



# Middle East Mediterranean

*An ELIAMEP Report*

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# Middle East Mediterranean

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**Middle East Mediterranean (MEM)** is an unbiased bimonthly report of the *ELIAMEP Middle East Research Project*, focusing largely on geopolitical and economic developments, debates as well as policies, affecting the future of the Middle East. Having a global outlook MEM hosts analyses, commentaries, interviews and news, conducting research in the fields of politics, economics and culture in the Middle East and adjacent areas, such as the Eastern Mediterranean.

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## Editor's Note

Nowadays the politics and society of Turkey face a major challenge, that of adjustment to the new economic landscape as a result of the economic booming of Turkey. Witnessing an unprecedented degree of economic development, Turkey needs to address and balance economic growth with social and political reforms encompassing almost every single human power at its disposal. Thus the social role of communities and the observance of human rights in Turkey acquire a major role.

In this context for the first time in less than a century the demarginalization of non-Muslim communities of Turkey poses a great challenge to the AKP government in their effort to proceed smoothly with the reforms that the society needs. This liberal approach of domestic social and political aspects of life must be implemented by the AKP government at a time that Erdogan seeks to democratize and re-Islamize Turkey's society. The two processes seem to be quite contradictory but the AKP leadership seems to have been used to this kind of dual approach of politics and policies.

So far this dual policy has worked out but major points rise as far as the future of the AKP domestic policy is concerned. Perhaps the major question is whether the dual policy of democratization and re-Islamization could last and if so for how long. Interestingly enough this process finds Turkey and its citizens at a crossroads of history. Turkey's AKP government is challenged to select the right path which could also mark the involvement and creative contribution of every citizen and community, Muslim or not, of Turkey in its economic, social and political renaissance.

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## Analyses

### Turkey's Test with Democracy

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*The Gezi events that escalated with the plan to demolish part of Taksim's Gezi Park infuriated non-partisan millions concerned not only about environmental policies but also AKP's, namely Erdoğan's, increasing drift to a one-man show leadership. The question is whether the AKP can live up to the expectations and own up to its wrongdoings as well as achievements or not.*

The recent mass protests in Turkey brought numerous comparisons between Tahrir and Taksim. Just to make things clear Taksim is not Tahrir and Erdoğan is no Mubarak or Assad. What is taking place in Turkey is definitely not the Turkish spring since the first call for justice and political change was delivered in 2002 with the landslide victory of the AKP. After all, it was the democratically elected AKP that introduced a more advanced understanding, application of democracy freeing Turkish politics from the grip of military tutelage and boosted the economy. Perhaps, Turkey's EU bid and AKP's determination in the accession process have been key motivators in this change which is occasionally dubbed as 'new Turkey'. Though this does not mean that everything regards to human rights, freedoms and participatory democracy have

been picture perfect. The Arab Spring was about having a say, Arab honor, taking political participation in autocratic regimes, whereas in Turkey there is already a working democracy, though with some visible flaws regarding pluralism and freedom of speech. Turkey as a fairly young republic and an immature democracy is still outgrowing former conflicts and find a solution to identity debates. Imagine an infant barely trying to walk, can he run before walking properly? Probably not. This is the case with Turkey as democracy does not come in full package at a glimpse of a second, it needs to be earned, appreciated and this learning process takes time. For that reason, there is no need to be hopeless but a cautious optimism is vital. Turkey, as a young nation with fairly large number of youth population is still absorbing the meaning and the way to achieve a

more consolidated democracy. The unprecedented Gezi Park protest is indeed a manifestation of a need to create a more open society, which is open to criticism, empathy and tolerance.

The late events that escalated with the plan to demolish part of Taksim's Gezi Park infuriated non-partisan millions concerned not only about environmental policies but also AKP's, namely Erdoğan's, increasing drift to a one-man show leadership not seeking consent on major issues. Gezi Park decision without asking public consent and the excessive use of force by the police was practically the ultimate rupture of a series of events that took place in the last few years such as Erdoğan's demand of an ideal citizen, increasing self-censorship in media and academia, urging women to have at least three children, discussions on abortion, increasing violence against women and the lack of rule of law, the demolish of historical Emek theatre, finding excuses to be absent from national holiday celebrations, unresolved case of the Hrant Dink murder and Uludere bombing, turbulence in foreign policy, sectarian perceptions, bombing in Hatay, recent Kurdish opening, the third Bosphorus bridge, third international airport decision in İstanbul and most recently passing of the law on the sale of alcohol. Perhaps most notably, in his last term Erdoğan has chosen a more

polarizing language that occasionally devalued those with a different lifestyle than the administration and discrediting the major part of the early republican period. It has been a showdown between the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic when one is glorified and the other devalued. Such polarization brought Turkey's major identity fault lines back to the surface with Gezi Park events generating a sense of humiliation amongst urbanized masses. Although not all of the issues mentioned relate to the identity discussion, it was as if the secular and liberal urban groups of the society were pushed to the sidelines, unheard and suffocating in an ever conservative policies together with the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. Erdoğan's attitude of 'my way or the highway' may have had huge impact on this suffocation. There was a build up of emotions, a well grounded feeling of threat to symbols of own identity, almost like a feeling of being the step-child amongst groups that do not vote or support the AKP. These non-violent protestors and many silent observers were saying 'Enough with meddling in my personal life and humiliating my values!'. In Turkey, where the state has the utmost importance and the leader considered as the paternal authority, Erdoğan's persistent discourse to create an ideal pious citizen has almost created a rebellion against the father figure. A large part

of the protestors took the streets just because they were fed up with being told how they should live. Interesting enough, the AKP came to power challenging the former Kemalist system generating 'ideal citizens', and in only in a matter of a decade it ended up following suit.

Which started out as an environmentalist protest became a nationwide anti-AKP rally following the brutal police repression of the non-violent protestors in Gezi Park on May 31<sup>st</sup>. Excessive use of force by the security forces with tear gasses, water cannons, plastic bullets, media self-censorship in broadcasting the events and Erdoğan's continuous derogatory language calling all protestors drunkards, marginal and 'çapulcular' (looters/marauders) mobilized more crowds through social media. Soon enough, the mostly secular, urban and middle-class took the streets in İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir, Adana, Hatay and several more cities to demonstrate peacefully taking pride in the word 'çapulcu'. Two weeks after the protests, as the government and a representative group of Gezi Park reached an agreement over freezing the construction project and evacuating the park things started to calm down. The peace offer and dialogue of the AKP was quite a daring step to find a common ground. However in a matter of 24 hours an unprecedented wave of

police violence swept İstanbul deepening the cultural fault lines.

Without any surprise, traditional Kemalist political groups, the radical left, groups of the old establishment tried to hijack the unexpected Gezi Park protests giving way to some vandalism and unacceptable defamatory language against Erdoğan. However oversimplification of the Gezi Park as another 'foreign plot' or 'strike back of the old state' is simply turning a blind eye to what is actually taking place on the societal level. Former anxieties such as 'the big game to stop Turkey from being successful' should have no part in analyzing Gezi Park as it resonates nothing but the Sevres syndrome. Rather think of a pressure cooker and how it needs to let the steam off. The Gezi Park events have turned out to be the last straw to let the societal steam off. It is as if the sidelined factions of the society have found a chance to ventilate instead of a mass explosion. In this sense, Gezi Park protests can be managed by the government to find new ways to incorporate the 'others', listen to their just grievances. When the children of the state rebel against the paternal authority figure it is not too bad at all. In fact, this symbolizes that the AKP has actually achieved in establishing a new framework for Turkish democracy, one that this new generation of youth were accustomed to. This is probably what

the AKP calls the new Turkey, one that is demanding more because of realizing that it can happen.

The question is whether the AKP can live up to the expectations and own up to its wrongdoings as well as achievements or not. Perhaps, Prime Minister Erdoğan needs an emergency reassessment of his polarizing, arrogant language, discover tolerance to communicate with the other 50% of the society who have not voted for his party and offer a breathing space that does not force his own moral principles on an ideal citizen. Yet, there are very little signs of improvement in language considering that the Premier is using a derogatory language to start a witch-hunt against protestors through falsified arguments that is igniting pious masses. More importantly, as the public conscience was hurt due to the disproportionate use of force throughout the police crackdown of the protests and human rights violations rule of law should immediately be applied to recover this trauma. All in all, this is a challenge for Turkey, Turkish democracy, AKP and Erdoğan. Although the Gezi protestors can also be criticized up to a point for letting some radical groups hijack the protests on several occasions, it is foremost up to Erdoğan and his government to take charge and solve this conflict, eliminate the threats to lifestyles –whether they are perceived or ture-, apply the rule of

law not only for the future of Turkey but also for the sake of all the advancements that the current government has introduced in the last decade. Conspiracy theories such as ‘foreign plot against Turkey’ and blaming the ‘interest lobby’ will only make matters worse, increasing societal frustration and diminishing trust to the state. Indeed, Erdoğan’s handling and evaluating the protests will determine the direction of Turkey’s historical grievances on identity. Turkey and the AKP administration should investigate the reasons behind this mass discontent and find out what the new demands of the new Turkey are in terms of freedoms. On the other hand that are massive lessons to be learned for the opposition parties suggesting a vacuum in the political system. When the dust settles, the demands of the digital youth may prove to become a major leap towards a liberal, participatory democracy and further societal tolerance. Let’s hope so.

## The Future of Monotheistic Non-Muslim Communities in Turkey

Lakis Vingas,  
*Representative of the Non Muslim Foundations in Turkey  
Council Member, General Directorate of Foundations, Ankara*

*The return of the marginalized non-Muslim communities in the core of the social and economic activity of society in Turkey is an ongoing process. The concept of democracy and respect of human rights are vital in this context..*

Democracy is founded on pluralism, tolerance and diversity. In fact it draws the maximum power from the concepts. The communities of the monotheistic religions living in Turkey today are pockets of pluralism, cultural diversity, social support, and therefore democracy. Free expression favors not only the sender but also the recipient of the message. In doing so, it contributes to information, knowledge, and thus shaping his/her worldview.

Pluralism within a democratic framework is strengthened and enriched not only by difference of opinion within a particular political and cultural group but also by the coexistence of views and cultural groups beyond. Thus it is easier to structure cultural interaction and mutual emulation among communities as a whole.

A democratic society based on drawing every aspect of spiritual inventory of its citizens, regardless of religion, ideology and payments is a

steady and strong politically and economically dynamic society with a bright future. The society which offers expression, creativity and work for its citizens highlights those very characteristics which guarantee safe and guide further development. Otherwise the dynamics of society has an expiration date, leading it inevitably to decline and decay.

This momentum does not only make the community self-sufficient but it attributes the feature of interactivity, creating the conditions for interaction with other cultural communities from a position of power.

Not only is the economic factor that makes the difference in a community. It is mainly the spiritual virtues and abilities of its members. These virtues, unlike the economy, are not measurable and make, mainly represented by the will of the people and the dynamics of the community, the basic difference, creating the conditions for prosperity

and positive contemplation of the future.

Monotheistic religions with their particular common spiritual characteristics form a legacy of intellectual and social virtues for society. Religions, without abolishing their special identity, form an amalgam, a set, such as the body and its members. In this section, each member has his own role and character befitting a pluralistic society. Otherwise, i.e. a society that does not highlight the presence and role of these communities resembles a crippled body whose members are either atrophied or dysfunctional with dire consequences for the society spiritually, socially and economically.

### Human Rights

In nature there is the dominant principle of reciprocity. In the same way that the body is benefited from every creative force of its members, so these communities are supported by the stable and creative social context in the formation of which they themselves contribute. This amplifying depends on highlighting those special virtues of each individual and group, qualities which would otherwise remain dormant, invisible and ultimately nonexistent.

Having these in mind, it is clear that a community which is

based on the principles of mutual respect, freedom and human rights with democracy as the dominant force, is undivided.

In one set harmoniously tuned by reciprocity there is no space for cultural competition among the parts. The monotheistic communities, each knowing the role and scope of existence and interaction with others, base their inter-communal relations on trust and mutual respect. In this way, there is harmony in a society where there should be no room for cultural competition.

Similarly, keeping in mind their common characteristics and common purpose, i.e. the spiritual rescue of man, religions having cultural self-awareness and social realism, are able to ensure coexistence and the public good through the development of cultural emulation. On this concept of emulation one should structure the daily routine of the members of the communities today and in the future in order to forge a common cultural heritage of all communities of Turkish society.

The aforementioned emulation is all about today, because through that human rights can be guaranteed, based on the United Nations Charter. And it is true that the international community usually promotes respect for human rights in their basic ideological framework

with the commonality of human nature as its main principle.

However, beyond the common theoretical framework of the concept of human rights our main task today is the application of the concept of human rights, and particularly their social aspect. Motivated by the diversification between theory and practice, I would like to stress at this point that the focal point of social and cultural developments for the Turkish society must be, and is to a certain extent, the definition of the practical dimension of human rights in our society today. The social palpation of such a theoretical concept is not a minor issue. It is up to both the state and its citizens to listen to the society's needs first and messages of the times. With this in mind, both rulers and the people are able to shape and describe the implementation of the practical framework of human rights today, based on mutual respect and cultural emulation.

These two concepts make the notion of human rights visible and tangible in a society where, admittedly, in the last eighty years they had become invisible and elusive. And indeed it is encouraging the fact that that the state in Turkey now recognizes realistically the past reality and makes efforts to improve further, i.e. the integration of the non-Muslim communities in Turkey's core of everyday economic

life based on the principle of equality before the law and general human rights.

An important source of knowledge for the social aspects of religion in the previous years has been my personal experience as a representative of the 166 minority institutions under the General Directorate of Religious Foundations of Turkey. In this capacity, I had the opportunity to travel to 12 cities of Turkey, being in constant contact with these institutions and expressing their needs and desires for a greater role in social interaction.

In this process the web of these religious institutions does not involve only religious issues, but above all it contributes to the information and multiculturalism of society. The social dimension of these institutions is evident not only in worship but also in the multidimensional reality and human activity, i.e. education, healthcare, sports, charity and other expressions of social life in general.

These social expressions are an integral part of everyday life for all minorities of the monotheistic religions in Turkey today, bringing social harmony in daily contact with the majority of Muslim residents. Indeed, in many respects common social activities of adherents to these religions make daily social communication a point of contact,

mutual cultural exchange and ultimately understanding and mutual respect.

It is important that the Turkish state agrees with the importance of the support and implementation of human rights. The support and preservation of these rights were highlighted during the widespread Gezi Park protests last summer. The society reminded the state of its obligations toward its people and the preservation and promotion of human rights for the whole spectrum of the society. Ahead of the forthcoming 2014 presidential and municipal elections in Turkey, it is noteworthy that the Turkish state has a fine opportunity to reaffirm strongly and actually its commitment to the protection of human rights.

Nowadays Turkey is in a transitional stage from a troubled past to a promising future. The under formation new Constitution of the

Turkish Republic could ensure in practice, not just theory, the egalitarianism of non-Muslim communities. It is, indeed, an important moment in the modern history of our country. It is the wish and expectation of all non-Muslim communities that the adoption of the new Constitution will enables to enjoy our rights as equal citizens in a flourishing society. The communities want to see themselves equal and free in every aspect of our personal and communal lives.

Ensuring multiculturalism, social harmony, creativity, economic and personal development based on cultural rivalry and respect for human rights can ensure the integrity of our own society, and mostly peace inside and outside the country.

## Comments

### Media Developments in Turkey

Dr. George Tzogopoulos,  
Bodossakis post-doctoral fellow, ELIAMEP

*Recent developments in the Turkish media contribute to rising concern and scepticism. That is because media owners are increasing their control over news content while many journalists are losing their jobs.*

The media landscape in Turkey has been an area of high interest for analysts and scholars. However, according to a 2012 Freedom House study, the evaluation can hardly be considered as positive. For example, constitutional guarantees of freedom of the press and expression are only partially upheld in practice and are generally undermined by provisions in the penal code and a strict antiterrorism law. Additionally, Turkish law does not meet press freedom standards as laid out in the European Convention on Human Rights.

Further to this, as the analysis of Freedom House highlights, the restrictive penal code continues to overshadow positive reforms that had been implemented as part of the country's bid for European Union membership, including a 2004 press law that replaced prison sentences with fines for media violations.

Moreover, journalists in Turkey are still suffering from imprisonment. According to *Hurriyet*, Anne Cooper, a former Committee to Protect Journalists official and free press advocate has said, expressing disappointment that problems similar to those she observed during her visits to Turkey in the 1990s remain unresolved.

Recent developments in the Turkish media contribute to rising concern and scepticism. That is because media owners are increasing their control over news content while many journalists are losing their jobs. For instance, editor-in-chief of the *Milliyet* daily, Derya Sazak, was affected by the winds of change in the Turkish media, being replaced by the daily's Ankara representative Fikret Bila. Likewise, columnist Can Dündar was also sacked from the newspaper.

It should be mentioned that *Milliyet* drew criticism from Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan after publishing the minutes of a meeting between imprisoned terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan and Kurdish politicians. For its part, the Turkish government denies claims that it is leading media owners to dismiss certain journalists because of anti-government views. As Today's Zaman has reported, a leading government figure Yalcın Akdoğan, has published an article deconstructing the argument of the alleged government's role.

Commenting on recent developments, Sahin Alpay observes that 'the argument that opposition in the media is silenced by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government is partially valid'. In his

view, the main problem with the media in the country is that the Erdogan government 'is silencing critical voices in state-owned media or private enterprises which are highly dependent on its political and economic favours.

In the aftermath of the Gezi park protests the position of Prime Minister Erdogan has deteriorated. The Committee to Protect Journalists is continuously putting pressure on him to safeguard press freedom in the country. The EU is also raising concerns for the protection of pluralism and editorial independence. But the 'democratisation package' itself cannot be considered as sufficient. Maybe Sahin Alpay is correct in proposing a reform package specifically for the media. 🇹🇷

## Erdogan, Islam and Chalki

Dr. Evangelos Venetis  
*Middle East Research Project - ELIAMEP*

*Turkey's policy regarding reopening the Theological School of Halki must be based on the past common Kemalist experience of Muslims and Christians in Turkey and not on any temporary short-sighted maneuvering on the part of Turkey's foreign policy makers.*

Following the recent announcement of the democratization package of Ankara for domestic minority issues, there was both euphoria and frustration amongst minorities in Turkey. First the news was positive mainly for Kurds and partly for Assyrians; yet it was not the case for the other monotheistic communities that are not satisfied with the range of reforms. Especially the Greek Orthodox community is dissatisfied with the fact that its request for the reopening of the Theological School of Halki was not fruitful. This is because Erdogan has declared openly that he views Halki as a bargaining chip to increase his rhetoric and influence over the Muslims of Greece, i.e. the Greek Muslims of Thrace and their newly arrived non-Greek coreligionists in Greece's cities.

Undoubtedly in the past ninety years Turkey's Prime Erdogan is the first Turkish leader who has

actively carried out a systematic policy of reform and reintegration of monotheistic communities in the society of Turkey. In August 2011 he ordered the return of the seized property and religious buildings of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and a month after the Bursa Bishop Elpidoforos was appointed as abbot of the Holy Trinity Monastery of Halki. Nine months ago, the Turkish Council of Foundations returned 190 hectares of land to the Foundation of the Monastery of the Holy Trinity, i.e. the institution -owner of the Theological School of Halki. These acts are evidence of Erdogan's intention to resolve the issue. Yet the problem is that he raises the issue of reciprocity as far as various issues of Muslims in Greece are concerned.

Regarding the newly arrived non-Greek Muslims Erdogan as pious Muslim leader of Turkey has the right to express his interest in the

same way that leaders of other Muslim countries do, especially when some of these Muslims are temporary residents and nationals of these Muslim countries, except Turkey. However Erdogan cannot use the newly arrived non-Greek Muslims in Greece as a means of political bargaining, because the Halki issue is exclusively related to the Treaty of Lausanne. Therefore Halki could only be related in terms of reciprocity to the status of Greek Muslims in Thrace, whose rights, however, are lawfully observed by the Greek State under the same treaty. Thus it is Turkey's violation of the Lausanne treaty in regard to Greek Orthodox Christians in Turkey and not vice versa.

Even if Erdogan claims about the contrary in order to support his arguments, he should speak from a moral, not only political, point of view. Thus he should first reopen the Theological School of Halki, the closure of which is a violation of the Treaty of Lausanne.

Apparently Erdogan knows well this reasoning and in particular an aspect that many in Turkey and Greece do not take into account, i.e.

the fact that the marginalization and violation of the rights of non-Muslim monotheistic communities in Turkey took place in a parallel way with the marginalization and violation of the rights of Muslim Turks by the secular and pro-Western Kemalist regime of Turkey. Therefore Prime Minister Erdogan knows firsthand the position of the Greek Orthodox in Turkey, since also he has been previously persecuted and marginalized socially, e.g. he was imprisoned only a few years ago. Hence in regard to the issue of reopening of the Theological School of Halki, Erdogan's outlook must be this common course of Muslim and non-Muslim monotheistic communities from the margins to the core of the vivid socially and economically life of the economically developing Turkey and not any ephemeral gains of his international Islamic rhetoric. Erdogan as Muslim knows it well. So Halki must open immediately.

## The Jewish Community in a multicultural Turkey: Background and Prospects

Gabriel Haritos

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*The new Constitution of the Republic of Turkey must ensure the de-marginalization of the non-Muslim Turkish citizens and the constitutional protection of their basic rights of freedom of belief, religious practices, minority education and cultural growth.*

While other Jewish Communities in Europe have suffered the results of the Holocaust, the Ottoman liberal policy towards the Jewish population as well as Ankara's neutrality during World War II turned Turkey to be a 'safe haven' for the Jews. Despite the fact that Kemalist secularism regulated reservations over religious teaching and imposed higher taxation, the Jewish Community of the country managed to remain alive during the 30s' and 40s'.

With the Proclamation of Israel's Independence in 1948, a great percentage of Turkish Jews emigrated to Israel. According to the World Jewish Congress and the Turkish Jewish Community official figures, between the years 1948 and 1951, 37,000 out of a total of 75,000 Turkish Jews emigrated to Israel ("Big Turkish Aliya"). Since 1948 a total of 61,221 Turkish Jews have

emigrated to Israel, while today a small population of 26,000 Jews are living in the country, most of them in Istanbul and fewer in other Turkish cities such as Izmir (est. 2,300), Ankara, Bursa, Adana, Kirklareli, Iskenderun and a tiny Arab-speaking Jewish Community of 10 families in Antakya.

Compared to other Muslim countries where Jewish Communities still exist, the Jewish Community in Turkey did not become a reason of any political or cultural conflict whatsoever between Ankara and Tel Aviv. Throughout the decades, both Turkish and Israeli government officials and entrepreneurs managed to keep away this delicate 'religion variable' from the flourishing Turkish-Israeli strategic and financial relations during the 80s' and the 90s'. Anti-Semitic sentiments within the

Turkish society caused by the continuous Arab-Israeli conflict did not succeed to influence the mainly secular and affiliated to the Turkish upper middle-class Jewish Community.

The gradual pro-Arab steps of the AKP administration combined with the new Turkish doctrine towards the Middle East and the Arab world have dramatically influenced the Turkish-Israeli relations. The Mavi Marmara incident on May 31, 2010 was the catalyst and anti-Jewish sentiments have been expressed by a great part of the Turkish society, regardless of the degree of religiosity.

The Jewish Community of Turkey suddenly found itself under extraordinary circumstances, given that for the first time Turkish citizens have become victims of the Israeli armed forces. The first –and last– declaration made by the Chief Rabbinate of Istanbul on the Mavi Marmara incident has been very careful: *"We are distressed to learn of the military intervention carried out against the ship Mavi Marmara which was heading toward Gaza. The fact that, according to the first reports we have received, there have been dead and wounded in the intervention, has increased our sorrow all the more. We fully share our country's reaction generated by the stopping of the aforementioned (humanitarian relief) effort in this*

*manner and our sorrow is the same as that of the general public."* It was obvious to the Jewish official bodies of Turkey that keeping a low-profile would ensure the traditionally centuries-old good relations with the 99,8% Muslim majority of the Turkish society.

Despite the political and social adversities that the Jewish Community of Turkey has faced since the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010 and although the Israeli authorities were getting prepared to accept an increased number of Turkish Jews due to the political developments that followed, the official figures provided by the Israeli Ministry of Immigrant Absorption prove that the average Turkish citizen of Jewish origin is still not willing to expatriate.

According to the official Israeli statistics, the Turkish "Olim Hadashim" (New Jewish Immigrants to Israel) in 2009, a year before the Mavi Marmara incident, were 150. This tendency remained stable in 2010 (155 migrants), while the following years the Jewish migration from Turkey was decreasing : 111 Turkish Jews migrated to Israel in 2011, 73 in 2012 and during the first 8 months of 2013 the total number of Turkish 'Olim' was only 47.

Explanations vary about Turkish Jewry's remarkable reluctance to abandon their motherland. Despite the recent

difficulties Turkish Jews were facing after the Mavi Marmara incident due to anti-Semitic anti-Israeli sentiments expressed by the local media and government officials, the remaining members of their Community seem not losing their confidence that a peaceful coexistence and religious diversity within the framework of a Turkish multicultural sociological status quo are still possible.

Turkish Jewry's intuition seems to be confirmed and despite AKP's political incentives, aiming to promote a neo-Islamist social agenda and restructuring the country's regional foreign policy priorities, in an encouraging move made by the Turkish administration, a public discussion about the new Constitution has started within the framework of which the government showed that religious diversity might be a factor of social reconciliation rather than a tool of foreign policy adversity. An encouraging sign of this conception was clear: In late 2011 the Jewish Community, the Greek Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Armenian and the Syriac Orthodox Churches –as well as the Alevi Community- have all been invited to convey their remarks and suggestions to the Constitutional Reconciliation Commission (AUK), which is entitled to form the draft of the new Turkish Constitution, aiming to regulate minority rights.

Ishak Ibrahimzadeh, the newly elected Chairman of the Jewish Community of Turkey expressed his optimism while emphasizing the basic guidelines that AUK should take into consideration:

*"We welcomed the democratization act announced by our Prime Minister. We fully believe that all these acts will contribute more to the unity, integrity and democracy of our Turkey. As we see that a lot of necessary reforms are going to be done, we believe in the requirement of pursuing them while they are implemented by the executives which should be in a way of uniting and embracing the public. We expect the hatred expressions being evaluated as crime and that the commuters of this crime be legally identified by the relevant institutions of our state in order to protect the rights of the offended and that the necessary punitive sanctions are applied.*

*Under the light of all these we hope that our government, our State and all society individuals altogether fulfill their own responsibilities with sincerity, and we wish success to all on this path".*

The new Constitution of the Republic of Turkey must ensure the de-marginalization of the non-Muslim Turkish citizens and the constitutional protection of their basic rights of freedom of belief, religious practices, minority education and cultural growth.

As for the religious and ethnic minorities within the Turkish

society, it is obvious that constitutional guarantees of their basic rights are the *ultimum refugium* as well as a sound basis of a tolerant, democratic and multicultural social environment as a whole, qualities that should continue

to be promoted and protected within the framework of the Turkish political system, regardless of Ankara's current foreign policy doctrine, which might as well change its orientation in the future. 

## Monitoring the Middle East

### Afghanistan

#### **Afghans protest opening of Taliban Office in Doha** (29 June, 2013)

People have taken to the streets across Afghanistan to protest against the opening of a political office for Taliban militants in the Qatari capital of Doha. Demos were held in Kabul, the provinces of Paktia and Khost as well as the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif.

### Bahrain

#### **Shia leader's death stirs Bahrain protest** (27 June, 2013)

The Shiite group February 14 movement said on Facebook that Hussein Abdullah, one of its local leaders, had been “martyred in a terrorist attack carried out by the intelligence services”. His death triggered anger, with the group saying its supporters set alight tyres and blocked several streets in protest.

*Comment: The crisis in Bahrain in the Persian Gulf is ongoing.*

### Egypt

#### **Coup d'Etat against President Morsi** (30 June, 2013)

Serious and massive protests have led to a *coup d'etat* by the Egyptian army against President Morsi, the first democratically elected president in Egypt's history.

*Comment: Bringing Democracy to a halt.*

### Iran

#### **Sheikh Hassan Rohani is elected new president** (15 June, 2013)

On the June 14 elections, in a landslide victory Sheikh Hassan Rohani was elected new president of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### Iraq

#### **Barzani to rule for 2 more years** (30 June, 2013)

The Leader of Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Massoud Barzani will remain in power for another two years as lawmakers voted to postpone presidential polls amid rows in the Kurdish parliament.

## Kuwait

### **Kuwaiti freight recovering** (29 June, 2013)

Kuwait's ports have struggled to recover the volumes they enjoyed prior to the global economic downturn, but BMI expects recovery to have been completed by 2013, and that growth will continue over the medium term.

## Lebanon

### **Lebanon army restores order in Sidon** (23 June, 2012)

The Lebanese army said in a statement issued late on Sunday that it restored order in the southern city of Sidon following bloody clashes with gunmen loyal to Salafist Sheikh Ahmed al-Assir.

## Libya

### **Libyan Defense Minister fired over deadly clashes** (27 June, 2013)

Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeydan fired Defense Minister Mohammed al-Barghathi following deadly clashes in Tripoli.

## Palestine - Israel

### **UN criticizes Israel settlement expansion** (15 June, 2013)

The UN chief is deeply concerned about Israel's plan to build more than 1000 illegal houses in two settlements in the West Bank.

### **Israel deploys Iron Dome Missile System in the North** (30 June, 2013)

The missile system was deployed at the northern city of Haifa on 28 June due to the alleged tension on its northern borders.

## Qatar

### **Obama and Karzai back Taliban talk in Qatar** (26 June, 2013)

According to the White House, US President Barack Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai support the prospect of holding talks with the Taliban in the Taliban's office in Qatar.

## Saudi Arabia

### **GCC to finalize curbs on Hezbollah** (29 June, 2013)

According to Gulf Cooperation Council Head Abdullatif al-Zayani, GCC held a meeting in Riyadh and agreed the mechanisms for imposing sanctions on members of the Lebanese Shiite political party Hezbollah.

## Somalia

### **UN condemns deadly assault in Mogadishu (20 June, 2013)**

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon condemned the al-Shabab attack on the main UN compound in the Somali capital Mogadishu, killing 15 people, including eight members of the UN staff.

## Syria

### **Russia denies shutting Embassy in Syria (29 June, 2013)**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov rejected reports suggesting that Moscow plans to close its embassy in the crisis-hit Syria, as well as its naval base in the Syrian port of Tartus.

## Tunisia

### **Tunisians protest against news draft law (29 June, 2013)**

Hundreds of Tunisian protesters have taken to the streets in the capital Tunis to voice their opposition to a draft law that is expected to ban the former regime's officials from running in elections. Opponents of the Tunisian government say the controversial law aims to keep the opposition out of politics.

## Turkey

### **Violent demonstrations erupt in Gezi Park - Istanbul (28 May, 2013)**

Protests raised against the plans of replacing Taksim Gezi Park with a reconstruction of the historic Taksim Military Barracks (demolished in 1940), with the possibility of housing a shopping mall. The protests developed into riots when a group occupying the park was attacked by police.

## United Arab Emirates

### **Dubai records significant growth in all key sectors (30 June, 2013)**

According to a latest report, Dubai marked significant growth in all key economic sectors in 2012 and the emirate will continue to maintain its position as a regional and global hub for business and finance.

## Yemen

### **Tribesmen attack oil pipeline in Yemen (27 June, 2013)**

Yemeni tribesmen carried out an attack on an oil pipeline in the Sarwah area of Marib, thus interrupting the flow of oil in the Marib province.. 



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