

Religious Education Policies of Republican People's Party (1923-1950) And Democrat Party (1950-1960) in Turkey

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Abstract: The decline in the influence of religion in social life in the face of modernization movements pointed to a new world in which secular paradigms prevailed. As a matter of fact, the Republic of Turkey, founded in 1923, started its revolutionary transformations in the field of education. First of all, they took religious education under the control of the state and opened new institutions. However, due to the indifference of the society to these institutions, they closed them completely in 1933. Afterwards, they did not put the issue of religious education on their agenda again until 1946. However, during this period, the political conditions all over the world changed and the need for democratization of Turkey emerged. In this period, when it was opposed by another party for the first time, the Republican People's Party put religious education on its agenda. However, it seems that they approached this issue rather reluctantly. The Democrat Party, which came to power later on, took very important steps regarding religious education and tried to meet the demands of the society. However, at the same time, it was criticized by the secular elite for taking steps against the republican revolutions.

Keywords: Education, Religious Education, Republican People's Party, Democrat Party

1. Introduction

Modernization movements have affected almost all societies in the world. The secular lifestyle, which constitutes the spirit of modernization, necessitated the replacement of religion that had prevailed throughout the Middle Ages with nationalism (Altun & Bilgin, 2022). In this context, it is possible to see the effects of modernization on education. Looking at the modernization movements in Turkey, a rapid secularization period was entered with the republican regime established in 1923. In addition, the Law of Unification of Education was enacted to solve some of the problems remaining from the Ottoman period and education was completely under the control of the state (Bilgin et al., 2022). During this period, religious education was given very little and after a while, all institutions were closed due to the public's lack of interest in institutions providing religious education. When the changing world conditions revealed the democratic opposition in 1946, the Republican People's Party (RPP) government of the time began to

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take some steps, albeit reluctantly, in religious education. However, the later Democratic Party (DP) government paved the way for religious education. This study evaluates the religious education policies that emerged in both periods.

2. Religion in the Face of Modernist Developments

It is possible to find traces of the enlightenment movements that started in Europe in the 18th century, in the Reform and Renaissance movements in the 15th and 16th centuries (Conrad, 2012). After the Enlightenment period, great mentality changes took place in the Western world and Christianity, which had dominated the entire medieval period, was at the center of criticism. The enrichment of societies with economic moves such as the industrial revolution and the decline of Christianity in the face of enlightenment encouraged the secular lifestyle more and the influence of religion on society decreased considerably. In fact, many superstitions and false beliefs developed by people during the Middle Ages were seen as a property of religion and payoff was quite harsh in the age of enlightenment. Therefore, the influence of religion on society was greatly reduced and ideologies suitable for the modern age were developed (Kay, 2012). We can say that one of the most striking aspects of the new ideologies, which were modernist and positivist, were direct opposition to religion. During this period, the decrease in the effectiveness of Christianity in the social life set an example for Turkey, which was chasing dreams of westernization. In this context, the Republic of Turkey, which was established in 1923, made an effort to adopt a secular lifestyle by realizing revolutionary transformations. For this reason, one of its main aims was to completely break the influence of religion on society and to bring it to a modern lifestyle (Yavuz, 2009).

3. Revolutionary Changes after the Formation of the Republic

Westernization and secularization movements were apparently in continuation in Turkey in the 19th century. In this period, institutions that would provide Western-style and secular education began to open more and more every day. However, institutions such as madrasahs providing religious education at that time were ignored by the state, but their activities were allowed. While secular schools opened in accordance with the westernization policies implemented by the state continued to provide education in a western style, religious education continued by non-governmental organizations was given in madrasahs and similar institutions. However, this situation required the existence of two different currents in education at the same time, and religious education took place outside the control of the state. This situation, which emerged in the Ottoman Empire especially after the Tanzimat edict in 1839, continued for many years (Hanioglu, 2010). However, after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, the Law of Unification of Education, one of the laws of the Revolution, was enacted and it was ensured that education should be completely under state control. However, in the process, institutions providing religious education were closed again and religious education had fallen into a secret and illegal position in the society. In any case, the founding elite of the republic never cared about religious education. As was the case in the enlightenment process in Western societies, questioning of religion, which continued its traditional structure, was required in this period as well. However, the different expectations and perspectives of the society prevented these revolutions from taking place to the desired extent (Zengin, 2002).

4. Religious Education Policies of Republican People's Party

Religious education was tremendously affected by the great changes in the country and the steps on the way to secularization. Firstly, it was decided to establish theology faculties with the law of Unification of Education, and imam-hatip schools took the place of the madrasahs in the countryside. However, religious education was completely abandoned until 1933, theology faculties and Imam-Hatip schools were closed due to lack of students (Özdalga, 2018). However, all these were pleasing developments for the one party (RPP was called one party because they kept the power for 27 years and did not even allow and opposition) that wanted a secular lifestyle. However, the decrease in interest in both mosques and these educational institutions means that the new regime that wants to keep religious education under the state monopoly ignored the possibility that the society could find different methods, especially within the social conditions of that day (Bilgin, 2015). However, there were some who interpreted the shortage of students on the way to the closure of these institutions as the low employment opportunities of the clergy and the shifts to new sectors that were developing within the republic, as opposed to the profession of imamate (Kılıç, 2015).

Religion courses were included in the primary education program in 1924, and classes were taught for one hour each in the 3rd, 4th and 5th grades. In 1930, only 5th grade students were given religious courses with the permission of their parents, and the following year they were completely abolished. In village schools, religion lessons continued until 1939. In the five-year primary teacher schools, it was determined as 2 hours per week in the 1st and 2nd grades (Zengin, 2002).

After that, the issue of religious education was not brought to the agenda until 1946, and it came to the fore again as a result of pressure from the people, along with the multi-party life.

While discussing the budget of the Ministry of National Education on December 24, 1946, Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver stated that the Turkish youth should be given conscience, nationalism and religious feelings, and that it was a necessity to reinforce national consciousness with religion in the face of foreign ideologies. Recep Peker, on the other hand, opposed this and stated that it is better to educate children with a sense of nationalism rather than a sense of religion, that modern people should have scientific and human values, and that the morality of nations that have taken major steps on the way to modernization should be taken as an example. He even defined religious education against communism as "treatment with poison against another poison" (Duman, 2015).

Later, at the party council meeting on January 16, 1947, religious education was discussed, and accordingly, it was decided to authorize the government to make legal arrangements for optional religious education to be held outside the school buildings, under the control of the government and in new Turkish letters (not old Arabic alphabet), provided that permission was obtained from the Ministry of National Education. In this context, a communiqué was published by the Ministry of National Education in July of the same year (Bilgiç & Bilgiç, 2017), and the following principles were determined:

1. In accordance with the 4th article of the Education Organization Law No. 789, religious education courses can be opened to teach the principles of Islam, provided that the permission of the Ministry of National Education is obtained.

2. Those who want to open private teaching institutions will apply to the governors in the provincial centers or the villages and sub-districts of the central district, and to the district governorships in the villages and sub-districts, in order to obtain permission from the Ministry of National Education.
3. Those who want to teach in these courses should have civil, moral attributes and health conditions. It is obligatory that they have gained the authority to teach in public schools, and have graduated from universities, colleges and high schools or equivalent schools or abolished imam hatip schools.
4. These courses can only be opened in places where there is a primary school, and the children who will attend these courses will be required to have completed primary school.
5. Only the program approved by the government will be applied, and teaching in any language other than Turkish will not be possible.
6. Within the scope of their programs, only the subjects that all sects have in common in the religion of Islam will be taught.
7. Even religious seminars can be opened in order to train teachers for these private teaching institutions and to prepare staff for imam-hatip services. These seminars will be based on secondary school education and will provide 5 years of education for secondary school graduates and 2 years for high school graduates (Uyanık, 2013).

The RPP, which had not taken any steps regarding religious education until 1946, entered a period of softening in this regard, due to some realities it had to face at that time. Although they did this very reluctantly, there was a completely different world where the circumstances surrounding them forced to do the opposite of what they had already done. As a matter of fact, they put forward many prerequisites for the delivery of religious education. The fact that the revolutionary values of the republic were not adopted by the people had a great impact on the formation of these conditions. After the religious education schools were closed completely in 1933, it was a big problem that this education was given by civilian people, out of the control of the state. In fact, after the alphabet reform in 1928, the new Latin alphabet was not adopted, and religious education continued to be given in Arabic letters outside the control of the state. It is possible to see the reflection of this problem even in the communiqué that allowed religious education in 1946 (Bilgiç & Bilgiç, 2017).

At that time, some important events took place that forced the RPP to change. First of all, in the new world order that emerged after the World War II, Soviet Russia claimed rights over the straits in Turkey and this situation worried the government. Turkey, which approached the democratic west to protect itself from the pressure of Russia, had in fact continued these dreams since the nineteenth century. However, the RPP, which took democratization steps under the pressure of the USA, started attempts to close even the village institutes it had established (Gökay, 2021).

As can be clearly seen in the example of the Village Institutes, the RPP had the aim of spreading modern western education throughout the country. In fact, for this purpose, they applied a mixed education model in the Village Institutes and did not teach religion courses in a way that would contradict the majority of the society (Kuçuktamer & Uzunboylu, 2015).

In the new era when the conditions changed drastically, the RPP was aware that it was in the last period of its power, because being a part of the democratic West meant accepting a change of power through elections. In any case, one of the important reasons why the RPP took up religious education at the end of

1946, which had never been on its agenda after 1933, was the transition to a multi-party system. Even though the election held on 21 July 1946 resulted in the RPP retaining its power, it was a rather dubious election and clearly showed that it was the last period of power for the RPP (Azak, 2012). RPP, which focused on the revolutions made by ignoring the demands of the society until that day, started to take into account the demands of the society in the next period. However, despite all this, even where they took steps to pave the way for religious education, they considered many restrictions necessary because the revolutions made according to them were not fully embraced by the society and religious education got out of control. It is understood from this communiqué that they are in a dilemma both to take this under control, to respond to the demands of the society in the new democratic period, and to protect the revolutions (Çalal, 2018).

In fact, it was clear that the RPP was quite reluctant to provide religious education, as relevant policies were constantly postponed. Some deputies, such as Hamdullah Suphi, who were in the Party organization at that time, constantly focused on religious education and forced the government to make some changes. However, despite all this, some decisions were taken quite late. For example, after the above-mentioned circular dated July 1947, a commission on religious education convened in February 1948 and decided to introduce religion as an elective course in the last two classes of primary schools. In addition, the same commission decided to train Imam Hatip students from secondary school graduates so as to be clergy (imam) and to open faculties of theology in Ankara and Istanbul universities. However, all this was still at the decision stage (Bilgiç & Bilgiç, 2017).

By 1949, the RPP, which had to prepare for the next election, was aware that one-party rule was also not possible. For this, they were evaluating all kinds of alternatives to maintain their power. In this context, for the first time in the history of the RPP, Şemsettin Günaltay, a theologian, formed the government in January 1949. The introduction of religion lessons in primary schools, on the other hand, coincided with three years after the 1946 elections, during the rule of a theologian Prime Minister, and there was very little time left for the elections (Şeyhun, 2015). As a matter of fact, religion lessons were given here under many conditions. First of all, religion classes would be outside of normal class hours. In addition, for this, the request of each student's parents would determine whether the child would be given a religious lesson. In addition, grading system would not be applied in these courses and there would be no failing in this course (Yardımcı & Edi, 2019).

On June 4, 1949, at the parliamentary session, the law was adopted to open the Faculty of Theology within Ankara University. In addition, it was announced that the Islamic Law Institute affiliated to the Faculty of Law and the Islamic Sciences Research Institute affiliated to the Faculty of Letters of Istanbul University at that time to be established (Ozgur, 2012).

5. Religious Education Policies of Democrat Party

Celal Bayar and Adnan Menderes, who were deputies in the RPP, then started to criticize the government due to many anti-democratic practices and resigned in 1945. Afterwards, they founded the Democratic party on January 7, 1946, and remained the opposition party in the 1946 elections. However, in the period until they came to power in 1950, they made a very strong opposition to the RPP and influenced the public policy choices of the ruling party (Saribay, 2016).

Democrat Party officials, who stated that they would remain loyal to the state's secular system during this period, thought very differently from the RPP on how secularism should be defined. According to them, while secularism was the state's keeping equal distance from all religions and promoting these religions equally, according to the RPP, such an approach could abolish the republican revolutions (Ahmad, 1991).

RPP, which did not include religious education on its agenda in the previous periods, started to discuss the issue due to the strong opposition it received from the DP in this period and agreed to give some rights, albeit reluctantly. Under these conditions, the 1950 elections were held, and the elections resulted in the victory of the DP. As soon as they came to power, their first actions were to return the adhan, which started to be recited in Turkish in 1932, to its original Arabic. Having seen the recitation of the prayer in Turkish as a great revolutionary move, the RPP stated that secularism was under great threat in the face of this action (Dikici, 2006).

However, despite all these, the DP did not give up its practices and expressed a different opinion on this issue. They had already stated that they accepted the principles adopted by the founding elite of the republic regarding education in the party program they prepared in 1946. In this context, they stated that they were in favor of nationalism based on a common history and culture unity among citizens and that they considered everyone to be a citizen regardless of religion and race, and they said that education should be designed according to these principles. In addition, they had committed to abide by the principles set forth in unification of education law (Şeyhanlıoğlu, 2020).

The religious education allowed in the last period of the RPP was met with interest by the society and almost all of the people were willing to let their children take religion lessons. Although the religion course was an elective course at that time and was subject to the permission of the parents, the popularity of it had a significant impact on the DP's view of this subject (Kılıç, 2015).

The most important reason why the RPP is so reluctant to provide religious education is its perception of a threat to the secular regime of the state. However, even within the party, there were criticisms on this issue and the party's pioneers had to take steps in this regard. Due to the general change in the atmosphere towards religious education, the DP also acted more comfortably. For this, they first made the elective religion course compulsory in the 4th and 5th grades of primary school. They published this with the circular of the Ministry of National Education dated 7 November 1950 (Şahin, 2012). In the previous period, religion lessons were considered as an out-of-school lesson. However, with this circular, one hour was taken from Turkish lessons and given to religion lessons. Moreover, it was requested that the parents who did not want to take religion lessons should notify the schools with a petition. In addition, religious lessons were given to teacher schools and Village Institutes during this period. In the state bureaucracy, the opinion that the compulsory religion course is contrary to secularism was widely expressed. However, the government stated that this was a request from the society and was done to meet a need, they and opposed the idea that it was against secularism (Levent, 2021).

Later on, pressure began to come from within the party to include religion lessons in secondary schools. On the other hand, those who wanted to prevent this said that such a practice was against secularism and postponed the introduction of religion lessons in secondary schools for a long time. In 1956, with the decision of the Council of Ministers, religion lessons were introduced in secondary schools. Thus, religious

lessons became compulsory in secondary schools, and it was decided that those who failed the lesson would fail and would have to take it again until they pass it (Şahin, 2012).

In addition, DP pioneered the reopening of Imam hatip schools. It was decided to admit students from primary school to these schools, which were opened since the 1951-1952 academic year. Accordingly, 7-year imam-hatip schools were opened, the first period being 4 years and the second period for 3 years. The 10-month Imam hatip courses, which were opened in 1948 during the RPP government, were thus transformed into a school. Imam hatip Schools, which were first opened in 7 cities, were connected to the General Directorate of Primary Education. After giving its first graduates in the 1950-1955 academic year, the second level of schools was opened. By the date of September 1958, the number of Imam hatips was 19. While the number of students in these schools was 889 in the 1951-1952 academic year when they were opened, it increased to 4101 in the 1950-1960 academic year (Ayhan, 1999).

There was no department in the university for imam hatips who had graduated from the first time in the 1957-1958 period. The Theology Faculties of the period were also accepting students from regular high schools. Thereupon, the Higher Islamic Institute was established with the law no. 575 dated 19 November 1959. Its aim is to train vocational course teachers for imam hatip schools and religion course teachers for schools other than primary schools (Baytal, 2020).

6. Discussion

In the enlightenment and modernization processes, the rising reactions against religion emerged as the exclusion of religion from social life. Therefore, all states that have adopted the secular lifestyle have tried to reduce the effectiveness of religion in society. RPP, the pioneer of westernization and modernization in Turkey, carried out revolutionary transformations with the establishment of the republic, and carried out important activities especially in the field of education. They produced policies for the establishment of a secular education and regarded the decrease in the interest in religion in the society as a positive development. With the law of unification of education in 1924, all institutions outside the state control were closed and especially religious education was taken under the control of the state. However, when the interest towards these new institutions faded away in the society, they closed these institutions completely in 1933 and did not put this issue on their agenda again until the multi-party system was introduced in 1946. However, during this period, they had taken all the steps necessary for secular education. With the change in the political atmosphere all over the world in 1946, Turkey, which needed to be allied with democratic Western countries, underwent major democratic changes. In this period, due to the demands of the people and the pressure of the opposition party, they put religion lessons on the agenda again. However, at this point, it should be noted that the opposition from within the party also made an important contribution. It was seen that where the RPP allowed religion classes, they constantly feared that the secular system of the state would be endangered. However, there was no such fear in the DP rule. While the DP government stated that it would develop policies in line with the secular values and unity of education established with the republic, it also showed that it differed with the RPP on secularism and freedoms with the policies it implemented on religious lessons. Despite the reluctant steps taken during the RPP period, quite brave steps were taken regarding religion lessons and religious freedoms during the DP period. However, these initiatives were always negatively received by the state bureaucracy, and it was thought that these initiatives would harm the secular system.

7. Conclusion

From the establishment of the Republic in 1923 until 1946, when the multi-party system was adopted, the demands of the society were constantly ignored, and the policies required by westernization and modernization were given importance. However, the revolutions did not receive the expected support from the society and the RPP administration had to change in the changing political atmosphere. As a matter of fact, it was seen in the last 4 years of the RPP between 1946-1950 that when the requirements of democracy worked, everyone's demands were important and were effective in the making of public policies.

Although RPP's thoughts, which perceived religious education as an opposition to the secular system, continued during the DP rule, they were not effective in policy making processes. In addition, it was seen in these examples how the demands of the society affect the policies in a democratic environment.

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