’s Seventh General Congress]. Ankara: Ulus, 1948, p. 448.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 454.

better when looked at the writings of the journalists at the Cumhuriyet Journal, known for its leftist stance. In an article titled *Sarığa Hasret* (Longing for *Sarığ*<sup>87</sup>), Nadir Nadi argues that it is wrong for the state to take over the governance of Islam through the ‘Ministry of Religious Affairs’. For Nadi, this can only be done by an autonomous institution, if religion is to remain truly in the realm of conscience. Moreover, he claims that the Ministry totally ignores the Alevi and their religious concerns, and then does further injustice by using Alevi citizens’ money.<sup>88</sup> This argument suggests that religious affairs should be handed over to the religious denominations. MP Vehbi Eral pursued the same line during parliamentary debates about teachers’ pay, insisting that parents who opt for religious education for their children should cover the relevant teacher salaries. Moreover, he argued that this proposal should apply to all religions; otherwise secularist principles and the state commitment to equality between religions would be jeopardized.<sup>89</sup>

In the end, these various concerns, especially the ones regarding Alevi, were readily dismissed by Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver when he stated that religion education in schools would cover only the essentials of Islam.<sup>90</sup> Although maybe with no deliberate ill intentions, this argument which claims that the religion education can be done by avoiding denominational (*mezhepsel*<sup>91</sup>) concerns, has led to a general avoidance, in Turkey, of any religious denomination outside Sunnism.

### 3.2.2 Re-introduction of religion courses in Turkish curricula: 1949

During this period, it became obvious that there was a growing popular demand for religion education. Some CHP MPs declared that if they did not implement some kind of religion instruction in schools, they would not win the next elections. Other people claimed that religion courses were needed to prevent society from becoming communist. In 1949, the government moved to meet these challenges by passing a decree setting out its plans in seven main principles.<sup>92</sup>

The decree confirmed that from 15<sup>th</sup> February 1949, religion courses would be taught

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<sup>87</sup> *Sarığ* designates *turban* that is wrapped around fez (hats). The title implies the longing of the writer for the past times of the Ottoman Empire which according to him was more welcoming of Islamic values.

<sup>88</sup> Nadir Nadi, “Sarığa Hasret” [“Longing for Sarığ”]. *Cumhuriyet* 5 Jan. 1949, p. 13.

<sup>89</sup> H.Vehbi Eralp, “Din Derslerine Dair Düşünceler” [“Thoughts about religion courses”]. *Yeni Sabah* 28 Jan. 1949, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup> *CHP Yedinci Kurultayı Tutanağı* [Records of Sessions of CHP’s Seventh General Congress]. Ankara: Ulus, 1948, p. 454.

<sup>91</sup> *Mezhep* is the Turkish word for Arabic *madhhab*, that refers to a school of thought or religious jurisprudence within Sunni Islam. Although ‘Alevism’ officially falls under Shi’a Islam, a denomination of Islam, rather than a *madhhab*, in Turkey it has become customary to call Alevism as a *mezhep*.

<sup>92</sup> Halis Ayhan, *Türkiye’de Din Eğitimi* [Religion Education in Turkey]. Istanbul: Dem, 2004, p. 144.

on a *voluntary* basis for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in primary schools. The courses were scheduled in the middle of the day (and not to the end or the beginning of the school day), which encouraged a higher attendance. These classes were not going to be added to course schedules at times which would make attendance possible. The second principle says that;

In the educational institutions of our country which is secular, it is out of question to teach any religious or denominational (*mezhepsel*) information in a compulsory way. Because of this, it is a principle that these courses are given on voluntary basis. No teacher or student will be forced to teach or take the course. Religion courses will not be taken into account for the passing of the grade.

This second principle is important to keep in mind because its account of secularism and religion education would change tremendously in the following decades. Whereas compulsory religion courses had once been unthinkable and incompatible with constitutional secularism, they would become the norm a few decades later.

The fourth principle in the decree states that parents would give written consent, a petition, if they wanted their children to attend this course. The sixth principle states as follows:

“It will not be permitted to cause inappropriate quarrels and offences between the families whose children are taking the course and between families who due to their thought, belief and denominational differences choose not to send their children to have this education.”<sup>93</sup>

This principle is also important because it shows an awareness of the possible enmities that the voluntary course could ignite between members of different religious groups and thus demand attention from school governments.

As village schooling lasted only three years, the children who resided in villages had no access to the course, as it started at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade level. This was a problem awaiting parliamentary attention and some concrete solution.<sup>94</sup> In a report prepared for the government, Akseki says that “the religion course has proved to be of no use to the children and indeed, some students have found it derisory. Many teachers consider themselves secularists and therefore, refuse to teach the course. If the course is voluntary for both teachers and students, then such reactions hardly come as a surprise.”<sup>95</sup>

Despite these shortcomings, Parmaksızoğlu noted that the public response to the courses was quite positive. Referring to a survey conducted by the state to evaluate the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>95</sup> Ahmet Hamdi Akseki, “Din Tedrisatı ve Dini Müesseseler” [“Religion Education and Religious Institutions”]. *Sebilürreşad* 5.105 (June 1951).

participation rate to the religion courses, he concluded that in 1949-1950 education year, out of 414.447 pupils of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades 2797 Muslim and 3002 non-Muslims opted out making 5799 students in total, which meant only 1% of the students did not want to take this course.<sup>96</sup>

Although only the parents who wanted their children to go to the classes were supposedly obliged to petition the school, Banguoğlu, the Ministry of Education noted the following contradictory situation:

“We had circulated letters for religion courses. These classes were going to be voluntary. But the consent belonged to the parents. The parents who did not want their children to take this course were supposed to write a letter to the school. I remember, at the end, they brought me this one letter from a professor who was teaching at Ankara University. We had especially advised that these courses should not be forced in Alevi villages. However all Alevis sent their children. Some Armenians living in Sivas too wanted to send their children, we were glad.”<sup>97</sup>

From the above passage, it is clear that parents who did *not* want to send their children had to write letters. Although at first glance, this may seem a small detail, it may also partly explain the huge participation in the course. Banguoğlu’s statement about the application may also be true, given that the decree changed the following year, making it obligatory for parents who did not want to send their children to write to the school government.

The year 1949 marked the end of CHP dominance in the Turkish political scene. Although there was wide acceptance of the idea that secularism and voluntary religion education could be compatible, there were still some fervent counter arguments.

### **3.2.3 The situation of minority schools during the single party regime, 1923-1950**

The number of minorities decreased tremendously during the single party regime. In 1927, there were 13.269.939 Muslims, whereas the number of non-Muslims was 378.664. Yet by 1955, the Muslim population amounted to 23.804.048, and that of non-Muslims to 260,715. A large portion of the Greek population had left for Greece during a population exchange<sup>98</sup> between Turkey and Greece in 1923. The remaining Greeks gathered in Istanbul,

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<sup>96</sup> İsmet Parmaksızoğlu, *Türkiye’de Din Eğitimi [Religion Education in Turkey]*. Ankara: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1966, p. 31.

<sup>97</sup> Halis Ayhan, *Türkiye’de Din Eğitimi [Religion Education in Turkey]*. Istanbul: Dem, 2004, p. 150.

<sup>98</sup> The 1923 population exchange between Greece and Turkey was the first large-scale population exchange, or agreed mutual expulsion, in the 20th century. It involved some two million people, most of them forcibly made refugees and *de jure* denaturalized from homelands of centuries or millennia, in a treaty promoted and overseen by the international community as part of the Treaty of Lausanne. The document about the population exchange was signed at Lausanne, Switzerland in 1923, between the governments of Greece and Turkey. The exchange took place between Turkish citizens of the Greek Orthodox religion established in Turkish territory, and Greek citizens of the Muslim religion, established in Greek territory. Under the terms of the agreement between the countries, a compulsory exchange of the approximately 150,000 remaining Turkish nationals of Greek Orthodox religion in Turkey and approximately 350,000 Greek nationals of the Muslim religion remaining in Greece

which led to the closure of their schools in different parts of Anatolia. The same was true of Armenians schools. Due to the forced emigration of thousands of Armenians from Anatolian cities such as Van, Erzurum, Diyarbakır and Kayseri, many of their schools also closed. Only a couple of schools remained in Istanbul and a few other cities.

By 1928, the total population of all the students in *all* minority schools had fallen to 17,329.<sup>99</sup> One reason for this sharp decrease, other than that of the general decline in non-Muslim numbers, was that these schools were not allowed to offer foreign languages, a subject considered crucial by most parents in order to be successful in business life.<sup>100</sup> Therefore many non-Muslims left these schools and preferred to enrol to schools offering foreign languages, such as Galatasaray Lisesi, or to schools belonging to the Christian missionaries. Although in party programmes, decrees and semi-official institutions, all nationals of the Turkish Republic were considered 'Turks'. Yet in laws and regulations regarding minority schools, non-Muslims were regularly discussed in the context of foreign schools, leaving the impression that non-Muslims were *not* considered as Turks.<sup>101</sup>

Inevitably, the radical secularism of the republic affected the curricula of minority schools, bringing further demands for these schools. Through the laws and regulations of 1925 and 1926, the numbers of religion classes offered in minority and foreign schools were decreased and religious icons/symbols found in school buildings were strictly banned.<sup>102</sup> It was forbidden to make any religious propaganda in schools. School textbooks that had pictures of Saints were prohibited. The schools, which did not abide by these rules, were closed down. A French school that disregarded these new laws were closed down and Italian and French schools that did not take down cross signs were closed until they took them down.<sup>103</sup> However religion education would not be banned from these establishments until 1936, as the Treaty of Lausanne specifically allowed the teaching of religion in these

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would commence immediately. (See: Triadafilopoulos, Triadafilos. "The Political Consequences of Refugee Incorporation after Population Transfers: Toward a Comparison of The Greek and German Experiences." Migration Education 2007. Web.

<sup>99</sup> There were 300,000 students only in Greek schools in 1914. This number shows the extent of the sharp decrease. For more information on the topic see: Wheelles, Carl Midkiff. *Turkey's policy toward her minorities 1922-1952* Diss. Georgetown U, 1957, p. 112.

<sup>100</sup> Rıfat Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni 1923-1945* [*The Jews of the Turkey during Republican Age, A Turkification Adventure 1923-1945*]. Istanbul: İletişim, 1999, p. 193.

<sup>101</sup> Mustafa Çapar, *Türkiye'de Eğitim ve 'Öteki Türkler'* [*Education in Turkey and the 'Other Turks'*]. Ankara: Maki, 2006, p. 355.

<sup>102</sup> Hidayet Vahapoğlu, *Osmanlı'dan Günümüze Azınlık ve Yabancı Okulları* [*The Minority and foreign schools from Ottoman times to the present day*]. Istanbul: MEB, 1997, pp. 219-223.

<sup>103</sup> Sezen Kılıç, "Cumhuriyet Döneminde Yabancı Okullar (1923-1938)" ["Foreign School During the Republican Age (1923-1938)"]. *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi* 21.61 (Mar. 2005):259-280.

institutions.<sup>104</sup> Yet these new laws (1924 Law of Unification of Instruction, and the 1925,1926 legislations), in a clear attempt to rationalize the education system, promised greater state control over all institutions of education in Turkey.<sup>105</sup> For instance, in the case of the Jewish population, the principle of secularism was used to justify the ban on Jewish religion and history courses. This prompted some Jewish community leaders to take the initiative and offer private religion lessons in synagogues.

In June 1924, the Ministry of Education presented all Jewish elementary schools with the option of either teaching in Turkish, or 'in their mother tongue,' which it declared was Hebrew. This was a clever move, as very few Turkish Jews were familiar with Hebrew as a living language and almost all spoke Judeo-Spanish. It is also obvious that the decree intended to displace French as the language of instruction for the Jews. The same requirement for the Greeks and Armenians would not have been problematic, as both minorities used their respective mother tongues, Greek and Armenian, as the language of instruction in their schools.<sup>106</sup>

The loophole that allowed Turkish citizens to attend foreign schools, such as French ones, was closed (at the elementary instruction level) in 1931. Under the new law, no Turkish citizen could attend foreign elementary schools. This was clearly a part of the larger process of creating a unitary national elementary education system in Turkey.<sup>107</sup>

By the end of the single party regime, 'Turkification', one of the aims of the Law on the Unification of education, had been achieved. In 1927, there were 82,000 Jewish people in the country and 5,459 students in 23 minority schools. By 1945, out of a population of 77,000 Jews, 2,623 students were attending the minority primary schools.<sup>108</sup> As for the Armenian schools, there were only 19 of them. Bali rightfully argues that this sharp decrease in the Jewish schools, as compared to other communities, may reflect either a more extreme pressure put on Jews to 'Turkify' or the relatively intensive Jewish attempts to respond to this pressure.<sup>109</sup>

The 1938 school directive decreed that Turkish teachers who were working in minority

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<sup>104</sup> Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990, p. 163.

<sup>105</sup> Mustafa Çapar, *Türkiye'de Eğitim ve 'Öteki Türkler'* [Education in Turkey and the 'Other Turks']. Ankara: Maki, 2006, p. 299.

<sup>106</sup> Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925*, Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990, p. 164.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Turkey. Başbakanlık İstatistik Genel Müdürlüğü. *Milli Eğitim İlköğretim İstatistikleri 1945-46* [National Education Primary Education Statistics 1945-46]. Vol. 280. Ankara: Pulhan, 1947, p.IX and 216.

<sup>109</sup> Rıfat Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni 1923-1945* [The Jews of the Turkey during Republican Age, A Turkification Adventure 1923-1945]. Istanbul: İletişim, 1999, p. 402.

schools and teaching Turkish and culture courses were to be given larger salaries than other teachers.<sup>110</sup> This factor contributed to the closure of some minority schools that could not afford these additional amounts for Turkish teachers.<sup>111</sup> Another issue which clearly disadvantaged minority schools, even after the religion education was prohibited in minority schools, was the directive prohibiting religious inculcation. At first glance, this might seem a necessary part of the unification of instruction. However, the application of religion education in state schools demonstrated otherwise. The same directive read as follows: It is forbidden to inculcate students with religious ideas that differ into the minds of students different from their own beliefs; students' original religions; and for this reason it is also forbidden to use any books which promote religion.<sup>112</sup> Yet in non-minority schools, Sunnism and Islamism were encouraged in both latent and sometimes explicit ways, without considering the Alevis and non-Muslims who attended these schools. Clauses 6 and 7 (of the same directive) decreed that minority and foreign school textbooks must also keep in line with state policies. Moreover in the minority schools, alongside the school directors who belonged to the religion of the schools, there were vice-directors who must be of 'Turkish' and 'Muslim' origin. Their duties were to monitor the school and confirm its compliance with state regulations. It is clear that these various measures indicated a state distrust of the minority schools. In 1942, the Capital Levy was invoked to tax 88 minority schools on the pretext that they were private places of business. These tax payments were not demanded from private Turkish schools.

#### **3.2.4. Alevis and religion courses**

Alevis in Turkey did not benefit from the minority rights granted to Greeks, Armenians and Jews. In fact, this had never become an issue for Alevis, probably because when the Republic was first established, they made no demand for recognition as a separate faith or religious group. Alevis had given full support for the establishment of the republic. In comparison to the Abdulhamid era, secularism had diminished the pressure on Alevis. Nonetheless, under the Republic, they retained a secondary status compared to the Sunni Muslims. Military units provided regular reports on the Kurds living in the east, and now also prepared reports on Alevis, especially Alevi Kurds in the same region. One such report, prepared by Jandarma Umum Kumandanlığı (*Gendarmerie General Command*) in 1930,

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<sup>110</sup> *Türk Hususi Azınlık ve Yabancı Okullarda İdare İşleri (Management in Turkish private minority and foreign schools)*. İstanbul: Ülkü, 1938.

<sup>111</sup> Rıfat Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni 1923-1945 [The Jews of the Turkey during Republican Age, A Turkification Adventure 1923-1945]*. İstanbul: İletişim, 1999, p. 192.

<sup>112</sup> Mustafa Çapar, *Türkiye'de Eğitim ve 'Öteki Türkler' [Education in Turkey and the 'Other Turks']*. Ankara: Maki, 2006, p. 359.

stated that there was a deep difference between being Turkish and being Alevi, the latter described as *kızılbaş*<sup>113</sup> and argued that Alevis dislike to the extent of despising the Turks. The report was open in its adherence to Sunnism. The attitude of the state towards Alevis in 1930s, when secularism was at its peak point, is important in showing the extent of pro-Sunni position that the state adopted. At first, the law of unification of education, along with the abolition of the caliphate and religion courses, seemed to open up new possibilities for the Alevis. However, as part of the secularisation policies, the *tekkes*, *zaviyes* and *dergahs* were closed. These places were not exclusively lodges for orthodox sufi brotherhoods, but also some of them had been the places where unofficial religious education was offered for heterodox branches of Islam, including Alevism. This further marginalised Alevi cultural practices and traditions. Officially, the Koran schools also closed, although they did not cease to exist. Moreover, mosques continued to be places of both worship and education. However, mosque education did not benefit the Alevis, who see their *cemevis*, rather than the mosques, as places of worship. In the religion textbooks used until 1939, there is no mention of Alevis or Alevism; it has been argued that Atatürk himself demanded that the textbooks should be written according to the Sunni-Hanefi doctrine.<sup>114</sup>

In 1947, the Ministry of Education called for the production of a religion textbook for use in the envisaged private educational institutions known as the *dershanes*. The textbook that came out in 1948 and titled “Müslüman Çocuğunun Kitabı”, created a huge outcry against its perceived communism and *dervishism*, and the inclusion of poems written by Pir Sultan Abdal, a famous Alevi leader. In addition, the book offered information on mysticism. It was condemned by so many religious leaders and politicians that the Prime Minister at the time, Hakan Saka, was forced to criticize the Ministry of Education for producing such a book. The Ministry was also forced to issue a press release explaining that the book had been an experiment, rather than anything intended for actual use. This episode makes clear that most of the politicians and religious leaders of Sunni origin would not tolerate even the slightest deviation from the teachings of Islam.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, it is difficult to substantiate Banguoğlu’s argument that there were Alevis who sent their children to voluntary religion courses offered at the elementary school level in a mere willing way. The reason of this attendance could be more complicated and manifold, from peer pressure to the non-existence of any kind of religion education in the reach of Alevis which might lead them to want to learn at least learn

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<sup>113</sup> See footnote 115 of Chapter 2 for the meaning of ‘*kızılbaş*’.

<sup>114</sup> Mustafa Çapar, *Türkiye’de Eğitim ve ‘Öteki Türkler’* [Education in Turkey and the ‘Other Turks’]. Ankara: Maki, 2006, p. 377.

<sup>115</sup> Halis Ayhan, *Türkiye’de Din Eğitimi* [Religion Education in Turkey]. Istanbul: Dem, 2004, p. 117.

the main teachings of Islam. This issue will be elaborated on in the coming chapters.

Finally in 1949, there appeared a rather offending statement for Alevis in the introduction of a religious publication distributed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and this issue has been brought up by the editor of the *Vatan* Journal, Ahmet Emin Yalman.<sup>116</sup> In the book titled “*Batınilerin ve Karmatilerin İç Yüzü*” [The hidden side of Batinis and Karmatis] Alevis were portrayed as degenerate and deviant in ways that defied true Islam. The book contained ascribed many denigrating practices to Alevis, such as incest, and wife-sharing in their rituals.<sup>117</sup> Yalman condemned both this publication and the Ministry of Religious Affairs who published this book and argued that the publication itself was against secularism and the freedom of religion. In relation to this particular episode, there were reports that *dedes* in Kahramanmaraş tried to write a letter of complaint to the Directorate of Religious Affairs, but the outcome of the letter is unknown.<sup>118</sup> Although it is possible catch occasional glimpses of Alevi reactions to events like these, we lack sufficient documentation to provide a thorough written account of Alevi concerns in this particular period.

### **3.3 Transition to the multi-party System in Turkey and religious minorities during the Democratic Party government (1950-1980)**

The Democratic Party’s election victory in May 1950 was a turning point in modern Turkish political history. The DP held an overwhelming majority in the parliament (408 seats against CHP’s 69). The new assembly selected Celal Bayar as president of the republic, while the post of prime minister went to the popular Adnan Menderes. The DP saw itself as the representative of the ‘national will’ (*milli irade*)—a term used endlessly by DP leaders—with a mission to transform the country.<sup>119</sup> In the DP vision of democracy, this “national will” gave the Democrats absolute power and legitimacy to do whatever they deemed necessary. Although the Democrats claimed to believe in the ideals of democracy, their perception of it was rather crude. “They failed to shed the anti-democratic mentality of the single party period which brooked no opposition from any quarter, including within the party itself”.<sup>120</sup>

Since the party’s foundation, the Democrats had been vigorously supported free market economics. Upon entering government, they immediately set about implementing

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<sup>116</sup> Zeynep Nevzatoğlu, “Basında Din Eğitimi-Öğretimi Laiklik Tartışmaları 1945-1960” [“Discussions about Secularism and Religion Education in the Media”]. MA Thesis Ankara U Soc. Sci. Inst, 2006, p. 120.

<sup>117</sup> Muhammed Hammadi, *Batıniler ve Karmatilerin İç Yüzü* [The hidden side of Batinis and Karmatis]. Trans. İsmail Hatib Erzen. Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Bakanlığı, 1948, pp. 61-62.

<sup>118</sup> A *dede* is a socio-religious leader in the Alevi community. The institution of *dede* is the most important of all the institutions, integral to the social and religious organization of the Anatolian Alevis.

<sup>119</sup> Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*. New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 110.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

liberalization policies.<sup>121</sup> The DP's economic success guaranteed it mass support, especially in the countryside. Moreover, the central theme of the CHP campaign—the lack of freedom and the government's authoritarian tendencies—had little credibility coming, as it did, from a party so closely identified with the authoritarian regime of the past. On 2 May 1954, the DP increased its share of vote (from 53.6 to 58.4 percent), while the CHP share dropped from 39.9 to 35.1 percent.<sup>122</sup> The 1954 elections had been a great success for Menderes. His policies seemed to be vindicated by the economic boom and the peasants now massively supported him. However in the following years, economic decline slowly began to erode support for the Democratic Party. “This was due partly to a real deterioration in standards of living but it was also true that there had been an explosive rise in the average villagers' expectations of material improvement, which the government could not meet”.<sup>123</sup>

In the early 1950s, many observers believed that with the democratization of Turkey, government policies on minority populations would also become more liberal. In the new government program, the party's understanding of nationalism was based on the concept of “citizenship” as defined through shared history, culture and ideals.<sup>124</sup> Any citizen, regardless of his/her race and religion, was regarded as a Turk. By promising equality and freedom, the DP program attracted most of the non-Muslim minority vote. In the 1946 election, most Jews voted for the Democratic Party in protest at the Capital Tax imposed by the ruling CHP.<sup>125</sup> It is true that during this period, discriminatory policies towards religious minorities were substantially relaxed. For instance, as of 1945 non-Muslims could be admitted to military academies, and they began to be recruited to the professional cadres of the Turkish military. In another example, the law stating that minority schools must be monitored by an official from the Ministry of Interior Affairs was scrapped in 1949. The general attitude towards non-Muslims was seemingly more tolerant. Almost all non-Muslims who used their voting rights voted DP in the 1950 and 1954 elections.<sup>126</sup> Traditionally reticent to discuss politics openly, non-Muslim religious and community leaders talked up the DP during this period, boosting the vote.<sup>127</sup> Moreover in the elections of 1950 and 1954, there were four non-Muslim DP

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<sup>121</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey, A Modern History*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1998, p. 224.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>124</sup> *Demokrat Parti Tüzük ve Programı [Democratic Party Program]*. Ankara: Doğuş, 1953.

<sup>125</sup> Rıfat Bali, “Resmi ideoloji ve Gayri Müslim Yurttaşlar” [“Official Ideology and the Non-Muslim citizens”]. *Birikim* (Jan-Feb 1998), p. 173.

<sup>126</sup> United States. National Archives and Records Administration. 782.00/11-2157 Consulate General of the United States of America. From Istanbul to the Department of State. 24 Nov. 1957.

<sup>127</sup> Dilek Güven, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Azınlık Politikaları Bağlamında 6-7 Eylül Olayları [6-7 September Events in the context of Minority Policies during Republican Era]*. İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yay, 2005, p. 129.

members of parliament, all from Istanbul and actively working in parliamentary committees.<sup>128</sup>

As noted in the previous section, the regime's attitude to religion had become extremely repressive in the 1930s and 1940s. It was only after the introduction of multi-party politics that both parties began to court the Muslim vote. Even the CHP became more tolerant of religion after the seventh party congress in 1947, reintroducing elective religious education in schools and training establishments for preachers. Ankara University announced the establishment of a Faculty of Divinity and in 1949, the tombs and shrines were allowed to reopen.

After gaining power, the Democrats continued the CHP policy of relaxing restrictions on expressions of religious feeling, and making concessions to the Muslim population. The call to prayer in Arabic was made legal again and religious education was expanded. There was a marked rise in the number of mosques being built and the sale of religious literature was allowed again.<sup>129</sup>

The relaxation of secularist policies under the DP made Islam much more prominent in everyday life in the cities. At the same time, massive urbanization reduced rural isolation and generally made the countryside more visible.<sup>130</sup> In contrast to the strict exclusion of Islam from the public sphere during the early republican period, the DP legitimized Islam and rural values. Mardin interprets these developments and the DP's electoral success as victory of a periphery made up of grassroots and the counter-official culture.<sup>131</sup> DP representatives were younger, often had local roots in their constituencies, were less likely to have a university education, and far more likely to have a background in commerce or law.<sup>132</sup> According to Toktaş, this development not only shook the balance of the traditional Ottoman Turkish polity, which had traditionally preserved a strong state by strengthening the center against the periphery but also provided unintended consequences for non-Muslims.<sup>133</sup>

Through the state projects of secularization and modernization undertaken by the CHP, Islamic identity was suppressed, although being Muslim remained one of the essential criteria of Turkishness. The revival of Islam under DP rule did not change this fact; meaning that

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1998, p. 233.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p. 234

<sup>131</sup> Şerif Mardin, "Türk Siyasetini Açıklayabilecek Bir Anahtar: Merkez- Çevre İlişkileri" ["A key to explain Turkish politics: Relations between center and periphery"]. *Şerif Mardin: Türkiye'de Toplum ve Siyaset Makaleler I* [Şerif Mardin: *Society and Politics in Turkey: Articles I*]. Istanbul: İletişim, 1995, pp. 30-66.

<sup>132</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey, A Modern History*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1998, p. 222.

<sup>133</sup> Şule Toktaş, "Citizenship and Minorities: A Historical Overview of Turkey's Jewish Minority." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 18.4 (Dec. 2005), p. 406.

Islam was still considered as one of the prominent markers of Turkish identity. What changed under the DP however is that Islam came to be more repeatedly used as a social and cultural benchmark for politics together with the more frequent practice of religious liberties in the public sphere. Effectively, this meant that non-Muslims were also under less pressure to secularize. They were able to make the most of their communal rights, which were defined in loose relation to religious rights. This trend was confirmed for Jews in 1953, with the first appointment to the Chief Rabbinate by the state since the foundation of the republic.<sup>134</sup>

Toktaş, who interprets these developments using a center-periphery analogy, argues that non-Muslims were part of the periphery. Similar to the countryside, which was suspected as being separatist due to several rebellions against the Turkish state in the 1920s and 30s, non-Muslims were also consigned to the periphery with similar suspicions cast on them due to their past history in the National War of Independence. The policies of the CHP therefore not only set limitations in Islam transgressing the public sphere, but also restricted other religious groups within society. When the DP created a public space for Islam, enabling peripheral elements and the rural masses to challenge the state elites, then non-Muslims, as elements of periphery, also found a more liberal environment for their communal identities.

However, with respect to the definition of nation, similar changes failed to materialize. During the early republican period, nation-building and secularization were complimentary parts of Turkish modernization, and the construction of modern citizenship necessitated Islamic identity to be truncated. This created a complicated situation for non-Muslim minorities. Although they were not Muslim and therefore had no Islamic identity to be curbed, they still fell outside received definitions of Turkishness. The exclusion of non-Muslims from this definition continued during the DP period. “It seems that though Islam was an issue to be dealt with in Turkish politics either in the form of prohibition or permission in the public sphere as well as a criteria for Turkishness both during the CHP and DP periods until 1960s, the status of non-Muslims was more susceptible to the center periphery cleavage than was Islam.”<sup>135</sup> “Therefore, setting the center periphery relation instead of Islam as an independent variable of the construction of citizenship provides an explanatory key to the changing milieu of non-Muslim citizenship in the 1950s.”<sup>136</sup>

To put it in another way, it can be concluded that the ‘zones of Turkishness’ that Çağaptay, talked about proved to be so strong and so embedded in the Turkish culture that it

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 407.

proved almost impossible to alter this conceptualization of Turkishness that marginalized non-Muslims, albeit with political differences in different political conjunctures. Indeed, it is possible that the exclusionary dimension of Turkish nationalism actually took shape during this populist era of the 1950s.<sup>137</sup>

By the end of 1953, the relationship between non-Muslims and the DP had worsened. The DP purposefully complicated the workings of community leaders and stopped the cooperation between them.<sup>138</sup> Newspapers reported that people who wished to volunteer for military service or enrol in the Piyade (Infantry) School (a special school for training executive military personnel) had to be of Turkish race. Applicants who were converts to Islam or whose mothers were non-Muslims were rejected. It was true that the numbers of non-Muslim reserve officers had increased, but they were rarely assigned strategic positions. Most non-Muslim officers were used as doctors, translators or engineers. Officers were forbidden to marry non-Muslims or foreigners. Other than the military sector, it was difficult for non-Muslims to find employment in public offices. Apart from those who had fled to Turkey from Germany, non-Muslims were forbidden to work in academia. Relations between non-Muslim minorities and the government grew more strained as it became clear that the DP view of minorities was not very different than that of the CHP. The DP's seemingly liberal minority policy proved to be one of political expedience related to foreign policy concerns and party tactics. In 1954, the intensification of disputes over Cyprus brought a complete end to the goodwill that the DP government had previously shown to non-Muslim minorities.

The DP pursued populist policies, and during the conflict over Cyprus, it frequently utilized a nationalist discourse. The party adopted a hard-line foreign policy against Greece. The Cyprus conflict also had implications for domestic politics. The Greek minority living in Turkey was accused of taking sides with both Greece and the Greek Cypriots in anti-Turkish Cypriot violence on the island. In 1955, following rumours that the house where Atatürk was born in Salonika was burning, DP propaganda against Greeks (both in Greece and in Turkey) grew more strident.<sup>139</sup> As a consequence, on September 6-7, 1955, anti-Greek violence erupted in Istanbul and Izmir, and then spilled over to Jewish-owned businesses. Other non-Muslims groups, such as the Armenians, were also threatened. Inflamed by both nationalist rhetoric and sensitivity over Cyprus, some people attacked non-Muslims, setting fire to their

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<sup>137</sup> Ali Tuna Kuyucu, "Ethno-Religious 'unmixing' of 'Turkey': 6-7 September riots as a case in Turkish nationalism." *Nations and Nationalism* 11 (2005), p. 363.

<sup>138</sup> Dilek Güven, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Azınlık Politikaları Bağlamında 6-7 Eylül Olayları [6-7 September Events in the context of Minority Policies during Republican Era]*. Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yay, 2005, p. 131.

<sup>139</sup> Şule Toktas, "Citizenship and Minorities: A Historical Overview of Turkey's Jewish Minority." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 18.4 (Dec. 2005), p. 407.

shops, attacking minority schools, insulting NATO commissioned Greek officers on the streets of Izmir, and burning down the residence of the Orthodox patriarch. Depending on the source, it is possible to reach different conclusions about the extent of harm and damage caused by these uprisings. According to an official Turkish source, there were attacks on 4,214 houses, 1,004 workplaces, 73 churches, 1 synagogue, 2 monasteries, 26 schools<sup>140</sup> and 5,137 business establishments such as hotels, bars and factories. There were a number of injuries (between 300 and 600) and 11 deaths.<sup>141</sup> The government paid some compensation to the victims of the violence, but these events may be seen as a major cause of non-Muslim emigration during the 1960s. Specifically, many Greeks emigrated from Turkey to Greece, while a number of Jews went to Israel.

Although the DP government blamed communists and outside agitators for the violence, it soon became obvious that the events of 6-7 September had been planned by the government with the cooperation of the secret service and local party activists, and state-administered organizations such as student unions and youth associations, syndicates and the KTC (*Kıbrıs Türk Cumhuriyeti*) Association of Turkish Cypriots.

The 1957 elections showed some loss of support for the DP in the countryside, but the party managed to hold on to the majority of the village population.<sup>142</sup> Between 1955 and 1960, the DP resorted to an appeal to religious sentiment, regularly publicizing the numbers of mosques and religious schools opened under the DP government. During this period, relations between the military and the DP worsened until finally, in 1960, five years after the riots, the ruling Democratic Party was brought down by a military coup. For reasons that are beyond the scope of this study, the DP leaders were put on trial by military court, resulting in the execution of three DP members, including Prime Minister Adnan Menderes.<sup>143</sup> A Constituent Assembly, made up of representatives from civic organizations and a military commander, was established in order to draft a new constitution. The Assembly also included single representatives from each recognized minority group, one Armenian, one Greek and one Jew. The 1961 Constitution promoted a more democratic government by creating an effective system of checks and balances to limit the power of the selected assemblies. It also expanded the scope of citizenship and included measures to safeguard the basic elements of civil society, such as the right to organize, freedom of the press, public speech and political

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<sup>140</sup> Dilek Güven, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Azınlık Politikaları Bağlamında 6-7 Eylül Olayları* [6-7 September Events in the context of Minority Policies during Republican Era]. Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yay, 2005, p. 36.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>142</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey, A Modern History*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1998, p. 230.

<sup>143</sup> Ali Tuna Kuyucu, "Ethno-Religious 'unmixing' of 'Turkey': 6-7 September riots as a case in Turkish nationalism." *Nations and Nationalism* 11 (2005), p. 362.

participation. The constitution aspired to a more liberal conception of citizenship than that of the early republican period. Yet despite these specific measures to broaden political participation, there were no non-Muslim deputies in Parliament for over 30 years.<sup>144</sup>

Although it was temporarily settled, the Cyprus problem continued to plague Greek-Turkish relations.<sup>145</sup> During the 1960s, Turkey began to deploy the ‘Constantinopolitan Greek factor’ in its diplomatic confrontations with Greece.<sup>146</sup> Thus on 24 March 1964, the list of the first Greeks deportees was announced in the Turkish press. The Turks claimed that the expulsions were aimed at individual Greeks involved in activities that threatened Turkey’s internal and external security. Many deportees were accused of smuggling foreign currency or sending money to Greek terrorists in Cyprus. Soon however, it became evident that the deportees were often highly respected individuals who had no previous involvement with the authorities. Nonetheless, more than 6,000 Greeks who held Greek nationality were deported from Turkey by 1965.<sup>147</sup> However, sensing a precarious future, Greeks with Turkish passports also began to leave Istanbul in great numbers. In October 1964, the *Cumhuriyet Journal* reported that in addition to the Greek subjects already expelled, some 30,000 Turkish nationals of Greek descent had left Turkey permanently.<sup>148</sup> Thus, the year 1964 witnessed an exodus of the Greek population.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there were frequent confrontations between rightist and leftist groups, leading to an alarming rise in political violence. The AP (Adalet Partisi/Justice Party), established as an heir to the shuttered DP, came to power in the 1960s. The old center-periphery divisions reappeared during this period and both civilian bureaucrats and the military grew distrustful of the Justice Party’s capacity to prevent political terrorism. In 1971, these factors led to the second military intervention to take place in modern Turkish history. As a result, constitutional amendments were enacted to strengthen the executive and

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<sup>144</sup> Şule Toktaş, “Citizenship and Minorities: A Historical Overview of Turkey’s Jewish Minority.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 18.4 (Dec. 2005), pp. 408-409.

<sup>145</sup> On 16 March 1964, the Turks unilaterally denounced the 1930 convention on Establishment, Commerce and Navigation. This had ramifications for over 10,000 Istanbul Greeks, established there under the provisions of the convention. Although most Greeks in Turkey held Turkish passports, nearly a third of the Istanbul Greeks had Greek nationality. They were allowed to remain in Turkey by virtue of the provisions of the convention (signed at Lausanne in 1923) respecting conditions of residence, business and jurisdiction. Moreover, in October 1930, the right of the Greeks to remain in their native city was extended with the signing of the new agreement. Despite this agreement, many Greeks found themselves out of work during the mid-1930s. Some of them decided to migrate to, Greece, while others changed professions. According to official Turkish estimates, there were 26,431 Hellenes in Istanbul in 1927. Their numbers decreased steadily to 17,672 in 1935, 13,598 in 1945, 11,879 in 1955, and 10,480 in 1960. (Alexis Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations 1918-1974*. Athens: Ctr. for Asia Minor Studies, 1983, p. 281)

<sup>146</sup> Alexis Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations 1918-1974*. Athens: Ctr. for Asia Minor Studies, 1983, p. 280.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 283.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

limit the activities of citizens so as to safeguard national security and unity. After the 1960 military coup, there were relatively open discussions about the taboos of Turkish society. In this context, President Cemal Gürsel proposed a “denomination bureau” to represent the interests of all beliefs other than orthodox Sunni Islam. This caused uproar amongst conservative Sunnis who argued that Alevi do not constitute a denomination because they are not Shiites. It was during these public debates that the first Alevi organisations and journals formed. The period between 1960 and 1970 witnessed an alliance between the left and Alevism. The left believed that they had found natural allies in the marginalized Alevi, while the latter, due to that same economic and social marginalization, were sympathetic to Marxist ideas.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, both Alevi and Kurdish youth gravitated to the left, hoping that this association might end the discrimination against them. After the 1960s, communism was often viewed as a foreign and atheist ideology. In that context, the rapprochement between Alevi and the left meant that Alevism came to be equated with communism. Ultranationalist youth began to target Alevi as enemies of Turkish social and cultural values. This polarization, frequently encouraged by both right and left wing politicians, produced violence that caused numerous Alevi deaths in southern and eastern Turkey.<sup>150</sup>

As for relations between non-Muslims and the state, the 1970s were dominated by the Cyprus issue. Rising nationalism put pressure on the Greek minority, again leading many to migrate to Greece. In the same period, the issue of religious foundations came to the fore and caused further problems for minorities. Under article 40 of the Treaty of Lausanne, non-Muslims had been granted the right to establish their own religious foundations. But in 1936, the Turkish government used the Law on Religious Foundations to treat non-Muslim foundations on the same basis as Muslim ones. Furthermore, since the Civic Law outlawed the establishment of any religious foundation designed to support the members of a specific race or community, the Law on Religious Foundation prohibited any new foundations by minority groups. The Law also required foundations to prepare a declaration of properties owned. However, in 1974, the Council of State decreed that no corporate body constituted by non-Turkish citizens would be allowed to obtain immovable property. Consequently, the authorities began to liquidate real estate belonging to minority religious foundations. The liquidation of these non-Muslim assets hindered the foundations’ provision of religious,

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<sup>149</sup> Elise Massicard, *Türkiye'den Avrupa'ya Alevi Hareketinin Siyasallaşması [The Politicization of Alevi Movement from Turkey to Europe]*. Trans. Ali Berktaş. İstanbul: İletişim, 2007, p. 60.

<sup>150</sup> One example of this is the Kahramanmaraş Events (Maraş Olayları), where Alevi villages in Kahramanmaraş were attacked by right wing youth, Grey wolves, which left more than 110 people dead. But according to informal sources, this number was much higher.

charitable or educational services to their communities, because most of these services depended on the revenues earned from rents of the properties.

Towards the end of the 1970s, political terrorism became more violent, which caused an ideological polarization of society. The non-Muslim minorities suffered the insecure environment along with their Muslim counterparts, but the ASALA attacks on Turkish institutions and embassies were additional sources of tension for Turkey's Armenian minority.<sup>151</sup> The increasing law and order problems, Kurdish separatism, a political system that seemed completely deadlocked, an economy in tatters, and the threat of Islamic fundamentalism—all these factors may have contributed to the third military intervention in Turkish politics.<sup>152</sup> In addition, the Cyprus crisis flared up again in 1974, resulting in a Turkish military invasion of 40 percent of the island on 14<sup>th</sup> August 1974. At home, this was viewed as a legitimate act of protection of the Turkish minority in Cyprus, but on the international stage, it put Turkey in a very isolated position.<sup>153</sup>

As a nation-state formed out of an empire, the Turkish case provides a good example for the analysis of state policies and practices of 'ethnic unmixing. "The 6-7 September riots, which had targeted non-Muslim minorities, constitute an important episode in the ethno-national homogenization (i.e. unmixing) of Turkey."<sup>154</sup> In this respect, the state's identity policy demonstrated itself very successfully in the domain of national education. The sharp fall in the number of minority schools, the requirement of Turkish as the language of instruction, supervision by the Ministry of National Education—these were key elements in the Turkification of non-Muslim education.<sup>155</sup>

### 3.3.1 Education policy and religion education, 1950-1980

In the section of the manifesto entitled "General Principles", the Democratic Party declared that "Our party...rejects the misinterpretation of secularism as hostility to religion; it recognizes freedom of religion as a sacred right of humanity like other liberties."<sup>156</sup> Thus the DP planned a "preparation of a profound program by experts concerning the issue of religion

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<sup>151</sup> Şule Toktaş, 'Citizenship and Minorities: A Historical Overview of Turkey's Jewish Minority', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol.18, No. 4, December 2005, p. 412. ASALA (The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) was a Marxist-Leninist militant/terrorist organisation that operated from 1975 to 1986.

<sup>152</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, *Turkey, A Modern History*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1998, p. 268.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>154</sup> Ali Tuna Kuyucu, "Ethno-Religious 'unmixing' of 'Turkey': 6-7 September riots as a case in Turkish nationalism." *Nations and Nationalism* 11 (2005), p. 364.

<sup>155</sup> Dilek Güven, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Azınlık Politikaları Bağlamında 6-7 Eylül Olayları [6-7 September Events in the context of Minority Policies during Republican Era]*. Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yay, 2005, p. 202.

<sup>156</sup> İsmail Kaplan, "The Ideology of National Education in Turkey and Its Implications for Political Socialization" Dissertation submitted to the Institute of Social Sciences, Boğaziçi University 1998, p. 199.

education as well as the establishment of institutions to educate men of religion”.<sup>157</sup> After the DP came to power in May 1950, there was new legislation to expand religion education, a policy in keeping with the party program. On 7 November 1950, decree number 2949 was distributed to the governors. The decree states that in village schools, time for religion education would be found by shortening the agriculture course by one hour, and in urban schools, by taking one hour from the Turkish course. This meant an incorporation of religion education into the weekly class schedules in all primary schools in Turkey. It was an important change insofar as previous religion instruction had been given *outside* the weekly class schedules, generally after the school day was over. Moreover, to encourage greater participation, the decree prohibited scheduling the religion courses at the beginning or end of the school day.

This program was called *compulsory* religion education, although students were allowed to opt out of the course. So, the term “compulsory” designated a different meaning than it did after 1980, when the course literally became compulsory in the sense that most students, apart from Jews, Greeks and Armenians, had to take it in order to pass their studies. But before 1980, the incorporation of the course into class schedules, albeit with the right to opt out, meant that the course was described as compulsory.

There is a second important detail in this decree. If parents wished their children to opt out of the course, they had to write a petition to the school administration. This was new in the sense that compared to the old legislation, parents now had to opt out rather than opt in. The intention with this new arrangement was to make opting out a harder choice for parents, given the social pressure. The decree allowed for the use of religion textbooks from previous school years, but it also called for an additional guide for teachers to be prepared. In schools with more than one teacher, older teachers took over the delivery of these classes; this led to more traditional approaches and methods. At this stage, there was little or no debate about the quality of teaching on the course.

The new DP legislation met with severe opposition from prominent politicians and intellectuals. The DP was accused of reviving religious reaction, betraying Atatürk's reforms, and throwing out the Kemalist reforms that had proved so important to the sphere of education in the late 1920s and 1930s. Due to the sensitivity of the issue, debates about the religion courses regularly ended in deadlock.

To trace the outline of the debates and the positions of the different camps, it may help

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

to return to an article written by Raif Ogan in 1950, titled “The Professor who does not want religion courses in Schools”. In this article, Ogan severely criticizes the lawsuit that Bulend Nuri Esen brought against the Ministry of Education. The reason for the lawsuit was that Esen found the introduction of voluntary religion courses in state school curricula unlawful. Esen claimed it amounted to a violation of the freedom of conscience *and* of the principle of secularism set out in the Turkish Constitution. He brought his case as a citizen and as a parent of two children of school age. Raif Ogan was a strong defender of the need for religion courses in Turkey and therefore his article was a refutation of Esen's arguments.

Taken together, Esen’s lawsuit and Ogan’s article provide a good summary of the main arguments about religion education in formal education. They also provide different interpretations of secularism. We gain some insight into the “secular” camp which, even with its voluntary status, found the religion courses unlawful. In addition, we broaden our understanding of how perceptions of this issue changed in the 1980s and beyond.

In his seven-page article, Raif Ogan accuses Bülent Nuri Esen of misinterpreting the constitution. The first point he makes is that since the majority of the population belongs to Islam, it is the duty of the state to provide religion education to children who want to receive it. Secondly, he suggests that atheists might follow the practice of religious minorities, by submitting an opt out petition to the school government. However, he states that people like Esen are hypocritical in their rejection of the petition. Although it is clear that the petition would give them what they want, they apparently fear the social exclusion that might result from an official declaration of atheism. Finally, he asserts that the principle of secularization and “freedom of conscience” was not put into the Constitution in order for atheists to put pressure on religious people. His article closes with a declaration of moral support for the current Minister of Education who must defend the new arrangement.

Bülend Nuri Esen’s opinions can only be found in minutes of the 1953 National Education Congress, when the newly elected DP government returned to the discussion.<sup>158</sup> The lawsuit had not yet reached a verdict. Esen responds to Raif Ogan’s article by arguing first, that it is not the duty of the state to provide religion education. According to Esen, the constitutional principle of secularism means that the state should maintain a formal distance from all religions. Also, for teachers to remain free individuals, they should be under no obligation to give religion courses. In fact, Esen argues, once a teacher begins to teach religion courses, he may have undue influence over student beliefs. Only religious officials

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<sup>158</sup> *Beşinci Milli Eğitim Şurası [Fifth Education Congress]*. Istanbul: Tıpkı Basım, 1991, p. 391.

should pursue this type of training. In relation to this point, Esen recalls the Universal Human Rights Declaration, of which Turkey is a signatory. He argues that freedom of religion can only be sustained through private religious instruction. Esen is not satisfied by the voluntary status of the course, because he believes that the Constitution has in *principle*, been breached. Finally he argues that, contrary to Ogan's views, it is not possible for democracy to satisfy all of the demands of citizens (which was one of the main points Raif Ogan had actually raised to argue for religion education based on high societal demand). Thus Ogan and Esen's arguments turned on different conceptions of democracy, majority rule and what citizens can legitimately demand of the state. In the end, Esen received little support from his colleagues at the 5<sup>th</sup> National Education Congress. Many MPs did not agree that religion education constituted a violation of secularism or the freedom of conscience. I believe that in these counter arguments there was a strong belief in the fact that the state would not impose anything to the students and will "objectively" teach students Islam. Indeed, MPs shared an underlying belief that the state had no official religion to impose anyway. The fact that people could opt out of the course (via petitions) provided another means to safeguard the freedom of conscience. I believe that in these counter arguments there was a strong belief in the fact that the state would not impose anything to the students and will "objectively" teach students Islam. Indeed, MPs shared an underlying belief that the state had no official religion to impose anyway. The fact that people could opt out of the course (via petitions) provided another means to safeguard the freedom of conscience.

Moreover Ülgen, an MP, argued that the introduction of these courses on a voluntary basis was actually the fulfilment of the 266<sup>th</sup> principle of the Constitution for Muslim citizens, which states that the "the decision on the religion education of the pupils belong to the parents". This principle—and here non-Muslims received their only specific mention in the Congress proceedings—was being used by non-Muslim citizens freely, because they were able to access religion education in their minority schools. Ülgen concluded that the new legislation promised to make this principle a reality for everybody.

Unsurprisingly, Esen's lawsuit against the Ministry of Education was rejected. The Ministry defended itself by claiming that religion courses did not constitute a breach of the secularism principle and that this could only be breached if class programs were prepared according to religious principles. Secondly, they argued that the courses did not violate the right of freedom of conscience since there was an option to opt out of the courses. The Council of State's verdict was the rejection of this case on the grounds that Esen's children were enrolled in first and third grades. As there was no voluntary religion course on their class

schedules, there was no breach of the plaintiff's rights. Esen brought the case again two years later, when his children reached the grade levels where they would encounter the religion courses. This time he lost the case on the grounds that it was possible to opt out of the course, and therefore no breach of the Constitution could be found.

Mustafa Nermi, a journalist who wrote for the *Yeni Istanbul* Journal, also made an important contribution to these debates.<sup>159</sup> First of all, he doubted the demand for the courses, and specifically, he questioned the 'survey' that the Ministry of Education was said to have conducted into whether parents were willing to have these courses or not.<sup>160</sup> Nermi argued that the information on this issue was not available to the public. Moreover, the arguments mounted by the Ministry of Education lacked authority because they were based solely on this survey and not on principles which were in line with the Constitution. Secondly, Nermi pointed out that many non-Sunni members of the population found the new legislation to be a violation of the freedom of conscience.<sup>161</sup> For Nermi, the objectives of the religion course must be better defined and argued:

If you are going to introduce another course to the class schedules you have to define what the course aims to achieve. But it seems that in the case of religion courses this aim is not defined yet. If you say it is needed to prevent the communist threat, then it means that when the threat is gone, these courses can be taken out of the curriculum. We do not know what we want to do with these courses. Are we going to raise faithful citizens, religion experts or propagandists to fight with communist threat?<sup>162</sup>

Nermi believed that the main reasons given for introducing these courses, such as the threat of communism or moral corruption, were not sufficient.

In sum, there were intense debates about the new program throughout the 1950s. In various commissions, journals and newspapers, there were specific discussions about how the program would work in relation to secularism. The compatibility of the Directorate of Religious Affairs with the secularism principle was also questioned.

In a short period, the debates about the religion courses had reached a deadlock. Discussions had been largely reduced to a political fight between CHP members and the DP government. CHP supporters tended to view the new program as part of the larger agenda of

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<sup>159</sup> Mustafa Mermi, "Din Dersleri ve Vicdan Hürriyeti" ["Religion courses and freedom of conscience"]. *Yeni İstanbul* 13 Oct. 1950, p. 1.

The existence and validity of the same 'survey' was also questioned by Nurettin Artam (another prominent intellectual who authored the controversial religion book prepared for fourth and fifth graders in 1949. As will be recalled in the previous section, this book was not welcomed by some circles.)

<sup>161</sup> Zeynep Nevzatoğlu, "Basında Din Eğitimi-Öğretimi Laiklik Tartışmaları 1945-1960" ["Discussions about Secularism and Religion Education in the Media"]. MA Thesis Ankara U Soc. Sci. Inst, 2006, p. 140.

<sup>162</sup> "DP Meclis grubunda Din Tedrisatı Görüşüldü" ["Religion instruction has been debated in the DP"]. *Vatan* 4 May 1951.

the Democratic Party. It is arguable that these debates did not extend to, or include, all sections of society. The courses were introduced quickly and with scant regard for the content or intended audience. As in the late 1940s, discussions were mainly theoretical and Alevi concerns, in particular, were given little consideration. In 1956, Menderes gave a speech in Konya, a city known for its strongly Islamic population. When he declared that his government would introduce religion courses in secondary schools, Menderes reignited the debates:

Turkish nation is a Muslim nation and it will stay so. For the nation to stay forever Muslim, the coming generations must know religious principles. But if there are not religion courses in schools then the parents who want to teach and inspire their children with their own religions become devoid of this opportunity. The lack of this opportunity and this deprivation of their rights' cannot be said to abide with the freedom of conscience. Because of this, the introduction of religion courses also to the secondary schools is going to be a very apt measure.

The speech caused uproar and made Menderes the target of critics. There were repercussions in Parliament as well. For example, Hikmet Bayur, an MP from the Nation Party, submitted the following parliamentary question to the Minister of Education: "What will be the situation of Alevi citizens who want to keep their children away from such courses?"

Bayur's main concern was that by teaching more advanced religious principles at the secondary level, the school risked putting children into a conflicted position; in one course they would gain scientific knowledge and in others, religious knowledge. In addition to that possible area of conflict, there was a larger contradiction with the secularism principle of the Constitution. He also argued that if the intention was to keep the courses fairly basic, without detailed study of Islam, then in fact there was no need to repeat the same material at the next level. A number of journalists elaborated on Bayur's questions. İsmail Hakki Baltacıoğlu supported Bayur's concerns about Alevi parents who, according to Bayur constituted almost half of the Muslim population in Turkey. Raif Ogan, who wrote in the *Sebilürreşad Journal* which was known for its Islamic line, attempted to refute this argument and in doing so, reflected the official state view of Alevis. Ogan claimed that there were no Alevi communities and no *kızılbaş* in Turkey which differed from the Islamic communities. Secondly, he argued for a view of Islam as comprised of three main denominations: Sunnism, Shi'ism and Kharijism. In his opinion, this meant that Alevism could only be a *tarikât* (religious order). Since religious orders had been abolished by law in Turkey, there could be no rights for people belonging to orders in the name of Alevisim.

In spite of opposition in various circles, the DP government introduced compulsory

religion courses for the first two levels of secondary school in 1956. Again, if there were parents who did not want their children to attend the course, they could opt out by submitting a petition to the schools. The secondary level courses would cover the main tenets of Islam including the concepts of *iman*, *ibadet* and *ahlak* (morality). The textbooks for the course were written from a Sunni perspective, making it abundantly clear that the course was designed to address only the Sunni population of Turkey.<sup>163</sup>

In 1957, during budget discussions for the Directorate of Religious Affairs, the government considered an expansion of the religion course to the lycee level. The idea was also discussed in Parliament. Yet in a 1958 piece in the *Vatan Journal*, the Minister of Education denied any such expansion.<sup>164</sup> At the same time, a number of books and articles in favour of state religion education began to appear. A well-known scholar, Bülent Daver, argued that the religion courses might be best legitimized on social and political grounds (such as public demand), rather than legalistic ones. Daver argued that there *was* public demand for these courses, citing the survey conducted by Dr. Thomas Mattheus of Cornell University, in which the views of Turkish administrators and university students were collected.<sup>165</sup> According to Daver, the survey showed a high percentage of support in favour of religion courses.<sup>166</sup>

In the same year, 1958, the government established a “National Education Committee” charged with producing a report based on a compilation and summary of observations about religion education. In its report, the committee found no incompatibility between religion education (in its current state) and the core principles of the Turkish republic. It also found that because the teachers had been trained in secular schools, they could be trusted to deliver the course material appropriately.<sup>167</sup>

In 1961, under the new Constitution, religion education received clear constitutional backing. The 4<sup>th</sup> clause of article 19 of the Constitution stated that “religious education and teaching shall be subject to individual’s own will and volition, and in the case of minors to

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<sup>163</sup> Nurullah Altaş, “Türkiye’de Örgün Öğretimde Dinin Yeri” [“The Place of Religion in the Turkish Formal Education System”]. *Maarife Dergisi* 1.2 (Spring 2002), p. 225.

<sup>164</sup> Zeynep Nevzatoglu, “Basında Din Eğitimi-Öğretimi Laiklik Tartışmaları 1945-1960” [“Discussions about Secularism and Religion Education in the Media”]. MA Thesis Ankara U Soc. Sci. Inst, 2006, p. 210.

<sup>165</sup> A.T.J Matthews, *Yetişen Türk İdarecileri: Genç ve Müstakbel İdarecilerin Mesleki ve Sosyal Tavrı Hakkında bir İnceleme* [Rising Turkish managers: a research about the social and professional behaviors of young and prospective managers]. Trans. Nermin Abadan. Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi, 1955.

<sup>166</sup> For a detailed analysis of the survey see: Daver, Bülent. *Türkiye Cumhuriyetinde Layiklik* [Secularism in Turkish Republic]. Ankara: Son Havadis Matbaası, Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Yayınları, 1955, p. 151.

<sup>167</sup> Beyza Bilgin, *Eğitim Bilimi ve Din Eğitimi*. 2nd ed. Ankara: Gün, 1997, p. 75.

their legally appointed guardians.”<sup>168</sup> Thus from then on, the question of compatibility between religion education and secularism was resolved in legalistic terms.

In 1967, 271 MPs from the Justice Party tabled a motion calling for the introduction of religion courses to the lycee level of education. The issue again created a commotion both in parliament and in the public sphere. Finally in this year, the Minister of Education introduced religion courses to the lycees, declaring that in the first two levels, it would take place at school, but outside the normal class hours, for one hour per week.<sup>169</sup> Shortly after, however, the Minister made successful completion of the course mandatory for student progression. During this time, the general objective of the course was to introduce students to the idea of a spiritual world, and to an understanding that material and spiritual values could be strongly linked.<sup>170</sup>

Beyza Bilgin, whose influence on the religion education on Turkish education system will be examined in the next chapter, has argued that although the provisions seem to satisfy the proponents of religion education in schools, the course (both content and application wise) itself was some way from realizing the goals set out in the legislation.<sup>171</sup> She found that the additional circulars meant that opting out of the courses was encouraged. She cited a circular dated 18 June 1969, which declared that parents wishing to enroll their children in the course at the lycee level must petition the school administration at the beginning of the school year. If the parents changed their minds, they had a month to withdraw their children from the courses. Bilgin argued that the capacity to avoid the course without giving a legitimate reason effectively meant that the freedom of conscience was exercised irresponsibly. In her writing, she compared this new program with previous ones arguing that in the previous ones, the criteria for the specification of students who were to take the course and enrolment to the course were more clearly defined.<sup>172</sup>

After the coup d’etat of 1971, religion education was once more in the spotlight. In 1974, the government introduced religion courses to the third level of each stage of education, meaning the third, eighth and eleventh grades. However with some additional legislation, this was altered; finally a 1976 decree provided for religion education at every level, from grades

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<sup>168</sup> “Lausanne Treaty”. *The Treaties of Peace 1919-1923, Vol. II*. New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1924.

<sup>169</sup> Tuğrul Yörük, “Cumhuriyet Döneminde Türkiye’de Laiklik Çerçevesinde Din Eğitimi” [“Religion Education in the context of secularism during the Republican age”]. MA thesis Çukurova U Soc. Sci. Inst, 2005, p. 94.

<sup>170</sup> Nurullah Altaş, “Türkiye’de Örgün Öğretimde Dinin Yeri” [“The Place of Religion in the Turkish Formal Education System”]. *Maarife Dergisi* 1.2 (Spring 2002), p. 227.

<sup>171</sup> Beyza Bilgin, *Türkiye’de Din Eğitimi ve Liselerde Din Dersleri* [Religion Education in Turkey and Religion Courses at High Schools]. Ankara: Emel, 1980, p. 70.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

one to eleven. During these years, it was stated that almost 93 percent of the primary school children were taking these courses in urban places where as this ratio was almost 100 percent.<sup>173</sup>

### **3.3.2 The education of religious minorities and Alevis' during the multi-party regime**

In the wake of political developments during the 1950s, Greek schools faced a number of difficulties, relatively more than those faced by Jews and Armenians. It is for this reason that I dwell mostly on problems surrounding Greek education in this section.

In the 1955 pogrom, the minority schools were attacked by mobs. As a result, out of 48 Greek Schools, 36 were either totally or partially damaged.<sup>174</sup> After the exodus of 30,000 Greeks in 1964, many of those who remained became anxious about their future prospects in Turkey. Soon after, in a move that reinforced Greek apprehensions, the Turkish authorities adopted a series of restrictive measures with regards to minority educational and charitable institutions.

First, in contravention of the Lausanne Treaty, Greek elementary and secondary schools were forced to accept the appointment of Turkish assistant headmasters recruited by the Ministry of Education.<sup>175</sup> The assistant headmasters deliberately followed policies intended to render the task of Greek headmasters and staff as difficult as possible and “to provoke the intervention of the Turkish educational authorities on charges of breaking the regulations and of anti-Turkish conduct”.<sup>176</sup> As a result, during the months of March and April 1964 alone, the Turkish authorities dismissed three headmasters and eleven teachers. In a renewed campaign against Greek minority schools in 1967, 39 teachers were expelled and six primary schools were closed down.<sup>177</sup> As the authorities refused to appoint new Greek headmasters, the management of the Greek minority schools eventually moved into the hands of Turkish deputy-headmasters. Likewise, despite Greek protestations, the Ministry turned down applications for the appointment of new teachers on the grounds that the applicants did not possess an adequate knowledge of Turkish.<sup>178</sup> While refusing permission for the repair of dilapidated school buildings, the authorities withdrew recognition of a number of elected

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<sup>173</sup> Tuğrul Yörük, “Cumhuriyet Döneminde Türkiye’de Laiklik Çerçevesinde Din Eğitimi” [“Religion Education in the context of secularism during the Republican age”]. MA thesis Çukurova U Soc. Sci. Inst, 2005, p. 95.

<sup>174</sup> Dilek Güven, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Azınlık Politikaları Bağlamında 6-7 Eylül Olayları* [6-7 September Events in the context of Minority Policies during Republican Era]. Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yay, 2005, p. 36.

<sup>175</sup> Alexis Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations 1918-1974*. Athens: Ctr. for Asia Minor Studies, 1983, p. 286.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

Greek community school boards. On 27 March 1964, a government circular (protocol no 410/16) prohibited Orthodox clerics from entering the premises of Greek minority schools. Another circular (protocol no 3885) dated 15 September, banned morning prayer in the Greek schools and prohibited the use of Greek textbooks and encyclopaedias.<sup>179</sup>

These various measures caused the quality of education in Greek minority schools, once highly regarded, to decline dramatically. The fear that their children would be inadequately educated was one of the many reasons for the departure of many Istanbul Greeks.<sup>180</sup>

In 1965, outspoken journalist Andreas Lambikis reacted to this state of affairs in an open letter to the Minister of Education, Cihat Bilgehan, requesting an end to the restrictive legislation that crippled Greek minority schools in Istanbul. When his appeal went unanswered, Lambikis tried to publish yet another open letter, addressed to President Gürsel. Prevented by the authorities from doing so, he noted this act of censorship by publishing the 19 July edition of his journal with a blank editorial space. The authorities were not prepared to put up with Lambikis for very long. On 11 September, he was arrested and transported by the police to the border, where he was told to cross over into Greece. It is worth mentioning here, that Lambikis was a Turkish national. Just before his expulsion, a court found Lambikis guilty of violating articles 141 and 142 of the penal code; he had been charged with producing Greek propaganda that threatened national unity. The premises of *Eleftheri Foni*, Lambikis's journal, were subsequently ransacked and the back issues of the newspaper destroyed. With the suppression of *Eleftheri Foni*, the Greek minority lost the only public voice for their grievances and a champion of the minority rights enshrined in the Turkish constitutions and the Treaty of Lausanne.<sup>181</sup>

Lastly, with the Turkish invasion of north Cyprus (1974-75), there was a further wave of Greek migration that marked almost the end of this population in Turkey. Within a year after the invasion, the number of Greek students had decreased by 700.<sup>182</sup> Although much of the pressure was on the Greek schools, the Jewish and Armenian schools were also affected by these developments. Bilgin's 1980 study (based on research conducted in 1975-76)

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid, p. 287.

<sup>180</sup> This is reflected in the following official figures: pupil numbers for the years 1923, 1964, 1970, 1978 and 1980 were 15000, 5000, 3930, 1147, and 816 respectively. In 1923, there were eight secondary schools; for the other years this number stood at six. The elementary school numbers were 85, 42, 42, 22 and 20. (Alexis Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations 1918-1974*. Athens: Ctr. for Asia Minor Studies, 1983, p. 287.)

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, p. 288.

<sup>182</sup> "Azınlık Okullarında Öğrenci Azlığı" ["The scarcity of students among minority schools"]. *Sabah Gazetesi* 10 Sept. 2008.

provides the only source of information on Alevi views of religion education in this era. According to her research, the denominational difference did not *necessarily* impact on Alevi attendance at the religion course offered in schools. She reported that in one village highly populated by Alevis, a teacher in the village lycee told her that the attendance rate for the religion course was very high. The teacher's straightforward explanation was that the Alevis were religious and cared very much for the education of their children. In another lycee where the community had a similar demographic pattern, the teacher stated that attendance was very low because the Alevis in that village did not want their children to receive this education.<sup>183</sup> What we learn from Bilgin is that, contrary to claims made in the 1940s about the fact that Alevis were willing to send their children to the courses, there were Alevi villagers who did not want their children to be indoctrinated with Sunni values. I believe this shift has to do with the political conjuncture that made Alevis conscious of their identities. This process started in the early 1960s and is the topic of the next chapter.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Secularism first appeared in the CHP manifesto in 1927, but it did not become a constitutional principle until 1937. Between 1922 and 1928, the constitution declared Islam the official religion, and the state the executor of Islamic law. Even after 1937, when those articles were removed, Islam was not removed from the state. The very existence of a Directorate of Religious Affairs weakened the officially declared secularism and presented a proof for the ambivalent and inconsistent form of secularism in Turkey. Indeed, Davison has persuasively argued that the new Kemalist state never made religion or Islam an entirely separate, private matter.<sup>184</sup> It might be more accurate to say that the state rescued Islam as a matter of belief and conscience by institutionally supporting, financing and promulgating a different version of Islam and its view of its relation to power and social life.<sup>185</sup> The secularization of education in the 1920s may be partly explained by the relations between the state and religious minorities. In other words, there is a sense in which secularism worked to marginalize minority groups by marginalizing minority religions. The net result was, in fact, an elevation of Islam in Turkey.

In this section I surveyed the history of religion education in Turkish formal education

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<sup>183</sup> Beyza Bilgin, *Türkiye'de Din Eğitimi ve Liselerde Din Dersleri [Religion Education in Turkey and Religion Courses at High Schools]*. Ankara: Emel, 1980, p. 121.

<sup>184</sup> Andrew Davison, "Turkey, a Secular Sate? The Challenge of Description." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102.2/3 (Spring/Summer 2003), p. 341.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

in the years between 1918 and 1980. Based on distinctive historical features and events with regard to minority rights, I identified three periods: 1918-1923, 1923-1950 and 1950-1980. With varying degrees, in each of these three periods, non-Muslims and Alevis were marginalized by state policies of 'Turkification' or by attempts to bring a degree of homogeneity to the erstwhile populations of the Ottoman Empire. This had profound effects on non-Muslims especially, resulting in a decrease of the non-Muslim population and the loss of their schools. Alevis, on the other hand, continued to be ignored at the state level. These developments inevitably affected—and in many ways were reflections of—educational policies which favoured a more pro-Sunni, Muslim education.

In addition to these changes, I have closely examined the various reactions in both government and intellectual circles, to the introduction of religion education into school curricula. As we have seen, the debates nearly always approached the issue evaluated from a perspective that approached the topic from a legal perspective, one dominated by the question of whether it was possible to have a religion course in a secular country. This approach to the topic tended, at times, to silence the many questions and concerns that might have been raised by people who were not Sunni-Muslims.

In Turkey, the ambivalent structure and discourses of secularism have resulted in an approach (especially by the CHP elites) to religion education that seeks to assert it as a 'right' that must be guaranteed by the state. During the Democratic Party government, there was some deviation from this understanding in the sense that the DP policymakers conceptualised religion education in terms of 'religious freedoms'. The fact that non-Muslims found it somewhat easier to exercise the rights granted by the Treaty of Lausanne could be seen as a reflection of this. However, as a general tendency in this three-decade period, the previous understanding that decrees that religion education in schools had better be treated as a religious right to be fulfilled by the state prevailed. This view finally achieved constitutional consolidation in 1982, when religion courses were formally designated a social right to be organised and monitored by the state. This development will be examined in detail in the next chapter. The question of whether religion education is a right or a freedom would continue to inform the development of religion education in Turkey and how that education would be experienced by non-Muslims.