

## **Hegemony through Private Welfare? Religiously Motivated Associations and Political Islam in Contemporary Turkey**

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### **Introduction**

Last decades in Turkey have been stage to a proliferation of religiously motivated associations in the welfare realm. Their numbers have dramatically increased since late 1990s, with these associations becoming one of the main providers of social assistance. Although in line with the rise of faith-based organizations in Europe and the United States (see Dierckx/Vranken/Kerstens 2009; Dinham/Furbey/Lowndes 2009; Harris/Halfpenny/Rochester 2003; Wuthnow 2004; Jawad 2009), this increase in the Turkish case had case specific reasons that are highly related to major shifts in its political sphere in the last decade. The rise of religion as a main cleavage in the political arena in the post-1980s period has been the most important reason enabling the rise of these associations in Turkey.

Religion has always been a contested area in Turkish politics, due to the specific secularization path that was followed in the formation of the nation state and since then. As a result, unlike most of the European cases, religion was not guaranteed a presence in the Turkish welfare state. This picture changed in the last decades—with the rise of pro-Islamic political parties. I claim that the shift in religion, from being excluded from the political arena to being a main cleavage line in politics, also opened up a space for it in the welfare arena. Networks of reciprocity established during the rise of Islam in the economic, political, and social spheres, and the exploitation of the social-provision arena by the political parties, set the foundational basis for the rise of RMAs.

Welfare provisioning through party channels, which are established as a part of Islamic solidarity networks, has been on the rise since the mid-1990s. Scholars conducting research on mobilization of political Islam in Turkey pointed out the role of welfare

provisions in this process (see Eligur 2010; White 2002; Heper 1997). Following the mid 1990s a new social policy approach based on a successful combination of Islamic ideals with neo-liberal principles has been dominating the social policy environment in Turkey. Bugra and Keyder point to a strong conservative–liberal tendency, whereby Islamic notions of charity successfully complement attempts at downsizing the state through strict controls over social spending (2006: 226). They claim that Islamic elements in the ideological orientation of the Justice and Development Party have been very useful in motivating and mobilizing civil initiatives, such as NGOs who appeal to the norms and institutions of Islamic solidarity, through which they generate private donations for providing social assistance (ibid. 224). In line with their arguments, I see the subsequent rise of RMAs as an extension of this new approach to social provision that has been developed by the political parties such as the Welfare Party and the Justice and Development Party, which have their roots in the Islamist National Outlook movement (*Milli Gorus*).

This paper presents the findings of in-depth research conducted with twenty-seven RMAs in three cities in Turkey in the period between January 2008 and June 2009. The empirical research—which was centered on the motivations, functioning and connections of the RMAs—aimed to attain a comprehensive understanding of RMAs as social policy providers. Although the increasing presence of RMAs in the welfare realm, and their discreet connections to some political parties, municipalities and business groups have been focus of media attention in the last decades, research on RMAs is still limited. Neither the exact population of the existing associations, nor their motivations and connections is known due to lack of research in the area. By focusing on the general characteristics of the twenty-seven RMAs and undertaking a deeper analysis of three of the biggest RMAs in Turkey, this paper aims to shed light on the relatively unexplored area of religion, politics and welfare. A closer analysis of the associations will not only help us to get a better understanding of these new actors in the welfare arena but will also uncover their connections to different branches of political Islam at the national and international level.

## Exploring the Universe of RMAs

This part of the paper takes the analysis to a meso level and focuses on a brief presentation of two groups of RMAs present in the Turkish welfare arena and a comprehensive study of three biggest RMAs in Turkey, as the main focus of empirical research. A detailed analysis of foundation histories, motivations and connections of RMAs will provide us with a comprehensive understanding of the divides in the universe of RMAs and the historical as well as the political reasons behind these divides. An analysis of the existing differences in the ideological and political stand points of the associations will shed light on the political economy of welfare provision by these associations.

RMAs 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). Organizational scales of the associations vary to a great extent. RMAs that are active at the local, national and international levels are all included in the sample in order to represent the present variety. In spite of the range in the organizational scale, the associations shared common area of activities such as regular support for the poor families by provision of basic supplies, temporary relief provision in times of emergency and informal education of the recipients on moral and religious issues. Target populations of the RMAs are citizens under poverty or extreme poverty line, who are not covered by any forms of state provision such as social security or social assistance. The associations work on a voluntary basis, and their main financial resource is donations. The information collected on the budgets of the associations has proven that their share in the social policy arena is much larger than expected.

Decentralized organizational structures of the associations and their emphasis on locality as the main source of human and financial capital were important indicators of their ties at the community level. A closer look into decision-making mechanisms and the practices of provision shed light on the lack of objective eligibility criteria;

lack of expertise in the area of provision; informal nature of the relationships between the providers and beneficiaries; and tighter surveillance mechanisms to control the use of provided help. Volunteers are active in all steps of provision such as deciding on who is eligible, making the social investigation to decide on provision, distributing the benefits and deciding on the termination of assistance. Although there are some codes of conduct defining how all of these steps should be taken, in most of the associations, personal judgments and lack of transparency seem to be the rule. The informal relations between the volunteers and the beneficiaries that involve a dose of surveillance and control—such as visits to the households and to the neighborhood of the beneficiaries—raises questions of possible breach of individual freedom.

An important finding of the study is the amount of heterogeneity that is present in the population of RMAs. Empirical research demonstrated that RMAs in Turkey do not compose a coherent group; they differ in many respects such as their relations to central and local state institutions, political and ideological standpoints, the level of religiosity involved in them, and their main motivations of action being the most important ones. The analysis of the associations interviewed made clear that the main dividing line in the sample is between what I labeled as the new and the vintage associations. This distinction is based on the foundation stories of the associations, which includes characteristics such as date of foundation, main aims of founders and main activity areas at the time of establishment. It is not very easy to set strict dividing lines in any of these areas. Yet, it is still possible to see the common trends that divide the two groups. I explain this variety, presented in the table below, in relation to the transformation of state-religion relations in Turkey. The associations, which are defined as the new RMAs, are established in the last decade, in which religion became the main cleavage in the political sphere of the country. Vintage associations, on the other hand, are the ones that have been established at the earlier stages of the rise of Islam. Therefore, they have been transformed and reshaped through ups and downs of state-religion relations. The main defining characteristics of the two groups can be seen in the table below:

**Table 1. New and Vintage RMAs**

|                                   | <b>New RMAs</b>                                      | <b>Vintage RMAs</b>                                |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Activity scale</b>             | National and international                           | Mainly local                                       |
| <b>Activity areas</b>             | Limited to social provision                          | Broader than social provision                      |
| <b>Foundation dates</b>           | Late 1990s, early 2000s                              | Earlier than 1990s                                 |
| <b>Secularization</b>             | High   | Low  |
| <b>Professionalization</b>        | High   | Low  |
| <b>Formulation of motivations</b> | Humanitarian   | Islamic  |
| <b>Administrative backgrounds</b> | University graduates, young professionals            | People with formal or informal religious education |
| <b>Funding sources</b>            | International campaigns, TV programs, advertisements | Personal and local community connections           |

New RMAs are the associations that were established in the late 1990s and early 2000s, whereas the vintage ones have a longer history. The foundation dates of the associations, which corresponded to different eras of state-religion relations, defined their main motivations and characteristics. It is possible to say that both groups have been important organizing forces for the rise of political Islam. Yet, they had different strategies to achieve this aim. Social provision was not a crucial part of Islamist movement in the period before the 1990s; the possible political benefits of social welfare provision have been discovered only in the mid-1990s. Therefore, the vintage associations and foundations that have been established with different motivations such as Qur'an courses, teaching Islamic ways of living or supporting the international Islamic movement began to put more emphasis on provision activities in the period after the mid 1990s and early 2000s. Most of the vintage associations have been involved in activities for Islamization of the society and the political system. Some of them have been through times of political pressure; they have been prohibited or closed down for periods. Yet, similar to the history of pro-Islamic political parties, following every closure, they re-opened with new names.

How the RMAs in these two groups perceive state and, their position in the social provision arena vis-a-vie the state are two important defining characteristics. The new RMAs see state institutions as possible partners, and define their role in the social provision arena as supporting the state. Unlike the new RMAs, the vintage ones see state institutions as control mechanisms, and define their actions in the provision arena either totally free of state action (outcome of religious aims) or as fixing the

failures of state (such as failing to institutionalize *zekat*). I interpret these two clearly defined positions of the new and vintage RMAs as a reflection of the shifts in the state-religion relations. Whether the associations were established in a time period in which the political environment was welcoming or not has been an important defining factor in shaping state-RMA relations. Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize that the picture presented here is a quite dynamic one. Since the relationship between state and religion is still not a settled one in the case of Turkey, it is possible to see the reflections of any change at the macro level on the identities and characteristics of the associations. Therefore, dynamism is the main characteristic both defining the state-religion relations at the macro level, and the relations between state institutions and RMAs at the meso level.

#### **A closer look at the new RMAs**

The associations included in this group can be labeled as the “kids” born after the last turn of political Islam in the last decade. This last turn, as already discussed in the historical chapters, brought a more modernist, liberal and western oriented group of Islamists (or conservative democrats, as they define themselves) to the power. The rise of the new RMAs corresponds to such a time period. Therefore, the traits of the associations included in this group, such as relatively high levels of professionalization and secularization should be seen as the outcomes of the learning process Islamic groups have been going through in the post-1970s period.

The new RMAs explain the establishment of their associations in relation to humanitarian and moral motivations. The founders/administrators define their ideal as the wish to become a partial remedy for the increasing number of people living in poverty, or as one respondent put it, “to be beneficial to the society”. In their responses to the questions related to motivations and aims of the organizations, they mainly touched upon issues of personal and social responsibility to fight the inequalities and poverty existing in the society.

If I do not care about this poverty around me, I will lose my humanity. To be indifferent to people who need help would have been a weakness of personality. So that is why we started this association. Our idea at first was not to form an association, we just wanted to help some people around us, but then when both demand and supply increased, we thought maybe it is a good idea to institutionalize what we are doing. Therefore we established this association.

Religious beliefs came to the picture when the administrators started to talk about the personal motivations of the volunteers. The interviewees did not avoid making clear statements about religiosity involved in the provision practices and the motivations behind these practices, especially at a personal level.

People apply as volunteers by saying that they want to acquire God's merit. This world is temporary; there will be an assessment in the other one.

Religious motivations have a very important influence. People do not come here to increase their economic gains, social status or political power. Some can try it, but they would not stay for a long time. People know that this world is a place of examination; they know that there will be an assessment of all what we have done in the otherworld. They know that as human beings we have humanistic and religious responsibilities. If one lives in prosperity and do not help the needy around them, this is a big question mark that they have to pay for at some point. Our Prophet had said: you earn God's merit when you pet the Orphan's head. Nothing apart from religion can make someone to go to the other end of the world to help others.

As can be seen from the quotes above although the associations in this group prefer to define the main motivations of their associations as humanitarian, when specially asked about the volunteer and employee motivations, they do not hide from mentioning religiosity as a crucial drive. This moderate level of religiosity present in their discourse is also visible in their publications, web pages, and the television and radio programs they produce.

The associations included in this group have quite positive interactions with central and local state institutions of social provision and also government. Their answers to my questions like how they see their role in the provision arena and whether they are open to work with state institutions were quite positive. They see public welfare offices as possible partners. Partnerships between a civil society association and a state institution in local, national or international projects are still rare, but there are

some examples<sup>1</sup>. In addition to partnerships, the most common interaction between welfare administrators at the local level and RMAs is information exchange. The public welfare agencies and RMAs do their own means testing but they share their lists of beneficiaries at the end of the day, in order to prevent double provision.

The founders of the RMAs in this group conveyed that the state cannot be a remedy for all needs in the society. In their perception, civil society associations should also play a role in social provision. Therefore, they decided to fulfill what they interpret as their responsibilities. As the passages below exemplifies:

We see what we do as a part of our social responsibility. I believe that is how things should work. I am very happy that the number of civil society organizations working in this area has been increasing. Of course the state has to provide social provision, but civil society organizations also have very important roles.

State has to be more active in the area of social policy. We see our role as guiding and stimulating for the state. We do not dream of overtaking the role of the state in the area of welfare. We just want to be a role model for the state activities. Civil society has to function as a role model in this area.

There are some things that you cannot expect the state to achieve; they are not a part of state's responsibility. State has responsibility in the areas of education, health and infrastructure; however, it cannot be expected to create solidarity. Creating solidarity bounds can only be a function of the civil society organizations like us. In a way what we do is complimentary to state activities.

This positive approach of believing in a necessary cooperation between state and civil society in the area of provision is common in the associations in this group.

A last characteristics of the associations included in this group can be marked as their positive interactions with the ruling government. An important indicator of this is the status of Association for Public Interest that has been awarded to some of the largest RMAs in this group. The title, which can only be decided by the Council of Ministers in Turkey, guarantees important rights such as tax exceptions for associations that are active at the national level. Two of the new RMAs—*Deniz Feneri* and *Kimse Yok mu*—achieved this status of Association for Public Interest in 2004 and 2006 subsequently. The fact that these entitlements were only possible in the Justice and Development Party's time in office can be seen as an indicator of the positive relations between

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<sup>1</sup> Such as a project of *Cansuyu* association with Ministry of Education on distributing free wheelchairs to disabled children.

these associations and the government. A second indicator of the positive relations between new RMAs and the Justice and Development Party government is the discursive support that is given to some associations in the media<sup>2</sup>.

As already mentioned in the introduction of this part, although the associations that are included under the title of new RMAs have many characteristics in common, it should still be kept in mind that the group in itself is not homogenous. The positions of the associations within the constituency of political Islam determine the differences that will be presented at the second level of classification. The remaining of the paper focuses on three of the biggest associations in the field, which have yearly budgets over million dollars. These grand RMAs that have presence in all parts of Turkey, and in many other countries, have a more or less common activity area. Nevertheless, their outlook to politics and connections to different power structures (such as different religious communities and political parties in Turkey, and international Islamic movement) are crucial in defining their motivations in the social provision arena. These three associations will be analyzed as the ideal types of three different Islamic identities present in the field: the first one (*Deniz Feneri*) identified with the rise of moderate political Islam in Turkey; the second one (*Kimse Yok Mu*) as a more liberally politicized version that carries important nationalistic tones; and finally the third one (*IHH*) which represents a more radical version of Islam that defines its identity in relation to the International Islamic movement.

### **Deniz Feneri Dernegi/ Light House Association**

The history of the association dates back to a television program *Sehir ve Ramazan* (City and Ramadan) started in the religious month of Ramadan in the year 1996. The television channel that produced and broadcasted the program was a municipal channel in Istanbul at the time when Recep Tayyip Erdogan was the Mayor and the Welfare Party was the governing party at the municipal level. Later on this television

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<sup>2</sup> For Prime Minister Erdogan's positive comments on *Kimse Yok mu* for their activities during the religious festivals see the related article in *Zaman* daily on 22.12.2007). Talks Erdogan held after the Gaza Flotilla incident in May 2010 was an example of support for *IHH*.

channel has been being privatized and sold to a business group of Islamic capital and changed its name. The foundation story of the television channel-*Kanal 7*<sup>3</sup> is as interesting as the foundation of the RMA and gives an idea about the loose boundaries between politics, business and civil society. The idea to establish a television channel broadcasting according to Islamic standards, which will also support the Islamist National Outlook movement (*Milli Gorus*), was an idea that appeared in early 1990s<sup>4</sup>. Many newspaper articles (appeared in the years from 2005 to 2008) claimed that this TV channel was founded with the money collected from migrant workers in Germany: After the decision to establish a TV channel was taken by Necmettin Erbakan and other members of *Milli Gorus*, they started searching for founders/shareholders that will support their initiative and most of the needed money had been collected from the visits they made to Germany. Supporters of the *Milli Gorus* movement gathered in the mosques and the idea to found a television channel that would broadcast programs that were in line with the principles of Islam and would support the *Welfare Party* were explained to them. So, it should be kept in mind that the *Deniz Feneri Association* was an initiative of this first Islamic television channel in Turkey.

Soon after the program started, it is transformed to a weekly program—called *Deniz Feneri*—of social aid collection and distribution<sup>5</sup>. As their administrators claim, due to the increasing interest and the rise of demand and supply *Deniz Feneri Welfare and Solidarity Association* have been established in 1998. In the years to follow, the association grew to be the largest RMA in Turkey. The current organizational structure of the association consists of three branches—in Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir and three representative offices—in Thrace, Black Sea Region and Eastern Anatolia. It has around 400 professional employees and more than 50.000 volunteers. In addition to

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<sup>3</sup> See related article in the daily *Radikal*, 14.10.2005

<sup>4</sup> Rusen Cakir, a journalist who conducted in-depth research on political Islam and Welfare Party, also claims that it is interesting that the Welfare Party did not make much investment to media in the period before the 1990s see (Cakir 1994)

<sup>5</sup> The trend television program to association is a quite common story in the establishment of the RMAs. The first television programs started in the mid 1990s set an example for further expansion of media-RMA relationships. Once the success of the television shows were realized in collecting large sums of money, civil society associations with the same names were established and they have kept up expanding since then.

total coverage of Turkey, the association has also been undertaking activities in many countries in the Middle East, and Africa.

The headquarters of the association is in Istanbul. As the administrators of the association put forward, this was not a professional effort in the beginning; neither the founders nor the volunteers were experienced in what they did. They rented a small storage area for the goods collected and started their activities from this base. The big earthquake that hit the Marmara Region in 1999 was a time of growth for the association; not only their budget, but also their publicity increased owing to the social aid activities they undertook in the earthquake region. The institutionalization and professionalization continued in the years to come, and the association received the ISO 9001 Quality Certificate in 2002. The association has been entitled to the Turkish National Assembly Award of Eminent Services and titled as a Leader in Social Responsibility in 2005.

In the interviews I have conducted with the association, I have been informed that the association regularly supports 30.000 families every month and in their records they have information about 470.000 families in Turkey, meaning nearly 2 million individuals. In addition to the headquarters in Istanbul (3300 m<sup>2</sup> administrative and logistics centre), the association has a major branch in Ankara (5000 m<sup>2</sup> area, logistic center, a guest house and a modern soup kitchen), and four representative offices<sup>6</sup> that are each responsible from ten to fifteen cities in their region. The coverage area of the association and the numbers are informative about the amount of funding it has access to.

Donations are the main and only cash income for the association. In addition to cash, they also accept in-kind donations such as food, clothing, furniture, medicine, education and cleaning materials. Advertisements broadcasted in television, radio and newspapers are the most important tools for increasing donations. As it is communicated by the PR manager, the association is very careful about maintaining a

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<sup>6</sup> Aegean Representative Office: 1200 m<sup>2</sup> administrative and logistics centre. Thrace Region Representative Office: 2500 m<sup>2</sup> logistics centre. Eastern Anatolia Representative Office: 3312 m<sup>2</sup> logistics centre. Black Sea Representative Office: 2500 m<sup>2</sup> logistics centre.

transparent system. They introduced a barcode system, which makes each and every donated good traceable. Moreover, a software program called Help Organization Programme is developed by the association in order to gather information about incoming donations, donors, volunteers and recipients. This is a central program that is available online and can be updated at the national level by any of the branches or representative offices. Deniz Feneri Association was the first one introducing these technologies to the social provisioning work that are later on taken as an example by other large RMAs.

I only had the chance to visit the headquarters of the association in Istanbul and interview the PR responsible and a couple of volunteers. My plan was to revisit the association in a couple of months again, but it was not possible due to a corruption scandal happened in the coming months. The disappearance of forty-one million euro, collected by a Turkish philanthropic association (*Deniz Feneri e.V*) in Germany, made the headlines of the news in all newspapers and television channels in fall 2008. The question, whether this association is a branch of the Turkish *Deniz Feneri* or not, was the central discussion in the media. The German association, although not officially a branch of the Turkish one, has also been established with the encouragement of Kanal 7. The suspects in Germany were accused of using the donations collected from the Turkish-German population with different aims than charity or philanthropy. An amount around twenty million was illegally transferred to some business corporations in Turkey. Nevertheless, the interesting situation is not limited to the use of donations in an illegal way. The names making the illegal transactions and the corporations that the money had been sent to were the real interesting parts of the story for the public in Turkey. The former head of radio and television supreme council, who is known for his close connections to the Justice and Development Party, was one of the founders of the business corporation to which the money was sent.

All three suspects of the trial were convicted of corruption and sentenced to prison by the German court in September 2008. In the months following the trial and the conviction of corruption, the issue continued to occupy major coverage in the Turkish media. The opposition party and some other media groups claimed that money, sent

to Turkey by the organization in Germany, was mostly used by the political party in power (AKP). Following that, Turkish Ministry of Justice inquired the German court to send the lawsuit file to Turkey in September 2008. In July 2011 the former head of Radio and Television Supreme Council and three senior executives of Kanal 7 have been arrested for charges of fraud, forgery and establishing an organization to commit a crime. Although the association lost some ground, it is still an important player in social provision arena.

### **Kimse Yok Mu Association**

*Kimse Yok Mu* is one of the three largest social solidarity associations in Turkey which is active at the national and international levels. The association defines itself as a Turkish non-governmental association that aims to fight poverty and eliminate social inequalities and encourage humanitarian aid. They have the mission to play a leadership role in aid activities all over the world. They want to be the first association to reach people—from all races, religions, nations—in times of natural or man made disasters. Currently, *Kimse Yok Mu* have branches in twenty-eight cities in Turkey, and around seventy-five percent of its budget is spent in the country. Social provision at the national level was the first area of action, yet it also started to undertake activities in other countries with the tsunami in Indonesia in 2004. Humanitarian aid campaigns for Palestine-Lebanon, Peru, Bangladesh, Sudan-Darfur, Georgia-Ossetia, Myanmar, China, Gaza and Haiti have been organized in the years to follow.

The foundation story of the association has important similarities to *Deniz Feneri*. *Kimse Yok Mu* also started as a follow-up of a television program in a TV channel—*Samanyolu*—with an Islamic identity. Both the association and the television channel are known for their close connection with the *Gülen Community*<sup>7</sup>. The television program started in the period after the big earthquake in Turkey in August 1999.

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<sup>7</sup> An Islamic social movement headed by Fethullah Gülen; a revised and “modernized” version of Nur movement which derives from Said Nursi’s teachings. For more information see (Ebaugh 2009; Esposito/Yavuz 2003)

*Samanyolu TV*<sup>8</sup>, with the help of the donations from its viewers, started a program that calls for help for the survivors of the earthquake. The name of the association, which can be translated as “*Is there anybody there?*” was inspired from the way rescue teams were calling while searching for any alive person in the wreckages of the buildings. By 2002 a system of organizing help was established under the name of the television program, whereas the launching of the NGO as a humanitarian aid association happened only in 2004.

The organizational structure of *Kimse Yok Mu* is less centralized than *Deniz Feneri*. Branches of the association are organized at the city level and they are responsible for raising their own funds. They share the vision and mission of the center and act in compliance with the main principles. Once a decision is taken by the association to establish a branch in a city, one or two possible candidates are appointed by the center. Since the association is organized around an already existing community of followers, appointing people for taking over responsibility is not a problem. Following the decision on the head of administration and the transfer of know how from the center, the branch is expected to function with its human and material resources at the local level. In cases of international projects, the branches are expected to collect funds and transfer them to the center.

The growth rate of the association in the last years is impressive. Currently the association has branches in 30 cities and only the Istanbul headquarters have access to 62.000 families with 100.000 volunteers and 110 employers. My interview partner, an administrator and volunteer in the headquarters of the association in Istanbul, stated that they could not limit or control the rapid growth of the association in the last years. As an example, he mentions how the association received 12 million USD donations in the two weeks after the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005. The association at the time was quite small—they had a two room office in Istanbul. Obviously the question I have in mind after this statement of my interview partner is how an organization that is one year old can have access to such a large scale of resources. In

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<sup>8</sup> My interview partner indicates that *Samanyolu TV* is particular in terms of its organizational style. It has many shareholders, who own small shares of the company. As he claims no one is allowed to own bigger shares since this is against the mission of the channel to be representative of a population.

the quote below the respondent explains how their connections to a religious leader (Fethullah Gülen) resulted in their extreme popularity in a short time:

Respondent: When our association was only two rooms, an earthquake happened in a country. Then the leader of one of the largest *cemaats* (religious communities) in Turkey, who is highly respected, made a statement that it is important to help the people in this country. In the next month, we received 12 million USD.

Me: So do you mean that this association has been established by this *cemaat* whose head is this leader?

Respondent: We can say this association is established with his advice. Whenever he briefly mentions that helping our brothers is important, millions are floating into the organization. So we cannot control it, we are expanding everyday even if we do not want to. Samanyolu television is also an establishment founded by his proposal; Zaman daily was also founded with his suggestion. Cihan News Agency is also set up with his initiative. But, we do not belong to a single group, we are open to everyone and we help everyone. We do not have connections to any political party.

This quote is an example demonstrating the benefits of the interconnectedness of the RMAs to the religious communities and the networks established around them. It is possible to see how social and cultural capital that is shared in these communities can easily be transferred to economic resources.

The international activities of the association in different countries are also closely connected to the already existing ties of the community. The colleges (*Türk kolejleri*) that are founded by the supporters of the Gülen community in the last decade in different countries have been the helping hand in spreading the activities of the association at the international arena. The respondent explains that the foundation story of the colleges is quite similar to foundation story of *Kimse Yok Mu*. In his words, after the disestablishment of the Soviet Republic, Fethullah Gülen advised people around him to found schools in Middle Asia. In the following years, he expanded his advice to cover whole world. This is how *Türk Kolejleri* were established, just like *Kimse Yok Mu*, just like *Samanyolu Tv*, *Zaman daily* and *Cihan news agency*. As my respondent put it, “currently there are more than a thousand of these colleges all over the world; they also work like civil society associations, although they are not”. As he explains the colleges have been the main guides when the association decides to take action in a country. This picture proves that *Kimse Yok Mu* is just one

branch of the large scale of activities undertaken by this religious *cemaat*, which defines its identity as a protective force against radical Islam.

### **Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH)**

The history and foundation story of IHH is quite different from the associations analyzed previously. IHH was established in 1992 with the main aim of helping the war victims in Bosnia Herzegovina. Supporting the civilians in the war in Chechnya in 1995 was their second main activity, where their name started to be heard in the public. As the two incidents resulting in the establishment of the association makes clear, IHH defines its mission broader than social provision. As they state in their web page, they aim to “spread justice and good, and to fight the evil on Earth” by protecting values in a changing world. Currently IHH is actively working over one hundred ten countries in the world, have around hundred thousand volunteers; and their yearly budget is around hundred million dollar<sup>9</sup>. The organizational structure of IHH is also different than *Deniz Feneri* and *Kimse Yok Mu*: they do not establish branches. As the respondent claimed they are supporting local people in different cities to establish associations like IHH. These new associations learn from the experiences of IHH, but they are established under different names. I have visited two of these local associations in different cities. They told me that they are sister associations with IHH. They raise their own funds and transfer around 50% to 70% of their income to IHH for the international projects.

The Islamic characteristic of the foundation is much visible in comparison to the other RMAs under study. IHH have been subject to the attention of the Turkish media for the first time in 1998. The association was accused of transferring thirty six million Turkish liras, collected for helping Muslims in Bosnia, to the Welfare Party<sup>10</sup>. Although the claim was not proved, the disappearance of this large amount of money collected for humanitarian aid was in the media as a scandal for a long time; and close relations of the association to the Islamist political party was put under light. More recently,

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<sup>9</sup> Numbers are taken from the interviews conducted with the administrator in the Istanbul headquarters.

<sup>10</sup> See related article in the daily Radikal, 01.06.2010

IHH—as one of the main organizers of humanitarian help to Gaza strip, with Free Gaza Movement—came to the center of attention with the Gaza Flotilla raid on May 31, 2010. The incident made the connections of the foundation with the international Islamist movement more visible. The interview I conducted with a member of the administrative board in 2007 gave hints about the broader aims of the association in supporting Muslim populations in different parts of the world. The two quotes below—the first by an administrator in the headquarters of the association, the second by an administrator in a local office—give an idea about the motivations of the foundation:

A new world order is on the rise in the last decades. We first realized this with the war in Bosnia. This new world order is creating people who are in need of support. We decided that we have to be with these people, we have to support them; not only materially, we also need to make their voice heard, we have to teach them about their rights. We have never been an organization who only provides food and clothing to needy in order to meet their daily needs. We wanted to learn the reasons behind people's problems; we wanted to have a political standpoint. Mending the wreckages others create has never been our only aim. We wanted to fix the sources of the problems. We decided that we have to be present in every part of the world where Muslims live; we have to be informed about them, take care of them. This is what we have been doing in the last decade.

Not every association services the stomach; servicing the intellect and hearts are equally important. These three can be fed by *halal* (objects or actions that are acceptable by Islam) or by *haram* (objects and actions that are forbidden by Islam). We are not only interested in the stomach; we also pay attention to nourish the mind and the heart.

As clear from the quotes, IHH is mainly active in countries with Muslim populations. The association did not start as a television program, but uses every kind of media to advertise its activities. They have weekly television shows that are broadcasted by different national and local television channels. At time of establishment, IHH became publicly known as an extension of Welfare Party and its leader Necmettin Erbakan. In the following years the association moved to a more radical Islamist standpoint and lost its connections to the political party. The administrators of *Cansuyu*<sup>11</sup> association, which is also a RMA that is established by the Felicity Party, were open in telling the

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<sup>11</sup> *Cansuyu* is an RMA that is included in the sample. It was founded in 2005 in Ankara and has offices in six major cities in Turkey. The administrative staff of *Cansuyu* consists of old bureaucrats, mayors and activists--many of them from the *Saadet Partisi* (Virtue Party). A detailed discussion on the association is not included due to its smaller scale in comparison to *Deniz Feneri* and *Kimse Yok Mu*.

connections of these two associations and their political party. They also mentioned benefits of being an already existing political party and religious community structures. As they claimed it is not possible for a civil society association to reach a large scale without having connections to some religious community and political parties. Apparently, being part of a big network makes it possible for the associations to have access to more resources.

### **Conclusion**

This paper presents the findings of research focusing on the relatively unexplored area at the intersection between religion, politics and welfare in Turkey. An in-depth analysis of the sample of RMAs; their histories, religious and political identities, missions and motivations demonstrated that the contemporary proliferation of these associations in the Turkish welfare realm cannot be understood without a focus on the rise of Islam in the political and economic spheres of the country, in the last two decades. The main division in the sample of RMAs is marked between the new and the vintage ones, whose foundation dates correspond to different stages of state-religion relations.

The analysis of a selection of associations demonstrated various groups with different political and religious ideologies populating the social provision arena. The in-depth analysis of single RMAs made clear that the identities of the associations are highly related to their different positions within the constituency of political Islam in Turkey and in the international Islamic movement. There is evidence demonstrating that some of the associations work as an extension of some political parties. Some others, aiming to keep their distance from party politics and defining their position against radical Islam, have combined forces in areas such as education, publication, broadcasting and social provision. Whether these associations are excluding populations that do not share worldviews, or whether any form of indoctrination is inherent to provision activities is not easy to determine. Nevertheless, what is clear is that the boundaries between social provision, politics and religion are totally blurred.

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