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Abstract

Religiously motivated welfare provisioning has played an increasingly important role in the Turkish social welfare arena over the previous two decades. This paper investigates the society-specific mechanisms behind the contemporary proliferation of religiously motivated associations (RMAs) in Turkey. The historical analysis of the development of the Turkish welfare regime demonstrates that the spread of RMAs cannot be attributed to retrenchments within the welfare state. In fact, the provision of social assistance by central and local state institutions has expanded over the same time period. The paper claims that the rise of RMAs is not only a response to increasing liberalization and economic deregulation, but also an outcome of the rise of religion as a principle line of cleavage within the political sphere.

Keywords

Faith-based organizations, FBOs, Islam and neoliberalism, political Islam, social policy change, Turkey

During the past two decades, there has been an increasing presence of voluntary associations in the social policy arena of various welfare states. One group of organizations that especially come to the foreground in the voluntary sector are faith-based organizations (FBOs) (Dierckx et al., 2009; Dinham et al., 2009; Harris et al., 2003; Melville and McDonald, 2006; Rochester et al., 2007). An increasing emphasis on FBOs started in the USA, when the Reagan administration claimed that religious organizations were more effective in the provision of welfare than secular ones (Carlson-Thies and Skillen, 1996; Nagel, 2006). In the United Kingdom, the interest on FBOs increased in the 1980s and 1990s with Thatch-

er's policy of 'rolling back the frontiers of the state', and rising emphasis on the role of 'active citizens' (Billis and Harris, 1992). Countries such as Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands and Sweden have also been the focus of research on the changing share of FBOs in welfare provisioning (Dierckx et al., 2009; Göçmen, 2013). In line with the developments in Europe, the proliferation of religiously motivated civil-society associations (RMAs) has also been

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the case in Turkey.¹ Their numbers increased dramatically during the late 1990s and 2000s with these associations becoming one of the main providers of social assistance.

In line with their increasing presence in the social welfare realms of various European countries and the US, there has also been a rise in academic interest on RMAs/FBOs. The research focuses on the capabilities and effectiveness of FBOs in areas such as social work, cohesion and integration (Boddie and Cnaan, 2006; Dinham, 2009; Dinham et al., 2009; Harris et al., 2005). These studies commonly address questions concerning the efficacy of FBOs to improve the wellbeing of citizens, solve social problems and contribute to social integration/cohesion. Nevertheless, the reasons for the increasing presence of religiously-motivated/faith-based provisioning in social welfare are largely understudied.

Contemporary changes in social policy and the ongoing transformations of the social security and social assistance systems in Turkey have become areas of scholarly debate over the last decades (Adar, 2007; Bugra and Candas, 2011; Bugra and Keyder, 2006; Kilic, 2006; Yıldırım and Yıldırım, 2011). While some studies make references to the growing importance of voluntary associations in social welfare, most focus on transformations in the social security and social assistance institutions. A specific study on RMAs is missing in the literature. This paper studies the reasons behind the contemporary rise of RMAs in the Turkish welfare system, and will at once contribute to existing literature on comparative analyses of social policy change both in Europe and in Turkey.

The sharp rise in the number of RMAs in Turkey began in the 1990s. Previous research² conducted in three cities with 26 RMAs demonstrates that more than half of the RMAs were established in the post-2002 period (when the Justice and Development Party came to power), the majority of the rest during the 1990s with the rise of political Islam in Turkey. Only two associations in the sample were established in the pre-1980s period. The four largest and most noteworthy associations are the Deniz Feneri Social Solidarity Association (1996), the Kimse Yok Mu Social Solidarity Association (2004), the Cansuyu Association (2005), and the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian

Relief (IHH) (1992). Their budgets varied between USD 2000 and USD 100 million, but the average hovers around USD 9 million (Göçmen, 2011). The total budget of 13 associations that disclosed their figures is about USD 66 million (excluding international humanitarian aid) (Göçmen, 2011). When compared with the budget of Turkey's largest state institution for social assistance,³ these figures show that the RMAs' share in the total social assistance arena is significant, and they are arguably among the main providers. They provide in-kind transfers such as groceries, fuel and clothing, and cash transfers such as scholarships and rent payments. The target populations of the RMAs are indigent citizens and those who live below the extreme poverty line, ineligible for state provision such as social security and social assistance. They work on a voluntary basis, and their main financial resource is donations.

The aim of this paper is to contextualize the reasons behind the recent proliferation of RMAs in the Turkish welfare state in relation to similar developments at the European level. Following a historical institutionalist approach, the paper explains the proliferation of RMAs in Turkey by focusing on two dynamics: neo-liberalization and the rise of political Islam. In order to trace how these two dynamics came together to bring about an accelerated spread of RMAs, the article provides the reader with an analysis of social assistance in Turkey from the early republican period until today along with an analysis of the changing position of religion in the economic and political fields since the 1980s.

The structure of the paper is as follows: the first part presents the analytical framework, focusing on two macro trends that have influenced various welfare states in the post 1980s period. The second part pinpoints certain characteristics of the Turkish welfare regime that have been established since the establishment of the Republic. The third part demonstrates how the two main dynamics of change that marked the post-1980s period, neo-liberalization and the rise of religion in the political sphere, triggered transformations in social welfare, setting the economic and political foundations for the proliferation of RMAs. The final part provides a closer look into the changes in the social assistance arena and the process of the rise of RMAs during the post-1980s.

The analytical framework

European welfare states experienced significant transformations during the last two decades. Subsequently, the foci of scholarship on welfare states and different welfare state typologies (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Ferrera, 1996) during the first half of the 1990s turned to address issues such as dismantling, retrenchments and restructuring (Bonoli et al., 2000; Gilbert, 2002; Mishra, 1999; Pierson, 1994, 1996) after the second half of the 1990s. Macro trends such as increasing liberalization, globalization, aging societies, new social movements and their effects on existing welfare states are at the centre of scholarship on contemporary welfare. Studies on welfare mixes emphasized the increasing share of private/voluntary/civil society actors in welfare provision in the post-1980s (Abrahamson, 1999; Ascoli and Ranci, 2002; Evers, 1993; Evers and Olk, 1996; Evers and Wintersberger, 1988; Wuthnow, 1988). Studies on governance also put emphasis on the changing role of private and voluntary providers in the social policy realm (Bode, 2006; Daly, 2003; Jessop, 1999). In line with the research, the first macro dynamic that explains the rising interest on RMAs/FBOs is the increasing influence of neo-liberal dynamics, which has triggered welfare-state transformations and redefined the roles of public, private and voluntary institutions in the welfare realm.

A second macro dynamic that sheds light on the contemporary position of RMAs/FBOs has been the growing position of religion in the public sphere since the 1990s. Increasing salience of religion is a commonly discussed issue both in the US and in various European countries, and accordingly, research on the topic has significantly increased. Habermas recently drew attention to the global renewal of religious movements, including those at the heart of the West. He defines this as the 'political revitalization of religion' (Habermas, 2006: 1). Casanova's influential book *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Casanova, 1994) shows civil society as the locus of religious action in the post 1980s. *Religion Returns to the Public Square* is another study that fleshes out the relationship between religion, civil society and public policy (Hecló and McClay, 2003). Hecló defines the relationship

between religion and public policy as an 'inescapable coupling' due to the 'profound and unavoidable' connections between them (Hecló, 2003: 18). Scholars such as Coleman (2003) and Carlson-Thies (2003) also present faith-based social provision as an outcome of the return of religion to public life. They argue that today's religious organizations are again important parts of welfare provisioning similar to the period prior to the extension of state welfare provisions after the Second World War.

This paper shows that although the international dynamics of change provide a skeletal framework to explain the contemporary state of RMAs in Turkey, a study of the historical development of social policy institutions and contemporary changes in the political environment particular to Turkey is necessary in order to understand the society-specific manifestations of these dynamics. The role of institutional and political factors in determining the end products of neo-liberalization in single countries has been underscored by various scholars of political economy (Schmidt, 2009; Streeck, 2011; Streeck and Kathleen, 2005) and social policy (Beland, 2009; Ebbinghaus and Manow, 2001; Palier, 2010). The role political parties play in shaping welfare states has also been acknowledged by scholars who claim that political parties, as organized expressions of social fault lines, have different logics of redistributive policies (Manow, 2009; Manow and Van Kersbergen, 2009). Following the framework of these literatures, I explain the contemporary rise of RMAs in Turkey as an outcome of the political climate since the 1980s. The dominant political ideology in Turkey after the 1980s, as I discuss in detail below, can be defined as a coalition of the right (neo-liberal) with the religious (conservative) cleavages. In consequence, the underdeveloped welfare regime of the country has been restructured under the political influence of these two currents.

The gap in social assistance from establishment to the 1980s

The Turkish welfare regime is generally included in the family of Southern European welfare states because of: (1) the fragmented and hierarchical nature

of its social policy; (2) a labour-market structure in which self-employment, unpaid family labour and informal-employment practices are very common; (3) the lack of universal healthcare; and (4) the centrality of the family in risk situations (Bugra and Keyder, 2003, 2006). Although a Bismarckian-like social security system was established in the period following the Second World War, the Turkish state never considered social assistance for the poor an area of public policy. Instead, poverty has always been seen as a problem to be handled by benevolent citizens in the Turkish social policy regime (Bugra, 2007, 2008). This can be seen as a continuation of the historical ways of caring for the poor that have been taking place in this region since the Middle Ages. *Vakıf Waqf* institutions, that used a hybrid combination of public and private funds for the provision of social welfare services (Özbek, 2001; Singer, 2002), played a crucial role in the social, cultural and economic life of the Turkic world from the 8th to the 19th century (Yediyildiz, 1996: 50). Inheriting this historical background, even the single-party period (1923–1945), which is generally described as *etatist* in Turkish politics, was not distinguished by the expansion of the state provision of welfare. The reforms undertaken by the new political elite (Republican People's Party) did not create a social policy arena based on social citizenship rights. Instead, they just reproduced the philanthropic institutions of the previous period (Bugra, 2007) along the lines of dominant political ideologies such as nationalism and modernization.

In line with the developments in European countries, the core institutions of the welfare regime in Turkey were also founded after the mid-1940s. These were the Social Insurance Institution (1945) for workers; the Retirement Chest (1949) for civil servants; and Bag-Kur (1971) for the self-employed. The main activities of these three institutions were limited to the provision of health and old age benefits, which were based on the payment of contributions by employees and employers (Özbek, 2006). This exclusionary system did not cover the sections of the population who were unemployed or employed in the informal sector. No investment was made in social assistance apart from the establishment of an institution to care for the poor and the needy (Darülaceze) at the end of the 19th century, and

another for the protection of children (SHÇEK) in the early 20th century. Legislation on social disabilities and retirement pensions, introduced in 1976, is arguably the only modern legislation in the realm of social assistance (Bugra and Keyder, 2006). This legislation guaranteed the protection of citizens without social security services and close relatives to care for them. The establishment of the Social Assistance Institute in 1959 was an attempt to care for the urban poor, the unemployed, children and teenagers, and support families in need. Nevertheless, its limited services could neither remedy increasing levels of poverty, nor change the belief that poverty should be alleviated through acts of charity from wealthy individuals and voluntary organizations.

In the pre-1980s period, social assistance was largely made possible through informal mechanisms of support from the state, family and other networks of social solidarity. Examples of state support for those not covered by one of the social security institutions included: agricultural support policies to sustain the rural population and encumber its migration to urban areas, informal housing support for unofficial settlements within cities and employment opportunities in state economic enterprises (Bugra and Candas, 2011; Bugra and Keyder, 2003). In addition to these informal mechanisms of state support, the predominance of extended families and intra-family support systems shouldered the burden of helping the poor (Kalaycioglu, 2006). Especially during the pre-1980s period, the connections migrants maintained to their villages helped them survive the big cities by traditional mechanisms of support such as in-kind and income supplements from relatives in the rural areas (Bugra and Keyder, 2006). Nevertheless, as will be discussed in the next section, all of these mechanisms began to decline in the post-1980s period, which resulted in the increasing emphasis on social assistance.

Political dynamics in the post-1980s: neo-liberalization and rise of political Islam

Two major socio-economic currents in the Turkish political sphere shaped the period following the coup

d'état of 1980: the liberalization of the economy and the rise of political Islam. The concurrence of these two dynamics fuelled the proliferation of RMAs in Turkey. While neoliberalism aggravated the socio-economic terrain of the poor and the needy, political Islam's moral obligation to alleviate poverty created a constituency, which sustained its growth and nurtured RMAs.

The transition from an import-substitution to a liberal, export-driven market economy has marked Turkey's socio-economic trends since the 1980s. The Özal era's (1983–1989) economic liberalization policies had transformative power in the Turkish economy (Aricanli and Rodrik, 1990). Innovations in the economy caused the gross national product (GNP) and the export rates to boom, but also resulted in declining living standards because of a decrease in formal employment brought about by increased deregulation and privatization of state-owned enterprises. By the end of Özal's term, unemployment had risen and the average wage of unionized workers was lower than in 1980 (Yeldan, 1994). Increasing rural-to-urban migration also increased unemployment and poverty, and the need for social-assistance mechanisms. The highest rate of migration from rural Turkey to the cities was recorded between 1980 and 1985. By the mid-1980s, the urban population had grown to equal the rural population (State Planning Organization, 2007: 156). The cumulative effect of these socio-economic developments was the expansion of the already existing gap in the social assistance arena, which enabled the proliferation of RMAs.

It was also in these years that informal mechanisms of support from the state, family and other networks of social solidarity, which had been available to the needy before the 1980s, lost their functionality. The period after the 1980s witnessed what is called the 'erosion of the informal pillars of developmental welfare' (Bugra and Keyder, 2006: 220). This period signalled a shift in state–society relationships as informal channels for housing and access to state-subsidized rent began to buckle under pressure from economic, social and political developments, and the rise of 'new forms of poverty' (Bugra and Keyder, 2003: 19). After the 1980s, new urban migrants sought alternative measures to supply their

needs. Existing social security structures that only provided for the formally employed and their dependents could not solve the increasing number of the urban population who were either unemployed or employed in the informal sector.

Pro-Islamic and conservative–liberal political parties taking shape during the period coincided with the country's integration into global capital. The first pro-Islamic parties were established in the 1970s, but were short-lived; each one was closed after a couple of years.⁴ Nonetheless, the principal changes in the post-1980s political arena, which were triggered not only by the socio-economic changes in the country but also by the Islamic movements in the Middle East, included religion as a main cleavage in politics. The 1980 military coup heralded a new start in relations between the state and religion in Turkey. In order to cope with the country's left–right polarization, 'Turkish–Islam' was promoted by the state's main ideology (see Cetinsaya, 1999). By fusing Islamic and nationalist goals, the leaders of the military coup aimed to create 'a more homogenous and less political Islamic community' (Yavuz, 1997: 67). This particular shift in the relationship between the state and religion resulted in the increasing strength of the National Outlook Movement (*Milli Gorus*), out of which the pro-Islamic parties, including the Welfare Party, the Virtue Party, and the Justice and Development Party were born. I claim that the rise of these political parties opened a space for religion in the welfare arena.

The changes introduced in the economic sphere in the post-1980s period and the rise of a new conservative Islamic bourgeoisie set the socio-economic stage for the rise of RMAs. The Özal government's introduction of Islamic banking was an important step that brought the savings of pious Muslims into the financial system and facilitated business relations with Arab states. As argued by Yavuz, the moves after the 1980 coup aimed at integrating Muslims in the economic system. This integration also facilitated the process by which they could 'shape the educational, political and economic spheres with their own norms' (Yavuz, 1997: 70). Strong evidence of the rise of a new elite in the economic arena concurrent to the rise of political Islam was the establishment of business associations of the

'Islamist', 'Green' or 'Anatolian' capital, such as MUSIAD in 1990, ASKON in 1998 and TUSKON in 2005. Yavuz defines the expansion of the economy to include these provincial small businessmen as an important reason for the success of the Welfare Party and adds that, although the main ideology of the emerging bourgeoisie was socially Islamic, it was economically liberal (1997: 72). The period of the rule of Justice and Development Party (from 2002 until today) has been a stage for the further expansion of the newly rising bourgeoisie (Bugra and Savaskan, 2012).

The proliferation of RMAs and the expansion of social assistance

The above-mentioned transformations in Turkey's socio-economic and political structures resulted in reforms in the social security system⁵ and the establishment of social-assistance mechanisms to support the unemployed and impoverished parts of the population. It would be a mistake to describe the post-1980s period in the Turkish welfare state as an era of welfare state retrenchment. A restructuring of social security (Bugra and Candas, 2011; Yıldırım and Yıldırım, 2011) and the increasing demand for social assistance characterized the welfare regime during the period. These changes resulted in an increase in government spending due to both an increase in claimants and the establishment of new institutions in the social assistance arena.⁶ Along with the proliferation of RMAs, centralized state actions and provisions at the municipal levels also came about in this environment of increasing need (Göçmen, 2011). Common to social-assistance mechanisms developed both at the central and local level is their charity-like organization supported by the prevailing political atmosphere (Bugra and Candas, 2011; Bugra and Keyder, 2006; Göçmen, 2011). The political dynamics of neo-liberalization and political Islam set the stage for the proliferation of RMAs in the welfare arena through two important mechanisms. The first was the establishment of solidarity networks during the rise of political Islam and the emergence of a conservative bourgeoisie, which

set the economic background for the RMAs. The second is the rise of a conservative approach towards social policy based on Islamic traditions of charity that could operate in line with neoliberal developments at the international level.

The networks of reciprocity established during the rise of political Islam constituted the economic foundations for the rise of RMAs. These networks of intra-community solidarity of Anatolian capital provided their members with mutual support and cooperation. The expansion and success of these networks was developed by a sense of intra-community trust and solidarity based on the ideals of Islam. As argued by Demir et al., '[r]eligious groups or communities, while building mosques, Qur'an courses, schools and student dormitories with money collected from members or friends who give to charity out of religious duty, also prepared a customer and capital base for the schools, business and enterprises of their members' (Demir et al., 2004: 171). Proof of how these networks function is the recent establishment of religiously motivated umbrella associations. The Turkish Foundation of Voluntary Organizations (TGTV) is the largest national umbrella association with Islamic sensitivities (Turkish Foundation of Voluntary Organizations, 2012). The aim of the umbrella organization is to act as a liaison between different areas of Islamic civil society – such as education, law, business and social provisioning associations. The largest Islamic business associations, such as MUSIAD and ASKON are also members of the TGTV. Accordingly, businesses of these associations bankroll the activities of the RMAs. As the president of TGTV claimed, the transfer of resources is much easier in such a network of civil society associations.⁷

A new approach to social policy also emerged in the political atmosphere defined by a combination of Islamic and liberal ideologies. The Welfare Party's main political programme, 'Just Order', was the first attempt to bring Islamic ideals and ethics into the capitalist economy and create a community around these ideals, which shared similarities with the ideals of a welfare state in its emphasis on achieving equality and social justice. Nevertheless, the road chosen in order to achieve the 'just order' was not to take state redistribution or widen the scope of welfare

policies, but rather to establish communities and networks founded on Islamic morality and a sense of trust. As asserted by Bugra, '[o]nly in the cultural setting of Islam could justice acquire a meaning, a meaning derived from reciprocal obligations of trust, loyalty and solidarity that bind the community of believers' (Bugra, 2002: 129). The 'just order' was to be engendered from private benevolence and voluntary initiatives organized around communal forms of belonging and solidarity. Therefore, the subsequent rise of RMAs should be seen as an extension of the new approach to social provision that began to take root with the Welfare Party and developed into a more liberal and conservative agenda with the advent of the Justice and Development Party.

The legal changes introduced to the associational laws and tax legislation, and the discursive support⁸ from the pro-Islamic political parties are additional factors that afford RMAs a privileged position. With the introduction of the new law of associations in 2004, a sub-department called the Department of Associations was established under the Ministry of Interior to supervise the establishment and operation of civil society organizations (Turkey, 2004a). The change facilitated both the founding and operation of RMAs. Development and implementation of joint projects between state institutions and civil society associations also began to occur for the first time during this period.⁹ The introduction of a food bank system in income tax legislation in 2004 made tax exemptions possible for companies donating to civil society associations (Turkey, 2004b). A further revision of the law in 2004 extended assistance beyond food to include clothing, home cleaning materials and fuel, which in turn increased the amount of donations RMAs received from different business (Turkey, 2004c). A crucial piece of legislation that merits special attention is the introduction of the award of Association for Public Interest status (Turkey, 2004a). The title, which can be granted by the Turkish Council of Ministers to selected voluntary associations, guarantees important rights such as tax exceptions. Two of the largest RMAs, *Deniz Feneri* Social Solidarity Association and *Kimse Yok mu* Social Solidarity Association, received this title in 2004 and 2006 respectively.

At the central level, the establishment of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund in 1986 was the first and main step taken by the government to support the parts of population that are not covered by social security services (SYGM, 2012). The legislation set up the Fund as an umbrella organization that assumed all the social responsibilities on behalf of the state with regards to the needy and the destitute who are deprived of any social security provisions (SYDGM, 2009). It was modelled on *vakif* institutions, which existed long before the birth of the Ottoman Empire. The idea of introducing a social-assistance institution modelled on *vakifs* is significant for two reasons: it is based on Islamic principles and it emphasizes citizens' duty to care for the poor. After the 1990s and particularly the financial crises of 2000 and 2001, both the fund's budget and field of activity expanded dramatically;¹⁰ currently there are more than 900 foundations of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund all over the country connected to the central directorate in Ankara (SYDTF, 2012). The main activities of the branches are conditional cash transfers to the poor, assistance programmes for education and health, and development projects such as micro-credit agencies. In 2004, the fund was given the institutional structure of a general directorate called the Prime Ministry General Directorate of Social Assistance and Solidarity, mainly financed by off-budget funding from income-tax revenues and traffic fines; and voluntary donations such as *fitre* and *zekat*.¹¹ Characteristics of the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations, such as their references to Islam and the Ottoman Empire, use of voluntary contributions, lack of systemic mechanisms of means testing and their discretionary targeting measures, are very similar to the RMAs that emerged during subsequent years (Göçmen, 2011).

At the local level, the distribution of social-assistance by municipal governments is another development in the welfare realm of the last two decades. The role of local governments in social policy has continuously increased since the mid-1990s. The Welfare Party's 1994 electoral success at the municipal level was a turning point for the acceleration of social assistance by municipalities (Akinci, 1999). The party invested heavily to mobilize grassroots support and establish personal contact with as many

voters as possible (Eligur, 2010; White, 2002). While statistical data on the scale of the social assistance work undertaken by the municipalities are unavailable, the presence of municipalities in the area of social provision with projects such as employment creation and direct social-aid programmes to distribute food, coal, clothing and the like is undeniable. An important legal change that increased activities in social provision by municipalities was established in 2005. A clause in the municipal law of 2005 opened the way for the municipalities to buy goods and services for social provision from the private sector, making it possible for municipalities to cooperate with the private sector in meting out social assistance (Turkey, 2005). Increasing levels of municipal social provision and questions regarding the political motives behind them have been widely discussed in the media. There was a significant increase in media coverage of the distribution of food, coal and even household appliances by the municipalities before the general elections in 2007 and local elections in 2009.¹² This demonstrates both the charity-like organization of social provision and its politicization in the last decade.

Conclusion

This paper discusses the proliferation of RMAs as one of the most important indicators of transformations in the Turkish welfare regime in recent decades. The study contributes to our understanding of recent developments in the welfare system by spotlighting the changes in Turkey's political milieu over the last decades. The analysis demonstrates that, although macro trends such as neoliberalization, Europeanization and globalization elicit similar structural changes in social-policy in many countries, a focus on the existing institutional structures and shifts in the political sphere is necessary to explain the internal dynamics of change in single welfare states. This paper, then, attributes the growing presence of RMAs in the Turkish welfare arena to: (1) an increased demand for social assistance occasioned by economic liberalization and deregulation; and (2) the predominance of religion

Table 1. Public expenditure as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP).

| | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 2005 |
|---------|------|------|------|------|
| Total | 4.4 | 7.6 | 13.3 | 13.7 |
| Health | 0.7 | 1.6 | 3.1 | 4.1 |
| Pension | 1.3 | 2.2 | n/a | 6.3 |

Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2010), Country Statistical Profiles.

in the political sphere after the 1980s and the subsequent restructuring of social policy under the rule of pro-Islamic political parties.

During the last two decades, the most specific developments in Turkey's welfare regime have been reforms to the social security system, an increased demand for social assistance, and the establishment of new social assistance mechanisms to meet the demand. The proliferation of RMAs took place when, for the first time, social assistance surfaced as the domain of state institutions. At a glance, the impetus behind the growing number of RMAs appears inaccessible. One could ascribe the emergence of these associations to retrenchments in welfare, as in many European countries. Nevertheless, as the analysis shows, the historical specificities of the Turkish welfare state and its lack of established social assistance institutions resulted in its inability to respond to the pressing imperatives of the post-1980s' welfare arena. In light of these historical particulars, then, the paper claims that the rise of RMAs in parallel to increasing local and central provision is best understood as the fallout of the political climate and the socio-economic imperatives since the 1980s.

The analysis of the post-1980s political arena shows that the political atmosphere of neoliberalism and political Islam had significant repercussions on social policy, setting the stage for an increase of RMAs. While neoliberalism triggered high unemployment and poverty – simultaneously dismantling unofficial mechanisms of support and creating a need for social assistance – political Islam established networks of solidarity based on charity to fill the lacuna of social assistance in Turkey.

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Notes

1. The concept of RMAs is preferred instead of FBOs for the case of Turkey because in Turkey these are civil-society organizations that are unconnected to institutionalized forms of religion or places of worship. The main reasons for conceptualizing them as 'religiously motivated' are their grounds for providing welfare and the mostly veiled connections they have to religious groups, sects and tarikats (Sufi orders and communities).
2. Research conducted between 2007 and 2009 by the author, in three cities (Konya, Istanbul and Bursa) through in-depth interviews with RMAs.
3. The total SYDGM (General Directorate of Social Assistance and Solidarity) budget for the year 2009 was about USD 395 million (see <http://www.sosyal-yardimlar.gov.tr/tr>).
4. The National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi – MNP*) established in 1970 and closed down in 1971. The National Salvation Party (*Milli Selamet Partisi – MSP*) established in 1972 closed down with the military coup in 1980 (Yavuz, 2009).
5. Reforms in the social security arena will not be covered in this paper. For a detailed study see Bugra and Candas, 2011.
6. For data see Table 1.
7. Interview conducted by the author on 5 April 2007.
8. For Prime Minister Erdogan's supportive comments about *Kimse Yok mu* concerning their activities during religious festivals, see the related article in *Zaman*, 22 December 2007. Talks T. Erdogan held after the Gaza Flotilla incident in May 2010 were an example of IHH (The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief) support. The Prime Minister emphasized the legitimacy of charity in *Milliyet*, 2 January 2009
9. An example of such collaboration was a joint project of Cansuyu Association and the Ministry of Education. 1615 free wheelchairs were distributed to disabled children (Cansuyu 2011).
10. The amount of help distributed by the General Directorate of Social Assistance and Solidarity increased threefold in the period between 2001 and 2004 (from 32,769,000 TL to 92,475,000 TL) (Bugra and Adar, 2008).
11. *Fitre* and *zekat* are both religious forms of giving in Islam.
12. There is no data available on the amount of media coverage, yet a claim made by the Prime Minister Erdogan on 2 January 2009 can be taken as an example of increasing media coverage on the issue. As a response to the critiques about the increasing social assistance provisions before the elections he stated that charity is part of our culture. Available at: <http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/470898.asp>

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