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Imagining the Nation: 'L'imaginaire' and Public Space in Turkey

Nur Yalman

What a history we have behind us in these lands! Göbekli Tepe, the first temple of mankind, recently discovered near Urfa in the east, is a kind of Stonehenge, only 6000 years earlier, from 11,000 BCE. Come closer. I live near Knidos in the summer, a few miles away from the Temple of Aphrodite with its divine statue of ancient fame by Praxiteles, modelled after an Athenian lady of dubious repute, Freyne. There are apparently 250 Roman copies, seven in the vaults of the Vatican, but the original has never been found. Come closer: do we speak of Alexander, or Cleopatra, or Herodotus of Halicarnassus, or Constantine, or Julian the apostate in Antioch? Come closer: shall we speak of the Byzantine and the Seljuk courts exchanging daughters as Ibn Battuta describes in the 1300s? Closer still: Ottomans? Fatih? Was his mother Greek? George Ghennadios? What was the deal with the Greek Orthodox Church in the Balkans during those long centuries from 1300 to 1918?¹

How have we come to this sorry pass between our peoples who have lived in close intimacy for as long as can be imagined? Are nationalist passions inevitable, or can we take charge of our fates? Much turns around the full recognition of the process involved in dismantling ancient bonds of an empire and creating imagined unities within the nation-state. Imagined? The French *l'imaginaire* has the implication of all those imagined realities that direct our thoughts, our hopes and desires. Such imagined realities then determine our actions, which in turn circumscribe the limits of our possibilities.²

Greeks have an entire array of imagined possibilities that relate to the roots of their identities; and some of these – the nation-states of Greece and of Cyprus and EU accession have, despite the contra-

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dictions, been achieved.³ What about *l'imaginaire* of the Turks? What lies in the shadows?⁴

Turkey is in an amazing state. It cannot be denied that it is enjoying its most prosperous and liberal period within living memory. National income has shot up to double what it was a few years ago. The number of billionaires has risen from six to twenty-six according to *Forbes* magazine. Credit cards are maxed out. Villagers have flooded the cities. Consumer goods like refrigerators and washing machines are everywhere. Stunning great shopping palaces are sprouting in unexpected places. Property prices compare with those in Miami and New York. There were admirably free elections not marred by violence. A party, supposedly liberal, supposedly populist, with an optimistic EU platform has reconfirmed its mandate with a stunning election victory on 22 July 2007 winning 47 per cent of the votes. And everybody is unhappy. They are also deeply troubled and frustrated.

The party in power does not accommodate the Westernized urban, middle and upper classes' imagined future, let alone that of the more senior civil servants and officer class of the military. Ever since the trauma of the First World War and the reforms of the 1920s and 1930s, these classes have been imbued with an ideology of nationalism. Readers may recall the stunning move that was made in 1928 to change the alphabet, used for 1000 years, into the Latin script in 1928. This was followed by a whole range of edicts that amounted to nothing less than a cultural revolution – a revolution now encapsulated in the austere Ataturk mausoleum in Ankara. It is a kind of secular tomb (*tekke*) with no prayers, but with devoutly felt written wishes and promises. Readers may ask why there is no Ataturk mosque, or why the new mosque in Ankara is merely called Kocatepe. Why is there so much resistance to the construction of a mosque in Taksim Square? After all, the square contains a superb monument dedicated to the national struggle of the 1920s with Mustafa Kemal and Inonu surrounded by unusual Soviet characters like Voroshilov and Frunze wearing communist caps. You may well ask, who owns the Ataturk revolution today?⁵

There is a deep yearning evident in many little ways for the imagined graceful Ottoman past represented by the imposing palaces and the magnificent mosques around the country. Given the continuing uncertainties in the Balkans, the disasters in the Middle East, the ominous events in the Caucasus and the feebleness of NATO, there is a desire for an independent and strong stance against both the perceived injustices of US policies against Islamic states and the similar veiled hypocrisies of the EU. Can the desire to become more Western

be squared with the old suspicions regarding the ulterior motives of the so-called colonialist West? Can these zombies of the past be exorcised?

There has been an interesting discussion lately about the major outlines of this malaise. It was engaged by the comments of the celebrated doyen of social scientists in Turkey, Serif Mardin, who claimed that there was an opposition between the old as the traditional neighbourhood organization of the Ottoman Empire, the mosque, the imam, the small shopkeepers, the local congregation and the new ideals of the republic. He associated all this with the Islamic learning of the imam, the books they read, the way of life they practised. Opposing this public and intellectual stance were the leaders of the new republic filled with radical ideas after the defeat of the empire at the end of the First World War. These were the new men and women of the imagined modern Turkey. They were secular, with a vision of Western advancement before them. They were to move in new directions, with a new alphabet, a new language, a new attire – with hats and top hats – with a view to adopting everything new in science and learning in the West. They had embraced, in other words, the old positivist formula of Auguste Comte – '*ordre et progrès*'!⁶

Mardin said that the new republican learning lacked a spiritual dimension: it was new, secular, but shallow. It left a hole in a place that traditional learning and especially religious practice had occupied. Mardin's comments, which were not in themselves surprising given that the well-worn debate on modernization is now nearly half a century old, touched a nerve in the public arena. In fact, on 24 May 2008, several major newspapers, including *Hurriyet*, *Vatan* and *Milliyet*, brought out leading articles on the subject. The reason for the heat was to do with the latest turn of the political screw in Ankara. The chief public prosecutor had accused the AK party of undermining the secular constitution of Turkey. The party therefore faced the possibility of being outlawed as a legal political entity by the constitutional court; in fact, in August 2008 it barely escaped that ignominious fate.

Some important writers such as Oktay Eksi have written in *Hurriyet* that Mardin is mistaken. The old ways of traditional learning will not prevail in the fight for the positivist soul of Turkey. The modern republicans will win the day. How could Mardin have imagined that an ancient society could be modernized, 'and turned around 180 degrees' in the 1930s without some serious encouragement. Eksi implied that Mardin was supporting the reactionary stance of the AK party in claiming that the Ataturk reforms were shallow and soulless. That hollow location in the soul had in fact been filled with Islamic

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learning with the implication that the AK party's programme was simply fulfilling a spiritual need in Turkey.

Given the bitterness of the struggle for power between the parties, the Supreme Court's involvement and the military's watchful interest, it is clear that we have landed in the middle of a minefield. Behind the vociferous bickering lies a profound disagreement over how to handle the legacy of the Ottomans and the changeover into a nation-state.⁷

If we were to use Habermas's metaphor concerning the 'public sphere', and if we put aside the solid practical aspects of who controls the levers of a multi-billion dollar economy, the debate is around a certain number of 'imagined' scenarios for the country. Oversimplifying greatly, one would detect three, or possibly four, imagined possibilities.

First, there is the modernization idea, a leftover from the single party regime of the 1930s, which envisages an autonomous, largely self-sufficient Turkey with a strong army and strong centralized state leading its population through better education to a positivist West-oriented (but not necessarily Western) future. The Republican People's Party (CHP) currently represents this option in the political arena. (Liberal writers are highly critical of the CHP for its negative stance on key issues such as EU accession, the role of the military and, especially, the Kurdish matter.)

Second, there is a return to the idea of our traditions and ancient strengths. The AK party, which in many different ways expresses a yearning for an imagined Islamic Ottoman past, represents this conservative position. This stance has proven popular with members of the rising middle classes who, suffused with considerable buying power from the many cities in Anatolia, see in their attitudes continuity with the traditional way of life of the provinces in Ottoman times. The headscarf dispute, originally a French problem, has become the touchstone for these demands.

Third, there is the question of ethnicity and identity. Here the multiethnic imperial past runs counter to the powerful stream of nationalism. Speculation in this respect may lead in the direction of the imagined identity of the Turks who have formed the core of the new nation out of the empire. The question of 'Who are the Turks?' leads naturally to other complicated areas of identity. 'Who are all these other people - Bosnians, Circassians and Arabs - inhabiting the national space?' Where are the 12 to 18 million Kurds to be placed? Are they merely 'Mountain Turks'?

Fourth, one should mention the serious debate about the nature of Islam. How is the idea of a secular state, a key item in the constitution,

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to be reconciled with the immense establishment of Sunni institutions that are evidently part of the structure of the state in the Prime Minister's Office. Where do the other streams of popular Islam, the Alevi, the Bektashi, the many *tariqats* and *tekkes* fit in? The cultural revolution was supposed to have outlawed them in the 1920s. How have they come back? Was President Ozal a Nakshibendi and a Kurd? Where do other religious denominations, the ancient Orthodox Church, the various other Christian groups, Armenians, Assyrians and the Jews fit in?

Those interested in the history of Turkish culture might well detect in these preoccupations a return to the issues old writers such as Gökalp and Akcura raised in the fading days of the Ottoman Empire. Akcura, escaping from the oppression of the sultan Abdul Hamid in Cairo, had published a celebrated article entitled 'Three ways of political action' (*Uc tarz-ı siyaset*), namely Ottomanism, pan-Turanism and Islamism. It is surely an irony that Gökalp was probably a Kurd from Diyarbakir, and Akcura a Tatar from Russia.

The 22 July 2007 elections, with an impressive 47 per cent popular mandate, brought to power a party the reformists regarded as reactionary. The Westernized urban elite were also agitated. The reason for the large support had much to do with the sense of political stability and economic well-being over the previous four years. It was gained by opposing a bitter CHP campaign that claimed that reactionary forces were undermining the secular principles of the Ataturk republic. The debate focused inevitably on the attitude of AK party supporters to a kind of imagined conservative Islam, in particular, and to the 'imagined Ottoman Islamic past' in general.

Hence, the interest in pseudo-Ottoman fashion, especially for women, the ostentatious performance of mass Friday prayers, of Ramadan rituals, encouragement of the hadj and other public displays of religiosity. To the public display of the separation of men and women, one may add innumerable small, supposedly Islamic pretensions, the vast new building in Ankara housing the new headquarters of the AK party, with the sumptuous interior decorated in pseudo-Ottoman nineteenth-century palatial gilded kitch, and other symbolisms. The wife of the new president, Hayrunisa Gul, shopping for full body-length demure swimsuits with Ottoman decorations, or trying to get gilded art objects from the Dolmabahce Palace to redecorate Ataturk's 1930s' modernist Bauhaus residence in Ankara were other similar indicators

This conservative cultural stance is buttressed in a more practical political fashion by the opening of new initiatives towards the Arab

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countries. The Gulf Arabs with their untold millions, and Qatar, have been a natural attraction, not to speak of irresistible temptations. (There is much unhappy discussion in the press of Gulf Arabs bringing sumptuous presents!) Numerous high-level civil servants have indicated where their interest resides by buying into modern high rise apartments in Saudi Arabia overlooking the Kabe in Mecca.

In hindsight, it was helpful that the Turkish parliament refused to join the Americans in the ill-fated Iraq war in 2001. It had hardly been a convincing stance. The motion was barely rejected because the vote was a tie. Still, the opening towards the East is also indicated in a considered political position taken by the AK party government. The policy particularly advocated by Ahmet Davutoglu, then the foreign affairs adviser to the prime minister (now foreign minister) in his book *Stratejik Derinlik*, sees Turkey taking initiatives to regulate matters in all areas where there had been Ottoman interests⁸ – hence, the interest in the Arab region, the Caucasus, the Balkans and in Turkish speakers in Central Asia and Muslims beyond. The first country Erdogan visited when he came to power turned out to be Malaysia. (This occasioned a heated debate just before the elections over whether Turkey was going to become another Malaysia, with Islamic headscarves, and thereby again undermining the Ataturk reforms.)

Erdogan's recent peace brokering visit to Lebanon was an important and immediate result of this interest in the Middle East. It was noted in the Lebanese press as 'the return of the Ottomans'. Similar initiatives for peace between Syria and Israel, for Georgia and Russia, as well as an opening towards Armenia were already underway in September 2008.

A large note to add to this imagined Ottoman past is the enigmatic Fethullah Gulen movement. Gulen, the controversial former imam of a mosque in Edirne, has become the leading figure for a kind of gentle and friendly Islam preaching brotherhood between the great world religions. The Pope has received him and he appears to have the blessing of Washington, for he has been residing in New Jersey for many years in self-imposed exile from Turkey. That the vast movement around him seems extremely well financed and has sprouted hundreds of well-run Turkish schools all over Asia, including Japan (in Yokohama), Kirghizistan and Cambodia, has given rise to much suspicion. It appears that the movement has numerous television and radio stations. It certainly appeals to modern minded and moderate Muslims in many countries, but in Turkey, given its immense geographical reach, the miasma of the involvement of dubious secret

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services with large pockets is not easily dismissed. To the innocent, Gulen comes across as a traditional Islamic preacher with a certain amount of television charisma who can move large congregations to tears. There are, after all, many such tele-evangelists in the USA with similarly well-funded congregations. The less innocent seem to think that the Gulen movement is an underground organization biding its time for an auspicious moment to take over the state apparatus in Turkey in its entirety. The goal is said to be a rejuvenated neo-Ottoman state. Gulen, with his pious manner and antiquated pseudo-Ottoman prose, personally encourages the symbolism of the Ottoman Sublime State (*Devlet-i Ali*).

Modernist secularists are dismayed by the return to an Ottoman past the 1923 nationalist revolution appeared to have vanquished. The educated elite of Ottoman society, including Mustafa Kemal and his friends, had always been open to Western ways. French ideas were extremely influential throughout the nineteenth century. One sees this in the interests of the royal family in the palace, their taste in music, in painting, in dress and decoration. There are indeed actual letters from Auguste Comte to the grand vizier expressing his confidence that the *jeunes turcs* of the Ottoman Empire will soon be at the forefront of positivism. The former palace school, Galatasaray, played an important role in providing a Westernized, French influenced Ottoman elite.

The modernist versus Islamist *kulturkampf* (*inkilap/irtica*) had been part of culture since the French revolution, but the fall of the empire, the national resurgence around Ataturk and the comprehensiveness of the cultural reforms had seemed to have settled the matter since the 1920s. The large Westernized urban classes of Turkey thus found it almost incomprehensible that the AK party should be able to tap into such immense grass-roots support at the elections. The AK party election victory seemed almost like a counter-revolution against the established forms of the secular Kemalist republic – hence, the stridently trumpeted CHP claim that the secular republic had to be protected by all available means (military and judicial) against the reactionary forces latent in the countryside.

The modernist republican parties have therefore had a difficult time maintaining popular support while at the same time remaining faithful to their mission of changing the culture of the people. We thus arrive at the CHP's dilemma, namely the inchoate idea that, in the context of popular elections, it is difficult to say that democracy is inappropriate for a country with a poorly educated population. A prominent member of the parliamentary delegation of the CHP, Onur

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Oymen, said exactly that in the disappointing morning-after the 2007 elections.

This is an idea that harks back to the revolutionary actions of the one-party system of the 1930s, but, with the exigencies of 2008, needs to express the legitimacy of its arguments by immersing them in the language of the constitution. There is much talk of the role of the judiciary, the high court of appeals, the constitutional court as the last resort of the resistance in a democracy to the rule of the majority party. The popular mandate is not exactly denied, but it is surrounded by higher democratic principles. Taking a page out of Roman history, Ahmet Insel has characterized this set of ideas as the desire for a Pretorian Republic. Rule by the pretorian elite, the professions, bureaucrats, the legal profession and universities, could naturally include the top military echelon as well. Some are expressing these ideas in the pages of the controversial newspaper, *Cumhuriyet*.⁹

I should note that there is indeed an important argument about the protection of the rights of minorities in a democracy with massive majorities. Respect for diversity is not easily cultivated. The Westernized, more secular elements in Turkey are evidently sympathetic to such considerations. They forcefully expressed their sentiments in the public demonstrations following the tragic (and suspicious) assassination of a greatly admired Armenian journalist, Hrant Dink in 2007.

Let us turn now to the self-styled nationalist elements that the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and Buyuk Birlik Party (BBP) represent. The lines are not clearly drawn but, in contrast to the CHP and the Pretorian Republicans their imagined utopia extends to the linguistic and racial origin of the Turks. They are sometimes accused of being racists – skull measurers like the Germans of the 1930s. At times, their interests, together with others mentioned above, do reach in the direction of the Turks of Central Asia, the Balkans and the Turkmen of Iraq. Many leaders such as president Ozal, ex-president Demirel, the head of the MHP, Bahceli, and others have nurtured this interest. A great deal of Turkish capital has been invested in various parts of Central Asia. A university, Ahmet Yesevi in Kazakhstan, and other educational initiatives have been initiated to increase communication with these distant relatives.

Given the amount of resistance to the use of the alphabet in the Turkish Republic by Azerbaijan, the closest of these relatives, it cannot be said that the linguistic/racial link has proved to be useful so far. While the formidable presence of the Soviet Union was a fact of life, these connections had an unreal, romantic element about them. With the opening of the borders, the immense cultural distance

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between the Turks of the Ottoman realm and those outside has become more salient. The political distance too can hardly be overlooked. There is no question that the historical experience of the Ottoman Turks has been very different from that of the Soviet influenced Tatar, Kazakh, Uzbek and others. The Azeri Turks of Azerbaijan and Iran (said to be 30–40 per cent of the Iranian population) are the subject of yet other speculations. Their Shia traditions are inevitably of critical importance, as is their sense of belonging, not to the Ottoman, but to the Persian cultural realm.

Sometimes the imagination takes in others who are supposed to have originated in a mythological Central Asia homeland, such as the American Indians. In a brilliant and arresting article in *Taraf* on 11 May 2008, Ayse Hur suggested that these speculations go back to Mustafa Kemal who, having dismantled the cosmopolitan empire, became interested for a while in speculating about the origin of the Turks. (He might well have wondered. After all, he himself is said to have been of Macedonian origin.) James Churchwell, a colonel in the Indian Army writing in the 1926–33 period, reported finding some mysterious tablets in a temple in Tibet that related the story of the inhabitants of a lost continent Mu, in the middle of the Pacific, which sank into the ocean 100,000 years ago. Apparently, the four mythological races that survived the cataclysm – white, red, yellow and black – went in different directions. The whites settled in Central Asia and then, according to Chinese sources, a grey wolf called Bozkurt led the Turks out of a mountain cave in Ergenekon. Then they conquered the known world – China, India, Europe and the Middle East – through a series of great empires.

Hur claims that the language of the Maya of Mexico, names like Chapultepec, so intrigued some Turkish linguists at the time (*tepe* – 'hill or mound' in Turkish!) that the son-in-law of Enver Pasha, Tahsin Bey, an ex-general and amateur historian, was sent by Mustafa Kemal to Mexico as the Turkish ambassador to look into these intriguing matters. He returned with enthusiastic reports and was given the surname Mayatepek.

There are distant echoes of marvellous adventures in this heady piece of wild mythology. Enver Pasha had died in the mountains of central Asia pursuing Pan-Turanian dreams, but that does not prevent the term Ergenekon from being used as the name for an underground 'ultra-nationalist' movement intent on staging a *coup d'état* to restore Turkish glory around some shadowy characters. Some 48, at the last count, including prominent generals are in prison and the issue is in the courts, to the evident dismay of the military establishment.¹⁰

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More needs to be said about the contradictions in the imagined unity of Turkish speakers around the world. It is true that there are many millions of Turkish speakers from Finland, Russia, Crimea, Central Asia, Iran and all the way to China. The Azeri and Turkmen are largely comprehensible to people in Turkey. Azerbaijan television is exotic but easily followed, and the Azeris and others are apparently getting used to hearing the Turkish of Turkey on their televisions and are becoming more adept at using a common language.

The reason for the feeble interest in pan-Turanism is that imagination has come up against hard realities. There is no common historical consciousness between these far-flung peoples. Most in Central Asia are turned towards Russia with considerable ambivalence. Their elites speak Russian. They appear to have made an effort to avoid the adoption of common alphabets that would encourage communication with Turkey. This reticence includes even Azerbaijan.

Among all the turbulent eddies in political and intellectual life in Turkey, two central issues demand resolution sooner or later, namely the Kurds and the Alevi. The most immediate matter is to ensure the implementation of full human rights – political, economic and social rights – in the Kurdish regions of Turkey. This is now self-evident to everybody, but the implementation comes in painfully small and hesitant steps. The reason for this is the very novelty of the idea that the Kurds should have some special dispensation when all the other Muslim ethno-linguistic groups ranging from the Ubich to the Chechen, Cherkess, Bosnian, Albanian, Georgian, Dagistani, Laz, Arabs and others appear to be content as citizens. Many know that they may have a variety of origins, but in traditional Ottoman usage only the uncouth and unlettered would insist on proclaiming their ethno-tribal backgrounds. The ‘educated’ were simply ‘Muslims’ and would speak the classical languages of Arabic, Farsi and Ottoman; the ‘uneducated’ flock (*reyaya*) would have to be content to speak their exotic languages. Cultural and linguistic assimilation was not much of an issue in those feudal times.

The Kurdish issue has evolved from an umma (*ummet*) background with tribal affiliations to a higher level of ethnic and now tentative national consciousness. The change has been slow because of the isolation of the mountain regions, the language barrier, tribal loyalties and the co-optation of large prominent landowning families in the southeastern provinces into the Turkish national parties. It is no accident that the Workers’ Party of Kurdistan (PKK) started as a communist movement not only against the Turkish state, but more particularly against the large landowning groups in the southeast.

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To my mind it is a tragedy that the Turkish political classes did not fully realize the significance and urgency of the matter until we had a full-blown insurgency in the country. During my field work in Malatya, Maras, Diyarbakir and Mardin in the 1960s the matter was simmering, but traditional personal ties between Turkish and Kurdish families were still very strong. These were expressed through religious affiliations despite the majority of Kormancho-speaking Kurds being Shafi Sunnis. A thoroughly democratic solution would have been much simpler to institute at the time, but that opportunity was lost.¹¹

Times have changed. Kurdish demands have become much more defiant and insistent. New conditions in northern Iraq, the presence of the US military with its own interests in an autonomous and controllable Kurdish region, have altered the international dimensions of the issue in an immensely significant fashion. The fact that the AK party, with its Sunni pretensions, has received considerable support from Kurdish regions is, perhaps, an intermediate stage. Much more needs to take place in political, economic and social respects before a stable and democratic solution becomes acceptable to all the many parties involved.

Finally, a few brief words on the Alevi issue. The subject is a large and fascinating one from the point of view of the history of religions. As is well known the Alevi represent the mystical Sufi dimension of Islam. They reject outward forms and rituals (*zahiri*). They insist on the sincere and mystical (*batini*) inner life of the worshipper. This renders them revolutionary from the point of view of the established Sunni religious authorities. I have heard it claimed that there had been discussions between religious leaders in Turkey and Iran to the effect that the Alevi should either be turned into Sunnis or taken over by Iran and made into proper Shi'is. Note that the Alevi, though different, are related in their conceptions of religious experience to the Bektashi. The Bektashi in turn were closely related to the Janissary Corps of the Ottoman Empire, most of whom were drawn from Christian peoples in the Balkans.¹² The Bektashi creed remains strong in Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia and other Balkan regions, but the brotherhood was closed down in Turkey after the destruction of the Janissaries in 1826. Nonetheless, they are quite popular at the moment considering how much attention politicians of all stripes, but more especially the secularists, lavish on the Hajji Bektash Veli Tekke in Nevsehir. However, the attraction of the Tekke in Turkish cultural life is such that, despite his Sunni credentials, President Gul recently paid them a high-profile visit. There are reports of Sunni-Bektashi tensions in Macedonia as well, around the Harabati Baba Tekke.

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Sunni–Alevi tensions have a tragic history in Turkey. There is no need to recall the savage incidents that occurred in Sivas, Maras and other places with terrible loss of life. What is important to note is that, with the increased consciousness of democratic rights in the context of discussions with the EU, the question of the immense Sunni establishment’s relationship to the state has now been raised. If the state is secular, as everyone seems to claim it is, what is going on with the Diyanet Isleri (Department of Religious Affairs) with its huge budget and under a minister of state who insists on controlling Alevi institutions? The issues here go beyond theological details and concern the lives of perhaps 30 per cent of the population. One may want to recall that perhaps 20 per cent of the Kurdish population are also Alevi. In many parts of rural Anatolia, Alevis marry Alevis and Sunnis marry Sunnis whatever language they may happen to speak. The marriage barriers tend to be along the lines of religious affiliation.

I started this discussion on imagined scenarios in the public sphere in Turkey by outlining the debates that are being passionately pursued in the press, on television and radio, as well as in cafés and drawing rooms throughout the country. Many people bemoan the sense of drift and malaise, and relate it to the ineffectiveness of the opposition in the parliament. There is a general sense that the CHP has let the country down. Party leaders on all sides do not tolerate creative new initiatives, especially when these challenge their authority.

A disturbing element in these controversies is the country’s curious dilemma about the EU. Most rational people see the EU connection as a natural one for Turkey. The contradiction arises from an exchange of hats between the parties. Formerly, the Islamist parties were against the EU, and the centrist groups were for it. The leftist groups had reservations about the Europe’s capitalist nature, and feared being left on the sidelines as a mere dumping market for the large multinationals. The CHP had always stood for an opening to the West. Meanwhile, the AK party found Europe’s liberal stance on freedom of conscience and expression useful for extending its platform in the teeth of opposition from the secular establishment. So, as the AK party embraced the EU idea with greater interest, the CHP turned increasingly against it. This then generated a nationalist backlash against the EU for interfering in the affairs of a sovereign nation culminating recently in Bahçeli, the leader of the MHP, changing the colours of the number plate of his car from the EU blue to the national red. (Hasan Cemal, in his column in *Milliyet* of 5 June 2008, claimed that all those who want to play the nationalist card against accession

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to the EU are, in fact, enamoured of the kind of authoritarian regime characterized by Putin's Russia and China. They are after regimes that will set aside those niceties about human rights, and allow an etatist state to control the lives of its citizens. This is the kind of desire for the pretorian rule described above.)

So with all the critical and highly strategic matters of EU accession hanging fire, the issues have been trivialized as if these were superficial questions to be disdainfully dismissed. Turkey's role is of vital importance to all its neighbours, Greece in particular, and reaches far into the most dangerous aspects of world politics. These would include Russia, China and Iran as well as the major supply routes of oil. A rational approach to EU problems is in the interest of all.

In the passage from empire to nation-state there are two kinds of boundaries to consider – physical boundaries in space and mental boundaries in time. While ownership of land and defence of vital frontiers are the concerns most likely to lead to collective hysteria, violence and war, mental attitudes determine the acceptance of diversity within a nation and are key to a richer future for all concerned. As imperial attitudes give way to the desire for homogeneity of the nation, ethno-linguistic religious groups become the target of anxiety as a perceived source of weakness; then demand for 'assimilation or else' may become insistent. We have all seen the tragic results of this process, with the latest turns of the screw being in former Yugoslavia – and, now, Osetia.

Western Europe has gone through similar violence: recall the Vendée in France and the tragedies in Germany. An entirely different political project should be on our agenda. A serious attempt needs to be made to educate the public for a change in mentality to ensure that religio-ethno-linguistic identities are respected by law and practice in the nation-state as if it were still an imperial administration with obligations to all its communities. This is in line with what the Ottomans considered to be the 'Circle of Equity' during those long centuries both in the Balkans and elsewhere.¹³ Indeed, the ideals of the EU show us the way in this direction.

We can think of this change in mentality as an attitude that first and foremost ensures the sacred right of individuals to be free from harassment by the multitude. It is not too difficult to imagine this, especially in the context of the cultures of the former Ottoman Empire. It is obvious to all observers that its people, whether in the Balkans or in the eastern regions, shared so much of their daily lives, manners of living, forms of family life and even patterns of religious observance.¹⁴ Personal relations between individuals were often of the

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warmest kind. While social distances between Greeks, Bulgars, Macedonians, Bosnians, Albanians, Circassians, Arabs and Turks were narrowed over long centuries, these people had been quite familiar with each other, as we can still sense in their interactions in many subtle ways even at this late date. The contrast with Western experience is telling. The daily experience of social distance in terms of close human contact renders the integration of some communities in the United States (blacks, Hispanics and Native Americans on the reservations), black and mixed-race people in the UK, Algerians in France, and Turks in the Netherlands and Germany much more of a challenge, even under well intentioned legal protections.

We need to alter rigid mental categories.¹⁵ The effort to get away from the exclusionary tendencies of the nation-state and move towards the inclusiveness of common citizenship is a noble goal to be pursued assiduously. A consistent intellectual effort is needed to create a more humane world for the future. It is regrettable that for a variety of reasons complicated international interests often stand in the way. *Divida et Impera* is a tempting formula that has worked wonders for each empire under the sun, from the Romans onwards. Here are the Arab states with so much in common, even a common history with the Ottomans, which since the nineteenth century the colonial powers have carefully been fragmenting and setting against each other. They have been made to swallow the elixir of false national consciousness, which has rendered them incapable of providing a satisfactory future for their teeming young and frustrated populations. And here are the Balkans, fresh from a century of blood letting with desperate conflicts still simmering under an uneasy and cold peace. The ideal of a homogeneous nation-state (*ein Volk, ein Land, ein Führer*) has let us down with dreadful consequences. We need to formulate those political theories that are essential for a more nuanced conception of identity and citizenship, as indeed the founders of the EU were trying to remind us. These remarks should make it clear that I regard the cultural space of the Balkans and Turkey as an ideal testing ground for the hopes of the EU for a better future.

However, as usual, political creativity and far-sighted statesmanship are clearly in short supply. One can only hope that effective leaders will recognize the nobility of this vital mission. They must avoid the popular temptation to be mere nationalist demagogues, and thus allow history to take its dangerous well-charted course. There is in Turkey a great yearning for a legitimate sense of purposeful direction, and a renewed enthusiasm for a peaceful future in the entire region. This is a young country with immense opportunities for

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greatness. The ancient historical record has proved the aptitude for great deeds. The future awaits it. It is surely no secret that serious cooperation between Greeks and Turks is likely to bring unimagined benefits for all concerned.