

# **Between Islam and Secularism: Religious Policies of Turkey in the Turkish Republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus**

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Since their independence, Turkish republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus have an entire place apart in the foreign cultural and religious policy of Turkey. Based on years of land surveys made during these past five years, this article is aimed at making a point on religious implications of Turkish policy in Turkish-speaking Central Asia and the Caucasus. Turkey's religious policy in the republics stemming from ex-USSR must be thought in triple dynamics: official Turkish State politics, Turkish brotherhood movements and "local," official or private components.

## **1) Islam and Politics in these Republics on the Eve of Independences**

It is suitable to recall, first of all, that all States in question are of Islamic culture: the major part of the population is Sunnite and the Hanafi school is dominant, in the same way as in Turkey. Nonetheless, in Azerbaijan, more than 60% of the population is Shiite. Historically, Islamic civili-

zation has been present in most of these states since at least the 10<sup>th</sup> century, except the Kazakh and Kirghiz steppes that were Islamized later.

All these States were created in the frame of soviet policy nationalities in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>1</sup> Islam's management in all these countries during the entire soviet period was the same, even though certain regions were touched more than others by the regime's anti-religious policy.<sup>2</sup> In all these States, during the soviet period a paradoxical situation was noted: officially, the State was basically against all Islam public expression. The Communist Party and press agencies, by perfectly submissive nature to the regime, actively fought against religiosity and against their influence practiced by Islam on consciences.<sup>3</sup> However, in fact, the situation was quite different. Certain local authorities, often active in certain religious practices, witnessed a lot of tolerance vis-à-vis religious practices in the community. There was numerous official administrators who, while denouncing religion and its hold on populations, respected themselves certain Islamic rites such as circumcision, funeral according to the mores or pilgrimages to the tombs of certain holy personalities. On the same way, in full soviet period, certain religious leaders succeeded, in spite of and under surveillance by official authorities, in continuing to form Islamic groups. Therefore, in Central Asia, Domla Hindustani formed several religious groups that since independences have retaken the torch of political Islam by creating associations and political Islamic-prone parties.<sup>4</sup> In

Azerbaijan, in Guba region, in the mid-70s, when religious repression was particularly fierce, a local mullah, Mehemed Hesên Shirkevi (1907-1976) was able to publish a *tefsir* (comment) of the Koran and train young disciples.<sup>5</sup> In the same manner, in southern Azerbaijan, especially in the village of Erkivan and in the vicinity of Massalli and Lenkeran, neighborhood mullahs kept dispensing Koranic courses and so trained young disciples who, in their turn, transmitted religious learning to their descendants. For example in Lenkeran city center, in southern Azerbaijan, a commemorative plate placed in 1994 by the local people pays tribute to a known religious personality in the region, Mirza Mehemed Huseyin Molla Hemidoglu (1878-1960). Indeed, there are a lot of several local religious cases that, in parallel to their official activities, contributed to the maintenance of Islamic knowledge and practice among citizen.

One of the first consequences of independences was to allow Islam to become visible in public space. Already started thanks to perestroika and its contributions to freedom of association in the political and cultural domain, the rehabilitation of Islam was going on. Upon declaring independences, the “new” powers, often constituted of old apparatchiks reconverted to nationalism, took a series of measures that favored renewal of Islam and its acceptance as a national culture component. Thus, most presidents of Central Asia and Azerbaijan made pilgrimage to Mecca, took the oath on the Koran and encouraged and participated in the reopening of several religious establishments that had been closed dur-

ing the soviet period. For example, in Azerbaijan, president Aliev, although had been serving the State during decades and mostly the KGB, made his hajj in Mecca in 1993 and was the main artisan of the restoration of several local pilgrimage sites such as Bibi Heybet or Mir Movsum Ata mausoleum in the suburbs of Baku. In Uzbekistan, the former communist party secretary, today president, Islam Karimov went to Bahauddin Nakchibend's tomb in Boukhara and brought an effective political and financial support to the restoration of the sanctuary. These measures taken by the new political authorities were not the only encouragements to Islamic revival in these countries.

Since opening of the borders, external influences strongly affected local Islam<sup>6</sup> and can be ranked according to three origins. First of all, it is convenient to remember that the first foreign influence was the result of soviet cooperation policy with the Muslim world. Indeed, in the mid 1970s, amid of the development of relations between the Soviet Union and the Muslim world, Moscow sent to certain Arab countries (mostly socialist regimes) young soviets to study Islam. For some of them, these stays were a crucial moment of making contact with Wahhabite ideas and Muslim Brothers' philosophy.<sup>7</sup> It is supposed that Wahhabism and other radical Islamist philosophies entered the Soviet Union by this means. However, main Islamist influences were clearer after independences, due to several phenomena. Firstly, it is necessary to underline the role of pilgrimage, the hajj to Mecca and Medina. During the soviet period,

every year, central authorities only authorized some fifteen or twenty pilgrims to travel to Saudi Arabia. Obviously, this figures have had a spectacular increase upon opening of the borders in the early 1990s. Some pilgrims, facing for the first time rigid Saudi Islam, were seduced by the Wahhabite discourse. In this aspect, the role of migrants originating from Central Asia, installed in holy cities after several decades, must be emphasized. There are in fact at least fifty thousand ethnic Uzbeks and as many Uighours in Saudi Arabia kingdom, which granted them political asylum, when they had to flee their countries because of soviet control strengthening over the entire Central Asia in the early 1930s. On the occasion of two missions realized pursuant to a study on Uzbeks in Saudi Arabia, it was possible to appreciate to what extent Uzbek community had taken part as of 1990 in the re-islamization of Central Asia.<sup>8</sup> Always under the renewing effort of the ties with the Muslim world, it appears that numerous students had chosen to go studying in Arab States, in Iran or Turkey. The contribution of these students to the re-islamization of all these republics was considerable. In some cases, they played the role of true missionaries sent by the States where they concluded their studies and were in charge of preaching the “true Islam.” Most Muslim countries close to Central Asia—Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan and Turkey—encouraged their respective missionaries to come to propagate their national view of Islam in these republics. Paradoxically, it is incontestably the secular of these States, Turkey, which had the biggest influ-

ence on the new Islam in each State of Central Asia. This paradoxical Turkish influence deserves a few clarifications.

## **2) Turkey and its Model in Political-Religious Matter**

The “Turkish model” concept is often, wrongly, seen as a political transition model, economic, political and religious, conceived by Turkey and designed to be exported to Turkish republics.<sup>9</sup> As a matter of fact, the situation was quite more complex in the early 1990s and it is incorrect to believe that Turkish diplomacy forged only one model for these States. It is undoubtedly necessary to remember what the context was at that time. With the Soviet Union dislocation, a new fear was installed in western chancelleries: The preoccupation was that Muslim populations from the former USSR, by reaction to anti-religious policy practiced by the soviet regime, drop into the trap of Islamist propaganda led by Iran and Saudi Arabia. Western experts (headed by Americans and Europeans) were persuaded that the communities in question would radicalize very quickly or at least, it was feared to see them seduced by the charms of Saudi or Iranian Islamism. It is in this context that western diplomats whispered to their colleagues and Turkish allies the idea of a “Turkish model”—where Islam, moderate and laic, is tightly controlled by military power—to be developed for these States and to be promoted as fast as possible. The reason by which Westerners were interested and reassured by the Turkish model was its choice for Kemalist secularism,

its great experience in market economy experience and the good integration of the countries to western liberal value system.

By the way, the developments of this “Turkish model” have evolved differently. Whereas Turkey has been chosen by its peers to export secularism in Central Asia, Ankara’s policy participated in the dissemination of a quite different kind of private Islam in these republics. The question is to find out why secular Turkey deployed so many means to provide Islamic services in these countries. In order to answer this question, it is appropriate to develop two points that seem fundamental to me: missionary activities of Turkish Islamist movements and the reaction of the Turkish State in view of this competition.

### **3) Turkish Missionaries in the Conquest of Central Asia and the Caucasus**

I use the term missionary to designate all Turkish Islamist movements that have been active in the Turkish-speaking world since the end of the Soviet Union. The use of this word seems to me to be in accordance with the reality that I observe in the field after ten years. Indeed, conversations with members of different movements, which will be approached here, have allowed me to reach the conclusion that every militant that is expatriated feels to be granted with a mission, i.e. disseminating Islam, or more precisely the Islamic conception of its origin community or of his brother-

hood in these virgin countries.<sup>10</sup> These movements are comparable, all proportions kept, to Christian missionary movements that set of at their time to conquest Africa or America. In our case, Central Asia and the Caucasus represent these new preaching countries, virgin of every influence, which must be conquered before it is too late, before other movements, Muslim or Christian, come and convert these “survivors of communism.” Of course, we cannot go into details of all missionary activities of Turkish Islamists. We will only mention their most visible expressions, deployed by the most influent movements, and especially the *nurcu*.

It is perhaps appropriate to recall what the *nurcu* movement represents in Turkey, in order to better locate the action of these heirs in the educational domain in the Turkish world since 1991. As everyone knows, Sait Nursi is the founder and thinking master of a vast religious community in Turkey, the *nurcu*. Born in 1873 in Eastern Turkey where he received classical madrasa education marked by *naqchibandi*<sup>11</sup> philosophy, he travels all over the country to lead a combat that is dear to him: save the faith in strong erosion in a world in full mutation. Strictly watched by the young Kemalist republic, he recovers certain freedom of action with the arrival of the conservative right to power in 1946. He is the author of exegetics of the Koran of more than 6,000 pages, *Risale i Nur*. The *Risale i Nur* were drafted largely in prison and their original diffusion was at first made in clandestinity. His first and closest disciples



scattered “his” good word and formed a very large party of *nurcu* movement militants.

Upon Nursi’s death in 1960, the movement split into several branches,<sup>12</sup> one of which is run by the not less famous Fethullah Gülen. These various groups and *nurcu* inheriting currents took different directions. Some privileged education (as is the case with Gülen), others publishing (such has *Yeni Asya* house specialized in publishing prestigious books on the movement founding master). In all cases, teaching of *nurcu* ideas is done within small circles created by the movement members, in school or even in university environment. The movement is very hierarchical and each bears a specific name: the first degree is to be *Talebe* (pupil), then to be *Abi* (eldest brother), to finally reach the status of *Varis* (heir). However, one of the *nurcu* groups is clearly distinguished from the others in both his organization and his expansion tactics and methods outwards. It is Fethullah Gülen move, and his disciples, the *fethullahçi*.

Born in 1938 in Erzurum, in Eastern Turkey, Fethullah Gülen too, like Sait Nursi, received classical, informal religious education, in the sense that at this time there were no official religious educational establishments. The young Gülen however begins his career in full legality, in capacity as preacher, or *vaiz*, at the service of the State. After having officiated for a certain time in Edirne, he was transferred to a small mosque of the suburbs of Izmir, in Kestanepazari in the early 1960s.

Like Nursi, he developed his own thought of his Islam vision, trained disciples, created a real religious movement, neo-*nurcu*, distinct from the one founded by the master. Fethullah Gülen's movement is born out of questionings on new educational methods and his power grows thanks to the accomplishment and success of educational projects. Indeed, the birth of the movement is confounded with the creation of an educational foundation gathering students' and teachers' relatives, in order to allow children to reach better results at school. It is materialized by the organization by Fethullah and his disciples of courses and activities for scholars, under auspice of this foundation and his activities at Kestanepazari mosque. These activities were consisting first of vacation camps, which Gülen organizes during several successive summers between 1968 and 1972, for taking care of children and youths during summer months. Generally, the students are devoted to intellectual activities, such as reading of the Koran and Sait Nursi's works, but also learning a series of knowledge allowing them later to integrate and progress in the midst of the organization implemented by Gülen. The first "vacationers" trained by Gülen later became personalities among the most influential of the movement and hold important positions in the structures composing the community (*cemaat*), using its term to introduce herself. Among the main bodies of *fethullahci* movement, we quote newspapers and magazines *Zaman*, *Sizinti*, *Fountain*, *Bizim Aile*, and *Aksiyon*, *Samanyolu* television network and more recently the foundation of writers

and journalists of Turkey, *Turkiye Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı*.<sup>13</sup>

Since its beginnings, the movement has been hierarchically organized. Similar branches to Kestanepazari community are created in other cities in the country. Influenced by Gülen's sermons or preaching, pronounced every Friday at the time of the weekly prayer, numerous and simple faithful, seduced by the character's charisma, go about disseminating his ideas and thus take part in the beginning of a truly distinct religious movement, with an original strong educational system. The "educational" foundations, *fethullahci*, initiated throughout the country by personalities marked by Gülen's *vaaz*, his books or further by the magazine *Sizinti* of which he is the inspirer or editor were increased. The role of the latter, founded by those close to Gülen and the movement, were crucial in the diffusion of his ideas.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, the great strength of movement is to have chosen to recruit among pupils and young students, by providing them with effective support in their studies. This support goes through an assistance structure, gathering associations and small merchants close to the movement. It may make available to most impoverished students a collective apartment, called houses of light or *yþýk evleri*, where often a responsible person is appointed *Abi*, initiated in the ideas of the movement and in charge of transmitting them to all those who share the apartment with him. Materially, the role of the *Abi* consists of teaching the students how to pray, read the Koran and the works of Sait Nursi and Fethullah

Gülen, but also each student is conducted to recruiting of new faithful in their original environment.

The 1980s constitute unquestionably a turnaround in Turkish economic, social and political history. January 1980 marks the end of the economic dirigisme inherited from the Kemalist period and a certain passage to market economy. Economic opening allows the beginning or at least the reinforcement of the private sector and with it of the associative environment close to brotherhoods and religious movements. Gülen's movement, and also other movements, at the same way as the *Naqchibandi* took advantage of this context to develop their associations all over the country. In the late 80s, enterprises, institutions and also private schools, university complexes are inspired by Gülen's and his friends' movement and are already counted by tens in the country. The 1980s can be considered as those of movement influence throughout the country, and the next decade was characterized by its expansion, far beyond Turkish borders, mainly in countries of the former socialist block.

The first *fethullahci* missionaries in Central Asia and the Caucasus arrive even before the declarations of independence, thanks to the establishment of intensive cultural ties between Turkey and Gorbachev's Soviet Union. At this point, since 1989, the Perestroika enabled closer contacts between the two countries—these contact opportunities being seized without hesitation by Gülen's movement businessmen. In fact, initially ties are built by entrepreneurs in the economic sphere before expanding in other domains, mostly educa-

tional. A *fethullahci* businessmen association, such as *Aksaray*, *Nigde* or *Izmir* decided to develop its activities in a precise region, such as for example, Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan. Once economic ties are solidly established and the confidence of local political authorities is ensured, the businessmen help teachers so that high schools may be implemented. This informal collaboration between cities and associations worked well and allowed springing up tens of schools in Eurasia. Teacher recruitment for these schools follows co-option logic. A teacher willing to be expatriated asks for a recommendation from the management of an educational enterprise that manages schools abroad.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike it is commonly considered, the private schools controlled by the group are not madrasas where the Koran and Nursi and Gülen religious philosophies are taught. They are “ordinary” high schools, but that are distinguished from local establishments by substantial human and material investment to ensure university and professional achievement of graduates. Initially without charge, schooling has gradually become payable. Mathematics, physics, biology, computing, English and economics are the most taught disciplines in these establishments, often of scientific character. However, although being without any religious expression, education contains some ethics and a certain philosophy, being the reflect, for example, of the nature at the same time conservative and modernist of the *fethullahci* movement. At first, the daily attitude of the teachers—characterized by hygiene, a good presentation, respect for hierarchy, politeness, cour-

tesy, sobriety—has unfailingly had real influence on their local Kazakh, Azeri, Turkmen etc. colleagues. Furthermore, outside school, when it is possible, in the dormitories and university complexes, the most permeable students are often identified, selected and their close tutors give them a religious instruction totally absent in school. Finally, we also must mention that in certain cities in Central Asia and the Caucasus, *cay sohbetleri* (collation-debate) were also organized, and have made the fortune and identity of the movement. They are private meetings, realized at initiative of every one, were a movement member read passages from the *Risale i Nur* by explaining them to the guests. However, two mitigations must be brought to this phenomenon: in Central Asia, still today, these theological debates only gather expatriated Turks. Very few “locals” are active in the movement, open proselytizing being dangerous to educational activities of the *cemaat*, and responsible persons behave in a very prudent manner. On the other hand, the situation is different in Azerbaijan. In this country, though the majority is Shiite, which therefore makes logically the task of *fethullahci* more difficult, who are very Sunnite, Fethullah Gülen’s missionaries have been successful where they failed in Central Asia, namely on-site training of local movement representatives. Thus, there are numerous Azeris *fethullahci* who attend these theological debate soirées; indeed some are organized by Azeris without any Turkish attendance, which is no longer necessary, as the first missionaries have accomplished their mission of local staff

training. Several reasons explain this better result in Azerbaijan than in Central Asia republics. Although remaining till now the most influential, Fethullah Gülen's disciples have not the monopole of Turkish missionary activities in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Different brotherhood groups or belonging to brotherhoods have deployed their activities in these countries and constitute competition to *fethullahci*.

Under a more or less organized form, Turkish *Naqchibandi* tried to settle in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Central Asia is more particularly interesting to them because it is there, near Boukhara, where the tomb of the order founder is located, Bahauddin Nakchibend. However, it is in Azerbaijan where we find the most powerful Turkish *naqchibandi* order. They are the disciples of Aziz Mahmut Hudayi, mystical 16<sup>th</sup> century *naqchibandi*, whose tomb is located at Uskudar in Istanbul.<sup>16</sup> Around this tomb a large socio-educational complex is erected, whose activities range from assistance to the most impoverished ones and a religious course for everybody. One of the leaders most marked by Aziz Mahmut Huday's teaching, Osman Nuri Topba<sup>o</sup> interests us more specially.

By his initiative, a charitable foundation *Azerbaycan Gençlerine Yardım Fondu* (Assistance Fund to Azerbaijan Youth) was born in 1994. Under the moral and spiritual authority of Osman Nuri Topba<sup>o</sup>, the Bakou-based foundation developed charitable and educational activities for Karabakh war refugees. However, in parallel, on its sites in Bakou and in province, it organizes in full legality English,

computing and Koranic reading courses,<sup>17</sup> given by teachers graduated in Turkey and increasingly by Azeris graduated in Turkey. Koranic reading, Muslim history courses and other teaching are accessible to all young people who attend this center. Courses are free because the association is granted by important financial assistance from Turkish or Turkish-European sponsors. The library allows, on the other hand, young and less young people to have access to religious literature coming from Turkey. The movement magazine published in Turkey, *Altinoluk*, is commonly available, Osman Nuri Topba<sup>o</sup>'s books as well as works by other religious movements, such as for example the works of Sait Nursi or even by certain Arab islamist thinkers like Seyyid Qutb.

Recently, the association launched a magazine in Russian aimed at readers from the former USSR, considering that most of them many speak Russian much better than the national Turkish language. *Zolotorodnik* (the golden source) retakes in fact articles published in Turkish in *Altinoluk* and translates them into Russian. At last, another magazine, for children, *Sebnem*, hold an important place on the library shelves. The association's activities are also as important in the province as in the capital, especially in the north of the country reputed to be more marked by Sunnism than Shiism. In the cities of Sheki, Zaqatala, Agdash and Goytchay the foundation owns and manages madrasa or Koranic reading centers. Regularly, the movement leader, Osman Nuri Topba<sup>o</sup>, comes to the country and encourages his disci-



ples to pursue their educational activities. The knowledge transmission means are therefore open, classical, under the form of a course in classrooms, registered at the Ministry of Justice and State Committee for religious affairs. We note that this is not the case of the groups *nurcu* or *fet-hullahci*, which under cover of secular education in high schools spread their respective leaders' thinking without being "controlled" by political and religious authorities. Likewise, in certain cases and according to their method and tactics, the association makes an agreement with Azeris public establishments to manage certain university branches in province. This is especially the case of the very Shiite Islamic university in Bakou whose branch in Zaqatala is managed by this foundation.

A small minority, but nevertheless active, the last and *naqchibandi* group of Mahmut Ustaosmanoglu must be mentioned. His community regularly meets around Ismail Aga mosque in Fatih-Carsamba on the suburbs of Istanbul. In Central Asia and the Caucasus, the movement has sent emissaries upon the collapse of the Soviet Union to develop contacts with local *naqchibandi* groups. Limited in Central Asia due to the distrust of Uzbek authorities, specially, the activity of the movement is remarkable in Azerbaijan and in Georgia (mainly in Adzharia), essentially in Sunnite regions. Until 1997, a date on which the army in Turkey brought a new restriction on religious activities of brotherhoods, the movement regularly received students from the Caucasus and Central Asia and trained them at its madrasa,

located on the premises of Ismail Aga mosque. Since the warning of the army in 1997, the madrasa in question works slowly, but Caucasians and Central Asians trained in its ranks continue to spread master Mahmut's message in certain regions of the former USSR.<sup>18</sup>

Suleyman Hilim Tunahan, born in 1888 in Bulgaria and deceased in 1959 in Turkey, is another great Turkish religious leader whose heirs have settled in Central Asia and the Caucasus as of the early 1990s. His main concern regards Koranic reading or more precisely training children so that they will be able to read the Koran.<sup>19</sup> By all means, the slogan for this movement was "everything for the Koran, everything by the Koran." It is estimated that disciples of this movement tried to settle in Azerbaijan in the early 1990s. After a few months of activities, seeing that the country was not a favorable place for their mission, *suleymanci* disciples stopped their youth supporting work or returned to Turkey. However, at the present time, a small *suleymanci* presence persists, especially in the midst of Turkish students coming to study in Bakou. This presence is however limited, personal and informal, at least compared to other Turkish movements. However, in Spring 2004, an educational center linked to this movement started again its activities in Bakou, in a center where Tunahan's disciples taught young Azeri Koranic reading.<sup>20</sup>

Several factors contribute to the quick, solid implementation of Turkish Islamist movements in the former USSR. We must first mention the relative linguistic relationship be-

tween Turkish and the main languages of Muslim former USSR (Uzbek, Kirghiz, Turkmen, Kazakh and Azeri) which makes Turkish expatriation in these countries easier. We might also suggest, as an explanatory criterion, cultural closeness between Turks and these above mentioned Turkish-speaking peoples, but it seems to me that the settlement of Turkish islamists is made easier mostly by the strong resemblance linking Anatolian Turks' Islam to the one of Turkish-speaking people in Central Asia. In fact, in this huge region extending from the Chinese border to the Balkans, there is the same type of Islam, very marked by brotherhoods and mysticism. The *naqchibandiyya*, this brotherhood born in Boukhara region counts devotees all over Eurasia and Turkish Islam, to a great extent marked by this brotherhood. We must further recall that in its expansion in Central Asia and the Caucasus, Turkish Islam (the movements as a whole) was supported by the State, and for at least two reasons. The first one refers to a sort of implicit encouragement to the settlement of certain movements, because their presence indirectly favors the implementation of some movements, for the reason why their presence is helping indirectly the implantation of the Turkish language and culture in these countries. For example, in the case of Fethullah Gülen's disciples, State support was tacit: openly distrustful and skeptical *vis-à-vis* the movement leader and his ideology in Turkey, the State indirectly strained Gülen's disciples to extend their school network to Central Asia where henceforth, thanks to Gülen's schools, Turkish cul-

ture is exported to all the steppes. But mostly, the Turkish State itself conceived an Islamic policy and exported a religious ideology that it now appropriate to explain.

#### **4) Official Policy in the Turkish-Speaking World: between Islam and Secularism**

It is not quite exaggerated to say that Turkey's foreign policy in religious matter is inspired by reaction. I mean that Ankara, pushed in this direction by Westerners, conceived an Islamic and Kemalist policy for the States by reaction to the strong dynamism of private Turkish religious movements and by fear that other countries or other Islamist movements of the Arab world or Iran will impose their conception of Islam. Chronologically, after the beginnings of intensive missionary activity by private movements, the Turkish State implemented spreading a moderate Islam and the promotion of Kemalism principles in the new republics.

One of the consequences of independences in all these countries was the keen interest in building new mosques or the restoration of the ones that had been closed or transformed into warehouses during the soviet period. The main mosques funded by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs or *Diyanet Vakfı* are the ones of Achkhabad in Turkmenistan, of Kochkor Ata in Kirghizstan. We will equally mention those of Nakhitchevan bearing the name of Kazim Karabekir or further the one of the Karabakh war martyr monument in Bakou. All these mosques imitate an ottoman

style and are run by an imam coming from Turkey. The mosques built in Azerbaijan take into account the Shiite character of Azeri Islam. So, for Shiites to feel at home, The Turkish management of the mosque made available to the faithful the famous *muhurs*, clay stones from holy Shiite cities such as Mashad, Kerbala or Qom and on which the faithful place their forehead during the prayer. Above all Shiite, this practice is usually totally absent in Sunnite mosques.

Spreading an abundant religious literature constitutes the other face of official Islamic presence of the *Diyanet*. In all the republics, this literature is displayed at mosque exit or in the main bookstores. Free, it intends mostly instill to the faithful prayer rules, Islamic morals. Thus, part of the literature insists on the misdeeds of alcoholism or drug usage, which put forth increasingly problems in these countries.

The creation of several Islamic educational establishments (theology colleges and high schools) undoubtedly constitutes the most important religious action, which has more consequence on Islamic revival in these countries. We give some examples of religious establishments opened by the *Diyanet*. In Turkmenistan, Kirghizstan and Azerbaijan theology colleges were created, where teaching is conceived on University of Marmara theology college model. Regularly, these students are sent to Turkey for long-term courses or training. Likewise, certain students are making all their studies in Turkey. These establishments try to guide themselves today towards general and orientalist teaching, and no longer solely theological, by proposing language and

eastern civilization courses, in order to allow graduates to find jobs more easily once their studies are completed.<sup>21</sup> Because the fundamental problem of these colleges is to train religious staffs in the countries where there really no new openings in “religious” professions. By training specialists of Arab-Muslim countries and reinforcing the ranks of Arab and Persian ranks, some students are enabled to find a job in enterprises, NGO or even diplomatic services of these countries.

Another initiative taken by the Turkish State via *Diyanet* is to be mentioned. It is setting up a Eurasian Religious Council (*Avrasya Dini Surasi*) that gathers on average every two years the major official religious personalities of Turkey, Caucasus States, Central Asia, the Russian Federation and certain Balkan States.<sup>22</sup> Meeting for the first time in Ankara in 1995, the council next met in Istanbul, Sarajevo then in the Turkish part of Cyprus. This council seeks to develop Islamic cooperation among all these States and go towards certain harmonization in religious practice and in the celebration of great Islamic holidays. Actually, organized under the auspices of Turkey, this council aims at establishing Turkish hegemony on the entire Caucasus, Central Asia indeed even the Balkans. More than religious, this *Diyanet* policy meets national political considerations originating from Turkish official authorities.

The second phase of the Turkish State reaction in view of the missionary movement offensive was Kemalist and secularist. In fact, noting the strong settlement of Turkish

Islamist movements in these countries and their strong popularity, the Turkish State implemented a Kemalism principle promotion policy. This policy had two positions.

By way of educational cooperation policy, Turkish school establishments were implemented in several Turkish-speaking republics. High schools, universities and colleges were created in several cities. Thus, there is a Turkish university in Kazakhstan, another one in Kirghizstan. Turkish high schools attached to the national Ministry of Education were implemented in Bakou, Bichkek, Almaty and Achkhabad. Educational programs of these establishments give great importance to Kemalism teaching and its secularism principles.<sup>23</sup>

More specifically conceived to spread Kemalism principles and ideas, Atatürk centers that Turkey implemented in Kirghizstan and Azerbaijan have had more mitigated results. Indeed, these centers produce in local languages a important literature on Atatürk and Kemalism, but they are often centers disconnected from reality, cut off from society and occasionally serving to organize meetings and conferences on modern Turkey's founder.

## **5) Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, three fundamental remarks can be made. First of all, Kemalist republican Turkey, compared to Turkish-speaking republics stemming from the former USSR seems to us to be quite more Islamic. In fact, the secu-

larization policy implemented among USSR Muslims was much more radical than the one of Mustapha Kemal in Turkey. After independences, the most Muslim character of the population and even of Turkey's institutions is undeniable in relation in relation to what prevails in Central Asia. For this reason, Turkey in principle had no need to export secularism, already strongly present in the countries that it wanted to secularize.

Actually, the enthusiasm of Turkey to propose an Islamic cooperation to these countries was based in 1991 on a myth, the danger of Iranian and Saudi Islamist movements. From the early 1990s, Ankara implemented a multi-factorial policy, in order to, among others, prevent the new republics, originated from the former USSR from becoming the Shiite or Wahhabite militant activism theater. Actually, these States demonstrated few penchants to being tempted by Islamisms originating from these two countries. This Turkish fear comprises also the Turkish Islamist movements which went to the conquest of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Fearing a harmful influence on its foreign policy, Turkish diplomacy was eager to send religious employees to all these republics to counteract the competition of Islamists, which is a constant of Turkish diplomacy: not to let its citizens acting alone abroad. At the same way as in Europe, where Turkey's Islamic policy enters into open competition with private Turkish private movements among Turkish immigrants, we in Central Asia watch at an equivalent competition, though less vehement than in Europe.



Thus, to Turkish diplomacy, religion and Islamic cooperation are perceived as tools serving an implementation method of Turkish policy in these countries. In other words, we assist to a religious cooperation instrumentation, on the same way as there is a Turkish Islamist movement instrumentation by Ankara, so that the force and dynamism of *nurcu*, *fethullahci* organizations and others will be useful to Turkey's official policy in these States. The ultimate target for the Turkish State is not so much to contribute to Islamic awakening in these countries, but to accompany it in order to prevent it from becoming radical and hostile to Turkey, and mostly to ensure that these spaces and societies in reformulation enter fully into a true Turkish zone of influence intended by Turkish policy and that would extend from the Balkans to Central Asian steppes.

## Notes

1. Olivier Roy, *La nouvelle Asie centrale ou la fabrication des nations*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1997, 326 p.
2. On the situation of Islam during the soviet period see the classical study by Alexandre Bennigsen, *Les Musulmans oubliés, l'Islam en Union soviétique*, Paris, 1981. For a more recent and pertinent analysis of soviet policy *vis-à-vis* Islam see Daniel Brower, *Turkistan and the Fate of the Russian Empire*, London-New York: Routledge Curzon, 2000. More specifically devoted to the fights led by the Soviet State against Islam, see the work by Soshanna Keller, *To Moscow, Not Mecca. The Soviet Campaign against Islam in Central Asia, 1917-1941*, Westport, CN-London: Praeger, 2001.
3. Soshana Keller, *op. cit.*

4. See the works by Bakhtiyar Babadjanov and Muzaffar Kamilov, "Muhammadjan Hindustani (1892-1989) and the Beginning of the 'Great Schism' Among the Muslims of Uzbekistan," Stéphane Dudoignon, Hisao Komatsu, *Islam and Politics in Russia and Central Asia (Early Eighteenth to late Twentieth Centuries)*, London-New York, Bahrain, Kegan Paul, 2001.
5. Interview with Naile Suleymanova, theologian and instructor of Khazar University, Bakou, June 2004.
6. Habiba Fathi, "La naissance de la coopération islamique en Asie centrale," *Recherches internationales*, n. 46, 1996, p. 65-80.
7. Bakhtiyar Babadjanov, Muzaffar Kamilov, *op. cit.*
8. Bayram Balci, "The Role of the Pilgrimage in the Establishment of Relations Between Uzbekistan and the Uzbek Community of Saudi Arabia," *Central Eurasian Studies Review*, v. 2, n. 3, 2003.
9. Gareth Winrow, *Turkey in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, London, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1994, 53 p.
10. On the missionary spirit of Turkish islamists in Central Asia see Bayram Balci, *Missionnaires de l'islam en Asie centrale, les écoles turques de Fethullah Gülen*, Paris, Maisonneuve et Larose, 2002.
11. On Sait Nursi movement, see: Safa Mürsel, *Siyasi Düşünce Tarihi İbryûnda Bediüzzaman Saïd Nursi* (Said Nursi in the shadow of political ideal history), Istanbul, Yeni Asya Yayınları, 237 p. One can also refer to the very instructive and most critical contribution by ʿarif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey, The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1989, 267 p.
12. On the different religious groups stemming from the movement founded by Sait Nursi, see Hasan Hüseyin Ongun, "Başlangıçtan Günümüze Said Nursi ve Nurculuk Hareketi" (The nurcu movement and Said Nursi: from his its beginning until today), *Yeni Türkiye*, n. 45, Nisan 1997, p. 57-71.
13. See the foundation's website, [www.yazarlarvakfi.org.tr](http://www.yazarlarvakfi.org.tr)
14. Hakan Yavuz, "Towards an Islamic Liberalism? The Nurcu Movement and Fethullah Gülen," *Middle East Journal*, v. 53, n. 4, Autumn 1999, p. 584-605.

15. On the implementation, operation of the ideology conveyed by the schools, see the studies of Bayram Balci, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Islam and Turkism," *Religion, State and Society*, v. 31, n. 2, p. 151-78.
16. On the movement religious philosophy, see: Kâmil Yılmaz, *Azîz Mahmûd Hüdâyî, Hayatı, Eserleri, Tarikatı* (Azîz Mahmûd Hüdâyî, his life, his works, his brotherhood), Ankara, Erkam Yayinlari, 1999, 325 p.
17. Conversation with Nedim Kaya, director of the foundation that represents in Azerbaijan nakchibendinaqchibandi movement of Topba°, Bakou, January 2004.
18. Conversation with Medet Bala, secretary-general of Hüdâyî Vakfı, Istanbul, September 2003.
19. On Süleyman Tunahan movement, see Birol Caymaz, *Les mouvements islamiques turcs à Paris*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2002, 282 p.
20. Conversation with Abdullah Banly, responsible for the association, Bakou, April 2004.
21. Conversation with Ahmet Polad, dean of the college of theology at the State University of Bakou, January 2004.
22. On current operation of the Diyanet, see its official website, [www.diyamet.gov.tr](http://www.diyamet.gov.tr)
23. Sađlam Mehmet, "Türk Cumhuriyetleri ile Eđitim İlişkilerimiz" (Our educational exchanges with Turkish republics), *Yeni Türkiye*, n. 14, 1997, p. 683-84.