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RELIGION IN THE TURKISH REPUBLIC







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Every Turkish citizen has freedom of religion granted by the country. 99 % of the Turkish population is Muslim, and the rest of the population consists of Christians (Orthodox, Protestant, Catholic) and Jews. For the purpose of this book, the word "religion" means Muslim in Turkey.

Before we begin to analyze the subject "Religion in Turkey" let us quote the views of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic. He says:

"Our religion is the most rational and most neutral religion, and for this reason it is the last one. In order to be a rational religion, it must not be in contradiction with wisdom, science, technique and logic. Our religion is not contradictory of these concepts. This is the measure to test our religion. With this measure you may decide whether anything is contrary to the wisdom, logic and the interest of the nation. For these reasons our religion is the most rational. The Islamic religion must be interpreted in this way."



DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF
PRESS AND INFORMATION

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RELIGION IN TURKEY

Every Turkish citizen has freedom of religion granted by the constitution. 99 % of the Turkish population is Muslim, and the rest of the population (less than 1 %) is composed of Christians (Orthodox, Protestant, Catholic) and Jews. For this reason, the word «religion» means Muslim in Turkey.

Before we begin to analyse the subject «Religion in Turkey» let us quote the views of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic. He says:

«Our religion is the most rational and most natural religion, and for this reason it is the last one. In order to be a natural religion, it must not be in contradiction with wisdom, science, technique and logic. Our religion is not contradictory of these concepts. This is the measure to test our religion. With this measure you may decide whether anything is contradictory to our religion or not. If anything fits wisdom, logic and the interest of the people, it also fits our religion. For these reasons our religion is the most developed and the last religion. The Turkish nation must be more re-

ligious. I mean this with all the pureness of a believer. I believe in religion like believing in truth. We realize the fact that the Islamic religion must be clear of political influences; and it must be believed in, in its historical **character**. We should be proud to be believers of Islam. In the Islamic social life none of the social classes have the right to live forever as the rulers of religion. Those who claim this right are acting against the rules of the Islamic religion. There is no holy class in Islam, we all are equal and have to learn the rules of Islam on an equal basis. Everybody needs a place where he can learn his own religion, and the rules of religion. This place is called school.»

Atatürk comments on mosques and prayers as follows :

«The sermons in the mosques must be so delivered that everyone should be able to understand their meaning and that they should inspire strong Islamic beliefs. The speakers must be men of learning. They must know the main rules of Islam and the realities of the world.

The mosques are not built only as places in which to pray, but they are built to enable us to think and to consult with others about the problems of the World and Islam.»

In Republican Turkey there is a Directorate of Religious Affairs. The muftis, hocas, and imams are directed by this Department.

The Directorate of Religious Affairs was established by a special Law numbered 633. According to the Article 154 of the Turkish constitution it deals with the administration of religious activities and religious places, with affairs related to islamic beliefs, islamic rules and the enlightenment of the people about Islam. The Directorate is directly attached to the Prime Ministry and one of the State Ministers is responsible for its activities.

The highest consulting and decision making body of the Directorate is the Religious Affairs High Committee composed of a president, ten members and a sufficient number of supporters.



Provincial Organizations

The Directorate has a provincial organization composed of provincial muftis. The provincial offices also have preachers and religious service personnel.

Republican Turkey provides religious education at three different levels :

- A) In Universities and the Ministry of National Education.
- B) By the Directorate of Religious Affairs.
- C) Privately.

A) There is a Directorate-General of Religious Education in the organization of the Ministry of National Education, which provides teaching at (1) primary and secondary level and (2) at higher level.

Primary and secondary level religious education is provided in all primary and secondary schools. There are also special schools for religious education.

In the 4th and 5th year classes of primary schools, and the first and **second year classes of secondary and high schools**, an elective course called «Religious Science» is taught.

Special schools based on the education of religious affairs are called «Imam-Hatip High Schools». These schools provide instruction in two stages: The First stage requires 3 years, the second stage requires 4 years. The main objectives of these schools as described by their by-laws are: «In the secular educational system, these schools are established by the Ministry of National Education as professional schools :

To educate students to become religious leaders (imam) and religious speakers (hatip), religious teachers for Kor'an Courses, and muftis, and similar religious posts»



Religious Education at Higher Level

Higher Islamic Institutes : Those who have graduated from the secondary levels of Imam-Hatip High Schools are accepted as students and their training lasts 4 years. In the by-laws of the institute; the objectives of these schools are stated as follows :

«Higher Islamic Institutes are entitled to educate religious service people for central and provincial organisations of the Religious Affairs Directorate, teachers for Imam-Hatip High Schools and Teachers of Religion for the other secondary schools and teacher training colleges. Higher Islamic institutes are also authorized to help the development of the graduates from a religious point of view and are under the control of the Ministry of National Education.» There are five such institutes.

Theological Faculties in Universities

There are two theological faculties, one in the University of Ankara, and the other in the Erzurum Atatürk University. The Theological Faculty, accepts only High School graduates. The Faculty of Islamic Sciences accepts the graduates of High Schools and Islamic High Schools (Imam-Hatip). The objectives of these faculties are parallel to the objectives of Higher Islamic Institutes, but they have more opportunities and facilities for further research in the Islamic culture.

Education by the Religious Affairs Directorate

This is done in two ways;

- 1) Job Training
- 2) Education of the People

1) The job training system is undertaken by the Department for Education of Religious Affairs and Religious Services for People. This education covers all the officials of the Religious Affairs Directorate. Every year hocas, muftis, provincial and central directors of the organization, religious preachers, Koran Course teachers and mosque attendants are called to at-

tend specially planned job training courses. The duration of these courses varies from 15 days to one year. There are three education centres for job training purposes. One is in Ankara, one is in Istanbul and one is in Bolu.

The facilities of other schools during the vacation times are also used for these summer courses. In addition to the disciplines related to religious affairs, administrative and legal subjects are also covered in these courses. The Religious Affairs Directorate calls university education staff and its own personnel to teach the people in these programmes.

Education of the People

This is also done on two levels namely:

a) Special Koran Education - The basic units of this education are the Koran courses. A specially authorized teacher from the Religious Affairs Directorate is responsible for the teaching of the Koran. He is also responsible for the management of the course. The education and training rules of these courses are planned by a special by-law of the Directorate of Religious Affairs.

b) General Religious Education — Preachers offer talks on religion.

On various days of the week, and on Fridays the Imams and other speakers talk about religious subjects and teach the religious rules

The main points of these talks are generally on Islamic rules, prayers and ethical subjects.

In addition to this general education, the Directorate of Religious Affairs offers religious education based on published materials.

This is done by publishing a fortnightly newspaper and a bi-monthly magazine, prepared by special departments, in addition to various books. All these publications are directed to a special educational programme. Among these books, the Koran, the meaning of the Koran, other holy books, and the sayings of the Prophet are included. Religious Affairs Directorate cooperates with the Turkish Radio and Television organisation for special radio and television programmes on religious subjects.

Private Education

Paragraphs of 1, 2 and 4 of Article 19 of the Turkish Constitution state that;

«Everyone has the freedom of religious belief, opinion and concept.

Any prayers, ceremonies and religious activities are free as long as they are not against public order, or the rules of general ethics and the laws concerning these subjects.»

Within this freedom many Muslims take special courses in the Islamic field, and children are trained with the permission of their legal representatives. Generally, this private education covers the Koran courses for children, analysis, comments and the translation of the Koran and the sayings of Mohammed. This private religious education creates an opportunity for those who do not have the chance to attend official training programmes.

RELIGIOUS LIFE OF THE PEOPLE

The Turkish people are pious people as can be observed by the attendance in the mosques, especially on Fridays and on Holy Days. The Holy Month of Ramadan provides a good example of the extent of their belief. Colourful religious ceremonies are programmed.

Some people arrange special rooms in their apartments for praying during Ramadan, sometimes they call special imams and hocas for this purpose. During wedding ceremonies, a Koran is the most valuable present of the Bride, also a special praying carpet.

Family leaders teach the rules of Islam to their children, sometimes they bring the young ones to the Mosques to teach them how to pray and worship.

In every home of Muslim Turks there is a Koran and a special praying carpet. Turkey has the largest percentage of pilgrims who go to the Holy places of Mecca every year.

There are forty-four thousand mosques in Turkey and this number increases yearly by a further 800 to 1000. There is no single village in Anatolia that is without a mosque. The number of mosques increases according to the size of the villages. In the big cities the mosques provide impressive examples of Turkish-Islamic art and civilization.

Non-Muslims

The small non-Muslim Minority is free under the Article 19 of the Turkish Constitution to conduct their own religious affairs namely education, training as well as worship.

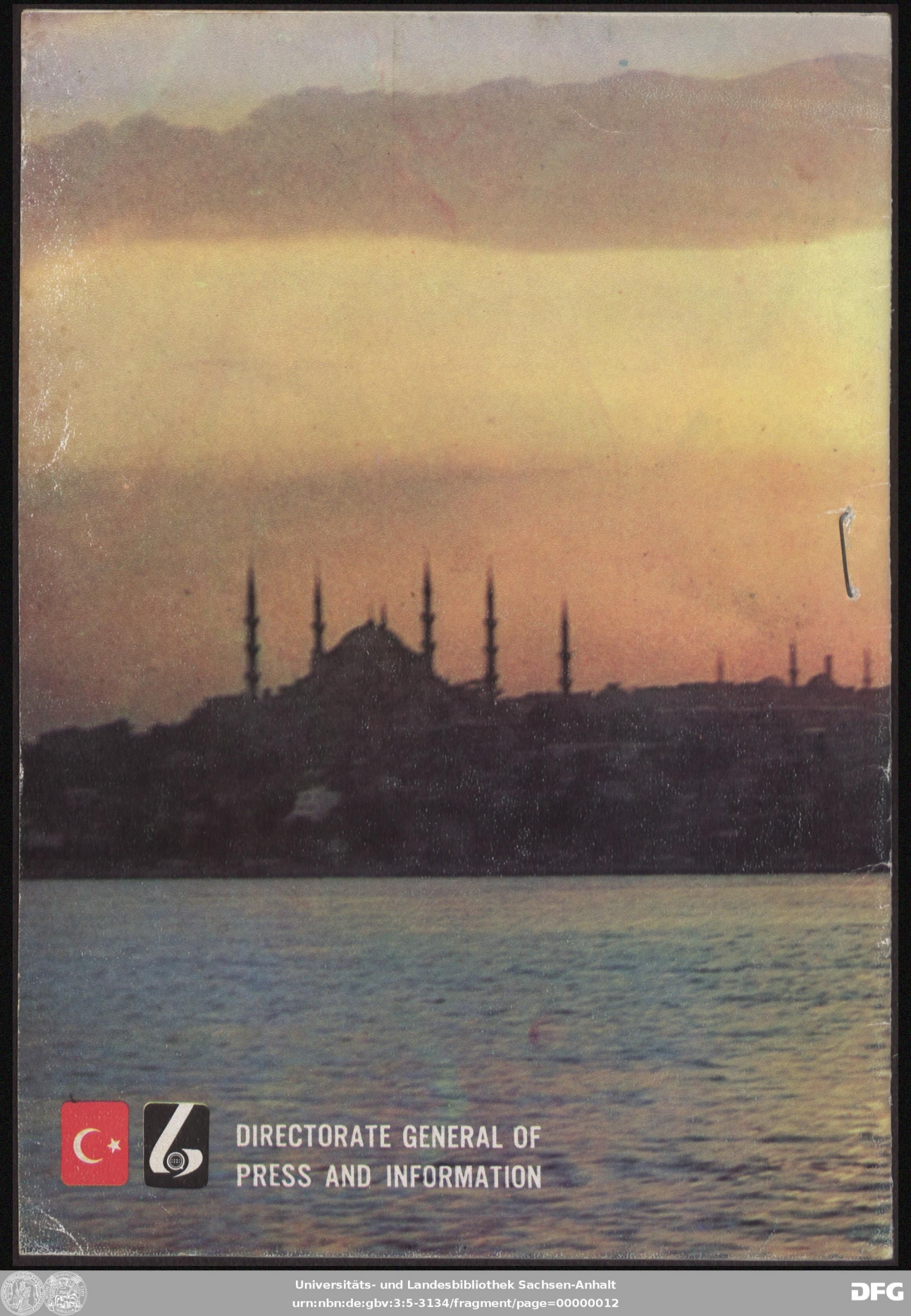
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