



Muslim Secularism in Europe: The Making, Unmaking and Remaking of Laïcité in Albania and Turkey

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Abstract: How do Albanian and Turkish models of secularism, both branded after the French-style Laïcité, translate European concepts into indigenous, case-specific models? And, how have Muslim majorities reacted to, embraced but also contested the established institutional arrangements? This article explores the evolution of secular institutional arrangements adopted in Albania and Turkey since their foundation as independent states and along different time periods and political regimes. We embody the analysis into two ideal-type secular traditions – civic-republican and liberal – each proposing different political projects and related institutional arrangements within the context of European modernity. The findings suggest that since independence both countries opted for variations of the state-engineered republican model, which insists in reformation of religion, social engineering, separation between state and religion and an interventionist state. Yet, those models also took case-specific features with Albania placing specific emphasis on interreligious equality and state neutrality as a means to pacify different religious communities; and Turkey promoting a synthesis between Sunni Islam and Turkishness as the basis of national identity and social cohesion. While the ‘founding’ model has largely stuck in post-communist Albania, Islamic political actors that came to power in Turkey, particularly AKP, which governs the country since 2002, has preserved the main institutional features of the secular system, but with a more Sunni majority bent.

Keywords: Secularism; European Modernity; Political Islam; Albania; Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

This article compares the key arrangements, evolution and twists of established secular models in two post-Ottoman and Muslim-majority countries in Europe – Turkey and Albania. Both countries share a common historical search for secular models rooted in the ideals and experiences of European modernity, which their founding elites embraced, under the influential gaze of European states (Clayer et al. 2019). As such, secular arrangements established during these states’ founding

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moments in the early twentieth century by and large mimicked modern European concepts – nation- and state building, central-state authority and differentiation between state and religion. Besides the influence of ‘winning’ European ideals, the emerging secular models also reflected these new states’ urge to secure their identity and even recognition as European states in the context of a predominantly Christian geopolitical European environment at best lukewarm to the existence of Muslim-majority and multi-religious polities in their midst (Elbasani and Puto 2017). Yet, the emerging secular models, both branded after the French *laïcité* (Turk. *Laiklik*; Alb. *Laicism*) also included indigenous case-specific arrangements based in the long-ongoing socioeconomic transformations of the Ottoman Empire, the contemporary experiences and concerns of the ‘Muslim World’ and their respective country’s demographic, intellectual, historical and socio-political conditions (Tezcan, 2011; Elbasani and Puto 2017; Aydin, 2017; Yaycioglu, 2018b; Somer, 2019). How do Albanian and Turkish models then translate European ideals into indigenous and case-specific models? What are the institutional devices to govern the Muslim majority and (both within-Muslim and non-Muslim) religious pluralism that both countries inherited from the multi-religious Ottoman empire? And finally, how have Muslim majorities engaged with these models – adapted to, developed and contested but also benefited from existing institutional frameworks?

Analytically, we embody the analysis of Albanian and Turkish secularisms into two ideal-type traditions – civic-republican and liberal – each proposing different political projects and related institutional arrangements within the context of European modernity (Casanova 1994, 172). The main difference between the two main types lies in the role and tools of the state to govern the religious communities. Whereas the civic republican tradition inspires strictly separationist, transformative, reformist and at times even hostile attitudes vis-à-vis religion while supporting the emergence of an interventionist state that monitors and controls expressions of faith; the liberal tradition suggests neutral independence and mutually respectful relationships, some kind of twin tolerations between state and religion.

Empirically, we trace and compare how founding secular models in each country fit into each model, and how those models evolved along time and across different regimes. By comparing Albania and Turkey in a long-term perspective, we can specifically assess how those countries’ early ‘fundamental’ choices were molded by the influence of the European ideals and geopolitical context, as much as case-specific contingencies, ideological priorities and ‘politics’ of secularism (Akan, 2017; Somer, 2019). By focusing on two Muslim-majority cases that



embraced secular ideals, we can also assess more specifically how organized Islamic actors in Turkey and Albania contributed to, embraced, but also contested and tried to transform those models.

Challenges to secular arrangements are particularly relevant during the democratic openings in Albania since the 1990s and Turkey relatively earlier. Democratization, by definition involves opening up the political sphere to different contenders, including organized religious alternatives (Elbasani 2017). Religious groups, including Muslim majorities, are usually among the best organized contenders, and thus able to rally and benefit from rules of democratic participation. What is less clear is whether they seek to reform the established secular systems towards a more restrictive and, this time around, pro-religious form of republicanism and state-interventionism or toward a more open liberal space of participation. In Turkey, particularly, the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) rooted in political Islamism provides a crucial case to examine what powerful Islamic actors do when they actually get hold of governing power and have political clout to reshape the secular institutional arrangements (Somer 2014; Elbasani and Saatcioglu 2014; Somer 2017). Yet, the issue is also pertinent in Albania where post-communist democratization and the liberalization of the religious restrictions enabled the revival of the Islamic community and free communication with the Islamic global movements, which have engaged with and, at times, challenged the established secular arrangements.

The article is organized in four sections. Section I outlines the main features of contrasting secular traditions within European modernity – civic republican and liberal traditions. The next three sections investigate the founding arrangements and modification of secular systems since the creation of independent states in Albania and Turkey. Section II outlines the features of what we call the state-engineered republican model of secularism, as institutionalized during the founding of post-Ottoman independent states. We focus particularly on: 1) selective exclusion of religion from the public sphere; 2) creation of rational religious hierarchies; and 3) establishment of an official Islam at home with nationalist and reformist ideas. Section III traces differential modifications to these models after the Second World War, when communist Albania moved towards the ban of religion, while Turkey's plural politics led to increasing accommodation of Islam. Section IV then investigates how revived Islamic actors have navigated the secular system to expand their respective political claims and sometimes challenge the secular institutional arrangements, since the



liberalization of the religious sphere in Albania and the success of Islamic parties in Turkey in the 1990s.

MODELS OF SECULARISM

The extensive and growing empirical research on the actual practices of secularism indicates that very few countries have effectively realized, or, for that matter, pursued, a strict separation between religion and state (Fox 2008; Philpott 2007; Elbasani 2017). Instead, the institutional and political arrangements that regulate the relation between state and religion reflect a mixture of separation, interaction, cooperation, and enmeshment between the two. Socio-political conditions of time and place, moreover, inform various secular arrangements, which vacillate somewhere between two broad ideal-type traditions, each proposing different political projects and related institutional solutions within the context of European modernity: civic-republican and liberal traditions (Casanova 1994).

The civic-republican tradition is rooted in the legacy of interreligious wars and Enlightenment ideas, which consider religion as a source of dogma and tutelage over individual reason and autonomy. Constitutive ideas of Enlightenment such as critique, emancipation, freedom and progress suggest the negation, and to some extent, reformation of religion via reason. As a social model, the civic-republican tradition encourages secular modernization and social engineering. In terms of the religion and state relationship, it inspires strictly separationist, hostile or reformist attitudes vis-à-vis religion. As a political-institutional model, it supports the emergence of a dominant and often interventionist state that monitors and controls expressions of faith, particularly in the emancipated and rationalized public arena.

By contrast, the historical origins of the liberal view of secularism lie at the post-Reformation religious wars and the way they were settled. In the context of religious conflict and struggle, it became necessary to find a ground for regulating the public domain in a way that allowed different sects to coexist peacefully. The liberal view claimed that such a ground could only be based on ‘an independent political ethic.’ (Taylor 1998). Accordingly, the state should safeguard this independent political ethic and, normatively speaking, should be neutral vis-à-vis different religions and sects. As a social model, the liberal tradition inspires a process of bottom-up rather than state-led modernization. In terms of the religion-state relationship, it induces neutral independence and mutually



respectful relationships. And, as a political-institutional model, it engenders non-interventionist state institutions based on ‘twin tolerations’ between state and faith (Stepan 2000). In its liberal sense, secularism is thus associated with religious plurality and tolerance. Any attempt at putting society under the principles of a comprehensive doctrine would mean injustice to the plurality of ideas, beliefs and conceptions of the good life, which characterizes modern societies (Rawls 2005). The basic principles for co-existence of plural ideas, therefore, should be state impartiality or neutrality vis-à-vis particular religious doctrines.

These two traditions constitute ‘ideal types’ and individual states may combine features of both. Furthermore, although these two traditions provide different justifications and formats of secularism, they also share some commonalities. Most importantly, they both aim to uphold freedom of conscience and, at least formally, share the common goal that no citizens will be disadvantaged or discriminated against on the grounds of his/her religion or beliefs (Bhargava 2015; Berlinerblau, 2017). Both also entail that separation of the state from religious doctrine and some insulation of the public sphere from mutually exclusive and absolutist religious assertions constitute ‘common goods’. For the sake of tolerance and plurality, or for the sake of national homogeneity, state sovereignty and emancipation from dogma, there must be some regulation of or at least voluntary self-restraint in the public space, so that religious dogmatism can be controlled and disciplined. However, whereas the civic-republican model would like to render religion a private matter and keep it outside the political realm altogether; the liberal model is more tolerant of public religions and seeks to promote a pluralist and tolerant political culture and civil society.

STATES’ FOUNDING CHOICES: VARIATIONS OF THE REPUBLICAN MODEL

From the eighteenth century on, the Ottoman authorities launched a series of ambitious reforms to modernize and centralize the state while shifting from indirect to direct rule in order to militarily and financially compete with ascending European powers (Karpas 2001; Wimmer 2013). These reforms were led by new classes of Ottoman intelligentsia, military and civilian bureaucrats – a mix of secularists and Europeanists as well as Islamist reformers – who succeeded to gradually expand their powers at the expense of the more traditional-minded Ulema and other state elites (Findley 2011; Yaycioglu, 2018b). During the second half of the nineteenth century, those reforms increasingly took the character of a top-down state-led modernization experiment, in addition to more autonomous



societal modernization triggered by integration with global markets. The Muslim majority and the Islamic clergy acted on and adapted to these processes in various ways – they variably served as barriers, but also vehicles or agents of modernization and construction of an overarching identity (Berkes 1998; Mardin, 2000; Bein 2011).

Ottoman modernization attempts, however, reinforced the centrifugal tendencies among the empire's vastly diverse people and regions. The weakening of the Empire in the nineteenth century made way for the advance of European concepts and principles of modernity, nation- state formation and religious re-organization while triggering various institutional reform strategies such as redeployment, layering and cooptation (Fabbe, 2019). The new entities that emerged out of former Ottoman territories, including Albania and Turkey, became most active in constructing national uniformity and consolidating central state authority as the basis of their states in-the-making (Elbasani and Roy 2015). Accordingly, attempts by post-Ottoman political entrepreneurs to agitate for national unity and to 'secure the state' were the liveliest in mixed areas, where religious, ethnic and national belonging remained the most fluid. Hence, during the founding moment of post-Ottoman nation-state building, religious reorganization was typically utilized in function of the grand political project of demarcating new nations, jumpstarting fast-track Europeanization and modernization, enforcing state authority, consolidating state borders, and more often than not, excluding those who became 'others' as a result of wars and political power shifts.

In the cases of Albania and Turkey, the only Muslim-majority countries striving to establish their statehood in a rather unfriendly European geopolitical context, managing reactionary Islamic impulses was another key pillar of the founding modern nation-state project (Tomboş and Aygenç 2017; Clayer 2009; Elbasani and Puto 2017). In the eyes of the nation- and state-building elites, the majority's and previously politically powerful faith, Islam, had to be curtailed, but also utilized in order to boost state legitimacy and national unity (Turam 2012). Indeed, the post-Ottoman reshuffling of the relations between state and religion targeted particularly the privileged role of Islam. In both states, the reorganization of the religious sphere in function of the states' goals of ensuring national unity and a centralized authority informed a trend of top-down and state-engineered republican model of secularism. The model incorporated three main pillars. First, founding state elites pursued large-scale reforms to separate and minimize, or banish formal religious influences from the public political sphere. Second, the envisioned differentiation between state and religion entailed



close state supervision, particularly through the creation of nationalized state-controlled religious hierarchies operating under state regulations. Last but not least, state authorities, in line with the European modernization project, intervened to make sure that their religious intermediaries adapted an ‘official’ Islam at home with both the new reality of ‘modern times’ where these states found themselves and state-pursued modernization reforms.

The founder of the Turkish Republic, Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), used the muscles of the authoritarian state to install the secular model (Eligür 2010; Tombuş and Aygenç 2017). The main goal of the Kemalist project was selective exclusion, reformation, but also control of the clergy and at times political instrumentalization of Islam’s public role. To this end, reforms made during the 20s and 30s abolished the Caliphate, removed Islam as an official source of state identity and replaced the latter with the constitutional principle of secularism. Kemalist elites also secularized the legal and educational system and reduced the scope of religious education in an effort to educate ‘rational citizens’ (Heper 2012). A 1934 law prohibited the public use of certain outfits and titles signifying traditional religious authority. Religious courts were dissolved, and traditional religious foundations (*vakıfs*) were brought under government supervision. A number of other changes followed, such as the westernization of the alphabet and calendar, universal suffrage for both sexes, and the adoption of secular civil and penal codes based on the Swiss and Italian models. Kemalist reformers also capitalized on the former Ottoman millet system of organization to establish tighter controls over Muslim organizations (Kazancıgil 1981). Accordingly, the Ottoman office of Şeyhülislam was reorganized into the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), operating under close state supervision and indeed helping state elites to govern broad Islamic impulses. Secularism thus entailed ‘the establishment of an official religious establishment in the form of a subordinate government agency’ (Cizre 1995). By monopolizing the regulation and organization of religion, Kemalists and in general pro-secular modernizers tried to minimize religious reactionary movements, while utilizing Sunni Islam in order to attain social cohesion and reinvent the new Turkish nation (Parla and Davison 2008). Indeed, Diyanet was tasked with the job of inculcating society with ‘correct’ Islam, that is, a rational and nationalized official doctrine devoid of ‘superstition’ and at home with a Turkish and secular ‘civilized’ European state.

In the case of Albania, the emancipatory authoritarian regime led by Zog (1922–1939), pursued similar reforms to minimize and control Islamic influences from the public sphere – state jurisdiction was completely detached from *sharīʿa* or any religious influences; Islamic lawyers, Cadis, who for centuries had



regulated family disputes, were abolished; religious authorities were stripped of any role in state structures; religious education was gradually nationalized and featured a mix of religious and non-religious courses; and the public wearing of religious symbols, including the veil, was banned by law (Della Rocca 1994; Clayer 2009). Quite similarly to the Turkish case, the post-Ottoman Albanian state also pressured religious communities to reorganize into easy-to-control central associations, operating under state jurisdiction and control. The Muslim community of Albania (MCA), founded in 1924, was recognized as the only authority in charge of managing the spiritual and administrative affairs pertinent to the community of believers, a status enshrined in the AMC statutes. Under the pressure of the state, the organization adopted new statutes and bylaws in compliance with modern state legislation; severed all previous administrative and financial links with the supranational authority of Şeyhülislam in Istanbul; and dissolved old structures such as the Sharia Council, in favor of elected religious structures (Della Rocca 1994). The state further controlled key religious appointments and approved their finances. Additionally, the Albanian state made sure that the Islamic community adapted to the demands of the new age and the ‘modern principles’ of European civilization, where the country now belonged (Clayer 2008).

In both cases, state-led reforms thus contributed to consolidate what can best be called a state-oriented, national, patriotic and progressive ‘official’ Islam. Despite similar and top-down secular arrangements to frame the role of religion, the different compositions of population in Albania and Turkey informed various solutions to boosting the Muslim majority as a source of nation-state unity. In the case of Albania, whose the population included a mixture of Muslim and Christian denominations, the state pledged religious neutrality and pressed for a model of equality and collaboration with centralized religious hierarchies as the only way to keep together separate religious communities (Elbasani and Puto 2017). Accordingly, all religious communities present in the Albanian territory enjoyed the same rights and duties and were similarly restructured into central organizations working in collaboration with the state. In the case of Turkey, which by 1923 presided over an overwhelmingly Muslim population, the state promoted mainly Sunni Muslimness, even if a controlled and minimized one, as a source of common national identity (McCarthy 2001; Ahmad 2008). The relatively small population of recognized non-Muslim minorities was allowed religious and cultural-educational autonomy, but suffered from discrimination and at times oppression and persecution because they were perceived as not fully loyal to the centralized modern Turkish state. Non-Sunni Muslim Alevis, too,



suffered discrimination and lacked recognition as a distinct religious minority, which on the one hand continued a centuries-long legacy of domination and stigmatization by Sunni-dominated Ottoman state and society; On the other hand, it reflected the ideological and bureaucratic limits of to what extent centralized state institutions, which were doubly shaped by Sunni Muslim theology and monolithic Turkish nationalism, could accommodate intra-Muslim diversity (Dressler 2013; Tanbar 2014). The unitary state, unitary society, and unitary identity, which became the backbone of the official secularist ideology in Turkey (Insel 2001), thus, failed to mediate different worldviews or provide institutional means to reconcile differences.

Such similar, and still diverging, institutional approaches to settle state relations with the religious communities, particularly the Islamic majority, inculcated diverse socio-political attitudes toward religious diversity, pluralism and tolerance. Albania has upheld equal treatment and state neutrality as the main value of its secular arrangements, thus implanting a strong liberal dimension to its founding civic republican arrangements. Turkey, instead, has institutionalized a Sunni bias at the expense of religious plurality and different worldviews in its founding model of secularism.

MODIFICATIONS OF THE STATE-ENGINEERED SECULARISMS AFTER WORLD WAR II

While both countries were launched on similar paths to secularism, the civil republican model was modified differently in Turkey and Albania in post-World War II. In the case of Albania, which in the period between 1949 and 1990 experienced one of the strictest communist regimes, state control mechanisms were reinforced in the direction of hostility, which went as far as the total ban of religion as a social and moral institution (Basha 2000). By contrast, after World War II, Turkey transitioned to a multiparty democracy, which led to political, practical, and partly institutional, but not necessarily ideological and principled, moderation of state-controlled secularism, particularly vis-à-vis Islam (Somer (2014).

In Albania, the communist regime built on the main pillars of the post-Ottoman independent state ideology – national unity, centralized state authority, and modernization – but it relied on extreme dictatorial means to ensure cooptation of religious communities into the totalitarian project of social and state engineering. Once in power, the communist regime assaulted all religious



institutions as a threat to the party's ideology and its total monopoly of power, a process, which managed to interrupt the evolution of religious life, thus halting and weakening rather than altering the organized religious sphere. During its first years, the communist government resorted to depriving religious actors of their properties and sources of revenue, forbidding religious education, appointing party cronies in all religious posts, and censoring religious publications (Prifti 1978). In 1949, the government made mandatory for all religious bodies 'to profess loyalty to the party and People's Republic' (Popovic 2006). Any resistance on the part of the clergy provoked harsh retaliation, including indictment and sentencing to long years in prison. By the mid-60s, the regime launched a final attack to eradicate religion after the model of China's cultural revolution: religious institutions were banned by law, religious infrastructure was destroyed or converted to other uses, including as public toilets, and even the practice of religion in the privacy of one's home was deemed a criminal act (Basha 2000). The 1976 constitution officially endorsed atheism by asserting that the state 'supports atheist propaganda', an acknowledgement, which signaled the total abrogation of religious organizations and closure of all objects of cults, until the collapse of the communist system in 1990.

By contrast, with the first free elections in 1950, Turkey transitioned to multi-party politics, which opened up important opportunities for Islamic actors to participate in the political-economic process and demand modification of existing secular arrangements via engagement with government agencies, and even power-sharing in coalition governments (Angrist 2004). It also brought about a moderation of secular actors and institutional controls, further differentiating the Turkish case from the civic republican model (Sommer 2014). Many of the religious communities, which had survived the transformative reforms during the early years of the republic, flourished during the establishment of multi-party democracy. They eventually became the springboard of political Islamism, alongside the gradual emergence of an Islamic-minded conservative middle class, a process that gained momentum after the 1980 military coup and ongoing economic liberalization (Yavuz 2003).

Initially, Islamic communities had an ambiguous relationship with party politics, often shunning it as divisive and morally corruptive. Yet, with time they became politically active and allied with economically progressive and culturally traditionalist center-right parties, although they shunned organic links with one single party. Later on, the rise of influence of Islamist ideologies in the world and dissatisfaction with what center-right parties had delivered for pious Muslims led to the mobilization of openly political-Islamic parties, which further challenged



the established contours of secularism, particularly regarding banishment of Islam from the public sphere. Yet, bringing religion into the public sphere didn't curtail state control over religious space or its restrictions. Neither did it liberalize the inherited state-organized religious sphere and the Muslim-Turkish synthesis. In fact, Diyanet, as the main institution in charge of controlling and imposing religious morality, was kept in place with the same task of reproducing Sunni Islam (Gözaydın 2009).² The compulsory religious education introduced in the 1980s by the Junta regime as a means to educate society and neutralize leftist ideas was kept in place. The constitution upheld freedom of conscience, and religious worship remained free in general, but very little was done to alleviate discrimination and policy restrictions towards what the homogenizing state considered religious 'others', particularly non-Muslims and Alevis (Bowen 2010; Sahin 2005).

A more open and moderate model of secularism, thus, only meant more freedom and visibility for the majority's Sunni version of Islam. Hence, rather than a movement toward the liberal model, the changes were confined to more openness towards and greater public presence for the majority religion. Meanwhile, while the state apparatus and political system became more inclusive of the pious including select Sufi communities, many Islamic communities continued to nurture a deep-seated sense of being oppressed. Both the basic legal-ideological and institutional framework of secularism remained the same, and the accompanying discrimination of select groups continued (Sommer 2014; Tombuş and Aygenç 2017). The Turkish state, meanwhile, continued to control and regulate religious affairs, shape acceptable forms of religiosity, and oppress non-official religions and forms of belief.

DEMOCRATIZATION OPENINGS, RELIGIOUS EMPOWERMENT AND CHALLENGES TO SECULARISM

Since the early 1990s, both Albania and Turkey have seen the revival of Islam as a social and political force during the processes of democratization. Organized religious actors have often capitalized on the democratic rules of participation and mobilization of the faithful to bring their claims in the political arena, including reconfiguration of the institutional limits of secularism. In Albania, the

² Non-Muslim religions recognized by the Lausanne Treaty maintained autonomous institutions even if they faced restrictions, some of which have been relaxed in recent years alongside EU-led legal reforms. Other religions need first to be recognized by the state in order to have legal protection.



liberalization of the communist restrictions in the 1990s enabled the reorganization of the Albanian Muslim Community (AMC), the successor of pre-communist central organization of the Sunni Community, which became the official voice of newborn Sunni majority (Elbasani 2016; Elbasani 2015b). Turkey in the 1990s also witnessed the growing success of political Islamist actors within competitive politics, a process that culminated in the ascendance to power of the Islamic-background AKP.

The newborn Islamic actors in both countries – the rather weak AMC official organization that came out of the ashes of communism and the well-organized AKP that managed to get to the helm of power – enjoyed different institutional and political clout to assert their preferences or negotiate the main contours of the republican format of secularism. Both organizations, however, capitalized on the existing secular arrangements to strengthen their hold within the system – AMC as the official voice of Sunni Islam and when allowed of state religious policies; AKP as a ruling Islamic party voicing the conservative religious strata including various religious groups, and overseeing the Diyanet. Both organizations also proved keen to maintain and even strengthen the main contours of the state controlled institutional and ideological system.

AMC as the Voice of Official Islam

The redefinition of state-church relations in post-communist Albania, by and large, replicates the institutional choices made soon after independence. The post-communist reshuffling of the constitutional framework, however, was also a crucial moment to update the secular arrangements with a range of religious freedoms guaranteed in democratic systems. The very first constitutional amendments included only one liberal clause on religious freedom: ‘[the state] respects religious freedoms and creates the conditions for their exercising’ (Albanian Parliament 1991, article 7). Later on, the first post-communist constitution adopted in 1998 elaborated a range of individual rights and restrictions besides the main contours of the secular system. Per Albanian constitution, ‘all citizens enjoy freedom of conscience to choose or change one’s religion and express it individually or collectively, in the public or private space’ (Albanian Parliament 1998, article 24). Yet, ‘no one may be compelled or prohibited to take part or not in a religious community’ (Ibid.). Similar to the previous pre-communist model, the post-communist state has no official religion. Instead, it claims neutrality ‘in questions of belief’ and ‘recognizes the equality of



all religious communities' (Albanian Parliament 1998, article 10). Besides these hints of liberal tradition, the secular model continues the legacy of close state supervision of religious activity. First of all, religious communities enjoy independence in running their affairs, but are also required to 'work for the good of each and all' (Ibid.). To this end, all religious organizations must be registered as judicial persons, a process, which entails their legal screening for compatibility with state legislation. The Committee of Cults, the state institution in charge of religious affairs is headed by a civil servant and is responsible for registering and documenting the activity of religious organizations, in addition to serving as a forum where the state and all four traditional religious communities –Sunni, Bektashi, Cristian Catholic and Cristian Orthodox – meet together to decide related policy initiatives (Elbasani 2016). The constitutional requirement that the four traditional religious communities be organized as centralized hierarchies that are entitled to sign bilateral agreements with the state enables the latter to negotiate with those organizations, including the AMC as the official Sunni organization. The AMC has indeed struck a deal with the state in order to safeguard the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion within the necessary restrictions 'of a democratic society, public security and protection of third-party rights' (Albanian Parliament 2009). The status of the AMC as the state-recognized official structure in charge of the spiritual and administrative affairs of the entire Sunni community, makes it a powerful centralized actor, but also an institutional interlocutor of the state religious policies.

Still, the liberalization of religious conduct has certainly created an open market of religion where various religious actors – migrants, students from abroad, humanitarian organizations, decentralized groups of practice and virtual internet networks – effectively compete with established institutions and traditional ideas for the hearts and minds of post-communist believers (Elbasani 2015a; Elbasani and Tosic 2017). Initially, cash rich Arab associations provided much-needed resources – funds for building necessary infrastructure, scholarships for students, Islamic literature and translations, religious missionaries and humanitarian assistance, mixed with proselytization activities – to help local Muslims find the way to Islamic faith (Lakshman-Lepain 2002). Those incoming networks, associations and ideas were necessary for the recovery of religious activities, but they did not always conform to the state-organized religious field, including its institutional infrastructure and traditional interpretations. Yet, throughout the Albanian transition and the externally-induced religious activities, AMC maintained a crucial legally regulated place in the system as the voice of official Islam. Indeed, in the bilateral agreement, which regulates AMC's



relations to the state, the state pledges to support its actions ‘against any deformations, extremist tendencies, or other aggressive demonstrations in the spaces occupied by [its] believers’ (Albanian Parliament 2009). The collaboration between the state and the AMC has, thus, facilitated the consolidation of an official doctrine, which develops parallel to the country’s socio-political expediencies and goals, particularly what are widely seen as the end goals of transition – democracy and European integration (Elbasani 2015b).

The central role of the AMC and how it contributes to the secular system became pertinent particularly after the unregulated intrusion of various religious organizations and ideas in the first half of the 1990s. Specifically, the initial liberalization of the religious freedoms coupled with the lack of state regulation for registration of religious organizations, which informed a laissez-faire approach towards religion, opened the country to all kinds of business prospectors, missionaries, advisers and religious groups who came to recruit for their faith (Elbasani 2016). Hence the initial revival of Islam – building of new imposing mosques, the opening of a wide range of private schools, the proliferation of humanitarian activities, the upsurge of Islamic literature, the mushrooming of proselyzation activities and to some extent rooting of terrorist cells in the country during the first half of the 1990s – were largely sponsored by a myriad of foreign organizations, which operated outside of the AMC’s structures. Soon after the discovery of the ‘Islamic fundamentalist’ networks in 1997, the state adopted a new regulatory framework, including specific details enshrined in the 1998 constitution. Besides, the state in collaboration with international security agencies initiated a scrutiny of Arab ‘charities’ that had established their basis in the country. Many of them were closed down, and their employees associated with illegal activities expatriated or arrested (ICG 2009). Additionally, the AMC was reshuffled with new staff and adopted new statutes that follow closely the official line.

AKP as the Voice of Moderate Political Islam

The AKP’s record with respect to redefinition of the established secular arrangements can be divided into two terms. During its first term in government, roughly between 2002 and 2008, the party adopted a liberal political discourse targeting relaxation of state control while upholding freedom of different religious groups, alongside promised democratization and EU-led reforms. Rather than openly challenging secular state institutions in this period ideologically, the party



focused on consolidating its power, staffing institutions and state capture (Sommer 2007; Sommer 2017). During the second term, the AKP did not necessarily modify the grand institutional structure of state-engineered secularism although it persistently weakened the institutional safeguards of the system while utilizing the institutional structure to enhance the public visibility of religion, particularly the privileged Sunni majority, and to promote the synthesis between Sunni Islam and Turkish nationalism (Tomboş and Aygenç 2017). The changes strengthened and brought to the fore the party's main constituencies – conservative Sunni believers – but they did little to expand freedoms and opportunities for the diverse Turkish society or relax state institutional and ideological controls. As AKP policies and discourse leaned further towards religious nationalism and a majoritarian understanding of democracy, the state-domeered form of secularism was extended to serve party political contingencies.

Much of AKP policies during the first two terms in power were shaped by pragmatic constraints – EU-accession process, a watchful military, a secularist president, liberal-secular intelligentsia and civil society, and a critical and combative media – which had brought to an end previous Islamic political projects. The AKP program itself shows an opening towards religious freedom in line with an explicit commitment to principles of secularism: 'it considers religion as one of the most important institutions of humanity and secularism as a prerequisite of democracy, and an assurance of the freedom of religion and conscience' (AKP Party Programme). Some short-lived attempts at criminalizing adultery and lifting the Islamic headscarf ban were quickly withdrawn after domestic and international skepticism; the party's priorities seemed to lie with distancing itself from its political Islamist roots. Accordingly, the party avoided an explicit religious and nationalist discourse and made minor changes oriented at reducing government involvement in religion, such as legalizing the right to leave blank the religious identity section in national identity cards, and easing legal procedures for establishing non-Muslim places of worship (US Department of State 2012).

During and after 2007–2008, legal-political confrontations between the AKP and the secular 'establishments', particularly the military, bureaucracy and pro-secular media enabled the AKP to progressively free itself from related checks and balances that those institutions imposed on religious parties (Elbasani and Saatçioğlu 2014). Yet, those mechanisms of control over party politics were not replaced with new and more democratic ones (Sommer 2007; Sommer 2017). Afterwards, the AKP's room for maneuver was drastically expanded with a series of electoral victories but also a new and cooperative president, a subdued



military, a gradually politically checkered bureaucracy, a heavily pressured media and weak opposition parties. Given its attack on previous secular establishment and increasing political control of all chains of state power, AKP could now use its powerful political mandate to either reform Turkish secularism in a more liberal and post-secular direction, as many liberal and religious critics had long demanded; or maintain the structure of an interventionist and biased system of secularism in the service of majority Sunni-Muslim strata rather than the various religious groups (Sommer 2013).

A more liberal secularism would have meant that, for example, the Diyanet would be abolished, or reformed to be inclusive of other Muslim minorities while reducing the domineering role of Sunni Majority. In fact, the Diyanet retained its mandate and became even more powerful as a state institution. Other state policies enhanced the freedoms and opportunities for pious Sunni Muslims, and, to some extent, non-Muslim minorities. The Islamic headscarf ban, for example was practically eliminated for college students and civil servants, and a fundamental restructuring of the primary and secondary school system enabled students to attend a religious school more easily and at an earlier age. The number of government-subsidized Sunni Muslim mosques and Qur'an schools steadily increased, while mandatory religion courses in high schools remained (Sommer 2013; Tombuş and Aygenç 2017).

Yet, attempts at open discussion for reforms that would secure equality for the Alevis – who constitute somewhere between 5 and 25 percent of the population – bore no tangible results. On the contrary, the government began to employ an increasingly religious-moralist, anti-secular, pro-Sunni, and anti-Alevi rhetoric. The pro-Sunni politics gained momentum after the Arab uprisings in 2011–2012, when the AKP formed alliances with Egyptian and Syrian Muslim Brothers, and after the antigovernment Gezi riots were disproportionately supported by Alevis and pro-secular groups. The Gezi protests also showed to the AKP that the marriage of political Islamism and neoliberal economic policies, which had originally catapulted the party to power, could only continue with more repression and social control, as the protesters revolted against the social, urban developmental and environmental products of this marriage even though many of them were economic beneficiaries (Akçalı and Korkut, 2015; Tuğal, 2016). Meanwhile, new laws, regulations, and practices restricted abortion rights, alcohol consumption, and co-ed student housing, fueling concerns about Islamization of the secular model (Elbasani and Saatçioğlu 2014).



CONCLUSIONS

The analysis shows that both Albania and Turkey developed similar secular systems centered on, and to some extent instrumental to, the process of modern nation and state-building processes. Those state engineered models of secularism enabled the state to regulate and govern Islamic majority, with a view to ‘reforming’ and ‘rationalizing’ it. Yet, in both cases, the emulation of the main pillars of the republican model - reformation of religion, social engineering, strict separation between state and religion and an interventionist state – took case-specific features. In the case of Albania, which displayed greater religious diversity, specific emphasis was placed on interreligious equality and state neutrality as a means to pacify different religious communities. Meanwhile, the Turkish state promoted selective aspects of Islam as a basis of national identity and social cohesion, thus inducing a synthesis between Sunni Islam and Turkishness in the process of state-building.

The analysis also shows that in both cases, various organized religious actors proved active to embrace, but also contest and challenge the respective secular arrangements. Especially in the Turkish case, Islamic actors exercised agency and helped to reshape secularism by using competitive politics. When Turkey’s AKP won elections and acquired sufficient power to redefine the secular constraints, it didn’t change the inherited system towards a more liberal order, but instead tried to instrumentalize, and to some extent, further Islamize state-engineered secularism. The case thus shows how Islamic parties may adopt and seek to Islamize the civic-republican model, rather than embrace the liberal model, for their own purposes.

This is not to say, however, that Islamic political actors have a fixed orientation toward state-engineered secularism. On the contrary, our comparative cases show that they adapt to their political-institutional and demographic environments, as the AMC’s commitment to secular arrangements and AKP’s relatively liberal orientation during its first period demonstrate. From this perspective, the recent endurance of Turkish state-engineered form of secularism with a more pro-Islamic bent is a product of politics and pursuit of power rather than unchanging ideological preferences. It is an outcome produced by secular as well as Islamic political actors, who have so far failed to share power in pursuit of a more inclusive and pluralistic social and political-institutional order.



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