

## CHAPTER III

### **Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) and the 4+4+4 Reform**

The objective of this chapter is to describe and explain the profile of Justice and Development Party. The writer will start by explaining the history of Justice and and later on specifically elaborate its vision, mission, objectives and programmes in education.

#### **A. AKP and its History**

Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (English: Justice and Development Party), known as AKP or Ak Parti (Ak means “white” or “clean” in Turkish), was founded in 2001 by a group of politicians who were former several prominent members of the “progressive” wing of the former Virtue Party among its leadership. The core of the party was formed from the reformist faction of the Islamist Virtue Party, Motherland Party, Justice Party and Right Path Party.<sup>42</sup> The party also attracted members of Kurdish parties no longer in existence.<sup>43</sup>

The most notable founders were Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Abdullah Gul, Idris Naim Sahin, Binali Yildirim, and Bulent Arinc. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, formerly mayor of Istanbul for the Welfare Party (WP), became the leader of the new party and is now the current Prime Minister of Turkey.

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<sup>42</sup>H. I. Yazici, ‘The Analysis of a Party in Questions: Justice and Development Party’, p. 1.

Abdullah Gül, who had served as secretary general of the WP, became a deputy leader and is the incumbent President of Turkey.<sup>44</sup>

The AKP identifies itself as a democratic and conservative movement. Although it does not consider itself an Islamist party, the AKP is always seen to be having close affiliation with Islam due to its political roots, some of the party's political endeavours (including proposed regulation of the display and advertisement of alcohol), and the lifting of head scarves ban.<sup>45</sup>

The party is also often considered as the continuation of Welfare Party and Virtue Party. The Welfare Party (Refah Partisi, RP) was an Islamic party established in the 1983. In 1995, it was the first Islamic party ever to win a general election in Turkey. The RP rose to prominence due to the increasing role of Islam in Turkish life during the 1980s and 1990s. However, the party was banned in January 1998 by Turkey's constitutional court under the charges of disturbing secular order. It resulted a number of its members joined the newly formed Islamic party, the Virtue Party (Turkish: Fazilet Partisi) which was also banned in June 2001.

The AKP situates itself at the center of the political spectrum.<sup>46</sup> In economical perspective, their ideology is liberalism.<sup>47</sup> The AKP rejects "Islamist" label given by the media, most commonly used by the western. It

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<sup>44</sup>Parslow, p. 37.

<sup>45</sup>The Encyclopedia of Britannica, <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1018363/Justice-and-Development-Party>>, consulted 3 September 2013.

<sup>46</sup>Political Vision of AK Parti 2023, 30 September 2012.

<sup>47</sup>AK party, Party Programme Title III. Economy Subtitle 3.1 Our Concept of the Economy. consulted 5 November 2013.

is routinely referred to in both media and in academic literature as “pro-Islamist,” yet its party program, official publications, and emblems are devoid of references to Islam. It further claims to be a pro-Western mainstream party with a “conservative” social agenda but also a firm commitment to liberal market economy and EU membership.<sup>48</sup> Strongly pro-Western, the AKP advocates Turkish membership in the EU. It has also attracted the attention of researchers due to what many see as a fundamental paradox in its party ideology.

In its first participation in the general election in 2002, helped by a 10% entry threshold, the AKP won a landslide victory over all other parties, and gained 363 of 550 seats.<sup>49</sup> AKP again had won 2007 election in the lead. In 2011 election, AKP had half of the voters voted for them. AKP’s projects for future Turkey of 2023 had especially drawn public interests to them (as well as promoting the country’s need for development instead of separatism).<sup>50</sup> Today, the AKP has successfully increased its votes in three consecutive elections and has been in office during these terms.

The AKP who sees itself as religious moderate, opposes Turkey’s dominant paradigm of Kemalist secularism and supports women’s rights to wear head scarves if they choose to do so. The AKP is in favor to the rights of women, including rights to play active role in politics. Also an advert

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<sup>48</sup> Yazici, p. 5.

<sup>49</sup> Parslow, p. 41.

<sup>50</sup> “11 Kasım 2011 Türkiye Genel Seçimleri 2011 OSCE/ODHB Election Assessment Mission”

supporter of free-market economy, the party's economic policies have been very successful in controlling Turkey's hyperinflation and have earned it strong support among the middle class.<sup>51</sup>

The current AKP-led government has succeeded in speeding up the reforms required by EU conditionality and negotiated the commencement of membership talks further cements the impression that the AKP leadership has either undergone a complete personal transformation, or is involved in dissimulation. The question of whether or not Erdogan's personal transformation from a pro-sharia fundamentalist to a conservative democrat is sincere has been the subject of several studies.<sup>52</sup>

## **B. Vision and Mission of the Party**

**Vision** – “Since the beginning, increasing the level and quality of education has become our constant aim. We have managed to achieve great success in the education system both in terms of physical and technological infrastructure.”

As Turkey will celebrate the Centennial of the Republic in 2023, the AKP aim to reach 100 % literacy rate for people under 50, enable all young population to have at least high school education and give a chance to all those who like to have a higher education. It strives for having more than 200 universities, resolving bureaucratic obstacles preventing the

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<sup>51</sup> <http://hadjilovcenter.georgetown.edu/resources/organizations/justice-and-development-party->

establishment of private universities, and increasing R&D budget to the levels of developed countries.<sup>53</sup>

**Mission** - “We know that the most precious source and wealth of countries is not material, underground sources or industrial investments. What matters is the production of knowledge, education for such knowledge and the use of this knowledge for innovating and exporting technology. Our task has been to maintain a system in which the basic requirements of our age are met. While aiming at raising the standards, it must be noted that we have been careful to comb out all of the discriminatory themes implying negative, stereotypical images and perceptions in the textbooks. We will continue to do so. Elements with negative and discriminatory perceptions, breaching human rights and universal rule of law will be erased form our national education system.”

As a conservative democratic party, AK Party’s conservative stance is not the protection of the status quo but of conserving perennial, productive values. The conservative approach is a pioneering element of the transformation and reform process in Turkey. It is to reformulate the party’s values, social and cultural principles that made us and give us our own identity, in a way that could respond the needs of our time.

### **C. Structure of the Party**

There are a chairman in party and deputy chairmen. Moreover, there are twelve different chairs in party organization: Political and Legal

Affairs, Organization, Election Affairs, Publicity and Media, Foreign Affairs, Social Affairs, Local Administrations, Economic Affairs, Public Relations, Financial and Administrative Affairs, R&D, Secretary General and also woman branches and youth branches. Administrative side of party has many organs. They are Central Executive Committee, Central Decision-Making and Administrative Committee, Central Disciplinary Board, Arbitration Board for internal Democracy. They have organizational structure in all province and districts of Turkey.<sup>54</sup>

#### **D. Turkey's Education Policy During AKP Era (2002-2012)**

The recent improvements in Turkey's educational system are a direct result of the AKP's educational policies and reforms. The AKP has been one of the most reformis governments of Turkey and has paid particular attention to improving the country's educational system. AKP's goals are to increase access to education, to improve quality of education, to democratize the education system that had been unable to meet social demands. Below are the agenda, projects and policies on education that has been set by the AKP during its leadership since 2002 to 2012 prior to the 4+4+4 Reform Law:

- 9th Development Plan and the Official Agenda of the 60th Government

To increase pre-school enrollment to 50 percent.

- The Strategic Plan of the Ministry of National Education

To raise the pre-school enrollment rate to 70 percent by 2014

- The Circular Note No. 53 on Promoting Pre-School Education, released on June 15th 2009

To ensure that pre-school institutions worked at full capacity, each elementary school had at least one pre-school grade and vacant schools be used for pre-school education.

- 8th Development Plan (2001-2005)

To increase secondary education enrollment levels to 75 percent by the end of its mandate in 2005.

- The Official Agenda of the 60th Government (2008-2012)

To increase secondary education enrollment enrollment to 90 percent.

- The Fatih Project (2011)

To enhance the technological infrastructure of classrooms and provide all students with tablet computers.

- The Official Agenda of 2002 and the Urgent Action Plan of 2003

To make comprehensive changes to the country's administration of national education and higher education systems . The Ministry of National Education's size would be reduced to provide greater provincial authorities, and the Council of Higher Education would be reorganized as independent body responsible for coordination. The documents recommended that local governments, and the private sector, and civil society participate more effectively in administrative and decision-making

to establish a more efficient system of education

- The Urgent Action Plan

To reorganize the Ministry of National Education whose 50+ divisions and 5,500 staff members account for its failure to offer services effectively in terms both of size and bureaucratic structure.

- Decree No. 652 (2011)

On the Ministry of National Education's organization and duties significantly altered the central structure of the institution

**E. The 4+4+4 Reform Bill**

Military juntas and high judiciary used to be the primary forces that shaped education system in Turkey, as the government fell under their feet. Following the February post-modern coup in 1997, the military command requested changes in school curricula and higher education which one of them was to close religious vocational schools. The decision was opposed by the general public, and since regarded as a failure inreflecting popular demands for education.<sup>55</sup>

In 2012, deputies of Adalet ve KalkınmaPartisi (AKP - English: Justice and Development Party) passed the 4+4+4 reform bill with some support from MHP and BDP deputies. The reform was considered as a crucial step to democratize and improve the education system in Turkey. However, the decision faced oppositions from CHP and several NGOs

<sup>55</sup> Ç. Ç. (2013). 'The 4+4+4 Education Reform During the AKP Party Era (2002-2013)'



during parliamentary hearings.<sup>56</sup> The reform bill, which also increases compulsory education from eight to twelve years, was approved earlier in March by President Abdullah Gul, following months of controversy that ended with deputies from the ruling AKP and main opposition CHP parties brawling in public.<sup>57</sup>

The first outcome made by the 4+4+4 reform was the division of mandatory education (previously uninterrupted 8 years) into two four-year stages. Most of education experts reportedly agree that providing education in stages would gain more benefits, despite the opponents' claim that the plan could be a harmful practice from a pedagogical standpoint and it contradicted the successful practices in other countries.<sup>58</sup> The latter does not prove reliable fact since many developed countries have used four to six years of primary education in various individual stages.<sup>59</sup> However, several experts of the supporters advised 5+3 years instead of 4+4+4 years of primary education to reduce 'side-effects' of the restructuring implementation which might cause surplus of primary school

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<sup>56</sup>U. Bektas, 'Secularist Turks protest "dynamite" education bill', *Reuters on the Web*, 27 March 2012, <<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/03/27/uk-turkey-education-idUKBRE82Q0OU20120>>, consulted 18 February 2014.

<sup>57</sup>J. Sabral, 'New Education Bill Revives Koran Studies in Turkish School', *Al Monitor*, 16 May 2012, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/turkish-education-reform-passed.html##ixzz38EJGaNuE>>, consulted 1 March 2014.

<sup>58</sup>Çelikand Gür, p. 168.

<sup>59</sup>U. Bektas, 'Secularist Turks protest "dynamite" education bill', *Reuters on the Web*, 27 March 2012, Schematic diagrams

teachers that lead them to start teaching different subjects from they were trained in.<sup>60</sup>

The second effect was the re-establishment of religious vocational schools and elective courses on religion. The 4+4+4 Law makes students may choose to attend vocational high schools, including imam-hatip (Muslim preacher) vocational high schools. The law creates imam-hatip schools at the intermediate level, enabling students to attend after the first four years of elementary school instead of after eight years as was previously the case; this change reduces the age at which a religious-track education becomes available. Additional religious courses can now be taken as electives for two hours per week in middle school and high school during regular school hours. The elective courses include: Qur'anic studies, basic religious knowledge (Islam), and the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The law also abolishes all age limits for Quran courses, meaning children under 12 will no longer be banned from taking such courses.

. That was seen rather more of an impact as it was the most highly-anticipated change by the critics. This development was considered to be the hidden agenda of the government (more specifically, the AKP) in yielding Turkish youth more religious. Some people argues if more students go to this school, science would be abandoned which can be

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<sup>60</sup>'Surplus of class teachers brings new problems', *Today's Zaman*, 21 January 2013, <<http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail.action;jsessionid=00rViNEYM2-NC2K-FC4k-812newsId=204715&columnistId=0>> consulted April 2014

obstacle in nation-building; students who do not opt to take religious courses would face severe peer pressure.<sup>61</sup> Apparently these schools are very popular in demands especially among children from lower-class families, and studies have shown the introduction of elective courses received large supports from parents.<sup>62</sup>

The 4+4+4 reforms also introduced elective courses on native languages such as Kurdish and Abkhazian, with Laz added to the list in 2013. The MoNE has introduced this course to reach students whose native language is not Turkish and those who are interested in learning them. The decision was addressed as a response to demands of Kurdish community to educate their children in their native languages.<sup>63</sup> Using regional and minority languages as an instruction language in private schools has been then permitted in 2013 Democratization Package.

There have been arguments that the 4+4+4 reform policies have shown substantial change from AKP's previous policies that these new policies now stem directly from the government, instead of bureaucracy, international organizations and even civil society.<sup>64</sup> In fact, the National Education Congress held in 2010 proposed the education system to be

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<sup>61</sup>T. Daloglu, 'Turkish children steered toward religious education', *Al Monitor's Turkey Pulse*, 19 August 2013, <<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/turkey-children-steered-religious-education.html#>>, consulted 18 December 2013.

<sup>62</sup>'Turkish society supports religious courses: Survey', *Hurriyet Daily News*, 14 June 2012, <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-society-supports-religious-courses-survey.aspx?pageID=238&nid=23104>>, consulted 3 October 2013.

<sup>63</sup>'Prime Minister Erdogan promises Kurdish as elective courses in schools', *Today's Zaman*, 12 June 2012, <<http://www.todayszaman.com/news-283331-prime-minister-erdogan-promises-kurdish-as-elective-course-in-schools.html>>, consulted 3 October 2013.

<sup>64</sup>A. Şaşmaz, 'To Which Direction Does the Education Policy of Ak Party Change?', *ResearchTurkey*, vol. II, Issue 2, 2013, pp. 40-47.

restructured into 4+4+4 stages.<sup>65</sup> Thus, the new education policy such as the 4+4+4 reform is a result of popular demands and previous policy documents.

Public opinion polls showed a great majority of people supporting the introduction of elective courses after the 4+4+4 reform in 2012.<sup>66</sup> The passage of the 4+4+4 law was stirring controversies and debated especially between the country's two political streams, Islam conservatives and secularists, regarding to the role of religious education in a secular republic – the preservation of it. Many changes had eventually been made to the early forms of the 4+4+4 law draft in accordance to the criticisms it received in the beginning. The public hopes the needs of this reformed education policies as a support for Turkey's attempt in renewing the Constitution that was drafted after the military intervention.

The 4+4+4 reform bill is only one of efforts initiated by AKP in expanding and democratizing educational opportunities for Turkish youth generation. The party also attempts to abolish the effect of militarization in Turkey's education system.