Transformation of Religious Institution in Turkey from the Ottoman Sheikh ul-Islam to the Modern Diyanet Institution

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Transformation of Religious Institution in Turkey from the Ottoman Sheikh ul-Islam to the Modern Diyanet Institution

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Abstract
This paper offers a critical analysis of the body of offices responsible for the regulation of the public religious affairs in Turkey with a historical perspective from the Ottoman Empire to the current Republican period. The paper has a specific goal to explore how the public bodies regulating the religious life have played their role for the purpose of ensuring political and social control in the country by reviewing the religious institution during the Ottoman era and comparing within the Republican period under three different ruling ages: the Republican People’s Party, the multi-party and the AK Party. A significant volume of research has been conducted on the various aspects of public religious offices; and have been reviewed for this purpose by using historical research design. The findings show that during the Ottoman Empire, the regulation of the spiritual life was marked by a strong influence of the Sheikh ul-Islam. However, this institution experienced a huge decline after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey when the new secular political system started to confiscate the powers of the Sheikh ul-Islam one by one to abolish it altogether eventually in 1924. Diyanet has been established in its place as a new religious institution to provide services for some spiritual practices with much-restricted powers and roles under the authority of a ministry. Diyanet came to this day without much change in its capabilities until the AK Party came into the government which intended to make it a more active and functional department as part of what is called its major political strategy of Islamization through democratization. It can be summed up that after almost two decades of its tenure, findings show that the AK Party has partially achieved its goal to introduce a major change in the character of Turkish secularism from the protection of people from religious authoritarianism to protection of religion from political authoritarianism compared with other previous political parties.

Keywords: Diyanet in Turkey, Religion in the Ottomans, Islamization via democratization, AK party

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Introduction

In Turkey, the Presidency of Religious Affair (Diyanet İşleri Reisliği) is a religious state institution established by Atatürk in 1924 after the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1922. With almost 99 per cent of its total population Muslim, establishing a religious institution to provide service for the practice of religious duties of its people was deemed necessary in Turkey also because Islam has many mainstream and marginal schools of thought to blur the minds of the people in their approach to the state. The establishment of a religious institution may raise question in the reader’s mind, like why the Diyanet was established only in 1924 but not earlier? Or were there any religious institutions that existed before it during the Ottoman Empire? If there was such a religious institution before the Diyanet, why was it abolished and how does Diyanet differ in its role and powers?

Research has shown that before the Turkish Republic was established, Turkey was known for its strategic location, until after the Ottoman Empire had managed to defeat the Byzantine Empire and reigned for five whole centuries (1453-1924) in Constantinople or later known Istanbul, as the capital. Since then, Islam has spread under Ottoman Caliphate from India to Balkan in Europe and also North Africa.¹

Hence, this article is going to explore the historical development of the Diyanet in Turkey by taking its roots from the Ottoman Empire, continuing with its emergence after the establishment of the Turkish Republic, and concluding with the analysis of its change during the almost 20 years of AK Party rule in the government. It is expected that the research conducted for the purpose will help raise awareness of the researchers and broaden their knowledge regarding the ways a religious institution is used as a tool of social control and political discipline as in the case of Turkey.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Administration System in the Ottoman Era

The administrative body of the Ottoman Empire was called Divan-i Humayun/Kubbealtı (the Imperial Council).² The organization of this Imperial


²Pal Fodor (1994) preferred to call it Divan-I-ali since the official documents in the Sixteenth century suggest this term was more frequently applied. See Pál Fodor, “Sultan, Imperial Council, Grand Vizier: Changes in the Ottoman Ruling Elite and the Formation of the Grand Vizieral “Telhis.” Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum
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Council consisted of the viziers, the scribes, the military men and the ulama (Refer Figure 1). In Fodor (1994), the structure was called telhiş (summary, abstract) which rested on three pillars: The Sultan, the Imperial Council, and the Grand Vizier. The different structure showed by Itzkowitz and Fodor could be a result of the change that happened under the reign of Suleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566) in which the body of the viziers was then separated to become an independent body outside the Imperial Council. As a Sultan, his authority was still absolute and indivisible, comprising legislative, judicial, and executive powers. Any of his decrees carried the force of law.

(Figure 1). The administration system of the Ottoman Monarch.

According to Shaw (1976), the ulema (the ulama) were represented by the judicial chiefs or certain scholars called kadiasker/kazasker (the chief justice) of


Suleyman the Magnificent (1520-1566) in Western or Suleyman the law-giver in his realm were title given to Suleyman I who was the tenth and longest-reigning Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1520 until his death. Bonney, Richard, Suleiman the Magnificent, 2012.

Rumeli and Anatolia as well as the Sheikh ul-Islam (chief of Islam). In this institution, the ulama carried the role of: organizing and propagating the faith of Islam; maintaining a united community of Muslims; interpreting, applying, and enforcing the religious shari’ah (law); expounding the sacred sciences in the mosques and schools, and also maintaining standards and training new staff to become ulama. In short, the ulama was in charge of the judicial, educational, and religious services in the society and it supervised another class of service called the Ilmiye (Learned Institution).

2.2 The Ilmiye (the Learned Institution)

In this Learned Institution (See Figure 2), Shaw classifies the members of ulama into four groups which included the Ilmiye class, the educational institutions, the legal system and the lesser ulama. In the Ottoman administration, the Ilmiye existed as early as the thirteenth century to the late seventeenth century. It continued to develop until the eighteenth century although it did not grow into a full-fledged bureaucracy.

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6By the mid-fifteenth century, the process of building up the ulama by importing learned men from the old centers of Islam, appointing them to judicial and other positions, and arranging for them to train Ottoman subjects to take their place by building up the madrasah system was too big for one man and caused the division of kadiasker (chief justice), with separate positions for Anatolia and Rumeli. Stanford J. Shaw, History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Vol.1, Empire of the Gazis: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire 1208-1808 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

7The Sheikh ul-Islam position was only created beginning the late fifteenth century as a recognition for a person who was in charge of a corporation of muftis around the expansive empire with his role of issuing fatwa legalizing the sultan’s laws and reconciling them with the religious law. (Stanford J. Shaw, History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Vol.1, Empire of the Gazis: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire 1208-1808, 115; Suraiya Faroqhi, Ottoman Costumes: From Textile to Identity (Istanbul: Eren, 2004).


In the Leadership of the Ilmiye, the Sheikh ul-Islam held its position in the Ilmiye. The official position of Sheikh ul-Islam was created in the late fifteenth century as an appreciation of his position as leader of the corporation of muftis around the empire as well as his prerogative of issuing fetvas (fatwa) legalizing the sultan’s kanuns (laws) and reconciling them with the religious law.\(^\text{10}\) As a Sheikh ul-Islam, he was the chief mufti and leader of the Ilmiye.\(^\text{11}\) Below him were kadiasker (chief justice) and his assistant from every province like Rumelia, Anatolia, Istanbul, Harameyn, Erbaa, and Mahree.

Gradually, the institution of Sheikh ul-Islam lost its powers due to the secularization project.\(^\text{12}\) During its final terms, the title of Sheikh ul-Islam was removed and he was appointed as a member of the cabinet with the title of the Minister of Religious Affairs and Charitable Foundations on the 4th May 1920. The new role of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Charitable Foundations was to be responsible for religious matters and charitable foundations as opposed to the previous obligations carried out by the Sheikh ul-Islam institution that used to perform judicial, legal, scholarly, administrative, and political duties as well as religious ones.\(^\text{13}\) Despite the reform, the institution had lasted for four years before it was replaced with the Directorate of Religious Affairs or known as the Diyanet.

\(^\text{10}\) Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey Empire of the Gazis: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire* 1208-1808, 137-139.
\(^\text{11}\) Halil Inalcik, *The Ottoman Empire, The Classical Age* 1300 (1973).
\(^\text{12}\) Korkut, “The Diyanet of Turkey and its Historical Evolution,” 451-452.
2.3 The Establishment of the Diyanet with the New Turkish State (1924-1938)

The abolition of the institution of Sheikh ul-Islam brought about about a serious institutional gap that constituted the major reason for the establishment of the Diyanet. The reason being, after Republic of Turkey was established, the religious administration was put under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Charitable Foundations (Şeriye ve Evkaf Vekaleti) on the 3rd May 1920 before it was replaced with the Diyanet on the 3rd March 1924. The replacement was made to assign the religious affairs to an administrative unit instead of assigning them to the ministry in the cabinet. In this way, the ruling elite took religion under their control and at the same time managed to break the potentially sacred significance of the religious body.

As an early establisher and ruler of the republic, Atatürk had a different agenda for the already deteriorating caliphate. His first intention was to execute the treaty that he had signed with the Westerns. The Lausanne Treaty 1923 forced Turkey to accept the peace conditions or known as the Fourth Conditions of Karzon. Karzon referred to an English delegate in the Lausanne conference. The Four Conditions included: 1) severing all relationships between Turkey and Islam, 2) abolishing the Caliphate, 3) deposing the Caliphate along with all members of the house of Osman from the country; and 4) replacing the antiquated religious courts and codes with modern scientific civil law.

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14 Korkut, “The Diyanet of Turkey and its Historical Evolution,” 448.
To fulfill the Four Conditions of Karzon, Atatürk executed the process of secularization based on his Kemalist principles—nationalism,18 republicanism,19 secularism,20 populism,21 reformism,22 and statism23 especially in terms of religious practices.24

2.3.1 Structure and Appointment Process

According to Bardakoğlu (2008), “The Diyanet continued the Ottoman experience to a certain extent, but was given a structure that was complied with the secular structure of the state.”25 If we look at the Sheikh ul-Islam structure of organization during the Ottoman period, we could see that the office of the Sheikh ul-Islam was an independent institution that combined the roles of the Ministry of National Education, the General Directorate for Foundations, and the Diyanet (named as Presidency of Meşihat in this period).26 The office of Sheikh ul-Islam monitored the Kaza system (office of Kadi) and the Kadis who were responsible for judicial and municipal services.27 In short, the structure covered all aspects of administration including political, economic, legal, and social.

Meanwhile, the Diyanet is put under the Office of the Prime Minister as an administrative unit to execute activities related to Islamic beliefs, the principles of worship and morality, religious education of the public, and management of places...

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18 Nationalism - an ideology of one nation-state and in Turkey’s case, a nation of Turk.
19 Republicanism - republic political system is the basic political rule and ideology instead of the caliphate monarch system, which consists of the rule of law, popular sovereignty, and civic virtue.
20 Secularism is contested concept in Turkey’s political landscape among various experts including the politician, scholars, and the Diyanet. However, according to Atatürk, it’s the separation of religion from political or state affairs.
21 Populism - civilian power
22 Reformism - an ideology that calls for a reformation of a traditional institution into a modern Western/European institution.
23 Statism - Kemal Atatürk made clear in his statements and policies that Turkey's complete modernization was based on economic and technological development especially from the Western counterparts.
of worship. It was established to replace the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Pious Foundation under Act No. 429 in 1924. If we look at the content of Act No. 429, the legal role stated for the Diyanet was “…and an office (Diyanet İşleri Reisliği) has been formed to implement all provisions regarding the ritual practices (ibadat) and the religion of Islam and to administer [Islamic] religious organizations.” The first president of the Diyanet was Rıfat Börekçi and he held the position until his death. He was previously a Mufti of Ankara who fought at the frontline along with Atatürk and became his loyal follower.

As a public institution, according to the Constitution of 1924 - Article No 136; the Diyanet became the part of the General Administration (genel idare, i.e., the Ministry led by the Prime Minister himself). During Atatürk’s ruling period, the Diyanet’s organization was divided into only two main divisions: the central organization and the provincial organization, similar as the Sheikh ul-Islam institution consisted of the central administration and the provincial entity that was administered by the local kadi or muftis. The central organization of the Diyanet resided at Ankara while the provincial organization operated through the regional offices in the various provinces and districts. Mufti was placed in every province to execute any order from the central organization. Throughout its establishment, those divisions went through structural changes according to the administrative need.

In 1931, there were some changes in the institution. The government ordered a transfer of the mosque staff and management from the Diyanet to the General Directorate of Foundations. Before this, the General Directorate of Foundations was a body integrated within the Diyanet called the Ministry of Religious Affairs

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and Pious Foundations. This act reduced the Diyanet’s power but Çakır and Bozan (2005) justified the Diyanet’s responsibility was reduced to ensure the qualifications of staff. As part of its establishment, there was a higher body established to monitor the Diyanet’s function i.e., the High Board of Religious Affairs.

As for the staff appointment, the Sheikh ul-Islam was appointed by the grand vizier and sultan based on the advice of the former Sheikh ul-Islam. The candidate was among the ulama who finished the eighth grade or rank of education inside the madrasah and came from the Suleymaniye group. The sultan could either accept the nomination or choose another candidate. The Sheikh ul-Islam then appointed or dismissed kadiis and muftis among the locals in every province. Meanwhile, the Diyanet’s President is appointed by the Prime Minister which according to Kara (2003) would resemble other civil servants, whose main purpose was to apply the policies of the governments and subject them to political authority without having any political power to dismiss or appoint his next successor.

As for the ordinary staff like imams and preachers, their process of appointment was just like other ordinary civil servants. But between 1924 and 1940, under the 1931 Fiscal Year Budget Law of the Directorate General of Foundations, the management and personnel of all mosques and prayer by the Diyanet was removed and transferred to the Directorate General of Foundations.

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34The High Board of Religious Affairs is sometimes mentioned by different names for certain scholars like High Council of Religious Affairs, Religious Affairs High Commission (Korkut, 2016: 460), or Higher Committee of Religious Affairs (Kaya, 2018: 54). To be accurate, this study takes the one mentioned on the official website of the Diyanet.

35Halil Inalcik, The Ottoman Empire, 96-97.

2.3.2 Official and Unofficial Duties

Regarding their duties, both the *Sheikh ul-Islam* institution and the *Diyanet* had the same official duties which included issuing fatwa when needed. Compared to the *Diyanet*, the *Sheikh ul-Islam* had the authority to undermine the sultan’s decree or *kanun* if it was incompatible with the teaching of Islam even though most of the time it was used to support the sultan’s *kanuns*. At some point, the *Sheikh ul-Islam* could even issue a fatwa to dismiss a sultan from his throne. The *Diyanet* on the other hand, during Atatürk’s leadership, issued fatwa to support the government’s secularization policies and could not issue any politically motivated fatwa. The *Diyanet*’s role and scope of authority were gradually reduced in both the public sphere and the state’s constitution.

According to the American Institute for the Study of Middle Eastern Civilization (1981), the *Diyanet* inherited most functions of the previous religious institution, which was authorized to manage practically all the religious affairs of the state. But this time, the religious affairs were separated from the political affairs of the state. The *Diyanet* only managed the mosques, the mausoleums, and the *tekkes* (dervish lodges) and activities inside the places. The *Diyanet* was also responsible for the appointment of imams, the preachers, the sheikhs, the muezzins, and other staff of the mosque. What was more important, it also controlled the muftis to whom it offered legal consultation when needed. Therefore, a more centralized religious organization under the Kemalists had furtively substituted a system that eventually allowed them to exercise practically exclusive control over religion.

From the above discussion, we could see the extensive power enjoyed by the *Sheikh ul-Islam* institution. Even though both institutions have the same function which is to give fatwa, the *Diyanet* does not enjoy as much power as the *Sheikh ul-Islam* since it cannot interfere with political and legal matters. However, according to Korkut (2016), “…although the duty and authority of this institution were more limited in comparison to the *Sheikh ul-Islam*, it was very successful especially in religious publications, religious services, and directing religious institutions (mosques, madrasah, *tekkes*, and waqfs) for mobilizing them to independence war.” We can relate their active function in the respective duty as mentioned by

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40 Korkut, “The Diyanet of Turkey and its Historical Evolution,” 452.
Korkut with the propagating agenda executed by Atatürk to realize his Kemalist project and therefore promoted religion in a political culture that was outwardly becoming more and more secular.\textsuperscript{41}

To achieve total control of the society, the \textit{Diyanet} has gone through legal and political reforms to adjust the institution structure and roles based on secular principles. From 1924 until 1938, the \textit{Diyanet} organization was restructured two times under the Budget Act of 1927 and 1931 before the first act “The Act on Organization and Missions of the Directorate of Religious Affairs” was published in 1935 and numbered Act 2800.\textsuperscript{42} In the Budget Act of 1931, a significant change occurred whereby the administration of all the mosques and smaller mosques and the people in charge of them were assigned to the General Directorate of Charitable Foundations together with their staff.\textsuperscript{43} This act was applicable until 1950 and proved that the role of the \textit{Diyanet} was limited and insignificant inside the society even though the organization was divided into a central organization and a provincial organization. Besides that, in the education field, religious education was removed from the state schools and the Faculty of Theology decreased their intake gradually before being closed down in 1933.\textsuperscript{44}

2.3.3 Reforms of the \textit{Diyanet} Post-Independence Era (1950-2002)

After the death of Atatürk in 1938, Mustafa Ismet İnönü (r.1938-1950) replaced him as the second President of Turkey, and continued executing the previous secular principles in rule. However, as the spirit of democracy spread across the European region, İnönü decided to embrace a much more democratic political system by introducing a multiparty system to replace the one-party system in 1946.

Based on the document analysis, as from 1950 until 2002, there were two constitutional reforms because of military intervention in 1960 and 1980, i.e., in 1961 and 1982,\textsuperscript{45} involving several significant political parties during the

\textsuperscript{41}Kaya, \textit{Secularism and State Religion in Modern Turkey: Law, Policy-making and the Diyanet}, 50.


\textsuperscript{43}Korkut, “The Diyanet of Turkey and its Historical Evolution,” 453.

\textsuperscript{44}Gözaydın, “Religion, Politics and the Politics of Religion in Turkey,” 2.

\textsuperscript{45}A new Act of Religious Affairs was created in 1975 to replace Act no. 633, but the Constitutional Court annulled its enforcement due to a refusal by the President to sign it (Gözaydın 2008: 219; Sunier and Landman 2011: 32). It had caused a legal vacuum of the \textit{Diyanet}’s function and this legal gap was only fulfilled 31 years after that by the AK Party.
multiparty period: the Democratic Party (DP) and the coalition government. In-between, a political shift after a military intervention in 1970 also resulted in the Diyanet’s reform even though it was only a small reform. The reform had produced a significant impact on the role that the Diyanet plays inside Turkey and the society.

2.3.4 Act No. 633

After the first coup (military intervention) occurred in 1960, Act No. 633 was established in 1961 to clarify the appointment process of the Diyanet’s staff where all imams (clergy) employed by the Diyanet were supposed to be graduates of official educational institutions. The reason being, graduates from private Quran schools were suspected of holding radical views. To execute the action, the Justice Party (AP), that became the next government between the 1960s and 1970s, started by building the state mosques and increase the pace of opening the Imam-hatip (imam-orator) schools to provide state-educated staff for the mosques and the Diyanet. As a result, the Diyanet’s budget significantly rose from 1.15 percent in 1965 to 1.89 percent in 1966 while at the same time; the Imam-hatip schools produced more graduates than the Diyanet demand.

As a consequence, the official duties of the Diyanet were constrained further inside a legal reform by the military. In this Act No. 633 dated 22 July 1965, the new official duties of the Diyanet stated: “The Presidency of Religious Affairs was established to conduct affairs related to doctrinal, devotional, and moral foundations of the Islamic religion; to enlighten society on religion, and to administer places of worship. Before the establishment of the 1961 Constitution, the first military intervention had occurred on the ground of fighting religious extremism. The new constitution designed the Diyanet as a Constitutional Institutional. It was published to replace the 1924 Constitution and officially titled the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey. Thus, Act No. 633 became a

in 2010.


fundamental law for the next years until 1982.\textsuperscript{49}

However, due to its lack of clarity, Law 633 was annulled by the Constitutional Court in 1979. This legal gap was only fulfilled 31 years after that by the AK Party in 2010.\textsuperscript{50}

\textbf{2.3.5 A Legislative Decree 190 No.3046}

Another significant amendment on the \textit{Diyanet} occurred after a military \textit{coup} took place in 1980. The 1982 Constitution through Article 136 determined the criteria that the \textit{Diyanet} must comply with. In the constitution, it was mentioned: “The Presidency of Religious Affairs existing in the general administration, in accordance with the principle of secularism, by staying out of all the political views and mentalities and adopting a goal of solidarity and integration as a nation, fulfills the missions that were specified in the special law.”\textsuperscript{51}

A Legislative Decree 190 numbered 3046, which was published in the Official Journal dated 14\textsuperscript{th} December 1983 was designed so the \textit{Diyanet} was organized again appropriate to the “Act of Organization and Duties of the Ministries.” The reform was made as a result of a new constitution in 1982.

Based on this act, the structure of the \textit{Diyanet} was divided into three main branches: the central, provincial, and foreign organizations (See Figure 3). The central organization consisted of the director (head), five deputy directors, five work and supervision units, five main service units, and four assisted services units. The main function of these units was to enlighten the public about Islam. As for the provincial organization, there were 67 provincial mufti’s offices, 582 district mufti’s offices, and 7 directorates of education center which focus on Qur’anic Courses and personnel training inside the education center. The \textit{Diyanet} was also going through expansion in its organization by adding foreign organization branches for religious services abroad. Sixteen religious services consultancy and seventeen attaché’s offices of religious services were created to fulfill the function. They are responsible to provide services for the Turkish and Turkic populations abroad and coordinated the appointment made to the areas demanding services like religious consultancy.\textsuperscript{52}


\textsuperscript{50}The Diyanet of Turkey and its Historical Evolution,” 455.


\textsuperscript{52}Kaya, Secularism and State Religion in Modern Turkey: Law, Policy-making and the
The changes post-1980 impacted every aspect of religious practice drastically despite the expansion of Diyanet’s organization and function as religious administration. The military aimed to make the society focused on national solidarity and unification instead of religion. For instance, headscarf-wearing among women is considered a religious symbol and therefore seen as a threat to secularism and thus being banned inside the public institution including the higher education institution. At the same time, photographs of women with a headscarf were not accepted in passport applications. Enrollment of the Imam-Hatip schools was not permitted despite overwhelming demand for religious education. The previous permission to go for pilgrimage by land was withdrawn and only air travel was permitted with an expensive cost during the Hajj season. Once again, religious freedom was deterred.

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3. The Diyanet Transformation under the AK Party

3.1 Act 6002 of 2010 and its Impact towards Socio-political Landscape

During a state of political chaos and economic downturn 2002, the result of the 2002 General Election showed another turning point in Turkey’s political landscape that changed the Diyanet’s role in a significant way. A new party, the AK Party’s unexpected biggest victory in the 2002 General Election generated high hopes among the Turkish society to see positive reforms inside the country. Its conservative democrat ideology promised an ideal change that the people hope for and (in this case), democratization and religious freedom.

A revision was made on Act 633 that was unclear and created a legal gap on the Diyanet status. A revision on Act 633 produces a new act - Act 6002 of 2010 that strengthened the Diyanet’s bureaucratic status. Under Act 6002, the Diyanet status has been elevated from the degree of the general directorate to undersecretary. The Grand National Assembly agrees to change some aspects in the Diyanet institutional structure that expands the Diyanet activities by introducing new missions to the Diyanet’s departments. According to the act, the President of the Diyanet is not elected by muftis or religious scholars but is appointed by the President of Turkey on the recommendation from the Turkish Prime Minister.

Before changing its legal status, the AK Party already made an effort to increase Diyanet’s staff, reaching 83,033 in 2008 and its budget has been increased year by year until it reached more than 1.5 billion USD in 2009. The increment in the budget proves that there has been an expansion of the Diyanet structure and religious activities.

A large sum of the Diyanet budget was used for personnel expenditures. As we

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54 Kaya, Secularism and State Religion in Modern Turkey: Law, Policy-making and the Diyanet, 53.
55“The Diyanet of Turkey and its Historical Evolution,” 455.
can see in Table 1, the number of personnel allocated by the *Diyanet* increased along with the increment of mosques built even though there is a sharp decrease of personnel appointments between 1999 and 2004 and even though there were many mosques built in the countryside. This was due to the political instability after the 1997 *coup*. In fact, in 2005, 30.8 percent of the mosques do not have the *Diyanet’s* personnel. 59 Hence, the AK Party decided to hire 15,000 personnel in 2010, a sharp increase compared with several years before 60 as a result of the new Act. 6002 was established that year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Mosques</th>
<th>Personnel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>73,722</td>
<td>79,685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>74,356</td>
<td>77,795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>75,002</td>
<td>75,433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>75,369</td>
<td>76,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>76,445</td>
<td>74,114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>77,151</td>
<td>71,693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>77,777</td>
<td>80,299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>78,608</td>
<td>79,810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>79,096</td>
<td>84,195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>80,053</td>
<td>83,033</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1.** Number of mosques and personnel, 1998-2008 (Adapted from [http://www.Diyanet.gov.tr](http://www.Diyanet.gov.tr))

Besides that, the legal reform took place actively during the AK Party’s second term in the office, shortly after they decided to focus on Islamization-democratization instead of the Europeanization process. Meanwhile, in 2011, the President of the *Diyanet* rank was promoted to the tenth row in the state protocol with the law that was enacted in the same year. At the same time, the Managers of Departments in the *Diyanet* were elevated to the status of being General Management Departments. Once again, in 2014, the *Diyanet* was connected directly to the Prime Minister’s Office. 61 Moreover, the tenure of the director was limited to five years and a person can only be appointed two times. At the same time, the number of deputies’ directors was reduced to three, and the scope of the board which would select the members for the High Board of Religious Affairs was broadened and participation of representatives from each rank of the

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59 Ibid., 44.
60 *Yeni Şafak*, 2007.
61 “The Diyanet of Turkey and its Historical Evolution,” 462.
As mentioned previously, the ruler worked to extend their control over society’s religious affairs considering them an effective method to control the society. Since the AK Party government controls the Diyanet, the classification of impact considered the involvement of the Diyanet to achieve the government’s Islamization-democratization agenda.

Concerning the efforts exerted, the Diyanet in Turkey today, according to many researchers and experts, goes through several legal and political reforms that give intended and direct impact and direct as well as the unintended impact on society. Among which are shown in Table 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intended</th>
<th>Unintended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Religious commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>Basic rights (Headscarf ban uplifted, anti-alcohol consumption law, official iftar (breaking fast) celebration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Classification of Impact onto Society

- the aim of religious education by the Diyanet through Qur’anic Courses, Imam-Hatip school, and the Faculty of Divinity is to improve religious commitment among society. When people understand Islam, they are more likely to commit to their practice. As under the AK Party, the demand for religious education is on the rise.

- religious freedom as a basic right has gained a stable ground inside the society through people’s consensus that resulted in the headscarf ban law lifted, the introduction of anti-alcohol consumption law, and official iftar celebration among public servants.

- the Diyanet has defied its role as a body separated from a political issue when the Diyanet issued an order to all imams to recite the azan as a way to defend the current government from coup attempts by the military on
15th July 2016.

- the Diyanet only caters Sunni-Hanafi school of teaching and based its fatwa on this school of thought. Therefore, the institution is seen as restricting certain religious practices and beliefs on a certain religious group like the Alevi.

4. Conclusion

This study critically reviews the historical aspects of the religious institution in Turkey in three different eras namely, the Ottoman rule era, after the independence period before the AK Party ruling era, and under the AK Party government era. It is expected that the research conducted for the purpose will help raise awareness on the part of the researchers and broaden their knowledge regarding the ways a religious institution is used as a tool of social control and political discipline in the case of Turkey. Also, it highlights the practice of religious institutions that existed therein and addresses their transformation especially under the AK Party and impacts on the socio-political landscape. During the Ottoman period, the Sheikh ul-Islam institution was playing an important role in the society, where the Sheikh ul-Islam provided important fatwa to the sultan even on matters outside the religious sphere. However, the Sheikh ul-Islam institution began to experience a huge decline during the independence era, particularly when Atatürk started to establish the Turkish Republic in 1924 and attempted to secularize the society once he realized how this religious institution has the power to control the society. The Sheikh ul-Islam institution was abolished and replaced with the Diyanet along with its new role to confine religious affairs into a private matter. After the AK Party came to office in 2002, there were several initiatives to upgrade the Diyanet through its Islamization-democratization agenda by revising the legal status of the Diyanet. Gradually, there are improvements in religious commitment and basic rights as a result of religious education by the Diyanet. At the same time, there is unintended-direct impact like the Diyanet’s involvement in the 15th July failed coup attempt and government high restriction on religious minority groups like the Alevi.

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