

# Articulations of Islamic nationalism in the educational reform discourse of ‘new Turkey’

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Turkey has become a powerful example of rising ethno-religious nationalism since the ruling Justice and Development Party allied with the Nationalist Movement Party in 2016. Conceptualising the political ideology in power as Islamic nationalism, I expose ways in which this ideology is articulated in the education reform discourse of ‘new Turkey’ through a critical analysis of a foundational education reform report (the Report). The analysis shows various aspects of ethno-religious construction of education reform discourse through a focus on citizenship education (CE) partly because the prominent configuration of power relations manifests itself in considerations of CE. The analysis finds that the Report vilifies CE and proposes an alternative for it: social entrepreneurship. Furthermore, it presents Turkey’s diverse population as a monolithic homogenous mass and makes no mention of democracy and human rights values. These findings call out the research community to investigate the negative implications of rising ultra-nationalism for CE.

**Keywords:** citizenship education; critical discourse analysis; curriculum reform; Islamic nationalism; Turkey; Justice and Development Party; educational reform.

## Introduction

Education reform discourse in Turkey is constructed in accordance with the expectations of ideological forces in power. The most fundamental shift in that discourse occurred following then-Prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Erdoğan hereafter) set the goal of education as raising a religious generation in 2012. The educational reforms which followed this statement signalled a departure from the secular educational objectives, which had customarily incorporated the ideas of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (Atatürk hereafter), the founder of secular Turkey. It is true that the expansion of Islamic education had been a parcel of educational reforms after the 1980 coup (Oran, 2001). However, this recent Islamic turn is quite different because it was driven by the ideology of political Islamism rather than religion-friendly secular nationalism.

As a successor to a number of disbanded Islamist parties, Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party [*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP*] has represented what Keddie (1998) calls ‘new religious politics’ because it has sustained a political discourse that references to a set of symbols, vocabularies and idioms associated with Sunni-Islam (p. 696). In accordance with this Islamist discourse, the AKP has made consistent attempts to bring the state and society closer to its ideological expectations. It has

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legitimised Islamisation policies through ‘religious majoritarianism’ by maintaining that the government meets its voters’ expectations (Lord, 2018, p. xiii). With this rhetoric, it has pushed for the ideological transformation of education since it came to power in 2002.

In its early years, the AKP’s positive relations with the USA and the western international organizations strengthened its hand to break the hegemony of militant-secular forces. A coalition of liberals from diverse ideological groups supported the AKP’s effort to pass the European Union (EU) integration laws. After the 2011 general election victory, however, the liberal democratic coalition forged around the AKP’s demilitarisation policies gradually weakened in parallel to the AKP’s growing appetite for Islamisation. In this period, the AKP began to draw a line between an old and new Turkey (Christofis, 2018). While ‘old Turkey’ implied that Turkey was a badly governed and underdeveloped country under the ruling of militant-secular forces, ‘new Turkey’ insinuated a promise that the AKP, as the genuine representative of the nation, will give Turkey a re-birth and make it a powerful country again, as in the Ottoman past. By that rhetoric, the AKP presented itself as a progressive force pushing for a new state tradition congruent with the culture of Sunni-Turkish majority.

The first significant turning point in AKP rule came after the spread of Gezi Park demonstrations in 2013. The positive course of relations with the western bloc worsened after the government suppressed the protests by deploying excessive police force. Shortly after the Gezi demonstrations, the AKP fell out with one of its critical allies: the Gülen movement. Led by cleric Fetullah Gülen living in a self-imposed exile in the USA, the Gülen movement provided strong support for the AKP in the fight against militant-secular forces. The tension between the Gülenists and the AKP further escalated when a group in the military attempted to topple the government on 15 July 2016. The governmental circles vehemently argued that the Gülenists function as the Trojan horse of western powers that desire to control Turkey.

In the wake of the coup attempt, the ruling AKP, the strongest representative of political Islamism, and the Nationalist Movement Party [*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, MHP*], the strongest representative of Turkish nationalism, formed an alliance. Coming from a political Islamist background, the AKP prioritises the religious identity of Sunni-Islam, whereas the MHP gives more priority to ethnic Turkish identity (Çağaptay, 2020). After this alliance was formed in 2016, Turkey saw radical changes, such as thousands of state employees have been purged based on charges of being involved in the Gülen movement and Turkey’s parliamentary democracy was turned into a strong-executive presidency system. In 2018, Erdoğan was elected as the first president and begun to introduce changes in an effort to build a ‘powerful Turkey’. Shortly after he appointed a new education minister, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) released a foundational reform report, entitled *Happy Children Powerful Turkey: 2023 Education Vision* (MoNE, 2018). The Report’s launching event was held in the presidential palace with the participation of President Erdoğan. The Report puts forward a new educational vision and sets, 2023, the centenary of the foundation of modern Turkey, as the deadline for the completion of a number of educational reforms.

In this article, I conceptualise the ideological alliance of political Islamism with Turkish nationalism as Islamic nationalism for its similarities to right-wing or ethno-religious nationalism. This is because, despite different descriptors, these ideologies commonly celebrate ethno-religious values of dominant groups, advocate security-oriented policies and make civilizational claims (Brubaker, 2017; Wodak, 2015).

Based on this observation, I undertake a critical analysis of the Report to show ways in which Islamic nationalism is articulated in the education reform discourse. The analysis is concentrated on citizenship education (CE) because a focus on CE allows revealing ideological influences in the reform discourse. My primary goal is to show how Islamic nationalism is articulated in the reform discourse partly because Turkey is a frontline member of international organizations representing the western bloc, and its education policies are very responsive to international developments. Secondly, I attempt to shine a light on the impact of rising ethno-religious nationalism on CE partly because this issue has not been explored with empirical evidence (Banks, 2017; Kymlicka, 2018; Westheimer, 2019). Since the analysis will show the ideological transformation of the reform discourse through a focus on CE, the next section will outline how CE functions as a barometer that shows ideological transformations in education.

### **Citizenship education as a barometer of ideological transformation**

CE can be narrowly considered as a discrete subject, but from a broader view, I consider all efforts having a goal to educate political subjects as CE. Although one may object to this broad conceptualisation arguing that authoritarian and non-democratic regimes do not teach CE, my focus in this study entails this operationalisation. Parker (2014) well clarifies this broad consideration of CE by highlighting that –

Every regime has an interest in civic education, even non-democracies like contemporary China and Saudi Arabia or 1940 Germany. Nazi Germany had extensive civic education programs, both in school and out, tailored to the cultivation of good Nazis. (p. 3)

As Parker eloquently posits, all regimes are interested in CE, but illiberal democracies rarely negotiate, often impose a specific notion of citizenship, whereas liberal democracies deliberate through struggles, negotiations and compromises what kind of citizens will be raised by education (Pykett, Saward, & Schaefer, 2010). In most cases, socio-political forces operating based on a vision of good society decide the substance and form of CE.

A traditional model of CE characterised by an uncritical and teacher-centric transmission of canonical knowledge of political systems was prominent in the past, but it has moved to a new form underpinned by cosmopolitan values of human rights, democratic citizenship (Moon, 2013; Rauner, 1999). The transformation of CE was facilitated by a commitment to creating ‘a school life more consonant with emerging democratic movements and practices in the broader society’ (Levinson, 2005, p. 333). The catastrophes of World War II (WW II) exposed the vitality of universal human values and brought human rights discourses into prominence. Subsequent efforts to promote international peace created a supportive context for the transition to liberal CE.

That socio-political context that supported the flourishing of liberal CE is now deteriorating, which may create substantive implications for CE. Human rights advocacy bodies note a concerning rise in hate speech, xenophobia, racism, intolerance, discrimination against migrant and minorities (UN, 2016). What has become a clear tendency in ideological, political, and social developments in a number of nations is the rise of ultra-nationalism along with the decline of liberal democratic aspirations. No matter what socio-economic and political conditions paved

the way for the major international events including but not limited to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Iraq and Afghanistan War, the Arab Spring and the Syrian crisis, the Brexit referendum, ever-accelerated speed of global migration and the terrorist attacks on civilian people in major cities, they all played a part in the deterioration of climate that once consolidated liberal CE. It seems the current rise of ethno-religious nationalism will take its toll on CE even though it is not possible to draw a commonly agreeable line in time between the rise and fall of liberal CE.

The transformation of CE in parallel with socio-political developments strongly suggests that there is an interdependent relation between CE and political culture. On the one hand, the development of liberal CE needs a supportive democratic culture. On the other hand, the making of a democratic culture needs a quality CE. The symbiotic relationship explains the main difficulties faced in consolidating CE in illiberal democracies. The responsiveness of CE to political conditions makes it a sensitive barometer to capture ideological transformations in education. It is particularly illustrative in Turkey because educating secular modern citizens was a clear educational objective of modern Turkey. This educational objective gradually came closer to the cultivation of an Islamic nationalist citizenry because the religiously conservative majority has elected a series of conservative governments after 1950 (Oran, 2001). Secondly, fight against communism changed the hard-line secularist attitude of militant forces, which led to the expansion of time, content and space of Islamic education. The historical background suggests that Islamic forces prefer to educate their ideal citizenry through Islamic education, whereas secular forces would like to raise a modern citizenry through CE. This ideological polarisation juxtaposes CE against Islamic education and makes it a barometer to observe the ideological transition from secular to Islamic nationalism. For example, when the Islamist coalition government was overthrown in 1997, the militant-secular forces narrowed down space for Islamic education and announced new programmes for citizenship and human rights education courses, most of which were repealed after the AKP consolidated power by 2005.

In today's Turkey, the figure of good citizen in education is framed depending on the alliance of sub-groups within or across dominant ideological camps. Expressed in broad terms, Islamic nationalists want Islamic moral education, while secular nationalists consider a particular type of CE as the backbone of an ideal educational system. Representatives of these ideological groups decide what kind of CE will be delivered at schools. However, established educational conventions set limitations to changes that an ideological group can make. This is because the national curriculum is more like a sedimented rock with several discursive layers, so proposed changes require a justification. Therefore, ideological groups at the helm often prefer a gradual transformation of national curriculum towards their beliefs. In this regard, the Report under investigation is a crucial documentary testament to the ideological transition of the national curriculum from militant-secular to Islamic nationalism.

### **Introducing the Report and tools for textual analysis**

In 140 pages, the Report<sup>1</sup> sets a number of reform objectives in relation to foreign language, special and early childhood education, school finance, measurement and evaluation etc. (MoNE, 2018). Each chapter is focused on a different area of education and presents a to-do list to achieve certain goals. Prior to the chapters, there are introductory statements by the president and the education minister, which are

followed by four sections summarizing the foundational policy, philosophy and model of the proposed changes. In most parts, the text is presented in a two-column layout with colourful photos and ample space in margins. The text is composed of formal, grammatically well-structured and relatively long sentences.

The Report is analysed with a focus on unearthing the ideological discourses of Islamic nationalism drawing on the conventions of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Discourse can be defined as an assemblage of certain signs available in the meaning-making resources of a text producer or speaker for the representation of social or natural reality. Ideologies that are identified with the interests of certain social groups, not the whole society, manifest themselves in language. Fairclough (2001) contends that 'ideological differences between texts in their representations of the world are coded in their vocabulary' (pp. 112–113). Then, a focus on wording can capture the particularistic representation of reality in discourse. Similarly, grammatical features, meaning relations and classification schemes can be suggestive of ideological discourses.

Differentiation along the ideological lines makes itself evident in the Turkish language prominently since the founding elites of modern Turkey launched a campaign to 'purify Turkish by purging it of Arabic and Persian words which are regarded comprising religious meaning' (Çolak, 2004, p. 67). This language purification effort gave rise to a vocabulary bifurcation as new words remained in circulation along with their old counterparts. Given that the secularization reforms affected most city-dwellers, new words took hold in the language of secular-oriented groups who were educated in city-schools, whereas traditional-religious groups that were relatively unaffected from the secularization reforms kept using old vocabularies. In contemporary Turkish, it may prove daunting to find out which groups use old or new vocabularies, but certain terms are retaining their ideological distinctiveness at least in political discourse. For example, Islamic nationalists do not generally use terms *Tanrı* [God], *ulus* [nation], *yurt* [homeland], *yurttaş* [citizen]. These words appear more in secular nationalist discourses, whereas Islamic nationalists prefer their older versions: *Allah* [God], *millet* [nation], *vatan* [homeland], *vatanadaş* [citizen]. This enables to identify ideological differentiation in discourse relatively easier by judging talks and texts against context.

Relying on these theoretical perspectives, I paid particular attention to the wording of the Report and the use of pronouns and modalities in it. I used the value classification developed by Fairclough (2001) as the main analytical frame. In line with this classification, I first identified experiential values that correspond to beliefs and conceptual statements that are associated with Islamic nationalism. Secondly, with a focus on the changing uses of the pronoun 'we/our', I pinpointed relational values that show how the speakers position themselves in relation to addressees: inclusive, exclusive, egalitarian or hierarchical. Lastly, I spotted expressive values by scrutinizing the visual representation of social identities as well as prominent evaluation statements, modalities and classification schemes. The deconstruction of the Report in this way revealed ways in which Islamic nationalism is articulated in the reform discourse.

## Findings

The excerpts from the Report are selected on the basis of their relevance to the focus of the study. I present findings in three parts under the following headings:

## *Ignorance of agentive powers of students and teachers*

A long-standing trope of educational reform discourse in Turkey maintains that the state will become stronger once as many people as possible are educated in modern schools (Fortna, 2002). This discourse which views education instrumental to broader statist objectives echoes strongly in the preface statement of president Erdoğan as he highlights that the goal of education reform is to create a powerful Turkey:

At the top of the characteristics of countries that have a strong economy, solid social structure, and lead the world comes having a quality, human-centric education-instruction system. In our struggle to turn dreams of our country into goals and its goals into reality, our biggest source of strength is our generations ... (MoNE, 2018, p. 4)<sup>2</sup>

The President legitimises the educational reform in reference to a contentious claim that having a quality education system is the defining feature of powerful countries. This discourse personifies countries as actors competing for hegemony in the global space. In this competition, the secondary actor ‘our generations’ are tasked to serve to the development of ‘our country’. What would be good for children and what kind of education would empower them to live an autonomous and fulfilling life are not given any attention, but they are tasked to strengthen the power of Turkey.

Prioritization of the collective over the individual is reflected in other parts of the president’s statement. Students are not recognised with their agentive power but depicted as though they were possessed by adults:

Many important responsibilities fall onto our teachers, school administrators and all members of our education community, to whom we entrust the education and instruction of our children [evlatlarımız], our most precious gifts [ciğerparemiz]. (p. 5)

The excerpt contains expressions that can be associated with the entrenched notion of father state [*devlet baba*] as the president talks as though he was fathering the whole nation. The word choice *evlatlarımız* [our children] and *ciğerparemiz* [our most precious gifts] may be construed that the speaker holds an authoritarian, affectionate and paternalistic consideration of children. This discourse comes to the surface when the Report underlines the importance of ‘raising a human with affection [*şefkat*]’ rather than love or respect (p. 21). The word *şefkat* [affection] highlights the vulnerability of children rather than their agentive power. The representation of students and teachers in the minister’s statement is similar to the ways they are represented in the president’s statement. The minister refers to students by the phrase ‘common denominator’ (pp. 8–9) by casting them as instrumental subjects whose main function is to unite the different factions of the nation and strengthen the state. Teachers’ agentive power is not recognised as well. The excerpt above from the president’s preface statement depicts teachers as though they were custodians to whom parents entrust their children. The following excerpt contains more convincing evidence:

If we compare the curriculum, which is one of the oft-used concepts in our age’s education concept map, with a good theatre play metaphor, those who will take the stage and read lines are our teachers, (p. 9)

The analogy undermines the agency of teachers by resembling a teacher to an actor reading lines on the stage. The analogy is not supportive of teacher agentic power but advises them to remain loyal to a prescribed text in the classroom.

### *Avoidance of civic values of democracy, human rights and diversity*

In the entire Report, the concept of democracy appears only once, but not as a value (p. 10). Furthermore, no attribution is made to human rights, social justice, diverse identities and gender equality. The negative consideration of the values of democracy and human rights gets crystallised as follows:

In today's world, the dominant view in credible mainstream systems tend to evaluate education by its functional outputs. As a result of this view, the responsibility area of education is limited to meeting daily needs (preparing for a job, cultivating a good citizen); instead of adopting a holistic and consistent perspective, with a superficial and reductionist approach, a human is defined as merely a thinking biological animate, *homo biologicus* and *homo economicus*. However, a human is neither only a matter nor a spirit, but a whole encompassing both. (p. 15)

The phrase 'cultivating a good citizen' in the parenthesis in the excerpt marks the only occasion where an implicit attribution to CE is made in the entire Report. This single time attribution is made on the occasion of raising an ironical criticism to the function of education to cultivate citizenship. In this sweeping statement, 'cultivating a good citizen' is criticised for being a shallow educational goal. This official aversion to CE is manifested in that the Report avoids terms citizenship and offers a replacement for it: 'social entrepreneurship' (p. 95). This term by no means amounts to citizenship as it sounds more like a de-politicised neoliberal wording of citizenship (Biesta, 2011). This aversion is further embodied with no mention of democracy and human rights values in the entire Report. The value lists presented in the Report reflect an avoidance to mention the civic values of democracy, human rights and diversity:

- ... universal, local, material, spiritual, professional, moral and national values ... (p. 15)
- ... universal humanity values ... (p. 14)
- ... national, moral, humane, spiritual and cultural values ... (p. 23)
- ... common values produced by humanity ... (p. 22)

Among the value descriptors, those associated with liberal tradition like 'universal' and 'humane' are never seen next to the term value. On a single occasion where the two adjectives come closest, 'universal' describes 'humanity', not 'values'. This suggests that de-politicised values are given prominence as nothing associated with democracy and human rights is included among the value descriptors. On other occasions, an oft-used descriptor *manevi* [spiritual] manifests the religious tone of the Report since it is used as a hyponym for 'religious or Islamic' (pp. 4, 15, 16, 23, 27, 135).

Except for a clear disregard for democracy and human rights values, the Report does not give a clue that students and teachers may have diverse identities. On the contrary, it contains evidence about the adoption of an ethno-religious notion of national identity, which becomes visible in the exclusionary use of the pronoun 'we/our' in the introductory statement of the minister:

As long as we develop a perspective under the guidance of science and our moral compass, we would protect a millennium-old legacy and heritage, textured with good examples, of our presence in Anatolia. (p. 8)

The excerpt makes it clear that ‘we’ have a thousand years presence (‘millennium-old legacy’) in Anatolia. It reveals that the minister is referring to ethnic Turks. According to a narrative of Turkish history, Turkic tribes started arriving in Anatolia at the beginning of the first millennium, and they made Anatolia their home since then. This narrative makes a genealogical distinction between those who had resided in Anatolia before Turkic tribes arrived in and those who came with the Turkic tribes, which reveals that an ethnic notion of national identity permeates the Report.

### ***Promotion of Islamic values and identities***

In the Report, Erdoğan sets the goal of education with a formulaic statement:

The goal of educational system must be to educate individuals with a clear mind [*aklıselim*], a clear heart [*kalbiselim*], a clear pleasure [*zevkiselim*]. (p. 5)

*Aklıselim* refers to the cognitive development of students which can be linked to science education. *Kalbiselim* involves religious/moral development partly because the word *kalp* is associated with faith in this context. Educating individuals with a clear heart is a glaring expression of Islamic education in the given context. Finally, *zevkiselim* stands for aesthetics development of students which can be construed as attribution to art education.

The use of the Ottoman-Turkish phrases in this formulaic statement may be taken as an embodiment of the speaker’s longing for the Ottoman past. Given that one formulaic statement of Atatürk characterises his ideal generation as ‘generations with free mind [*fikri hür*], free conscious [*vicdani hür*] and free wisdom [*irfanı hür*]’, Erdoğan’s tripartite characterisation can be construed as an attempt to create a counter-formula to that of Atatürk. In fact, Erdoğan’s descriptors emphasise clarity [*selim*] and form a foundation for Islamic education, whereas Atatürk’s descriptors emphasise freedom and offer a justification for secular education. Furthermore, Erdoğan’s descriptors do not bring into picture socio-political development of young people, whereas Atatürk’s formula reflects a desire to educate free individuals. These details suggest that Erdoğan’s formula is arguably inspired by a traditional madrasah culture that glorifies obedience, clarity and stability, whereas Atatürk’s formula is underpinned by a positivist belief in rational thinking and progress.

The Islamic nationalist tone of the Report becomes clearer when it provides a confident answer to the challenging philosophical question of what a human is:

In fact, modern psychology and education defines a human as a bio-psycho social being. This definition turned into a practice which reinforces a human conception that incorporates all of biological, psychological, and sociological elements, but unfortunately [that practice] considers a human merely as a material/psychosomatic being, emphasises merely its bodily vitality (*vitalité*) and somatic structure by ignoring its spiritual/psychospiritual dimensions. However, a human is a somato psycho-spiritual being. A human being is a whole with its bodily (somatic) and inner (spiritual) vitality. (p. 15)

The excerpt mounts a strong criticism to the conventional definition of human. It is criticised for being a combination of ‘biological, psychological, and sociological

elements', it is criticised for merely emphasizing 'bodily vitality (vitalité) and somatic structure'. The three components in the first criticism ('biological, psychological, and sociological') are reduced to two ('bodily vitality (vitalité) and somatic structure') in the second. Then a human is re-defined as 'a somato psycho-spiritual being'. As compared to the criticised definition, the only difference in the new definition is the addition of 'spiritual' and the removal of 'sociological'. It seems this re-definition is made to bring 'spiritual' dimension into the picture. Defining a human as a combination of heart and mind provide an ideological justification for an education reform that addresses the mind component by a focus on science education and the spirit component by a focus on Islamic education.

The religious aspects of the Report become articulate in the chapter on Imam-Hatip schools. Imam-Hatip schools teach social science and science courses along with Islamic education courses underpinned by the official Sunni interpretation of Islam (Ozgur, 2012). With the 1997 coup, Imam-Hatip middle schools were shut down, the graduates of Imam-Hatip high schools were excluded from colleges except for theology and Islamic education teaching. In 2012, the AKP government re-opened Imam-Hatip middle-schools and removed all barriers in the way of Imam-Hatip graduates' college entrance. Now, the number of Imam-Hatip students is around 1,350,000, which is over six times higher than what it was ten years ago, which was around 215.000 (MoNE, 2019). Statistical information suggests that the number of students at Imam-Hatip schools reached to their all-time peak in the history of modern Turkey (Lord, 2018). The Report includes the following statements in respect of Imam-Hatip schools:

Imam-Hatip schools, which were established with the goal of institutionalizing religious education within the formal education, have in time turned into an educational institution that is perceived as a part of general education. Parents who wanted their children to learn basic religious knowledge while receiving academic education prefers Imam Hatip schools. (...) Adults' debates over children's educational matters give harm to children. In order to eliminate discriminatory language used in these debates and not to harm our children's spiritual health, a reconciliatory and inclusive perspective will be put into practice. (...) Against the presence of increasing marginal groups around the world and some groups' tendencies to associate Islam with violence, the importance of Imam-Hatip schools as an original model within the Turkish educational system is coming to the fore. (p. 104)

The excerpt puts forward that Imam-Hatip schools are no different from other schools with a caveat that they provide religious education. The statements send a message that parents who would like their children to know about 'religions' prefer those schools. Through the use of generalised terms like *din* [religion] and *dini eğitim* [religious education], the Report conceals the fact that Imam-Hatip schools provide an Islamic education in accordance with the Sunni interpretation of Islam. It also conceals the fact that Imam-Hatip schools predominately appeal to Sunni families who want their children to receive an Islamic education. By playing the compassion card, it is claimed that the public debates about Imam-Hatip schools give harm to 'children's spiritual health'. This diagnosis implicitly blames those who maintain the debate for not caring about children's wellbeing. It arguably reflects an intention to shut down the public debate about the status of Imam-Hatip schools. In the Report, Imam-Hatip schools are presented as places where young people are introduced to the 'right' interpretation of Islam. They are described as 'original model [*telif bir model*]' having a proselytizing function to prevent Islamic radicalization and offer solutions to 'value crisis and uncertainties'. Furthermore, Imam-Hatip schools are described as 'national model' that has the potential to be presented as an example to other

countries (p. 104). These praises for Imam-Hatip schools make it explicit that the Islamic nationalist forces in power consider these schools as places where good citizens are likely to come out.

In the Report, the photos of students above elementary school age feature single-sex groups in a way that no male and female student sit next to each other at the same desk or work together (pp. 45, 48, 64, 90, 93, 102, 111, 116, 118, 121). The photos from Imam-Hatip schools feature single-sex classrooms in which all female students unexceptionally wear headscarves (pp. 105, 108). Finally, one photo shows a veiled female student playing the piano in the background with two blurry women figures (one veiled, one unveiled) both playing the violin (p. 37). The inclusion of this photo suggests that religious female students are allowed to make contact with western cultural products. It suggests that the western cultural hegemony is felt in the educational discourses of an Islamic nationalist government which sustains an overt political opposition to the West.

Finally, the Report mentions the name of Atatürk and the concept of Republic only for a single time (p. 9). The scarcity of the mention of Atatürk is an indication of the ideological shift as Atatürk is venerated mostly by secular, rather than religious Turks in power. Even though there is not an old report to compare the one under investigation, the Basic Law of National Education in which Atatürk was mentioned many times can be noted here to support the point that the attributions to Atatürk were customary in the past, which remarkably go down in the Report (MoNE, 1973).

## **Conclusion**

Nearly two-decades rule of the AKP has made the Islamic nationalist narrative dominant in the education reform discourse. From the 2011 general elections to 15 July 2016 failed coup attempt, the AKP's education policies were close to the wishes of its political Islamist groups. After Erdoğan openly set the goal of education as raising a 'religious generation' in 2012, the educational reforms expanded the time, space and content of Islamic education. However, the ideological coalition forged after the 15-July coup attempt led to the re-construction of a new reform discourse. The analysis identified a concern in the Report to utilise education for the economic and political development of the nation and the promotion of Islamic nationalist values. This observation gives credit to the contention that is firmly defended by Apple (2006) that neoliberalism and neoconservatism go hand in hand in educational reforms, which are often justified through a nationalist frame of reference. The Turkish case substantiates Apple's insight with a caveat that, it is not only the wishes of dominant ideological groups, but the course of international relations exerts a discernible impact on the direction of educational reforms in Turkey. It seems the estrangement from the western bloc, the political alliance with the MHP and the re-positioning in international arena are all leading to the expulsion of values of liberal democracy from reform discourse.

The Report constructs a figure of a good citizen and proposes changes to re-orient the national education to the cultivation of that model citizen. The findings suggest that the planned educational reforms are not likely to promote socio-political values of democratic citizenship, human rights and diversity and minimise barriers to the participation of disadvantaged identities. Islamic nationalism now penetrates the discursive spaces of educational reform more than ever. No acknowledgement of gender, ethnic, or cultural diversity, purposeful avoidance of any mention of the

diverse identities, the presentation of the diverse population as a monolithic homogenous mass, the expulsion of democracy and human rights values all suggest that authoritarian regimes consider education as their favourite ideological device to secure the prosperity and tranquillity of the nation, meaning the perpetuation of their privileges. These findings call out the research community to pay more attention to the implications of rising ethno-religious nationalism for democratic CE which may push the field into an existential crisis in near future.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Turkish version of the Report is used for analysis, and all excerpts from the Report are translated from Turkish to English by the author.
- <sup>2</sup> Excerpts from the Report are cited with their page number.

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