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EDITOR'S NOTE

MUHİTTİN ATAMAN

Religion, religious groups and teo-politics are always most vital topics of the Western politics. The relationship between politics and religion is reciprocal. While both domestic and international political actors try to exploit religion and religious sensitivity for their political interests and gains, religion and belief systems want to use significant power over main political and cultural actors and perceptions. With the emergence of the violent non-state actors such as Taliban, al-Qaeda and DAISH, which were all surfaced in the Middle East but have become transnational actors deeply affecting European politics, and the recent popularity of far-right Islam-phobic movements such as PEGIDA in Europe have once again forced us to look closely at the relationship between religion and politics in Western politics specifically in Europe.

Even though it is generally perceived that the religion has lost its war against politics in Europe as European countries have established secular democracies based on the promotion of individual freedoms and pluralism, it is an undisputable fact that the general framework in European states is largely affected by the Christian values and often its imprints are seen in politics.

The developments around the recent large scale immigration toward Europe from Middle East and Africa are the reasons which force us to make this bold statement. How Europe deals with mostly Muslim immigrants who come from very different ethnic and cultural backgrounds from European values is very alarming. After unsuccessful assimilation and/or integration efforts for these non-European and non-Christian immigrants, state and societal actors have instigated to take restrictive measures against further immigration and migrants. Furthermore we have started to witness strong wave of xenophobia and Islamophobia in these democratic European societies. Islamophobia, relations with European Muslims and implications of political developments in the Muslim World will significantly influence the future religion-state relations in European countries. However, for the last few months we have been spectators of the tragic death of thousands desperate immigrants at the Mediterranean Sea who were trying to reach Europe. Unfortunately the European countries have done nothing to prevent their death.

In order to understand the state-religion relationship we should focus on two important topics like education and media. It is well-known that education plays a significant role in perception of religion and religious actors as well as the observation of the media outlets. All these political and social developments necessitated the reevaluation of state-religion relationship in Europe.

Therefore, the new issue of *Insight Turkey* concentrates on religion, state and legal framework in European countries and the European Union. We have five significant research articles written by leading European scholars. While one article analyzes the place of religion and religious communities in the EU legal system, the other four examine religion and law in Great Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium and Poland.

Silvio Ferrari analyses the EU legal framework on basis of the body of law called as “*acquis communautaire*”, which is applicable also in terms of the relation between the state and religious communities. He especially emphasizes that there is a two-way impact: a member has to accept the European legacy, which affects laws directly related to religion, but at the same time grants possibilities for its renewal.

While assessing the Great Britain case, Rebecca Catto et al. attest that the relation between state and religion is in a continuous change, but the historical connection between the Church of England and the State still endures. On the other hand, currently the Muslims are considered as the dangerous “other”.

A special focus was put on the Muslim Communities and their relations with their respective states. In Belgium there has been a slow development of the Muslim Community and its effective recognition has lasted until late. In some other cases, the Muslim Communities have faced problems in organization or divergences among them, even when similar rights with other religious groups were granted from the state. A typical example for this is the Muslim Community in the Netherlands.

Özlem Uluç discusses the state-religion relations in the Turkish context. Asserting that the state’s apathetic stance towards religion and religious institutions began to change during the AK Party governments, she appraises the

religious developments and the relationship between increasing religious demands responded by the secular Turkish democracy.

There are two additional off-topic research articles. Mohammed Nuru-zzaman scrutinizes President Obama's foreign policy towards the Middle East during his first term, focusing on "smart power" strategy implemented by Obama. In the other research article Ali Alipour argues that Turkey's "strategic depth" and "zero problems with neighbors" policy approaches towards South Caucasus served as leverage towards its relations with other influential powers such as Russia and the EU.

Ali Balcı evaluates the AK Party's policies and dynamics in terms of the struggle with the Gülen movement, showing how this struggle influences the foreign policy perception of the country with Iran. Gallia Lindenstraus analyzes the implications of the 2015 Israeli general elections on Turkish-Israeli relations, mainly focusing on the Israeli policy towards Palestine.

Yavuz Güçtürk examines war crimes and crimes against humanity, committed during the Syrian civil war, and calls the international community for a more decisive intervention to stop the crimes against humanity. Ambika Vishwanath et. al. discuss the significance of water security in the Middle East. They assert that regional countries can achieve peace and security through water cooperation.

Farewell...

With this issue, Insight Turkey has a new editor-in-chief. The previous editor-in-chief Dr. Talip Küçükcan has decided to run for a seat in Turkish Grand National Assembly General Elections held on June 7th, in which he was elected as a deputy from Adana Province. During Dr. Küçükcan's tenure, Insight Turkey published excellent scholarly materials and solidified its reputation in academic circles. As his successor, I pledge to keep up the journal's academic standards and influence. I extend my gratitude to Dr. Küçükcan for all of his endeavors and contributions to make *Insight Turkey* an influential international journal. As Insight team, we wish Dr. Küçükcan a fruitful and successful experience in politics. ■