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#### Introduction

Having the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, modern Turkey, with more than 72 million inhabitants, is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country, housing approximately 50 different Muslim and/or non-Muslim ethno-cultural groups: Sunni Turks, Alevi Turks, Sunni Kurds, Alevi Kurds, Circassians, Lazis, Armenians, Georgians, Jews, Greeks, Arabs, Assyrians etc (Andrews, 1989). However, leaving aside the attempts made for democratisation of the country in the last decade, the Turkish state has been far from recognising the ethnically and culturally diverse nature of the Turkish society. Ethno-cultural and religious minorities in Turkey have been subject to homogenising state policies.

As Turkey is a republican country, one could not find official figures about the numbers of ethno-cultural and religious minorities. The article is designed to portray the ways in which ethno-cultural and religious diversity has hitherto been managed by modern Turkish state within the framework of the discourse of tolerance. Explicating the construction of the Turkish national identity and the modern Turkish state, the article will primarily delineate the constitutive elements of the state machinery as well as the technologies of citizenship. Turkey's process of Europeanization will also be scrutinized in order to pave the way to a detailed analysis of the transformation of the Turkish polity from the Cold War years to the Post-Cold War years. In doing so, major challenges against the traditional Kemalist nation-state building process will be scrutinized such as political Islam, Alevi revival, Kurdish revival and Europeanization/globalization. Subsequently, some statistical information will be given regarding the major ethno-cultural and religious minorities. The term 'minority' has a delicate history in Turkey, as it often has negative connotation in the popular imagery. In the text, the term 'minority' will be used in both legal and sociological/anthropological framework.

Ottoman multiculturalism was usually coupled with the term 'tolerance'. The concept of tolerance has a very long history in the Turkish context tracing back to the Ottoman Empire. It also has a very popular usage in everyday life. Turks are usually proud of referring to the Millet System of the Ottoman Empire is often known to be the guarantor of tolerance,

respecting the boundaries between religious communities. The equivalents of the term tolerance in the Turkish language are *tolerans*, *hoşgörü*, *tahammül*, *müsamaha*, *görmezden gelme*, and *göz yumma*. The meaning of the term *hoşgörü* is depicted in the Dictionary of the Turkish Language Association (*Türk Dil Kurumu*) as follows: “the state of tolerating everything as much as possible.” *hoşgörü* literally means “seeing (the other) in a good way”. The term ‘*tahammul*’ is derived from the Arabic root word ‘*haml*’, which literally means ‘to pick’ or ‘to bear’ or ‘to carry’. For example if one picks a book, or carries a load or a burden, etc. the word ‘*haml*’ would generally be used; but if one patiently bears a turmoil, or an affliction, or a humiliation, or an indignity, or an oppression, etc...the term ‘*tahammul*’ would be used. The word *musamaha* literally means to forgive, and it is even claimed that the word *Masih* derives from this word in Arabic. Additionally, in Arabic, the word *tasamuh* transcends the realm of political toleration and connotes personal virtues such as patience and generosity. On the other hand, “*görmezden gelme*” means “pretending not to see”, and “*göz yumma*” literally refers to “to close one’s eyes”, or to condone, excuse.

Most of these words used in Turkish as equivalents of the term tolerance, address at a kind of burden to carry on one’s shoulders, so they all refer to a kind of endurance and forbearance. The very etymological meaning of ‘tolerance’ also has parallels with the use of its equivalents in the Turkish language. It does not seem to be accidental that in most languages in which tolerance has been historically debated, the words tolerance (or its synonym, sufferance) and suffering have the same source. The etymology of the term ‘tolerance’ is also very illustrative to understand what it contains. It does not seem to be accidental that in most languages in which tolerance has been historically debated, the words tolerance (or its synonym, sufferance) and suffering have the same source. The Latin word *tolerantia* comes from *tolere*, to bear, and tolerate, to suffer, endure, and the same link exists in English (through the synonym, sufferance), in French (*souffrir*), Italian (*soffrire*), and even in Hebrew (*sevel-sovlanut*). This etymological fact happens to be philosophically significant. It indicates that there is no tolerance without suffering and its overcoming. Tolerating someone means recognizing an irreducible difference, a gap of alienness separating us, which nevertheless is accepted. This implies a concealed hatred or contest between the tolerating and the tolerated party. By this very otherness, the other represents a challenge to the self in the form of a potential competition over goods, power, moral values, and so on.

### Nation, State and citizenship in Turkey

Since the beginning of the nation-state building process, the primary goal of the main constituents of the Turkish Republic had been the establishment of a homogenous nation and a unitary state. In order to achieve this goal, Mustafa Kemal and the military/political elite equipped the state with a superior power over the civil society. Serif Mardin (1975) puts special emphasis on the statist and centralist character of the Republic in its founding years. He underlines that the Republic was ‘diffident’ in integrating the social forces into the central political system although the local notables, who took part in the National Independence War, and formed a significant component of the first Grand National Assembly, were incorporated into the Republican People’s Party (RPP) and the bureaucracy (Mardin,

1975: 22-27). To this aim, some religious, ethnic and local claims such as Kurdish *Sheikh Sait* rebellion (1925) and the Islamist *Menemen* revolt (a district of Izmir), were suppressed by the state elite on the ground that the social forces were regarded as the sources of decentralisation and political rivalry (ibid.: 23). Therefore, Mardin argues that rather than integration of the social forces into the centre through mobilisation of the masses, the Republican idea to restructure the society was confined to the bureaucratisation and regulation (ibid.). Hence, the Kemalist elite preferred achieve the goal of forming the unitary state and a homogeneous nation by means of preserving the state's *raison d'être*, and adopting policies to suppress, assimilate and exclude diverse societal groups along religious, ethnic and cultural lines.

In order to maintain the dominance of the state in political and social structuring over its social rivals, Mustafa Kemal and the state elite adopted policies and programmes to homogenise linguistic, historical and cultural features of the Turkish society and to construct a 'new national identity'. Atatürk defined the Turkish nation as "the Turkish people forming the Turkish Republic". By this statement, he elucidated that every individual who participated in the establishment of the Republic and took a share in the future of it is a Turk (Özbudun, 1981: 18). Atatürk's definition of the Turkish nation embraces all the people who live in the lands of Anatolia and Thrace, and feel to be a part of the past and the future of the Republic. That is why his conception of Turkish nation avoids the distinction of any social segment along with religion, ethnicity, and sectarianism. In this sense, the republican Kemalist elite were difference-blind, and did not recognise ethno-cultural diversity of the Turkish nation.

The defining distinctiveness of the early Republic was Turkification policies, which sought the dominance of Turkishness and Sunni Islam as the defining elements in every walk of life, from the language spoken in the public space to citizenship, national education, trade regime, personnel regime in public enterprises, industrial life and even settlement laws. Having an imperial legacy, many such new regulations and laws referred to a set of attempts to homogenise the entire nation without any tolerance for difference. It is highly probable that the underestimation of ethno-cultural diversity among the Muslim population of the Republic was due to the preceding Ottoman *Millet* system borrowed by the republican political elite. The *Millet* system did not consider ethnic differences among Muslims. All Muslims, regardless of their other differences, belonged to the one and the same 'Muslim nation'. Paradoxically, the successful nature of the Turkish revolution/rupture lays in the continuity of the Ottoman notion of millet.

In the years to come following the formation of the Republic, assimilationist and/or exclusionary policies of the state elite, which sought to erase social and cultural diversity, continued to render the national identity based on Sunni Islam and Turkishness a dominant role in social and political spheres. The social forces affiliated with diverse religious, ethnic and cultural values were frequently faced with and suppressed by the homogenising policies such as the nationalist Turkish history thesis of 1932, the Sun Language Theory of 1936, the unitarian nationalist education policies (*Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu*, 1924), banning the use of mother tongue and of ethnic minority names, discriminatory settlement laws put in effect on the exchange minorities and new migrants (*Iskan*

*Kanunu*, 1934), discriminatory citizenship laws granting citizenship exclusively to Muslim origin migrants, the imposition of Wealth Tax in 1942, especially on non-Muslims, and the forced migration of Kurds in the east and southeast of Turkey (Kaya, 2007). Ethno-cultural minorities adopted different means to cope with the challenge of the state's homogenising policies. They generated their own individual identities in accordance with these assimilationist and/or exclusionary policies. Within the framework of the majority nationalism, ethnic and cultural minorities chose to be involved in the project of the construction of a homogenous Turkish nation, disguised their ethnic identities in the public, and identified themselves as a constitutive element of the Turkish nation.

Subsequent to the primary goal of the formation of a homogenous nation and a unitary state, the state elite pointed at the modern and secular character of the state.<sup>1</sup> Without a macro socio-economic transformation, a total cultural change through the adoption of the Kemalist version of Westernisation and secularism required the state elite to construct 'an imagined Turkish nation' in line with the interests of the unitary and bureaucratic state (Cizre-Sakallioğlu, 1996). In its configuration of secularism, the Kemalist elite did not only accommodate the Islamist identity of the individual but also dispersed the individual identity under the banner of the modern and secular Turkish nation (ibid.). In doing so, they ensured that the individual will was secondary to national will, and also precluded that Islam as a social power could be organised as a challenge to the unitary and bureaucratic state (ibid.). Relying on the 'bureaucratic code', the state elite instrumentalised secularism, which was conceptualised as the separation of politics and religion both in public and private spheres, in order to consolidate the central state power against the potential threat of social forces affiliated with Islamic values and aims.

It should be noted that there is a debate over the definition of Turkish citizenship, for instance "while some argue that the formal definition of Turkish citizenship is based on territoriality rather than ethnicity (Kirişçi, 2000), for some, Turkish citizenship oscillates between political and ethnicists logic (Kadioğlu, 2007). The historical evidence shows that citizenship policies of Turkey were civic republican in rhetoric. The first citizenship law of 1928 gave citizenship to all those residing within the boundaries of the republic on the basis of *jus soli* principle. However, it has gradually become ethno-cultural in nature embraced by *jus sanguinis* principle. Retrospectively speaking, ethnic groups in Turkey such as Kurds, Circassians, Alevis, Armenians, Lazis and Arabs have developed various political participation strategies *vis-à-vis* the legal and political structure and delimitations.

### Cultural diversity challenges

In the aftermath of the 1980 military coup, Kemalist ideology encountered various challenges originating from ethno-cultural and religious groups. This was the time when the Kemalist rhetoric of nationalism, which was based on a retrospective narrative holding the Muslim origin nation together against the syndrome of common enemy of imperialist European powers, was challenged by its major taboos: Islam, Kurds, Alevis, globalization and liberalization. In what follows, these challenges will be scrutinized.

1. For the Kemalist mode of secularism as a means to the project of modernist nationalism see Göle (1997), Keyman (1995), and Cizre-Sakallioğlu (1996).

## Rise of political Islam in the 1980s: Islamist forces as integral parts of the regime

State-centric Kemalist regime was confronted with the challenge of ethno-cultural and religious groups in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup (Keyman and Öniş, 2007: 16). The military coup and the policies undertaken by the military government until 1983 revealed that the military elite made a profound attempt to eradicate the sources of social strife emerging from the conflict between the rightists and leftists, and between diverse ethno-cultural communities in the 1970s, and to rebuild the social-political cohesion (Cizre-Sakallıoğlu, 1996: 245-246). For this purpose, the military elite began to pursue a project of restructuring the society in a way that the conservative and Islamist sources of culture were accommodated into the homogenous modern Turkish national identity (ibid.).

In parallel with the invocation of the Islamist aspects in the national culture, the policy of economic liberalisation was regarded as a necessary means to structure a new social and economic order. Both the accommodation of the Islamist forces and the economic liberalisation were expected to avoid the polarisation and fragmentation among the political parties supported by the diverse social forces contesting to obtain resources and to shape the social order. It is in this political context after the 1980 coup that it became possible to see the Islamist forces, values and themes more pervasively involved in various areas of formal political and social spheres. For instance, the Islamist orders and communities (*Sufi tarikats*) infiltrated into the political parties, government, civil service, and the business and banking sectors. Moreover, the Prime Minister Turgut Özal, who was backed up by the military in the formation of the new conservative and economically liberal order, met the leaders of some *Sufi tarikats* for the Friday prayer. Mandatory religious instruction in primary and secondary schools was introduced by the military regime led by Kenan Evren (Cizre-Sakallıoğlu, 1996: 244).

However, the state's project of restructuring the political society was embedded in an implicit 'double discourse'. One aim of the military government in the project of reorganising the society was the integration of social forces into the political system, and the other was the enhancement of the state's role in politics. To put it differently, the military government undertook a macro socio-economic transformation, whereby it attempted to create a homogenous and cohesive society unified in Islamic and nationalist identity under the circumstances of liberal economy, on the one hand. On the other, it was committed to strengthen the state's control over the political and social realms. That is to say that although the introduction of free market economy both in economic and social spheres such as the privatisation of mass media stimulated the mobilisation of social forces and the proliferation of civil society, it also impeded the democratic consolidation by containing the political activity of the civil society within the channels of political participation (Toprak, 1988: 126-127).

In order to enhance the state's role in politics, the military government initiated the enactment of an electoral law, by which it adopted the 10 % national threshold in order to preclude the participation of the ideologically oppositional parties in the competitive politics (Özbudun, 2000: 75). The military government also enacted some articles of the 1982 constitution and other laws, whereby it outlawed cooperation between political

parties and other civil society institutions aiming at demobilising the working class and depoliticising the civil society (ibid.: 27). Therefore, it can be argued that the enhanced state's control over the political and social spheres eliminated a civil society autonomous from the state, in which social forces could be mobilised into major oppositional groups organised along ethno-cultural lines as a challenge to the unitary state and the republican regime.

The Islamist forces incorporated into the new socio-economic order in which the big business circles in the centre and in the peripheral Anatolian petite bourgeoisie circles integrated and coexisted within the structure of liberal economy. Hence, they were used by the new state elite to counterbalance the leftists and highly mobilised urban working class (ibid: 26-27). The Islamist forces did not emerge as a challenge to the secular and republican regime, they rather became an integral part constituting and maintaining the status quo of the liberal and capitalist order, which enabled the military and state elite to sustain the political regime.

### **New challenges in the 1990s: Ethno-religious claims**

The political context of the 1990s showed a different character from the 1980s, whereby the enhancement of the state's role in politics proved to be counter-productive. While the state's control over the political and social realms prevailed, ethno-cultural and religious minorities mobilised a politics of identity in reaction to the state's restriction of political participation. Ethno-cultural and religious communities, which were already integrated into the regime in the 1980s, could not participate in the political process to the extent that they could manifest their dissidence against the inequality and injustice in the distribution of resources within the restricted liberal system.

Due to the lack of the political will and capacity of the coalition governments of the 1990s in management of the economic liberalisation in technological and organisational terms, the opportunities of the open and free market economy did not assure sustained economic growth and were not equally allocated to every segment of the society (Keyman and Öniş, 2007: 136). Both the rapid integration to the world economy and the poor management of the economic liberalisation gave rise to economic crises and problems of inequality and poverty. Social segments which were marginalised and deprived by the unjust features of the liberal economy protested against the deteriorating effects of the socio-economic structure such as poverty, unemployment, corruption, social injustice and 'the moral decay'.

Another factor which played a significant role in the rise of the politics of identity by which political mobilisation was stimulated and formed along ethno-cultural and religious lines was the process of globalisation. The transformation to the free market economy and broader interaction with the world societies also created an impetus for the proliferation of liberal, democratic and pluralistic ideas in the political realm as well as to the cultivation of social mobilisation in civil society.

However, the Turkish political regime based on the priority of state and the restricted political participation was not able to respond to the demands for fostering a political system promoting democracy, pluralism and civil

society required by the liberalisation process. Fragmentation embedded in the globalisation process provided the marginalised and oppressed social groups with an informal social-economic structure by which they were able to mobilise in the political context of restricted participation and devalued left-right axis and to fight against the inequalities of the liberal economy and the complexities of the urban life (Hale and Özbudun, 2009:35). Hence, it is crucial to present that his period has witnessed three major social movements challenging the authority of the traditional political centre: political Islam, Alevi revivalism, and Kurdish nationalism.

### *Political Islam as a challenge to the Kemalist regime*

The emergence of the Welfare Party with an Islamic social base and political agenda posed a profound challenge to the state-centric, republican and secular regime in both political and cultural terms. The Welfare Party (WP, *Refah Partisi*) and the broader social network of the Islamist movement sought to respond to the inequalities of the global and liberal system by transcending the state and mobilising the marginalised and underprivileged social groups within an expanding Islamic civil society (*umma*) and the framing structure of identity politics. The WP tried to generate its electoral support from a broad Islamist social network both by supporting the socio-economic opportunity structures for the social integration of the Islamist forces into the growing liberal economy and the competitive urban life and by channelling their interests and demands to the national politics through political parties. Like the Islamist movements in the other Middle Eastern countries, Islamist communities, Sufi orders (*tarikats*) and Islamic welfare associations provided a network for the marginalised classes, in which they were provided with sources of social services including employment, religious and secular education, health services, food, cloth and coal supplies which the nation-state failed to provide to a large extent thanks to the unmanaged transition to the liberal economy (Hale and Özbudun, 2009: 16-18).

It should be noticed that the Islamist political mobilisation appealed both to the winners and losers of the global and liberal economy in the sense that the newly emerging Islamic bourgeoisie, which underwent a continuous integration into the liberal system since the 1980s, distributed to the poor the wealth raised from the publishing houses, private media channels, university preparation courses, Islamic banks and financial institutions and holding companies (ibid: 13). Through its connections with these Islamist communities, the WP attracted the votes of the Islamic bourgeoisie, the upper middle class and the marginalised lower class and also stimulated political mobilisation of the conservative and Islamist social forces, which dramatically challenged the republican and secular segments.

In regard with the unacceptability and intolerance of the dominant regime towards the Islamist forces, the military elite and the coalition government led by the WP in 1997 confronted some crises. The WP posed some challenges to the secular regime with its demands articulating Islamic values and purposes in the political life involving the exercise of the Islamic law, the segregation of sexes in social life, religious education and the headscarf issue. Analysing the demands of the WP for the incorporation of Islam into formal politics, it should be underlined that what the WP was seeking was the acquisition of state power and the formation

of an Islamic social order from above rather than mere toleration for the recognition of freedom of religion and conscience and the protection of religious rights such as the wearing of headscarf and religious cloths in public places (ibid: 7-9).

Within the legal and institutional framework, the military/bureaucratic state elite made it explicit that the WP's Islamist demands cannot be tolerated as the military gave a harsh ultimatum to the party in the meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) on the February 28, 1997 and the party was closed down on the January 16, 1998 by a Constitutional Court decision in the following year (ibid: 4). The WP and the Islamist forces constituted a religious and cultural challenge to the republican and secular dominant regime and segments of the society. Their challenge was manifested in the legal and institutional frameworks in that the WP suggested the introduction of a new legal implementation, whereby each legal community would be governed in accordance with its own religious rules. In doing so, it asserted a return to the *Medina Covenant* of the Prophet Muhammad's time, the age of happiness (*asr-i saadet*), whereby a kind of multiculturalism based on religious differences was experienced (ibid: 7-8).

In the social and economic spheres as an everyday practice, the WP also attempted to undermine the secular and Western order and to alter it in a way that it could also embrace the social forces, which had a religious and Islamic way of living. Therefore, the WP and Islamist forces posed a religious and cultural diversity challenge both in their attempt to stimulate social integration and political participation of the Islamist segments into the republican and secular establishment and to Islamize the society and culture in the legal and institutional framework and everyday practices. However, the state elite and dominant secular segments reacted to this challenge of the WP immediately, and showed their intolerance towards the Islamist forces by purging them from the formal political sphere.

### *Alevi Revivalism*

The other challenge to the republican state and the myth of homogenous nation rose from the Alevi community. After the adoption of the caliphate institution by the Sublime Port in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Sultan, Yavuz Sultan Selim, imposed the dominance of the Sunni Islamic tradition over various religious groups in Anatolia (Erman and Erdemir, 2008). As a consequence of these assimilationist and suppressive policies, Alevis were compelled to develop a protective attitude towards their own community and identity by living in small social enclosures in rural areas (ibid.). In the Millet system of the Ottoman Empire, Islam was the main constitutive element (Yıldız, 2001). In the *Millet* system did not distinguish between the Muslim subjects of the Ottoman with regard to ethno-cultural differences. All Muslims, regardless of their differences, belonged to the one and the same 'Muslim nation'. Thereby, Alevis were also imagined as the integral subjects of the 'Sunni Muslim nation' (Kaya, 2004).

Throughout the nation-state building process, the state elite also followed the Ottoman heritage of the 'Millet system' imposing the dominance of the Sunni Islam. In order to achieve the goal of the Kemalist

mode of modernisation, the republican political elite implemented policies for the secularisation of the political and social life (Göle, 1997). One of these policies was the abolishment of any kind of place for religious communion and practice other than mosques without taking into consideration the *Cemevis*, dervish lodges and special places for Alevi communion (Erman and Erdemir, 2008). For this reason, Alevi communities were deprived of the places where they could be organised into a religious community as an alternative to the Sunni communities.

Moreover, by the entitlement of all the religious affairs to the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) accountable to the Prime Minister's Office, the Alevis were subject to the decisions made by this institution on all matters of religious life (Erman and Erdemir, 2008). It is also worth noting that the Directorate of Religious Affairs gradually turned into a state institution instrumentalised to impose and diffuse the values and practices of the dominant Sunni Islam. The transition to the multi-party politics did not bring about a radical challenge to the dominant republican and secular regime based on the homogenous Sunni-Turkish nation. Rather, the Democrat Party which emerged as the opposition to the Kemalist Republican People Party, had embraced the dominant Sunni Islamic discourse, mobilised the Sunni conservatism, made connections with Sunni sufi sheikhs and returned to the Arabic prayer's call in the 1950s. Thus, we can draw the argument that throughout the Republican history, both the state and the society regarded Alevis as intolerable or difficult to tolerate or accept as they posed a challenge to the dominant Sunni Muslim order.

Despite the state discourse for the re-alignment with the Alevis and the common initiatives of the Sunnis secularists and Alevis to accommodate cultural and religious diversity, in this decade, one could also find obvious examples illustrating the cases of intolerance and conflict. As an ethno-class group, the Alevi community living in the squatters of the shanty town Gazi at the periphery of Istanbul emerged as a resistance grouping, which considered their Alevi identity superior to the Turkish national identity as opposed to the moderate Alevis seeking a democratic, pluralistic and peaceful movement. The Alevi community of Gazi neighbourhood identified themselves with aspects such as distrustful and sceptic of the bureaucracy, the state authorities, the politicians and the municipal governments, which ignored the grievances and the lack of social services there as a result of their 'Othering' the 'poor and different' Alevis.

This conflict between the dominant classes and the culturally and religiously different underclass Alevis of the urban life took place in an armed clash in Gazi neighbourhood. In March 1995, an unknown person fired at the people in three coffee houses and one of them died and 20 of them were seriously injured. The neighbourhood people were involved in an armed conflict with the police forces, which were late to intervene and thus seen as responsible for the attack. At the end of the clash between the Alevis and the police in the neighbourhood, 15 people were killed by the policemen. This case of armed conflict between the security forces and the marginalised Alevis revealed that the level of social intolerance, suspicion and hatred increases when the dichotomy between Sunni-Muslim-Turkish majority and the ethno-religious groups and minorities such as the Alevis was re-emphasised, and the gap between the rich and the poor was widened.

### *Kurdish Revivalism*

At the end of 1980s, political parties which represented the Kurdish identity and defended the Kurdish cultural and political rights began to enter the formal political sphere. Under the Özal government, the abolition of the articles of the law 765 of the Turkish Penal Code, which restricted the freedom of expression, laid the ground for the formation of legal ethnic and religious parties (Sahin, 2008: 134). In addition, departing from their alliances with the leftists parties of the 1970s, the Kurdish political and intellectual elite abandoned the old communist slogans, the socialist economic programmes, and the aim of forming an independent Kurdistan, and replaced them with the seizure of the cultural rights for the Kurdish people and the democratic consolidation of the democratic republic (ibid). During the 1990s, the attempts of the Kurdish political elite to represent the Kurdish cultural and political rights by participating in the national politics through political parties were undermined by closure cases of the Constitutional Court and the public debates on the legitimacy of a party, which was founded on the basis of the recognition of ethnic identity.

Ever since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, the state has never been tolerant to the expression of Kurdish identity in the public space. The Kurdish population was considered by the Kemalist elite as the most formidable threat against the formation of nation-state based on the republican, secular, modern and bureaucratic principles as well as on the homogenous Turkish national identity. First, as it was evidently revealed in the Sheikh Sait Rebellion (1925), the Kurdish tribal leaders and religious leaders, sheikhs, who maintained control over the local community, constituted a potential source of rivalry to the central political authority.

Second, the Kurdish people were also perceived as a rigorous impediment to the project of the Kemalist mode of modernisation and Westernisation due to their 'backward, pre-modern and inprogressive' communal and primordial life style based on Sufi order (*tarikats*), tribes, sheikhs, landlords, warlords and rebels (ibid). Consequently, the increasing affiliation of the Kurds with the PKK, the Kurdish Workers Party (*Partia Kerkeran Kurdistan*) is even making them more intolerable for the majority Turkish nation and the state.

Since 1984, the PKK has been leading an armed struggle against the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) in the southeastern region. In order to defend the Turkish territorial integrity and the national security, an urgent implementation of excessive military and authoritarian control over the governance of some cities (Martial Law) in the eastern and South Eastern regions was introduced in 1987, and was extended for 57 times until its abolition in 2002. Moreover, since 1985 the military adopted another strategy, whereby they supported and armed the village guards of some Kurdish tribes allying with them to counterattack the tribes involved in armed attacks.

The rise of the Kurdish ethnic nationalism, which involved the attempts of the Kurdish representation in the national politics, on the one hand, and the armed struggle, on the other was perceived as 'a low-intensity war' between the Kurdish minority and the Turkish state. The armed conflict has resulted with an increasing tension between the Turks and the Kurds in a way that leads to the mental division among the Kurds. Kurds are now willing to stay in their home cities despite the difficulties in getting jobs. Racism and institutional discrimination towards the Kurds in the big

cities and in western Anatolia is growing day by day. Since the mid-1980s, the Kurds have been coupled by the majority Turkish public with separation, division, disintegration, terror, violence, drug trafficking, informal economics, and gun industry.

### **2000s: European Integration and Euroscepticism**

As stated earlier, Turkey was granted the right to candidacy in the Helsinki Summit of the European Union in December 1999. Later in 2002, the Copenhagen Summit introduced new concerns and discussions regarding the nature of European identity, the notion of Europeanization and the borders of Europe, which led to identity-based concerns regarding Turkey's place in Europe and the situation of Islamic identity in European societies. According to Keyman and Öniş (2007), the main concern was whether the EU aspired to become a global actor or rather preferred inward-oriented integration. Subsequently, while the former aspiration was accommodating towards Turkish membership, the latter perceived Turkey as a liability due to the social, political and economic disparities between the EU member states and Turkey (ibid: 48-50). For the first time the Copenhagen Summit and the subsequent discussions linked the question of culture with European enlargement and the EU's capacity to embrace cultural differences. "The discussions over Turkish accession reveal yet another dimension of 'absorption capacity', that of 'cultural' and 'social' absorption, which are directly related to the 'identity' of the Union. Jean-Louis Bourlanges, an MEP from a French centre-right party vocal on Turkish accession, has argued that the accession of Turkey will not only have a huge economic impact on the EU, but will also introduce a great deal of cultural and social heterogeneity that will endanger the formation of a solid and democratically organised political community" (Emerson et al., 2006: 3)

In the course of European integration, the JDP adopted a conservative democratic ideology with an emphasis on secularism, social peace, social justice, the preservation of moral values and norms, pluralism, democracy, free market economy, civil society and good governance. By using such a pragmatist discourse, the JDP aimed to mobilise socially and economically marginalised classes, which reacted to the inequalities deriving from the processes of globalization and urban life (Kaya, 2004: 16-17). Moreover, the JDP also became attractive for the liberal and secular bourgeoisie, upper middle and middle classes, who were disenchanted with the political system because of the political and economic instability (Hale and Özbudun, 2009: 37). The JDP immediately took an initiative to raise toleration and respect for the freedom of religion and conscience, and for the protection of religious rights such as the right to practice religion in public and private space.

Whether the JDP's discourse on conservative democracy and Islamic liberalism achieved to transform the society into a more tolerant society with respect to the recognition of religious freedom and rights is not certain. However, it is clear that the JDP government made profound attempts to force the state and the society to recognise cultural and religious differences. The protection of religious freedoms and rights became a heated debate between the Islamist and secular segments of society. One of the cases, where the JDP sought to increase the tolerance *vis-a-vis* the social integration of Islamist forces and to foster the respect for religious free-

dom is that the JDP government proposed a draft-law, which enabled the *Imam Hatip* (clergy high-school) graduates to study not only in the faculty of Islamic theology but also in other faculties (ibid: 86). By doing so, it made an attempt to eradicate the constraints, which gave rise to the social and economic segregation of religious and conservative segments.

Moreover, between 2002 and 2008 the JDP made several attempts to initiate the amendments and decisions in the legal and institutional framework for the lift of the ban on headscarf. The JDP government proposed to the Constitutional Court an amendment on the articles of the Constitution concerning the ban on wearing headscarf in universities with the expectation that this amendment would lead to the lift of the ban in 2008. Following the constitutional amendments, the newly elected head of the Board of the Higher Education (BHE), Yusuf Ziya Özcan made an announcement to the universities and stated that according to the constitutional change, the ban on wearing a headscarf in the Turkish universities was lifted. However, the Court repudiated the lift of the ban ultimately.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, the appearance/ existence of conservative and Islamist segments in the socio-economic sphere was recognised/accepted as an everyday reality although (in)tolerance/(dis)respect for the expression of faith and wearing religious clothes still remained as a highly debated topic in the public.

On the other hand, it should be thoroughly questioned whether the quest of the JDP for the recognition of religious freedom and rights through the adoption of the discourses on conservative democracy was equally carried out in every social cleavage, and particularly, in the case of religious minorities. Before the 2007 elections, even though the JDP took an initiative to accommodate the Alevis in the Sunni-dominant order, the party was primarily concerned with gaining more votes from the Alevis. The Alevis were not equally treated in the JDP's policy to transform the society to become more tolerant for the expression of faith and religious rights. The JDP failed to accommodate the Alevis into the social sphere and continued to retain the Sunni-dominant social order since it did not recognise the *Cemevis* (Alevi communion houses) as places of worship in addition to mosques, and insisted on the inclusion of the Alevi children in the assignment of the compulsory courses of religion in the secondary school education. Therefore, one should contend that the JDP's policies to stimulate the social sensitivities for the toleration and recognition of the religious minorities and the protection of religious rights were confined to the Sunni conservative and Islamist segments.<sup>3</sup>

In the legal and institutional framework, since February 2002, it is also possible to find various reform policies for the recognition and protection of ethnic minority rights, which manifested a great shift in the discursive position taken by the political elite. Since the Accession Partnership Programme and the National Programme (March 2001) addressed at the recognition of ethno-cultural diversity, the former coalition government and the JDP government enacted and enforced reform packages and policies to accommodate ethno-cultural diversity, and in a broader sense, to secure the individual rights, liberties and human rights within the framework of the consolidation of democracy and the rule of law. With the initial reform packages put into force between 2002 and 2004, first, they reduced the role of the military in politics by removing the military origin judges from the State Security Courts, and eventually abolishing these courts, removing the military members from the High Audio Visual Board (RTÜK) and

2. *Turkish Daily News* webpage, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=95065> (accessed on 8 May 2010).

3. *Turkish Daily News* webpage, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=80103&contact=1> (accessed 10 May 2010).

the Board of Higher Education (BHE), weakening the military impact on the judiciary, civilianising the National Security Council (NSC) and restricting its role to a consultative body, and by bringing the extra-budgetary funds of the military under the general budget of the Defence Ministry.

Secondly, they reinforced the individual rights, liberties and human rights versus the authoritarian and unitary state by loosening the law on the freedom of association and demonstration, abolishing the death penalty and all means and practices of tortures by the security forces, revising the Penal Code, abolishing the term of 'forbidden language' from the Press law, permitting limited broadcast in Kurdish in the private radio and TV channels, introducing limited broadcast in Arabic, Circassian, and various dialects of the Kurdish such as Kurmanji and Zaza on the national radio and TV channels, and by allowing the ethnic languages and dialects to be taught in private courses. Consequently, the reform packages, which were adopted to raise the social awareness of tolerance and acceptance of ethno-cultural minorities, encouraged ethno-cultural groups to vocalise their claims through legitimate political channels.

Since 2001, the governments took initiatives to remedy the civil and cultural rights of non-Muslim minorities through legal amendments. In accordance with the Copenhagen Political Criteria, the constitutional amendments expanded the individual rights and liberties to every citizen and provided the structural arrangements for democratic consolidation and the enhancement of the rule of law and human rights (Oran, 2004). The EU Reform Packages partially and gradually restored civil and cultural rights conceded to the non-Muslim minorities with the Lausanne Agreement.

In the nation-state formation process, the state elite of the Republic inherited from the Ottoman the discourse and practices of the homogenous nation based on the Sunni Islam and the exclusion of the non-Muslim minorities. The Kemalist definition of nationalism was also discriminative against the non-Muslim minorities since it incorporated the element of Islam into the so-called modern secular national identity. The configuration of the majority and minority elements of the Turkish nation were also inscribed in the (1923) during the foundation of the Turkish Republic. According to LA, the non-Muslim minorities (Greek, Jewish, Armenian and Assyrian) were officially categorised and recognised as 'minorities' resting upon their ethnic and religious differences whereas Kurds, Alevis, Circassians and other Muslim elements belonged to the Turkish nation (*Türk Uyruklu*) constituting the majority (Oran, 2004).

With the EU Reform packages, the ban on establishing associations for the preservation and diffusion of languages and cultures other than Turkish and traditional to minorities was abolished; the use of the 'forbidden language' was re-legalised in the law of associations; the restrictions on learning and publishing in different languages and dialects other than Turkish were abandoned; the right to acquire intangible property of the foundations belonging to the non-Muslim minorities was restored by a change in the law on foundations and was initially subjected to the decisions of the cabinet and later to the General Secretary of Foundations (*Vakıflar Genel Müdürlüğü*), and the limitation on the names other than Turkish was abolished by a change in the law on population. Furthermore, recently the European Union General Secretariat in Ankara has decided to drop the use of the term 'non-Muslims' in identifying officially recognized

minorities in Turkey. Seeking to update the government's terminology for the 21st century, Turkey's chief negotiator for European Union affairs has announced a decision to use the term "different belief groups" instead of "*gayrimüslim*" (non-Muslim) in official EU correspondence. The decision was taken after the Chief Negotiator Egemen Bagis received a letter from the vice patriarch of the Ancient Syriac Orthodox Church, Yusuf Çetin, who pointed out that "Muslim" means "believer" in Aramaic, a northwest Semitic language used in ancient times as the everyday speech of Syria. As such, the term "*gayrimüslim*," which has been the preferred term for non-Muslims in Turkey, implied "nonbelievers"<sup>4</sup>.

Furthermore, the discursive shift from 'majority nationalism' to 'diversity as an ideology' fostered by the governing party created an incentive for a change in the every-day life for the social motivation toward toleration of ethno-religious rights of non-Muslim minorities. The political elite, the Turkish and Armenian intellectuals and civil society organisations were induced to open public discussion on the taboo issues involving the Armenian 'genocide', the Armenian ethnic minority rights, the Armenian-Turkish diplomatic relations and the impact of the Armenian Diaspora on the problems related to the Armenians.

Strikingly, the debates on the Armenian 'genocide' both at the state and society levels have been good examples of the rising aspiration of toleration for the Armenian ethnic and cultural rights. One of these cases of the rising tolerance was the highly debated and polemical conference on 'Ottoman Armenians during the Demise of the Empire' held at Istanbul Bilgi University in 2005. Although some ultranationalists brought a lawsuit on the organisers of the conference and the court partly considered their claims rightful and lawful, this conference became a good indicator of eradicating the biased views on the Armenian issue.

On the other hand, it should be also pointed out that the EU Reforms on civil and cultural rights of non-Muslim minorities could not be brought into practice in an immediate and effective way because its application was obscured and delayed by bureaucratic obstacles and the interference of National Security Council, the intelligence agencies and the Security Forces. Since 2004, none of the applications for the approval of non-Muslim foundations has been approved, and 18.66% of the applications for the acquisition of intangible properties belonging to the existing foundations have been approved (Oran, 2004: 133-134). By looking at the constraints in bringing the EU reforms on non-Muslim minorities into practice, one could maintain that the dominant discourse of 'non-Turkish' and 'foreign' non-Muslim minorities is still prevalent, and therefore, the Turkish state is still reluctant to accommodate tolerance, recognition or acceptance in everyday life.

### Discourses and practices of (in)tolerance in the age of euroscepticism

From 17 December 2004 to 3 October 2005, when EU state and national government leaders decided to start negotiations with Turkey, tensions began to rise between nationalist, patriotic, statist, pro-status-quo groups on the one hand and pro-EU groups on the other hand. This was the time when the *virtuous cycle* of the period between 1999 and 2005 was replaced with the *vicious cycle* starting from the late 2005. A new nationalist

4. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=gayrimuslim-replaced-by-8220different-belief-groups8221-2010-06-27> (accessed on 30 June 2010).

and religious wave embraced the country, especially among middle-class and upper middle-class groups. The actual start of the accession negotiations in 2005 was a turning point towards Euroscepticism. This was also observed in several previous cases during the accession negotiations of the 2004/2007 entrants. Political elites and the government come to realize that accession negotiations are not in fact “negotiations” but rather a unilateral imposition from the EU. The only “negotiable” matters that would benefit the candidate are generally some minor exceptions and hardly bargained transition periods. Furthermore, this reality of actual accession negotiations is often abused by politicians to unfoundedly blame many governmental actions onto the EU. Be the “blaming of Brussels” honest or not, the overall impact on public support is almost surely negative.

Euroscepticism, nationalism and parochialism in Turkey were triggered by the disapproving sentiments towards the American occupation of Iraq, the limitations on national sovereignty posed by the EU integration, the high tide of the 90th anniversary of the Armenian “deportation”/“genocide” among the Armenian diaspora (2005), the “risk of recognition” of Southern Cyprus by Turkey for the sake of the EU integration, anti-Turkey public opinion in the EU countries (e.g. France and Austria) framed by conservative powers, and Israel’s attacks on Lebanon in 2006. Against such a background the state elite has also become very sceptical of the Europeanization process. The best way to explain the sources of such a kind of scepticism among the state elite is to refer to the “*Sevres Syndrome*”, which is based on a fear deriving from the post-World War I era characterized with a popular belief regarding the risk of the break-up of the Turkish state (Öniş, 2004: 12).<sup>5</sup>

Against this background, the JDP immediately set back from its pro-European position as it was perceived by the Party that the EU no longer paid off. Actually, it is not the nationalist climax in the country which turned the JDP into a Eurosceptical party, but it was the decision of the European Court of Human Rights vis-a-vis the headscarf case brought by Leyla Sahin v. Turkey challenging a Turkish law which bans wearing the Islamic headscarf at universities and other educational and state institutions. In 2005, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) heard a particularly monumental case called *Leyla Sahin v. Turkey*. It was monumental because the Grand Chamber agreed to hear Sahin’s case at all. And two previous admissions to the European Human Rights Commission concerning the Turkish headscarf were ruled inadmissible. In Sahin’s case, however, the outcome equalled temporary defeat for headscarf supporters. The court ruled that there had been no violation to Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (freedom of thought, conscience and religion); Article 10 (freedom of expression); Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) and Article 2, Protocol No.1 (right to education) (ECHR, 2004). In short, the Grand Chamber concluded that the interference/violations of fundamental rights concerning headscarf were acceptable and legitimate. In addition to these rulings, Grand Chamber stated that the interference to her education triggered by her wearing a headscarf was found to be necessary for protecting the rights and freedoms of others and maintaining public order. While the Chamber recognized that the ban interfered with Sahin’s right to publicly express her religion, it stated that the ban was acceptable if it was imposed to protect the rights of third parties, to preserve public order, and to safeguard the principles of secularism and equality in Turkey. Since the ECHR is an institution within the framework of the Council of Europe, to which Turkey is a member since 1949, it could

5. Sévres Syndrome derives from the Sévres Peace Treaty signed by the Allied powers and the Ottoman Empire in 1920 in the aftermath of the World War I, leading to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire.

be difficult to see how its judgment could have an impact on the support for the EU membership. The only way, then, could be that Euroscepticism is understood as a general perception and attitude towards Europe, not only towards the EU and the prospect of membership. This is actually a remarkable phenomenon indicating that Europe and European Union are often interchangeably used in Turkey.

The Eurosceptic attitude towards the EU-accession could be found not only in the JDP government and among Turkish nationalists and pro-status quo groups. Rather, after 2005, the Kurdish people also became ardously critical of the EU reforms with a growing sentiment of Euroscepticism. In parallel with the suspicion of the sufficiency and the efficiency of the JDP attempts to recognise the Kurdish identity, the revocation of the concept 'minority' in the Progress Report in 2004 provoked some of the Kurdish nationalists to reemphasize their position against the Turkish majority nationalism. A considerable fraction among the Kurds claimed that they denounced the concept 'minority' because it rendered them a 'degrading', 'inferior' and 'unequal' status versus the Turkish people (Sahin, 2008: 144). Rather, this fraction defended their claim that the Kurdish people were one of 'the constitutive elements' of the Turkish Republic, and therefore, had a status equal to that of the Turks. Considering themselves as the 'constitutive element' rather than a minority, the Kurds fervently alleged that their characteristics which distinguish them from other minorities should be recognised, and the equality to the Turkish majority in living conditions should be secured (ibid). In other words, even though this demand gives the Kurds a distinctive status in comparison to the other ethnic and religious minorities, it is sound in the sense that it remarkably denotes to the right of 'equal citizenship'.

It has also been suggested that although the EU reforms on the protection of ethnic minorities culminated in an open public debate, they did not achieve to take a concrete and significant step towards the settlement of the Kurdish problem (Sommer and Liaras, 2010). The Kurdish Democratic Society Movement (DTH) declared in 2004 that the objectives of the movement involved the support for the EU accession, the resolution of the Kurdish problem by peaceful and democratic means and with respect to territorial integrity, and the adoption of a new democratic and universal constitution (hurriyetim.com.tr, 22.10.2004).<sup>6</sup> The DTH, which abandoned the secessionist and federalist claims, put forth its demands for the adoption of 'constitutional citizenship', the abolition of the 10% national threshold in the electoral law, the liberalisation of equal participation for all political parties, and social and economic development in the Kurdish populated regions (Radikal, 26.05.2004).<sup>7</sup> Thus, considering the definition of 'minority' in the Turkish political context and on the Kurdish political party, one should carry on debating whether the EU reforms adopted by the JDP government aim to merely tolerate cultural and individual rights of the Kurdish minority, or are designed as an initial stage drifting towards a national project for the resolution of the Kurdish issue and the recognition/acceptance/respect of the difference of the Kurds.

It was possible to find the examples of intolerance influenced by the upsurge of radical nationalism in the practices of everyday life. In March 2005, two Kurdish children allegedly burnt the Turkish flag during the Newroz celebrations (hurriyet.com.tr, 21.03.2005).<sup>8</sup> Six month after the Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to Diyarbakir in 2005 where he declared his full support of the solution of the Kurdish problem with respect to

6. For more information about the declaration of the DTH see "Eski DEP'lilerden Demokratik Toplum Hareketi (The Democratic Society Movement from the former members of the DEP) <http://hurriyetim.com.tr>, 22 October 2004 accessed on 13 June 2010
7. Y. Alataş "AB Eşiğinde Kürt Sorunu Yazı Dizisi" (The Series on the Kurdish Question on the Verge of the EU Accession), Radikal (27 May 2004).
8. <http://webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/2005/03/21/616617.asp> (accessed on 14 June 2010).

democracy, the Kurdish people in this city rioted in the funerals of four PKK members (Somer and Liaras, 2010). In the following months, the casualties caused by the PKK attacks increased.

It should also be underlined that the Turkish majority nationalism increased as a response to the rising Kurdish nationalism as well as to Euroscepticism. In retaliation to the issue of flag burning in Mersin (21 March 2005), some public figures started flag campaigns in the name of 'responsible statesmanship' (Hurriyet.com.tr, 21.03.2005)<sup>9</sup>. The 'waved and unwaved flags' (Billig, 1995:10) obviously indicated the cases of the rise of intolerance where the nationalist and sceptic attitudes of both Kurdish and Turkish people were provoked in regard to the national and ethnic conflict. Hence, the intolerance, ethnic conflict and violence increased at the time when the Kurdish people became increasingly critical of the suitability and the sufficiency of the JDP government's EU reforms for the recognition of ethno-cultural identity and the resolution of identity-related issues, and the sceptical and nationalist attitude towards the 'Other' was strengthened by the Turks and the Kurds.

Finally, it is also possible to find striking cases where social intolerance, unacceptability, non-recognition and even hatred towards the Armenians reached its peak and even involved violent conflict. The most conspicuous of these cases was the assassination of the prominent Armenian journalist, Hrant Dink in January 2007. It was claimed by some journalists in the media that the assassination of Hrant Dink could be linked to a reaction of ultranationalists, who were agitated by the verdict of guilty for Hrant Dink on the denigration of Turkishness in one of his articles. In 2005, Hrant Dink was sentenced to six months' conditional imprisonment on account of 'insulting Turkish national identity' according to the article 301 of the Penal Code. The article 301 of the Penal Code considers a criminal somebody who publicly denigrates Turkishness, the Republic or the Grand National Assembly of Turkey and sentences him/her to imprisonment between six months and three years.

Moreover, the rise of Euroscepticism and the reinvigoration of national identity as a response to the upsurge of identity politics based on ethnic and religious difference after the articulation of the concept of 'minority' in the 2005 Progress Report also aggravated intolerance and conflict between the Turkish nationalists and the Armenian minorities. For example, in March 2005 the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gallipoli Victory was celebrated in an exaggerated manner in retaliation to the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary activities of the Armenian exodus (hurriyet.com.tr, 17.03.2005)<sup>10</sup>. Hence, it is argued that the shift in the discourse from 'majority nationalism' to 'diversity as an ideology' through the EU reforms and the attempts of the JDP did not result in a substantial change in the attitude of the Sunni-Turkish majority towards the toleration and acceptance of ethno-cultural and religious diversity for non-Turks and non-Muslim minorities such as Armenians .

## Conclusion: The myth of tolerance in Turkey

The concept of tolerance has a very long history in the Turkish context tracing back to the Ottoman Empire. It also has a very popular usage in everyday life. Turks are usually proud of referring to the Millet System of the Ottoman Empire is often known to be the guarantor of tolerance, respecting the boundaries between religious communities. Such an official

9. <http://webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/2005/03/21/616617.asp> (accessed on 14 June 2010).

10. For more information on the celebration for the 80th anniversary of the Gallipoli Victory on 19 March 2005 see <http://webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/2005/03/18/615296.asp> (accessed on 14 June 2010)

discourse is still carried out in contemporary Turkey, although it is evident that it is just a myth. *The myth of tolerance* was functional to conceal the mistreatment of ethno-cultural and religious minorities other than the majority of Sunni-Muslim-Turks in Turkey. The term tolerance has become more viable in the aftermath of the Helsinki Summit of the European Union in 1999. Whether a cultural diversity challenge is tackled in relation to the concept 'tolerance' or other concepts such as 'recognition'/'acceptance' or assimilation, expulsion and persecution, depends on the historical form of a particular state.

The definition of tolerance is confined to the acceptance of Sunni Muslims and their secular counterparts under the banner of the Sunni-Muslim-Turkish nation. However, it does not mean to embrace all different kinds of ethno-cultural and religious minorities. As Karen Barkey (2008: 110), a famous Ottoman historian, stated earlier, toleration in the Ottoman context as well as in other imperial contexts refers to the "absence of persecution of people but not their acceptance into society as full and welcomed members of community". Toleration is actually nothing but a form of governmentality, designed to maintain peace and order in multi-ethnic and multi-nominational contexts. The Ottoman imperial experience and the Turkish national experience approve that the Turkish nation tolerate those non-Muslims, non-Sunni-Muslims and non-Turks as long as they did not disturb or go against the Sunni-Islam-Turkish order. If ethno-cultural and religious minorities did transgress, their recognition could easily turn into suppression and persecution.

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