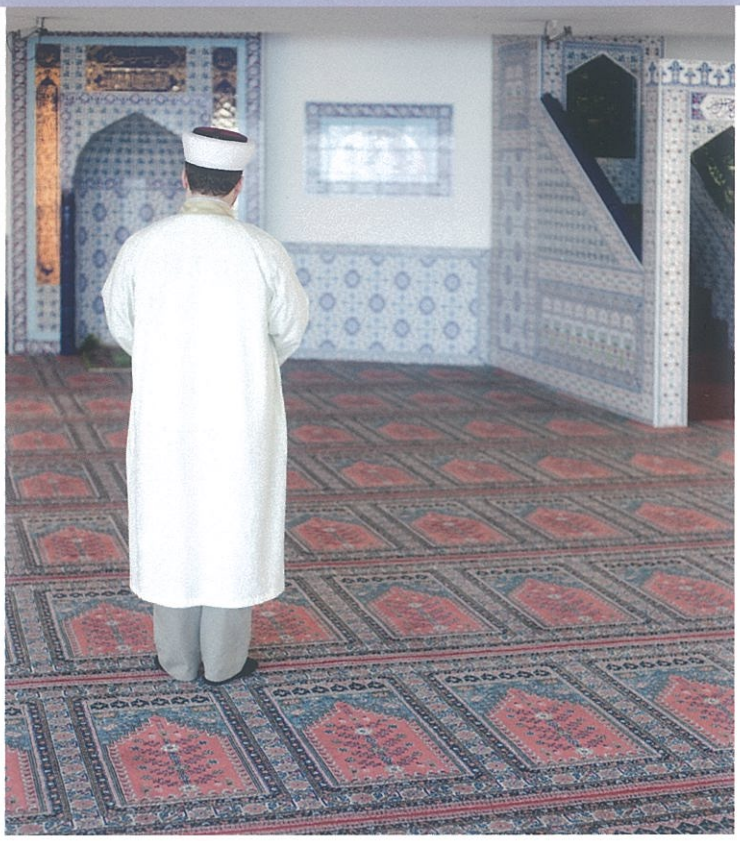
WIENER ISLAMSTUDIEN
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Ednan Aslan / Zsófia Windisch (eds.)

The Training of Imams and Teachers for Islamic Education in Europe

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Table of Contents

11 *Foreword*

375 *Authors*

PART 1 – INTRODUCTION

19 Ednan Aslan
Training of Imams and Teachers in Europe

71 Enes Karić
Higher Educational Institutions in the Balkans which Educate Imams and Religious Teachers (Overview from 1990–Present)

91 Jørgen S. Nielsen
Reflections on the Role and Training of Imams and Islamic Teachers for Europe

103 Qazim Qazimi
Religious Identity and Globalism

PART 2 – TRAINING OF IMAMS AND TEACHERS FOR ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN EUROPE

113 Bayram Karci/Elton Karaj
Religious Education in Albania: The Case of the Tirana Haxi Hahmud Dashi Madrasah from 1924–1964 and 1991 onward

121 Vahidin Beluli
Methods of Professional Advancement for Imams and Islamic Studies Teachers in Austria

135 Mustafa Hasani
The Status of Imams in Bosnia and Herzegovina

147 Sefer Hasanov
Training Imams and Religious Teachers in Bulgaria

157 Aziz Hasanović
Spiritual and Professional Profile of Imams in the 21st Century in Europe

175 Samim Akgönül
The Debate on Imams and Imam Training in France

189 Ibrahim Serif
The Legal Status of the Muslim Turkish Minority of Western Thrace

197 Xhabir Hamiti
The Status of the Imam and His Position in the Past and Present – with a Focus on Albanian Territories

203 Muhamed Ali
Islamic Education in Macedonia – The Case of the Isa Beg Madresa and the Faculty of Islamic Sciences

217 Omer Halil Kajoshaj
Dawah in the Changing World: New Challenges to the Work of Imams

223 Johan Meuleman
Educating for an Old Profession in a New Context:The Imam Training Programme of Inholland University, the Netherlands

241 Mircea Botescu
The European Dobrudjan Islam: A Curricular Perspective on the Education of Imams in Romania

251 Damir Shagaviev
Training and Retraining of Imams in Russia (An Example of Tatarstan)

257 Juan Ferreiro Galguera
Training Centres for Imams in Spain

273 Rehan Neziri
The Training of Imams and Islamic Education Teachers in Switzerland: Between Real Local Needs and Imported Fear

281 Abdullah Sahin
Rethinking the Meaning of Being Islamicly Educated in a Secular Context: Reflections on the Future of Teacher and Imam Training within the British Muslim Communities

291 Z. Şeyma Arslan
Training of Imams and Teachers for Islamic Education in Turkey

311 Hasan Ali Yurtsever
The Role and Training of Imams & Muslim Chaplains in the U. S. A.

PART 3 – DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

325 Eileen M. Daily
Formation of Catholic Religious Educators in the United States

335 Sabine Hermisson/Martin Rothgangel
"Spiritual Competence": Research Project on a New Key Term in Protestant Training for Ministry

349 Kevser Muratovic
The Relationship Between Imams and Adolescents: Do Imams Have to Show Pedagogical Skills in order to be a Contact Person for Young Muslims with Everyday Issues and Problems?

363 Ilire Halimi Poniku
Implementation of Educational Standards: An Opportunity for the Advancement of Islamic Education in Kosovo

369 Jeton Mehmeti
Imams in Western Societies: Why communication skills matter as much as knowledge?

Z. Şeyma Arslan

Training of Imams and Teachers for Islamic Education in Turkey

Training Imams or religious education teachers in countries like Turkey – countries that have a significant Muslim population and Islamic tradition – not only means training religious functionaries, but also producing Islamic knowledge. Although Imams, teachers of religion, and religious scholars (ulema) carry out a social service, they also hold authority on the basis of religious knowledge. In the case of Turkey, following the reign of the Ottomans, the form of this traditional structure changed after the Republican period. While Turkey is a secular nation state, it also has a rich historical legacy and dominant Muslim population and produced its religious educational institutions in a neither entirely Western nor fully traditional way. The search for middle ground between the idealized Westernization of the modern Turkish Republic and the traditional Islamic heritage has engendered today's Islamic discourse (which has been described as "moderate"), along with the structure of contemporary religious educational institutions.

The Background

The Transformation of Educational Institutions

The transition of the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey ignited a new way of training Imams and teachers of religious education. Like many countries in that region of the world in the 19th century, the traditional educational institutions experienced a transition to more modern frameworks in line with the development of new life conditions and political systems. *Madrasas* were the only middle and higher educational institutions of Ottoman period. While madrasas were the central institution where theologians (ulama) and those of the bureaucracy taught in the Republican period, they left their positions to join the theology faculty when a new kind of institution developed: the university. Today, Imams and religious educators are trained in these state-owned secular institutions.

Madrasas were religious in character, though they did have some secular purposes. They were controlled by private initiative and the religious agencies in society. By the time modernization arrived in the 19th century, the education system in general, and religious education in particular, took two directions. While one form of educational instruction continued in the madrasas, another form developed in the new, modern setting. This modern form of schooling aspired to train a new form of bureaucrats for the contemporary and changing positions of state affairs. The new schools found their students in the Madrasa teachers and graduates. Turkey established and supported the new schools, which stood contrary to its traditional educational institutions, to cope with the missionary schools that were opening all around the territory of the empire. The new schools provided both religious education as well as secular instruction in curriculum, and were able to ensure the maintenance of the people in a religious sense while not falling behind in the worldwide race of progress and modernization.

The Turkish Revolution in 1923, which ended the Ottoman Empire, also continued the Ottoman project of modernizing education that was predicated on the reactionary attitude toward religion. Madrasas were abolished in 1924; the official objective was to unify the divide in education. The religious disposition of the new administration was not only to discontinue the traditional educational institutions, but also to close the principal institutions of folk religion – namely *tekkes* and *zaviyes* – in 1925. The state also abolished the caliphate, which had a political significance as well as being religious, and held the claim of leadership of the Muslim world. Concurrent with these prohibitions, a theology faculty in the new university body, which served as a secondary level school for educating religious functionaries, was set up in 1924. And in 1924 an official unit was created within the state mechanism to carry out religious affairs. A Sunni-based interpretation of book-oriented Islam was taken under state authority and control, and maintained to stand in opposition to folk religion with its various forms.

New institutions of religious education were modeled after secular European educational institutions. The new Republic formed a state system of secular schools and placed all education under the supervision and control of the state. The theology faculty and schools for training Imams were short-lived; only in the 1950s were they able to be reopened. The initiation and then closure of the schools in the early stages of the Republic can be seen as an attempt to alleviate the reaction. The revolutionary attempts to create a secular Turkish republicanism from above were relaxed within nearly a quarter of a century, along with the transition to a multi-party political system. In 1949, sacred tombs that had been closed in 1925 were reopened, religious education was restored to the classroom, and the Ministry of Education allowed a course on religious culture as an elective subject – which in the 1980s became compulsory in schools. That same year *Imam hatip* courses, aimed to train Imams and preachers, were set up and a theology faculty opened in Ankara.

Religion-State Relations

The discussion about religious services and religious education in Turkey requires an in-depth analysis of religion-state relations. Today, controversial subjects, such as providing compulsory non-confessional religious education in schools in a secular state system, training course teachers in state institutions, state financing of religious education teachers and Imams, conducting all religious services as a public service, etc., are the reflections of issues in religion-state relations and the policies that frame religious matters of the country.

Today, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) is the authorized body for religious affairs in Turkey. In spite of the officially secular nature of the Turkish state, the Presidency of Religious Affairs was founded the same year the Caliphate was abolished. It is a secular administrative unit that was established in 1924 to execute services regarding Islamic faith and practices. It was designed to enlighten society on the topic of religion as well as carry out the management of places of prayer (Presidency of Religious Affairs, 2005), rather than articulate a religious view on the activities of the state (Olgun, 2005).

The existence of the Presidency of Religious Affairs may not be seen as a novelty for the country; its roots can be found in Ottoman history as the successor entity to the office of the Sheikh al-Islam. The role of the state on determining religious subjects can be seen as a historical product of the conditions surrounding the formation and the evolution of the 'strong state' tradition by the Ottomans, which was inherited by the young republic (Sakallıoğlu, 1995). So, the intertwined relationship between religion and state is somehow a sequel to the country's mindset of society, drawn from the mentality inherited by the Ottoman Empire. This mentality continued throughout the Republican period, with some limitations in the field of authority. The Turkish state, however, has always followed a restrictive policy that has been suspicious of religion. The use of religion both as a threat against and as a tool for the state results in ambiguity in relation to secularity in Turkey (Olgun, 2005 p.339; Tank, 2005, p.3).

While defining the Presidency, the former president Ali Bardakoğlu identified three major features that explain its current structure and function (Bardakoğlu, 2008):

> Its public, free and civilian nature ... It is a public institution, in other words it is located within the state organization ... It is free to choose the scholarly and religious discourse it will use. It acts on its own initiative, its own scholarly competence and accumulation of knowledge and with Turkey's scholarly capacity while providing religious services, responding to religious questions that come from the citizens or informing people of religious issues ... And it is civilian, it is not a hierarchical institution that is detached from the real religious life or the demands of people ...

How can a secular system have a state-sponsored religious institution? The existence of Diyanet and its function have been challenged on many grounds, with concerns ranging from its control of religion to actual interference with it. When discussing the issue of religious services in modern Turkey, arguments arise over the state-Diyanet connection, the control of the state over the religious services the Diyanet offers, and the secular nature of the Turkish political system. As Subaşı expresses, "religion as an important fact, has complex and often chaotic aspects in Turkey, yet it has always been taken into consideration" (Subaşı, 2008, p.265). Interestingly, as Turkey's experience of secularism deepens, the opinion that "the abolishment of the Presidency of Religious Affairs would create more troubles than solutions" receives common approval. For instance,

1
The proposal of The Union of Turkish Bar Associations about Diyanet underlines the principle of equal treatment of different religions and sects. (Türkiye Barolar Birliği [The Union of Turkish Bar Associations], 2007). The report of TESEV (Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation) expresses the same principle of neutrality of Diyanet as well as towards the unbelief and suggests a downsized but autonomous structure, with a smaller budget. (Erdoğan & S.Yazıcı, 2011). The report of DİSK (Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey) opposes to current function of Diyanet such as giving fetwas of organizing pilgrimage tours to Mecca; instead it should remain as an administrative unit for observing and controlling the religious activities of various private groups in terms of compliance with laws. (DİSK [Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey], 2009). TÜSİAD (Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association) report of a consultation meeting on constitution states the need of reorganization which enables the representation of groups that regard themselves outside the dominant understanding of faith. Legal obstacles on establishing parallel structures for the groups who don't want to be represented within Diyanet must be lifted. (TÜSİAD [Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association], 2011). The survey of

most of the constitution draft proposals[1] – written in 2011 by a diverse set of groups in Turkey's ongoing preparation process of a new constitution – do not indicate entirely ending the Presidency and do not suggest delegating the task of regulating religious affairs to non-state institutions. Instead, an autonomous position, similar to some of other state organizations, is among the suggestions. Two texts from İştar Gözaydın, one of the prominent researchers about religion-state relations and Diyanet in Turkey, make different assertions but outline another example of the perspective change. While her first study in 1993 (Tarhanlı, 1993) suggests taking necessary action to realize laicism, the second revised version of the same study in 2009[2] underlines the fact that "despite the governments who tried to shape it, Diyanet produced its own dynamics, and on the other hand it has gained a meaning and significance at a degree that the suggestion of leaving religious issues to religious communities has no sense in social contexts" (Gözaydın, 2009, p. 306).

Contrary to the position of mosques or representative Islamic associations of Muslims in Europe, Diyanet is not a representative unit in Turkey. In a legal sense, the religious congregations are only those of the minority communities (i.e., Greeks, Armenians, and Jewish) and those identified in the agreements signed after World War I. Since the Muslim population is not a congregation in the legal sense, the Diyanet is not a representative unit for Muslims. It is instead an administrative unit and doesn't have an official role in policy development processes. The transformation of the position of Diyanet into a representative unit will probably not be realistic in Turkey's current political conditions because it requires a reorganization of the religious congregations in the legal sense, taking into consideration whether there is a social demand for it.

As a consequence of organizing the religious affairs as a public service of the state, all religious education activities are also organized as the state's public service in Turkey. Diyanet delivers one aspect of the

1 BİLGESAM (Wise Men Center for Strategic Studies) on social expectations about the new constitution declares while half of the sample thinks that Diyanet should remain virtually unchanged, the opinion of other half is towards the inclusion of Diyanet the other faith groups (BİLGESAM [Wise Men Center for Strategic Studies], 2011).

2 Author's surname has changed at the second study.

education through Qur'anic courses where fundamental principles, moral values, and behavioral aspects of Islam are taught. While the Presidency offers informal religious education in these Qur'anic courses, the Ministry of Education provides formal religious education in schools through courses on Religious Culture and Ethical Knowledge (RCEK). These are given in primary (2 hours per week) and secondary schools (1 hour per week) and in vocational religious high schools – secondary schools for training Imams and preachers. The Higher Education Council organizes religious education in theology faculties at the university level.

Professional Development Practices of Imams and RE Teachers

The recent institutional structures of training Imams and RE teachers of today's Turkey are as follows:

1. Theology faculties
   - For training of Imams and other religious functionaries
   - For training of high school religious education teachers
2. Education faculties (Primary School Religious Culture and Ethical Knowledge Training Program)
   - For training of primary school religious education teachers
3. The Religious Vocational High Schools (IHL)
   - For training of Imams and other religious functionaries

The Religious Vocational High Schools (IHL)

The Religious Vocational High Schools – the exact translation being "The Imam and Preacher High Schools" (İHL, İmam Hatip Lisesi), serve at the secondary school level. These are the vocational high schools that the graduates serve in as the Imams or teachers of Koran courses – only as an "as needed" basis, in the absence of a sufficient number of university graduates. In order to steer the graduates to the

faculty of theology, those who choose the faculty of theology receive additional points in the university entrance exam.

In addition to Islamic studies lessons, these 4-year schools offer normal high school lessons in the curriculum. Official documents have declared the foundational aim of the IHL schools (in the 1950s) is "to train enlightened clerics". We may also remember that during the Ottoman modernization period, "being an enlightened intellectual" was understood and defined in relation to the exact sciences. Designed to train the enlightened clerics, the major feature of IHL schools is its dual curriculum. But this structure has been perceived by the public not as a vocational education but as a high school education that provides additional religious education.

3 Ünsür gives the rate 65% for the schools wholly constructed by the public. The İHL buildings done by the state without any public support is only 9,5 % (Ünsür, 1995, p. 148).

However, the main objective of these schools was to train clergy who will carry out religious services. Over the years, the Imam-Hatip schools have transformed into more mainstream educational institutions that cater primarily to the children of conservative and religious parents (Kazamias, 1966) and recruit many more students than could ever find a paid position as mosque personnel. These schools came to function as channels of social mobility for children of the pious rural families that were not accommodated in the secular schools, and the vast majority of graduates of these schools went on to other professions. According to the research, most of the students stated that they were glad to be in such a school because they were learning spiritual and material 'sciences' at the same time. They believed that neither 'Western material sciences' nor 'Eastern spiritual sciences' were conducive to development and happiness (Akşit, 1991). It is not incorrect to say that this public consideration equally alludes to a kind of pious perception that doesn't see the religious education alone sufficient. Consequently, these schools – of which Turkey's current prime minister is also among the graduates – found great public demand and support. A significant amount of the İHL school and dormitory buildings were built by the people and delivered to the Ministry of Education.[3] Another reflection of the public opinion about the function of

the schools is the fact that almost 52 %[4] of its students are female; however, the young women cannot be Imams. Because of worries that the schools may constitute an alternative to regular high school education, they have always been an intricate element of discourse on laicism in Turkey.

4 The figure belongs to the year 2010; the rate is much more in big cities. In the province of Istanbul the rate of the girls is 66 %.

Theology Faculties

At the college educational level there are theology faculties that provide four years of education. The professional aspect of the curriculum combines the Islamic studies and religious studies. The idea of a higher religious academy has its roots in the philosophy of the Ottoman era.[5] The very notion of a theology faculty appeared at the same time as that of the modern university in Ottoman Turkey, modeling the faculties found in western European universities, instead of the traditional madrasa education. In spite of the secular character of the new theology faculties and the mostly secular and academic language they preserve[6], the schools found acceptance by the public as Islamic institutions. This is most likely because of the lack of any other institution for higher religious instruction, and the inclination to understand these institutions as an opportunity for Islamic religious education in spite of their secular foundations.

5 Faculty of Religious Sciences was one of the five faculty of the first modern Ottoman university, Ottoman Darülfunun-ı Şahane established in 1900, later become Istanbul University.

6 Tahsin Banguoğlu, the Minister of education of the time, explains the purpose of the opening of Faculty of Divinity in Ankara in 1949, distinguishing the concept of Faculty from that of the madrasa. He believed the madrasa to be places in which to learn the tenets of Islam, whereas the Faculties were " ...houses of science; they endeavor to make comparison, observation and finally, if possible, explanation ..." (Banguoğlu).

At the establishment period of the new republic in the 1920s, the traditional educational institutions were not re-organized in structure and content, but new institutions had been established in their place. These new ones, while taking their shape in line with modern approaches, also functioned as the carrier of the traditional, in accordance with the demands of the Muslim population. The structure and curriculum of the theology faculties in Turkey can be seen as a reflection of this fact. They have a program combining the contemporary

religious and philosophical studies of Western theology faculties, and the Islamic sciences like the seminaries of Western countries.

For a long time – until 1998 – theology faculties served all the following functions with one curriculum program; the functions of training Imams and other religious servants, training academicians for higher religious studies and training teachers for religious courses in primary and secondary schools. Thus, the curriculum was containing courses of vocational knowledge, general culture, and pedagogical formation. Among these, vocational knowledge courses – containing both Islamic sciences and religious studies – had been slightly more than 50%.[7] In 1998, the theology program and the teacher training program for primary education were separated in some faculties.[8] And in 2006, teacher training program for primary education were taken from the structure of the theology faculty and moved to the faculty of education.[9] The importance of this decision, which is still in practice today, rests in the execution of religious instruction outside of the theology faculty and, more generally, outside religious education institutions.

The latest regulation on the curriculum of theology faculties was instated in 2009, which increased the proportion of professional knowledge courses to 83.4%.[10] The sole function of the faculties is to train the personnel that the Diyanet needs for religious services and the Ministry of Education needs for secondary school Religious Culture and Ethical Knowledge courses.[11] An additional purpose is to train scholars of religious sciences, including the faculties' own staff. While considering these functions an important critique of the existing program of the faculty and graduate qualifications,

7
For example, in 1983–84 academic year, there were averagely 30 hours of classes a week and vocational knowledge courses were 53.25%, general culture courses were 26.95% and pedagogical formation courses were 12.03% of the curriculum.

8
Within the context of restructuring process of teacher training institutions at the end of 1990's, the function of theology faculty about training teachers had restructured in 1998–1999 academic year. Resolution of the Higher Education Council, number: 97.23.1660 at 11.07.1997 and number: 97.30.2248 at 10.09.1997. The faculty was divided into two programs, one for general theology education, and the other for training of primary school religious education teachers. The new curriculum of the teacher training program were consist of vocational knowledge courses 26.95%, general culture courses 8.98%, pedagogical formation courses 29.77%, minor program courses 12.37%, Arabic language 13.48%, elective subjects 7.86%. General theology education department which doesn't give pedagogical formation were consist of vocational knowledge courses 47.49%, general culture courses 12.70%, Arabic language 23.20%, elective subjects 16.57%.

the education provided by the faculties is insufficient for serving in the field as a religious functionary. While graduates of theology faculties who desire to be RCEK teachers at secondary schools need to attend a certificate program of pedagogical formation for one year, no practical education is required for religious services. Although some theology faculties have established within their academic structure special departments for religious services – such as Ankara University Divinity Faculty, Common Religious Teaching and Its Practice Undergraduate Program – these attempts are sporadic and uncommon. The question of whether there exists such a need for a separate department is still a controversial issue. The quest for achieving competencies on religious services still continues.

Together with the recent additions, 26 of 105 public universities in Turkey contain a theology faculty.[12] They receive students that come from Religious Vocational High Schools and other schools. In 2010, for the first time in Turkey's history, private universities are also added to these colleges with different names (such as Faculty of Islamic and Religious Studies). As these private theology faculties open their doors to students this year, the issue of religious education will also be opened for the first time in the private sphere.

9
Resolution of the Higher Education Council, number: 2006.5.2375 at 26.05.2006.

10
The current curriculum consists of vocational knowledge courses 83.4%, general culture courses 6.1% and elective subjects 10.5%.

11
After the departure of primary school RCEK teaching program, the function of training teachers of theology faculties continued for the religious education teachers of secondary education provided that attending pedagogical formation certificate program for one year.

12
As of the year 2011, there are 172 universities in Turkey. 105 of them are public universities, and 61 are private. 6 of them are private vocational academies.

Education Faculties (Teacher Training Program for Primary Education Religious Culture and Ethical Knowledge)

As mentioned above, teachers of the RCEK courses in primary education are instructed by faculties of education. Recently added under the umbrella of faculty of education, teacher training programs for the RCEK courses in primary educational institutions have graduated

two classes. Before that, training of RCEK teachers had always been a task of theology faculties. Ten years following the constitutional decision that made the religious courses in schools a compulsory subject (1982), a new program was established in theology faculty for the instruction of RCEK teachers (1997) – and ten years following that decision, these programs were moved to the Faculty of Education (2006) where other primary education teachers are trained. At the universities without a theology faculty, this situation has caused difficulties because of the lack of teaching staff in the content area of theology. The negative impact of this new situation on the quality of education has been a subject of discussion. The new programs are still in the process of structuring and creating their own staff apart from the theology faculty.

Undoubtedly, the curriculum of the teacher training program differs from the curriculum of theology faculties. It consists of courses of professional knowledge (49%), general culture (26%) educational sciences (24%), and an internship program in primary schools. It should be noted that the professional knowledge part of the curriculum does not consist only of classical Islamic sciences or their modern interpretations, but also of the subjects concerning the relationship of religion, culture and ethics, of which consist a large proportion of the curriculum. This situation can be seen in relation to the current structure and curriculum of RCEK courses in schools. The RCEK courses are, at least at legal level, designed as a cultural lesson that deals with "learning about religion", most namely the religion of Islam. After the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in 2007, and notably the criticisms surrounding the insufficiently of addressing religious pluralism, authorities of the Ministry of Education attempted to respond to the plurality in Islam by adding Alevi religious tradition to the RCEK curriculum. This process is also interpreted as the inclination to turn from a "traditional teaching of Islam" – based on the book of Islam and on the dimensions of faith, worship and morality in Islam – to "teaching the popular version of Islam", which embraces current day manifestations of the religion (Kaymakcan, 2011). It's possible to say that the changing scope of RCEK courses to teaching living religious cultures resulted in the training of RCEK teachers outside of theology faculties, while also reorganizing the curriculum of teacher training programs to include subjects on the relationship of religion and culture.

Just like the responsibility of the preparation, adoption and implementation process of RCEK curriculum belongs to the authority of Ministry of Education, the RCEK teachers are trained by the state universities and appointed by the Ministry of Education. No outside religious group or institution plays any role in the education or appointment of these teachers.

Today, 21 of the 72 education faculties have the Teacher Training Program for Primary Education Religious Culture and Ethical Knowledge. Since private schools consist of only 2% of all primary and secondary level schools in Turkey, the large proportion of graduates of this program work in public schools.

The Appointment of Imams and RE Teachers

According to the 2011(Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2011b) figures, 95,554 of the total 106,256 employees of the Presidency are religious services officers that include Imams, preachers, teachers of Qur'an courses, experts in religious services and muftis. The Presidency is a powerful body in Turkish state organization. While the expenses of religious services, including the salaries of Imams, are covered by the secular state, it can be supposed that the Diyanet budgets have always been brought up as a matter of discussion.

Although there is an effort to raise the educational level of Imams, an important part of the religious functionaries is not university graduates. In a ten-year period between 1993 and 2003, a comparison of the Diyanet personnel's educational status shows that the number of employees of primary school graduates has decreased from 13% to 1%. However, the increase of four-year college graduates within this period is around 2.5%. In 2009, the proportion of university graduates –

including the postgraduates – increased to 17.5%; however, İHL and two-year program graduates are still at 78% (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2011a). An effort is underway to increase these levels with the help of distance education programs designed for this purpose.

Since the state is the employer for both the Imams and the RE teachers, the appointments are made according to the results of centralized examinations for civil servants. Additionally, the PRA requires a professional qualifying exam, along with a series of vocational training activities according to the type of service the appointees will fulfill. The teachers are appointed by the Ministry of Education and carry the status of teacher candidates for one year. They also take preparation courses.

Anyone who has graduated from a theology faculty can be appointed as an Imam in Turkey; and being a Muslim is not necessary to study theology. Therefore, there is no legal requirement for being Muslim to be appointed and serve as an Imam. However, we can talk about a tacit situation.

One of the current implementations in appointment of Imams is employing local clerics who have public appreciation and whose religious education is not from an official institution, but instead from local madrasas (although they are not officially recognized). The reason stemming from this decision revolves around their high-level dialogue with communities, especially where Diyanet personnel have deficiencies and they wish to benefit from their facilities in religious services.[13] This provision indicates an increasing level of awareness about the personnel who will serve in different regions who have different competencies. It is well known that graduates of theology faculties with single curriculum programs can be deficient in addressing the local challenges, both in terms of language, as well as sectarian differences.

The Status and the Public Recognition of the Imams and the RE Teachers, and the Role of the Mosque

The bureaucratic title of Imams in Turkey is *din görevlisi* (religious functionary), which implies a range of functions besides only officiating at worship. In addition to the word Imam, Muslims do generally use the term *hoca* (teacher), a title that carries more respect. It is possible to say that the Diyanet's religious functionaries have a respectable image in the society because of the respect given to all religious matters. However, Imams have reflected that people in the community see them more as a civil servant (Çakır & Bozan, 2005). People expect them to perform the necessary ritual functions and teach children the basis of Islam in summers. Community members may ask the Imam's opinion in simple matters of belief and practice, but if they disagree with his answers, they are likely to look for a more respected authority.

Religious functionaries are like other state employees. They receive their salaries from the state and they are subject to the same codes of conduct with which every other state employee has to comply. Standards of living of religious functionaries are comparable to other public servants. It is known that both the Imamate and the religious education teaching positions are preferred by the middle and lower income groups of the society, as may be in most other countries. According to research results, however, the Imams say that while they are satisfied with their professions, there is a high level of demand within the Imam system to shift to the other units of the state (Çakır & Bozan, 2005). According to a study (1999), the proportion of Imams who were satisfied with their profession is 63.3%, while partly satisfied 31.3%, and those who weren't satisfied is 4.7% (Cengiz, 1999, p.184). As for the religious education teachers in schools (2009), professional satisfaction levels are higher (65.9%) than the average of teachers in general (56.1%) (Kaymakcan, 2009).

The Imam is the most accessible source of Islamic knowledge for most Muslims in everyday practice, imparting his knowledge through

preaching, personal counseling and answering questions, guiding major rituals such as the hajj and sacrifice, and his personal example of the Muslim lifestyle. However, the official expectation does not include personal counseling, mediating in family conflicts, or similar pastoral activities that strengthen the bond between the congregations (cemaat) and the Imam and mosque. Diyanet activated "family offices" within each city to address religious and social counseling demands. While preachers are employed for periodical visits to prisons, visits to hospitals have been abolished.

13 These persons who have local religious education are required to get an exam to be appointed as official religious functionaries.

14 The 2000 results were confirmed in a 2006 survey: (Çarkoğlu & Toprak, 2006).

15 Cited by Gözaydın, from the report with the title "Din Görevlileri Hakkında Bilgiler" [Information on religious functionaries] (Gözaydın, 2009, pp. 216–217).

It is possible to say that, in general, the public sees the Diyanet authorities as the competent authority in religious matters. Research has found that the rate of those who find the religious edicts (fetwas) issued by the Diyanet authorities on religious issues reliable is 76%. The attitudes of Alevi-Bektashi groups toward these judgments may be expected to be lower than this (Taş, 2003). The findings of other research on the role of religion in Turkish society indicate that social acceptance of the Diyanet is high; 81.7% of all the respondents said that they were opposed to the idea of abolishing the Presidency of Religious Affairs and delegating the task of regulating religious affairs to non-state institutions (Çarkoğlu & Toprak, 2000, pp. 66–68).[14]

When Turkey ceased to discuss the existence of Diyanet, it became more possible to focus on its functioning. Diyanet commissioned a survey to its own members in eleven provinces at the end of the 1990's that captured the criticisms of Imams toward their institutions[15]:

- Do you approve of the Presidency's activities toward protection of our religious and national culture, and providing national unity and cohesion? Approve: 35.2%, Partly approve: 50.3%, Don't approve: 14.5%
- How are religious provisions presented by the Presidency according to the needs of the day? Well presented: 19.1%, Moderately presented: 33.3%, Badly presented: 41%, Not presented: 6.6%
- Do you find the publications of the Presidency that enlighten the society sufficient? Sufficient: 27.8%, Partly sufficient: 50.8%, Not sufficient: 21.4%
- Do you find the religious guidance services of the Presidency to the public sufficient? Sufficient: 12.8%, Partly sufficient: 48.5%, Not sufficient: 38.7%

The public opinion, including the Diyanet's own personnel, is that the Diyanet head office does not adequately meet the expectations of society in religious matters. The increase of the impact of the media and especially television – particularly recently popular private television channels that discuss issues, mostly speculative, concerning religion – causes inversions and disruptions to the religious knowledge and culture of the Turkish society. The Diyanet is put into a difficult situation when they take almost no part in these debates, as the Diyanet personnel themselves state (Çakır & Bozan, 2005). In this respect, being more active in the media, and additionally creating alternative media, is among the recommendations to Diyanet.

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