

The Place and Importance of the “Views of Ummah” Movement in Turkish Democracy With The Sample of ‘Welfare Party’

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Introduction

This paper aims to understand the “Milli Gorus Hareketi”¹ (*Views of Ummah, hereinafter referred to as VOU*)’s positive effects of democratization in Turkey. With respect to this issue, Caglar Keyder (2013) and Mehmet Turhan (2002) provide information. Emre Kongar (2010) pursues this study and explains the events with actual and true-life examples. On the other hand, we can say that they have failed to reveal a permanent diagnosis due to unconformity with the academic criteria, emotional and partly prejudiced approach to the subject. Moreover, they mostly focused on negative aspects of VOU; however, I think that positive effects need to be examined. So, the question posed for this research is: what are the positive effects of VOU on democratization in Turkey? In this context, I analyzed the “Refah Parti”(Welfare Party, hereinafter referred to as WP)’s election bulletins and interviewed with some parliamentarians. Understanding the history of democracy of Anatolia will also give a chance for analysis and interpret the current situation of Turkey. Therefore, the first chapter, covers a brief overview on democratization in Turkey until VOU. In the second chapter, through examples and interviews, I will analyze new discourses introduced by the WP into Turkish politics, Party’s identity, Just Order rhetoric, and the acquisitions of Turkish democracy by its election strategy and propaganda, respectively. In addition to these, there are introduction and conclusion chapters.

VOU is the movement started with the founding of “Milli Nizam Partisi”(National Order Party, *hereinafter referred to as NOP*) under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan in the beginning of 1970s. In the competitive party systems, under the name of “Milli Selamet Partisi”(National Salvation

Party, *hereinafter referred to as* NSP), the VOU built coalition partnerships in four different periods between 1974-1978. After that, it enjoyed great successes in local and general elections under the name of WP in the 1990s. Hence, all these successes provide decisive coalition partnerships and crowned its popularity in the political history of Turkey.²

1. A Brief Overview on Democratization in Turkey until VOU

Turkey started to discuss the democracy in the last period of Ottoman Empire especially, the Tanzimat (literally meaning reorganization of the Ottoman Empire, was a period of reformation that began in 1839 and ended with the first Constitutional Era in 1876) and Constitutional Era. Between these eras, a large amount of reforms had been enacted such as: guaranteeing the right of life and property to all of the empire's subjects, the abolition of slavery, legalization of homosexuality and so on.

Between 1923 (formal establishment of the Republic of Turkey) and 1945, Turkey was controlled by the single-party regime. The “Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi”(Republican People's Party, *hereinafter referred to as* RPP) was the only party during that period. Single party regime was not desired and targeted continuously; it was seen as a temporary regime because of the political situation in Turkey. Moreover, the multi-party system was an ideal system to be achieved.

In May 1950, a general election was held in the Turkish Republic that resulted in a big victory for the opposition. Democrat Party (DP) became the first party. Bernard Lewis, puts forth the following insight describing the event:

“This was a very important event for a country like Turkey. For a government to lose an election and be replaced by the opposition is nothing extraordinary in the political life of established democratic societies. In Turkey, however, such a peaceful transition was a novelty – not only in the history of the country, but of the entire region, and indeed of others that shared a comparable history and tradition. This was an epoch-making event, seen by many at the time as the dawn of a new era. Some indeed went so far as to assert that the defeat and supersession of Atatürk's RPP was the last and greatest of all its achievements in the building of the

Turkish Republic".³

With the multi-party system, DP was the most important outstanding party. Very popular at first, the government, eased the restrictions on Islam and led a booming economy. As seen from this view, this period was the period of change and development in Turkey. However, at the same time, it further alienated the opposition by imposing restrictive laws on the media and occasionally banned critical newspapers from publishing. Growing tensions caused the government to impose martial law in early 1960. The army stepped in and toppled the government on May 27; the president, prime minister and several cabinet members were arrested and quickly trailed for treason. Adnan Menderes (Prime Minister) was executed.⁴

2. Welfare Party

2.1 The Foundation of WP

1980 coup d'etat caused a great crisis in Turkey. The democracy was suspended, and all the political parties were closed. Since 1983, the closed parties begin to open one by one, and instead of the NSP, the WP was founded as the new representative of VOU in Turkish diplomacy.

The successful leadership of Necmettin Erbakan was the main factor for achieving the election and the rise of WP. In fact, after the general elections in 1987, the WP had its highest vote at rate of 7,14% on November 29, 1987 general election.

According to Yasar Yakis, the ambassador of Egypt at that period and then one of the founders of Justice and Development Party, the reasons for the WP's success was as follows:

"For Turkish society, the state had been considered as a destroyer for his people, a source just to enlist our children to the army and a source for tax. As a result, the parties benefiting the dissatisfaction of society and turning it into a voting opportunity always succeeded. This was one of the successes of the VOU. Secondly, in the aspect of the method they used, VOU was impressed by Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. It drew the attention of a regime serving the suburban and the countryside people.

WP accepted Muslim Brotherhood's methods, and it served humanitarian aids to those who have financial problems in slums and countryside such as food items and medical service. As a matter of course, it managed to get mass support.”⁵

Likewise, Ersonmez Yarbay, the former parliament member of the WP, commented about the reasons for the WP's successes:

“At that time, the other parties had instability in politics and they were very detached from the public. However, the WP had a rapid rise by benefiting this situation via integrating with public and having stability in politics. Moreover, people who had Islamic sensitiveness were under an ever-growing pressure, and other parties were deaf to this. The WP tried to stand up for their rights unlike other parties, and this contributed to the rise of WP.”⁶

2.2 The Identity of WP

With its discourse and action, the WP has the characteristics of a party which is in line with the NOP and reflects the same discourse, policy, and world-views, the first political party of VOU. As stated previously, the WP carries political Islamist tradition in its staff and discourse without any change. Hence, it is observed that the WP rarely changes the discourse of VOU, but has some strategic changes and updatings in methods of spreading the discourse to different populaces. Defining its world-view as VOU, the WP is both a nationalist and an Islamist party. According to Hakan Yavuz:

“The supporters of the party argued that the WP was different from other parties in Turkey because it emphasizes historic Ottoman and Islamic bonds, not Turkish ethnicity, and thus helps to bring the Kurds into the system. The forces that motivate supporters of the WP to become involved in politics are not solely religious, but rather include the search for community and redistribution of resources.”⁷

In WP's party program, the title of 'Foreign Policy' mentions that the WP establishes good relations with all Muslim and neighboring countries of Turkey.

Also, according to WP's party program it is possible to improve existing relations with the countries which Turkey has historical and cultural bonds, and this provides material and nonmaterial benefits for our country according to the program.⁸ Unlike other parties it aims to make a strong union among the undeveloped Islamic countries. In particular, the Middle Eastern, central Asian and Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia in the far East who have great importance for the WP.

The program which includes just a few sentences about secularism and freedom of thought and faith emphasized that it finds all repressions primitive and contrary to freedom of thought and faith. According to it, secularism is not anti-religious, instead, it must be improved and activated as a principle to save all those freedoms from any violation.⁹

The element which never change from the beginning in the discourse of VOU is the pan-Islamist World-view fed with strong anti-Zionism. At this point, the WP's discourse about Nationalism is considered from a Pan-Islamist perspective. Erbakan, the master of the discourse, represents the nationalism of 'Islamic great eastern civilization' in the maturity stage of Islamic discourse. In the context of functional solidarity, it can be mentioned about a Pan-Islamist mindset in Turkey or worldwide. In its discourse, the WP uses the emphasis of Turkishness as a 'Muslim nation aiming to carry Islamic standards further'. In such a Nationalist instrumentalisation, the WP dreams D8 as the union of Muslim nations, and Turkey is in the role of 'Big Brother' for underdeveloped countries in Islamic geography.¹⁰ According to this, the guns and items produced in intended heavy industrialization thrust are sent to these countries so as to use against West and Zionists. In one of his speeches, Erbakan mentions about a Turkey-centred Islamic Union in these words:

*"Turkey is at the center of World. The right of leadership in forming a just World naturally belongs to Turkey which has a unique history representing justice. I hope Turkey will surely be the leader in forming a just world with its geography, history, people and all its resources."*¹¹

2.3 The Rhetoric of 'JUST ORDER'

The discourse of VOU is rarely updated from the beginning but changed its focal point according to the conjuncture, and associates functionality with a

pragmatist balance in Islamic discourse. The focal point of the WP's discourse is concerned with social policies differently from the NOP and the NSP. This is because of the socio-economical destruction that resulted from the neo-liberal-oriented structural transformation in the Turkish Economy during the Ozal period after 1980 coup d'etat. The conjuncture between 1985-1995, in which the mass immigration from the countryside to cities is the biggest factor for social change, which is accepted by VOU as the predominant factor for the discourse. Hence, the focus on the suburban population was greater than urban population which was affected negatively by structural economic transformation.

The scope of the WP's discourse is constituted with all social science subjects and a method whose content is filled with a complex justice myth and reference comes from compulsory rules of Islam. The rhetoric which the party usually constructs with this method and updates is 'Just Order'. The two publications of the party which are written by Necmettin Erbakan in 1991 describes the general theme of the 'Just Order', and this rhetoric is knitted around this general theme.

The first discourse that was intended to include in the 'Just Order' was the brochure of the WP which criticized interest rate lobby with anti-zionist power eclectically. Repetidly, the basic reference here is again the compulsory rules of Islam.¹² In 'Just Order' brochure, the existing world order is emphasized with this determination:

“The zionists take the world imperialism under their control. They exploit the humanity via usurious capitalist order. They keep their political dominance on earth via the imperialist states.”¹³

The literature and presentation model of 'Just Order', which is enriched with metaphors, simple logic sampling, and Islamic patterns, besides of being doctrinaire, is at such a level that it is easily understood and accepted by the people who have lower or mid-level intelligence and perception threshold. The following statement is an example from 'Just Order':

“In the order of VOU, there won't be interest, and all the unfair taxes will be removed. Everybody will get the opportunity to buy three loaves of bread with the same money that he buys just one formerly. With the same

*fund, he will produce three times more than today. The cheapest production will belong to Turkey, and exportation will increase. The needs of Muslim countries will be met in Turkey by establishing the common market, and so Turkey will become one of the strongest countries in the World!"*¹⁴

Differently from former VOU parties, the WP which has the rhetoric of 'Just Order' rejects the statist and protective policies, and tends to market economy model. Mostly the small-sized enterprises benefit from economical improvement resulted from free market policy in Ozal Period, and they establish 'The Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (MUSIAD) in order to protect their benefits against a big business world which aim to merge with European markets. The demands of this new bourgeoisie grown in Anatolia cause the WP to follow the market economy model.¹⁵ By this way, WP encouraged the compatibility between justice for the poor and the growing gap between the rich and the poor caused by the expansion of the market economy.

Ersonmez Yarbay gives the following information about 'Just Order':

*"'Just Order' was a system proposed by Erbakan against monopolization. It aimed to remove unfair income distribution and form the noninterest economy. This system aimed to decrease the sentimental value of money in care of public and remove interest. As members of the WP, we represented the poor in society. These poor demanded the removal of interest, however, just their demand was not enough to manage it entirely. Thus, there was not much improvement about interest problem and 'Just Order'. Yet, this is a worth-stressing issue. Another destructive problem of World is absolutely monopolization and unfair income distribution. 'Just Order' can be a solution to these problems if it is improved."*¹⁶

2.4 The Electoral Strategy and Propaganda of The WP

The organization model of the WP is defined as 'Rosary Model' that is the provincial organizational committee has thirty-three members modeled as the thirty-three beads of the traditional Muslim rosary. According to this model, the WP places a party member to each province, and this member places other party agents to each district, street, and even apartment. By this way,

inspectors check other organizations local party activities.¹⁷ Moreover, if a local needs financial aid, those local party organizations never hesitate to help. For the WP, the policy not only offers services and helps needy people, but also defines the symbols of Turkish society, and shapes Muslim political views and social life. By establishing hegemony over the symbolic structure of Turkish society, the WP seeks to become the hegemonic political force.¹⁸

One of the most important features of the WP which separate it from other parties is the strong bonds between voters and the party members. Ersonmez Yarbay emphasizes that one of the most important factors for his party's success is 'Rosary Model'. He states:

*"The WP had to be everywhere that human beings lived. For this reason, we had party agents in every city, county, district, street and even apartment, and we always checked their activities. Everyone worked to reach the best rate by dealing the people one to one. For instance, there were ballot boxes in elections. Let's say that each box has 200 voters. During the election, we began sending a party representative to each box in order to keep in touch with the voters. Let's think that there are one hundred thousand boxes, and in this case, we aimed to reach two hundred thousand representatives with one extra helper party members for each box. As the WP, we put up candidates everywhere in every election. This was one of the most important reasons for success. We had candidates in every city and district even if we knew we would fail. In the regions where we could not find any candidate, we had assigned-candidates. For instance, if we don't have any candidate in Tunceli (a city of Turkey), we assign one of our members there as a candidate. We defended that if we were at the right side, then our thoughts would be everywhere. It was not important to win or lose. The important point was to emphasize our right thoughts."*¹⁹

In the interview with Alaattin Sahin, who graduated from Faculty of Political Science at Ankara University and was the member of Board of Overseers in Sifa University,²⁰ he tells how he is impressed by the WP's election propaganda in these statements:

*"After Ozal's death, I voted for the WP in 1994-1995 because center-right parties didn't have promising future to society. It had a different sound in Turkish policy. One of the factors for my vote was that the people who were bound up with the WP were possibly more honest. In 1994-1995, the WP's propaganda made the public participate in politics. Istanbul was an example for that situation. The WP representatives had strong bonds with people. Women first took place in politics in a religious-based platform. As is known to all, women are shy in conservative societies, and they don't easily take part in public sphere or politics. However, women had a chance to be involved in politics thanks to the WP's women's branch."*²¹

2.5 February 28 Process and Closure of The WP

February 28 process is the general name for the sequence of events which ended the coalition leadership of the WP and prognosticates the breaking in 1980 coup d'etat perception of military elites about the legitimacy of civil authority. Today, it is still discussed whether February 28 process is a post-modern coup, a military memorandum or a high-dose intervention to democratic civil authority.

One of the most effective events for February 28 process in WP-TPP government is the 'D8' project which is included in the electoral declaration of the WP in 1995 elections. It is considered as an alternative to G-8 and planned to establish with Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Turkey. The former governments in Turkey generally declare their dependance to the Western block as a first step and have their official visits to Western countries. However, Erbakan first visits Eastern countries such as Iran, Pakistan, Singapore and Malaysia, caused severe criticisms and discussions in Turkey. The external media organs aren't unresponsive to this event, and especially the USA criticizes the Iran visit and the treaties that are planned to conclude with Iran.²²

The internal policy had a hand in the process initiating February 28. Sometimes, the notable members of the WP use over-ambitious statements in their speeches, and this causes harshness in the political discourse of WP. Thus, the WP becomes a focus of anti-secular actions. In this context, the speech of Sukru Karatepe, the mayor of Kayseri, on November 10, 1996 is an obvious example for radical Islamic discourse, and this speech is cited as evidence for

closure case of the WP. In a province basis meeting of the WP, Karatepe claims that Turkey isn't ruled by real democracy, and the dark dominant forces manipulate the public. From his speech:

*“Never think I am secular by judging my clothing style. I took part in a ceremony today –implying the commemoration of Ataturk- just because it's my official duty. Of course, the prime minister, other ministers, and deputies have some obligations, but you have none. As a member of the WP, I must try to change this order even if I am on my own on Earth. Muslims! Never leave this belief, passion, and hatred. Changing this order is a binding duty for us…”*²³

When the pressures on the WP increase, it has the fear of entrapment by the secular front and has its first contra operations on the press which criticizes the WP all along. The WP took urgent measurements, and it plans to publish a three-point decree about press which is to come into force in one month. According to this decree, it is stated that the government no longer gives loans to press, the payment date of former loans will no more be delayed, and promotion ban is placed. This decree is considered as a “blow to freedom of the press”, and it causes severe reactions of press. Moreover, the WP interrupts the advertising and promotion because it assumes that the press does injustice, terminates with extreme prejudice, and snitches via falsified news all along.²⁴

It is very helpful to understand the comments of Yasar Yakis. He states:

“Erbakan offended and perhaps threatened the secular part of the public while presenting his plans and religious aims. However, the army was very powerful at that time, and naturally, the army was very brave to take actions against Erbakan. This was an important reason for February 28. At the time when the female students with head-scarf weren't allowed to universities, he threatened the chancellors and the teachers by saying ‘One day you will salute these girls’. Since the army was very powerful at that time when Erbakan was prime minister, the military elites purposively developed the relations and had cooperations with Israel. In Egypt, some asked me the reason why Turkey became a strategic ally to Israel

*suddenly. In fact, this situation influenced the relations with Egypt negatively, and I always struggled to improve the relations. This was just one of the reasons. Another one is that the army was the protector of secularism in Turkey all along.”*²⁵

The statement of Alaattin Sahin is a summative assessment for us to understand the fall of the WP. He states:

*“Obviously, the wrong discourses of the WP provoked February 28. The WP did politics on ‘head-scarf’ and ‘Imam-Hatip’ high schools which the secular front was strictly against. For instance, in a caucus, Erbakan used some harsh statements such as ‘the WP will be in power and form ‘Just Order’’, ‘ Let’s wait and see whether the transition period will be rough or smooth. We will come into power whether bloody or bloodless’. In another caucus, he told that the Imam-Hatip schools were their base courts. These discourses are among those which provoked the process.”*²⁶

All these factors dragged Turkey to February 28 process and also prepared for the end of the WP. Turkish Armed Forces use the National Security Council (NSC) and increase the attempts of imposing its policy to the government with the help of President Suleyman Demirel. Finally, a new period started in the history of Turkish policy with the official declaration of NSC on February 28, 1997. With this declaration, the army enforced an ‘action plan against reactionary forces’ to the government. Under these conditions, Necmettin Erbakan has to resign the prime ministry.²⁷ On 16 January 1998, WP was dissolved and its leaders were banned from political life for five years by the Turkish Court. The remaining 153 party members continued as elected representatives to the Grand National Assembly in their individual capacities. Only two members of the Constitutional Court dissented from the judgment (Judges Hasim Kilic and Sacit Adali). Their reasoning was based on the European Convention on Human Rights.²⁸

The European Court of Human Rights concludes the decision about the closure of the WP on July 31, 2001. The court accepts that a shariah-based state, violent and jihadist discourses of executives and multilateral judicial system proposals are against the European Convention of Human Rights. The court also reminds

that the interpretation on the Secularism Principle of the Constitutional Court is made by considering the history of Turkish law, and the Turkish society tries the theocratical regime in Ottoman period, but then ends the theocratical order by founding the Turkish Republic. Moreover, the court concluded that the theocratical threat in Turkey is in its early stages, which indicates that this threat may rise again in the close future by considering the reality that most of the Turkish population is Muslim.²⁹

Conclusion

It is clearly seen that mistakes made by the WP in February 28 Process negatively affected the development of democracy. Needless to say that these issues should also be studied comprehensively in the future. As stated previously, the research question was the positive effects of VOU on democratization in Turkey. For this reason, I want to summarize and analyze the positive effects of VOU on democratization.

VOU contributed a lot to the Turkish democracy. It must be considered as a great success that the WP behaved as a spokesperson for the people who were under pressure due to their Islamic beliefs and conservative behaviours, and took it as a duty upon themselves to lend a hand to them when other parties were not addressing their needs. VOU managed to reach the needy who live in slums and in the countryside, and so receives a great political support.

As seen in this study, the electoral strategy and propaganda of the WP have also a positive role for the Turkish democracy. The WP manages to deal with the society by reaching its 'capillaries' via the 'Rosary Model'. Moreover, the WP introduced and nominated candidates in every province or district despite certain failure, and thus it is the first party in the history of Turkish democracy to do so.

Finally, women, for the first time had a chance to take part in policy on a religiously-based platform. Credit of this achievement goes to the women's branches of the WP. As stated above, women are in the background in conservative societies. However, they participate in politics in a conservative base with the encouragement of the WP. This was one of the most important achievements of the WP and VOU to the Turkish democracy.

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- 1 The translating of “Milli Gorus Hareketi” is National Vision Movement. Because of this, we can see that generally people are translating as this way. However; according to Necmettin Erbakan, what is meant by “milli” was not national but ummah. This is why, in this study, I prefer to translate as “Views of Ummah”.
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- 10 For more information see M. Hakan Yavuz, *ibid.*,
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- 15 Hakan Ozdemir, *ibid.*, p. 172.
- 16 The interview with Ersonmez Yarbay, Ankara, 10.06.2016.
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- 18 M. Hakan Yavuz, *ibid.*, p. 77.
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- 20 Sifa University is one of the fifteen universities which were closed by the government in Turkey after the coup attempt in July 2016.
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Abstract

The Place and Importance of the “Views of Ummah” Movement in Turkish Democracy With The Sample of ‘Welfare Party’

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The view of Views of Ummah is a movement having started through the establishment of National Order Party (MNP) with the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan (died in 2011) in the beginning of 1970. Under the roof of forming a party, National Order Party became power partner four times between 1974 and 1978. With the name of Welfare Party (RP), it boosted its popularity through several local and general elections in nineties and consequently appeared in governments as a great power partner.

Having been established in 1983, The Welfare Party is known to have obtained successful results within a very short time. Principally in Local Elections held in 1994, it received 19.14% of the votes with a huge leap and gained mayoralities of 28 cities, metropolitan mayoralities of İstanbul and Ankara in particular. Consecutively, in General Elections of 1995, it managed to be in the first rank in the parliament with the vote proportion of 21.38%. It is undoubtedly obvious that unprecedentedly outstanding election works and discourses in Turkey prevailed in those achievements.

The Views of Ummah movement, as a view to have formed this political organisation, claimed its place in Turkish Political History but encountered the resistance of military and judicial bureaucracy all the way, and it was hindered and forced to depoliticisation.

In my study I initially mentioned about historical development of Views of Ummah Movement. And then, through examples and the interviews, I explained new discourses introduced by the Welfare Party into Turkish politics, Party’s identity, Just Order rhetoric, and the acquisitions of Turkish democracy by its election strategy and propaganda, respectively.

