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3. The February 28 Process: A Postmodern Coup

3.1. Rise of the Welfare Party

When it was once again allowed to engage in political activities after the military intervention of 1980, conservative politics resumed as expected. Before 1980 there had also been a powerful stream of conservative politics in Turkey. The movement, named the National Outlook (Milli Görüş, MG), had an anti-Western alignment and advocated a combination of moral and economic development for Turkey. After its earlier incarnations were closed in the 1971 and 1980 military interventions, this time the conservative party of the MG was named the RP. Given its leader, high-rank figures and ideology, the RP was a typical National Outlook Party in the beginning. Although the continuity was not interrupted in terms of its leading cadres over the next decade, external factors were now more advantageous for the RP in the 1990’s. Turkey’s new social and economic conditions offered various opportunities for the RP. Capitalizing on such political advantages, the party received 21.4 percent of the national vote at its height in 1995. These new opportunities included the tolerant attitude of the state mechanism to Islam in the post-1980 period, the culturally conservative and economically liberal character of the Özal period, and the collapse of Turkey’s center parties.

The ruling elite after the 1980 military coup instrumentalized religion against the leftist mobilization of the time. This attitude toward Islam – embodied by the junta leader and later president Kenan Evren – used the religion as a barrier against radical leftist politics. Evren himself often referred to “Quranic Islam” while he was expressing his ideas about the importance of order and rule for a society. In issues ranging from birth control to the increasing “communist threat,” Islam was used as a way of expressing the official ideology. However, the societal results of Evren’s policy became different from his expectations - a clear case of the law of unintended consequences. Instead of an enlightened and instrumental Islam that would be compatible with Kemalism, conservative mobilization became the beneficiary of the situation. Conservative actors increased their influence and expanded their domain. For example, apart from the addition of mandatory religion courses to primary and secondary school curriculum, the number of students enrolled in İmam-Hatip Schools increased by 61 percent and 51 percent at the senior and junior levels, respectively.

112 Yavuz, H. Islamic Political Identity, p.70-1.
increase in the number of enrolled students, but not in the number of schools, is a good example of the difference between the result of Evren’s instrumentalization of Islam and his intentions. The number of İmam-Hatip Schools did not increase due to the difficulty of getting permission to set up new ones, but it was still possible to open new schools as branches of existing ones.\textsuperscript{114}

Furthermore, Turgut Özal’s governance, first as prime minister and later as president, also stimulated a tolerant attitude toward conservative activism. Among many other developments, the removal of the symbolic barriers that had previously blocked conservative actors’ participation in social and political life is worth mentioning. Due to the fact that one of the major policies of the Kemalist modernization about Islam was the prohibition of any kind of Islamic representation in the public sphere, conservative actors had voluntarily remained outside of the public sphere, in addition to being excluded from it forcibly. Aktay refers to this self-imposed exclusion from the public sphere as a situation of symbolic diaspora.\textsuperscript{115} The tolerant attitude of the Evren period and later the Özal period stimulated the process of conservative actors’ entrance into the public sphere. The establishment of Islamic financial institutions, the increasing circulation of conservative books, newspapers, and magazines, and the increasing public visibility of women wearing the headscarf were prominent examples of increasing conservative public visibility from the 1980’s onwards.

The formation of a new middle class was another political opportunity for the RP as a result of the policies of the post-1980 period and the Özal administration. As a consequence of Özal’s liberal policies in the economic field, the small and the middle-scale businessmen of the major Anatolian cities were given access to the domestic and international market. The new emerging middle class was more conservative compared to the existing one. As they were the representatives of the periphery, values such as religion and tradition were dominant. In the beginning of the 1990’s, this new middle class materialized under the umbrella of the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (Müstakil Sanayici ve İşadamları Derneği, MÜSİAD). The letter “M” in the name of the organization, which represents the word müstakil - independent, is often claimed to represent “Muslim” instead of “müstakil” due to the religious affiliations of the members of the organization. The incorporation dates of MÜSİAD’s member companies and their geographical distribution provide insight into the

\textsuperscript{114} Özdalga, E. Education in the Name of “Order and Progress”, p.424.
\textsuperscript{115} Aktay, Y. (2003). “Diaspora and Stability: Constitutive Elements in a Body of Knowledge,” in Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement, H. Yavuz and J. Esposito (eds.), 131-155. New York: Syracuse University Press, p.133-140. By “diaspora” Aktay designates a symbolic condition rather than a geographic one. According to Aktay, the sudden separation from Islamic history and the beloved Ottoman tradition, which is very well expressed in the poem of the conservative poet Necip Fazıl Kısakürek as “being a pariah in one’s own country and being estranged in one’s own home” (p.137), are the two reasons for the existence of the symbolic diaspora.
relationship between the post-1980 period and the rise of the RP. Whereas only 280 of these companies had been incorporated in the period from 1970 to 1979, this number rose to 744 in the 1980-1989 period.\textsuperscript{116} The geographical distribution of the member companies is also useful for understanding the peripheral character of the association, as Konya, a peripheral city, with 153 companies, comes third after metropolitan Istanbul, with 488 members, and metropolitan Ankara, with 175 members, while Kayseri, also a peripheral city, with 112 members, comes fifth after metropolitan Izmir, with 114 members.\textsuperscript{117}

The economic visibility of the traditional Anatolian middle class was not independent from the increasing social participation of conservative actors. Rather than arising as independent social, economic and political processes, these processes emerged synchronously out of a shared set of causes. When conservative actors began participating in social life, their economic activity increased, and vice versa.

In addition to these factors, the RP’s ability to capitalize on these opportunities and its mobilization of resources were crucial. When the 1990s arrived, the political arena in Turkey was in the midst of a serious deadlock. Ongoing political corruption and a series of unsuccessful coalition governments made the RP a popular, fresh and untested alternative to the prevailing political system. As a result, the party took 19.7 percent of the national vote in the local elections of 1994. On the one hand, the political opportunities described above encouraged the rise of the RP in the 1994 local elections. On the other hand, the successful administration of the RP mayors further increased support for the RP in the 1995 elections. As Yavuz wrote: “The RP’s victory in the 1995 elections is less the result of Islam than of a complex set of factors. Since the local elections of March 1994, RP mayors have offered better services than their predecessors and worked hard to improve public services. Moreover, they reduced corruption and nepotism in their municipalities. The RP also acted more professionally than the other parties on the left and right.”\textsuperscript{118}

However, the picture of the political arena after the elections on December 25, 1995 was not clear. The RP was the leading party with 21.38 percent of the total vote and the Motherland Party (Anavatan Partisi, ANAP) became the main opposition party with 19.65 percent, while the True Path Party (Doğru Yol Partisi, DYP) came third with 19.18 percent of the total vote. Secularist public opinion favored a center-right coalition of the ANAP and DYP.

\textsuperscript{117} Buğra, A. Class, Culture, and State, p.530.
Newspapers, in particular, openly encouraged and supported a coalition between the center-right parties that would exclude the RP. Newspapers were implicitly, if not explicitly, claiming that the military was also supporting a center-right coalition and that it was upset with the possibility of the RP becoming a part of the government.\(^{119}\) Although a center-right coalition government was set up by the ANAP and the DYP, these parties were not inclined toward cooperation, because each of them was trying to eliminate the other in order to become the only representative of center-right politics. As a result, the coalition was dissolved after three months. The RP played a significant role in the collapse of the coalition government by both applying for and receiving a Constitutional Court decision that invalidated a vote of confidence for the government and, later, by setting up a parliamentary means test commission for Tansu Çiller, leader of the DYP. Mesut Yılmaz, the leader of the ANAP, tried to take advantage of the means test commission to eliminate Tansu Çiller from center-right politics. As expected, the coalition dissolved on June 6, 1996.


After the resignation of Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz, the formation of a coalition government between the RP and DYP was one of two alternatives, the other of which was early elections. The second option was not received well as the parties in parliament were not optimistic about the possible results of an early election. Moreover: “Refah [RP] made a special effort to appease the ‘powers-that-be’ and demonstrate that it was a tenable and credibly mainstream political party. It was important for Refah to establish its legitimacy in order to fully mobilize its potential base of support, which was divided among several center right parties and a large group who did not even go to the polls.”\(^{120}\) Thus, the coalition government of the RP and DYP was a real win-win scenario for both parties: It served as a medium of legitimacy for the RP and as an escape route for Tansu Çiller from the parliamentary investigation. As expected, the coalition government, which was named Refahyol -- a combination of the names of the participating parties, the RP (Refah Partisi) and the DYP (Doğru Yol Partisi) -- was established on June 28, 1996.

Intra-governmental relations and relations with the military were relatively free of problems in the first months of this government. This virtual harmony was sustained by the compromises made by the RP. As the RP’s main motivation was gaining legitimacy and

\(^{119}\) A detailed account of newspapers’ attitudes to the coalition formation process will be offered in the next parts of the paper.

securing itself a place among the center parties, the party’s ideological position was not reflected in the program of the government. It was very difficult even to differentiate between the coalition protocol of Refahyol and the previous ANAP-DYP government.\textsuperscript{121} The sharp ideological tones of the RP and the MG of Necmettin Erbakan did not rank among the projects of the RP in government.

In addition to economic policies, important parts of the RP’s conservative discourse were also abandoned. During the first months of the government, Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan signed very controversial documents that were entirely contrary to his party’s principles. The discharge from the military of some personnel who were practicing Muslims, the extension of the mandate of the Poisoned Hammer Force\textsuperscript{122} and, finally, the renewal of security agreements with Israel were some examples of the compromises the RP made in order to secure its position as a center-right party. However, Erbakan’s strategy did not work. The reason for the RP’s failure to secure a position among the ranks of the center right was the reluctance of the historic hegemonic center to accept a new element into the politics of the center. For the historic hegemonic center, the problem was not only rising fears of reaction or worries about secularism, but also the RP’s threat of filling the political gap in the center of Turkish politics.\textsuperscript{123} For the RP to fill the political gap in the center of Turkish politics meant a new actor in hegemonic politics, a new claimant for political power. To avoid such an outcome, the fear of reactionary danger was manipulated again.

3.3 Rising Reactionary Danger

After a relatively calm period of three months, tensions in the Turkish political arena increased toward October 1996. In Turkey the September-October period marks the beginning of the new administrative year. In this period, the Turkish bureaucracy and other state-related sectors – sectors that are occupied by the Kemalist cadres - organize the first gathering of the year for occasions such as the beginning of judicial, financial, and academic years and the parliamentary session. In the Turkish political tradition, the heads of these state organs give speeches at the first gatherings of their respective institutions. In these speeches, the wishes and intentions of these institutions are declared in the presence of all ranks of the state mechanism. This was also the case in 1996, but the content of the speeches was somehow different from previous years. The heads of these institutions mentioned the rising

\textsuperscript{121} Gülalp, H. Political Islam in Turkey, p.37.
\textsuperscript{122} Coalition Forces of the USA, England and France that deployed in Turkey to protect Iraqi refugees. However, conservative politicians claimed that Poisoned Force engaged in extra-mission activities during the Gulf War.
danger of reaction and the necessity of protecting the secular state. These warnings were a sign of the coming campaign against the coalition government. After the warnings of the bureaucrats, Mesut Yılmaz, leader of main opposition party, and Chief of General Staff İsmail Hakkı Karadayı took the floor again to talk about the rising reactionary danger. As expected, the media also joined the Kemalist chorus, and news articles about the rising reactionary danger started to appear on the front pages of the country’s newspapers simultaneously.

It is possible to categorize the so-called major reactionary incidents that were presented by the media in this period. Some were long-standing discussions of secularism in Turkey, such as the headscarf ban in universities, the construction of a mosque in Taksim Square, and the opening of a land route to the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. The university headscarf ban was introduced by Kenan Evren, whose administration was considered to have been tolerant of conservative demands. Although under the rule of the conservative mayor of Istanbul, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, some plans were made and expectations were raised for the construction of a mosque in Taksim Square, the project did not amount to more than a fantasy. In addition, the Hajj land route was an old practice that had been abandoned years ago. Demands for its reopening had always been popular in Turkish public opinion, but the prospect started to be considered a reactionary danger under the rule of the RP-DYP coalition government. The main discourse about such demands argued that the reactionaries had been emboldened by the conservative RP and that they had therefore become more demanding.

However, the RP itself also provided much additional ammunition for the Kemalists to use to bolster its claims about the rising reactionary danger. First among these was Erbakan’s visits to Islamic countries such as Libya, Egypt, Malaysia and Indonesia. Although earlier Turkish prime ministers had visited these countries as well,124 the timing and character of Erbakan’s visits was severely criticized by the media, especially the Libyan dictator Colonel Qaddafi’s treatment of the prime minister, which was a real diplomatic scandal and was also criticized by Erbakan’s supporters as well as going too far in the eyes of secularists.

Erbakan’s proposal of an Islamic solution to the Kurdish question and the Sincan incident can be considered as having been the last straw for the Kemalists. Toward the end of the 1990s, Turkey was proceeding in its struggle against the PKK, Kurdish armed insurgence organization, through military means. However, the core of the Kurdish problem still existed, as the demands of the Kurdish population had not been met. At that point, Erbakan offered the classical formula of the instrumentalization of religion as the cement of a society.

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Although the Kemalists had been applying the same formula to Turkish society, Erbakan’s attitude was more Islamic compared to the cultural Islam of the Kemalists. For example, Erbakan and his party were loudly pronouncing the brotherhood of all Muslims, the idea of *Ummah*, whereas Kemalist discourse was more silent on the Islamic part of the discourse and contented itself with mentioning the brotherhood of Turks and Kurds. Secondly, the Sincan incident was another cornerstone illustrating the rising reactionary danger. The RP mayor of Sincan, a provincial town close to Ankara, organized a Jerusalem Night at the end of January 1997. The Iranian ambassador was invited to speak at this program. Although the Association for Solidarity with Jerusalem had organized similar solidarity nights several times in the past, this one was different, as the speech by the Iranian ambassador fit very well into the narrative of the Iranization of Turkey. Another reason for the TSK’s harsh reaction to the Jerusalem Solidarity Night was the origin of this type of event: Ayatollah Khomeini, the religious-clerical leader of the revolution in Iran, first established such celebrations in revolutionary Iran. Jerusalem Nights, which were events aimed at increasing solidarity with Palestinian Muslims and protesting Israel’s occupation of Jerusalem, was also utilized for the spread of a new regime to all segments of society. Furthermore, the mayor of Sincan, Bekir Yıldız, was a member of the RP. A few days later, the military responded to the Jerusalem Night with a parade of tanks on the main street of Sincan. Although the military cadres claimed that the tanks’ appearance on the streets of Sincan was a previously planned regular training move, it was widely considered a warning to the RP.

Among all of these incidents, the Fadime Şahin episode was the most effective and serviceable case in favor of claims about a rising reactionary threat. In the last days of 1996, the self-proclaimed Sufi sheikh Müslüm Gündüz, who was wanted by the police for violating the secular regime of Turkey by gathering with his followers in the great mosques of big cities for the remembrance and recitation of God and violating laws on religious dress, was raided while he was together with a woman named Fadime Şahin. The incident was covered as the drama of Şahin by the media, because Gündüz was half naked when the policed broke into his house with television cameras in tow. Şahin appeared in the news releases of the major television channels and claimed that she had been deceived by Gündüz and that her religious feelings had been exploited by him. In a few days, Fadime turned into a celebrity

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125 Howe, M. *Turkey Today*, p.138.
127 This was not the first time the TSK utilized a Jerusalem Solidarity Organization for its intervention. The huge Jerusalem meeting organized in Konya before the 1980 military intervention was also counted among the factors that “forced” the TSK to intervene. Salt, J. *Nationalism and the Rise of Muslim Sentiment*, p. 16.
128 The military’s intention of introducing its measures as totally lawful is worth pondering, as exemplified by its insistence on the “previously organized training move” of the tanks in Sincan. Moreover, its emphasis on the Domestic Service Law of the Turkish Armed Forces when fighting against “rising danger of reaction” was the same kind of action.
and her former relationships with other self-proclaimed sheikhs, such as Ali Kalkancı, were uncovered. Furthermore, Şahin claimed that the children of certain famous RP members were also followers of her ex-lover-sheikh Kalkancı. Furthermore, Kalkancı’s ex-wife Emire Kalkancı also proceeded to make sensational confessions about the so-called deviant relationship between politics, Sufi orders and sex. Although the incident was brought to court and several lawsuits were filed against Kalkancı and Gündüz, the claims of Şahin and Emire Kalkancı were never proven. The manipulation in the Şahin incident will be covered in detail later in this study. For now, it can be said that the incident and its manipulation by the media were the trademarks of the process just as the Susurluk incident, which will be also covered in subsequent sections. Such incidents of rising reactionary danger were regarded as threats to the secular character of the state and, as a result, the state apparatus started to take measures in order to defend itself.

3.4. ‘The System Defends Itself’: The National Security Council and Briefings

Once the necessary conditions for a military intervention were set by the discourse about a rising reactionary danger, it was the military’s turn to begin taking more drastic measures. Its first move was an ordinary MGK meeting on February 28.

The MGK is a constitutional body that was formed by the 1982 Constitution. However, the official website of the council traces its establishment back to 1933. According to the official site of MGK, the period between 1933 and 1949 is known as the Secretariat General of Supreme Defense Assembly Era, the period between 1949 and 1962 is the National Defense Supreme Council and Secretariat General Era, the period between 1962 and 1983 is the National Security Council and Secretariat General of National Security Council Era under the provisions of the 1961 Constitution, and, finally, the period from 1983 until the present is the National Security Council and Secretariat General of National Security Council Era under the provisions of the 1982 Constitution. The official interpretation of the continuity of the council offers insight into the role of the Turkish Army in politics and establishes legitimacy through a link to the Atatürk era. The main aim of the establishment of the National Security Council in 1962, which at that time consisted of five high-ranking military officers - namely, the chief of general staff, the commanders of the army, navy, air forces, and gendarmerie - and five civilians - the president, prime minister, and the ministers of interior affairs, foreign

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affairs and national defense - was to supply a legitimate basis for the military’s intervention into politics.\textsuperscript{130}

After the council’s regular February 28 meeting, a press release was issued. Such meetings and press releases were normal for the Council, but the content of the press release of this meeting was extraordinary, as the council – or rather the military side of the council - wanted the government to take harsh measures against the so-called rising danger of reaction. The content of the statement and its discourse, which threatened the government with “sanctions,” “yaptırımlar” if it neglected to take action against the rising danger of reaction, was regarded as a memorandum. After the MGK meeting, Prime Minister Erbakan tried to face the memorandum by directing the issue to the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, TBMM). However, he reached an impasse as neither the president of the assembly, the leaders of the opposition parties, nor his partner Tansu Çiller supported him. After the unsuccessful attempt at directing the issue to the assembly, Erbakan made another attempt to respond to the memorandum by not signing decisions passed by the National Security Council. As the prime minister, he was “officially” a member of a council that had threatened him with “sanctions,” and therefore these decisions needed his signature in order to be legal. This attempt also lacked both public and political support and, after a month of resistance, Erbakan signed the decisions.\textsuperscript{131}

Two documents were created after the February 28 MGK meeting. The first was a press statement\textsuperscript{132} that consisted of four articles. The first article of the statement contained information about the participants, venue, and date of the meeting. The second article was reserved for the Kurdish issue, and the third for the Cyprus problem. Aside from the fourth article, the context was typical of press statements made by the MGK. However, the fourth article, which constituted nearly the half of the whole statement, was very different from usual MGK press statements. The article was an examination of “movements opposed to the regime that were looking to establish a base against the Republic of Turkey, which is known as a democratic, laic, social state and a state governed by the rule of law bounded with Atatürk nationalism.” The article called for the enforcement of laws against the rising


\textsuperscript{131} Although 15 years have passed since the February 28 Process, there is still controversy about whether or not Erbakan signed the MGK decisions. Supporters of Erbakan claim that he did not sign the decisions, but signed the press release of the February 28 MGK meeting. However, in the end the MGK decisions were sent to the office of the prime minister as the MGK’s proposals to the government.

\textsuperscript{132} Yıldız, A. (2000). \textit{28 Şubat: Belgeler}. İstanbul: Pınar Yayınları, p.93-5. It is difficult to find the exact content of the MGK’s proposals to the government as they were not released to the press. These decisions were declared to the cabinet as proposals to be implemented. However, after the February 28 meeting of the MGK, newspapers issued more or less the same content. In this study I will use Abdullah Yıldız’s collection of documents of the February 28 Process.
reactionary danger, and stated that “laicism in Turkey is not only the guarantee of the political regime but also the guarantee of democracy and social peace, and it is a way of life.” The striking point in the statement is that it regards democracy as external to the political regime it mentions. The statement was not detailed about the proposed measures against the rising reactionary danger. Rather, it underlined the principle of laicism and the importance of this principle from the aspect of characteristics of the state and societal peace. The possible results of acts contrary to this principle were mentioned as “new tensions and sanctions,” “yeni gerilimler ve yaptırımlar”.

The press release identified the problem, whereas the second document detailed the MGK’s proposals to the government, demanding measures against the rising reactionary danger. The general themes of the text start with a conventional declaration about the need for the enforcement of existing laws and making new ones if needed for the fight against the rising reactionary danger. Furthermore, in many points - articles 1, 12-16, and 18 - the text refers to laws and legal arrangements. Moreover, later it also specifically calls for the enforcement of existing laws and regulations against outdated/backward, çağışı, clothing, the hides of sacrificial animals, private security staff and the protection of Atatürk. This stress on the enforcement of existing laws and regulations was in order to stop the prevailing tolerant attitude of the state mechanism toward Islam. After the laws and regulations, education was the second most-stressed issue in the text, with demands that the legislative organ introduce eight-year mandatory education, decrease the number of İmam-Hatip Schools, and finally subordinate education institutions that claimed to be under the control of sufi orders to the Ministry of Education. The ideological make-up of the state’s civil servant ranks was also stressed in the text as a hot item, and other state institutions were advised to adopt the TSK’s policy of discharging those members of the staff who are practicing Muslims as a means against ideological staffing.

The MGK wanted the government to fight against the rising danger of reaction with the assistance of other elements of the historic hegemonic center. Although Erbakan avoided direct confrontation with the military and did not deny its claims, he was not eager to follow its instructions. Erbakan’s main strategy was to buy time. When he was asked about the MGK decisions, he accused the media of formulating an artificial agenda. Erbakan was justified in his accusations of an artificial agenda, but he targeted the intermediary, not the instigator, which was the military. The meetings of the MGK in March and April were calm, as the

133 For the second document see: Yıldız, A. 28 Şubat: Belgeler, p.95-7.
134 The schools in question are private secondary schools whose curriculum is controlled by the Ministry of Education. The discussions about these institutions originated from the claims that these schools had unofficial ties with Sufi orders or other types of religious communities.
military set time aside for the government to execute the February 28 MGK decisions. In the meantime, the military was increasing the tension day by day and asking for the cooperation of civil society. They insisted that their real aim was not to use power, but that they expected politicians and the parliament to follow the instructions of the MGK.\textsuperscript{135} Their expectations from the parliament meant a change in parliamentary arithmetic, which started slowly with DYP representatives going over to the opposition. Yet the tension between the government and the military did not develop as slowly as the change in parliamentary balance, because the armed forces increased tension as “one senior officer went so far as to call the prime minister “a pimp” for going with his family on the pilgrimage to Mecca as guests of Saudi Arabia. When Erbakan urged the military to sanction the officer, they refused.”\textsuperscript{136}

The MGK meeting in May was crucial as time was now up for the government. In the meeting the generals called the government to account for the lack of measures taken against the rising reactionary danger. The result was nothing more than a delusion for the military. Therefore, the military employed the second phase of their action plan; organizing other elements of the historic hegemonic center - or civil society in their terminology. In this phase, the military organized briefings for judges, the media and civil society organizations.

3.5. Civil Society at Work: Activities of NGOs and Non-State Actors

Unlike former military interventions, the February 28 Process was a military intervention that was realized through civil society in the Gramscian sense. In the February 28 Process, the Armed Forces chose to organize so-called civilian forces\textsuperscript{137} to overthrow the coalition government instead of directly targeting the government with memorandums and/or physical interventions by using their armed advantage. The civilian forces, which consisted of the judicial organs, bureaucracy, universities, trade unions, trade associations and, finally, the media, played crucial roles in overthrowing the coalition government. The contribution of NGOs to the process was so ironic that some of the so-called NGOs, such as the Association for Kemalist Thought (Atatürkçü Düşünce Derneği, ADD) and the Association for the

\textsuperscript{135} Howe, M. Turkey Today, p.140.
\textsuperscript{136} Howe, M. Turkey Today, p.140.
\textsuperscript{137} The usage of the word ‘civil’ in Turkish makes the discussion more tragic. The Turkish word for civil is ‘sivil’, borrowed from the English word ‘civil’. However, there had been a manipulation in the meaning of the word when it was carried into Turkish, as the word ‘sivil’ means “non-military” in Turkish. Therefore, the interpretation of civil society is also biased by this change in meaning, as all non-military groups are regarded as part of civil society. Furthermore, Non-Governmental Organizations are called Civil Society Organizations in Turkey. The inexistence of an organic tie between these organizations and the military has been the only variable in considering an organization as a part of civil society. From this aspect, the Kemalist NGOs are considered part of civil society regardless of their ideas being hegemonic and statist.
Support of Modern Life (Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği, ÇYDD)\textsuperscript{138} demanded the military to take control of the government, using the slogan “Army Do Your Duty,” “Ordu Göreve.” Actually, the existence and activities of these two organizations can be traced back to the period before the process, as they considered Kenan Evren’s tolerant and instrumentalizing policies regarding Islam as a deviation from the principles of Kemalism. That is to say, before the process they had been critical about the opportunity structures which made the rise of the RP possible. Therefore, during the process, such organizations worked as an extension of the official body of the TSK and, not very surprisingly, high-ranked retired officers occupied the presidencies of these organizations. The stance of the Kemalist NGOs was full of contradictions concerning their relationships with the state. As already mentioned, before the end of the 1990s these groups had accused the army and other state institutions of compromising the principles of the Kemalist revolution and being tolerant of conservative politics. For example, Erdoğan mentions that the ADD established a foundation called the Foundation for Kemalist Thought, Atatürkçü Düşünce Vakfı, a kind of property that cannot be confiscated according to law, because they thought that there was a possibility of being closed after a military coup like the one in 1980.\textsuperscript{139} Despite the fact that they feared the potential negative consequences of a military coup, they supported the campaign and role of the military in the February 28 Process. Besides their contradictory relationship with the military and their role in the process, the Kemalist NGOs had a particular agenda, which was the hegemonic projection of Kemalism. In his detailed research of the discourse of such NGOs, Erdoğan states: “The discourse of associations like the ADD and the ÇYDD re-accentuates and re-articulates Kemalism into a new context so as to make it hegemonic over social. It attempts to construct a new and civil collective will that would serve as the subject of Kemalist restoration, or as a supplement of the official project.”\textsuperscript{140}

The Susurluk Scandal is of central importance for understanding the historic hegemonic center’s mobilization. On November 3, 1996, Turkish people learned from news sources that a car accident had occurred near a town called Susurluk. However, after a short time, it was revealed that it was not an ordinary car accident. There were four people in the car at the time of the accident: (1) a senior police officer, Hüseyin Kocadağ, (2) an outlaw heroin smuggler who was also accused of killing several people in the context of intrastate mafia relations and was wanted by Interpol, Abdullah Çatlı, (3) a former beauty queen and Çatlı’s girlfriend, 

\textsuperscript{138} The English translation of “çağdaş” is always problematic. Normally, “çağdaş” means contemporary. However, because Kemalists associate the modern with the contemporary, they use the word “çağdaş” as a synonym of modern. For example, when I was a sociology student in the Middle East Technical University in 2004, the course name “Postmodern Sociology” was “corrected” by the office of the dean into “Contemporary Sociology” because the dean was unable to imagine a contemporary condition that was beyond modernity.

\textsuperscript{139} Erdoğan, N. Kemalist Non-Governmental Organizations, p.271.

\textsuperscript{140} Erdoğan, N. Kemalist Non-Governmental Organizations, p.280.
Gonca Us, and, finally, (4) a DYP deputy for Şanlıurfa who was the leader of an anti-PKK Kurdish tribe, Sedat Edip Bucak. After a few hours passed, people began to question the context that had brought these people together. The incident created suspicions in society about the interrelationships between the mafia, politics and the state. As a result of society’s increasing sensitivity about the incident, people started a protest to demand an investigation of the incident and intrastate relations by turning their lights on and off every night at 21.00. The protests were named the “One Minute Darkness for Everlasting Light,” “Sürekli Aydınlık İçin Bir Dakika Karanlık” campaign.

In the beginning, society’s reaction to the incident had nothing to do with the RP, as the party had been out of the state mechanism for years. However, the RP spokespersons, especially Minister of Justice Şevket Kazan, belittled the people’s demands in order to protect their coalition partner.¹⁴¹ The explanations of the RP members suddenly created public sentiment against the RP and the coalition. Now the RP became the center of attention and people were demanding the resignation of the government every night during their protests. Of course, the media also played an important role in channeling discomfort against the RP.¹⁴² Public opinion’s sensitivity lasted only a few months as the agenda in Turkey was taken over by the rising reactionary danger of the February 28 Process. However, the RP’s ordeal related to Susurluk continued. The internalized method of the protests - turning lights on and off - was used against the rising reactionary danger. In the second rally of protests that started after the critical May meeting of the MGK, people started turning their lights on and off for the resignation of the government. Thus, public sensitivity and method of protest about the Susurluk incident accumulated and were manipulated against the conservative party. At the beginning of protests the word light was used concretely as the opposite of darkness. However, as soon as the protests became popular, the word also took on an abstract meaning and the campaign turned against conservative politics. NGOs were very active in the transformation of the campaign against conservative politics. For example, the Isparta branch of the ADD declared after a regional meeting that, “Our light will be shining over the gangs, the reactionaries and those who use the headscarf as a political symbol.”¹⁴³ In addition to combining Susurluk and reaction, these lines are also critical with respect to discourse. Instead of directly referring to headscarf itself, the declaration targets “those who use the headscarf as a political symbol.” The following remarks by Ives reflect this discourse very well: “Traditional intellectuals, as functionaries of the leading classes, present themselves as

¹⁴¹ While criticizing the protests Şevket Kazan blundered by referring to the prejudiced urban legend about the Alevi community in Turkey. Kazan’s blunder made the situation more tragic as he confronted the number one example of “good Muslims” of the official discourse.
¹⁴³ Erdoğan, N. Kemalist Non-Governmental Organizations, p.253.
if they are not attached to leading classes. By doing so, they present the interests and truths of leading classes as if objective truths and common interests.”

As will be mentioned in the discourse analysis chapter, newspapers also claimed that their criticisms were not against Islam itself, which is followed by good Muslims, but rather that they were against the deceivers of Islam, i.e. the bad Muslims.

All in the same breath, a civil society alliance was being formed against the RP. Major employers’ associations and trade unions in Turkey – the Confederation of Public Employees Trade Unions (Kamu Emekçileri Sendikası, KESK), the Confederation of Turkish Tradesman and Craftsmen (Türkiye Esnaf ve Sanatkarlar Konfederasyonu, TESK), the Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions (Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, TÜRK-İŞ), the Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions (Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu, DİSK), and finally the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (Türkiye Odalar ve Borsalar Birliği, TOBB) – allied against the coalition government. With a declaration signed on May 4, 1997, the leaders of these unions demanded the government’s resignation. The timing of the declaration was significant, as it was just after the unsuccessful posing of the question of confidence among opposition parties. During the process, the alliance organized several rallies against the government and fully adopted the historic hegemonic center’s discourse of the rising reactionary danger.

Later, the largest association of capitalists, TÜSİAD, also became involved in the alliance. The alliance was very significant, considering the different backgrounds and ideologies of the associations, such as KESK, TÜRK-İŞ and DİSK, which were leftist trade unions; TOBB and TESK, which were middle class employees’ organizations; and TÜSİAD, which was an organization of upper-class capitalists that is publicly known as the Employer’s Club. For example, TÜSİAD used to be a politically liberal organization that supported the market economy. Until the February 28 Process, the organization supported the democratization of Turkey and in several policy papers prepared by the organization existing civil-military relations in Turkey were harshly criticized. However, during the February 28 Process, the organization changed its tone and backed the military’s intervention in Turkish politics. It seems that the pro-center and elitist attributes of TÜSİAD were dominant over its capitalist characteristics and, as a result, TÜSİAD preferred to act in this manner. The change in the position of TÜSİAD proves the explanations of Gramsci on crisis moments. According to

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144 Ives, P. Language and Hegemony in Gramsci, p.77.
Gramsci, the moments when vital and major issues are in question are not the testing moments of a historic bloc; rather they are the moments of its formation.\footnote{Gramsci, A. Selections from the Prison Notebooks, p.158.} The relationship of TÜSİAD and ÇYDD is another example of the formation of the historic bloc, because the ÇYDD began to receive financial support from TÜSİAD.\footnote{Erdoğan, N. Kemalist Non-Governmental Organizations, p.279.} Before the process, the ADD used to be critical of financial support, and generally the ADD considered the ÇYDD as not sufficiently Kemalist. When a crisis moment like the process occurred, the ÇYDD turned out to be a fully Kemalist organization and developed good relationships with the relatively statist ADD and liberal TÜSİAD. The formation of a strong relationship with both parties shows the hegemonic capacity of Kemalism in Turkey.

Not surprisingly, the coalition government could no longer resist this rising pressure and Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan resigned on June 17, 1997. Coalition parties tried to demonstrate that the resignation was a consequence of coalition protocol, by which a rotation in the office of the prime minister between Erbakan and Çiller was made after the government fulfilled half of its pre-appointed time. In fact, the coalition protocol really ordered such a rotation, but in this it occurred prematurely. However, the plan did not work because of the fact that President Demirel did not appoint Çiller as prime minister. Demirel’s decision was entirely lawful but not just. According to precedent and established practices, Demirel was expected to appoint Çiller as prime minister due to the fact that the two-party coalition still formed the majority of the parliament. Nevertheless, Mesut Yılmaz was appointed as the prime minister. In the meantime, the Democratic Turkey Party (Demokrat Türkiye Partisi, DTP) of Hüsamettin Cindoruk was formed by parliamentarians who had suddenly and successively decided to resign from the DYP during the governmental crisis. Despite the fact that the resignations from the DYP had started before the resignation of Prime Minister Erbakan, the government block lost its majority amidst the resignations during the government formation process of the ANAP and Democratic Left Party (Demokratik Sol Parti, DSP). In the end, Mesut Yılmaz formed a minority government consisting of his ANAP, Bülent Ecevit’s DSP, and Hüsamettin Cindoruk’s DTP. Receiving a vote of confidence for Yılmaz’s government only became possible with the support of the CHP. However, the process did not end with the overthrow of the coalition government. On the contrary, the overthrow of the coalition government and the establishment of a new one were the preparatory stages for “cleansing Islam from the public sphere.”\footnote{Yavuz, H. M. (2000). “Cleansing Islam From the Public Sphere,” Journal of International Affairs, 54(1), 21-42.} The problems with the military faced by the succeeding government of Mesut Yılmaz despite its dedication to fighting the rising danger of reaction offers insight into the interventionist aims of the TSK.
behind the discourse of the rising danger of reaction. These interventionist aims were declared in the statement: “The Process Lasts Ad Infinitum.”


It is said that the Turkish military has never been particularly eager to intervene in civil politics. Due to the fact that military regimes in Turkish history were not long lasting, many commentators make this claim. Even if this common-sense claim was true, the military intervention of February 28 is an exception. As Chief of General Staff Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu stated in a reception in the first days of 2001, the February 28 Process was meant to last for a thousand years.

The aim of the process was to silence all conservative claims and to banish the conservative actors back to their symbolic diaspora. Therefore, the process did not finish when Erbakan resigned from the office of prime minister, nor with the banning of the RP on January 16, 1998. Furthermore, it is difficult to set an end date for the period. It can even be said that the process is still continuing, considering the adoption of the same discourse of the rising reactionary danger today. Naturally, however, the scope and potency of the process have decreased over time.

As stated before, there was a political opportunity structure for conservative demands in Turkey during the 1980s and 1990s. During the process, these political opportunities were reversed. The rapid rise of conservative actors in the public sphere decelerated, if not halted entirely, through the process. Education was one of the issues emphasized most by the military during the process. As mentioned before, the military in their briefings claimed that the educational institutions run by reactionaries should be closed down in order to fight against the rising reactionary danger. Therefore, during the process, the educational means of the conservative opposition were amputated. The closure of junior high school-level İmam-Hatip Schools, discrimination against İmam-Hatip graduates in university entrance exams, the headscarf ban in universities, and the pressure on private conservative education institutions were aimed at blocking conservative upward mobilization through education. Secondly, the economy was considered another sphere in which an arduous fight against the reactionaries was necessary. The military claimed that the so-called Green Capital, Yeşil Sermaye, economically supported the reaction in Turkey. As a consequence, harsh measures were taken

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against companies that were accused of being reactionary. Thirdly, staffing was another issue pointed out by the Kemalists as one of the indicators of rising reactionary danger, and harsh measures were also taken against conservative personnel in state institutions. Just as the military advised in their briefings, other state institutions also started dismissing practicing Muslim staff, claiming that they were reactionaries. Last but not least, the Kemalist establishment claimed that reactionaries made use of loopholes in laws in order to expand their sphere of influence. In order to stop the usage of these loopholes, new legal arrangements were made by the government that was established after the resignation of Erbakan. By taking these measures, the Kemalists hoped to destroy the social, political and economical bases of conservative politics in Turkey forever, and this is what is meant by the \textit{ad infinitum} character of the intervention.

However, while nobody thought that the February 28 Process would last \textit{ad infinitum}, nor did anyone think that it would be mostly stopped by majority rule of the AKP that started in 2002. Yet the AKP majority was not free from problems in terms of civilian-military relations or the debate over secularism.