From the Desk of the Editor

The first issue of TPQ in 2004 focuses on religion and politics, specifically in terms of both the worldwide debate on the relationship between Islam and democracy and the role religion plays in Turkey's quest for EU membership. Nowadays many of both Turkey's domestic and foreign policy concerns involve religion in some form or another, for better or worse. As a candidate for the EU, Turkey anticipates beginning negotiations for full membership following the EU's December summit in 2004. It is well known that some in the EU view Turkey's membership as unlikely because of the Muslim population that is perceived to constitute a risk to the identity of the Union. On the other hand, a country whose population is predominantly Muslim joining the EU is said to send a positive message to the Muslim world about reconciliation between civilizations that are seen to be clashing. Parallel to these discussions is the developing notion of the Greater Middle East and Turkey's role as a model of democratic moderate Islam in this framework. This discourse creates both enthusiasm and concern in Turkey: Enthusiasm to play a leading role in the inevitably transforming region, yet concern of being bunched with the Middle Eastern countries as opposed to the Western world which Turkey has been striving to join since its founding. For a country that since its inception has been defining itself in opposition to the Middle Eastern countries to its south, it is somewhat ironic that today Turkey finds its shared religion with the Middle East one of its most marketable assets in certain contexts.

The significance of Turkey's religion in foreign policy is paralleled by the domestic developments in which religion has come to the forefront. AKP (Justice and Development Party), the ruling party with its roots in political Islam, has been carrying out a reform driven agenda geared at EU membership since its election into power on 3 November 2002. AKP is also seen as playing the card of being a model of moderate Islam, taking advantage of the search for an inspiration for the Middle East to emulate. These identities, namely that of being western and of being Muslim, are not mutually exclusive, however the emphasis on one or the other can make all the difference, especially in this critical year of consolidation of Turkey's primary orientation. In principle, it appears advantageous that Turkey manages both orientations in harmony, however, whether the domestic dynamics and sensitivities along with the turbulent regional developments are a feasible context for this harmony to be embraced is questionable. As the EU skeptically observes Turkey's Muslim identity play out, many in the Middle East do not hide their resentment towards Turkey, rooted in reasons ranging from Turkey's choice of western orientation or having ruled the region for centuries under the Ottoman Empire to supposedly having sold out Muslim unity through abolishing the Caliphate. Getting the best of both worlds may be the aim, but loosing both is the risk.

As Esra Bulut outlines in her article, the Turkish Republic has acted cautiously and tried to avoid that religious identity play a role in the determination of national interest and pursuit of foreign policy. In fact one could argue that Turkish policy overcompensated for its so called weakness of being a Muslim country, or in other words, an effort was made to prove to the West that Turkey's orientation was towards the West at the expense of a more active policy towards the Turkic countries of Eurasia or the Muslim Middle East. The implication of Western concerns regarding pan-Islamic or pan-Turkic trends and the assumption that Turkey might still carry romantic views of its Ottoman past has led Turkey to stay clear of moves that might feed into these perceptions. Though state policies have been non-adventurist regarding the Muslim world, civil initiatives with Islamic undertones such as the controversial Nurcu Movement and some less organized and less resourceful initiatives emphasizing the Turkic link have been active. Whether or not Turkey has the responsibility to defend Muslims in-

need in its near abroad was debated during the conflicts in the Balkans and tensions in Central Asia and the Caucasus, but a clear definition of the acceptable extent of intervention has not come about. Working within international organizations has been preferred by Turkey in such cases for the most part. And now regarding the Muslim Middle East, there is an opportunity for Turkey to be active not on its own account which might be controversial domestically and internationally, but as part of a larger project, supported by the international community as a whole. Now that the Middle East is seen as posing a threat to international order and the security of Western powers, it is supposedly more legitimate that Turkey step up its involvement in coordination with Western initiatives. However the fact that the project currently on the agenda is US driven and Turkey is also striving to be a part of the EU complicates the picture. It is natural that Turkey is interested in the stability of the Middle East due to being a neighbour as well as being negatively effected by the negative perception of the Muslim world. However, with the EU's Middle East policy unclear, transatlantic relations suffering and domestic shortcomings to tend to, it is doubtful that in the short term Turkey can pursue a more active role than it is.

Despite the accomplishments of the AKP government, suspicion about the longer-term objectives of this party prevails among certain segments of the Turkish society. At a crucial time with regard to EU relations, the skeptical circles are careful not to rock the boat in Turkey's domestic scene. Tension in the country would be bound to create more excuses for the EU members who would rather keep Turkey out due to the challenges Turkey's membership would entail (challenges to the effectiveness of European institutions, burden on the EU budget etc). Though it has become politically incorrect to publicly announce concern about the Islamic nature of Turkey in Europe, the underlying implication among Europeans is that a more conservative Turkey is less likely to be viewed as belonging to 'the Club'. On one hand, the EU wants to see democracy unfold in Turkey; on the other it does not necessarily feel affinity with the results. What is often overseen is that the main reason of AKP's support may not be necessarily due to its Islamic leanings as much as to the failure of other political actors. For many years the needs of the society have not been delivered and rampant corruption has damaged trust and participation in the country. It can be argued that much of the embracement of AKP is less ideological and more practical than the observers who tend to characterize Turkey as an oriental society driven by a different worldview assume.

Somewhat ironically, the success of AKP rests primarily on the developments with regard to relations with the EU. Constituencies eventually respond to economic prospects and it is primarily the signals from the EU that offer hope for the sustainable recovery of the economic conditions of the country. Had it not been for the EU membership prospect, the support to AKP by certain unlikely supporters in the civil society and business world would not necessarily have developed. Progress regarding the fulfillment of the Copenhagen Criteria is of crucial importance at this junction for Turkey and the EU benchmark offers the framework for this progress. The fact that AKP has used the EU as leverage to pursue democratization parallels the trend in Turkey of compensating the lack of domestic discipline with benchmarks defined by the Western World. Though serving the country's current needs, this point somewhat touches upon the concern inherent in the secularist circles of Turkey. If the EU is a means for democratization, can democratization be a means for another agenda item, such as further Islamization? Has a paradigm shift among Islamists truly occurred or has the strategy simply become more sophisticated? No doubt the Islamic leaning circles are not homogeneous in Turkey and labeling them in one way or another risks alienating those that could serve as the most important agents of overcoming social tensions in the country. Answers to the larger questions of managing Islam in the Middle East are suggested in the

nature of these arguments. Is part of the problem the fact that staunch secularists do not vest trust in the moderate versions of Islam, thus leaving the floor open to radical and reactive versions?

In his piece titled "Euro-Islam: The Quest of Islamic Migrants and of Turkey to Become European in a Secular Europe," Bassam Tibi points out the critical importance of the integration of the existing Muslim migrants in their respective European societies for the entry of Turkey as a member. Tibi uses the term Euro-Islam to define a form of Islam which is compatible with the requirements of liberal democracy and civil society, such as individual human rights, tolerance, secularism and cultural modernity. The development and adoption of Euro-Islam as a multi-faceted identity, he argues, is the ticket for Turkey's accession as well as to the accomplishment of a more general cross cultural consensus among these deeply rooted and ever-changing cultural systems. For Tibi the answer to the question of compatibility between Islam and modernity lies in Europe's Muslim migrants and Turkey's EU membership. In his piece titled "AKP and the Paradox of Islamic Europhilia", Grigoriadis points out that the success of AKP's EU policy and the EU's stance towards Turkey would refute the incompatibility of Islam with Western political values. One could argue that beyond this, from the perspective of Turkey's domestic dynamics, the EU factor is central in terms of empowering progressive forces of all walks of life and overcoming tensions which render Turkey less able to play an active role in the Muslim world.

Gökhan Bacık's analysis focuses on the search for consensus within Turkey to reconcile contemporary values and Islam. Turkey exemplifies a merger of coexisting identities, however, analysts often disagree as to how close Turkey is to the end of history with regard to a genuine sustainable synthesis and social contract. Bacık believes that the Islamic leaning circles of the society have come to understand that they can no longer have ideological agendas in the globalizing world. The view that political Islam in Turkey has rationalized and has adapted to the realities of the 21st century is shared by Aras and Grigoriadis. Bacık points out that AKP has seized the opportunity to serve as a model of moderate Islam yet no longer seeks to create a political system shaped by Islamic doctrine. He acknowledges though that his conviction is not shared by the staunch secularists in the country and that a certain level of tension prevails.

The concern that democratic developments in the Middle East are unlikely to produce results in line with Western principles and interests is a real one. Whether to allow Islamic forces to take power and exhaust themselves by inevitably being judged on their merits or to wait until democratic institutions and values are established prior to allowing popular will to be practiced is debatable. In the case of Turkey, as some of the authors of this issue of TPQ have pointed out, banning political formations by the Islamic groups has led to mixed results. Many lessons were learned over the years by all involved actors and it is impossible to derive from history how it would have turned out had tight control not have been implemented.

Bülent Aras suggests social engineering was carried out by the Turkish establishment creating a polarized political atmosphere and consequential tissue incompatibility when the more traditional and Islamically oriented segments of society joined the economic and political spheres. The social sensitivities rooted in the particular historical dynamics of religion and politics in Turkey raise question as to the feasibility of emulating the Turkish example and suggests that attempts in this regard may cause disruption within the domestic balances of the country.

The questions raised over the compatibility of Islam with democracy tend to be addressed either with arguments regarding the doctrine and early practices of Islam or to the state of affairs of Muslim societies today. As Ali R. Abootalebi points out in their doctrinal framework no religion is compatible with political democracy. And is the culture of fatalism and loyalty to God above any worldly authority not shared inherently by the pious believer of any faith? Judaism and Christianity have also undergone significant adaptation as the democratic way of life evolved. The diversity and dynamism of Islam is pointed out by a number of the authors of TPQ. As the future of the Middle East is debated, the extent to which Islam should play a constructive role in transitions is a central theme. Drawing upon the code of Islam set forth by the Quran, the Hadiths, and the early centuries of Muslim rule, references are made as to whether democracy can be legitimized in this framework. Reha Keskintepe points to the early political arrangements in the Muslim world, reflecting upon the accommodation of pro-democratic practices and scientific reasoning. However, offering interpretations of Islam with a view to imbuing democracy with legitimacy opens the debate to alternative interpretations that do not. It is not a given that moderate versions will overcome the more fundamentalist ones in many Muslim societies today. The establishment of democratic institutions that focus on the individual and their rights is central. Seeking to converge the spheres of religion and politics carries the risk of empowering marginal interpretations and further narrowing the space of the individual. The notion that religion has become so engrained in identity of the Middle Eastern societies that the only way to move them towards democracy is to encourage reinterpretation of Islam by Muslim scholars and practitioners is voiced in debates over the future of the Middle East. As Jonathan Fox observes, religion plays a more central role in the Middle Eastern countries when compared to the rest of the world, including Muslim populations in other regions. If religion is to play a central role in an engineered social change of the Middle East, Turkey can hardly be a model. As Ali Bardakoğlu outlines, Turkey's approach regarding the positioning of religion in the political and social spheres has been based on secularism. In order for Islam to reform and the floor not be left to the radicals, the goal of reforming Islam can be worked towards by relevant individuals within the Muslim world, nonwithstanding nationality. Agents of change can be reformist individuals, not one state or another. Furthermore, as the centuries long evolution of Christianity since the Reformation and Enlightenment cannot be emulated in the globalized environment today, neither can Turkey's experience with Islam. Furthermore, one needs to consider the impacts on Turkey's social fabric of efforts to design parallel institutions or understandings in the Middle East.

Though Turkey is not a model that can be emulated in terms of political transformation and religious culture for the Middle East, Turkey's increasingly vibrant civil society, educational institutions, and private sector can serve as both sources of inspiration and partners for emerging Middle Eastern counterparts.

Democratic principles and participation by definition entail the maintenance of the democratic system itself. In other words, it is not democratically legitimate to hinder the free participation of political competitors. A concern has been that political Islam might exploit the opportunity to gradually narrow the democratic space that allowed them to flourish. As the EU and the US face cases regarding religious freedoms, such questions surface. The European Court of Justice has consistently ruled in favor of legal and constitutional arrangements which uphold democratic principles even when this may entail restrictions on religious freedoms, such as the banning of the Welfare Party in Turkey which was judged to be campaigning for changes incompatible with the norms of democracy. Countries in the EU, which is home to 20 million Muslims, are in search of the parameters of religious freedom and are in the process of

identifying the thin line between neutrality and freedom of religion, such as regarding the wearing of the headscarf in public spaces. Daniel Freifeld outlines the debate over faith-based organizations in the US, pointing to the dilemmas which the interaction between freedom and discrimination pose. Since September 11th, the US has been increasingly debating the limits of freedom. Though no universal formula has been discovered by the established democracies of the world, it is apparent that each country needs to evaluate its own risks in light of its values and social fabric. Nevertheless, certain parameters are recognized, such as the necessity that no one faith restricts basic freedoms of those who believe and practice otherwise. In his article Gareth Jenkins offers an overview of the progress and shortcomings in the treatment of and legislation regarding the non-Muslim citizens of Turkey in light of the Copenhagen Criteria and acqui. As analysts debate alternative road maps for the democratization of the Islamic world, these experiences offer food for thought.

As Turkey focuses on the approaching EU Summit in December, the debates over Turkey's role as a model of moderate Islam in the Middle East have a distracting nature. Being a long-term project, the still vague Greater Middle East initiative may entail various roles for Turkey, all of which Turkey can perform more effectively and with less complications if negotiations for EU membership are begun and ongoing. As Jenkins points out, there remains more to be done in Turkey to complete the reform processes and social understanding. Consolidation of these for the time being will benefit not only Turkey, but in the longer term, the entire region and global dynamics.

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