

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE SHIFTING OF TURKEY'S POLITICAL DIRECTION**

Geographically, Turkey lies in a strategic location because it stands between the continents of Asia and Europe with its Muslim population. Although the majority of Turkish society are Muslims, yet Turkey is not a country that officially declares itself as an Islamic State. Turkey is the only Muslim-majority country that adheres to the idea of secularism. The reformation in Turkey was pioneered by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. He held an important role in changing the form of government of Turkey into a Republic and formalized the separation between religion and state affairs. This chapter will be mainly discussing the shifting of Turkish political direction under the Kemal Ataturk and Erdogan.

#### **A. The Secularization of Turkey Under Kemal Ataturk**

The establishment of Turkey as a Republican State due to the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate was led by one of the charismatic and influential figures in Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk or Mustafa Kemal Pasha. Mustafa Kemal was considered a national hero because of his effort in maintaining peace in Turkey after World War I. Subsequently, on November 1st, 1922 Kemal was abolishing the Caliphate in Turkey and officially proclaimed the formation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 (Ramadanti, 2014).

Long before the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkinma* Partition) party was chosen, Turkey was formerly led by Kemal. At that time, Kemal wanted Turkey to separate all elements related to Islam that existed in the Ottoman era. He originally wanted to replace it with Secularism and

Westernization which then resulted on the Turkish foreign policy that was closer to West and its relations to the East are not as balanced as their tendency to the West. Turkey actually also had some serious problems with the Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq and Syria, which has led to worse relationships around the Middle East region (Hati, 2016).

During the leadership of Kemal, the problems that happened in the Muslim world and Islamic regions were not becoming Turkey's priorities. The political system run by Kemal and his party was also considered very dictatorial. There were many rebellions from the Kurds and a small group of immigrants, yet they did not have a meaningful impact on the Kemal government. There was no easy way to add Islamic values in Turkey's political direction under Kemal governance (Solikhun, 2013).

Under his governance, Kemal believes in the three renewal principles, namely Nationalism which was inspired by the original thought of Ziya Gokalp to make Islam as an expression of the Turkish ethos only. The element of secularism was taken by Kemal simply because he firmly believes that religion will only make any kind of conflict. By then, the element of Westernization was eventually embraced because Kemal perceives that Turkey must be oriented their view to the West, who was able to defeat other civilizations and become advanced in every aspect including science. These three principles then have resulted in the birth of Kemalism which then create Republicanism as a guideline to build a Republican state of Turkey (Fuqon, 2012).

Kemal perceived his party, the Republican People's Party (CHP), as the only institution that represents the entire Turkish people and its national interest. As an ideology, Kemalism embraces the secular values of Turkish nationalism and the personality of Mustafa Kemal as the father of their nation. However, there was a lot of criticism

towards Kemal because he practiced the Muslims, Kurds, Alevis, and those who are non-Muslims based on his sense of secularism (Yilmaz & Bashirov, 2018).

Every aspect of life in Turkey was drastically changed due to the ideology that introduced by Kemal. The Islamic values that used to be Turkey's identity were slowly faded. Some policies made by Kemal has slowly changed the Islam position in Turkey. Islam did hold an essential function in Turkish society until Kemal minimize its role with his new ideology. Referring to the first sentence, Kemal kept focusing on how his ideology could be accepted and create a whole new sense in Turkish society.

## **B. Contemporary Turkish Islamism**

The AKP or the Justice and Development Party was officially entering the political arena on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2001, the party's founder, Erdogan, proposed himself as a candidate for the board in the 2002 election. In November 2002, The AKP party won the election, and it became a new historic event in the political world that exists in Turkey, simply because they can still be considered as a new party. The AKP party was surprisingly able to defeat the other Nationalist and Secular parties (Nuh, 2009).

However, in 2003, when the AKP party came to power, Turkey tried to reconcile its past poor relations with the Middle East and started to rebrand its new image. Turkey's rapid progress under the leadership of Erdogan as a Prime Minister has built an excellent image for Turkey who is now respected as one of the most influential countries in Europe. This is actually one of the reasons why AKP won back in the general election in 2011, followed by Erdogan who served as the Prime Minister. Erdogan was then successfully to win back the Turkish people by becoming the President through a general election in 2014 (Junaidi, 2016).

A new political direction has emerged since the leadership of PM Erdogan. The friction of secular ideology that was created by Kemal has slowly replaced by a new political regime called Erdoganism. Specifically, Erdoganism was referring to the political regime in Turkey that has four main dimensions namely: Authoritarianism as an electoral system, neopatrimonialism as their economic system, populism as a political strategy, and Islamism as a political ideology or direction. Erdoganism can be defined as a type of political regime comprises not only about ideological aspects, but also economic, political, and the ongoing regime that is happening in Turkey (Yilmaz & Bashirov, 2018).

The rise of Political Islam in Turkey has emerged mainly as a response towards the internal factors in the term of democratization and the transformation of socioeconomic in Turkish society since the last decade. Erdogan itself can be considered as a successful leader in building a good image of Turkey. Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of Turkey's National Islamic Salvation Party, was actually one of the most influential figures that inspire Erdogan to be what he is now. Erbakan's character in struggling for Islam has encouraged Erdogan to do the same thing for Turkish society. Although Erdogan and AKP do not officially declare to embrace the Islamic principles into his political direction, mainly because it is strongly prohibited, nevertheless the Turkish people have known them well as the successors to the Erbakan struggle, which has the Islamic ideology (Junaidi, 2016).

AKP's Islamism has been demonstrated its image in the Turkish foreign policy as well. Started since 2016, the government grew the sense of the anti-west outlook. It was proven by the fact of how Turkey vehemently accused US and EU of the failed coup that happened in 2017. Mainly, Erdogan massively tried to propagate the existence

of holy warfare between the Christian West and the Muslim world. This kind of approach is totally in contrary with Kemalism regime (Miere, 2017).

## **1. Domestic Policy**

Seeing the existence of political direction taken by Erdogan in transforming contemporary Turkish Islamism, these are some actions and policies that considered abolishing the secular values in Turkish domestic scope :

- a. Obligating the teaching of Holy Quran and legalizing the wearing of Hijab in public schools and universities.
- b. Obligating the teaching of Islamic studies since elementary school.
- c. The necessity of Arabic teaching as a secondary language. From this policy, Erdogan expects there will be more youths who are able to examine the Holy Quran (Junaidi, 2016).

From day to day, Turkey underwent a change and took off his westernization image to return into its Islamic principles and the pride of its identities, civilizations, and position among the countries of the Middle East, Central Asia, and Europe. With the majority vote gained by the AKP in parliament, Erdogan is able to direct the whole country's political direction in accordance with his vision. Through the AKP party, Erdogan is able to control more than fifty per cent of the seats in parliament. Through his policies, Erdogan is succeeded in convincing the Turkish people, that secularism which was once rooted in Kemal era should be replaced. Erdogan convinced his people that by using an Islamic identity, Turkey could restore the glory of the Ottoman Empire, a Khilafah that was not

only strong in terms of defense, but also in the economy.

## **2. Foreign Policy**

Although Erdogan and his government have never officially declared, many observers argue that nowadays Turkish foreign policy has shifted to a "new direction", namely a focus towards the East that is "too Islamic" and becomes the contrary to the basic principles established by Kemal. This can be seen started with the refusal of Turkey to provide facilities and cooperation requested by Washington to invade Iraq back then in 2003. A lot of criticisms were raised against the policy-making in parliament in the early of March 2003, yet it can be considered as a courageous decision made by Erdogan (Junaidi, 2016).

Through some various obstacles and challenges, the Turkish government is trying to give a definite step forward in defending the oppressed Islamic states. This is reflected again through some policies in Erdogan's political action, which are often contradicting with the US foreign policies, such as:

1. Refused the isolation and embargo towards Syria after the invasion of the U.S. to Iraq in 2003 and the murder of Lebanon ex-prime minister, Rafiq Hariri.
2. Refused the isolation and the rebellion towards the Islamic Hamas in its position as an official government in Palestine.
3. Strongly condemn the massacre did by Israel towards Palestinians in Gaza.
4. Refused the using of military forces to do embargo towards Iran's nuclear program.

Through these foreign policies that have been realized by Erdogan, the Turkish government has had significant impacts on the lives of their people. In its framework and development, Turkey also emerged as a model for many countries in the Arab world. As a result, Turkey is now respected for being a brave country and having policies to maintain its leading role as a mediator in resolving conflicts in the Muslim world (Gursel, 2011). Erdogan was also listed as the only Prime Turkish Ministers who attended the Arab League Summit in Khartoum. As a result, Turkey is being nominated as the "Permanent Guest" on that annual agenda. Every Erdogan's step always has a purpose in strengthening Turkey's influence in the Arab countries, as well as increasing Turkey's economic welfare (Junaidi, 2016).

The rise of Islam back in Turkey in a period of Post-Kemalist is a vast phenomenon that occurs together with the deterioration of secularism. The general influence of contemporary Islamism is still in accordance with the traditional Islamic values that still exist on Turkish society. One thing that should be underlined, the national sentiment that happens in Turkey is mainly connected with the Islamic sentiment in its society. This kind of event has triggered some of the observers who are worried that it would lead to the revival of religious fanaticism (Junaidi, 2016).

Apparently, it was a national response from the people of Turkey on its strong national drive towards religion. This means that Turkey has slowly changed its political direction from secularism to Islamic principles. It is proof that secularism has failed to meet social and cultural demands in Turkish society. Under Erdogan, Turkey has politically stated that Turkey is a member of Western civilization, yet in terms of cultural

loyalty, the Turkish people continue to maintain their identity with Islamic values (Junaidi, 2016).

When power is being achieved, it should be followed by identity. This is what exactly Erdogan tried to accomplish. He managed to strongly convince his people that the idea of secularism which had existed and being applied during Kemal's era was a failure that put Turkey under the secular nationalist control. Erdogan believes that with an Islamic identity, Turkey could restore the glory of the Ottoman Empire, an era that was not only strong in terms of defence, but also in the economy aspect (Heper & Toktas, 2003).

Erdogan's foreign policy in building the welfare of Turkish society by embracing the bilateral relations with various countries is a form of humanization. Erdogan does perceive that by building good relations in order to implement mutual harmony is a very crucial agenda for Turkey's national interest. Although Turkey lies within the scope of the European continent, Erdogan's foreign policy has made many people realized that Turkey, in this contemporary era, is currently more inclined towards the eastern countries and the culture of Arab society. It could be seen on how Erdogan's various policies are supporting many Arab countries like Syria, Egypt, and Palestine. Erdogan is even considered really brave to become an opposition, even condemning the actions of those countries which have carried out acts of oppression against the Islamic states (Junaidi, 2016).

Many criticisms were coming against Erdogan's statement regarding his foreign policy agenda. He stated that democracy is not actually a destination, yet it is a tool to achieve welfare. And as the "Imam of Istanbul", he was also a "servant of



*sharia*” In some extent, Erdogan has a full power in the executive and legislative branch of government to embrace Islamic agenda more aggressively than before. It is proven by the fact that Turkey’s foreign policy is having tendencies on the strong relations with the Muslim world, especially to Iran and Syria. This action is considered way braver than the pro-Palestine action. In facing its challenges in Europe, Erdogan and his government were postponing accession negotiations and returning to create a new Islamic block (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008).

Contemporary Turkish Islamism is actually one of the things that are worried by most of the Turkish secularists. Many of them are afraid that Erdogan actually has a hidden agenda to Islamize Turkish society (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008). The leadership of Erdogan is also considered having pressure from its cabinet to be more aggressive in social issues. However, these things should not happen because most of the Turks are supporting the secular country rather than the *sharia*.

However, the Turkish bureaucracy and its decision-makers should be more careful about defining their country as a “model” for Middle East countries. The secularists and the military apparently become more uncomfortable because they are worried about the friction of Turkey’s political direction. This kind of shifting then could indirectly trigger on the weakness of Turkey’s western identity and practices. Additionally, the emergence of Islamism in Turkish society will also abolish the secularism principles in a long time. However, the military will also be able step forward in resolving their worry (Rabasa & Larrabee, 2008).

Erdogan's political movement in leading Turkey has made the military, a legacy of Kemal's secularisation, did some intervention. They have tried to overthrow Erdogan's power, but they failed many times. Despite its power in the executive branch, Erdogan also receives support from the Turkish majority and the police. There were at least 250 military forces who are jailed for attempting this action. Erdogan's power has actually defined him as "The Strongest Man in Turkey". This is the new face of Turkey under Erdogan's political management (Junaidi, 2016).