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**Embodiment of *Tolerance* in Discourses and  
Practices Addressing Cultural Diversity in  
Schools:**

Alevi Claims on the Compulsory Courses on Religious Culture  
and Morality, and Headscarf Issue in Higher Education

Ayhan Kaya and Ece Harmanyeri  
Istanbul Bilgi University

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ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

# **Embodiment of *Tolerance* in Discourses and Practices Addressing Cultural Diversity in Schools**

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**İSTANBUL BİLGİ UNIVERSITY**  
**European Institute**

**Work Package 3-National Case Studies of Challenges to *Tolerance* in School Life**

**D3.1 Country Reports on Concepts and Practices of *Tolerance* Addressing Cultural Diversity in Schools**

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## Executive Summary

This study aims to illustrate the discourses and practices of accommodation of cultural diversity in Turkey with a special focus on the response of the Alevis to the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality (*Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi*) and the ban on headscarf in higher education institutions. To put it differently, this report seeks to understand the meaning of *tolerance* shaped by particular actors and groups in a specific political context. For this purpose, this report investigates public policies and political initiatives proposed for the resolution of cultural diversity challenges with respect to *tolerance* and/or respect/recognition in school life. In doing so, we analysed the ways in which public policies vis-a-vis cultural and religious diversity have recently taken shape.

### Issues Raised

First, we examined the government's initiative to accommodate Alevi claims with respect to change in the curriculum of the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality. In doing so, we refer to the discourses of various Alevi actors, who take different positions in responding to the political initiative of the government. Secondly, this study scrutinised the public policy and political initiatives undertaken for the lift of the ban on headscarf in universities, which have so far been unsuccessful in making a substantial change in the national discourse of laicism. These attempts have also become short of introducing a new discourse based on respecting and recognising religious diversity in higher education. Referring to the interviews undertaken with several different actors, we reveal that there is a common belief that all these attempts made by political parties have just been politicizing the headscarf issue without making any substantial improvement for the resolution of the ongoing problem.

### Methodology

Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted with relevant individuals, experts, parents, students, teachers, community leaders and lawyers. These interviews were scrutinized through the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This means that the interviews were critically explored by the researchers in order to locate each of them into the right spot of the discursive map. In the mean time, an extensive literature review was also made in order to position the acts of speeches of the interlocutors along with the literature.

### AKP's Alevi Initiative and Curricula of the Courses

It was found out that the attempts made for the revision of the curriculum in the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality do not necessarily bring about respect and recognition for the Alevi culture as a distinct and peculiar identity in school life. However, it means to some Alevi groups that the participation of Alevi children is tolerated, and religious differences of the Alevis are accepted by means of incorporating Alevi belief into the curriculum and textbooks. This initiative cannot be regarded as a public policy, which effectively responds to the Alevi claims along with the respect and recognition of the Alevi identity in the framework of more rigorous problems/issues arising from the religious difference of Alevis such as places of worship (*cemevi*) and the alleged legal status within the Directorate of Religious Affairs. Furthermore, the issue of education on Alevi belief should be discussed more in the public space with respect to the freedom of faith in general.

### Lifting the Ban on Headscarf in Universities: Right to Education

It was revealed that most of the interlocutors regard the public policies and political initiatives proposed for the resolution of the headscarf issue in universities by making new legal changes or by reinstating and enforcing the laws to re-assure the right to education, as palliative solutions. However, it was mostly claimed that in order to resolve this issue with an address to *tolerance*, respect and recognition, a more structural solution should be found on the basis of right to freedom of religion.



Accordingly, those interviewed have expressed their willingness to see a constitutional reform to clearly make sure that headscarf ban will no longer be an obstacle before the right to education of individuals, to precisely highlight the right to religious difference, and to prevent the politicization of the headscarf issue.

### **Freedom of Religion: Tolerance, or Equality?**

This study claims that although the government's initiative may be regarded as an attempt to tolerate religious differences of the Alevi in school life, the inclusion of Alevi belief in the curriculum of the compulsory courses does not lead to the recognition of Alevi culture as a unique entity. The end result is to try to identify Alevism with Islam in a way that undermines the claims of a great number of Alevi associations. Similarly, one could also see that even though the public policy and political initiatives for lifting the ban on headscarf in universities intend to tolerate the self-presentation of headscarfed women in universities and to assure their right to education, they are far from resolving the headscarf issue with reference to the freedom of religion.

### **Laicism: Infidelity, or Piety?**

It seems that the most crucial impact of strict laicism in Turkey is that it polarizes and diffuses the society between *laicists*, who comply with the state's principles and interests, and *Islamists*, who challenge the state and the regime with their social and individual preferences. In fact, this study has found out that the state-centric process of secularization divides the society between citizens and non-citizens. Since the state discourse of laicism is imposed on individuals, the individuals have internalized the state's control over their religious claims. It seems that top-down simple modernization run by the state has created believers of Laicism on the one hand, and believers of Islam on the other.

Following the French model of *laïcité*, the choice of the early Republicans on the integration of the principle of Laicism into the Turkish Constitution in 1937 indicates that the Kemalist elite was not preoccupied at all with the elimination of religion from public space. On the contrary, they affirmed the fact that Turkish society was religious in essence. The main rationale behind the principle of Laicism was not to wage war against Islam, but to provide the people with the power to challenge the rising authority of the Islamic clergy since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Laicism derives from the French word *lai* (or *laïque*, in contemporary usage, lay people in English, or *inanınlar* in Turkish), meaning “of the people” as distinguished from “the clergy”.

Hence, laicism underscores the distinction between lay members of a church and its clergy. In other words, Laicism in a way rescued Islam as a matter of ‘belief’ and ‘conscience’ by institutionally supporting, financing, and promulgating a different version of Islam and its view of relation to power and social life. The separation of religion from its previous position of influence in the Ottoman Empire constituted a shift in Islam's institutional and legitimation position, not its formal, full elimination.

In this sense, rather than antagonizing Islam, laicism simply means to empower the individual believers vis-a-vis the clergy. Furthermore, laicist ideology has also made it possible that the Kemalist elite politically and culturally instrumentalised Islam to unify the nation through the institutions of the Ministry of Education and the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*). The perception that Laicism (*Laiklik* in Turkish) was “antireligious secularism” ignores the regime's religious policy, and fails to consider the existence of different versions of political Islam in Turkey, one of them enshrined in power until very recently and others outside it.

### **Secularism and Laicism: Are they the same?**

The terms *laicism* and *secularism* are often interchangeably used in Turkey. Both terms rather have different etymologies, institutional histories, and normative theoretical implications. Secularism derives from the Latin *saeculum*, meaning generation or age, and originally meant “of the world”

(*dünyevi* in Turkish) as opposed to “of the church” (*ruhani* in Turkish). Hence, the term “secular” differentiates between matters of religiosity and matters of the world. In this sense, secularization of a society simply refers to the “diminution of the social significance of religion” and “the growing tendency to do without religion”. A secular state then refers to a “religion-free” state - a kind of state that does not apparently comply with the modern Turkish state. In this sense, Laicism is actually a kind of obstacle to secularization as it has so far made the state to instrumentalise religion as a tool to control the masses.

This study concludes that laicist/religious divide has so far been ideologically manipulated by both pro-laicist and pro-Islamist political elite. The political obsession with religion, as displayed by both Laicism and Islamism, tends to distract the masses from social and economic problems by turning them into a rhetorical debate about existential and societal fears. One could clearly see that the theological and political debates around Laicism and Islamism cannot be isolated from the socio-economic realities in which they are situated. The rise of an Islamic bourgeoisie with roots in Anatolian culture, the re-Islamization of society and politics in everyday life through the debates on headscarf issue and Alevism, the emergence of consumerist lifestyles not only among the secular segments of the Turkish society, but also among the Islamists, and finally the weakening of the legitimacy of the Turkish military as the guardian of national unity and the laicist order are all very important aspects of the ways in which the Turkish society and politics have radically transformed in the last two decades.

Thus, one should certainly try to assess the social and political change in Turkey without falling into the trap essentializing the Laicist-Islamist divide. This research has partly revealed that both laicist and Islamist discourses have so far been used by Turkish political elite as two different forms of ideology in order to conceal social, economic and political issues prevalent in the society by means of institutions, procedures, analyses, debates, and reflections.

### **Keywords**

Nationalism, laicism, republicanism, secularism, freedom of religion, religious symbols, *tolerance*, recognition, respect, Alevism, headscarf.

**Embodiment of *Tolerance* in Discourses and Practices  
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Headscarf Issue in Higher Education**

**Introduction**

Turkey has a very intricate history with regard to the culture of *tolerance*. The multiculturalist *millet* system certainly praised the act of tolerance during the heydays of the Ottoman Empire, while the nationalist rhetoric promoted a homogeneous nation based on Sunni-Muslim-Turkish elements. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, indoctrination of the members of the nation was undertaken through the citizenship education. Hence, one could trace the footsteps of the culture of (in-)tolerance in Turkey through citizenship education. Üstel (2004)'s study on the citizenship education during the Ottoman Empire and subsequently during the Turkish Republic proves that there has always been a continuous indoctrination of individuals in terms of their duties towards the state. Üstel (2004) argues that the state has used ethnicity, culture, history, religion the like to create a sense of homogenous national identity.

Kemalist education has certainly made a radical change in the mind-set of the Turkish citizens, who were before the members of the Ottoman *umma* (community of Muslims). However, scientific studies reveal that Kemalist Turkish secularism has been used to reinstrumentalize Islam in the service of secularist nationalism to foster a holistic citizenship instead of liberating individual subjects (Davison, 1998; Mardin, 1973, 1989; Türkmen, 2009). Turkish secularism and its relationship to Islam indicate that there is continuity between the Ottoman state and modern Turkey in the sense that the temporal authority supersedes the religious authority (Inalcık, 1958). Turkish modernity is certainly based on secular premises. However, the aim of the Turkish form of secularism has never become to accommodate the political authority and Islam, it has rather become to maintain the religious authority under the reign of secularism (Türkmen, 2009; Bayar, 2009; Gürbey, 2009). The place of religion in Turkish national education has always been evident since the very early days of the Republic in the 1920s.<sup>1</sup>

The emphasis on religion in the Turkish national education has never changed. The integration of secularism and religion was perceived to be the main goal of the curriculum by the nation-builders. However, the objectives of citizenship education show some differences in the history of the Republic. Drawing upon Üstel's work among others, Çayır and Gürkaynak (2008: 51) argue that the objectives of citizenship education have gradually changed:

“In 1926 the new primary school program stated its objective as ‘raising good citizens’, the 1929 program as ‘raising people, physically and psychologically fit to be Turkish citizens’, the 1936 program as ‘raising republican, statist, secular, revolutionary citizens’.”

The Turkish national oath, which is still being repeated at the primary and secondary levels, is a great example of this constant process of indoctrination. Since it was written by Resit Galip in 1933, the oath is ingrained in the back of the minds of the Turks with the last sentence "How happy is the one

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<sup>1</sup> For the embeddedness of religion in the modern Turkish national education since the very early days of the Republic see Bayar (2009). Bayar very eloquently explains the debates undertaken in the Turkish Grand National Assembly in the 1920s and 1930s concluding that Turkish Ministry of National Education was always tempted to religious and secular teaching together, but not to secularize the social and political system. Emphasizing the importance of the Islamic character of the modern Turkish nation, Gürbey (2009) gives several examples from the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. For instance, while during the Turkish-Greek population exchange Turkish speaking Christian Karamans were forced to emigrate in the 1920s, the immigration demands of Turkish speaking Christians in Moldova denied. Religion but not the language and ethnicity was the main driving force behind the making of the nation.

who calls himself/herself a Turk!" (*Ne mutlu Türkiim diyene!*).<sup>2</sup> Üstel argues that one of the most significant changes in citizenship education was held in the late 1930s, with the primary school program introduced by the ruling single party, Republican People's Party (CHP). Accordingly, primary schools became the production sites for '*milli yurttaş*' (national citizen) leading to the production of a homogenous nation (Üstel, 2004:138).

The Turkish national education curriculum has always promoted a civic education based on the celebration of the Sunni-Islam-Turkish culture. It has been very difficult for the non-Sunni-Muslim-Turkish students to publicly express their identities in school as well as getting their practical claims about their ethno-cultural and religious difference accommodated by the state. Research on the minorities reveals the difficulties experienced by non-Muslim, non-Sunni, and non-Turkish students in everyday life (Yıldız, 2001). Although ethno-cultural and religious identities are now being expressed rather freely in the public space, there are still barriers before the expression of one's ethno-cultural and religious identity. To illustrate this problem, in September 2010, the Kurdish origin Democratic Society Party (DTP) decided to boycott the first week of the primary and secondary school education in order to make their point about the right to education in their own language that is other Turkish.

The Ministry of National Education introduced new reforms, in the last decade, in order to redesign the whole curriculum on the basis of a *constructivist paradigm* as opposed to *didactic education*, and to develop new textbooks with a 'student-centered' approach (Avenstrup, 2005; Aşkar et.al., 2005; Sahlberg, 2005). According to the Ministry of National Education, the new curriculum "draws on our country's cultural, historical, and moral tenets, and aims to maintain the Turkish Republic," And the new curriculum adopts "the norms, aims and educational stance of the European Union" (TTKB, 2009). The terms '*tolerance*', 'human rights', and 'Europeanization' are also explicitly stated in these reforms as well as the revitalization of the *Ancien Regime* of the Ottoman Empire as in the historical figure of Sultan Mehmet II, who is portrayed as someone *tolerant*, protective and just *vis-a-vis* non-Muslim minorities of the Empire (Çayır, 2009).

Essentializing the term *tolerance*, the term was specifically mentioned in the textbooks of religious culture and morality courses with reference to the Medina Constitution, formulated by Prophet Mohammad to regulate relationships with non-Muslims, and Mohammad's 'tolerant attitude' towards the Christians of Yemen (Türkmen, 2009: 91).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in September 2010, the Ministry of National Education released a public statement in the first week of the school year 2010-2011 to underline the need for the 'education of values'. Accordingly, the education of values such as citizenship, hospitality, solidarity and *tolerance* aims at empowering individual students against the challenges posed in everyday life by the processes of globalisation (MEB, 2010).

In the mean time, the curriculum change made in 2007 and 2008 brought about some changes with regard to Alevism. The new curriculum focussed on different sects and diverse mystic interpretations of Islam. Alevism was mentioned among mystic interpretations as the main constitutive other of the course's syllabus and was integrated into what is called 'Turkish Sunni Islam' in the book. This implies that Alevism was perceived and exposed by the authors of the book as a part of the Sunni Islam with some deviations. This intervention in the textbook was interpreted by several Alevi parents as a form of assimilation, and it was taken to the courts (Türkmen, 2009: 92), as will be explicated below in more detail.

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<sup>2</sup> The oath has recently become very problematic for the ethno-cultural and non-Muslim minorities in Turkey as the last sentence seems to have strong ethnic connotations with an assimilationist undertone.

<sup>3</sup> Türkmen (2009) successfully reveals the changes made in the curriculum of the courses on religious culture and morality between 1995 and 2007-2008. Referring to the changes made such as Islamization of the human rights concept, religionization of education, exposition of marriage as not only a precondition to establish a family but also as a remedy to adultery, and presentation of Atatürk as someone seeing seeing secularism as the basis for living the real Islam, she concludes that the new curriculum is designed to reislamize the Turkish society in a neo-liberal fashion.

In this report, we investigate two case studies in order to illuminate the examples of public policy implemented for the resolution of cultural and religious diversity challenges and the extent to which notions of *tolerance/acceptance* and/or *respect/recognition* are used. In the first case, we focus on the government's initiative to widen the curriculum of the compulsory (REC) to include Alevi belief and practices. In the second case, we examine the public policy and the political initiatives undertaken for the lift of the ban on headscarf in higher education. The two case studies presented in this report are *not illustrated as good examples of managing cultural/religious diversity in education and school life; but rather as examples of how the government seeks to resolve cultural diversity tensions in school life through palliative and situational solutions*. We argue that although the government's initiative may be regarded as an attempt to tolerate religious differences of the Alevis in school life, the inclusion of Alevi belief in the curriculum of the compulsory REC does not lead to the recognition of Alevi culture as a unique entity. Similarly, we contend that even though the public policy and political initiatives for the lift of the ban on headscarf in universities intend to tolerate the self-presentation of headscarfed women in higher education and to assure their right to education, they are far from resolving the headscarf issue with reference to the freedom of religion.

### **Data and Methods**

This report is based on desk-research as well as field work. We have collected relevant data and information about the two cases through a study on NGO reports, policy documents, public statements, internet news and a wide range of books and articles enlisted in the academic literature. Fieldwork was conducted between the end of February and mid-April 2011. We have conducted nineteen semi-structured qualitative interviews, nine of which were conducted on the first case (compulsory course on religious culture and morality), and ten of which were conducted on the second case (the lift of the ban on headscarf in universities). Among these interviews, thirteen were conducted with experts including civil society leaders, policy makers, politicians, bureaucrats, and academics and six with practitioners and other stakeholders such as teachers, students, and parents. Most of the interviews were conducted in Istanbul, while four of them were held in Ankara with policy makers, politicians and bureaucrats.

The final part of the field work was accomplished with the focus group discussion in July 2011. A group of journalists, civil society leaders, practitioners and headscarfed lawyers had a heated debate on both cases. The focus group discussion was very constructive in revising our arguments and conclusions. The data collected through the interviews were evaluated on the basis of the interlocutors' reflections on some common denominators such as tolerance, Europeanization, religion, secularism and laicism. These interviews were analyzed through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method (Wodak, 2010; 2002; 1999). CDA is a method of discourse analysis focusing on the investigation of the relations between discourse and social/cultural developments in everyday life. It views discursive practices as an important form of social practice contributing to the constitution of the social and cultural world including social identities and relations.

#### **1. Case 1: Including Alevism in the curriculum of Compulsory Religious culture and morality Courses**

It is estimated that Alevis constitute more than 15 percent of the population in Turkey. Alevism demonstrates a variety of differences from mainstream Sunni Islam. Alevis were silenced until recently due to the ongoing and unresolved historical animosity with the Sunnis due to various stereotypes. Alevi identity became publicized in the 1990s as a kind of response to the rising political Islam in Turkey, and there are signs indicating that Alevism was embraced and promoted by the laicist military and state bureaucracy in order to balance the growing impact of the sunni-based political Islam. Accordingly, Alevis started to raise their cultural and religious claims revolving around four basic issues: a) compulsory courses on religious culture and morality in the primary and secondary education, which is believed to be promoting Sunni Islam; b) asking the state to recognize the Alevi communion houses (*Cemevi*) to be equal to the mosques as holly worship places; c) asking the state not to discriminate the Alevis in allocating the sources to the Directorate of Religious Affairs attached

to the Primeministry (employing all the Immas in Turkey and abroad), which is believed to be only serving the interests of the Sunnis in Turkey; and d) fighting against all kinds of stereotypes mostly expressed by the Sunnis. In this section, the issue of the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality will be analysed. Prior to that, some basic information about the Alevi and Alevism will be delineated.

Alevism is a heterodox religious identity peculiar to Anatolia. It is practised by some Turkish and Kurdish segments of Anatolian society. Turkish Alevi used to be concentrated in central Anatolia, with important pockets in the Aegean and Mediterranean coastal regions and the European part of Turkey. Kurdish Alevi were concentrated in the north-western part of the Kurdish settlement zone between the southeast Anatolia and the rest of the country. Both Turkish and Kurdish Alevi have been leaving their isolated villages for the big cities of Turkey and Europe since 1950s.<sup>4</sup> Alevi have started to publicly declare their religious identity after some tragic incidences in Turkey, like the massacre of 37 Alevi artists in a central Anatolian city, Sivas (July, 1993), and of 15 Alevi people in an Alevi neighbourhood of Istanbul (Gaziosmanpasa, March 1995).

When Pir Sultan Abdal association organised a cultural festival in Sivas, which is historically divided between Sunnis and Alevi- in July 1993, numerous prominent Alevi-origin artists and authors, including novelist Aziz Nesin (not an Alevi), attended. The festival was picketed by a large group of violent right-wing demonstrators who were clearly keen on killing Aziz Nesin who had previously provoked the anger of many Sunni Muslims by announcing his intention to publish a translation of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. Throwing stones and burning rags through the windows of the hotel, where the participants of the festival were staying, the demonstrators succeeded in setting fire to the hotel. Thirty-seven people were killed in this fire, due to the indifferent attitude of the police forces of the 'Sunni' Turkish state. This was a very crucial incident which has led to the radicalisation of the Alevi movement in relation to the sluggishness of the state apparatus.

Relations between Alevi and the Turkish state reached even lower depths with clashes between the police and Alevi demonstrators in the Gazi neighbourhood of Istanbul in March 1995. *Gazi* suburb is a ghetto which is dominated by Alevi residents. The hostilities started when an unknown gunman in a stolen taxi fired a number of shots against a group of men sitting in a café, killing one Alevi. Police were remarkably slow in taking action, and the rumour soon spread that the local police post might have been involved in the terrorist attacks. The day after, thousands of Alevi people from the Gazi neighbourhood went on to the streets to protest about the murder. The police and the demonstrators clashed, and fifteen Alevi demonstrators were killed by the police (Kaya, 2001: Chapter 3; Bruinessen, 1996b: 9-10). These incidences have opened a new era in Alevi revivalism both at home and in diaspora in a way that has prompted Alevi to become more vocal in raising their claims about the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality, the recognition of communion houses as warship places, the allocation of resources from the Diyanet, and struggling against stereotypes.

### **AKP's Alevi Initiative**

From June 2009 to January 2010, the AKP government organised seven Alevi workshops under the auspices of the Ministry of State in order to deepen the dialogue between Sunni intellectuals and the Alevi civil society leaders.<sup>5</sup> These workshops were held to hear the claims of Alevi on the religious and cultural based issues. In every workshop, Alevi raised their complaints and demands that compulsory courses on religious culture and morality should be annulled, and an elective course on the

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<sup>4</sup> For further detail about the Alevi transnational networks see Erman and Erdemir (2005).

<sup>5</sup> For more information for the last workshop held on 31 January 2010, <http://www.cnnturk.com/2010/turkiye/02/01/alevi.calistayi.bitti.uzlasma.saglandi/561722.0/index.html> , accessed on 19.10.2010

Alevi belief and practices should be introduced.<sup>6</sup> They further suggested that the content of the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality should not include stereotypes regarding the Alevi belief and practices. After the workshops were completed, the Ministry of State released a preliminary report concluding that all the citizens were in need of religious instruction (ERG, 2011). Although some Alevi representatives articulated their demands on the abolishment of the compulsory REC, the government representatives stressed that it was not possible and appropriate to respond to this demand in short-term under the existing social and political circumstances (Alevi Workshop Report, 2011). Thus, it was decided that the curriculum of the compulsory religious culture and morality courses should be re-designed with a perspective, which does not degrade any religious belief, and with an encompassing language, which is recognised by all social groups (ERG, 2011).

Having concluded the debates on the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality in the workshops, the Directorate General of Religious Instruction (DÖGM) was assigned with the revision of the curriculum to include the Alevi belief (ERG, 2011). The DÖGM formed a commission of 15 people consisting of Alevi saints (*Dedes*), intellectuals, civil society representatives, and academics, Sunni theologians and specialists from the Ministry of Education (*ibid.*). In October 2010, the Minister of State, Faruk Çelik, who supervised the Alevi workshops responded to the Alevi claims, and stated that an expert commission has been working on the re-designation of the textbooks used in compulsory courses on religious culture and morality in a way that would include the teaching of Alevi belief and practices.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, some Alevi civil society actors, who did not support the negotiations with the government, continued to have protests/boycotts against the compulsory courses.<sup>8</sup> Eventually, in December 2010, a meeting was held in order to present the revised curriculum prepared by the DÖGM to the Alevi representatives.<sup>9</sup>

Compulsory courses on religious culture and morality was introduced in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup. The aim of the army was to consolidate the role of the state in everyday life and to depoliticise the civil society. 1982 Constitution was also designed in the same manner to unite the nation through a nationalist and Islamist ideology. Considering the fact that the national unity was threatened by the social strife between the rightists and leftists in the 1970s, the military government (1980-1983) adopted a political project to enhance the role of the state in public realm demobilising and depoliticising civil society (Özbudun, 2000; Arat, 2005). For this end, the military on the one hand emphasized the laicist discourse, and on the other hand adapted a kind of state-run political Islam indoctrinating the young generations through compulsory courses on religious culture and morality in schools. Hence, the new constitution after the coup indicated the obligation of the state to ensure the religious education of its citizens. From the very beginning, the content of this new course (REC) revealed a Turco-Islamist spirit, reflecting the new political and social concerns (Türkmen, 2009: 86).

A similar approach was embraced by the successive government of the Motherland Party (ANAP) under the leadership of Turgut Özal in the mid-1980s (Akbulut and Usal, 2008). According to the Article 24 of the 1982 Constitution introduced by the military regime, "Education on Religious culture and morality shall be conducted under state supervision and control. Instruction on religious culture and morality shall be compulsory in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Other religious education and instruction shall be subject to the individual's own desire and, in the case of minors, to the request of their legal representatives" (Goner, 2005). Article 12 of the Basic Law of National Education states that "Secularism is fundamental in education in Turkey. Instruction on religious

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<sup>6</sup> *Sol website*, <http://haber.sol.org.tr/devlet-ve-siyaset/alevi-acilimi-ilahiyatcilara-soruldu-haberi-17116> accessed on 19.10.2010

<sup>7</sup> *Newspaper Radikal website*, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalHaberDetay&Date=09%20Ekim%202010&ArticleID=1022834>, accessed on 19.10.2010

<sup>8</sup> *Webhaber*, <http://www.webhaber.com/haber/06-10-2010/aleviler-zorunlu-din-dersinin-kaldirilmesi-icin-2-2268512-haberi>, accessed on 19.10.2010

<sup>9</sup> *Hurriyet website*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/16521327.asp>, accessed on 10.02.2011

culture and morality is included among compulsory courses to be taught in primary and secondary schools and their equivalents” (ibid.). The compulsory religion courses were called “Education on Religious culture and morality” and made mandatory for all Turkish students. Although the title of the course sounds neutral towards all religions, its content involves the teaching of a homogenous way of life based on Sunni-Islam. Therefore, Alevi citizens felt that they were explicitly indoctrinated through Sunni Islam. Non-Muslim minorities could abstain from these courses.

Considering the attempts to meet the needs and demands of Alevi citizens with regard to the compulsory REC, one should draw attention to the fact that the revision of the curriculum did not start with the Alevi workshops. The process actually goes back to the programme of the Directorate General of Religious Instruction (DÖGM) for the re-arrangement of the curriculum in 2006 and 2007. The DÖGM revised the curriculum of the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality for secondary schools in 2006 and for primary schools in 2007 (ERG, 2011). By these reforms in the curriculum, the DÖGM aimed to bring a more objective, pluralistic and critical perspective in the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality (Kaymakcan, 2007). To put it differently, the DÖGM attempted to eliminate the Sunni-based content of the course, and to make it equally distant to all religions and beliefs. On the other hand, it was argued that the theological approach was still prevalent in the content of the course, and should be replaced with a comparative approach to concentrate on the history of religions. Therefore, it was believed that the curriculum still maintained some elements prioritising one religion over the others (Gözaydın, 2009).

Eventually, Alevi citizens continued to bring the issue to the court on the grounds that the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality do not respect and recognise the Alevi belief (ERG, 2010). The parents of Alevi children claimed that the programme and the textbooks of the course conflict with their own religious beliefs and practices, and asked the court to exempt their children from the ‘compulsory’ courses on religious culture and morality (ibid.). In order to acquire the right to be exempted from the courses, they appealed first to the administrative courts, second to the regional courts, and finally to the State Council (ERG, 2011). In some of the cases, the court decided that the family should be granted the right to have their child to be exempted from the course on the grounds that the curriculum does not accord the goal of the Article 24 of the constitution and does not respect the objectivity and plurality in the courses on religious culture and morality (ibid.). In contrast, some other courts decided that the curriculum revised in 2006 and 2007 does not violate human rights, uses a language beyond particular religions, and provides sufficient room for Alevi belief (ibid.).

### **Winning Ground in the European Court of Human Rights**

One of the court cases, which became decisive on the drift towards policies and initiatives for a change in the national discourse to accommodate the Alevi belief in compulsory REC, is the case of *Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey*. In this case, the Alevi citizens brought their objections to the compulsory religious education to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 2009. The ECtHR found the claims of the Alevi citizens rightful since mandatory religion education was considered to be in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Kaya, 2009). The ruling in the ECtHR urged that Turkey should come into conformity with Article 2 of Protocol No. 1, which covers the right to education (ibid.). It should be underlined that two of the judgements made by the court arduously required the national discourse on the non-acceptance and *intolerance* towards Alevi students in school life to be changed immediately. First, the subjection of all children to compulsory courses on religious culture and morality clash with principle of secularism and the right to education (Akbulut and Usal, 2008). Therefore, the course on ‘Religious culture and morality’, cannot be made compulsory if it does not teach different religious beliefs and practices. Second, the curriculum of the course is not objective, critical and pluralistic since it does not respect religious and philosophical conviction of the parents as it was claimed (ibid.). In accordance with the judgements of the ECtHR, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) revealed that “if the course indeed covered different religious cultures, there should be no reason to make it compulsory for



Muslim children alone; conversely, if it was essentially designed to teach the Sunni Islam, it should not be compulsory in order to preserve children's and parents' religious freedom" (ECRI, 2011: 27).

While the AKP government employed policies to manage ethno-cultural and religious diversity through the EU reforms in the first half of the last decade,<sup>10</sup> the claims and objections of Alevi citizens with regard to the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality were aggravated, and the number of court cases increased at both domestic and international courts in the late 2000s. Therefore, both the external factors involving the EU accession process, along with the ECtHR's decision, and the internal dynamics framed by the rising claims to freedom of faith brought about a stimulus for a remarkable shift from the national discourse of non-acceptance and *intolerance* towards religious differences of Alevis to the acceptance of the Alevi claims on the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality.

### **Diversification of Alevi Claims**

The government's initiative for the revision of the curriculum to include the Alevi belief and practices was regarded by some Alevi groups as a change in the dominant Sunni-Muslim discourse and as a new practice of tolerating religious differences of Alevis. In order to respond to the claims of the Alevi citizens, who invoked their arguments in the courts at different levels, the government initiated the Alevi workshop, and decided to revise the curriculum with an objective, critical and pluralistic perspective. Those Alevi groups such as the Cem Foundation favouring the government's initiative raised their expectations for the weakening of the Sunni dominance in public life, so that it could be easier to incorporate the Alevi-Bektashi claims into the established structure of education through the existing instruction on religious culture and morality. These groups were highly encouraged to expect some degree of *tolerance* and cultural integration in the courses on religious culture and morality as the government claimed that the revised course was to deploy an all-encompassing language, and to teach Alevi belief and practices.

*The AKP government achieved something, which nobody could achieve before. It has managed to include the Alevi belief in textbooks of the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality. The Alevi belief is referred to in different pages of the textbooks. The steps taken by the AKP government are very important. Ten years later, a child who finishes the high school would be familiar with the Alevi's existence and identity. The Alevi culture will become more visible, heard of and familiar to the others. What is more important than the feelings of the Alevi children is that the Sunni children would be familiar with the Alevi culture, and would be able to perceive it without any prejudice (a top level figure in the Federation of Alevi Associations).*

One of our main research questions was whether the AKP's Alevi initiative could be regarded as an approach to cultivate *tolerance* vis-a-vis the Alevi community and their different cultural practices in the society as well as in school life. In the interviews conducted we found out that some Alevi groups and leaders evaluated this initiative as a serious attempt to tolerate Alevi children, and raise social awareness towards different cultural practices of Alevis in schools. Furthermore, the proposal of the government to include Alevi belief and practices into the content of the compulsory religion course was interpreted by some Alevi representatives as an indicator of the toleration of the Alevi existence and participation in the school life. These groups identify themselves within Islam, and therefore, consider the initiative as a genuine attempt of the Sunni-based state to accept and to tolerate the cultural differences of Alevis.

In this sense, we can mark out the discourse of '*tolerance*' inscribed in the viewpoints of the respective Alevi groups narrating that there is a relationship of toleration between the political elite

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<sup>10</sup> For more information, see the *ACCEPT PLURALISM First Report of Turkey*, "Tolerance and Cultural Diversity Discourses in Turkey," <http://www.eui.eu/Projects/ACCEPT/Documents/Research/wp1/ACCEPTPLURALISMWP1BackgroundreportTurkey.pdf>

and these groups based on the accommodation of cultural differences of Alevis. In this relationship of toleration, the tolerator (Sunni-based government) desires to remedy the grievances of Alevis resulting from the ‘centuries-old oppression’ and to show their willingness to embrace Alevis. The tolerated (proponent Alevi groups) intends to ‘transcend the adverse effects of exclusion and assimilation’ and to ‘be involved in a process of negotiation’ for cultural integration.

The arguments of the proponent Alevi groups and the relationship between the government and these groups can be interpreted in a conceptual structure of toleration. Within this structure, the reasons for acceptance and objection are reconsidered and articulated, and the reasons for acceptance balance out the reasons for rejection by both parties (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011). “...Acceptance is sufficient for non-interference without invalidating the reasons for objection... The forbearance of toleration is motivated by reasons that override *but do not cancel out reasons for rejection*” (ibid.:10, emphasis by the authors). In this respect, toleration becomes relational in the sense that both majority and minority groups reciprocally prioritise the reasons for *acceptance*, but do not remove the reasons for *objection*. Accordingly, the AKP government appropriates the reasons for the acceptance that are identified as alleviation of the repression imposed upon Alevis, and the allowance of the practice of ‘individual Alevi belief’ in school life.

The specific discourse of tolerance that was implicitly referred to in this relationship of toleration is the ‘allowance conception of toleration’. However, the government preserved the reasons for objection that are articulated as the refusal to recognise a legal status for *cemeevi* (Alevi communion houses), and to secure the right to practice religion for Alevis as a ‘collective and public practice’. These groups want to have a course on the history of religions embedded in the formal system of education, in which Alevi belief would be taught under the banner of Islam together with the Sunni belief. In addition, they also adhere to the proposition of having an elective religion course on teaching Alevi belief and practice in more detail. In this regard, what the supportive Alevi groups argue for is not only *acceptance*, but also *respect*.

In order to understand the reasons behind the dominant discourse on the non-acceptance of, and *intolerance* to, Alevi claims on religious rights and freedoms, particularly in the primary and secondary education, one should have an insightful analysis of the arguments made by the government. Initially, the government justifies its policies and practices towards Alevis’ ‘intolerable and unacceptable’ demands on the religious rights in compulsory courses on religious culture and morality arguing that some Alevis are inclined to produce a social and political conflict through their request for the abolition of the ‘compulsory’ courses on religious culture and morality (Final Report, 2011). This point of view of the government can be classified as a discourse of *communal intolerance* of perceived illiberal cultural practices, which are harmful for the society (Dobbernack and Modood, 2001).

The discourse embedded in this view is that of *intolerance* towards the Alevi groups opposing the government’s initiative in their claim for the abolition of religious culture and morality course, which presupposes to maintain integration of culturally and religiously diverse social groups. The government’s position regards the Alevi groups in question as intolerable on the basis that those groups are intolerant towards other social segments, and offense them in their pursuit for cultural integration. Furthermore, the government tends to justify its *intolerance* towards some of the Alevi claims as the Alevis ask the state to exempt their children from the compulsory courses, and aspire to remain outside the public policies regulating the religious affairs (ibid.). The government also substantiates its intolerant position against the anti-initiative Alevi groups with the assertion that there is an inevitable social need for an informative course for teaching religion for the sake of social cohesion (Kaymakcan, 2009).

Some Sunni intellectuals and theologians also support the revision and the widening of the curriculum to include the Alevi belief and practices as opposed to the assertions of secularists and some Alevi leaders that the religion course should be entirely lifted, or made optional. From this perspective, the

government's initiative is very positive and beneficial since it intends to secure social cohesion by bringing children from different faiths together and fostering the cultural interaction between them:

*Alevi are diversified. Alevi intellectuals are not engaged in a serious search for the Alevi roots, and the traditional Alevi groups do not have strong connections with the modern world. Alevi culture is so diversified and complicated that teaching Alevi belief and practice to students in courses and applying it to the everyday-life is a very challenging task. Therefore, the state undertakes the duty of adjusting to Alevi belief to the modern times, re-organising and rendering public visibility to it. Alevi culture does not have a formal and official chain of representatives which the state can correspond to. Nor does it have a formal cadre for clergy. Therefore, the state has to think in the name of Alevi families as well (the Moderator of the Alevi Workshops and the coordinator for the Centre of Strategy Development at the Directorate of Religious Affairs, DİB)*

Similarly, a Sunni origin Secondary school teacher teaching courses on religious culture and morality also underlines the need for a compulsory courses on religious culture and morality with reference to the cohesive nature of such a course:

*Generally, I believe that there should be a compulsory religion course entitled 'Education on Religious culture and morality', because religion is a sociological phenomenon, whether it involves pious people or non-believers. A course on different religious cultures contributes to the foundation of social peace in our country and peace in the world. If this course is not taught in schools, people who do not know each other can become enemies. This course should teach about various religious cultures as the name suggests, and it should not promote only Sunni Islam. The curriculum of this course should be revised, and Sunni and Alevi children should be able to receive objective information about each other in a way that could lead to the strengthening of social cohesion in the coming years (a teacher of the course 'Religious culture and morality').*

Drawing upon the viewpoints raised by these interlocutors, one could argue that the Alevi groups and Sunni intellectuals who are in favour of the initiative refer to a discourse of *acceptance* vis-a-vis Alevi in the sense that they retaliate Alevi's grievances, encourage their participation, and stimulate cultural integration through 'pluralistic' version of the course. Claiming that "the state thinking on behalf of the Alevi", the moderator of the Alevi Workshops places an emphasis on a specific discourse of *acceptance* that is founded on the political will of the government to respond to the needs of some Alevi citizens and to integrate diffused, informal and personal networks of Alevi into the majority society. Hence, Alevi parents and their children are granted an opportunity for social and cultural integration into the modern Turkish society by means of *acceptance* in school life, although Alevi are not accommodated into a truly pluralistic environment of education where they can interact with students of other religions on the basis of their own free will.

However, from the perspective of the Alevi groups such as Hacı Bektas Veli Anadolu Kültür Derneği opposed to the Alevi initiative of the AKP, the government's policies to reinvigorate the compulsory religious culture and morality course through its revision and the accommodation of Alevi belief into the curriculum is not a genuine attempt to stimulate the acceptance of, or *tolerance* towards, the Alevi and Alevi belief. The resistant and dissident attitude of these groups mainly rests upon the argument that the political elite, in line with the republican discourse, aims to interfere with religion, and to control it through the Islamisation of the public sphere. Thus, these groups assume that the government attempts to assimilate Alevi into the Sunni social and cultural order by containing Alevi belief and practice (Final Report, 2011). In this sense, the government initiative merely reproduces the dominance of Sunni Islam and the assimilation of Alevi by revitalizing Sunni Islam in public life and incorporating Alevi belief into the official curriculum (ibid.). Hence, these groups desire to abstain from REC, and also assert that the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality should be abolished to ensure that neither the state nor the government intervenes in religion as far as the laicist character of the state is concerned.

Drawing upon the arguments and the critiques of the opponent Alevi groups, we analyse that the embedded discourse here is that of *intolerance* that is attributed to the approach of the government towards Alevi in its claim to promote the teaching of Alevi belief and to remove the repressive and discriminative practices. According to the interpretation of these oppositional groups, the government actually implies a discourse of *intolerance* towards Alevi since it does not secure the ‘non-interference principle of liberal toleration’ (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011). Although this initiative is alleged to be a practice of interference with the religious instruction in order to assure limited cultural rights to practice Alevi belief, it can still be regarded as an act of interference on the grounds that the government is involved in religious affairs and teaching of a particular religious culture in a prescribed structure of education. In the AKP’s approach towards Alevi, the tolerated minority group does only remain ‘subject to interference’ (ibid.), but also the relationship between the tolerator and the tolerated is of ‘domination and subordination’ (ibid.). In this case, the tolerator, the dominant Sunni elite still holds the power to constrain the teaching of Alevi belief and to impose Sunni Islam. The tolerated, Alevi groups, are, on the other hand, still subordinated because the religion course is still compulsory and its pluralistic nature still needs to be secured.

### **Incomplete discourses of respect and recognition: unfair conditions of cultural integration**

Considering the potential of attaining respect and recognition towards Alevi identity and belief through the government’s initiative on the revision of the compulsory REC, one should also raise the question whether the inclusion of Alevi belief in the content makes a substantial difference for Alevi in terms of enhancing their self-respect and self-esteem. In order to be able to talk about an institutional change driven by the government, which aims to break apart the prejudices and to eradicate stigmatisation and discrimination against the Alevi, the revision of the courses on religious culture and morality is supposed to assure respecting and recognizing Alevi differences in and out of school life. Toleration as respect and recognition considerably differs from the traditional liberal conception of toleration (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011). Whereas liberal toleration is confined to a legal and institutional change led by the intervention of the state or political elite, and toleration as respect and recognition requires a more complicated set of social and attitudinal changes (ibid.). Toleration as recognition goes beyond the minimalistic principle of liberal *tolerance* defined as non-interference, and opens up a space where ethno-religious minorities could ask for public recognition (ibid.). In what follows, we will scrutinize the discourses of various individual actors regarding the role of the AKP’s initiative to change the dominant perceptions about the Alevi.

The field research reveals that for some Alevi groups, who are opposed to the compulsory courses and to the revision of the curriculum as well as to the additional content about the Alevi belief inserted in the textbooks. It is raised by some critical voices among the Alevi that the selected topics to teach Alevi belief and practices do not truly reflect the very essence of the Alevi culture, which is very syncretic and heterodox combining pre-Islamic, shamanist, sufist, pantheist, and even Christian elements:

*If we investigate the textbooks from the fourth grade to the ninth grade, we do not see anything related to the Alevi. For example, as for the Pilgrim Hacı Bektaş Veli [a 13<sup>th</sup> century Alevi saint], the book suggests that he used to fast, and became a pilgrim because he fulfilled the commitment of pilgrimage. However, there is no evidence to show that he committed pilgrimage. For this reason, we certainly think that the curriculum has nothing in relation to the Alevi belief as the Alevi experience it... Alevi culture consists of features, which are inherited from the pre-Islamic era. It also contains elements deriving from the natural life (an executive member of the Hacı Bektas Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation).*

Moreover, the opponents of the initiative criticised the attempt to include Alevi belief in the curriculum and pointed out to the constraints of teaching Alevi belief in relation to the complex, mystic and diversified character of the Alevi culture. It should be acknowledged that through centuries, Alevi belief evolved as an oral tradition and has become highly syncretic and eclectic (Subaşı, 2009).

*It should be questioned which variation of the Alevi belief would be taught in the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality. There is a notion in Alevi belief implying that the pathway of Alevis is the same but leading through that pathway differs widely in tradition (Yol bir, sürek binbir: Destination is the same, paths differ). Which one of these variations will be inserted in the textbooks? Thus, the inclusion of Alevi belief will solely trigger the conflict and distinctions between religions (an executive member of the Hubyar Sultan Association of Alevi Culture and an Alevi parent who won the case in the State Council with regard to the exemption of his child from the compulsory religion course).*

By the above mentioned propositions put forward in the interviews, the representatives of the opponent Alevi associations underline that this initiative leads to the reproduction of the nationalist discourse on the dominance and oneness of Sunni Islamic belief, and exacerbates the social conflict arising from the religious and cultural differences of the Alevis. According to these Alevi organisations, since the Alevi belief is supposed to be taught in the compulsory courses only as chapters explaining different Sufi interpretations within the mainstream Sunni Islam, this initiative may also be perceived as an attempt to teach Alevi belief as ‘an indispensable part of Islam’ in order to eliminate the contesting discourse that ‘Alevism deviates from the mainstream Islam’. Hence, these groups perceive the attempt of the AKP as a way of Islamizing Alevism.

In their account, the initiative is denounced because it does not prove to be a genuine and serious step to understand what Alevism is all about. For this reason, the government’s willingness to approach the Alevis and to remedy the mistakes of the past is not convincing and sincere. Should the government contain Alevi belief within a religious culture and morality course, which is primarily designed to teach Sunni Islam, the revision of the course is unlikely to drive and motivate a substantial change in majority-minority relations. These groups perceive the acts of the AKP as a practice of ‘toleration without respect and recognition’. They argue that the government should propose more egalitarian policies vis-a-vis Alevis in order to generate a respect ethics with regard to the Alevis.

Furthermore, these Alevi groups critical about the AKP’s initiative underline the point that some Alevis are completely against the idea of teaching Alevi belief in schools in the first place. They maintain that the teaching of Alevi belief should be left to the parents and families, and the state should not intervene in it at all as it is categorised as a private matter:

*Religious education should be left to the private sphere. My child can learn Alevi belief and practices from me or from the saints (Alevi dedes) from whom we have traditionally acquired our knowledge for years. Today, Alevi belief can also be learnt in Alevi communion houses (cemevi) in the cities. Alevi belief can be provided in the places of worship, which is an essential element of the Alevi civil society. If you incorporate religion in schools, religion may have a disuniting impact on students (an executive member of the Hubyar Sultan Association of Alevi Culture and an Alevi parent who won the case in the State Council with regard to the exemption of his child from the compulsory religion course).*

This point of view demonstrates that their demands and claims did not include the inclusion of Alevi belief into the curriculum. Rather, they asked the government to abolish the religious culture and morality course, or to be exempt from it on the grounds that it contradicts their own religious belief and practices. It should be also noticed that the first choice of the opponent Alevi groups is to eliminate compulsory courses on religious culture and morality. If that is not possible then they express their willingness to see the changes in the curricula of the compulsory courses, turning the course into a critical and pluralistic one in which Alevism is also accepted, recognized and respected as a distinct faith with its own peculiarities.

The fact that the demand for the termination of the religious culture and morality course was declined has a significant implication on the means and terms of the negotiations. It implies that the initiative for the inclusion of Alevi belief is determined by the upper hand of the government and without achieving an agreement between all the actors involved in the process. One should also take into

account the fact that the representatives of some of the opponent Alevi groups did not participate in the workshops other than the first one (Focus Group Discussion). As a result, the decision on the inclusion of Alevi belief was made with the dominant role of the government and did not rely on the agency of the Alevis in general. Therefore, those Alevi groups, who are critical to the AKP's initiative, argue that the government's tolerance vis-a-vis the Alevis is far from generating an ethics based on respect and recognition. In contrast to the discourse of 'tolerance' as suggested by the moderate Alevi groups adhering to the initiative, the dissident Alevi groups portray this initiative as an attempt to foster cultural integration, the terms of which are designed and identified by the government and the political elite without consulting the Alevis through a fair negotiation process.

*This policy perplexes the knowledge about Alevism and the attitude of our children towards the Alevi culture... In the meeting, which was held to present the revised curriculum to the Alevi representatives, I asked the Minister of State whether our children would still be compelled to learn Arabic verses, Islamic prayer and fasting. Inserting some sections about Alevi belief does not mean that it is taught properly (an executive member of the Hubyar Sultan Association of Alevi Culture and an Alevi parent who won the case in the State Council with regard to the exemption of his child from the compulsory religion course).*

In this respect, it is perceived that any effort to incorporate Alevi belief into the courses on religious culture and morality would lead to the cultural integration of Alevis in inegalitarian terms since this course is neither critical nor pluralistic. The prerequisite for the accommodation of Alevi belief into the religious culture and morality course is that the course should be taught from a comparative, critical and pluralistic perspective even if it is compulsory. Therefore, in the view of dissident Alevi groups, the *tolerance* towards religious differences of the Alevis in school life through the inclusion of Alevi belief in the curriculum may also lead to the reproduction of the dominance of Sunni Islam and of the prevailing indoctrination of its norms and practices.

On the other hand, the pro-initiative Alevi groups agreed on the point that the Alevi Workshops did not constitute an egalitarian and fair process of negotiations for the revision and the widening of the curriculum of the courses on religious culture and morality. As a top level figure of the Federation of the Alevi foundations argued in the Focus Group discussion that the Alevi groups supporting the workshops had some reservations on the revision of the programme: "At first, the government formed a small commission composed of fifteen Alevi-Bektashi saints (*dedes* and *babas*), intellectuals, academics, and Sunni theologians. However towards the end of the workshops, Alevi-Bektashi saints and Alevi representatives were expelled, and specialists of education, who were senior bureaucrats within the DÖGM were included." In other words, none of the Alevi representatives were included in the negotiations regarding the REC, and the commission formed for the preparation of the new curriculum extended to Alevi belief was closed to the deliberation and argumentation of Alevis. The Alevi representative from the Federation also raised the point that the content of the revisions is still not clear to them as they were only informed about the titles of the changes at the meeting organized by the government on 12 November 2010.

Drawing upon the arguments and positions of the proponent Alevi groups, we analysed that the perception about the government's initiative is related to a 'discourse of tolerance'. More precisely, the discourse of tolerance embedded in the toleration of the government towards the Alevi groups can be identified as 'the allowance of conception of toleration' since the government took a friendly approach to remedy the previous repressive policies caused by the Sunni dominance, and also 'allowed' Alevis to practice or teach their individual beliefs in school life. On the other hand, the view of the *proponent* Alevi groups address at the discourse of tolerance in search of acceptance of their cultural differences in the public space. In particular, the discourse of *tolerance* they inscribe in their arguments also points to their desire for cultural integration in school life through the revision of compulsory courses on religious culture and morality.

In contrast, the *opponent* Alevi groups are likely to perceive the AKP's initiative as a discourse of 'toleration without respect and recognition'. They put forward two main reasons for this perception.

First, they assert that the initiative is not a genuine attempt to understand Alevi belief as a unique and distinct identity with its peculiar aspects outside Islam. Second, they see all the issues related to the practice of Alevi belief as a private matter. Hence, they demand the abolition of the courses on religious culture and morality. If it cannot be abolished they ask for exemption, and they protest against the inclusion of Alevi belief in the courses on religious culture and morality. In order to avoid cultural integration/assimilation reproducing the Sunni dominance and to be in favour of an initiative to accord more 'egalitarian and substantive respect conception', this course should be thoroughly transformed into a critical, objective and pluralistic course.

Against this background, we draw the conclusion that the government's initiative could not achieve to accommodate the cultural diversity of Alevis in the field of education since the divergent Alevi groups position themselves at the two poles of the spectrum ranging from cultural integration to cultural segregation. Thus, we argue that the only possible solution, which responds to the demands of the disparate Alevi groups, is that the government gives priority to the teaching of a course based on the history and sociology of religions from an academic and comparative perspective; and that the teaching of Alevi belief should be left to the private sphere.

The analysis presented here about the ways in which various Alevi groups perceive the Alevi initiative of the AKP government in general opens the way to consider that not only the final outcome, or the specific policy measure, is important, but also the way it is implemented. Thus although including elements of the Alevi tradition in the textbook is an act of acceptance, the way this was negotiated in due course and the textbook change designed without the actual voice of the minority points to a *minimal tolerance approach* and paying lip service only to *acceptance*. This actually refers to the difference between toleration and tolerance. Toleration is the activity of enduring, while tolerance is the virtue (attitude) itself (Cohen, 2004: 77). This study reveals that the Turkish government shows *toleration* towards Alevis even if the salutation adopted is about acceptance, but not about respect though. But then the question is if toleration is enough on the part of the government without showing any sign of tolerance, recognition and respect.

To recapitulate, it seems that what the Turkish government did with regard to the Alevi claims on the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality is to *accept*, but not necessarily *respect*, the minority claims. In other words, the governmental action regarding is resolution of the Alevi claims is not just a question of *tolerance*. Because, tolerance would probably be to prepare the legal and moral ground in schools in order to allow them not to participate in the compulsory courses. On the other hand, acceptance is about modifying the content of these courses. However, the acceptance was done unilaterally without truly including all the relevant partners from within the Alevis. As this is the case practiced, the government has not performed well in fully respecting the particularities of the Alevi culture. What some of the Alevis actually claimed was full respect and recognition. This case reveals that while the actual solution proposed by the government points to acceptance, the way it was presented by the government and bureaucracy was an act of toleration, but not of tolerance. Because, tolerance is a virtue, which needs to be internalized by the tolerator as Cohen (2004) eloquently put it. In the case of the Alevi Initiative held by the AKP government, it seems that it was the transnationalization of the Alevi claims through the decision of the European Court of Human Rights (2009) as well as the electoral concerns which made the AKP act upon the resolution of the Alevi claims on various issues including the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality.

## 2. Case Study 2: The public policy and the political initiatives for the lift of the headscarf ban in universities

Between July and September 2010, the headscarf issue reached its climax when the head of the Higher Education Council (YÖK) claimed in his statement that the right to education is a fundamental human right secured by the Constitution and the European Convention of Human Rights. His public statement was sent to Istanbul University as a reply to the petition of complaint by a medical faculty student, who was compelled to leave the lecture room due to her headscarf.<sup>11</sup> The YÖK also enunciated that expelling a student from the classroom on the ground of his/her clothing is an act of committing a crime of discipline. The leaders of both the leading Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the main opposition party, CHP, reacted to this incident with rigorous attempt to resolve the headscarf issue. The main opposition party, CHP, made a claim on the resolution of this issue by initiating a change in the Laws of Higher Education with respect to the right to education, although this issue is bound with the principles of secularism and freedom of religion, and requires a constitutional and structural reform. Therefore, it was debated between the two political leaders to establish a commission with a joint initiative and to discuss the alternative strategies for an immediate solution to the headscarf issue.<sup>12</sup> However, from October 2010 on, the CHP, refrained from making an alliance with the governing party, AKP, in resolving the conflicts in the universities arising from the headscarf ban, and consequently, the initiative taken by the politicians reached a deadlock.<sup>13</sup>

Another landmark in tackling the problems in higher education caused by the headscarf ban is the abolishment of legal arrangements restricting the entry of veiled candidates to the Academic Personnel and Postgraduate Exam (ALES).<sup>14</sup> However, the State Council (*Danıştay*) made a decision in January 2011 to cancel the enforcement of the new legal arrangements, which made no restriction regarding the dress code in attending the aforementioned exam, on the ground that the new legal arrangements violate the decisions of the Constitutional Court and of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) on the headscarf issue.<sup>15</sup>

The public debates and the literature on the headscarf issue in Turkey predominantly focus on the Secularist-Islamist divide apparent since the founding years of the Republic. Social scientists in Turkey often take this political cleavage as the central unit of analysis in their work. Their main argument is that the dichotomy between secularism and Islamism is an unintended consequence of the Turkish modernisation. The reasons behind the emergence of the headscarf issue were mainly ascribed to the political project of the founding state elite in search of the establishment of a modern and secular state, and to the ethno-culturally and religiously motivated opposition of the centrifugal civil forces vis-a-vis the top-down simple modernization of the state elite (Giddens, 1994). In this view, the central themes embedded in the headscarf issue are the making of the Turkish nation-state, modernisation, secularisation, Islamisation, and identity-formation at national, communal and individual levels. However, in the search for a more insightful understanding of the headscarf issue, one should examine the nature and characteristics lying behind the modernisation project leading to the secularist -Islamist divide.

In order to understand the linkage between the secularist ideology and the headscarf issue within the framework of top-down simple modernisation process (Giddens, 1994), one should look at the

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<sup>11</sup> *Haberaktuel.com*, “Üniversitelerde Başörtüsü Özgürlüğü Belgesi”, <http://www.haberaktuel.com/universitelerde-basortusu-ozgurlugu-belgesi-haberi-312491.html>, accessed on 17.10.2010

<sup>12</sup> *ZamanOnline website*, . <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=1037458> , accessed on 16.10.2010

<sup>13</sup> *Internethaber website*, <http://www.internethaber.com/iste-chpdeki-basortu-savasinin-arka-yuzu-300769h.htm>, accessed on 10.02.2011

<sup>14</sup> *Memurlar.net website*, <http://www.memurlar.net/haber/179304>, accessed on 10.02.2011

<sup>15</sup> *Hurriyet Gundem website*, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/16799756.asp>, accessed on 10.02.2011



political context bringing about the headscarf issue. The emergence of secularist and Islamist divide is historically rooted in the political discourse of the founding elite of the Turkish Republic aiming at the establishment of a secular and homogenous nation. The Kemalist state elite established a modern and secular nation-state breaking up with the Ottoman state.<sup>16</sup> For this purpose, the Kemalist elite undertook structural reforms securing a new political order separating the state from religion. However, the structural and institutional changes were not sufficient to build a modern Turkish state, which would presumably constitute its relations with the nation through a secular social ethos and reason. In order to form the state-society relations resting upon rational-secular form of power and legitimacy, the Kemalist elite pursued a modernisation project to transform the Turkish nation affiliated with religious, traditional and ethnic identities into a modern and secular nation based on Turkishness (ibid.). The Kemalist elite adopted significant reforms for the cultural transformation involving the adoption of the dress code in 1924, which rejected the veiling of women and any kind of religious symbols, and introduced the modern-Western style of clothing (Göle, 1997). The political project of modernisation and the state-led policies for secularisation partly were not completely successful in transforming the traditional and religious society into a modern and secular one.

The state-centric secularisation and modernisation project imposed from above created a society with modern-Western-looking and rational-secular-thinking in the public space without dismantling the religious forms of social interactions. The strict separation of religion from the state as well as ‘the constitutional control of religious affairs by the state’ led to the generation of a laicist national ethos rather than a secular social ethos (Keyman, 2007). Following the French model of *laïcité*, the choice of the early Republicans on the integration of the principle of Laicism into the Turkish Constitution in 1937 indicates that the Kemalist elite was not preoccupied at all with the elimination of religion from public space. On the contrary, they affirmed the fact that Turkish society was religious in essence. The main rationale behind the principle of Laicism was not to wage a war against Islam, but to provide the people with the power to challenge the rising authority of the Islamic clergy since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Laicism derives from the French word *lai* (or *laïque*, in contemporary usage, lay people in English), meaning “of the people” as distinguished from “the clergy”. Hence, laicism underscores the distinction between lay members of a church and its clergy (Davison, 2003). In other words, as Davison (2003: 341) put it very well:

*“[Laicism] ‘rescued Islam’ as a matter of ‘belief’ and ‘conscience’ by institutionally supporting, financing, and promulgating a different version of Islam and its view of relation to power and social life. The separation of religion from its previous position of influence [in the Ottoman Empire] constituted a shift in Islam’s institutional and legitimation position, not its formal, full elimination.”*

In this sense, rather than antagonizing Islam, laicism simply means to empower the individual believers vis-a-vis the clergy. Furthermore, laicist ideology has also made it possible that the Kemalist elite politically and culturally instrumentalised Islam to unify the nation through the institutions of the Ministry of Education and the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*). The perception that Laicism (Laiklik in Turkish) was “antireligious secularism” ignores the regime’s religious policy, and fails to consider the existence of different versions of political Islam in Turkey, one of them enshrined in power until very recently and others outside it.

The terms laicism and secularism are often interchangeably used in Turkey. Both terms rather have different etymologies, institutional histories, and normative theoretical implications. Secularism

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<sup>16</sup> Referring to the writings of Ernest Gellner (1994) and Joseph S. Szyliowicz (1966), we assume that the main shortcoming of the Kemalist revolution was rather not to try hard to reach out to the rural population. Both civil and military bureaucracy established clientalist relations with the local elite in the periphery without an attempt to reach out to the rural people in general. This is why the elements of a modern state such as secular education, justice and security have not really been institutionalized in the periphery; instead the state made itself visible there through an alliance with the local, patriarchal and semi-feudal big landowners.

derives from the Latin *saeculum*, meaning generation or age, and originally meant “of the world” as opposed to “of the church”. Hence, the term “secular” differentiates between matters of religiosity and matters of the world. In this sense, secularization of a society simply refers to the “diminution of the social significance of religion” and “the growing tendency to do without religion” (Bruce and Wallis, 1994; Davison, 2003). A secular state then refers to a “religion-free” state - a kind of state that does not apparently comply with the modern Turkish state. Davison (2003: 344) draws attention to Laicism as an obstacle to secularization as it has so far made the state to instrumentalise religion as a tool to control the masses.<sup>17</sup>

Against this background, in this study it is argued that Turkish laicism employs religious semantics in a way that actually constitutes impediments before the secularization of the state and society. This is why the debates about the headscarf issue have so far been held on a very ideological ground, in which the so-called Laicists and Islamists have been misrepresented as if they are in a constant binary opposition. To begin with, we seek to understand how and why the dominant national discourses and practices on the headscarf issue in higher education were produced and reproduced. In order to do that one should look at the political context of the 1980s and 1990s, a period in which strict laicist policies were implemented.

Considering the fragility of social cohesion and national unity in the 1970s, the military government undertook structural changes for the enhancement of the state’s role in public realm in order to demobilise and depoliticise the civil society (Özbudun, 2000; Arat, 2005). A crucial policy of the military government for strengthening the state’s role in public realm is the establishment of the Higher Education Council aiming at the control over the politicisation of thoughts and debates motivating the left wing and right wing groups in universities, and at the eradication of the conflicts arising between them (Saktanber and Çorbacioğlu, 2008). In parallel with the suppression of the political orientations of both right and left wing groups, the Council was established to control the politicisation of cultural and religious symbols in universities. For this purpose, the Council took some measures restricting the way students dressed up in higher education institutions. In 1982, the YÖK banned wearing headscarf and having beard as they were perceived to be the symbols of religious and political identities manifested by Islamist as well as leftist and extreme-right wing students (ibid). It is also essential to note that in the same year, a general regulation was made with regard to the dress code of the personnel employed by the public institutions (Cindoğlu, 2010). According to this regulation, wearing a headscarf for the employees working in public institutions was banned.

### History of Headscarf Issue

Between 1984 and 1987, the government run by the Motherland Party (ANAP) pursued a practice of *tolerance* towards religious differences as a way of self-presentation, and the dress code was loosened up to include wearing a special headscarf, so-called modern *Turban* (Cindoğlu, 2010; Saktanber and Çorbacioğlu, 2008). Nevertheless, the practice of the ANAP government, which put a claim on the modernity of the turban versus the traditionality of the headscarf, does not considerably differ from the discourse of the state elite on the national identity intertwined with the Islamic aspects of the Turkish society. In order to restore the social cohesion, the military initiated a political project for re-structuring the national unity by incorporating conservative and Islamist sources of culture into the modern and homogenous Turkish national identity (Cizre, 1996: 245-246). In this respect, the social forces reflecting the new Turkish identity could have Islamic features as long as they did not clash with the secular and modern national identity (ibid.). Thus, female university students with religious convictions and practices could be tolerated as long as they did not challenge the modern and secular public realm of the Turkish society. Hence, it is pointed out that the headscarf issue could be tolerated in line with the political discourse of integrating the Islamist social forces into the regime, although the

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<sup>17</sup> Niyazi Berkes is one of those Turkish scholars who used the term secularism in its correct form. In his book *Secularism in Turkey* (1978), Berkes defines secularism as an ideology used to differentiate the matters of this world and of the other world.

management of this issue could never transcend the framing of the dominant state discourse of strict laicism.

Between 1987 and 1997, the laws regulating the headscarf ban in universities were changed. In 1987, the president of the republic, Kenan Evren, the former Chief of Staff, who initiated the 1980 military coup, intervened in the issue, and the Higher Education Council annulled the article about the freedom of wearing the 'modern turban' (Arat, 2005). Yet in 1991, relying on the liberal political context, the political elite made an attempt to change the law, and the supplementary article 17 of the Higher Education Law recognising the freedom of choice for dress code in higher education institutions was ratified (CEDAW, 2010). Thus, in the early 1990s, discriminative policies and practices against students wearing a headscarf in universities were not often practiced (ibid.).

Considering the shifts in the national discourse on the headscarf issue in universities in a specific period, the political context in the aftermath of the 28 February 1997 semi-military coup brought about a turning point in the sense that the state elite and the republican -secular segments of the society firmly agreed on the marginalisation of the headscarf issue, which was regarded as intolerable and unacceptable. The reasons for the marginalisation of the headscarf issue lie in the association of wearing a headscarf with the politicisation of religious symbols in parallel with the rise of political Islam. It should be underlined that in 1987, the pro-Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*, RP) established the ladies' commissions<sup>18</sup> to replace women's branches, which were outlawed by the military government under the 1982 Constitution in order to constrain the mobilisation of the political parties (Arat, 2005). The ladies' commissions provided a frame of social network for Islamist women, who could find a community to share their discontents about the modern urban life and to struggle with the deprived neighbourhoods at the outskirts of the big cities (ibid.).

On the other hand, it should also be noticed that the ladies' commissions provided educated and qualified young women wearing headscarf with an opportunity to participate in the reshaping of the public space (Arat, 2005; White, 2002). In 1991 election campaigns, the party leaders attempted to transform the party from a traditionalist religious party into a mass party by changing its public image (Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu, 2008). In order to create a new image, the party used seven women to give the impression to the public that the Welfare Party was inclusive for everybody including the women (ibid.). One of these women was a young headscarfed woman, who could not complete her university education due to the headscarf ban. Since a young headscarfed woman participated in a political party's election campaign and publicly articulated her aspirations to challenge the republican and secular regime, her wearing a headscarf was perceived by the public as an attempt to politically instrumentalise a religious symbol and as an ideological threat to the republican regime. Frustrated by the policies and practices of the Welfare party government in coalition with the liberal-conservative True Path Party (DYP) and the growing Islamist social movement, the military intervened in politics to bring an end to the rise of political Islam seen as a rigorous threat to modern and secular Turkey.

On 28 February 1997, the National Security Council (MGK) gave an ultimatum to the Welfare-True Path coalition government to refrain from the Islamist politics, and this warning led to the collapse of the coalition government (Cizre and Çınar, 2003). Furthermore, the MGK meeting on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February gave rise to a new period, in which the MGK took significant measures to exclude the conservative and religious individual citizens from political, social and economic spheres of life and to restore the 'laicist' regime (ibid.). In this period, the MGK held meeting with the Higher Education Council and the university presidents/chancellors, and warned them not to allow the female students with a headscarf to get into campus (CEDAW, 2010). Hence, it should be stated that the measure of the MGK in the aftermath of the 28 February coup opened up a new period, known as 28th February

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<sup>18</sup> The commissions formed to mobilise women by Welfare Party in 1987 were deliberately given the name, Ladies' Commission instead of Women's Branch since the Political Parties Law, which was put in force after the 1980 coup, outlawed women's branches.

Process, in which the concept ‘public sphere’ was dramatically constrained and the state-centric secularism became restrictive towards religious activities with fundamentalist tone.

In 2005, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) made a decision on the headscarf case between a Turkish citizen, Leyla Sahin, and Turkey. In this case, the conflict between Şahin wearing a headscarf in a Turkish university and the Turkish state was discussed in relation to both the right to publicly express religious belief and the right to education. Drawing on the principle of fundamental rights, the Court decided that the interference of the Turkish state with Şahin’s education was rightful and legal, since the state intended to protect the right of others to education and to maintain public order (Kaya, 2009; and Saktanber and Çorbacıoğlu, 2008). It was a monumental development that the Grand Chamber of the ECHR agreed to hear Şahin’s case at all, since two previous applications concerning the Turkish headscarf had been ruled inadmissible. In Şahin’s case, however, the outcome was a temporary defeat for headscarf supporters. The court ruled that there had been no violation of Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (freedom of thought, conscience and religion); Article 10 (freedom of expression); Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) and Article 2, Protocol No. 1 (right to education). In short, the Grand Chamber concluded that in the case of the headscarf, the interference with fundamental rights might be necessary to protect the rights and freedoms of others and maintain public order. While the Chamber recognised that the ban interfered with Şahin’s right to publicly manifest her religion, it stated that the ban was acceptable if it was imposed to protect the rights of third parties, to preserve public order, and to safeguard the principles of secularism and equality in Turkey.

Three years after the Sahin vs. Turkey case, in 2008, the JDP government in cooperation with the right-wing party MHP (Nationalist Action Party) proposed a constitutional amendment concerning the ban on wearing headscarf in public places with the expectation that this amendment would lift the ban in universities (Kaya, 2009). Following the constitutional amendments, the newly elected head of the Higher Education Council (YÖK), Yusuf Ziya Özcan, made an announcement to the universities and stated that according to the constitutional change, the ban on wearing a headscarf in the Turkish universities was lifted. However, the Court ultimately repudiated the decisions regarding the lift of the ban with the consideration of the secularist main opposition party CHP’s objection to the amendment.

Since July 2010, the Higher Education Council released a public statement to avow its decision that the right to education is a fundamental right secured by the Constitution and the European Convention of Human Rights, and that enrolling a university for a student with headscarf should be considered as a right to education. However, some public universities still persist on the suspension of the students with headscarf before their entry to the university campus or buildings, although most of the Turkish universities have recently abandoned the exercise of the headscarf ban on campuses. Furthermore, the headscarf issue is not sufficiently debated with respect to secularism, freedom of faith, individual rights, and freedom of self-identification in the public sphere. Another important point is that all the public policies and political initiatives regarding the solution of the so-called headscarf problem are confined to the lift of the headscarf ban in universities. So far no single serious attempt or initiative has been directed towards the lift of the ban in public institutions. Therefore, this work argues that the headscarf issue in universities remains as a challenge to the national discourses on modern and secular Turkey, and has to be resolved with an address to the re-configuration of the concept of ‘public sphere’ where religious and cultural differences of individuals are tolerated and accepted. This work also claims that it will be highly difficult to resolve the headscarf issue without dismantling the perception of the laicist groups about the headscarfed women posing a societal challenge is resolve.

### **Reproduction of Binary Oppositions between Islamism and Secularism**

The state-centric laicism and the restriction of the public sphere are the central themes for our research, which has enabled us to understand why the headscarf issue has become so intolerable and unacceptable in a diverse society. One of the most fundamental questions of our research is to find out what lies behind the emergence of the headscarf issue. What is repeatedly narrated by the interlocutors during the field research is that the strict secularism of the state and the barriers before the freedom of

religion erected by the state lead to the emergence of the headscarf issue. All the interlocutors stated that the state's strict form of laicism is not equally distant to all religions, and aims to control religion while it separates state affairs from religious affairs:

*Similar to the case in France, the Turkish state does not conceive secularism as the delineation of religion from politics but also it replaces the religion with another form of belief. Because religion is a source of power, the state aspires to use that power in order to control its citizens. If you are a woman, who is well-educated, lives in a city and has a middle or upper socio-economic status, the state wishes you to be a modern woman and dress in the 'modern and Western' style. If you do not comply with the requirements of the state, then you are compelled to concede your right to education (a former executive member of the Association of Women's Rights and Struggle Against Discrimination, AKDER, and a lawyer on women's rights)*

However, what is more important in our findings is that the most crucial impact of strict secularism in Turkey is that it polarises and diffuses the society between secularists, who conform with the state's principles and interests, and Islamists, who challenge the state and the regime with their social and individual preferences. In fact, we find out that the state-centric process of secularisation divides the society between citizens and non-citizens. Since the state discourse of laicism imposed on the individuals, the individuals have internalized the state's control over religious claims of individuals and groups. It seems that top-down simple modernization run by the state has created believers of Laicism on the one hand, and believers of Islam on the other.

Public sphere is the main instrument of the state elite to impose the state-centric secularisation. In the aftermath of the 28th February, the most influential strategy that the state elite adopted to consolidate the state-led laicism and social groups was the designation of the public sphere by the ban on headscarf in universities. Since the self-presentation using a religious symbol in the public sphere contradicts the principle of laicism, wearing a headscarf in universities was stigmatised as an act of dissidence against the modern and secular state. Public sphere has so far been defined as the sphere of the state in Turkey; those who insisted on entering these places with a headscarf were not allowed to do so, and they were reduced to the second class citizens:

*The public sphere in Turkey is perceived as a space belonging to the state. Throughout the republican history, we have called hospital, university and school 'the public sphere'. However, public sphere has to be a common space of negotiation for different groups and actors coming from the civil society. As Habermas put it very well, the language of the public sphere should be rational rather than ideological. If the language of the public sphere is ideological, the public sphere turns to be hierarchical (Professor of Theology in a public university in Istanbul).*

A similar line of thinking was displayed by another scholar teaching in a foundation university, underlining the fact that the public space is constructed in Turkey as a neutral and abstract category. She claims that the public space should be an unprescribed, democratic and inclusive space open to all the individuals:

*The public sphere in Turkey is designed as an abstract space to which you enter after you are refined from all your differences and identities. However, the individual carries his/her baggage of identity with while entering the public sphere. In fact, public sphere is a space where all individuals can produce policies by bringing all their differences in (Professor of Sociology in a foundation university in Istanbul).*

In what follows, we shall scrutinize the discourses on *tolerance* at the societal level towards headscarf as a form of self-presentation and self-identification in the public sphere. We shall also explore the discourses on the recent public policies and political initiatives brought up for the solution to the headscarf issue.

The question at the level of social *tolerance* towards the headscarf issue is dramatically important in understanding whether individuals and social groups approach the headscarf conflict between secularists and Islamists with respect to *tolerance* and acceptance. The majority of the interlocutors replied to the question in a positive way. Aggregating the replies to this question, the most obvious finding we achieved is that at societal level, there is no such problem as *intolerance* and non-acceptance between veiled and unveiled women in terms of self-presentation, peaceful co-existence, and social-cultural interaction in everyday life. According to a research on the social conflict stemming from the headscarf issue, 71.1 percent of the research sample supported the freedom for wearing a headscarf in universities (Toprak and Çarkoğlu, 2006). In other words, there is no social tendency and attitude indicating the non-acceptance and *intolerance* towards the existence and involvement of headscarfed women in everyday life including the universities. A member of the Humanitarian Relief Foundation refers to the potential of the Turkish society to resolve those ossified problems such as the headscarf issue:

*Turkish society could be a model for the European societies in terms of the promotion of cultural interaction between different religions, sects, sufi communities, and ethnic groups. In recent years, the civil society organisations, academics, intellectuals and women rights' activists drew a remarkable attention to raising awareness for the incorporation and existence of headscarfed women in social life (a female executive member of the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, and of the Association of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People, MAZLUMDER).*

Similarly, some of the interlocutors brought forward that one could easily observe the cultural interaction between veiled women and unveiled women among the lower and middle classes of the society. On the other hand, they further argued that we cannot talk of the same interaction at the higher levels of the society. One of our interlocutors addressed at the members of the military bureaucracy, judicial bureaucracy and the high-ranking public administration who have had a vested interest in the reproduction of the state-centric laicist discourse in their everyday life, which prevents them from interacting with the so-called lower and marginalised segments of the society:

*As the level of education and socio-economic status rises, the cultural interaction between different sectors of the society declines. For those people who attain a higher level of socio-economic status, the space of everyday life diverts from that of people with a lower socio-economic status. As a consequence, individuals begin to approach and treat each other with perceptions and judgements they create in their own life world (Professor of Theology in a public university in Istanbul).*

We claim that the problem which is deeply embedded in these contesting discursive positions is the lack of awareness about freedom of religion in public sphere rather than the degree of tolerance among different segments of the society. The definition of the freedom of religion in public sphere is highly contested.

### ***Tolerance, Respect and Recognition***

This section deals with the ways in which the interlocutors propose to resolve the headscarf issue with reference to *tolerance*, recognition, or respect. The interlocutors we interviewed were asked what they think about the public statement sent by the Higher Education Council to Istanbul University in July 2010 underlining the right to education secured by the Constitution and the European Convention of Human Rights. We were also interested in inquiring the views of the interlocutors on the initiatives of the political parties vis-a-vis the public statement of the YÖK made in July 2010. Major political parties publicly pledged their claims on the resolution of the headscarf ban in universities by fortifying and enforcing the laws to reemphasize the legal respect/recognition for the right to education for everybody, and to eliminate the discrimination against headscarfed women in practice.

It was found out that most of the interlocutors perceive the political parties' initiatives and the policy document of YÖK as a commitment made by the political leaders and policymakers to solve the headscarf issue in universities. To corroborate this position, they stress that AKP is very much committed to solve the headscarf conflict with respect to the right to education. They believe that the constitutional amendment of 2008 is an indication of this determination. We assume that this argument evokes the discourse of 'toleration as an allowance concept' (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011) in a minimalist sense. The discourse of *tolerance* deployed here reveals that the public institutions in alliance with the ruling party see the grievances of headscarfed students, who have been deprived of the right to higher education. In this sense, the ruling elite and the political parties involved in the process accept that headscarf cannot be an impediment to the right to education of female students, and thus, they 'allow' these students to publicly present their religious symbols and clothes. In other words, they achieve the minimalist principle of liberal *tolerance*, which is defined as 'the absence of interference' (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011). Thus, we argue that the positions displayed in the interviews with regard to the perceptions about the public policy and political initiatives to lift the ban on headscarf, address at the allowance conception of toleration expressed by the government to comply with 'the principle of non-interference' with regard to the right to education.

However, none of our interlocutors believed that the solution to this problem lies in the political will. They mostly stated that they do not believe that the political parties can resolve the problem. The common answer we received to the question was that they do not want the political parties to get involved in solving the headscarf issue:

*I can tell for all the political leaders that they do not grasp the essence of the issue. They consistently debate about the headscarf issue in the public space along the lines of appearance, symbols, images and signs, but not on the grounds of ethical and moral communication. Even if the headscarf ban is lifted in universities, the debate would go on. This time they would begin to debate whether they should allow the students to wear a headscarf in high schools or in primary schools or to veil in different ways in accordance with different sects of Islam. The political parties do not discuss the issue in terms of freedom of religion. I do not believe that issues related to religion are freely debated in Turkey today. The state should recognise a space where the public can freely discuss the headscarf issue on the grounds of ethics. (The former director of the Women's Activities at the Directorate of Religious Affairs, DİB and a delegate of the Democratic Party)*

So what she asks is respect for people. They should be respected and recognised in their capacity to solve this issue, and they should not be simply tolerated in the liberal sense by the state, which imposes rules banning (or not) the headscarf. Similarly, an MP from the Republican People's Party (CHP) has stated that the headscarf issue has become politicized. She claims that the issue could be resolved if only it is depoliticized:

*The politicians should not be involved in the headscarf issue and other issues concerning the clothing of women. The issue became so inflated because it has been overwhelmingly debated since the 1980s. In fact, this issue could have been eliminated in the 1980s if it had not been talked about so much. This issue can only be solved if we let it go on its own way (an MP from the Republican People's Party).*

It is worth noting that the arguments mentioned above underline that the public policy and the political initiatives to solve the headscarf issue in universities through legal and institutional changes are very limited and palliative. Furthermore, these solutions cannot eradicate the headscarf conflict with respect to freedom of belief. The arguments concerning the social attitude towards the public policy and the political initiatives also imply that there is a lack of the discourse of 'respect and recognition'. The 'respect/recognition conception of toleration' or 'toleration as public recognition' (Dobbernack and Modood, 2011) is not relevant here to account for the perception of our interlocutors about the public policies and initiatives. We argue that the initiatives for the lift of the ban in universities cannot be explained as a process of shift in the discourse from 'toleration as allowance' to 'toleration as public

recognition' since the stigmatisation and discrimination against headscarfed women still prevails although headscarf as a part of Islamic belief is no longer seen as a reason for objection to the right to education.

A headscarfed woman who is a graduate from a private university in 2005 stated that unless there is a permanent and fundamental solution to the issue, she does not believe in the initiatives taken by the political leaders:

*In Turkey, such attempts have been made in the political context of elections or specific favourable situations. However, what I demand is that a structural and radical solution should be brought not only to this issue but also to the other issues related to the freedom of religion. The headscarf issue is a problem of everybody, not only ours (a professional working as an export manager at a trading company).*

One of the most significant findings we drew from these interviews is that our interlocutors believe that as long as the political parties are involved in resolving the headscarf issue in general, this issue is bound to be hijacked by the debates and conflicts revolving around the ideology of laicism. As in the case of the closure case of the ruling party, AKP, in which the party was accused of violating the principle of laicism, every attempt of a political party would face the risk of contravening the state's constitutive elements, and thus, of being labelled as Islamists. Therefore, it seems to be more conceivable to claim that the political actors should refrain themselves from proposing legal and constitutional arrangements on their own to resolve the issue, rather they should contribute to the preparation of a convenient ground to open up a public debate around the idea of freedom of religion and diversity.

### Conclusion

We presented two case studies in order to illustrate some examples of public policies and political initiatives deployed for the accommodation of cultural diversity challenges in primary, secondary and higher education institutions with respect to *tolerance/acceptance* and/or *respect/recognition*. One of our cases was the public policy and political initiatives employed for the lift of the ban on headscarf in universities. The other case was the government's initiative for the widening of the curriculum of the compulsory religious culture and morality course to include Alevi belief and practices. It is revealed that neither of these two cases can be indicated as good practices of managing cultural and religious diversity in the field of education. *The public policy, or political initiatives, employed for the lift of the headscarf ban in universities was not widely supported and endorsed by the public, because neither the public policy nor the political initiatives were seen as a solution to the headscarf issue on the basis of respect/recognition. Likewise, the government's initiative for the extension of the curriculum of the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality to Alevi belief was not regarded as an attempt to dismantle the dominant discourse of Sunni Islam as well as the intolerance towards the Alevis in school life.* Hence, it has fallen short of changing the act of *intolerance* of the Sunni Muslims towards the Alevis.

Our research reveals that the government's initiative to include Alevi belief and practices in the curriculum of the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality may be a solution to the religious diversity challenges posed by the Alevis. There are two dominant groups among the Alevis who are supportive and opponent to the AKP's initiative. The proponent Alevi group highlights the willingness of the AKP to change the discourse of dominant Sunni Islam and their own claim for cultural integration in school life whereas the opponent Alevi groups do not find the initiative to be credible as they believe that that is far from generating a discourse based on 'toleration with respect and recognition'. They assert that the initiative is not a genuine attempt to understand Alevi belief as a unique and distinct identity with its peculiar aspects outside Islam. And, they see all the issues related to the practice of Alevi belief as a private matter. Hence, they opt for the abolition of the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality. If not they ask for exemption from the course.



Against this background, *we conclude that the course content should be based on the history and sociology of religions without promoting Sunni Islam.* We also conclude that the Alevi initiative of the AKP should not be regarded as a public policy, which effectively responds to the Alevi claims addressing at respect and recognition vis-a-vis Alevi identity in settling more rigorous problems/issues such as places of worship (*cemeevi*) for Alevi and the alleged legal status of Alevism within the Directorate of Religious Affairs. Accordingly, *we propose that the curriculum of the compulsory courses on religion and ethics should be changed, and concentrate on the history and sociology of religions.* Such a change could immediately create a cohesive society in which no group would be feeling threatened by the hegemonic discourse of Sunni-Islam. Furthermore, *the issue of education on Alevi belief should be discussed more in the public space with respect to the freedom of religion in general.* In order to pursue such an aim, *more funds and time should be allocated by the public policy makers at both local and national levels to the research and development regarding the preparation of more egalitarian, more inclusive, and more elaborate textbooks to make sure that social cohesion will be secured without offending anyone with regard to her/his religious, ethnic, and cultural convictions.*

Similarly, *we found out that the public policy and political initiatives implemented for the lift of the headscarf ban in universities can be considered by the public in general as a solution to the issue with respect to the right to education.* Drawing upon our analysis on the public debates and the findings of interviews, we conclude that there is a social consensus on toleration and acceptance vis-a-vis headscarfed women in higher education. The standpoints on the public policy and the political initiatives embody the discourse of ‘toleration as allowance’. In this standpoint, the discourse of ‘toleration as allowance’ means in the public opinion that the leading AKP is committed to accept headscarf as a part of the religious belief of headscarfed women, and allows them to be present with this religious symbol in universities and to obtain the right to education. Therefore, it is indicated that wearing a headscarf in universities can be tolerated as a way of self-presentation and self-identification. However, some other opinions were also stated by the interlocutors. Some blamed the AKP of not having made an attempt to lift the overall ban on headscarf in public institutions other than universities. *Considering the discourses of toleration and respect/recognition linked to freedom of religion, which was placed at the heart of headscarf issue, we conclude that there is an ambiguity about the definition of freedom of religion.* There needs to be further public discussion on the freedom of religion. *These kinds of discussions could eventually contribute to the generation of a public understanding, which perceives religious convictions as a matter of private domain.*

*The binary opposition between laicism and Islamism has also blocked the resolution of the headscarf issue, and framed the issue as a challenge against the security of the state.* So far, the attempts to discuss the issue with reference to the right to education, the right to the public space, the right to the city, and the right to equal pay to equal labour have failed. This ongoing binary opposition has also misled the politicians, scholars, journalists and community leaders to perceive both sides of the binary opposition as homogeneous entities. *Hence, this divide between the so-called laicists and Islamists should be uncovered by critical social scientists in order to reveal the fact that it is actually concealing subordination of headscarfed women by political parties, males and religious communities themselves.* *The educators should be aware of this dilemma while they teach in classroom in a way that tackles with the ethno-cultural and religious stereotypes, so that educators could be agents of social cohesion.*

In the Turkish debates on laicism there is little acknowledgment of the similarities between Alevi organizations and pious Sunni Muslim groups in regard of their opposition to the laicist regime, as well as in their demands for recognition of their practices. As Markus Dressler (2010) also put it very well this clearly has to do with the ways in which the knowledge regime of laicism juxtaposes the notions of modern and reactionary (*irticai*) religion as opposite poles in a binary opposition leaving little leeway for more complex and creative imaginations. *The research reveals that scientific elaboration of the problems in democratic platforms leads both Alevi and headscarfed women to agree that their problems spring from the fact that there is no freedom of religion in Turkey.* Hence, one should not underestimate the power of liminal spaces whereby Alevi and headscarfed women, or

Alevis and Sunnis, or Muslims and Christians, come together, as they have the potential be the fertile grounds of dialogue, respect, empathy, recognition and pluralism.

Furthermore, what is also remarkable in both cases is the fact that the decisions taken by the European Court of Human Rights about each case made a great impact on the domestic developments regarding Alevis' position vis-a-vis the compulsory courses on religious culture and morality, and the AKP's position vis-a-vis the Europeanization process of Turkey. *EU circles should be aware of the fact that Turkish domestic political affairs are highly shaped by the European judiciary circles.* One could also conclude that Turkey is going through a process in which both desecularization and militant secularism are simultaneously occurring in a way that reproduces binary oppositions resulting from the way Turkish modernity is experienced. *The collision of secular and desecularized ways of life seems to be the reflection of the social and political transformation experienced in the last two decades in the Turkish society.*

Eventually, one could conclude that laicist/religious divide has been so far ideologically manipulated by both pro-laicist and pro-Islamist political elite. The political obsession with religion, as displayed by laicism, or the political obsession with religion, as displayed by Islamism, tends to distract the masses from social and economic problems by turning them into a rhetorical debate about existential and societal fears. *One could clearly see that the theological and political debates around laicism and Islamism cannot be isolated from the socio-economic realities in which they are situated.* The rise of an Islamic bourgeoisie with roots in Anatolian culture, the re-Islamization of society and politics in everyday life through the debates on headscarf issue and Alevism, the emergence of consumerist lifestyles not only among the secular segments of the Turkish society, but also among the Islamists, and finally the weakening of the legitimacy of the Turkish military as the guardian of national unity and the laicist order are all very important aspects of the ways in which the Turkish society and politics have radically transformed in the last two decades.

Thus, one should certainly try to assess the social and political change in Turkey without falling into the trap essentializing the laicist-Islamist divide. *This paper has partly revealed that both laicist and Islamist discourses have so far been used by Turkish political elite as two different forms of governmentality (Foucault, 1979) in order to conceal social, economic and political issues prevalent in the society by means of institutions, procedures, analyses, debates, and reflections. The last but not the least, this study concludes that the policy makers should not only be limited with the use of the notion of tolerance (hosgörü) in settling the societal, cultural and religious conflicts. They should also give credit to the notions of respect, recognition, pluralism, equality and justice in order to create a cohesive society.*

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## **Annex I**

### **List of Interviews:**

(All interviews are tape recorded and transcribed, unless otherwise stated below)

### **The Revision of the Religious culture and morality Course to include the Alevi belief**

#### **2 Civil Society Leaders:**

**D. B.**, male, engineer, 50-55 years old, the president of the Federation of Alevi Foundations, Istanbul, February 2011

**K. A.**, male, 50-55 years old, the president of the Haci Bektas Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation, Istanbul, March 2011

#### **Policy Maker:**

**N. S.**, male, professor of sociology of religion, 50 years old, the Moderator of the Alevi Workshops and the coordinator for the Centre of Strategy Development at the Directorate of Religious Affairs, DİB, Ankara, March 2011

#### **Bureaucrat:**

**İ. A.**, male, professor of theology, 50 years old, the Directorate General of Religious Instruction (DÖGM) at the Ministry of National Education, Ankara, March 2011

#### **Parents of Alevi Students:**

**A. K.**, male, accounting and finance manager at private companies, 41 years old, the president of the Hubyar Sultan Association of Alevi Culture and an Alevi parent who won the case in the State Council with regard to the exemption of his child from the compulsory religion course, Istanbul, April 2011

**D. Ö.**, male, 39 years old, an executive member of the Haci Bektas Veli Anadolu Cultural Foundation and a father of an Alevi student, Istanbul, March 2011

#### **Teachers of the Compulsory Religion Course ‘Religious culture and morality’:**

**İ. Ü.**, male, 45 years old, a primary school teacher, Erzincan, Eastern Turkey, March 2011

**M. Y.**, male, 40-45 years old, a high school teacher, Istanbul, March 2011

### **The Headscarf Issue in Universities:**

#### **2 Civil Society Leaders:**

**F. B.**, female, a lawyer on women’s rights, 30-35 years old, the former vice president of the Association of Women’s Rights and Struggle Against Discrimination (AKDER) and, Istanbul, March 2011

**G. S.**, female, a lawyer, 40 years old, an executive member of the IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation and of the Association of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed People, MAZLUMDER, Istanbul, March 2011

#### **Policy Maker:**

**A. S.**, female, a theologian, 45-50 years old, the former director of the Women’s Activities at the Directorate of Religious Affairs, DİB, and a current delegate of the Democratic Party, Ankara, March 2011

#### **Politicians:**

**G. E.**, female, professor of chemical engineer, 61 years old, an MP from the Republican People’s Party, Ankara, April 2011

**A. B.**, female, a journalist, 47 years old, an executive member of the Justice and Development Party and, May 2011 (no tape)

### **3 Academics:**

**A. Y.**, female, Professor of Sociology, 45-50 years old, in a foundation university in Istanbul, Istanbul, March 2011

**T. K.**, male, Professor of Theology, 45 years old, in a public university in Istanbul, Istanbul, April 2011

**Ü. M.**, female, Professor of Sociology, 65 years old, (retired from a public university in Istanbul and became a devout Muslim), Istanbul, April 2011

### **Students:**

**V. E.**, female, a graduate of Bilgi University, 29 years old, export manager at a trading company, Istanbul, April 2011

**Z. S. D.**, female, a postgraduate student in European Studies programme at Bilgi University, 20-25 years old, Istanbul, April 2011

**A. Ö.**, female, a headscarfed woman who declined in her studies at an undergraduate programme at Istanbul University due to the ban on headscarf in the 28 February Process, 32 years old, Istanbul, April 2011

### **Focus Group Discussion:**

(The Focus group discussion was conducted at Santral Campus of Istanbul Bilgi University on 9 July 2011 and fully tape recorded.)

### **The Participants:**

**A. K.**, male, accounting and finance manager at private companies, 41 years old, the president of the Hubyar Sultan Association of Alevi Culture and an Alevi parent who won the case in the State Council with regard to the exemption of his child from the compulsory religion course

**D. B.**, male, engineer, 50-55 years old, the president of the Federation of Alevi Foundations

**F. B.**, female, a lawyer on women's rights, 30-35 years old, the former vice president of the Association of Women's Rights and Struggle Against Discrimination (AKDER) and a lawyer on women's rights

**H.K.**, female, journalist and columnist at a private newspaper, 25-30 years old

**Z.Ü.B.**, female, radio and TV programme producer, radio speaker at a private radio channel, 31 years old

**S.C.**, male, a postgraduate student in European Studies at a private university and a columnist at an online newspaper,

**B. Ç.**, female, a PhD student in political science at a private university in Istanbul, 25-30 years old

**H.D.**, female, founding partner of a private business on speaker agency, conference organisation and global publishing, 55 years old, president of a speakers bureau in Istanbul.



## **Annex II**

### **Interview Guide for Key Informants**

#### **QUESTION SETS:**

#### **Question Set 1: The Widening of the Curriculum of Religious culture and morality Course for Alevi Belief**

#### **Questions for Policy Makers, Politicians, and National Representative of Ethnic/Religious Groups:**

- 1) There has been an ongoing debate on the curriculum of the Course “Religious Culture and Moral Education”. What is your assessment on these debates?
- 2) What do you think about the compulsory religious courses which are taught under the title “Religious Course and Moral Education” in the primary and secondary schools?
- 3) Do you approve and accept the way in which “Religious Culture and Moral Education” is taught at the present? Do you think that in these courses, students are forced to learn Islam, and to adopt Islamic beliefs and practices?
- 4) Do you believe that in these courses, Alevi and other non-Sunni students are being humiliated? If so, can you explain how and why?
- 5) How did you find the AKP government’s initiation of a new educational policy within the framework of Alevi question, which proposed a law draft to widen the curriculum of the compulsory religious courses for the teaching of Alevi belief and practices?
- 6) In your opinion, is it possible that the educational policy which aims to eliminate the religious, cultural and ideological discrimination against Alevi children in the religious courses will lead to the acceptance and recognition of Alevi belief and practice in other spaces of public life? (For example, is it possible that influenced by the reform in the religious courses, the Directorate of Religious Affairs recognise Cemevis, Alevi communion houses, as places of worship and respect the Alevi cultural rights within the framework of the Initiative?)
- 7) Do you think that the Alevi Initiative and the reform on the religious course is a process, which begins with the toleration of the teaching of their own religion for Alevi children in school, and leads to the recognition of religious and cultural differences of Alevi communities and respect for their socio-cultural rights?
- 8) Could you argue that the demands and claims which are represented by the leaders of the Alevi groups involved in the negotiations with the government are sincere in the sense that they aim to propagate the recognition/respect of Alevi culture?
- 9) Can you say that the Alevi Initiative, which is attempted and directed by the AKP government, weakens the belief of Alevi groups in its potential for raising tolerance toward cultural diversity?
- 10) Can you tell that the AKP government is genuine and dedicated in its Alevi Initiative? Does it only put forth an interim solution, which could encourage the people to tolerate religious differences of Alevi in the process of the EU-accession?

- 11) Can you tell us about your view on toleration and acceptance of life styles of different religious, cultural and ethnic groups?
- 12) Do you think that various political and social actors have recently attempted to raise awareness for toleration, recognition of and respect for different religious, cultural and ethnic groups in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools?
- 13) How do you think the most appropriate content should be for the course “Religious Culture and Moral Education”?

**Questions for Teachers, Parents and School Principles:**

- 1) There has been an ongoing debate on the curriculum of the Course “Religious Culture and Moral Education”. What is your assessment on these debates?
- 2) What do you think about the compulsory religious courses which are taught by the title “Religious Course and Moral Education” in the primary and secondary schools?
- 3) Do you approve and accept the way in which “Religious Culture and Moral Education” is taught at the present? Do you think that in these courses, students are forced to learn religion, and to adopt Islamic belief and practice?
- 4) Do you believe that in these courses, Alevi and other non-Sunni students are subject to humiliation? If so, can you explain how and why?
- 5) In the case of a student or a parent complains about such a compelling, humiliating or insulting behaviour that himself/herself or his/her child is subjected to, how is the conflict settled? In such cases, does the personal approach of the teacher, parent or school principle make a difference? If so, how?
- 6) In your opinion, is it possible that the educational policy which aims to eliminate the religious, cultural and ideological discrimination against Alevi children in the religious courses will lead to the acceptance and recognition of Alevi belief and practice in other spaces of public life? (For example, is it possible that influenced by the reform in the religious courses, the Directorate of Religious Affairs recognise Cemevis, Alevi communion houses, as places of worship and respect the Alevi cultural rights within the framework of Initiative?)
- 7) Do you think that Alevi Initiative and the reform on the religious course is a process, which begins with the toleration of the teaching of their own religion for Alevi children in schools and leads to the recognition of religious and cultural differences of Alevi communities and respect for their socio-cultural rights?
- 8) Can you tell that the AKP government is genuine and decisive in its Alevi Initiative? Does it only put forth an interim solution, which could encourage to tolerate religious differences of Alevis, in the process of the EU-accession?
- 9) Can you tell us about your view on the toleration and acceptance of life styles of different religious, cultural and ethnic groups?

- 10) Do you think that various political and social actors have recently attempted to raise awareness for toleration, recognition of and respect for different religious, cultural and ethnic groups in the curriculum of primary and secondary schools?
- 11) How do you think the most appropriate content should be for the course “Religious Culture and Moral Education”?

## **Question Set 2: The Headscarf Issue in Universities**

### **Questions for Policy Makers, Politicians and National Representative of Ethnic/Religious Groups**

- 1) In your opinion, what are the reasons which lie behind the headscarf issue?
- 2) Do you think that a legal arrangement in the Laws of Higher Education is satisfactory for the abolishment of the ban on headscarf in universities? Or, do you think a constitutional reform is necessary for the liberation of wearing a headscarf in all public institutions?
- 3) Can you claim that the lifting the headscarf ban is an instant threat against the principle of secularism which separates religious affairs from state affairs?
- 4) What do you think about the public statement of the Council of Higher Education which was sent to the university chancellors and approved the lifting of the headscarf ban in universities?
- 5) Could you say that the lifting of headscarf ban in universities is only an interim solution to the challenges emerging from religious differences? Otherwise, can you tell that it is the initial stage of a longer process, which begins with the toleration of religious and cultural differences and leads to the recognition by the state of religious rights and freedoms with respect to the principle of secularism?
- 6) What is your opinion about the initiatives that the government and opposition take in order to solve the headscarf issue?
- 7) Can you suggest that without reaching social consensus on tolerating and accepting religious differences, a political initiative to solve the headscarf issue taken by the political parties and bureaucrats can be decisive and stable?

### **Questions for Teachers, Parents and School Principals:**

- 1) What do you think about the prevention of university students from wearing headscarf on university campuses and the expulsion from lecture rooms of those students who can enter the campus by wearing a hat on headscarf?
- 2) In your opinion, what are the reasons which lie behind the headscarf issue?
- 3) What do you think about the public statement of the Council of Higher Education, which was sent to the university chancellors and approved the lift of the ban on wearing a headscarf in universities?

- 4) Can you say that female university students wearing a headscarf support a democratic regime, which maintains pluralism, equality and the fundamental rights and liberties, or is it possible that they have interests or desires in another way? (For example, what do they think about gender equality and women's rights?)
- 5) Can you say that women wearing with headscarf and without headscarf interact with, and understand, each other, and are tolerant toward each other?
- 6) Do you think that a legal arrangement in the Laws of Higher Education is satisfactory for the abolishment of the ban on headscarf in universities? Or, a constitutional reform is necessary for the liberation of wearing a headscarf in all public institutions?
- 7) Could you say that the lifting of headscarf ban in universities is only an interim solution to the challenges emerging from religious differences? Otherwise, can you tell that it is the initial stage of a longer process, which begins with the toleration of religious and cultural differences and leads to the recognition by the state of religious rights and freedoms with respect to the principle of secularism?
- 8) What is your opinion about the initiatives that the government and opposition take in order to solve the headscarf issue?
- 9) Can you suggest that without reaching social consensus on tolerating and accepting religious differences, a political initiative to solve the headscarf issue taken by the political parties and bureaucrats can be decisive and stable?

