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TURKEY AND THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD: CROSSING ROADS IN SYRIA

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Abstract

Relations between Turkey and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood (SMB) have gained momentum in the light of post-Arab revolt developments. This study aims to present the historical background of the relationship between SMB and AKP and effects of this relationship on foreign policy. For the analytical discussion on the relationship between AKP and SMB integration to 'particular' recent foreign policies of Turkey, first of all, it will be examined how the SMB is perceived in Turkey in social and political arenas. Thus, the socio-political dimensions of the process in which the SMB came to the fore and began to be known in Turkey will be explored along with its position in foreign policy during the Justice and Development Party (JDP) government and the Syrian crisis.

Keywords: Justice and Development Party, Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Foreign Policy, Turkey

1. Introduction

This study aims to analyze transformation of the relationship between Turkey and the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. In many points Turkey has moved away from traditional Turkish foreign policy in its attitude toward the Arab revolts. In this respect, Turkey began to support civil unrest as distinct from the idea that states are the main actors in international relations. It was a significant shift from the dominant principle of maintaining the status quo in traditional Turkish foreign policy. The traditional foreign policy rule "non-interference in the internal affairs of states" was abandoned by Turkey, with the expectation of the Syrian regime would soon change. With the Syrian crisis and the Arab revolts in particular, Turkey for the first time embraced its position as a 'model country' for the Middle East countries and applied this perception in its foreign policy. The visible signs in this major shift in foreign policy are Turkey's moving away from its secular foreign policy as one of the interested parties of the problem as a result of its systematic and explicit intervention and its policy of supporting refugees with many pre-established camps in the immediate vicinity of the border. In terms of foreign policy, Turkey began for the first time to be known for its relations with a non-governmental opposition party, namely the SMB and SMB-Turkey relations also attracted much attention from the foreign press. For example, in the analysis published by the New York Times in February (Thomas Jr., 2011), it is mentioned that "Mr. Erdogan's party has already established ties with the Muslim Brotherhood — a result of Mr. Erdogan's long and successful campaign to present himself as a dominant and increasingly anti-Israeli voice in the Middle East". And according to research by Dore Gold at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, three members of the Muslim Brotherhood — two of whom serve in the Egyptian Parliament — were on the Turkish-sponsored ship that was attacked by Israeli forces on its way to deliver aid to the Gaza Strip in May. "There is a great deal of ideological compatibility between the A.K.P. and the Muslim Brotherhood," said Mr.

Gold, a former top adviser to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, in reference to Erdogan's JDP (Thomas Jr., 2011).

It may be said that the Turkish government's policy and the relationship established with the SMB during the Syrian crisis were the indications of an entirely new era. It is evident for the MB that its relations with Turkey have a special place in terms of its international connections and have gained momentum in the light of the developments in the aftermath of the Arab revolts. However, the interesting fact is that there are limited academic researches into the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Turkey despite its important role among Islamic organizations. It is also interesting that almost all of these studies, other than a few exceptions referring to the SMB (Gurpinar, 2014; Cakmak, 2007; Caglayan, 2010), are related to the emergence and development of the movement in Egypt (Bulut, 1994; Baban, 2006). Despite the fact that the establishment and political activities of the MB in Syria are of particular concern to Turkey, the issue could hardly find a place in academic articles in Turkey. Taking into account this lack of interest, this study aims to analyse the highly controversial relationship between Turkey and the SMB.

2. Social & Intellectual Convergence and the Regime's Reflex

Turkey's relationship with the SMB should be evaluated along with the evolution of Islamism in Turkey. While the core of the MB was being formed, the political orientation of Turkey was to institutionalize a secular regime by becoming distant from Islam. As in the case of political parties, religion came to the fore in social life. Saban Sitembolukbasi who is examining the evolution of Islam in Turkey has also emphasized that conservative ideas that gathered a large crowd in the 1950s were spread by magazines such as *Sebilürreşad* (Debus, 2009), *Büyük Doğu*, *Allah Yolu*, *İslam*, and *Ehl-i Sünnet* and that they were brought to the political arena through the Democratic Party (Nal, 2005) and the National Party (Sitembolukbasi, 1995). When religious high schools were opened in 1951 after the transition period, the lack of religious publications became evident along with the need and demand for religious information. However, the opportunity to benefit from pre-1928 resources became problematic due to the 1928 Turkish Letter Reform. After the madrassas were closed in 1924, students who went to Egypt to receive religious education at Al-Azhar University later returned to assume a 'transmitter' role in the transfer of the movement to Turkey. Al-Azhar is of great importance for the MB. Mustafa Es-Sibai met Hassan Al-Banna at Al-Azhar in the early 1930s. And, many people from Syria had connections with the organization in Egypt through the works of Al Azhar (Martin, 2004). Moreover, it was claimed at the start of that period that the Turkish students studying at Al-Azhar University had connections with the MB and were making plans to subvert the regime in Turkey, and that Egypt's Government started to give financial support through the Ministry of Foundation (Cumhuriyet, 1953). Ismail Kara, in his article, cited Ali Yakup Cenkiler and Ahmet Davutoglu as examples of those who went to Egypt and who then, after the loss of the Balkans and the weakening of religious educational institutions, returned to Turkey to play a transmitter role (Kara, 1991).

The evolution of political Islam in Turkey began with the translation of the works of MB members in the 60s along with the 27 May coup. The translated works of the authors of MB-origin published in the 1960s proved their impact. For example Al-Banna's works began to be translated and published in the second half of the 1960s (Al-Banna, 1968; 1969a; 1969b; 1972; 1979; 1981). The translated works of Sayyid Qutb also had an impact in this period (Qutb, 1966). It can be argued that Sayyid Qutb and Mawdudi had 'a huge' impact on Turkish Islamists in the 1970s (Yorgancilar, 2012).

After the single-party period, more freedom was provided and, in the words of Ali Bulac, "Muslim religious kids of traditional families turned their eyes to the Middle East, to the Islamic world the first model they encountered was the Muslim Brotherhood," (Bulac, 2012, p.294). Turkey's Islamists after the '60s could easily realize that they were different branches of the same tree. Bulac drew attention to the similarities between Fethullah Gulen's movement and the organization by stating that "Gulen is also giving his students Hassan Al-Banna's book *Risalah Pergerakan* to read. And he has great respect for Hassan Al-Banna," (Bulac, 2012, p.295). When Islamist ideas came to light, opposing views that perceived these ideas as a danger to

the regime and a threat to secularism had wide press coverage from the 1950s onwards. Islamist activities were mostly defined as 'externally' supported attempts to export a regime, and all religious-centric dissenting opinions were evaluated in the same category without discrimination.

The MB appeared in the press for the first time in 1954 in the context of the developments in Egypt (Milliyet, 1954a; Cumhuriyet, 1954a). It was defined with Soviet communism, and negative statements were used such as "The Name of the Snake: Muslim Brotherhood" (Milliyet, 1954b), "The coup d'état prepared by communists ... is supported by the Muslim Brotherhood" (Milliyet, 1954c), "it plays an agitator role under the directives of Moscow" (Cumhuriyet, 1954b). The MB was presented as being founded in communism and defined as an extension of Soviet Russia. At this point, the fact that the SMB was represented in the Syrian parliament under the name of Islamic Socialist Front was a key factor.

It was at the end of the 1960s when the SMB's position in Turkey was discussed in parliament and made the subject of parliamentary questions, and the government began to observe its activities more closely. "Our country Turkey seems to be the home country of the 'Muslim Brotherhood' that lost its grip in Egypt, Syria and Iraq," said Cemal Madanoglu, a member of the Senate of the Republic (SR, 1968, p.62). The concern about the fact that some right-wing movements in Turkey had received assistance from the MB was brought to the agenda at the Assembly, and the question of Deputy Ali Riza Gullu, namely "Are they informed about the Muslim Brotherhood Organization which is organized abroad... and are there any measures in this regard?" was answered by Minister Hasan Dincer as follows: "The government has information on the issue in question of 'Muslim Brotherhood Organization' and is observing it closely," (NA, 1971, p.35).

As can be seen, only Islamist sections in Turkey gave close attention to the SMB during the 1950s until the beginning of the 1960s. It is said that this intimate relationship, which began with translation activities in the 1960s, reached a point of 'contact' in the 1970s, and even talks about 'giving military training' to the SMB in Turkey began. Seyfi Ozturk, Minister of Suleyman Demirel's governments, said, "When Assad... got close to the Soviet Union, MIT (National Intelligence Organization) and the CIA helped the Muslim Brotherhood that fought against Assad. Its members were trained in Turkey. There were even camps" (cited in Yalcin, 2012, pp. 293-294). Considering the information given above as a whole, it may be argued that the MB was not on the agenda so much in Turkey until 1980, and that news/opinions related to the MB usually remained insignificant.

3. Political Convergence and the Regime's Reflex

Islamism achieved distinct political power in Turkey with the establishment of the National Order Party (MNP) in 1970 (Ozdalga, 2007). And Islamism was included in mainstream politics by The National Salvation Party and in the 1980s and 1990s with the Welfare Party (RP). Besides growing interest in the MB, the organization became an issue on Turkey's agenda, an issue which was divided into two conflicting axes by the coup of 1980. In one aspect, the organization was being presented with its acts of violence in Turkey. For instance, in June 1980, news appeared in the press on the claim that the MB took the blame for the death of Emin Bulent Demir, Istanbul Deputy Mayor and CHP Beyoglu District Head, because he was "feeding and guiding communist traitors" (Isleyen, 1980). In July, it was also said that the organization took the rap for the death of CHP Fatih Former District Head, Ali Ismet Gencay (Milliyet, 1980). But on the other side, another discussion began after the coup when the Secretary General of the organization known as *Rabita (Rabitat-al-Alam-al-Islam)*. The Muslim World League, shortly known as *Rabita (Rabitat-al-Alam-al-Islam)* and the MB can be regarded as Muslim Comintern in a sense. They have established various institutional structures at the level of representation in many countries, particularly in the Middle East (Aksit, 2011). Also one of the MB's leading theologians and known as Secretary-General of Rabita Mohammed Mahmoud Es-Savaf moved to Yalova, causing concern over the arrival of Arab visitors to the region in small groups. In fact, *Rabitat-al-Alam-al-Islam* came into question for the first time in 1970 with a parliamentary motion prepared by the Minister of Bulent Ulusu government, Mehmet Ozgunes, along with 14 senators. In the motion submitted to the Turkish parliamentary speaker's office, it

was argued that Suleyman Demirel and two Ministers 'had tolerated the exploitation of Islam for various purposes' by protecting the former Vice President of Religious Affairs, Yasar Tunagur. In the documents attached to the motion given by Ozgunes and 14 senators, it was stated that Tunagur had been in constant contact with *Rabita* as well as its Secretary-General Mohammed El Savvaf. The investigation commission, established because of the motion, came to the conclusion in 1971 that there was no need for an investigation (Mumcu, 1993). Savvaf stated that he met with Ozal in order to discuss how they, as *Rabita*, could contribute to Islam becoming widespread in Turkey (Kirtay, 1999). Meanwhile in Syria, Law No.49 was adopted, the Hama Events took place, and the MB turned out to be one of Syria's significant national security issues.

The problem of 'separatism' emerged in Turkey, and the PKK turned out to be a primary threat. Moreover, support given to the PKK by Syria put a strain on relations between the two countries. When Prime Minister Ozal visited Syria to meet with Prime Minister Abdul Rauf al-Kasm, he criticized Syria for the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's settlement as well as the PKK congress held there (Birand, 1987a). Like al-Kasm, President Hafez al-Assad expressed that they never held Turkey responsible for the MB although it was 'organized in Turkey.' He also stated that they never thought that the MB was acting with the approval of Turkey (Birand, 1987b). Interestingly, the fact that Turkey signed a protocol at the end of the visit as 'an assurance for restrictions of the Muslim Brotherhood's activities' was an indication of the government's approval of the truth of those activities (Birand, 1987c). Teoman Erel, a journalist from *Milliyet*, published this remarkable quotation from a member of parliament:

"Mr. K. has very important relations beyond being a member of the parliament... we are members of the same political party... Mr. K. is not the only one. S. Ö. may be more important. He has a very strong relationship with Rabitatu'l-alem-i Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood. No matter where he is in the world, a fleet of Rolls Royces are provided for him at the airport," (Erel, 1985).

It was brought to the agenda of the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1993 only after the death of Savvaf. The subject matter of the parliamentary motion for the Minister of National Education, Koksal Toptan, was Savvaf's assets and statements. According to Mus Deputy Muzaffer Demir, "it is reported that Savvaf has established four large dormitories and a Qur'an Course in the last three years (corresponding to a total cost of 15 Billion Turkish Liras for 700 students). Considering that those dormitories should be under the supervision of the Ministry of National Education, it is explained that District Education Director is not aware of the situation or hasn't conduct any audits," (Erel, 1985).

Extensive relations with the MB are evidenced in news articles in the press about the MB's meetings with many deputies, the government, and even the president, along with the assurance given to Syria for the 'restriction' of its activities. Eventually, the organization's activities in Turkey strained relations between Syria and Turkey during this period. The Syrian MB then started to become one of Turkey's foreign policy issues during the 1980s. Moreover, its name was frequently referred to in Turkey's domestic political tensions. In the 1990s, the MB turned out to be a controversial organization in Turkey with the rise of the Welfare Party and Necmettin Erbakan becoming Prime Minister. In fact, the discussion was mainly on the Islamist movements in general and their involvement in Turkey. In this context, the MB came to the fore, especially in conjunction with the National vision (MG).

The connection between National vision \Welfare Party\Erbakan and the MB was discussed both in the national and international press. It can be said that these discussions developed in three aspects:

1) Some members of the National vision who were known as the members of the MB.

Erbakan's *family relationship* with Ibrahim al-Zayat who is known to be a member of the MB came to the fore during this period. It was reported in the press that Ibrahim Zaydan (Ibrahim al-Zayat) who is Erbakan's brother's brother-in-law living in Cologne (who is in charge of all real estate of the National vision in Europe) had sent tens of cars and imported them for free on behalf of the organization for election campaigns (Gur,1996). The allegations on the MB membership of Dr. Zeynel Abidin, who is active in the European National vision Organization

(AMGT), were put in such a way as to suggest that the National vision and the Muslim Brotherhood had a connection (Yurteri, 1995). Regarding this connection, AMGT President Osman Yumakogullari's response is remarkable: "nobody can infiltrate the National vision. The National vision is not managed it does the managing," (Cumhuriyet, 1990).

2) The Rhetoric affirming the MB

Like Erbakan's words to Hosni Mubarak: "Don't be hard on the Muslim Brotherhood. I know them, they are good guys," (Cakir, 2012).

3) Meetings that were said to be directly held by the MB and the Welfare Party.

The Welfare Party tried hard to mediate in the Gulf crisis and met with many Middle Eastern countries and the MB organizations here during this period. During the Gulf crisis in particular, Erbakan activated the MB pillar in mediation activities. The Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia and Minister of Internal Affairs Nayef bin Abdul-Aziz told that he had welcomed a delegation composed of Rachid al-Ghannouchi (Tunisia), Hassan al-Turabi (Sudan), Abdulmecid Zindani (Yemen) and Necmettin Erbakan (Turkey) during the Gulf War in 1990-91. He also mentioned that all those people were associated with the MB (Gresh, 2012). In his book Erbakan has already disclosed his contact with the MB among the mediation activities carried out in the framework of the Gulf crisis in 1990. In his book *Körfez Krizi, Emperyalizm ve Petrol [Gulf Crisis, Imperialism and Oil]*, Necmettin Erbakan states that he had met with the MB in Syria among other activities between September 9 and October 1, 1990 (Erbakan, 1991 cited in Cakir, 1994, pp.176-177).

Another mediation activity of Erbakan before coming into power in Turkey was also for the MB. The intimate relationship between Shaykh al-Islam Al-Banna and Erbakan became clearer for the MB members in Egypt who were sentenced to death. In Egypt, 10 people were tried and sentenced to death for their MB membership while Turkey was preparing for the 1995 elections. Erbakan sent a three-person delegation to Egypt to halt executions under the leadership of Van Deputy Fethullah Erbas (MG, 2014). The delegation met with judges, and the judges said to Hosni Mubarak, "Necmettin Erbakan has sent delegations from Turkey. This delegation is a member of Amnesty International. If these detainees won't be acquitted, Erbakan would force the world to Egypt. They have great political power." In the end, the detainees were released. After years one of those who were sentenced to death attended the funeral of Erbakan Hodja as a representative of the MB.

Close relations, especially during the Gulf War, were also highlighted in the report prepared upon the request of Ankara Martial Law Command following the closure of the National Salvation Party. According to the report published in *Cumhuriyet* (Yurteri, 1995), "In the report prepared by intelligence agencies on the relations of the Welfare Party officials before 1980, it is stated that Necmettin Erbakan, the leader of RP, met with Essam El-Attar, Syrian-born leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, in Germany." Beyond the connection between the National vision and the MB, the claims made in the *Cumhuriyet* article are even more remarkable (Yurteri, 1995):

"It is argued that Turkish intelligence let the Brotherhood members stay in some centers, including Yalova, Mersin and Iskenderun... It is also asserted that a senior official of the Welfare Party has gone to Syria several times in order to make an agreement between the Muslim Brotherhood and Turkish intelligence against the PKK."

Here, it is argued that the MB was supported by 'Turkey' and the intelligence beyond the Welfare Party. This discussion which began in the press was also reflected in bilateral relations and foreign policy issues. Erbakan planned for Egypt to be the first port of call during his Middle East trip; yet Egypt responded to his request after a five-day delay. Further, the welcoming ceremony for the Turkish delegation was also delayed by three hours, and no Turkish flag was raised at the ceremony (Cumhuriyet, 1996a). And when his trip continued on to Tunisia, the next place in the list, he and his team were met with a similar 'diplomatic crisis'. Erbakan was welcomed but then sent off again by Deputy Governor, Mayor and State Chief of Protocol. The relationship between Erbakan and Ghannouchi was presented as the cause of this crisis (Erinc, 1996). In the motion of no confidence issued by the CHP in 1996, Erbakan's Middle East policy and the events that occurred during his trips were criticized: "Some members

of the Turkish delegation met with the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood known as a terrorist organization in a context unknown,” (NA, 1996).

The Welfare Party didn't reject its relations with the MB. Moreover, it hosted leading names of the Egyptian MB at its 4th Congress on October 10, 1993; such as Mustafa Meshur (Vice-President of the Egyptian MB), Muhammad Mahdi Akif (Education Officer of the Egyptian MB), Memnun Hedayb and Mustafa al-Jaafar (Yalcin, 2012). The Welfare Party owned its relation with the MB by accepting some representatives of the Egyptian MB, including Shaykh al-Islam Al-Banna, at the 5th Party Congress (Cumhuriyet, 1996b). In Congress, FIS and HAMAS were represented along with the MB.

In summary, both sides don't deny the relationship between the National vision or Erbakan movement and the SMB. They even affirm it. In an interview about Erbakan, Basil Haffar from the MB stated (Haffar, 2013), “Our relationship was very good during his reign. However, our relations with the Felicity Party were weakened after ‘the Syrian revolution’ because they were on Assad's side.” IHH Board Member Osman Atalay also mentioned that the MB was, at most, taken as a model by the Welfare Party/National Salvation Party (Atalay, 2013).

The relationship between the MB and the National vision was once again affected by a reflex in the regime regarding the February 28 Process. This relationship was put under a microscope and frequently mentioned in reports and briefings with the Army and MIT as the main subjects. Moreover, the information with regard to the organization's contact with and support for the Welfare Party was transmitted to President Suleyman Demirel in briefings. In September 1996, in a briefing to President Suleyman Demirel on ‘reactionary activities’ which seems to have been prepared by MIT (National Intelligence Organization), it was indicated that Members of the National vision are in contact with various organization and its elements, such as Saudi Arabia/Rabita, the International Islamic Call Society of Libya, Iran Ministry of Guidance, HAMAS and the Muslim Brotherhood. As cited by the Parliamentary Research Commission for Coups and Memorandums Report (PRC, 2012, p.86), on January 17, 1997, it was also said in another briefing to President Suleyman Demirel entitled Reactionary Activities given at the Turkish General Staff Headquarters that they had received “unverified information about the Welfare Party's gaining support from other countries that want a change in Turkey's regime and/or the division of Turkey, and even its revenues earned by weapon and drug trafficking”. It was also stated that one of those who supported the Welfare Party was “the Muslim Brotherhood organization supported by Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait,” (Yuksel, 2005, p.59).

In this context, another interesting argument is the report published in *Le Monde* subsequently disavowed by Abdullah Gul. In January 1997, it was claimed that the MB had held a meeting in Istanbul with members of the Welfare Party (Gurel, 1997). In *Le Monde du Renseignement*, a supplement of the newspaper *Le Monde*, minutes of a meeting in which Erbakan almost gave an account to the MB were published. It was also stated that a meeting was organized by Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul in January 1997 with the participation of representatives of the Egyptian and Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood. It was said that Amin Yakan, the leader of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, and Mustafa Masur from the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt also attended the meeting (Yalova, 1997). When this report disavowed by Erbakan, “Don't believe reports” commented Erbakan with regard to this article (Cumhuriyet, 1997). When raised a question about this report in the National Assembly a year later, Abdullah Gul refuted it by stating:

“In fact, weekly newsletters of the French Newspaper *Le Monde* published in English and French reported as news that when I was Minister, I brought some leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood and Erbakan together and talked, here, about some fundamental issues of Turkey... That is not true, it is a lie! Therefore, I immediately refuted *Le Monde*. The refutation I had sent was published in *Le Monde*, and the issue with my refutation included was also sent to me... This was published in *Cumhuriyet*. I sent the correction

published in Le Monde to the *Cumhuriyet*... Recently, a lady named Guzin¹ came out and told the story in her column in the daily *Hürriyet*, which was accompanied with a picture. I also sent her the same refutation which had been published in English and French in France; however, she has neither informed me nor published the refutation in her column in accordance with the press code," (NA, 1998, p.266).

In sum, in the 1990s, the Welfare Party's coming into power as well as the relationship between the National vision and the Muslim Brotherhood came to the fore in the political sphere. Moreover, its contact with the government, which began with Ozal/Evren-Savvaf, became stronger. Similarly, the regime's response for this relationship, which emerged for the first time in the social sphere in the 1950s and 1960s, continued to increase during this period. MB-Turkey relations began to cause trouble not only for Syria but also for many Middle Eastern countries. It can be said that this integration attempt which had been interrupted by the February 28 process was crowned during the JDP government with the process following the Arab revolts.

4. The Era of the JDP & Integration of the MB into the State Policy

Regarding Turkey's foreign policy, the main thesis of the JDP is to guide Turkey to becoming a leading country by following a "proactive policy" in the face of regional problems. In this context, it claims to be effective in its own region by paying particular attention to the problems in the Middle East. It has tried to establish relationships with the other states and actors in the region. HAMAS leader Khaled Meshaal's visit to Ankara in 2006 is one of the signs of this policy. Although it was said that Meshaal was invited not by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but the JDP, the party emblem was closed in the press conference at the party headquarters. Moreover, it wasn't brought to light by whom and why this invitation was made. In a sense, the real motivation behind the government's foreign policy initiative that would be a continual concern wasn't revealed. Cengiz Candar commented that "The JDP have a constant 'Sunni reflex'. Seeking rapprochement with Hamas doesn't conflict with the Party's foreign policy... It is said that they have a relationship with everyone in Iraq, but the real one is with this party which is the Iraqi branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas is the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. A lot of factors in the JDP have ideological kinship with this movement as well as personal acquaintances" (Candar, 2006). The debate that had begun with this visit continued with the Arab revolts and Turkey's response to them. Ideological affinity has become apparent and concrete. This ideological foreign policy of the JDP received support from the Islamists in Turkey. *Yeni Şafak* columnist Ibrahim Karagul: "For years, our motto for the region and our analysis regarding the future of the region has always been 'Zone of Muslim Brotherhood from Sudan to Syria'... From Sudan to North Africa, Egypt to Jordan and Syria, the most organized structures of the region are those coming from the Muslim Brotherhood school" (Karagul, 2012). At the conference of the Economic and Social Research Center entitled *Zulmün Son Çıkmazı: SURİYE* (The Stalemate of Last Persecution: SYRIA) in which al-Shaqfeh attended, the words of Secretary General Prof. Dr. Arif Ersoy are remarkable, "We believe that the oppressive rule recently in Syria will surely change under the leadership of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood that took lessons from the recent development in the Islamic world. A state which will be a model for others will be established under the leadership of our brothers. The borders and gulfs between us will be removed; Istanbul will belong to Syrians and Damascus will be ours," (DB, 2012).

As a reflection of this policy, the Islamists in the Middle East were impressed by the JDP, and their ideological affinity was crowned with contacts. In Egypt, the Islamist section established four different parties after the civil commotion that toppled the Hosni Mubarak's regime. Importantly, two of them adopted the founding philosophy and program of the JDP as a principle. The Freedom and Justice Party (HAP) supported by the MB and *Vasat* Party established by a group left from the MB took the JDP as a model. The concerned parties announced to the public that they had adopted the ruling party of the Turkish Republic as a

¹ For the concerned article of *Hürriyet* columnist Gulcin Telci mentioned by Abdullah Gul, see Telci (1997).

model during the establishment phase (NTV, 2011). Another important point Candar argues, is that the 'mentor' of Mohammed Mursi and the MB was for a long time Tayyip Erdogan's inner circle and his JDP cadres (Candar, 2013). Moreover, Bulac argues that the political process in Egypt occurred with the guidance of Turkish advisers from beginning to end (Bulac, 2014). Another argument is that a similar approach was used for the SMB and the SMB was asked to 'get a move on', but it preferred to wait cautiously. Syrian activist and journalist in CNN Omar Al-Muqdad quoted the talks between the SMB and the Foreign Affairs officials in a meeting in which he also attended in this manner (Al-Muqdad, 2014).

Morsi's attendance at the 4th Party Congress of the JDP held on September 30, 2013, as a guest has given rise the perception that Erdogan and the JDP, who are expected to be a model for the Muslim Brotherhood, want to establish a regional hegemony' from the viewpoint of the Gulf countries and the United States (Keyman, 2014). In the demonstrations in Turkey organized by Erdogan after the overthrow of Morsi, the JDP as well as some non-governmental organizations (IHH, MazlumDer and OzgurDer), people protested against the Egyptian army's seizing power and called on support for Egypt (BBC, 2013). The intimate relationship between the MB and the JDP emerged as an important factor in the Syrian crisis. Turkey's attitude toward the Syrian crisis along with its intimate relationship with the SMB is a product of the Party's rhetoric of proactive policies/leader country in terms of foreign policy.

The Syrian uprising at first began against corruption and human rights violations in January 2011. Considering Turkey-Syria relations, meanwhile, the foundations for a Syria-Turkey Friendship Dam were laid in Hatay on February 6, 2011. Prime Minister Erdogan said that the fraternal ties between the people of Turkey and Syria grew stronger and were rebuilt on the basis of much stronger, much more intimate and much more concrete relations. He also said, "The more Syria is in peace the more Turkey is in peace. The more Turkey is in wealth the more the more Syria is in wealth" (Idiz, 2011). Turkey had established close relations with Syria by holding a common council of ministers meeting and removing visa protocols during that period, and began to be known through meetings organized by the opposition. Even when relations between Syria and Turkey were strong, Erdogan never concealed his sympathy for the MB from Bashar al-Assad and had even asked him to grant the Brothers amnesty and legalize their movement (Balci, 2012). According to the Syrian Ambassador, when President al-Assad came to Istanbul [in 2009], Mr. Erdogan introduced [Gazi Misirli] and said, "Please, my brother Bashar, help this man... He was welcomed by Bashar al-Assad personally to go back to Syria." In this paper, Misirli was presented as the SMB leader.

Further examples of Turkey's sympathy for the SMB can be given. Regarding his meeting with the MB's Political Bureau Member Samir Abu Leban, Fehim Tastekin has stated that (2014) it was "a critical subject of bargaining to give the SMB a permit to return home and politics in the talks between the Turkish government and Assad", and that Turkey requested for legalization of the SMB and its participation in politics even when relations were strong. It is also argued that Turkey even imposed it as a condition for bringing the crisis to an end. In a report based on the information given by a diplomat, "it is asserted that in June, Prime Minister Erdogan gave Syrian President Bashar al-Assad an assurance of support to suppress the uprising in return for his allowing the banned members of the Muslim Brotherhood to be included in the cabinet. Erdogan's demand was to give the members of the Muslim Brotherhood at least a quarter of the ministries, four of which are important ones. However, Assad has rejected this request," AFP commented (Milliyet, 2011). In line with the above mentioned considerations, it can be said that the SMB turned out to be a major issue for Turkey-Syria relations. And, the JDP requested that the Syrian government allow SMB members to return home and gain legitimacy in order to obtain political rights both prior to and at every stage of the crisis.

During this period, there are two important dates to be mentioned in terms of Syria-Turkey relations: The first is August 9, 2011, when Assad declined Davutoglu's call for reform and dialogue in his visit to Damascus, and the second one is March 26, 2012, when the embassy in Damascus was closed. However, upon the start of the Syrian Crisis before this period, the Syrian opposition meetings were held in Turkey with the attendance of MazlumDer, the Union of NGOs of the Islamic World (IDSB), the Foundation for Volunteer Organizations of Turkey (TGTV), the Civilian Solidarity Platform (SDP), the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH)

and MUSIAD, along with the MB (sometimes with two leaders, namely al-Bayanouni and al-Shaqfeh). According to Balci (2012), “[Ankara] allowed human rights organizations such as MazlumDer and IHH, formally independent but in reality very close to the Erdogan government, to help the Syrian opposition hold meetings and more broadly coordinate its activities.” The first meeting recounted in the press was the one held in Istanbul on April 1, 2011, by MazlumDer with the attendance of the SMB Secretary-General Shaqfeh and Political Chief Muhammed Tayfur (MazlumDer, 2011a; Ilke, 2011). According to the report, Tayfur said that the most appropriate government model for Syria and the whole Arab world was Turkey’s model in force today, and that the cooperation had reached its highest level ever thanks to the relations established by Turkey (Mehmet, 2011). Following this meeting, MazlumDer organized the Pendik Meeting where it gathered all components of the Syrian opposition (MazlumDer, 2011b). This meeting was followed by another called Conference on Change in Syria held on June 1-2, 2011, in Antalya with broader participation by attracting global attention (Ayhan and Orhan, 2011). The leader of the Syrian Justice and Development Movement inspired by the JDP (SAKP), Anas Abdullah, who took part in the organization of the Antalya meeting, said in an interview that he was grateful to Turkey as no permission was required to hold a conference: “First of all, we’d like to say that we are grateful to the Turkish people and government. This is because of our experience of freedom and democracy in Turkey at the moment. We have the opportunity to hold this conference in Turkey. We didn’t have to get any permission for the conference” (Orsam, 2011). In his evaluation of the conference, Abdullah emphasized an important point while indicating that the ‘Turkey model’ had been mentioned by almost all opposition groups: “However, at this point here, it is necessary to indicate that the Turkey model is identified with the JDP by some groups. It is a common approach among the Muslim Brotherhood, some Sunni Arab tribes and conservative young activists. These groups using the concept of Islamic democracy lay emphasis on the importance of free elections and democracy in Turkey on the one hand, and on the other they care about ‘the existence of a government with Islamic sensitivity’”. In this regard, it is important to point out that there is another movement among the opposition front called the Syrian Justice and Development Movement which is directly inspired by the JDP.

After these two important meetings, the number of similar meetings has increased since the end of 2011. Indeed, the SMB has organized a lot of meetings in Turkey and had the opportunity to declare its demands through press releases and press conferences (Aydintasbas, 2011). Among them are Consultation Meeting on Latest Developments in Syria in IHH Humanitarian Aid Organization headquarters by IDSB, TGTV and SDP on March 6, 2012 (IDSB, 2012a); the conference series with the slogan ‘For Syria, For Humanity’ on March 10, 2012, by the attendance of Dr. Amir Abu al-Salemi from the SMB (IDSB, 2012b); the panel organized by MUSIAD on August 1, 2012, and directed/interpreted by Gazi Misirli; the board member of MUSIAD, with the attendance of al-Shaqfeh (IDSB, 2012a) and the conference held by IDSB during the International Syria Conference on January 26, 2013, with the attendance of representatives from the Syrian National Coalition (SUKO) and al-Bayanouni (IDSB, 2013). Finally, claims of a ‘secret meeting’ in Istanbul after the Egypt coup should be mentioned. According to the report based on Abu Dhabi-based Skynews Arabia channel, after Mursi representatives of the movement living in Europe and Arab countries took decisions concerning the future of the movement in the national and international sphere. Among the representatives who attended the meeting were Rashid Al Ghannouchi, the leader of the Tunisian Al-Nahda movement, a representative of the Palestinian Hamas and a senior official of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood organization. In the words of Faik Bulut, “According to Arab commentators, the coup in Egypt was an earthquake and its aftershocks are also affecting the JDP. Perhaps this is why Turkey has become a center for determining Islamic politics in the region. It must be one of reasons for holding the meeting of the Brotherhood in Istanbul” (Cumhuriyet, 2013).

As can be seen, Turkey has turned out to be a channel where meetings are held and messages are transmitted for the regime opponents since the very beginning of the Syrian crisis. Since April 1, 2011 Turkey has become a place where the regime opponents in general and the SMB in particular can be clearly organized. At these meetings, it was repeatedly emphasized that Turkey is a democratic model for Syria as it supports all Syrians. Unlike ‘moral support’, the SMB members repeated in their talks that they haven’t got any direct support from

Turkey, showing sensitivity because of their position of asylum seekers. This delicate situation can be understood from the words of Lovay Safi, a member of the MB, at the Istanbul meeting: "We have a relationship with the Turkish government. Of course, we want to get their support, but we know and respect Turkey's priorities," (Hurhaber, 2011). On the other hand, at the same period, the policies for Syria especially within the framework of humanitarian aid were directed to the region through a number of projects once again led by MazlumDer and IHH. It sometimes brought different discussions. In the article published in the Times, it was reported that the MB got help from IHH for the confiscation of the ship delivery sent to Syria. Moreover, people were warned about the Muslim Brotherhood which, in the words of the Free Syrian Army militants, "has tried to increase its influence through its connections in Turkey, money and weapons." According to the Times, A Libyan ship carrying the largest consignment of weapons for Syria since the uprising began has docked in Turkey and most of its cargo is making its way to rebels on the front lines and IHH gave them to MB (Frenkel, 2012). It is seen that the MB has been in Turkey officially since 2011 and its leaders have often come to Turkey (Atalay, 2013). For example, former Secretary-General of the Syrian Political Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood, Basil Haffar, has been living with his family in Turkey and working for the Anadolu Agency for three years (Haffar, 2013).

The important point associated with the Syrian crisis is that today is the period of the SMB members who took refuge in Turkey due to the oppression of Assad's regime in the 1980s. Considering the Syrian problem, it can be said that this generation paved the way for the regime opponents to be able to organize in Turkey.

5. Conclusion

In this study on the historical background of Turkey's relations with the SMB, some of the major conclusions may be summarized as follows. First of all, the climate in which Islamist movements in the MB and Turkey coincided may be characterized by reactions to the authoritarian regimes in the countries where they emerged. While the MB emerged as a response to colonialism, Turkey's Islamism was a response to the establishment of the Republic. The MB's uprising also affected the actors in Turkey. Both sought to regain religious freedom suppressed by the regime by highlighting the political dimension of Islam. To influence and transform the current political regime was considered a means of expanding the area of freedom for religion. But to politicize Islam might be a goal on its own from time to time. The SMB had an impact on the Islamists in Turkey as a discourse and ideology upon the transition to a multi-party system. However, Turkey-SMB relations evaluated in conjunction with secularism/regime's reaction during this period as well as the SMB's socialist ties were of great concern for Turkey. Hence, the SMB only attracted the attention of a specific segment. The first contact was observed at the end of the 1960s and at the start of the 1970s. The SMB gained more recognition in Turkey by developing close relations with the West after being exiled and by keeping its distance from left wing politics following the Baath coup. In particular, it is obvious that the SMB's 'purification' had an important impact on the start of close contacts established by the state. Given the bipolar structure of the international system, the commonality of Turkey and the SMB increased after this period, and obstacles to negotiations were overcome. Indeed, the MB has always been a reference for those who are close to Political Islam in Turkey. However, dimensions of this relationship and whether it is 'evident' or not are limited within the international system as well as the opportunities of Turkish political life.

Considering the advent of Islamism in Turkey, the impact of the MB movement, especially in terms of discourse, is undeniable. It wasn't organized directly, but it is beyond doubt that the perception of the SMB has been asserted in the eyes of the state since the 1980s. The relationship came to light when Savvaf publicly revealed his meetings with the President and the Prime Minister in addition to his long-term residence in Turkey. However, it can be seen that this relationship did not go beyond the instrumentalization of the MB in terms of Turkey's foreign policy.

In Turkey, the MB movement that primarily became effective in the intellectual sphere was welcomed by Islamists. In this sense, it can be argued that this process, which started from the first years of the establishment of the SMB, affected the leading players that would have an

important role in the future of Turkey's political dimensions. These players tried to adapt these positive returns in the intellectual sphere to the political sphere through the MB movement, but they encountered the regime's resistance. Moreover, the intellectual climate of the MB movement couldn't find its place in the state policies in Turkey, but rather it caused major crisis in the foreign policy. In a sense, the SMB got its share from the perception of Islamism in Turkey. The relationship between the SMB and Turkey directly affected the state policies of the JDP government, surpassing its position of the previous years. The MB was perceived as a supporting tool for the Development and Justice Party's foreign policy based on the strategy of being a regional leader. It can be argued that it is not an ideological relationship any more. Rather, relations with the MB have turned into a strategic cooperation with the JDP government.

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