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Re-Educating Turkey

AKP Efforts to Promote Religious Values in Turkish Schools

By Alan Makovsky December 2015

Center for American Progress



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Introduction and summary

Although the issue of education played little role in Turkey's recent parliamentary elections, few areas of Turkish public life generate more heat in public discourse than education. Yet, the most intense controversies regarding educational policies are not about issues such as student achievement or teacher-student ratios. Rather, like so many other controversies in Turkey—particularly over the past two decades—they are focused on the proper role of Islam in Turkish society.

For the ruling Justice and Development Party, known by its Turkish acronym AKP, and its de facto leader, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, increasing both the reach of state-sponsored parochial schools and the religious content of curricula in traditional state secular schools is vital to achieving Erdoğan's stated vision of raising a "dindar nesil," or pious generation.¹ This, in turn, serves Erdoğan's larger goal of achieving a new Turkey that is less in tune with the radically secular values of Atatürk's republic and more consonant with the religious values of its Ottoman predecessor state.

Less grandly but just as importantly, the AKP considers the expansion of parochial schools, known as Imam-Hatips, as the righting of a historical wrong: the near-evisceration of those schools following the military's 1997 intervention in domestic politics. The AKP also has a political motive for providing significant religious content in Turkish education: Turks who are committed to Islam, or at least appreciative of its role in Turkish society, are generally more likely to vote for the AKP. To Turkish secularists, these AKP efforts to increase the religious content of education are part of a broader campaign to impose religious values on society with the aims of eroding Turkey's secular structure, loosening its ties with the West, and ultimately threatening secular lifestyles, not to mention securing the AKP's political dominance.

Secularism vs. religious conservatism: A fulcrum of Turkish politics

Controversy over the religious content of education is particularly sharp among partisans of Turkey's two leading parties: the conservative and religious AKP and the strongly secularist Republican People's Party, known by its Turkish acronym CHP. In fact, disagreements over educational policy were reportedly among the major impediments that contributed to the failed negotiations to establish an AKP-CHP coalition following the parliamentary election in June 2015.²

The AKP-majority government, which has ruled Turkey since late 2002, sharpened its focus on recasting Turkey's educational policy during its third term, from 2011 to 2015. During this period, the AKP was buoyed by a 49.8 percent vote in the 2011 parliamentary elections and liberated by the political sidelining of an uncompromisingly secularist military. This allowed the AKP to more assiduously implement its vision of "raising a pious generation."³

The centerpiece of this effort was the passage of two major education bills in 2012 and 2014. The first vastly expanded the state-sponsored Imam-Hatip religious school system, while the second sought to ensure the dominance of religiously conservative pro-AKP personnel over Turkey's educational bureaucracy. Many secularists viewed these laws, and other similarly pro-religious measures, as evidence of gradual Islamization of the Turkish educational system. For its part, the AKP says its religion-oriented educational reforms are intended to broaden democracy; to right past wrongs inflicted on the religious community; and, unapologetically, to pursue the vision of a pious generation.

With the AKP having recaptured a solid parliamentary majority in November 1, 2015, elections, President Erdoğan's and the AKP's project of expanding religious education and providing a more religious atmosphere in schools will likely continue. But even if the AKP had lost the election, some of its religion-oriented educational reforms—particularly the expansion of the Imam-Hatip school system and the liberalization of dress codes to allow girls to cover their heads—are now sufficiently rooted in the educational landscape that they probably would not be rolled back even by a CHP government.

For the United States and the West, it is unclear what significance, if any, an increased focus on religious education in Turkey could hold. A reflexive reaction might be that a Turkey with more emphasis on religious education will produce a more religiously conscious Turkey, which, in turn, is a Turkey more likely to identify with its Middle Eastern neighbors than with its long-time Western allies—all of which are overwhelmingly Christian. This transition would imply a Turkey that is less likely to act as a reliable ally.⁴ But that could be false reasoning: More religious education will not necessarily make Turkey a more religiously conscious nation. Even if it were to have that effect, Turkey could still emerge as a strongly democratic country, which, in turn, could strengthen Turkey’s identity and commitment to its Western allies.⁵

The Republic of Turkey has been searching for the right blend of religion and secularism almost since its birth. On the one hand, many of its citizens are deeply religious; on the other, it is intimately tied to the West through economic and security relations. The late scholar Samuel Huntington famously called Turkey a “torn country,” sharply divided between the secular and religious components of its populace.⁶ The AKP government’s effort to swing the social pendulum further toward the religious side than it has been in nearly a century—in part through educational policies—may or may not have a profound effect on Turkey’s future identity, stability, and regional politics. The possibility that it could have a powerful effect, however, bears watching. The purpose of this report is to review that effort—although it is too early to render a judgment as to its effect.

Education is likely to remain a central battlefield in Turkey’s political struggle between those who consider themselves secular and want Islam to be a strictly private matter and those who favor a prominent public role for Islam. For shorthand, this paper will refer to this clash of worldviews as “secularist” versus “religious.”⁷ It should be kept in mind, however, that some religious Turks favor a minimal public role for religion and that some secular, i.e., non-religious, Turks are comfortable with a larger role for religion in public life.

This report will avoid use of the term “Islamist” as applied to the AKP and its followers. The reason is that, as understood in most of the Islamic world, an Islamist is an advocate for governance according to sharia, or Islamic law. Although many Turkish secularists fear Erdoğan’s and the AKP’s long-term intention may indeed be a sharia-based state, the AKP has thus far neither advocated for application of sharia law nor made any effort to apply it. Nor has it, to this writer’s knowledge,

sought to promote Islamism in the educational system; the curriculum of the Imam-Hatip state-sponsored parochial schools, on which much of this report is focused, does not promote political Islam, religious radicalism, or sharia as a basis for state law—even though individual teachers reportedly have done so at times.⁸

During his final term as prime minister, from 2011 to 2015, President Erdoğan pursued a four-pronged approach to his “pious generation” project: first, expanding the state-sponsored religious school system; second, broadening religious education in secular schools; third, entrenching religiously conservative pro-AKP personnel in schools and in the professional education bureaucracy; and fourth, providing a more conservative cultural environment for students. He has made headway in all four areas—particularly in the first.

Growth of Imam-Hatip schools

The AKP's most significant educational reform has been the vast expansion of the Imam-Hatip religious school system. Enrollment in Imam-Hatips increased nearly fifteen-fold over the years of AKP governance, from 65,000 to 932,000; the percentage of middle-school students in Imam-Hatips increased from zero to 10.5 percent; and the percentage of high-school students in Imam-Hatips increased from 2.6 percent to 12.9 percent. Those figures are likely to increase further. (see Table 1)

Officially classified as vocational schools due to their original mission of training religious officials,⁹ Imam-Hatip schools function in much the same way as parochial schools do in the United States, providing students with an education that blends secular and religious studies.¹⁰ Students at these generally gender-segregated schools spend roughly one-quarter to one-third of their time on religious subjects, including the study of the Quran, the life of Muhammad, and the Arabic language. The remainder of their time is spent studying the same secular subjects—math, literature, history, and science—as their peers in secular schools, albeit for fewer hours. Imam-hatip schools are popular both for the conservative environment that they offer and the religious curriculum, as well as for, some would argue, the superior education they provide—even in secular subjects.¹¹

The main and most significant way that Imam-Hatip schools differ from U.S.-style parochial schools is that the former are funded by the state rather than privately. Imam-hatip schools teach only Sunni Islam of the Hanafi¹² school of law, historically the dominant religious legal school in Turkey. Yet, the taxes of all Turkish citizens—including those of the estimated 15 percent to 20 percent non-Sunni portion of the population¹³—support Imam-Hatip schools.¹⁴

The most notable of the AKP government's educational reforms—and the action that has done the most to expand the Imam-Hatip schools—was a law passed in March 2012, widely known as “4+4+4.”¹⁵ The 4+4+4 legislation made education in Turkey mandatory through the 12th grade for the first time.¹⁶ Previously, Turkish law required only eight years of schooling and, prior to 1997, only five years. However, the expansion of mandatory schooling drew less attention than the expansion of Imam-Hatips that the bill enabled—and that was almost certainly the law's primary intent.¹⁷

In Turkey, the hot-button issue of religion in education is sometimes oddly masked by the blandness of an arithmetical equation. When a military-influenced civilian government under Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz passed the eight-year schooling requirement in 1997, the proposal was known as 5+3, meaning five years of primary school plus three years of secondary school, with high school being optional.¹⁸ What it actually meant was that eight years of strictly secular schooling would be required, necessitating the closing of the Imam-Hatip junior high schools, which then served grades six through eight.¹⁹

When the AKP government felt itself sufficiently independent of military control to reverse the earlier legislation closing Imam-Hatip junior high schools, its reform was dubbed “4+4+4.”²⁰ Specifically, the formula means four years each of primary, middle—now grades five through eight—and high schools. An outsider might look at the model primarily as an extension of mandatory schooling. For many Turks, however, the prolonging of mandatory schooling was seen as a secondary aspect of 4+4+4; rather, they see the 4+4+4 plan foremost as code for the re-opening of Imam-Hatip middle schools, the most significant recent development in Turkey’s ongoing tug-of-war between secular and religious influences in education.²¹

As important as the substance of the 4+4+4 reform was—providing ready access to more religious education for more Turkish children—its symbolism was probably at least as important as its substance for the AKP and its supporters. The closure of the Imam-Hatip middle schools had been among the top priorities of the military and its Ataturkist supporters when the former staged its so-called post-modern coup of February 28, 1997, which sought to force Turkey’s first Islamist-oriented prime minister, Necmettin Erbakan, from office. The military and its supporters saw the growth of the Imam-Hatip school system as both symptom and cause of Turkey’s drift away from Ataturk’s secular vision; they viewed Erbakan, the leader of the AKP’s predecessor party, the Refah, or Welfare Party, as a primary driver and beneficiary of this process. Among the 18 “February 28” demands, closure of Imam-Hatip junior high schools was the first step taken by the post-February 28 civilian government that the military helped to install.²²

By reversing this centerpiece of the so-called February 28 process, the AKP government avenged Erbakan’s humiliation²³ and signaled decisively that the AKP civilian government was now running the show in Turkey. In the wake of passage of 4+4+4, President Erdoğan gloated that “[f]ascist pressures have been corrected through democracy,” underscoring that the new law “showed once again who the true owners of national sovereignty are.”²⁴

By re-opening Imam-Hatip middle schools, the AKP government vastly expanded the number of Imam-Hatip schools and the students that they educate. Aside from the 4+4+4 legislation, at least four other factors have played a role in this expansion.

1. Revived mission for Imam-Hatip schools

When the military-influenced civilian government closed Imam-Hatip junior high schools in 1997, it also insisted that future admission to Imam-Hatip high schools be limited to those students seeking to join the clergy and that the number of admissions be limited based on likely future employability as a religious official. Imam-Hatip schools were to be treated strictly as vocational schools. Thus, the number of Imam-Hatip high school students was steadily trimmed over the next five years, from 193,000 in the 1998–1999 school year to 65,000 in 2002–2003 school year—a decrease of nearly 70 percent. (see Table 1)

After the AKP was elected for the first time in November 2002, it reversed that policy, at least informally.²⁵ Imam-hatip high schools once more began welcoming more students than could possibly enjoy future employment as clerics—meaning that parents could once more enroll their children in Imam-Hatip high schools simply because they liked what Imam-Hatips offered: religious education in a conservative environment. The Imam-Hatip high school population once again mushroomed from 65,000 in the 2002–2003 school year, which began shortly before the AKP came to power; to 85,000 in the 2003–2004 school year, the first full school year after the AKP came to power; and finally to 268,000 in the 2011–2012 school year, the final school year beginning before passage of 4+4+4 and the re-opening of Imam-Hatip middle schools. All told, the Imam-Hatip high school population increased more than four-fold over the first nine years of AKP rule.

TABLE 1

The rise, fall, and rise of Imam-Hatip religious schools in Turkey, 1991 to 2015

School year	Number of Imam-Hatip:		Number of students in Imam-Hatip:			Percentage of all students in Imam-Hatip schools	
	Middle schools	High schools	Middle schools	High schools	Total	Middle school	High school
1991–1992	390	390	227,088	119,086	346,174	n/a	n/a
1992–1993	390	390	249,981	142,097	392,078	9.80%	9.00%
1993–1994	391	391	274,175	162,353	436,528	10.40%	8.30%
1994–1995	446	394	301,862	171,439	473,301	11.30%	8.70%
1995–1996	479	434	306,684	188,896	495,580	11.60%	10.90%
1996–1997	601	601	318,775	192,727	511,502	12.20%	9.30%
1997–1998	604	605	218,631	178,046	396,677	n/a	8.60%
1998–1999	612	612	0	192,786	192,786	0	9.60%
1999–2000	0	504	0	134,224	134,224	0	4.30%
2000–2001	0	500	0	91,620	91,620	0	3.10%
2001–2002	0	458	0	71,583	71,583	0	2.65%
2002–2003	0	450	0	64,534	64,534	0	2.60%
2003–2004	0	452	0	84,898	84,898	0	3.20%
2004–2005	0	452	0	96,851	96,851	0	3.60%
2005–2006	0	453	0	108,064	108,064	0	3.70%
2006–2007	0	455	0	120,668	120,668	0	4.00%
2007–2008	0	456	0	129,274	129,274	0	4.40%
2008–2009	0	458	0	143,637	143,637	0	4.30%
2009–2010	0	465	0	198,581	198,581	0	5.50%
2010–2011	0	493	0	235,639	235,639	0	5.90%
2011–2012	0	537	0	268,245	268,245	0	7.00%
2012–2013	1,099	708	94,467	380,771	475,238	7.60%	9.60%
2013–2014	1,361	854	240,015	474,096	714,111	9.50%	11.50%
2014–2015	1,597	1,017	385,830	546,443	932,273	10.50%	12.90%

Note on percentages for Imam-Hatip middle schools: The 2012–2013 figure for the percentage of middle school students in Imam-Hatip schools is the ratio of fifth graders in the Imam-Hatip middle schools to all fifth graders. The 2013–2014 figure is the ratio of fifth and sixth graders in Imam-Hatip middle schools to all fifth and sixth graders. The 2014–2015 figures is the ratio of students in grades five to seven in Imam-Hatip schools to all students in grades five to seven. This reflects the phasing-in of 4+4+4.

Source: For statistics from 1991–1992 to 2003–2004, see Rusen Cakir, Irfan Bozan, and Blakan Talu, "Imam-Hatip liseleri: Efsaneler ve gerçekler" (Istanbul, Turkey: TESEV, 2004). Statistics for Imam-Hatip enrollment from 2005–2006 to 2014–2015, as well as enrollment percentages from 2004–2005 to 2014–2015, were provided to the author by Education Reform Initiative, Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey, June 4, 2015. For statistics for Imam-Hatip enrollment in 2004–2005, see Hurriyet, "Imam hatibe ilgi 11 yılda 7 kat arttı," December 4, 2014, available at <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/imam-hatibe-ilgi-11-yilda-7-kat-artti-27706500>.

2. Enhanced standing for university admission

A 2011 AKP government decision to accord Imam-Hatip graduates standing equal to that of secular graduates in college applications made Imam-Hatips a more attractive option for college-bound students. Prior to that decision, Imam-Hatip graduates were disadvantaged in applying to all faculties other than theology. In effect, the 2011 decision ended a point system that distinguished between graduates of regular secular schools and all other vocational schools, including Imam-Hatips, in college applications.²⁶

3. Rebranding and closing secular schools

Since 2010, the number of Imam-Hatip schools has surged. In addition to the need for new buildings to accommodate the revived Imam-Hatip middle schools following 4+4+4 and the ever-rising Imam-Hatip high school population, there were two other reasons for the surge. One stemmed from a decision by the Ministry of National Education, or MNE, in academic year 2010–2011 to close an entire category of secular public high schools, the so-called general schools, which were deemed educationally inadequate. Between the 2010–2011 and 2013–2014 school years, all 1,477 general high schools were phased out and converted into other types of schools. Many, perhaps most, of them became Imam-Hatips, but the exact number of general schools converted into Imam-Hatips is unclear.²⁷

Another reason for the surge was that many other secular and vocational schools were simply converted into Imam-Hatips on the decision of MNE officials. Again, there are no available figures to show precisely how many schools were converted.

One educator interviewed for this report said that MNE-appointed local school superintendents are empowered to decide when to transform secular schools into Imam-Hatips.²⁸ Ostensibly, this educator said, such decisions are made when the superintendent judges that most of the neighborhood wants an Imam-Hatip school, although, he claimed, no formal survey of opinion is conducted.²⁹ An MNE spokesperson, however, claimed that the opening of new imam-hatips and the conversion of other schools into Imam-Hatips are “based on analytics derived from county and provincial needs surveys.”³⁰ If so, such surveys have not been made publicly available. Turkish education scholar Isik Tuzun notes that it is “difficult to obtain information” about how decisions are made to create new Imam-Hatip schools or convert secular public schools into Imam-Hatips, but she believes the process to be “rather arbitrary.”³¹

The conversion of some public schools into Imam-Hatips left many students without a neighborhood secular public school, forcing them to choose between a nearby Imam-Hatip and a more distant secular school.³² Thus, an increased number of students chose Imam-Hatips out of convenience rather than conviction or career path.

Whatever the reasons, the ballooning number of Imam-Hatip schools has been well documented. (see Table 1) During the 1997–1998 school year—the final year of Imam-Hatip middle schools prior to their closure by the Yilmaz government—there were 604 such schools. When Imam-Hatip middle schools were revived in the 2012–2013 school year, they reopened with 1,099 schools. Their number increased to 1,361 during the 2013–14 school year and to 1,597 schools—accommodating 385,830 students—during the 2014–2015 school year. (see Table 1)

There were 605 Imam-Hatip high schools in the 1997–1998 school year. As the Imam-Hatip student population decreased, the number of Imam-Hatip high schools declined to 450 by the 2002–2003 school year. But even as Imam-Hatip high school student enrollment more than quadrupled during the nine years of AKP rule before the passage of 4+4+4, the number of Imam-Hatip high schools increased only to 537 during the 2011–2012 school year—fewer than during the 1997–1998 school year. After the passage of 4+4+4, the number of Imam-Hatip high schools soared, almost doubling within three years: 708 in the 2012–2013 school year, 854 in the 2013–2014 school year; and 1,017 in the 2014–2015 school year. (see Table 1)

The net effect is that an increased number of Imam-Hatips schools are more accessible to more students. Turkish education officials and AKP partisans say they are simply meeting the desires of communities. But Batuhan Aydagul, the executive director of a prominent Istanbul-based Education Research Institute, or ERI, sees the expansion of Imam-Hatip schools not as a matter of supply meeting demand but of supply creating demand. “They say it is based due to demand, but if you increase the capacity and supply of these schools, then you are proactively increasing demand,” said Aydagul.³³ Lacking meaningful survey data, it is impossible to know which view is more accurate.

4. New exam and arbitrary assignments

The fourth factor supporting an enrollment boom in Imam-Hatip schools was the introduction, in the 2013–2014 school year, of a national exam taken during eighth grade, the final year of middle school.³⁴ This exam is intended to help determine students’ placement into a category of high school: standard academic; specialized academic; or vocational, the category that includes Imam-Hatips.

Along with the exam, students were asked to list their top 15 school preferences, with the understanding that they would only be assigned to a school for which their test scores and grades qualified them. This gave the government wider latitude than ever before to assign students to high schools. Prior to enactment of 4+4+4, students did not have to attend grades 9 through 12. A number of secularists charge that this government discretion resulted in arbitrary assignments to Imam-Hatip high schools.

As is the case with other Turkish vocational schools, the test-score threshold for admission to Imam-Hatip high schools is lower than that required for admission to secular academic schools. As a result, many students were presumably assigned to Imam-Hatips, contrary to their preference, because their scores did not merit admission to traditional secular academic schools.

In general, Turkish policy seems to be focused on increasing vocational schooling, including Imam-Hatips, at the expense of secular academic schooling. During the 2010–2011 school year, at which time high school enrollment was voluntary, 53 percent of newly enrolled high school students attended secular academic schools and 47 percent attended vocational schools. By the following year, vocational school enrollees were a slight majority among the newly enrolled. By the 2013–2014 school year—at which time the 4+4+4 law had made high-school attendance mandatory—the figures were 63 percent vocational and 37 percent academic.³⁵

Many students were reportedly assigned to Imam-Hatips arbitrarily, however, without regard to their test results. One Turkish columnist complained that his daughter had been assigned to a distant Imam-Hatip school against her will after she did not submit her 15 school preferences. She had been mistakenly told that it was unnecessary to provide preferences if one wanted simply to go to one's neighborhood secular public school, the columnist wrote.³⁶ Among other widely cited examples of the arbitrariness of the assignments, the grandson of the chief rabbi of Turkey also was assigned to an Imam-Hatip school, as were many Christians.³⁷ There is no data on how many students were simply assigned to Imam-Hatips as a result of an arbitrary decision, or a mistake, rather than test scores—nor is there information on whether such mistakes were rectified, although the MNE pledged that they would be.

In fact, there is no clear data on how many students were assigned to Imam-Hatip schools against their preference for any reason, although one CHP parliamentarian put the number at 40,000.³⁸ The MNE acknowledged that 9,802 students had been inadvertently assigned to schools far from their homes, but it did not say how many of these students had been assigned to Imam-Hatips. In a February 2015 interview, Minister of National Education Nabi Avci suggested that inappropriate school assignments were found only among a pool of 130,000 students who, presumably as a result of confusion—as in the case of the columnist’s daughter—did not fill out their preference sheet.³⁹

As a result of all these factors, there has been a massive increase in the number of Imam-Hatip schools and students. In the 2014–2015 school year, some 932,000 students attended Imam-Hatip schools, a roughly 40 percent increase from the previous school year. The number of Imam-Hatip high school students alone more than doubled after passage of 4+4+4 from 268,000 students in the 2011–2012 school year to 546,000 in the 2014–2015 school year. (see Table 1) Figures for 2015-16 are currently unavailable.

Imam-Hatip students now constitute 10.5 percent of all middle school students and 12.9 percent of all high school students. By way of comparison, Imam-Hatip high school students constituted only 2.6 percent of all Turkish high school students when the AKP came to power in 2002. (see Table 1) That low figure corresponded to the apex of Turkish secularist efforts to return Imam-Hatips to their original, narrow mission of simply training clerics, with the world of higher education welcoming its graduates, for the most part, only into theology faculties.

The Imam-Hatip enrollment numbers, in absolute terms, now go far beyond their pre-February 28, 1997 level—surely a source of great satisfaction not only to President Erdoğan, but also to much of the religious community in Turkey. At their pre-1997 peak—the 1996–1997 school year—511,502 students attended 1,202 Imam-Hatip middle and high schools. As previously noted, in the 2014–2015 school year, there were 932,273 students in 2,614 Imam-Hatip middle and high schools, an increase of more than 80 percent in students and more than 100 percent in school buildings over the pre-1997 peak.⁴⁰ Yet, as a percentage of the overall student body, Imam-Hatip enrollment is not much different than it was at its pre-February 28, 1997 peak in the 1995–1996 and 1996–1997 school years.⁴¹ In both eras, the percentage of students enrolled in Imam-Hatips was steadily on the rise. In 1997, the military stepped in to put a stop to that increase and roll it back. There is no prospect that the politically weakened military or any other nondemocratic force

would or could do such a thing today. Even were a secularist government to come to power, it might well seek to find ways to slow or cap the increase, but rolling back the Imam-Hatip system to its vocational-only days—with limited university prospects for its students—would be out of the question. With the AKP having won another strong mandate to rule in the November 1, 2015 parliamentary election, there is every reason to believe the expansion of Imam-Hatips will continue.

Secularists believe soaring Imam-Hatip enrollment is, at least in part, a result of the government's channeling students into the religious school system through sleight-of-hand methods, such as the elimination of secular neighborhood schools. Religious conservatives, however, believe that Imam-Hatips are simply the people's choice. In a June 28, 2015, speech before a nongovernmental organization devoted to promoting religious education, President Erdoğan—himself an Imam-Hatip graduate—exulted that he had succeeded in removing the “unjust, lawless, and grievous” measures of the February 28 period. “The number of students in our Imam-Hatip schools, which fell from 600,000 to 60,000 [as a result of February 28], is now one million. This shows one thing: that our nation, in its own spiritual world, is determined to send its kids to Imam-Hatip schools.”⁴²

In a February 2015 interview, Minister of National Education Avci claimed that 94,000 students listed Imam-Hatip schools as their top high school preference but that only 54,000 of these students qualified.⁴³ Avci was trying to refute the claim that the state was arbitrarily assigning students to Imam-Hatips in order to fill them; quite the contrary, he implied, there are not enough places for all the students clamoring to get in.

Religious electives in secular schools

The expansion of Imam-Hatip schools was the most dramatic development in advancing President Erdoğan’s goal of raising a pious generation, but it was not the only one. In fact, there was another aspect of 4+4+4 that arouses the concern of some secularists: mandating the availability of elective courses on “the Holy Quran” and “the life of our Prophet” in secular middle and high schools, both public and private.⁴⁴

Mandating the availability of these electives, which are required courses in Imam-Hatip schools, feeds secularist fears that the AKP’s long-term goal is to impose an Imam-Hatip-type curriculum in all Turkish schools.⁴⁵ Aside from this concern over “Imam-Hatip-ification” of secular schools, many secularists worry that, given the prominent role Islam plays in Turkish society, students will feel social pressure to take the religious electives. Thus far, the MNE has not issued statistics on how many students are taking the religious electives.

It should be noted that the new religion electives are in addition to a required course on religion, called “Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge,” a mandatory part of the curriculum in grades four through twelve in all schools—public and private—since 1982.⁴⁶ Course presentation generally accords with the precepts of Sunni Islam, as well as the Hanafi legal school that predominates in Turkey. Yet, unlike the religious electives, which have an unvarnished Sunni Islamic content, the required course also blends ethical issues and a limited amount of comparative religion into the curriculum.⁴⁷

“Religious Culture and Moral Knowledge” has come under fire from the European Court of Human Rights in recent years, as Alevis—adherents of a heterodox Islamic sect that generally has no official recognition in Turkey—have protested both the overwhelming focus on Sunni Islam in the course curriculum and the state’s refusal to exempt Alevi children from the requirement to take the course. In contrast, Christian and Jewish children are excused from the course if their parents so request, since, unlike Alevism, Christianity and Judaism are recognized by the state as official religions.⁴⁸

On two occasions, in 2007 and 2014, the European Court of Human Rights, or ECHR, ruled that Turkey should excuse any students who so desire from the mandatory religion course without their parents' having to reveal their religion or beliefs. When the ECHR ruling was issued in 2014, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu took exception. He said it was important even for atheists to learn about religion, “just like I should know about Marxism even though I am not a Marxist.” The prime minister suggested it is important for everyone to understand religion—clearly meaning Sunni Islam—in order to understand events in Turkey, the Middle East, and the Balkans.⁴⁹

Davutoglu then added a thought rarely invoked by religious Turks—but one that might be their strongest argument in justifying state-sponsored religious education to secular audiences: “You can see the developments [in the region]. If a proper religious culture had been taught [at schools] in countries surrounding us, certain developments would never have taken place.”⁵⁰ In indirectly suggesting that compulsory religion courses are a critical measure in fighting radicalism, his social-engineering approach was not so different from that of the secular generals who insisted on the course in the first place, or from that of Ataturk himself, who first insisted on unfettered state control of religious messaging.⁵¹

To be persuaded by Davutoğlu's presumed logic, of course, secularists would have to be convinced of the state's moderate intentions. As long as the state's religious and educational institutions remain under the AKP's sway, few secularists will be so convinced.⁵² Yet, for now, no evidence suggests that the Islam promoted in the compulsory course is anything other than moderate.

Cleansing the bureaucracy

On March 7, 2014, almost precisely two years after passage of 4+4+4, the AKP-majority parliament passed another major education law, no. 6528, this one setting out an 18-month timeframe for closing *dershanes*, or private-tutoring and exam-preparation institutes.⁵³ The primary purpose of the law was presumably to inflict damage on the Gulen religious movement, which reportedly derives significant income from *dershanes*. Gulenists—followers of religious philosopher Fethullah Gulen—who for many years were a political ally of AKP, emerged as President Erdoğan's public-enemy number-one after a major corruption scandal rocked his administration in late 2013. Erdoğan was convinced that Gulenists in the bureaucracy had produced charges aimed at his family, officials, and friends for the sole purpose of toppling the AKP government. As prime minister and later as president,

Erdoğan denounced Gulenists as terrorists and traitors who had formed a “parallel state” within the state bureaucracy. For that reason, it was widely assumed that the new law, which came to be known as the dersshane-closing law, was conceived for the specific purpose of diminishing the Gulenists’ revenue.

There was less media focus on a second equally important aspect of the law that was aimed not only at punishing Gulenists, but also at tightening the AKP’s grip on the education bureaucracy. It mandated the removal of senior managers at the central and local offices of the Ministry of National Education and also opened the way for the dismissal of 8,403 school principals and deputy principals nationwide, most of them reportedly Gulenists.⁵⁴ Virtually all of the replacement principals and deputy principals were reportedly pro-AKP, and most of them were recruited from among members of an influential, pro-AKP teachers union called Egitim Bir-Sen.⁵⁵

In mid-2015, both the dersshanes and the dismissed employees seemingly received a reprieve. In a surprising 12-5 decision on July 13, 2015, the Constitutional Court of Turkey overturned the entire law affecting both the dersshanes and the school officials. The court asserted that law no. 6528 was contrary to constitutional provisions on freedom of enterprise, the right to an education, and the right to work.⁵⁶ The success of the appeal by the secular opposition—CHP—was surprising in light of the fact that the overwhelming majority of the court’s judges had been appointed by President Erdoğan and his predecessor, Abdullah Gul, both co-founders of AKP.⁵⁷ After all, the law was passed by then-Prime Minister Erdoğan’s AKP-majority government and signed into law by then-President Gul. At least symbolically, the Constitutional Court ruling overturning the dersshane-closing law was the first significant defeat for—and a stinging legal rebuke to—Erdoğan’s efforts to rid the Turkish bureaucracy of Gulenists.

At present, however, the government appears to be circumventing the Constitutional Court ruling in a manner that will still result in the closure of the Gulenist-owned dersshanes.⁵⁸ Given the government’s determination to crush the Gulenists, there seems little likelihood of full compliance with the Constitutional Court ruling. Likewise, the principals, deputy principals, and MNE bureaucrats who were fired thus far have been unable to recover their positions.

The dersshane-closing law was intended to serve three related purposes: deprive Gulenists of revenue through closure of their dersshanes; remove Gulenist influence in the educational system through firing principals, deputy principals, and other bureaucrats; and more deeply implant AKP influence through the appointment of pro-AKP personnel throughout the educational bureaucracy and in the schools.

More than four months after the Constitutional Court's ruling negated the law, it appears likely that the government will be able to accomplish those goals. Legal appeals may well follow but, for now, the nonimplementation of the court ruling stands as a powerful commentary on the state of rule of law in Turkey.

Altering the educational environment

The AKP-majority government took other measures as well to create an educational environment more hospitable to religion. Culturally and in terms of importance to the AKP's religious base, the most significant of these measures was the removal of the ban on women's wearing a head covering—usually, a scarf—in schools and universities. For years, this ban—which was formalized by the military government in 1982—was one of the hottest issues and at times dominated the political landscape in Turkey. Three government attempts to remove the ban—in 1988, 1990, and 2008⁵⁹—were overruled by Atatürkist-dominated Constitutional Court decisions. As prime minister, Erdoğan had often complained that he had to send his two daughters abroad, to the West, for their higher education so that they could matriculate at a campus that respected their right to wear the headscarf.⁶⁰

Prior to 2010, Turkish law actually banned the wearing of religious dress not only in universities but also in schools and in the performance of official duties, meaning that the ban also applied to civil servants.⁶¹ The ban in universities attracted the most attention, however, and was certainly the most emotional issue for the religious community.⁶² The university ban confronted religious girls with a particularly difficult choice: whether to remove the headscarf for the sake of a university education; adhere to their principles regarding the headscarf and forgo a university education; or, for those few who could afford it, whether to leave Turkey and pursue a university education abroad, as Erdoğan's daughters did.

By 2010, the AKP government was starting to assert its grip on state institutions. Following a September 2010 referendum that amended the constitution to strengthen the elected government's influence over the judiciary, the Erdoğan government announced that it would henceforth defend any university student who was expelled or disciplined for wearing a headscarf. This was followed by a directive from Turkey's Higher Education Council, or HEC, instructing universities to take no further action against headscarved students, notwithstanding a 2008 Constitutional Court decision affirming the ban.⁶³

With the passage of the referendum and the issuance of the HEC directive, secularist desire to fight for the ban wilted, including within the CHP, whose appeal had led to the 2008 Constitutional Court decision that upheld the ban.⁶⁴ Once the headscarf issue was decided, a number of other headscarf-related issues were decided and implemented by the Turkish government with surprisingly little fanfare or resistance, all in favor of the right to wear the headscarf.

In 2012, the government ruled that girls in Imam-Hatip schools could wear headscarves in all classes.⁶⁵ Previously, Imam-Hatip girls officially had only been allowed to wear their headscarves in Quran classes. In 2013, a ban on headscarves applied to employees of state institutions was lifted, allowing headscarved women to fill civil service positions, including teaching.⁶⁶ In September 2014, the government ruled that girls could wear headscarves in all schools starting in the fifth grade.⁶⁷ This represented a substantial leap forward in the legitimation of the headscarf in educational settings and the culmination of a four-year process during which the headscarf went from nearly entirely taboo to nearly universally accepted in universities, schools, and other state institutions.⁶⁸

While the passage of 4+4+4; the closing of the dershanes and the broad-scale replacement of principals and MNE officials by AKP loyalists; and the acceptance of the hijab were the most significant religiously tinged educational reforms of the latter Erdoğan era, there were other, less high-profile measures as well. In 2014, for example, voluntary preschool Quran courses for 4- to 6-year-olds were organized by the Religious Affairs Directorate, or Diyanet Isleri Baskanligi, the state agency that regulates mosques, sermons, the hiring of clergy, and most other religious matters. The establishment of the course meshes with President Erdoğan's December 2014 pledge of "offering a new lifestyle starting from kindergarten."⁶⁹ Somewhat similarly, in October 2015, MNE officials announced that, beginning in the 2016-17 academic year, second graders will be allowed to choose Arabic to fulfill their mandatory foreign language requirement. Currently, they choose among English, French, and German.⁷⁰

Other AKP government decisions also reflected religiously based social concerns. In 2012, the government banned the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages on university campuses. The decision reportedly was justified in terms of personal and communal health, although secularists suspected that—in combination with limits on alcohol consumption in many AKP-ruled towns and on Turkish domestic airlines flights—the motivating impulse was Islamic law.⁷¹ In November 2013 then-Prime Minister Erdoğan threatened to close co-ed dormitories and even

off-campus, private, coed housing. He was quoted as saying “as a conservative, democratic government, we need to intervene,” and called on provincial governors to investigate the situation. There was no meaningful follow-up, however, and Erdoğan soon dropped the issue.⁷²

National Education Council: Harbinger of reform?

A number of controversial recommendations emanated from a December 2014 meeting of the National Education Council, or NEC, whose 600-strong, religiously conservative membership meets quadrennially and influentially advises the MNE.⁷³ Turkish secularists tend to see NEC proposals as a harbinger of things to come, particularly since the NEC advocated 4+4+4 well before the AKP government promoted it.⁷⁴ Among proposals supported by the NEC at its December 2014 meeting were mandatory religious instruction starting in the first grade—rather than in fourth grade, as is currently the case—and the teaching of religious values in kindergarten, including the concepts of “paradise and hell” and “love for Allah”⁷⁵

Among proposals considered but not endorsed by the NEC were gender segregation of all classes and mandatory inclusion of Ottoman Turkish—or Turkish in the Arabic script, which was abolished by Atatürk and replaced with the current Latin-letter alphabet in 1928—as an elective in all schools. The proposal on Ottoman Turkish touched off a media firestorm, fueled by President Erdoğan’s assertion that, “whether they [critics] like it or not, Ottoman will be taught and learned in this country.”⁷⁶ In the end, the NEC apparently recommended only that Ottoman Turkish be made compulsory in advanced, or Anadolu, Imam-Hatip schools.⁷⁷

Implications for the United States

The issue of religion in Turkish education is a strictly internal matter and not one that the United States should try to, or even could, affect. It is plausible, but by no means certain, that a Turkey that emphasizes religious education is likely to become a more religious Turkey, and a more religious Turkey is likely to be more involved in the Islamic world, particularly with nearby Middle Eastern nations. A more religious Turkey could be fully democratic and pro-Western, its greater religious consciousness and its deepened involvement with its neighboring co-religionists having no effect on its basic political and strategic orientation.

Alternatively, such a Turkey could progressively identify more closely with Middle Eastern countries and less so with its long-time Western allies. Because of Turkey's location at the heart of so many issues of importance to U.S. interests—whether the Islamic State, or ISIS; Iranian regional aggression; broader Middle Eastern stability; the Cyprus dispute; or Russian maneuvers in Ukraine and Syria, to name just a few—the United States will likely continue to place high value on its strategic relationship with Turkey. Turkey's stability and its attitude toward the West have an inherent importance for the United States, and educational policies could have a long-term effect on Turkish stability and identity. Educational policies are also a barometer of the values of a nation's rulers. It is useful for the United States to remain mindful of educational policies, recognizing that it is by no means clear how these policies might bear on Turkish foreign policies or U.S. interests at any given time.

Conclusion

Many Turks find the religious-secular dispute, as played out in the educational arena, a worrisome distraction from a needed focus on quality of education. They argue that there are many more pressing educational issues that should concern Turks, such as low student achievement in math and sciences; socioeconomic inequalities in education; teacher and classroom shortages; the interference of the state in higher education through the HEC⁷⁸; and the like.⁷⁹

It is clear, however, that Turkey's secular-religious dispute in the educational arena will not easily be cast aside. Virtually every nation uses its educational system to promote its national principles. However, in Turkey, this process is complicated by the fact that the country is deeply divided into opposing camps regarding those principles, so the echoes of the religious-secular dispute are not likely to disappear from the classroom any time soon. CHP has certainly mellowed on religious issues—on the headscarf matter, for example—but it remains a highly secularist party, and its grassroots remain deeply suspicious that President Erdoğan's and AKP's goal is to undo all of Atatürk's Westernizing reforms and to thoroughly Islamize Turkey.⁸⁰ The AKP's grassroots, in turn, see CHP as atheist elitists who reject—in fact, are contemptuous of—the values of the God-fearing masses. Education, of which the promotion of values is such an indelible part, inevitably will remain a key battlefield in this clash of worldviews.

The AKP emerged from November 1, 2015, elections with nearly 50 percent of the popular vote—a level rarely attained in Turkish history—and a strong parliamentary majority that should keep it in power at least until regularly-scheduled elections in 2019. With the wind at its back and the tireless Erdoğan likely to remain its most powerful figure, AKP is virtually certain to continue to push for an enhancement of religious education in Turkey. That push could take the form of further expansion of Imam-Hatip schools, enhanced and earlier religious study in secular schools, promotion of more advanced religious training, or other programs.

It would behoove the United States to closely monitor this process. Turkey is an important U.S. ally, and issues of Turkish identity and stability can affect the quality of that alliance. Turkey's commitment to that alliance was sustained over the years in significant part because Turkish leadership identified more with the West than with its Muslim-majority Middle Eastern neighbors. Should the new AKP government aggressively pursue President Erdoğan's vision of raising a pious generation in the years ahead, those equations might change: A deepening of the secular-religious split in Turkey could threaten Turkey's stability, making it a less reliable ally. If Turkey comes to identify increasingly with its Muslim-majority neighbors, its bonds with the West may fray. Only time, and Turkish leaders and voters, will tell.

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Endnotes

- 1 Hurriyet, "Dindar genclik yetistirecegiz" February 2, 2012, available at <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/19825231.asp>; Kadri Gursel, "Erdogan Islamizes education system to raise 'devout youth,'" *Al-Monitor*, December 9, 2014, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/12/turkey-islamize-education-religion.html#>. Erdogan used the term "pious generation" on February 1, 2012, at a meeting of AKP officials, in response to criticism from CHP leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who had accused him of exploiting religion for political gain. The context of Erdogan's quote suggests he had used the term previously. Erdogan can also be heard in a YouTube clip using the term at a February 6, 2012, education-related ceremony, in which he emphasizes his conviction that a "pious generation" can also be professionally accomplished and "modern (cagdas)." See The Tecessum's channel, "Recep Tayyip Erdogan Dindar Nesil Aciklamasi," YouTube, February 6, 2012, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EuN55EL71_k.
- 2 Sputnik News, "CHP koalisyonda 'indirim'e gitti," July 30, 2015, available at <http://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/20150730/1016850461.html>.
- 3 Gursel, "Erdogan Islamizes education system to raise 'devout youth'"
- 4 Albania, the only other Muslim-majority country in NATO, joined the alliance in 2009.
- 5 For an argument that Turkish society is becoming more secular, even as the government takes measures to make it more religious, see the comments of scholar Volkan Ertit in a recent interview with journalist Ahmet Hakan. Ahmet Hakan, "Turkiye dindarlasmiyor aksine dinden uzaklasiyor," *Hurriyet*, September 16, 2015, available at http://sosyal.hurriyet.com.tr/yazar/ahmet-hakan_131/turkiye-dindarlasmiyor-aksine-dinden-uzaklasiyor_30083737.
- 6 Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs* 72 (3) (1993): 22–49, p. 42.
- 7 Turkey can be fairly described as a religious country with a significant nonreligious minority. According to a 2012 Pew Research Center survey, 88 percent of Turks said religion is either very important—67 percent—or somewhat important—21 percent—to them. On the other hand, 38 percent of Turks say they attend mosque seldom—15 percent—or never—23 percent. See Pew Research Center, "The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity" (2012), available at <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/08/09/the-worlds-muslims-unity-and-diversity-executive-summary/>.
- 8 Iren Ozgur, *Islamic Schools in Modern Turkey: Faith, Politics, and Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 69, 79, 97–100. The Imam-Hatip website seeks to project the schools as forward-looking, as well as religion-oriented. For example, it says the basic goal of Imam-Hatip schools is "to develop youth who are knowledgeable about society and themselves, cultured, successful, self-confident, and believing (in God); to prepare them for life as individuals who can provide answers to the needs of the twenty-first century; and to develop them as distinctive individuals who value others, can solve problems, and who protect and develop national and spiritual values." See Imam Hatip, "İmam Hatip Okullari," available at <http://www.imamhatipokullari.org/20-soruda-ihl.html> (last accessed June 2015). See also Rusen Cakir, Irfan Bozan, and Balkan Talu, "İmam Hatip Liseleri: Efsaneler ve Gercekler" (Istanbul: Tesev Yayinlari, 2004), pp. 39–53, available at <http://www.tesev.org.tr/Upload/Publication/b12fbad8-6b04-4b4c-a987-021487dafa00/IH%20Efsaneler-Gercekler.pdf>.
- 9 Imams are prayer leaders; hatips are preachers. Imam-Hatips were founded in 1924 as strictly vocational schools. They began teaching secular subjects—thus taking on their current look of a national parochial school system—and broadening their student base mainly under center-right governments of the 1950s through 1970s. The most significant expansion of student population in this period, and the establishment of Imam-Hatips unalterably as part of the educational landscape, took place in the 1970s. The admission of girls in 1976 was a particularly important development, signaling that Imam-Hatips could not de facto be considered simply vocational schools, whatever their official designation, since the Islamic clergy (with rare exception) is all-male. For a good historical overview of Imam-Hatip schools, see Cakir, Bozan, and Talu, "İmam Hatip Liseleri: Efsaneler ve Gercekler," pp. 39–53, available at <http://www.tesev.org.tr/Upload/Publication/b12fbad8-6b04-4b4c-a987-021487dafa00/IH%20Efsaneler-Gercekler.pdf>. Also see Ozgur, *Islamic Schools in Modern Turkey: Faith, Politics, and Education*, pp. 26–55.
- 10 Imam-Hatip students generally spend about one-quarter to one-third of their time in religious instruction. Specifically, they receive the following amounts of religious versus secular instruction per week: In grades five through seven: 26 hours secular, 8 hours religious; in grade eight: 26 secular, 9 religious; in grade nine: 31 secular, 9 religious; in grades 10 and 12: 26 secular, 14 religious; in grade 11: 28 secular, 12 religious. Secular high school students generally attend 32 hours of class per week. Personal email communications from scholar Isik Tuzun, Education Reform Initiative, July 15, 2015. ERI is an education think-tank affiliated with Sabanci University, Istanbul. In Turkish it is known as Eğitim Reformu Girişimi, or ERG. For a full listing in English, by course, of the weekly curriculum in Imam-Hatip high schools as of 2009, see Ozgur, *Islamic Schools in Modern Turkey: Faith, Politics, and Education*, pp. 194–195.
- 11 For example, teacher-student ratios are far better in Imam-Hatip schools than in the public secular schools, according to Ozgur. See *Ibid.*, p. 143. Additionally, by the late 1990s, Imam-Hatip graduates were achieving far higher rates of admission to university than were graduates of public secular schools. See *Ibid.*, pp. 50–51.
- 12 In Turkish, "Hanefi."
- 13 Including non-Sunnis, mainly Alevis, perhaps up to a third of Turks can be said to be non-Hanafi, as most Kurdish Sunnis follow the Shafii legal tradition. Census-takers in Turkey generally do not include information about ethnicity or about religious preferences within Islam. Estimates of the Alevi portion of the Turkish population generally fall into the 15 to 20 percent range, but some run much higher. According to a 2014 survey conducted by the Turkish Statistics Institute on behalf of the Religious Affairs Directorate, 77.5 percent of Turks who believe in Islam identify themselves as Hanafi and 11.5 percent as Shafii. See Haberler, "Türkiye'de Halkın Yüzde 83.4'ü Oruç Tutuyor," July 15, 2014, available at <http://www.haberler.com/turkiye-de-halkin-yuzde-83-4-u-oruc-tutuyor-6262450-haber/>. The percentage of Hanafis is likely over-stated; many Alevis are reticent to openly declare themselves as such and may have told pollsters they are part of the Sunni Hanafi majority.
- 14 Many aspects of Imam-Hatips arouse controversy among Turkish secularists, but the issue of state funding, jarring to foreigners accustomed to separation of church and state, is rarely raised. The oft-stated claim that Atatürkist Turkey separated religion and state is incorrect. Rather, Atatürk and his followers instituted state control of Islam, under which the various instruments of that control, primarily the Religious Affairs Directorate, were, and remain, state-funded.

- 15 The official title of the law, as passed in parliament, was the nondescriptive “İLKÖĞRETİM VE EĞİTİM KANUNU İLE BAZI KANUNLARDA DEĞİŞİKLİK YAPILMASINA DAİR KANUN,” which translates roughly to The Law Concerning Modification of the Primary and General Education Law and of Some Other Laws.” public law 6287.
- 16 At the time, only roughly two-thirds of Turkish students attended high school or vocational school following eighth grade. See Sedat Ergin, “The rise of the ‘Imam-Hatip’ religious high schools,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 9, 2012, available at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/the-rise-of-the-imam-hatip-religious-high-schools--.aspx?pageID=449&nID=22747&NewsCatID=428>.
- 17 4+4+4 passed by a vote of 295 to 91, with one abstention. The majority of the votes in favor came from AKP; the majority in opposition came from CHP. MHP did not participate in the vote, despite its traditionalist base, perhaps in acknowledgement of the fact that it had been part of the 1997, post-Erbakan government that originally closed the Imam-Hatip junior high schools. A senior MHP official claimed that MHP had not been opposed to re-opening the Imam-Hatip junior high schools or to the expansion of mandatory schooling to 12 years, but that MHP considered the bill to have been introduced and passed too hastily and without proper discussion. Personal phone communication with senior MHP official, July 9, 2015. The pro-Kurdish and secular BDP also eschewed participation rather than join CHP in voting no, perhaps to avoid alienating an AKP government with which it then still hoped to negotiate an end to Turkey’s Kurdish problem and perhaps also to avoid further alienating the many Kurdish traditionalists who generally voted for AKP but which BDP hoped ultimately to attract. In its Peoples’ Democratic Party/ HDP incarnation, the BDP did so to a significant extent in June 2015 elections and, to a somewhat lesser extent, in the November 2015 elections. According to a poll commissioned by an association of Imam-Hatip alumni, or TIMAV, in mid-2012, MHP voters actually opposed the 4+4+4 bill by 41 percent to 28 percent, with the remainder undecided. BDP voters slightly favored it, 32 percent to 30 percent, with the remainder undecided. If the poll is accurate, perhaps the nonparticipation of MHP and BDP in the vote is best explained as an effort to avoid alienating a significant portion of their respective supporters. According to the poll, AKP voters supported the bill 68 percent to 7 percent, and CHP voters opposed it 69 percent to 13 percent. See Ertan Ozensel, Mahmut Hakki Akin, and Mehmet Ali Aydemir, “Türkiye’de Imam Hatip Liseleri ve Imam Hatipliler Algisi” (TIMAV, 2012), p.133, available at, <http://www.imamhatipokullari.org>.
- 18 Iren Ozgur, *Islamic Schools in Modern Turkey: Faith, Politics, and Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For an analysis of the non-Imam-Hatip-related aspects of the 1997 reform, which were also significant, see İlhan Dulger, *Turkey: Rapid Coverage for Compulsory Education—The 1997 Basic Education Program* (Ankara: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank, 2004), available at http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTTURKEY/Resources/361616-1142415001082/Compulsory_Education_by_Dulger.pdf.
- 19 Niyazi Gunay, “Implementing the ‘February 28’ Recommendations: A Scorecard” (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001), pp. 7–8, available at <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/ResearchNote10-sm.pdf>.
- 20 Ministry of National Education, “12 Yil Zorunlu Egitim: Sorular—Cevaplar” (2012), available at http://www.meb.gov.tr/duyurular/duyurular2012/12Yil_Soru_Cevaplar.pdf.
- 21 In its 2015 election platform statement, the secular CHP also calls for a mandatory 12 years of education—one year of preschool, eight years of “basic” education, and four years of high school—which it dubs “1+8+4.” The “1” refers to pre-school. The platform’s use of “8,” rather than “4+4,” signals consecutive years of required secular schooling, which would entail closing the Imam-Hatip middle schools. See *Secim Bildirgesi 2015: CHP*, p. 109.
- 22 Gunay, “Implementing the ‘February 28’ Recommendations: A Scorecard.” This marked the second time a military government closed Imam-Hatip junior high schools. Following the so-called coup by memorandum of March 12, 1971, the military-backed technocratic government also closed the Imam-Hatip junior high schools. In some ways, that was a more dramatic decision, since more than 80 percent of the then 48,475 Imam-Hatip students were in junior high school at that time. However, in that era, Imam-Hatips were more narrowly vocational, boys-only, and focused on training future religious officials. They did not yet have the society-wide resonance they were later to achieve. The junior high schools were re-opened in 1974 by the first post-coup elected government, composed of one of Turkey’s most unlikely coalitions: Bulent Ecevit’s center-left CHP and Erbakan’s religious-oriented National Salvation Party, which was later banned, only to re-emerge as the RP. The Imam-Hatip junior high schools then remained open until 1997. Ozgur, *Islamic Schools in Modern Turkey: Faith, Politics, and Education*, p. 42.
- 23 Erbakan was a highly significant figure, not only in the development of religious politics in Turkey, but specifically in the development of Imam-Hatips. His National Religious Party, or MSP, participated in three governments in the 1970s that oversaw a vast expansion of the Imam-Hatip system for which he is widely credited by both admirers and critics.
- 24 Jody Sabral, “New Education Bill Revives Koran Studies in Turkish Schools,” *Al-Monitor*, May 16, 2012, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/turkish-education-reform-passed.html>. Two years later, reflecting on the post-February 28, 1997 period, Erdogan observed that “(t)hose were truly hurtful days. I hope God never makes us live through days like those again.” See Dasha Afanasieva and Can Sezer, “Rise of Turkish Islamic schooling upsets secular parents,” Reuters, December 2, 2014, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/12/02/us-turkey-education-idUSKCN0JG0CK20141202>.
- 25 The change in policy can be inferred from the increase in Imam-Hatip students after years of steady decline. (see Table 1)
- 26 Afanasieva and Sezer, “Rise of Turkish Islamic schooling upsets secular parents.” In 2012, the AKP government reportedly planned to open military academies to Imam-Hatip graduates, but the military seems to have fended off the effort. Military academies now are apparently the only higher educational institutions off-limits to Imam-Hatip graduates. See Today’s Zaman, “Imam-Hatip graduates to be accepted into military academies,” September 17, 2012, available at http://www.todayszaman.com/national_imam-hatip-graduates-to-be-accepted-into-military-academies_292604.html. For an article from the religious and pro-AKP newspaper *Yeni Akit*, which harshly criticizes the military for this policy, see Muhammet Kutlu, “Askeri okullarda IHL’ye ambargo suruyor,” *Yeni Akit*, March 27, 2015, available at <http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/askeri-okullarda-ihlye-ambargo-suruyor-58762.html>.

- 27 Education Reform Initiative “Education Monitoring Report 2013: Executive Summary” (2014), p. 12, available at http://erg.sabanciuniv.edu/sites/erg.sabanciuniv.edu/files/ERG_EMR2013.web_0.pdf. Figure 7 shows the increase in the number of Anatolian, or secular public, high schools; vocational high schools; and Imam-Hatip high schools. The 1,477 “general” high schools gradually were closed over a three-year period. The total increase in the number of other types of schools appears to be significantly greater than 1,477, suggesting that the increase in each category of high school does not derive solely from the closure of the general schools. Imam-Hatip schools are still formally considered vocational schools. Because of their importance, however, they are often—but not always—separated from other vocational schools in official MNE statistics. They are also separated bureaucratically from other vocational schools in the MNE bureaucracy, administered by the MNE directorate general of religious instruction, which also oversees the teaching of constitutionally mandated religious instruction throughout the school system. Personal email communication from Isik Tuzun, Education Reform Initiative, July 20, 2015.
- 28 Interview with anonymous Turkish educator, July 8, 2015.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Lauren Williams, “Turkey education reforms fuel controversy,” *Al Jazeera*, October 29, 2014, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middle-east/2014/10/turkey-education-reforms-fuel-controversy-20141013103317146282.html>.
- 31 Isik Tuzun, “Rising discrimination in education,” *Perspectives* 12 (2015): 40–44, p. 41. See also Afanasieva and Sezer, “Rise of Turkish Islamic schooling upsets secular parents.” According to the latter, surveys were conducted in three provinces only—Erzerum, Kayseri, and Konya—all known to be religiously conservative.
- 32 Interview with anonymous Turkish educator, July 8, 2015; author’s personal communications with anonymous Turkish parents. The latter source provided anecdotal evidence from parents whose children experienced this.
- 33 Williams, “Turkey education reforms fuel controversy.”
- 34 See, for example, Nasil Kolay, “TEOG Nedir?,” available at <http://nasilkolay.com/teog-nedir>.
- 35 Education Reform Initiative “Education Monitoring Report 2013: Executive Summary” p. 13, figure 8. Of course, the overall number of students increased dramatically with mandatory high school attendance. At least, in part, the 63 percent figure probably reflects the fact that fewer academically oriented students who previously would not have gone to high school are qualifying only for vocational schools.
- 36 Tulay Cetingulec, “Hands off my child, Turks tell government,” *Al-Monitor*, September 5, 2014, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/09/turkey-education-system-non-muslims-islamic-schools.html#>. For journalist Fatih Altayli’s original column about his daughter’s alleged assignment to an Imam-Hatip school, see Fatih Altayli, “Birisi Milli Egitim Bakanligi’na harita yollasin,” *Haberturk*, August 26, 2014, available at <http://www.haberturk.com/yazarlar/fatih-altayli/983802-birisi-milli-egitim-bakanligina-harita-yollasin>.
- 37 Tulay Cetingulec, “Hands off my child, Turks tell government.”
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ministry of National Education, “Minister Avci speaks to Haberturk TV,” February 4, 2015, available at <http://www.meb.gov.tr/bakan-avci-haberturk-tvye-konuk-oldu/haber/7947/en>.
- 40 See Table 1. Also see Tuzun, “Rising discrimination in education,” p. 40; Today’s Zaman, “Top school converted into Imam-Hatip amid increase in religious schools,” July 7, 2015, available at http://www.todayszaman.com/national_top-school-converted-into-Imam-Hatip-amid-increase-in-religious-schools_393081.html.
- 41 See Table 1. In 1995-96, 11.6 percent of Turkish middle school (grades 6-8) students and 10.9 percent of Turkish high school students attended Imam-Hatips. In 1996-97, those figures were 12.2 percent and 9.3 percent, respectively. In 2014-15, 10.5 percent of students in grades five through seven and 12.9 percent of high school students attended Imam-Hatips.
- 42 Hurriyet, “Cumhurbaşkanı Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: ‘Bunlar bizim neslimiz olamaz,’” June 29, 2015, available at <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/cumhurbaskani-recep-tayyip-erdogan-bunlar-bizim-neslimiz-olamaz-29406127>.
- 43 Ministry of National Education, “Minister Avci speaks to Haberturk Tv (sic),” available at <http://www.meb.gov.tr/minister-avci-speaks-to-haberturk-tv/haber/7947/en>.
- 44 Although the law seems to require that the two courses be taught (*okutulur*) the situation in reality affords more flexibility. MNE guidelines require the courses to be given only if at least 10 students request them. See Ministry of National Education, “12 Yil Zorunlu Egitim: Sorular-Cevaplar” (2012), available at http://www.meb.gov.tr/duyurular/duyurular2012/12Yil_Soru_Cevaplar.pdf. Thus far, the MNE has not issued statistics on how many schools are offering the religious electives or how many students are taking them.
- 45 This concern was stoked by at least one AKP parliamentarian, an Imam-Hatip alumnus, who declared, “We have the chance to turn all schools into Imam Hatip schools.” See Dorian Jones, “In Turkey, Religious Schools Gain a Foothold,” *Voice of America*, September 25, 2012, available at <http://www.voanews.com/content/turkey-controversial-education-reform-imam-hatip-schools/1514915.html>. In fact, Erdoğan, then mayor of Istanbul, said in 1994, “We will assign Imam-Hatip curricula to all the schools in the country.” See Özgür, *Islamic Schools in Modern Turkey: Faith, Politics, and Education*, p. 143.
- 46 The course is taught two hours per week in the fourth grade through the eighth grade and one hour per week thereafter through the completion of high school.
- 47 Hadi Adanali, “The Many Dimensions of Religious Instruction in Turkey” (Ankara, Turkey: International Association for Religious Freedom), available at <https://www.iarf.net/REBooklet/Turkey.htm>. Ironically, the origin of the required religion course lies in an ostensibly strongly secular military government. The military seized control of the Turkish government in September 1980 in the wake of widespread political violence that mainly reflected a deep right-left divide in the nation. Persuaded that communism and disintegrating social values were the real culprits of the violence, Turkey’s military leaders sought to inoculate Turkish students against these problems through education in Islam and ethics. Thus, article 24 of the 1982 constitution—produced under military rule but still today the law of the land in Turkey—states, “Instruction in religious culture and morals shall be one of the compulsory lessons in the curricula of primary and secondary schools.”

- 48 In 2011, 14 Alevi families challenged the state's insistence that their children take the compulsory religion course, taking their cause to the European Court of Human Rights, or ECHR. Three years later, in September 2014, the ECHR ruled in their favor: "Turkey has to remedy the situation without delay, in particular by introducing a system whereby pupils could be exempted from religion and ethics classes without their parents having to disclose their own religious or philosophical convictions." Alternatively, the court said, Turkey could design a compulsory course that teaches a wide variety of religions, without favoring one religion over another, or it could simply stop offering the course. Turkey's appeal of the decision was rejected by the ECHR in February 2015. To this point, Turkey has not taken steps to implement the ECHR decision, which essentially reiterated a similar ECHR judgment issued in 2007. That 2007 judgment prompted Turkey slightly to alter its textbooks, including the addition of some material about the Alevis, but not enough to satisfy the ECHR, which still considers the course biased in favor of Sunni Hanafi Islam. In a June 2015 ruling, Turkey's supreme administrative court, the Council of State, reportedly declared it "unlawful" to make the religion course compulsory for those who consider it contrary to their religious beliefs. It is unclear if this ruling is the final word or if it applies only to the plaintiff, an Alevi family from Antalya. See Doğan News Agency, "Key ruling by Turkey's top court on religious classes," *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 17, 2015, available at <http://www.hurriyet-dailynews.com/key-ruling-by-turkeys-top-court-on-religious-classes.aspx?PageID=238&NID=84146&NewsCatID=341>. For the 2014 case, *Mansur Yalcin and Others v. Turkey*, see European Court of Human Rights, "Turkey must reform religious education in schools to ensure respect for parents' convictions," Press release, September 16, 2014. For the 2007 case, see European Court of Human Rights, "Chamber Judgment: Hasan and Eylem Zengin v. Turkey," Press release, September 9, 2007, available at [http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-2142546-2275681#{"itemid":"003-2142546-2275681](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng-press?i=003-2142546-2275681#{). According to a FAQ section on the MNE website regarding the new high school entrance exam, only 376 students did not take the required religion course in academic year 2012-13—a surprisingly low figure. See "TEMEL EĞİTİMDEN ORTAÖĞRETİME GEÇİŞ SİSTEMİ İLE İLGİLİ SIKÇA SORULAN SORULAR," available at http://www.meb.gov.tr/duyurular/duyurular2013/bigb/tegitimdenogretimegecis/MEB_SSS_20_09_2013.pdf.
- 49 Today's Zaman, "Davutoglu defends religion courses despite European court ruling," September 17, 2014, available at http://www.todayszaman.com/anasyafa_davutoglu-defends-religion-courses-despite-european-court-ruling_358975.html.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 The evidence as to whether Imam-Hatip teachers hew to a secularist line is equivocal, based on information in Ozgur, *Islamic Schools in Modern Turkey*, the most in-depth English language study of Imam-Hatips. Ozgur points out that Imam-Hatip schools, like all schools in Turkey, come under the aegis of the Ministry of National Education (p.68); that they "do not overtly promote political opposition or religious revivalism" (p. 65); that, based on her interviews, they do not teach that Turkey should be governed according to sharia or that Turkish citizens should live their lives according to sharia (p.79); and that they "endorse the state's secularist agenda through the images, representations, and proclamations of Ataturk" (p.85), albeit sometimes with pro-religious Ataturk statements (p.86) that would be unfamiliar to the average Turkish secularist. However, she also points out that teachers are given wide latitude as to how they teach the curriculum and what supplementary materials to introduce. For example, she reports an interview with one former Imam-Hatip student—the famous Islamist writer Ali Bulac—who says that he was introduced to Muslim Brotherhood writings by Imam-Hatip teachers. (pp. 97-99). She also notes an interesting 1998 study that showed both Imam-Hatip students and secular-school students considered Ataturk and the Prophet Muhammad to be their two favorite leaders, but Imam-Hatip students overwhelmingly ranked Muhammad first and the secular-school students overwhelmingly ranked Ataturk first. (p. 77) The fascinating full results of the poll can be found in Cakir, Bozan, and Talu, "Imam Hatip Liseleri: Efsaneler ve Gercekler," Table 1.17.3. See also Ozgur's several examples of AKP officials' mixing religion with official duties and using public funds to promote religion (pgs. 150-154).
- 53 Resmî Gazete, "Law no. 6528" (2014), available at <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2014/03/20140314-1.htm>.
- 54 Adem Elitok, "Council of State decision on school principals opens way to reinstatement," Today's Zaman, June 11, 2015, available at http://www.todayszaman.com/anasyafa_council-of-state-decision-on-school-principals-opens-way-to-reinstatement_385163.html.
- 55 Education Reform Initiative "Education Monitoring Report 2013: Executive Summary," p. 14; Tulay Cetingulec, "Turkish judiciary halts school firings," Al-Monitor, June 24, 2015, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/turkey-education-judiciary-halts-purge-in-schools.html>. Egitim Bir-Sen is credited with originating the idea of reopening Imam-Hatip middle schools under the guise of 4+4+4. See Idris Emen, "Her taşın altından çıkan sendika: Eğitim Bir-Sen," Radikal, December 14, 2014, available at http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/her_tasin_altindan_cikan_sendika_egitim_bir_sen-1250506#.
- 56 Memular.net, "AYM, dershanelerin kapatilmasiyla ilgili yasayi iptal etti," July 13, 2015, available at <http://www.memurlar.net/haber/526070/>; Today's Zaman, "Top court's dershane ruling comes as relief, but uncertainties persist" July 16, 2015, available at http://www.todayszaman.com/national_top-courts-dershane-ruling-comes-as-relief-but-uncertainties-persist_393824.html. The dismissal of the school officials had been rescinded, at least seemingly, by a June 11 ruling of Turkey's Council of State, which said that the process for determining the dismissals was unclear and inappropriate. Some 7,600 principals and deputy principals, also eligible for dismissal, had been allowed to retain their jobs. It was unclear, the Council of State said, why the 8,400 had been fired and the 7,600 retained, and it instructed that the dismissed principals and deputy principals be restored to their jobs. On July 1, the MNE issued a directive to the governors of Turkey's 81 provinces instructing that the Council of State ruling rescinding the firings not be implemented. See Suleyman Kayhan, "Education Ministry disregards top court ruling to reinstate 8,400 principals," Today's Zaman, July 6, 2015, available at http://www.todayszaman.com/anasyafa_education-ministry-disregards-top-court-ruling-to-reinstate-8400-principals_393002.html. The MNE directive is presumably rendered null by the Constitutional Court decision.

- 57 Eight of the 12 votes in favor of overturning were cast by Gul appointees; 2 of his appointees voted to sustain the law. Erdogan's 4 appointees split, 2-2. See Haberler, "AYM'nin Dershane Kararında Abdullah Gul Damgasi," July 15, 2015, available at <http://www.haberler.com/aym-nin-dershane-kararinda-abdullah-gul-damgasi-7510493-haber/>. The appeal to the Constitutional Court was made by the secular, center-left CHP, primarily on the basis of freedom of enterprise—somewhat ironically for a center-left party that long defended Turkey's formerly statist economy.
- 58 Today's Zaman, "Turkey's top administrative court annuls controversial prep school circular," September 18, 2015, available at http://www.todayszaman.com/anasyafa_turkeys-top-administrative-court-annuls-controversial-prep-school-circular_399541.html.
- 59 Kerime Sule Akoglu, "Piecemeal Freedom: Why the Headscarf Ban Remains in Place in Turkey," *Boston College International & Comparative Law Review* 38 (2) (2015): 277–304, available at http://iclr.bclawreview.org/files/2015/05/04_akoglu.pdf. Specific cite: pp. 286, 290-91.
- 60 The Journal of Turkish Weekly, "Erdogan's daughters studying in U.S. to escape headscarf ban," October 25, 2004, available at <http://www.turkishweekly.net/2004/10/25/news/erdogan-s-daughters-studying-in-us-to-escape-headscarf-ban/>.
- 61 Akoglu, "Piecemeal Freedom: Why the Headscarf Ban Remains in Place in Turkey," pp. 277-8.
- 62 Ozgur, *Islamic Schools in Modern Turkey: Faith, Politics, and Education*, p. 95. This was probably because male and female students meet in relatively uncontrolled circumstances on university campuses. Religious parents seemed to object less to the ban as applied in middle and high schools, perhaps because of stricter teacher supervision of student behavior at those levels. Also, in Imam-Hatip schools—where many religious students attended high school—administrators often did not enforce the ban.
- 63 Akoglu, "Piecemeal Freedom: Why the Headscarf Ban Remains in Place in Turkey," p. 293; Jonathan Head, "Quiet end to Turkey's college headscarf ban," BBC News, December 31, 2010, available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-11880622>. The HEC—perhaps better known by its Turkish acronym, YOK—was already at this time dominated by pro-AKP figures, including its powerful chairman, Yusuf Ziya Ozcan. The key turning-point for the HEC's rapid evolution from an Atatürkist to a pro-AKP institution was the ascension of AKP co-founder Abdullah Gul to the Presidency of Turkey in August 2007. For a useful reference-point regarding this evolution, see Nuran Cakmakci, "Dersimiz YOK uyelerini taniyalim," *Hurriyet*, March 2, 2008, accessed at <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dersimiz-yok-uyelerini-taniyalim-8348259>.
- 64 This was probably the result of three somewhat inter-related factors: the ascent to party leadership of Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who was somewhat more liberal on the issue than was his predecessor, Deniz Baykal; the repeated thrashing of CHP at the polls, in part because of AKP's success branding the secularists as anti-religion; and CHP's recognition that traditional secular forces had lost control of the bureaucracy and judiciary and that the secularist military no longer was willing or able to intimidate the civilian government or even to jawbone it effectively regarding domestic political matters.
- 65 Reuters, "Turkey lifts headscarf ban in religious schools," November 28, 2012, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/28/us-turkey-headscarf-idUSBRE8AR0JW20121128>. This marked the culmination of an effort that began shortly after AKP took office. See "Turbana vize taslagi," *Cumhuriyet*, February 23, 2003, available at <http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/cumhuriyet/w/c0119.html>.
- 66 Akoglu, "Piecemeal Freedom: Why the Headscarf Ban Remains in Place in Turkey," p. 278.
- 67 Al Arabiya News, "Turkey lifts ban on headscarves at high schools," September 23, 2014, available at <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/life-style/art-and-culture/2014/09/23/Turkey-lifts-ban-on-headscarves-at-high-schools-.html>.
- 68 Three institutions remain off-limits for headscarved women seeking employment: the judiciary, the military, and the police. Akoglu, "Piecemeal Freedom: Why the Headscarf Ban Remains in Place in Turkey," p. 277.
- 69 Murat Aksoy, "Decisions leading to raising pro-AKP, not religious, generations," *Today's Zaman*, December 8, 2014, available at http://www.todayszaman.com/op-ed_decisions-leading-to-raising-pro-akp-not-religious-generations_366403.html; Diyanet Isleri Bakanligi, "Yaz Kur'an kursları 22 Haziran Pazartesi günü başlıyor. . .," available at <http://www.diyaret.gov.tr/tr/icerik/yaz-kur'an-kurslari-22-haziran-pazartesi-gunu-basliyor.../26931> (last accessed November 2015); Radikal, "Okul oncesi ogrencileri Kur'an ogreniyor (Pre-school students are learning the Quran)," July 13, 2015, available at http://www.radikal.com.tr/siirt_haber/okul_onesi_ogrencileri_kuran_ogreniyor-1396747. The curriculum for the course, in Turkish, is available at [http://www2.diyaret.gov.tr/EgitimHizmetleriGenelMudurlugu/KuranKursuOgretimProgrami/KURAN%20KURSLARI%20ÖĞRETİM%20PROGRAMI\(04-06%20YAŞ\)-2014.pdf](http://www2.diyaret.gov.tr/EgitimHizmetleriGenelMudurlugu/KuranKursuOgretimProgrami/KURAN%20KURSLARI%20ÖĞRETİM%20PROGRAMI(04-06%20YAŞ)-2014.pdf).
- 70 *Hurriyet Daily News*, "Arabic to be offered as 2nd language in primary schools," October 24-25, 2015, available at <http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com/arabic-to-be-offered-as-second-language-in-turkish-elementary-schools.aspx?pageID=238&nID=90244&NewsCatID=341>. Regarding secularist criticisms and suspicions regarding this decision, see Tulay Cetingulec, "Turks divided over plans to introduce Arabic-language teaching," *Al-Monitor*, November 2, 2015, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/11/turkey-arabic-education-divides-country.html>.
- 71 Kadri Gursel, "Turkey's Creeping Alcohol Ban Reaches New Heights," *Al-Monitor*, February 19, 2013, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ar/originals/2013/02/turkey-alcohol-ban-turkish-airlines-akp-islamist.html#>.
- 72 Tim Arango, "After a Break, Turkey's Prime Minister Again Courts Controversy," *The New York Times*, November 7, 2013, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/11/08/world/europe/turkey-coed-dormitories-.html?_r=0; Yavuz Bayda, "Erdogan stirs controversy on women in university housing," *Al-Monitor*, November 6, 2013, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/11/erdogan-state-role-turks-lives-losing-moderate-supporters.html>; Today's Zaman, "Erdogan sets national agenda with remarks on students' houses," November 6, 2013, available at http://www.todayszaman.com/national_erdogan-sets-national-agenda-with-remarks-on-students-houses_330786.html.
- 73 Kadri Gursel, "Erdogan Islamizes education system to raise 'devout youth,'" *Al-Monitor*, December 9, 2014, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/12/turkey-islamize-education-religion.html>; Ali Unal, "Minister: Ottoman not compulsory for all, Alevism can also be taught," *Daily Sabah*, December 11, 2014, available at <http://www.dailysabah.com/politics/2014/12/11/minister-ottoman-not-compulsory-for-all-alevism-can-also-be-taught>.
- 74 In 2010. Bekir S. Gur and others, "2012'de Egitim," *SETA Analiz*, December 2012, p. 3, available at http://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20130104114533_seta_analiz_2012egitim.pdf.

- 75 *Hurriyet Daily News*, "Religion courses for primary schools on agenda of Turkish education council," December 4, 2014, available at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/religion-courses-for-primary-schools-on-agenda-of-turkish-education-council.aspx?PageID=238&NID=75225&NewsCatID=338>.
- 76 Tulin Daloglu, "Erdogan wants youth to learn Ottoman-era Turkish," *Al-Monitor*, December 9, 2014, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/12/erdogan-ottoman-turkish-mandatory-language-instruction.html>.
- 77 Unal, "Minister: Ottoman not compulsory for all, Alevism can also be taught." In another decision that drew considerable press attention, the NEC also recommended that tourism-management high schools cease teaching courses in cocktail-mixing. See T.C. Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, "19. Milli Eğitim Surasi Sona Erdi" (2014), available at <http://www.meb.gov.tr/19-mill-egitim-srasi-sona-erdi/haber/7594/tr>.
- 78 The government recently gave the HEC authority to close private universities that "have become a focal point for activities against the state's indivisible integrity." The move is almost certainly aimed at Gulenist universities. See *Today's Zaman*, "New regulation allowing YÖK to shut down private universities goes into effect," November 19, 2015, available at http://www.todayszaman.com/national_new-regulation-allowing-yok-to-shut-down-private-universities-goes-into-effect_404791.html.
- 79 In the most recent OECD Programme for International Student Assessment, or PISA survey, conducted in 2012, Turkish 15-year-olds ranked below average in reading, math, and science literacy. See Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, "Country Profiles: Turkey" (2012), available at <http://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?primaryCountry=TUR&threshold=10&topic=PI>.
- 80 An example of the deep concern that the AKP's religious educational reforms arouse in secularists, justifiably or not, can be found in Gursel, "Erdogan Islamizes education system to raise 'devout youth.'" According to Gursel, "[t]hese steps by the ruling Justice and Development Party are not only reshaping the education system according to the Sunni faith, but they increasingly render the country's 'constitutional secularism' a principle existing only on paper ... The generation to be raised under an Islamized education system is seen [by AKP and its supporters] as the guarantor of the regime political Islam is building in Turkey."

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