EU, Turkey and the Kurds
The Turkish discussion on minority rights

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Foreword

Initially, the purpose of this research project was to study the official Turkish minority policy and its changes since the 2005 European Union (EU) negotiations. However, during field studies that were carried out in Turkey in 2006, it became evident that there was neither such a thing as a contemporary official Turkish minority policy nor have there been any major changes with regard to minority rights in Turkey since 2005.

The last official minority policy in Turkey was set by the Lausanne Treaty of 1923. This Treaty recognized only non-Muslim minorities, thereby ignoring whole groups, such as the Kurds. This policy has never been officially revised, since a change in this policy would violate the principles of Kemalism, which is the State ideology of the Turkish Republic.

Notwithstanding the several improvements such as a greater respect for cultural diversity during the past years, no major changes which emphasized minority rights were implemented after the 2005 EU negotiations. The main legal changes that have taken place during the past five year period are allowing broadcasting in languages other than Turkish, albeit with several restrictions, and the right to pursue private language courses in Kurdish.

Due to the above factors, focus of this study was moved from policy and legal changes implemented by official Turkey to the discussion of minority issues taking place in Turkish civil society and academia. It became evident that to a large extent official Turkey still pursues a Kemalist approach, but that there is - simultaneously - a dynamic process promoting discussion of citizenship and minority rights within Turkey today. As it turned out, it seemed much more interesting to study this process than to study policy changes. As a consequence this is a study of the Turkish discussion on minority rights. Later in the text it will be shown why this shift is both interesting and relevant.
Abstract

This is a study of the Turkish discussion on minority rights. The minority issue in Turkey was placed on the Turkish agenda in connection with intensified negotiations with the European Union on Turkish membership. The unusual and complex circumstances regarding the minority issue in Turkey makes it interesting and relevant to study this topic. The particular focus of this study is on the Kurdish minority and on the alternative discussion regarding the minority issue pursued within civil society groups and the academic sphere. The aim is to contribute to the understanding of the debate on minority rights within these groups. Interviews and collection of literature were made during a field study in Turkey in 2006. A result of this field study was the observation that there are forces working for a change in the notion of Turkish citizenship, and that the minority concept is controversial in Turkey for a number of reasons. Another observation was that the tension between assimilation and cultural identity is an important aspect of the discussion on minorities in Turkey. The Turkish debate has been contrasted to the debate on multiculturalism within political theory. This debate on multiculturalism is about how to deal with culturally diverse societies. There is one main position in favour of multiculturalism and one against. The ideas put forward in the Turkish discussion have been compared with this debate and it has been found that the Turkish discussion differs from this debate in some respects.

Key words: EU, Turkey, Kurds, cultural diversity, minority rights, multiculturalism
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List of Abbreviations

CSCE       Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
ECHR       European Convention on Human Rights
ECRI       European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
EU         European Union
FCNM       Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
ICCPR      International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR     International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
NGO        Non-Governmental Organization
OSCE       Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PKK        Kurdistan Workers’ Party
TRT        Turkish Public Television

Lausanne Treaty  1923 Treaty of Lausanne
Minority report  Minority Rights and Cultural Rights Report
1. INTRODUCTION

Most nation states are culturally diverse, in terms of ethnicity, religion or language. However, the fact of cultural diversity within a nation state does not necessarily coincide with its recognition. Turkey is clearly a diverse nation state, but officially only one cultural identity has been recognized. Ever since the Turkish republic was founded the matter of cultural diversity has been severely problematic to the country.

Turkey’s democratic development and its respect for human rights is an important matter, not only within Turkey but also in the European Union. This matter has been debated frequently, especially after 1999 when Turkey was recognized as a candidate for membership of the EU. This debate has accelerated considerably since the formal accession negotiations between the EU and Turkey began in 2005. Thus the minority issue has been in focus when the EU countries have discussed a Turkish membership of the EU. As a result of the intensified negotiations, the minority issue was placed on the agenda in Turkey.

For almost 80 years Turkey denied any existence of minorities in the country.\(^1\) Recognition of minorities contradicts the ideological foundation on which the republic of Turkey is based,\(^2\) though there are indications that this is beginning to change. However, it is a generally accepted opinion in Turkey today that the legal changes that have been implemented in this area during the past few years are a direct effect of the EU demands – and only as a means of satisfying the EU.\(^3\) However, beyond official Turkey there are other forces within Turkey that are concerned with the minority issue. With a collective term these forces can be identified as civil society.

This study is demarcated to the Kurdish community. The Kurdish issue is very controversial in Turkey. Many studies have been conducted on the Kurdish issue and the matter is widely debated both in Turkey and internationally. Very often studies on the Kurdish issue are concerned with Kurdish separatism. This paper though is rather concerned with the minority issue in a general sense, but with focus on the Kurdish group.

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\(^1\) The existence of Muslim minorities has been denied. The non-Muslim minorities Jews, Armenians and Greeks are recognized as minorities in accordance with the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne.


\(^3\) This view was the prevailing view among the people that were interviewed during a field study in Turkey in 2006
1.1 Purpose and research question

This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of the Turkish discussion on minority rights as well as an understanding of the unusual and complex circumstances of the minority issue in Turkey. The focus is on the Kurdish community, but while many studies have been conducted on the Kurdish issue alone, this paper is rather concerned with the general minority issue, delimited to the Kurdish group. The Turkish discussion under study is an alternative discussion on the minority issue, pursued within parts of Turkish civil society and academia. The purpose is to contribute to the understanding of the debate on minority rights within this limited scope.

To help in understanding this discussion, the ideas put forward will be compared with the normative positions in a theoretical debate on multiculturalism. Contrasting the Turkish discussion (on minority rights) to this debate (on multiculturalism) will provide a method for analysis, through which the comprehension of what it is that characterizes the Turkish discussion is made possible.

There are two questions to be answered in this study. While they will be dealt with separately, they are also related to each other in the sense that the latter helps in understanding the former.

1.) What characterizes this Turkish discussion on minority rights for the Kurds?

2.) How does this Turkish discussion correspond to the theoretical debate on multiculturalism?

1.2 Definition and demarcation

Due to the sensitivity of the term ‘minority’, which will be examined later in the text, there are problems associated with naming the subject area ‘minority issue’. Since it is problematic to use this concept in the Turkish context, I have occasionally chosen to use the notion of ‘cultural diversity’ instead, to avoid using the term ‘minority’. Therefore, ‘the matter of cultural diversity’ and ‘minority issue’ will sometimes be used interchangeably throughout the following work.

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4 Alternative’ is meant in contrast to the Kemalist position.
5 The first question will be dealt with in section 5 and the second in section 6.
The position of the EU serves only as a point of departure. What will be studied in respect to the EU is the negotiation framework, as laid out by the EU Commission, where the main points of the critique towards the Turkish approach to the minority issue will be brought forward and the demands for minority rights for the Kurds will be especially highlighted. Thus, the EU will not be studied as an actor itself, but its positions will be used only as a point of reference.

A distinction will be made between the position of the State and that of civil society. This distinction is crucial, since this study does not take into account the position of the State, but instead focuses on the civil society. It is important to point out however that the State – or let’s say the Turkish Establishment – is not only made up of the State in a traditional sense, but that the political system also includes the influential Turkish military. This phenomenon is generally known as ‘the Deep State’. In this paper, this will be referred to as ‘official Turkey’.

‘The Turkish discussion’ is not an actual discussion carried out in Turkish media and public life, but rather a number of opinions posed by parts of civil society and academia in regard to the minority issue in Turkey. The ‘discussion’ is thus a constructed one, here divided into four categories, which will be presented in the section Empirical findings. These categories are nothing less than the four aspects of the minority issue that proved to be most significant to the respondents that were interviewed during the field study, and which also corresponds well to the literature studied, in the sense that these aspects are continuously brought forward as significant aspects of the minority issue in Turkey. The discussion is a contemporary one. The earliest source referred to is from 1998, but the discussion studied has for the most part taken place in the first decade of the 21st century.

The Kurds constitute the largest minority in Turkey. Yet sheer size is not necessarily relevant for choosing this group as a main actor. Only in combination with other aspects that define the status of the Kurds in Turkey, such as their linguistic deviation, do they constitute an optimal

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6 Other EU institutions such as the European Parliament have been excluded from this study.
7 The author is aware of the fact that this demarcation is problematic. Since the Turkish State – or official Turkey – is impossible not to mention as a contrast, it is problematical not taking it into account and thereby treating it as a static actor, leaving no room for problemizing. However, this type of delimitation is nevertheless necessary to make to be able to carry out this study. For further reading on Kemalism and the Turkish State, see for example Poulton, Hugh, Top hat, grey wolf and crescent. Turkish Nationalism and the Turkish Republic (1997) London: Hurst & Company.
9 What the author has chosen to call "Turkish" discussion should not be confused with a discussion pursued by ethnic Turks, but rather a discussion taking place in Turkey.
case for studying the minority issue in Turkey. There are also many other minorities in Turkey. They will be mentioned as a frame of reference when discussing the minority issue.

Generally the notions of ‘the Kurdish problem’ and ‘the Kurdish issue’ are used interchangeably and often refer to the separatist claims of certain Kurdish groups, primarily the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party PKK. In this paper though, there is a separation between ‘the Kurdish problem’ and ‘the Kurdish issue’. The Kurdish problem, which here refers to the matter of Kurdish separatism and the PKK, will be ignored in this study. The Kurdish issue on the other hand refers to the general problem concerning lack of respect for cultural diversity as well as the minority rights for the Kurds in Turkey. Hence, it is the latter aspect that is placed under the microscope in this study.

1.3 Outline of the paper

In section 2, the Method and Material used in this study will be described. Here the method used, together with the mode of procedure for collecting material, is presented, as well as a criticism of the sources.

The following section 3, the Background, will provide the reader with historical facts as well as information about contemporary Turkish society. An account of international law concerning minorities will be presented as well as the EU demands.

Given this background, the reader is prepared to get into the theoretical discussion on multiculturalism in section 4, Theoretical framework. Here the analytical framework that will be used when analysing the empirical material is presented.

In section 5, Empirical findings, the empirical material consisting of the Turkish debate on minorities is presented. This is divided into four parts, where four different discussions will be portrayed.

In section 6, an Analysis of the empirical material will be made, contrasting the theoretical debate on multiculturalism to the Turkish debate on minority rights.

Finally, section 7 will present a Conclusion of the main results.
2. METHOD AND MATERIAL

This is a qualitative case study aiming to analyse and interpret the discussion in Turkey on minority rights. A case study is defined as a study on a particular phenomenon. In this study the case is the discussion on minorities. The aim in a case study is to describe the reality, rather than explaining it in terms of cause and effect. Accordingly, the purpose is to describe the discussion on minorities rather than to explain it.

The type of method used is a descriptive concept analysis, which aims at describing and interpreting the meaning of a political message. The political message is represented here by the ideas put forward in the discussion on minority rights. Whereas descriptions of the reality can not explain why a phenomenon has occurred, they can describe what the phenomenon means. Thus, a descriptive analysis is not only about rendering a material, but rather to make inferences about it. The technique that has been used to analyse the ideas put forward in the discussion on minority rights is a technique through which different dimensions are distinguished. These dimensions are here made up of key characteristics of the two approaches (the culturalist approach and the egalitarian approach) that will be presented in the section Theoretical framework. The empirical material has been compared with these dimensions in the section Analysis and, where applicable, classified in to either a culturalist or an egalitarian dimension.

2.1 Data collection

Data has been collected through triangulation, which means that different modes of procedures to collect information have been used. Data has been collected through interviews and gathering of literature.

In-depth interviews have been carried out with representatives from key organizations within Turkish civil society and key persons from the academic spheres. The interviews were carried out between November 2006 and January 2007 in Istanbul, Diyarbakir, and Stockholm. The interviews were carried out in a semi-structured manner. A semi-structured

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12 Beckman, 2005, p. 48-49
15 Largest Kurd-dominated town in South-eastern Turkey
16 One interview was carried out in Stockholm with a Turkish woman partly operative in Turkey.
interview combines more and less structured approaches to create a balance between covering the topics the researcher thinks are important and, at the same time, allowing the respondent to get into new areas.\textsuperscript{17} Open-ended questions were prepared before the interviews, although not all the questions were used in each interview. Supplementary questions were sometimes added. A copy of the interview guide is enclosed in the \textit{Appendix}. The interviews were recorded on a dictaphone and are saved on computer disks. An interpreter was used in cases where the respondent did not speak English. Translations were made either between Turkish to English or between Kurdish to Swedish. In addition to this, information has been obtained through email interviews during the same period. This has been done in cases where person-to-person interviews were not possible to carry out.\textsuperscript{18} To protect the respondents’ integrity, only first names are written out. This has been done consistently, although the identity of some of the respondents can be easily revealed. Other information includes the field they are engaged in, when and where the interview took place, and the respondent’s ethnicity/nationality.\textsuperscript{19}

In connection to some of the interviews, the respondents were also asked if they could suggest any literature or other material that they thought would be helpful to this study. The collection of literature has been done mainly during the field study in Turkey, as a result of recommendations from some respondents (sometimes consisting of their own works) and though the author’s own enquiries. The main material used in the study consists of literature on the contemporary discussion on the minority issue and the Kurdish issue in Turkey, made up of books and academic articles. Background materials are comprised of historical sources, international conventions and reports.

The interviews have been used in different ways. Initially, the respondents were seen mainly as informants who could give valuable information about policy changes regarding minorities and the policy towards cultural diversity in general. However, as the focus shifted to the study of the discussion on the minority issue, the centre of attention moved to the respondents’ ideas instead. As a consequence, much of the observations from the interviews are not directly included in the presentation of the study, but nevertheless constitute important background knowledge that could also be seen as a result itself. For example, the fact that there have been no major changes in the official minority policy is an interesting observation.


\textsuperscript{18} Only person-to-person interviews have been included directly in the material. Additional information obtained through email interviews have only been treated as background information.

\textsuperscript{19} For additional information on the respondents and organizations please contact the author.
Also, because of this change in focus, the interviews were treated increasingly as a background distinguishing the most important aspects of the minority discussion, and contemporary literature was instead given more priority.

2.2 Selection and criticism of the sources

A target-directed selection of sources has been used. The aim of this is to discover, thereby gaining knowledge and understanding.20 The respondents consist of key persons from civil society and the academic sphere and were selected through snowball sampling.21 By using snowball sampling there is a risk of generating a sample from one network of people with particular characteristics, which might distort the representativeness. However, this study does not claim to be representative of the Turkish population, since it is a study of the ideas of an alternative, intellectual debate, pursued by a limited network of people within civil society. However, the intention has been to achieve representativeness within the scope of this debate. This, however, is easier said than done for a number of reasons, primarily because the author does not speak Turkish and must therefore resort to using English language material.

A majority of the respondents turned out to be of Kurdish origin. This was not intended22, but it involves both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantage is that it facilitates the understanding of how the Kurds view the minority issue. The disadvantage is that they can be seen as tendentious sources, seeing this issue only from one perspective.

A disadvantage with using a qualitative method in general and with in-depth interviews in particular, is the lack of objectivity as well as the subjective interpretation that emanates from the fact that the researcher is participating in the study. The selection of information obtained will go through the glasses of the researcher. The points that are here perceived as the most important in the Turkish discussion on minority rights are therefore largely a product of the author’s own interpretation. However, there is no such a thing as genuine objectivity. Already the selection of the field of study and the formulation of the research question is a matter of personal interest and bias. In the light of these concerns, this paper therefore tries to be as transparent as possible, giving the reader a chance to critically examine the sources.

20 Merriam, 1994. p. 61
21 Devine, 2002, p. 205
22 At least two reasons seem probable for this result. One that respondents of Kurdish origin are more apt to respond to questions of this nature, the other that the author’s network of contacts includes many Kurds.
3. BACKGROUND

Before moving on to the empirical material it is necessary to provide the reader with some background facts of the subjects studied. This naturally includes a description of the Kurds and their background, but also a description of the Turkish history in relation to the Kurdish issue and minority rights. This is followed by an explanation of international law concerning minority rights which, in turn, is followed by an account of the EU demands on Turkey.

It should be pointed out here that although the underlying Turkish reality as such is not a study objective in this research, this reality is nevertheless an indispensable part of the background without which an understanding of the discussion on minorities would be difficult to attain.

3.1 The Kurds

The Kurds are an ethnic group that mainly inhabits the Zagros-Taurus mountain systems, the area where Turkey, Iran and Iraq meet. The use of the term ‘Kurd’ dates back to the 17th century AD and the term ‘Kurdistan’ appeared in the 12th century. The exact number of Kurds is not known, but it is estimated today to be about 25 million. Their language is Kurdish, which is an indo-European language belonging to the Iranian group. There are several dialects of Kurdish; the two major ones are known as Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish) and Sorani (Southern Kurdish).

The years following the First World War were an important period in the Kurdish history. It was at this time that the new nation states were founded and the fate of the Kurds was determined. In the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres the Kurds were given the right to become an independent state. However, the Treaty was never implemented. Instead, what was then known as Ottoman Kurdistan was, under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne, split into three newly created nation states; Turkey, Iraq and Syria.

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24 The number of Kurds is contested. Generally the states tend to underestimate the number of Kurds living within their borders, whereas Kurdish nationalists tend to exaggerate the numbers. For historical facts, see first McDowall, David., *A Modern History of the Kurds*, 2004. London: IB Tauris or Van Bruinessen, Martin, Agha, Shaikh & State, 1992. London and New Jersey: Zed Books
25 Article 64 in the Treaty of Sèvres gave the Kurds the right to become independent one year after the implementation of the Treaty. See McDowall, 2004, p. 136
26 Kurdistan is here referring to the geographical area dominated by Kurds. Ottoman Kurdistan is the parts of Kurdistan that were under Ottoman control, in contrast to Persian Kurdistan.
The Kurds in Turkey, which are the centre of attention of this paper, are thought to make up approximately half of the total number of Kurds and about a fifth of the Turkish population. The vast majority of the Kurds in Turkey speaks Kurmanji and belongs to the dominant Sunni Islam. A smaller group of the Kurds speaks the Zaza-dialect and/or believes in Alevism.  

3.2 Turkey, the Kurdish issue and minority rights

In the pre-nation state era – in this context, the time before the Turkish Republic was founded – the area that is today known as Turkey was part of the Ottoman Empire. Modern Turkey emerged in 1923 from the break-up of this empire. The leader of the Turkish nationalist movement and later on the founding father of the Republic of Turkey was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. His aim was to create a ‘European’, unified, centralized and secular nation state with one single Turkish identity. The 1924 Constitution set out the new ideological basis known as Kemalism, which to this day has a great significance. Kemalism is made up of the “six arrows”; Republicanism, Nationalism, Populism, Etatism, Secularism and Reformism.

The Kurds, being the largest non-Turkish people in Turkey, were a great threat against the principles of Kemalism, especially the principle of nationalism. To achieve the desired Turkish national identity the destruction of alternative cultural identities through assimilation was necessary. Therefore a programme of ‘Turkification’ was introduced, with an aim of destroying non-Turkish culture and expression. Administrative appointments in the Kurdish region were filled by ethnic Turks and all references to Kurdistan were erased from office materials. Also Kurdish place names began to be replaced by Turkish ones. In 1924, the use of Kurdish was banned in official domains, including schools.

Following the 1980 military coup, further repression of Kurdish culture was introduced. In 1983, the use of the term ‘Kurdish’ was banned. Moreover, Kurdish folk songs and names were prohibited.

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29 In the preamble of the constitution of the Republic of Turkey, (as amended on October 17, 2001), the first paragraph states: “In line with the concept of nationalism and the reforms and principles introduced by the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Atatürk, the immortal leader and the unrivalled hero, this Constitution, which affirms the eternal existence of the Turkish nation and motherland and the indivisible unity of the Turkish state…” See [http://www.byegm.gov.tr/mevzuat/anayasa/anayasa-ing.htm](http://www.byegm.gov.tr/mevzuat/anayasa/anayasa-ing.htm) access 2007-03-02
34 Yildiz, 2005, p. 17
Which are then the other minorities in Turkey? According to research made by the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, the predominately ethnic communities in Turkey include Kurds, Gypsies, Dönme, Caucasian groups (including Circassians, Georgians and Laz), Arabs and Balkan Immigrants. There are also various religious and linguistic communities, of which some of them coincide with different ethnic groups, including Alevis, Armenians, Jews, Greeks, Assyrians/Syriacs, Zaza and Laz.

One of the most important principles in Atatürk’s modernization project was the principle of nationalism, with the aim of creating a homogenous Turkish society. Any suggestion of another identity than the Turkish was viewed as treachery and separatism, especially the indication of ‘Kurdishness’. However, the notion of ‘Turk’ was not based on racist ideas. Any person who wished to be a part of the new nation state was welcomed to adopt the new identity and could be called a Turk. Many of the different minority groups could accept this new identity more easily, whereas other groups, and particularly the Kurds, could not accept it.

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne (hereafter referred to as the Lausanne Treaty) is a very important document, not only in regard to the Kurdish fate as referred to above, but when it comes to the minority issue in Turkey in general. Under the Lausanne Treaty, the definition of minorities was made as ‘non-Muslims’, while it refused a distinct status for the non-Turkish Muslims. The formally recognized minorities in Turkey, in accordance with the Lausanne Treaty, are the non-Muslim groups comprising Greeks, Armenians and Jews. The Christian Assyrians/Syriacs, a community distinguished by their religion, ethnicity and language, were excluded from the Lausanne Treaty together with all the other (Muslim) cultural groups in Turkey. The Lausanne Treaty is crucial because it is here that the official Turkish policy on minority rights is outlined. Official Turkey argues that minorities are those that are recognized by international treaties and the only minorities in Turkey are consequently the Greeks, Armenians and Jews.

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35 Gypsies in Turkey are divided into three groups. Apart from the Roma, there are also those who identify as “Lom” and “Dom”. Therefore, Gypsy is a better term than Roma when referring to all the Gypsy groups in Turkey. Marsh, Adrian & Strand, Elin, *Gypsies and the Problem of Identities*, 2006. Stockholm: Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul, p. 215


3.3 International law

There is not a single, agreed definition of the term ‘minority’. In 1979, Francesco Capotorti, Special Rapporteur of the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, defined a minority as:

a group that is numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members – being nationals of the state – possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing to those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language.\(^{39}\)

This is probably the most accepted definition, but there are also other, similar definitions of minorities present in the international law.\(^{40}\) The recognition of a minority is crucial, because it is only those groups that are recognized as minorities that can obtain minority rights. The Human Rights Committee has presented a General Comment asserting that the existence of a minority in a given State ‘does not depend upon a decision by that State party but requires to be established by objective criteria’.\(^{41}\) However, since states are the legal persons recognized by international law, they are assigned with the task of recognizing minorities and implementing minority rights.

There are several international documents that grant rights for those persons belonging to a minority that have acquired a minority status. Some of the most important ones are the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Council of Europe 1992 European Charter for Regional and minority Languages and 1993 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the 1993 UN Declaration of the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities and the 1990 CSCE Copenhagen document.

What then are the minority rights? Here the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (hereafter referred to as FCNM) is important, since it is the first legally binding multilateral treaty on minority rights. FCNM is the translation of the work of the OSCE, most importantly the CSCE Copenhagen document, which has set out the most developed standards on minority rights. The political commitments of the Copenhagen document have, through the FCNM, and to the greatest possible extent, been transformed into

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40 The 1985 report of the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities set out a similar definition and so has the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.
41 UN Human Rights Committee, ‘General Comment 23’, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.5, para. 5.2.
legal obligations. According to the FCNM, the obligations of the States towards persons belonging to a national minority include, for instance:

- to promote the conditions necessary for the national minorities to maintain and develop their culture, and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and cultural heritage. (FCNM, art. 5.1)
- to recognize the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas in the minority language. (FCNM, art. 9.1)
- not to hinder the creation and the use of media by persons belonging to national minorities. (FCNM, art. 9.3)
- to recognize the right to use freely and without interference the minority language, in private and in public, orally and in writing. (FCNM, art. 10.1)
- to recognize the right to use surnames and first names in the minority languages and the right to official recognition of them. (FCNM, art. 11.1)
- to take measures in the fields of education and research to foster knowledge of the culture, history, language and religion of their national minorities. (FCNM, art. 12.1)
- to, within the framework of their education systems, recognize that persons belonging to a national minority have the right to set up and manage their own private educational and training establishments. (FCNM, art. 13.1)
- to recognize that every person belonging to a national minority has the right to learn his or her minority language. (FCNM, art. 14.1)
- to create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to national minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them. (FCNM, art. 15.1)
- not to interfere with the right to establish and maintain free and peaceful contacts across frontiers with persons lawfully staying in other states, in particular those with whom they share an ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity, or a common cultural heritage. (FCNM, art. 17.1)

3.4 The EU demands

As pointed out previously, the EU serves only as a point of departure for this study. Nevertheless, in order to understand the background to the Turkish discussion on minority rights, it is highly important to include the EU in the overall background picture, since their demands on Turkey are also key factors in Turkey’s domestic discussion on minority rights. With these demands at hand as a reference, it can be established which of the minority rights Turkey is still not living up to.

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44 The demands of minority rights are found in the negotiation framework, which is mainly led by the EU Commission. The material used here consists of the 2005 and 2006 Progress reports on Turkey, which constitute one of the most important documents concerning the negotiations. See European Commission, Brussels, 9 November 2005, SEC (2005) 1426, Turkey 2005 Progress Report {COM (2005) 561 final} and Commission of the European Communities, Brussels, 08.11.2006, SEC (2006) 1390, Commission Staff Working Document, Turkey 2006 Progress Report {COM (2006) 649 final}
The EU Commission establishes that Turkey’s approach to minority rights has remained unchanged since the previous reports. According to the Turkish authorities, minorities in Turkey consist exclusively of non-Muslim communities. This is despite the fact, the Commission claims, that there are other communities which could qualify as minorities. Furthermore, the Commission criticizes Turkey’s reservations regarding the rights of minorities to the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).\(^{45}\) In addition, the Commission notes that Turkey has signed neither the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, nor ratified Additional Protocol No 12 to the ECHR on the general prohibition of discrimination by public authorities. This, the Commission notes, is particularly important given that minorities are often subject to \textit{de facto} discrimination.

Moreover, the Commission mentions the Minority Rights and Cultural Rights Report (hereafter referred to as the Minority report), released in October 2004, which provoked a lively debate in Turkey. The Minority report was released under the sponsorship of the Human Rights Advisory Board, which is a state body that reports to the Office of the Prime Minister. The report questioned the policy on minorities and especially highlighted the restrictive interpretation of the Lausanne Treaty. The Commission states that it is of concern that an investigation was subsequently launched against the author of the report, Baskin Oran, and the Chairman of the Board, Ibrahim Kaboglu.

The Commission considers that there has been a greater tolerance towards the use of the Kurdish language during the past few years, though there remain significant limitations. For example, there are still restrictions on the use of languages other than Turkish by political parties. Moreover, the Commission refers to an ECRI report, which encourages the Turkish authorities to revise Article 42 of the Constitution, which prohibits the teaching of any language other than Turkish as a mother tongue in State schools. The same report also emphasizes the need to take comprehensive measures aimed at overcoming barriers to access to public services for those who do not speak Turkish. Furthermore, the Commission remarks

\(^{45}\) Extract of reservation to ICCPR: “The Republic of Turkey reserves the right to interpret and apply the provisions of Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in accordance with the related provisions and rules of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey and the Treaty of Lausanne of 24 July 1923 and its Appendices.” Extract of reservation to ICESCR: “The Republic of Turkey reserves the right to interpret and apply the provisions of the paragraph (3) and (4) of the Article 13 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in accordance to the provisions under the Article 3, 14 and 42 of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey.” See European Commission, Brussels, 9 November 2005, SEC (2005) 1426, Turkey 2005 Progress Report {COM (2005) 561 final}
that the teaching of Kurdish underwent a serious setback in August 2005 when all existing courses in Kurdish were closed down. The decision to close down the courses was caused by several factors, especially as it is necessary to pay for them, but also due to other factors such as lack of financial resources, restrictions concerning the curriculum, appointment of teachers, timetables and attenders.

The Commission also observes there is some improvement regarding cultural rights. Two local TV channels in Diyarbakir and one radio channel in Sanliurfα were granted permission to broadcast in Kurdish. However, the broadcasting is restricted in several ways. With the exception of films and music programmes, time restrictions apply, and all broadcasts (except songs) must be subtitled or translated into Turkish. Besides, educational programmes teaching the Kurdish language are not allowed. The Turkish Public Television (TRT) has continued broadcasting in five languages including Kurdish. However, the duration and scope of TRT’s national broadcasts is still very limited.

The Commission establishes that the February 2005 visit of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to Ankara has not been followed up and no progress has been made in starting a dialogue on the situation of national minorities in Turkey. The Commission also remarks that the positive statement of Prime Minister Erdogan in Diyarbakir in August 2005, where he emphasised the need to resolve what he described as ‘the Kurdish issue’ through democratic means, was not followed up. There is almost no dialogue between the authorities and the locally elected politicians in the Southeast of Turkey. In addition, many locally elected politicians face court cases. Furthermore, the 10 % threshold under the electoral law makes it difficult for all but the nationwide largest parties to be represented in Parliament.

In sum, the Commission maintains that Turkey made little progress on promoting cultural diversity and the respect for and protection of minorities in accordance with international standards.
4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this paper a set of different theories of multiculturalism is used as a framework in relation to which the Turkish discussion on minority rights is analysed. This theoretical framework is made up of normative ideas of how a multicultural society should be organized, which groups should be seen as minorities and what type of rights these minorities should be granted. The normative ideas have proven to be well suited for providing an analytical framework from which it is possible to analyse the Turkish debate on minority rights.

In this section, two opposite positions within the framework of multiculturalism will be portrayed. Later in the analysis these positions are used when analysing the ideas put forward in the discussion.

4.1 Definition of multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a summatory concept in political theory. Thus, there is not one theory of multiculturalism, but several multiculturalist constructs with many definitions. Therefore, multiculturalism could be described in different ways. One wording reads:

Multiculturalism, according to one especially compelling formulation, is the radical idea that people in other cultures, foreign and domestic, are human beings, too – moral equals, entitled to equal respect and concern, not to be discounted or treated as a subordinate caste. Thus understood, multiculturalism condemns intolerance of other ways of life, finds the human in what might seem Other, and encourages cultural diversity.46

Multiculturalism can also have different connotations. It can refer to the fact of cultural diversity, but it can also refer to the multiculturalist political program.47

Multiculturalism as a theory is contested, both internally among the different multiculturalists and from outside. The external critique comes from various quarters. The main critique and the type of critique that will be brought up here comes from liberals. But criticism also comes from feminists such as Susan Moller Okin, who says that claims for group rights in the name of multiculturalism clash with gender equality.48

Here, two opposite positions on multiculturalism will be presented. The first one, the *culturalist approach*, is represented by Bhikhu Parekh, Charles Taylor, Will Kymlicka and Tariq Modood. Their respective views differ on various points, a fact that shows the diversity among those in favour of multiculturalism, even while they share common points. The other position, the *egalitarian approach*, which is a critique of multiculturalism, is represented by Brian Barry. While many liberals may disagree with the multiculturalist position, few have explicitly announced their disagreement. Barry on the other hand has dedicated a book to criticizing multiculturalism. Therefore, his position will be used as an opposite pole to multiculturalism.

4.2 The culturalist approach

What characterizes the culturalist approach is its emphasis on the value of culture. The culturalists argue that cultural diversity has an intrinsic value and that recognition of one’s cultural identity is crucial to human beings. Group-rights directed at minorities, then, are seen as a means of ensuring these values.

According to Bhikhu Parekh, multiculturalism is not primarily concerned with minorities, but with the place of culture in human life.\(^{49}\) Culture can be seen as a system of beliefs and practices through which human beings understand and structure their lives.\(^{50}\) According to Will Kymlicka, culture can also be seen as a context of choice. He says that freedom involves making choices amongst various options, and that our culture not only provides these options, but also makes them meaningful to us. Thus, cultures are valuable since it is only through having access to a culture that people can have access to a range of meaningful options.\(^{51}\) Parekh asserts that a people with a shared culture constitute a cultural community and that the membership of this community both shapes the individual’s personality and makes him or her identify with it.\(^{52}\) Thus, respect for a person’s identity entails respect for his or her culture. Charles Taylor states that our identity is partly shaped by the recognition of others and therefore, nonrecognition or misrecognition can cause damage to a person.\(^{53}\)


\(^{50}\) Parekh, 2000,p. 142f


\(^{52}\) Parekh, 2000, p. 154 ff

diversity has an intrinsic value because different cultures correct and complement each other and because it increases the available range of options and expands freedom of choice.

Group rights are seen as a means of ensuring the value of culture. Parekh says that minorities need equal treatment, but also equal opportunities, which might involve giving them additional help such as affirmative action. Thus, equality involves having an equal chance to be different. Treating human beings equally therefore requires us to take into account both their similarities, where equality entails equal treatment, and their differences, where differential treatment is required. Kymlicka makes a distinction between ‘national minorities’ and ‘ethnic groups’. A national minority is defined as a previously self-governing, territorially concentrated cultural group that has been incorporated into a larger state whereas an ethnic group is defined as a cultural group that has immigrated to a state. National minorities generally want to preserve their distinct society beside the majority culture, whereas ethnic groups usually want to integrate into the majority culture. As a consequence, Kymlicka also distinguishes between different types of rights. These are self-government rights, which are adherent to national minorities and involve delegation of power, often through some form of federalism, polyethnic rights, which is adherent to ethnic groups and involve legal protection for certain practices associated with particular ethnic or religious groups, and special representation rights, which both type of groups can receive and which often involves quota systems to central institutions of the larger state.

The importance of including both public and private spheres is stressed by Tariq Modood. He says there seem to be two separate conceptions of equal citizenship. He distinguishes between the right of assimilation to the majority culture in the public sphere and the toleration of “difference” in the private sphere on the one hand, and the right to recognition and support of “difference” in the public and private spheres on the other hand. Modood argues that these two categories are not mutually exclusive, but rather that multiculturalism requires support for both.

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54 Parekh, 2000, p. 167
55 Kymlicka, 1995, p. 121
56 Parekh, 2000, p. 239 ff
57 Kymlicka, 1995, p. 10
58 Kymlicka, 1995, p. 27 ff
In his essay *The Politics of Recognition* (1994), Charles Taylor makes a distinction between what he calls ‘politics of equal dignity’ and ‘politics of difference’. The politics of equal dignity emerged with the collapse of social hierarchies, which used to be the basis for ‘honour’. Honour, in this context, is connected to inequalities. For a person to have honour, it was important that not everyone had it. But this system collapsed with the entry of the politics of equal dignity. Dignity is here used in an egalitarian and universalist sense, referring to the natural dignity of the human being, which means that – in contrast to honour – everyone shares it.\(^{60}\) Taylor then describes how the politics of equal *recognition* – or politics of difference – emerged out of the politics of equal dignity. He says that the politics of difference grows organically out of the politics of universal dignity and that it gives us a new understanding of an old principle. He says that where the politics of equal dignity fought for non-discrimination that was difference-blind, the politics of difference redifines non-discrimination as requiring that we make these differences the basis for differential treatment. That is, everyone should be recognised for his or her distinctive identity.\(^{61}\) This, as we shall see, is where the culturalist approach and the egalitarian approach disagree.

### 4.3 The egalitarian approach

While there are several types of critique of multiculturalism, the most fundamental one is probably the critique from liberals. Whereas Kymlicka has developed what he calls a “liberal theory of multiculturalism”, many liberals argue that there is a fundamental clash between liberalism and multiculturalism. Brian Barry has made a contribution to the debate on multiculturalism in *Culture and Equality* (2001).

Barry sees the multiculturalist emphasis on culture as problematic, since the formation of groups does not always coincide with cultural unity.\(^{62}\) Moreover, he argues, culture *per se* does not have an intrinsic value. That is, cultural survival is not an end in itself.\(^{63}\) Barry says that it is perfectly possible to accept the reality of cultural diversity but at the same time hold that multiculturalism is incompatible with equality, on the ground that equality is opposite of the promotion of differentiation.\(^{64}\)

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60 Taylor, 1994, p. 27  
61 Taylor, 1994, p. 38-39  
62 Barry, 2001, p. 305 f  
63 Barry, 2001, p. 65 f  
64 Barry, 2001, p. 23
According to Barry, equal treatment and equality of opportunity is what is important. He is strongly opposed to the differentiation made by multiculturalists. He argues that distinction is the opposite of equality\textsuperscript{65} and that differential treatment can cause segregation and increase racism. Barry rejects the multiculturalist accusation that the liberal, supposedly universalist principles cannot be neutral and in fact reflect one hegemonic culture. He says that liberalism is neutral because it is fair.\textsuperscript{66} This fairness is connected to Barry’s view on public/private, which differs from the multiculturalist view. The idea is depoliticization or privatization of differences. The state should stay neutral to religious and other traits through providing everyone the same set of rules. Then it is up to each individual to decide what to do within the scope of these rules. The important thing is that everyone has the equal opportunities.\textsuperscript{67}

4.4 Two dimensions

Having presented the main points of the culturalist approach represented by Parekh, Kymlicka, Taylor and Modood and the egalitarian approach personified by Barry, it is possible to distinguish two dimensions. By using these dimensions, it will be easier to distinguish the different approaches when analysing the discussion on minorities in Turkey. A bit simplified, it can be tabulated like this:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|l|}
\hline
Culturalist dimension & Egalitarian dimension \\
\hline
Culture has an intrinsic value & Culture \textit{per se} does not have a value \\
Equality requires differential treatment & Equality requires equal treatment \\
Pro group-specific rights & Contra group-specific rights \\
Recognition of difference & Privatization of difference \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{65} ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} Barry, 2001, p. 28
\textsuperscript{67} Barry, 2001, p. 32
“I am Kurd, but citizen of Turkey”  
(Ali, Kurd, employee at an NGO based in Diyarbakir, Turkey 2006)

5. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In this section the empirical material will be presented. The core of this material comes down to four ‘discussions’, each in its own way shedding light on central aspects of the minority issue in Turkey. This debate is mirrored in the material through the voices of a number of people who were interviewed during field studies in Turkey, representing various groups within the civil society and academia, as well as the work of leading scholars in social sciences who are researching the minority issue in Turkey.

5.1 The discussion on citizenship

The fact that citizenship is directly linked with the question of minority rights is fundamental in the theoretical framework invoked in this study. Therefore it is highly relevant to take a closer look at the recent debate on citizenship in Turkey.

The Minority report released in October 2004, which was referred to above, provoked a lively debate in Turkey. The report called for a revision of the Constitution and relevant laws so that cultural rights could be expanded. It also criticized Turkey’s reservations on international conventions on minority rights. One controversial suggestion in the Minority report was the idea of ‘türkiyelilik’. The suggestion was to use the term türkiyeli, which means “from Turkey”, instead of ‘Turk’ to describe a citizen of the Republic of Turkey. It is thought that with this term it would facilitate multiple identities. The idea of Türk iyelilik is that since Turkishness is an ethnic, exclusive category which is hard for groups such as the Kurds to accept, it should be replaced with a non-ethnic, inclusive category, such as Türk iyelilik.

Murat Somer, at the Department of International Relations at Koç University, has made a contribution to the Türkiyeli lık-discussion. Somer starts by bringing up the traditional concept of ‘Turkishness’. He argues there are two types of critics of the concept of Turkishness. The first one claims that Turkishness is essentially an ethnic category, whereas the other one criticizes state practises without making this assumption about the nature of Turkishness.

Somer himself tends to support the latter version. He says that although there is no doubt that the Turkish national project favoured the Turkish language and those who were inclined to adopt this new identity, it does not follow that Turkishness is an ethnic category itself. He argues that some religious ethnic Turks might have had greater difficulties than secular ethnic Albanians in adopting the idea of Turkishness, which Somer claims is a national identity. This is important, because the implication of not acknowledging Turkishness as an ethnical category is to undermine the whole concept of Türkiyelilik.

A Turkish woman that was interviewed said that she has never described herself as a ‘Turk’, despite the fact that she is an ethnic Turk. Instead she has always said that she is “from Turkey”, as a sense of solidarity with all those cultural groups in Turkey which are not ethnically Turkish. However, this view is not commonplace in the Turkish society. The recent Türkiyelilik debate has mainly been conducted in academic circles and in some parts of civil society and has not reached popularity among the majority of the Turkish population.

How then is Türkiyelilik perceived among the groups who are thought to benefit from this term? As for the Kurds, there is clearly a division between those Kurds with a pan-Kurdish agenda aiming at the creation of an independent Kurdish State, and those who seek recognition of the Kurds as a constituent nation of Turkey. Paradoxically, the now imprisoned leader of the PKK - the very symbol of Kurdish separatism - Abdullah Öcalan, has recently announced his support for the idea of Türkiyelilik and has suggested that the state should promote Türkiyelilik instead of Turkishness.

There are also other contributions to the recent discussion on citizenship in Turkey. Mesut Yegen, a sociologist at the Middle East Technical University who has specialised on the Kurdish issue, pictures a narrative on the connections between citizenship and Turkishness. Yegen means that Turkishness has been divided into two categories; “Turkishness as citizenship” and “Turkishness as such”. Basically, Turkishness has been open to non-Turks, but as we shall see, not to all of them. Yegen goes back to the 1924 Constitution, where article 88 says: “the people of Turkey regardless of their religion and race would, in terms of citizenship, be considered Turkish.” (Emphasis added.) This indicates that there is a Turkishness beyond Turkishness in terms of citizenship. Hence, in the eyes of official Turkey, there has been a difference between “constitutional-Turks and “Turks as such”. Whereas

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69 Somer, Murat, “Defensive- vs. Liberal-nationalist Perspectives on Diversity and the Kurdish Conflict: Europeanization, the Internal Debate, and Türkiyelilik”, New Perspectives on Turkey, no. 32 (2005): p. 84
70 Interview with Unzile, 2007-01-18
71 Somer, 2005, p. 85
Muslim Turkish citizens such as the Kurds have mostly been invited to Turkishness as such, non-Muslims have fallen into the category of Turkishness as citizenship.\textsuperscript{72}

In August 2005 Prime Minister Erdogan gave a speech that attracted very much attention.\textsuperscript{73} The speech was given at a meeting with 12 intellectuals in Diyarbakir (the largest Kurd-dominated town in southeast of Turkey). Erdogan stated that ‘the Kurdish question’ was a problem of democratization. He also said: “there have been faults in the past and we are strong enough to solve these faults and questions. And the Kurdish question is also my own problem.” This announcement was remarkable for two reasons: First, because it was the first time that Erdogan used the expression ‘the Kurdish question’, referring to it as a democratic issue rather than a security issue, and second, because of the indication that sub-identities such as ‘Kurd’ are acceptable, under the supra-identity of being a citizen of Turkey.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{72} Yegen, Mesut, “Prospective-Turks” or “Pseudo-Citizens”. Kurds in Turkey, Department of Sociology, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, p. 11 ff
\textsuperscript{73} This attention was also showing during field studies where this was very often brought up.
\textsuperscript{74} “Military, government meet to assess terror and ‘Kurdish problem’”, Turkish Daily News, 2005-08-24
5.2 The discussion on the minority concept

The notion of ‘minority’ is very controversial, in Turkey as well as internationally, and it is important to clarify the content of this controversy. Since in Turkey the nature of this controversy is partly distinctive from other contexts, it is even more important to clarify that which characterizes the Turkish sensitiveness towards this concept. The controversy in Turkey is not only about the reluctance of the State to grant the Kurds and other groups minority rights. There is also a fundamental scepticism towards the concept of minority as such.

In his contribution to the volume *New Perspectives on Turkey* (2005), Somer gives an account of Baskin Oran’s explanation of the mainstream Turkish suspicion of ethnic-linguistic and religious diversity. This suspicion goes back to the Ottoman time and the *millet* system. According to this system, the non-Muslim millets enjoyed considerable autonomy. However, these groups were seen as socially and politically inferior by the Muslims. This fact has resulted in the conception of minorities as second-class citizens and the association of minorities with inferiority. Because of this, even if minorities are not at all seen as inferior and minority status is associated only with rights and not with disadvantages, many people in Turkey are still suspicious of the notion of minority. This applies not only to ethnic Turks, but also to the Kurds and other minorities.

In the interviews that were carried out, many of those of Kurdish origin meant that the Kurds in Turkey should not be described as a minority but as a constituent element of the country. A common answer to the question of whether the Kurds are a minority was “the Kurds are not a minority. Turks and Kurds are both basic peoples of this country.” However, irrespective of whether the Kurds as a group want to be called a minority or not, the claims they put forward coincide with the rights they would enjoy if given minority status.

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75 A *millet* is defined as a religious community. See McDowall, 2004, p.2
77 Question was mostly brought up when I asked them to define the term minority, question number 3 in the interview guide, or sometimes when I asked which are the minorities in Turkey, number 4. See Appendix
78 Interview with Yusuf, 2006-11-30
79 This conclusion is also made by Olgun Akbulut in “The State of Political Participation of Minorities in Turkey. An Analysis under the ECHR and the ICCPR” in *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 12, 2005. Netherlands:
In her doctoral dissertation on minority rights, political scientist Cigdem Nas highlights the fact that international standards have not been able to arrive at a consensual definition of ‘minority’ and she poses the following question:

The fact remains that it would be impossible to have a nation-state for each ethnic group. It is equally impossible to have ethnically homogenous nation-states. No matter how homogenous a nation-state is, there will always be minorities. The important question then concerns the conditions of the peaceful coexistence of majority and minority groups. The granting of minority rights has to be balanced with the need to achieve a certain amount of integration within the society. Is a regime where every ethnic group has its separate organizations, educational establishments, possesses the right to use own language in private and in public, listens to its own radio and television, reads its own newspaper, has a proportional number of seats in parliament etc. viable? What will be the common denominators binding the different groups together?\(^{80}\)

Kemal Kirisci and Gareth M. Winrow also point to the problems of minority rights in *The Kurdish Question and Turkey* (2004). Firstly, they raise the question of whether or not, in a democracy, the rights of all citizens automatically would be covered. Or is it the case, even in a democracy, that minorities need additional rights? They refer to an article in *The Economist* that asserts that the concept of minority rights seems flawed at first sight, since it applies only to some, while basic democratic rights should apply to all. But then the article continues to say, that a solution could be to deal with the issue on a case-by-case basis, since some minorities may need special rights to protect their language and culture in cases where these are threatened and in danger of extinction. Kirisci and Winrow say the discussion concerning whether ‘prevention of discrimination’ is enough to protect minorities or if ‘positive action’ is necessary is linked with the issue of whether minorities need special rights. Prevention of discrimination means equality of treatment with the majority, whereas positive action entails differential treatment such as special measures to protect their culture and language.\(^{81}\)

In *Confronting Equality* (2003), Dilek Kurban presents an idea of which groups there are, that constitute a minority and what type of rights they should have. She says that the distinction between the subjective and objective criteria plays an essential role in determining which minority groups in multicultural societies should be given legal recognition. She writes:

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In this context, it is imperative to distinguish between national minorities and cultural minorities. The former refers to “groups within a state who are long established in a particular territory that they regard as their homeland and whose members are bound together by a common consciousness and culture.” Such groups satisfy both the objective criteria—history and culture—and the subjective criteria—minority consciousness. Cultural minorities, on the other hand, refers to “immigrants and their descendants—people who have uprooted themselves from their homelands to resettled in a new territory in a new polity.” This individual mode of dislocation detaches such minorities from the cultural communities with whom they share historical roots—and therefore strips them from meeting the critical objective criteria—and their desire to integrate into the dominant culture of their new homelands disqualifies them from fulfilling the subjective criteria. Hence, cultural minorities do not meet the requirements for legal recognition as minorities and the subsequent entitlements to rights that follow.82

As a consequence of this categorization, Kurban argues that the Alevis and the Kurds are the minorities in Turkey that should be given legal recognition. She maintains that notwithstanding the fact that Turkey is home to many different communities, only the Alevis and the Kurds qualify for national minority status. The remaining groups, she says, constitute cultural minorities. She alleges three reasons for making this type of distinction. First, the Kurds and Alevis meet the objective criteria of the minority definition to a far greater extent than the other groups. The Kurds, since they are the only large linguistic minority in Turkey, as well as comprising about one fifth of the population, and the Alevis, since they comprise one third. Furthermore, she says, the Kurds (and some Alevis) are indigenous populations inhabiting Anatolia at the time of the Turks’ arrival. Second, the Kurds and Alevis have preserved their identities and resisted assimilation into the majority culture. Third, whereas most Alevis are Turkish in terms of ethnicity and language, three million of them are also Kurdish. Kurban argues that this double religious-ethnic identity of Alevi-Kurds has a reinforcing effect on their self-consciousness.83

Yegen also makes a separation between different minorities. He says that basically there could be thousands of minority groups. One could simply look at the demographic figures and see which groups there are. However, what is interesting is which groups are demanding rights. Consequently, he makes a distinction between those groups who claim a separate identity and those who do not. In Turkey, this distinction could be made between the non-territorial groups (e.g. Circassians) that have to a large extent been assimilated into a Turkish identity, and the territorial groups (e.g. Kurds) that have refused to become assimilated.84

83 Kurban, 2003, p. 182 ff
84 Interview with Mesut 2006-12-05
5.3 The discussion on the Treaty of Lausanne

The Lausanne Treaty, as referred to above, is central to the discussion on minorities and minority rights in Turkey. Whenever discussing the minority issue, official Turkey invokes the Lausanne Treaty, where it is argued that minorities are those that are recognized by international treaties and consequently, the only minorities in Turkey are the Greeks, Armenians and Jews. Therefore, it is important to understand the controversy over the Treaty.

In an article about the European Parliament’s approach to the minority issue in Turkey, Cigdem Nas outlines the official Turkish position on the minority issue. She writes that although official Turkey accepts that Turkish citizens come from various origins, it rejects the argument that different ethnic origins justify the claim for the granting of minority status. Instead, it is believed that all of them constitute the Turkish nation and are first-class citizens. Granting minority status is seen as something that would limit the rights of these people, since it is thought that they already enjoy full civil and political rights and are in no way discriminated against. Furthermore, it is thought, it would crack the Anatolian mosaic. Turkish citizenship is seen as an all-embracing identity, covering different ethnicities. Cultural rights are seen as falling in the private sphere and consequently, ‘ethnic languages’ may be spoken in private but not in public offices or schools. Nas illustrates this position by referring to a decision by the Turkish Constitutional Court in 1993 concerning banning of a political party:

In our country, no minority exists except for those recognized by the Lausanne Treaty and the Turkish-Bulgarian Friendship Agreement. It is only a natural fact that groups showing linguistic, religious, racial and sectarian differences exist within states. However, granting minority status to every such group conflicts with the principle of the indivisibility of the State and its country/nation. Moreover, if such groups have constructed the 'Turkish nation' within national boundaries, possessing an understanding of historical and cultural integrity, based on a common past as is the case in our history, and established the Turkish Republic, there is no need to grant such status to these groups. In this regard the Turkish nation is not comprised of peoples, but of a single people, the Turkish people, created by societal consensus based on a common past.

As shown above, the Lausanne Treaty is quoted on a regular basis whenever official Turkey defends its position on the minority issue. Although many have questioned the narrow definition of minority made in the Lausanne Treaty, only a few have scrutinized how the Turkish establishment has applied the Treaty. It can be claimed that Turkey itself is not going

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by the letter of the treaty. Baskin Oran has made such a claim. As is mentioned above, an investigation was launched against him after the release of the Minority report. One of the counts of the indictment concerned the Lausanne Treaty. In the indictment we can read that:

The Report claims [...] that Turkey is violating the Lausanne Treaty. As an example Article 39/4 of the Treaty has been cited in the report. This Article grants all citizens the right to use the language they choose; however the report states that the implementation of this Article is restricted. The Lausanne Treaty [...] is a founding document that is still valid and in force, and it is the document which certifies the independence of the Republic of Turkey in international law. [...] in Turkey minorities are the non-Muslim citizens. Apart from them, there are no other minorities based on ethnic, religious or linguistic grounds. All citizens who are outside of the scope of the mentioned group, who have played a role in the establishment of this State and who are within these borders are the “constituent elements of this State and not “minorities”.

In his defence to the indictment, Baskin Oran clarifies some of the incorrectness of the official Turkish position in regard to the Lausanne treaty. First, Oran points out that the ‘existence of a minority’ and the ‘status of a minority’ are two different things. The existence of a minority, he says, is a sociological fact which is not up to a State to decide. If there is a non-dominant group, displaying ethnic, linguistic or religious differences which are seen as an inseparable part of its identity, international standards say that a minority exists within that State. The status of a minority, on the other hand, is a legal condition where the authority lies with the State. Thus, the State is free to grant or deny minority status, and consequently, minority rights.

Second, Oran remarks on the error that is made in the indictment by referring to ‘the constituent elements of this State’, and thus defining the Muslim citizens. Oran argues that in doing that, the prosecutor is indirectly defining the non-Muslim citizens as ‘subsidiary’ elements, which he claims is a crime of separatism. In his defence he writes:

I wonder if The Public Prosecutor’s Office is aware of the fact that he himself is committing the crime of separatism that he charged us with without showing any evidence? Isn’t this “openly inciting a part of the population which has a different race or religion to breed hatred and enmity against the other (TPC Art.216/1)”

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87 Counterindictment, Full text translation of Oran’s defence read in Ankara at the “Minority Report” trial on 15 Feb. 2006, Baskin Oran, Professor of International Relations, Faculty of Political Science, Ankara University.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
Third, Oran makes a comment about article 39/4. He says that had the article been implemented, that is if the State had not been violating the article until today, then there would not be a problem concerning broadcasts in ‘languages other than Turkish’. He also poses the question of whether, if the article had been implemented correctly, the Kurdish nationalism would not have gained strength. The Article 39 of the Lausanne Treaty read:

No restriction shall be imposed on the free use by any Turkish national of any language in private intercourse, in commerce, religion, in the press, or in publication of any kind, or at public meetings. Notwithstanding the existence of the official language, adequate facilities shall be given to Turkish nationals of non-Turkish speech for the oral use of language before their own courts.\(^90\)

\(^90\) See Kirisci & Winrow, 2004, p. 44
5.4 The discussion on assimilation and identity

Central to the debate on the minority issue in Turkey is the matter of identity. Very often when reference is made to the Kurdish issue, there will follow a reference to their national identity, irrespective of whether aiming to support their claims of a separate identity or to deny it. Many of these claims, and especially those claims that deny a separate Kurdish identity, are intimately linked with the question of assimilation. Understanding this connection between national identity and assimilation is crucial to fully grasp the discussion on minority rights in Turkey.

Let us take a look at some of the most common statements that are made in descriptions of the Kurds. Referring again to Nas’ description of the official Turkish position on minority rights, it is stated that Muslim communities such as the Kurds are seen as ‘first-class citizens’. What is meant by a first class citizen is not clearly defined, but it is thought that they are not discriminated against but treated as equal citizens, as long as they accept the main tenets of the Turkish State. It is also pointed out that many Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin have acquired important positions in society.

How then can this be linked to the matter of assimilation? Mesut Yegen has explained the background for this linkage. He portrays the official view on Kurds, according to which they have been seen as ‘prospective-Turks’, in other words as potential members of the Turkish ethno-cultural community. Like other inhabitants of Turkey that have been viewed as prospective Turks, the Circassians for example, Kurds have been subject to assimilationist practices rather than discriminatory ones. These assimilationist practices, or policies of ‘Turkification’, were introduced along with the foundation of the Republic and involved compulsory settlement and prohibition of the Kurdish language, Kurdish names, etc. Also, boarding schools were established in the Kurdish regions as a means to separate Kurdish children from their natural environment.

Yegen points out that a large number of Kurds have in fact been successfully assimilated into mainstream society ever since the foundation of the Turkish republic, and that some have also acquired important positions in society. A similar statement is to be found in Ingmar

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92 Yegen, Mesut, “Prospective-Turks” or “Pseudo-Citizens”. Kurds in Turkey, Department of Sociology, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, p.2
93 Ibid, p. 5 ff
Karlsson’s book *Europa och Turken* (2007). He asserts that the Kurds are active in all areas of social and political life, and that around 25 percent of the members of parliament as well as the top-ranking figures in the industry are Kurds. Moreover, three of Turkey’s former presidents were of Kurdish origin. Therefore, he concludes, being Kurdish in itself is not a reason for discrimination. In direct connection to this conclusion, he refers to a survey carried out among Kurds in Istanbul in 1993, where 13 percent said they had Kurdish background, 3.9 percent said they were Kurds, 3.7 percent saw themselves as Turks with Kurdish parents and the rest identified themselves as Turks.

Returning to Yegen, we find the assertion that the fact of assimilation has generally been seen as proof of the Kurds’ commitment to the Turkish community and as an indication that they identify with the concept of Turkishness. He also asserts this has been seen as evidence of the fact that Kurds deserve to be recognized as first class citizens. However, this is provided that they accept the main principles of the Turkish State. That is, Kurds are not discriminated against as long as they identify themselves as Turks.

Often the fact of cultural diversity within a nation state is seen as something that would justify minority rights. However, in the Turkish context, this fact has often been used for the opposite purpose. In the same article as referred to above, Nas writes that granting minority rights is seen as something that would damage the socio-cultural foundation of the Turkish society. Since the Turkish society is consisting of people of various ethnic backgrounds, granting minority status would destroy the mosaic configuration of the Turkish nation. Furthermore, it is argued, due to inter-ethnic marriages it is very complicated to distinguish between the ethnic origins of citizens. There are many people who come from both Turkish and Kurdish backgrounds.

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95 Yegen, Mesut, “Prospective-Turks” or “Pseudo-Citizens”. *Kurds in Turkey*, Department of Sociology, Middle East Technical University, Ankara, Turkey, p.11
97 Ibid.
In the interviews that were carried out in Istanbul and Diyarbakir the respondents were asked to define their nationality, leaving the question open to interpretation. As it turned out, the vast majority of those respondents with Kurdish background answered that they are Kurds, but citizens of Turkey. So even though nationality is generally perceived as a legal term, many of the respondents of Kurdish origin chose to stress their Kurdish identity. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of constitutional recognition as Kurds.\footnote{Interviews carried out in Diyarbakir and Istanbul, 2006-11-30 and 2006-12-06}

An important distinction to make is the one between voluntary and forced assimilation. Dilek Kurban brings up this issue in \textit{Confronting Equality} (2003). A minority might naturally assimilate into the majority culture over time, or voluntary - i.e. intentionally - assimilate into the majority culture. It is often the case that when a State pursues a policy of recognition and inclusion, minorities do not have a reason to stay away from interaction with the majority out of fear of the extinction of their culture. However, if a state pursues oppressive policies characterized by forced assimilation, this often leads to a scenario where persons belonging to minorities reduce their interaction with the dominant culture. Consequently, such oppressive State policies often have a counterproductive effect.\footnote{Kurban, 2003, p. 160} Clearly, assimilation \textit{per se} does not necessarily have to be something bad. Mesut Yegen puts it like this:

\begin{quote}
There are groups in Turkey that have voluntarily assimilated into a Turkish identity, and that is fine. Assimilation should be allowed. The problem is when it is compulsory.\footnote{Interview with Mesut 2006-12-05}
\end{quote}
6. ANALYSIS

In this section, there will be an analysis of the empirical material, stemming from the theoretical framework made up of the theories of multiculturalism. We are going to study how the ideas brought forward in the discussion correspond to the multicultural ideas. We are also going to look at how the positions in the debate relate to the different positions in the theories. In that way we can contrast a normative theoretical debate concerning the status of minorities with an existing debate on minorities in Turkey.

6.1 The culturalist dimension

Dilek Kurban’s idea to distinguish between national minorities and cultural minorities as well as her argument that only the Kurds and the Alevis qualify as national minorities and consequently can acquire minority rights, correspond with Kymlicka’s theory to a large extent. Her distinction between national minorities and cultural minorities as such is more or less identical with Kymlicka’s theory. However, the narrow interpretation of national minorities differs from Kymlicka’s view. First, according to Kymlicka’s definition, there are more groups that could qualify as national minorities in Turkey. A national minority is defined as a previously self-governing, territorially concentrated cultural group that has been incorporated into a larger state. One example would be the Christian Assyrians/Syriacs, with historical roots in south eastern Turkey. The Alevis on the other hand would, according to the same definition, probably not qualify for national minority status. Moreover, cultural groups may get minority status – the question is what type of minority rights they are entitled to.

On the whole, Kurban’s contribution to the discussion is clearly culturalist, where she stresses the intrinsic value of (some) minority cultures and propagates for group rights as a means of achieving equality.

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101 Kymlicka, 1995, p. 10
The fact that the majority of the respondents with Kurdish origin defined themselves as “Kurds, but citizens of Turkey” in terms of nationality and that they called for constitutional recognition as Kurds (although not necessarily as a minority) is in itself a manifestation of what Taylor calls ‘politics of recognition’. Taylor argues that our identity is partly shaped by the recognition of others, why nonrecognition or misrecognition can be a sort of oppression. The politics of recognition entails that everyone should be recognised for his or her distinctive identity.

The suggestion to use the term türkiyeli instead of Turk to describe a citizen of Turkey is an example of an attempt to recognize those citizens who do not identify as Turks. This could also be compared with Taylor’s emphasis on the importance of recognition or with Parekh’s view of an ideal national identity. Parekh says that in order to create a successful national identity, there are several criteria that need to be fulfilled. For example, since members of the multicultural society belong to different ethnic, religious and cultural groups, there must be room for multiple identities. Parekh says that in order for these groups to identify with the society, the national identity must be defined to include all citizens and to accept them as equally valued.

Thus, on the one hand, the Türkiyelilik-discussion could be included in the culturalist dimension. But on the other hand, egalitarians like Barry would probably not disagree with the suggestion to use türkiyeli to create a new, civic national identity. As we shall see, it is not always obvious where the different ideas put forward in the discussion belong.

### 6.2 The egalitarian dimension

The widespread opinion in Turkey that minorities are connected with second-class citizenship and inferiority may be compared with the egalitarian disapproval of differentiation. Just as Barry argues that differentiation leads to segregation, the Turkish fear is that the creation of minorities will lead to second-class citizenship. Likewise, while Barry thinks that cultural diversity should be respected, he rejects the claims for differentiation because he thinks it is opposite equality. And while most Kurds hold that they should obtain the rights normally associated with minority status, they dislike the idea of being a minority.

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102 Taylor, 1994, p. 25
103 Taylor, 1994, p. 38-39
104 Parekh, 2000, p. 230 ff
105 Barry, 2001, p. 81 f
In Cigdem Nas’s description of the official Turkish position, there is rhetoric that resembles the egalitarian dimension. Nas writes that although official Turkey accepts that Turkish citizens come from various origins, it rejects the argument that different ethnic origins justify the claim for the granting of minority status. This may be compared with Barry’s statement that it is possible to accept the reality of cultural diversity but at the same time hold that multiculturalism is incompatible with equality, on the grounds that equality is opposite of the promotion of differentiation.\footnote{Barry, 2001, p. 23} Nas also writes that granting minority rights is seen as something that would damage the socio-cultural foundation of the Turkish society. Due to inter-ethnic marriages, it is complicated to distinguish between the ethnic origins of citizens and there are many people who come from both Turkish and Kurdish backgrounds. This may be compared with Barry’s questioning of the multiculturalist view on culture, where cultural homogeneity is taken for granted.\footnote{Barry, 2001, p. 305 f} However, the fact that the rhetoric is similar does not necessarily mean that the underlying views correspond to each other. While Barry reasons on grounds of liberal equality, official Turkey does so in the light of \textit{de facto} restraint against Kurdish liberal rights.\footnote{See EU 2006 progress report: Commission of the European Communities, Brussels, 08.11.2006, SEC (2006) 1390, Commission Staff Working Document, Turkey 2006 Progress Report\{COM (2006) 649 final\}}

In her PhD thesis, Cigdem Nas questions whether it is viable for a state to allow every ethnic group to have its own separate organizations and educational establishments, enjoy the right to use its own language in private and in public, listen to its own radio and television, read its own newspaper, and have a proportional number of seats in parliament. Barry’s view on this problem is that when a single state contains more than one linguistic community because of historic linguistic frontiers, the different communities have a legitimate claim to conduct their collective life in their own language. However, this type of arrangement does limit the functioning of a democratic regime.\footnote{Barry, 2001, p. 226} That is, although Barry here makes an exception from his view on group rights, he still sees it as something problematic.

The question that comes to mind here is whether these two dimensions are fully applicable on the Turkish context? Or is it the case that we need a third dimension?
6.3 A third dimension?

Kirisci and Winrow pose an important question when they ask whether or not, in a democracy, the rights of all citizens automatically would be covered or if it instead is the case that even in a democracy, minorities need additional rights. This is obviously one of the central issues under dispute between the multiculturalists and their liberal critics. Whereas multiculturalists argue that minorities need additional rights, liberals propagate for identical, ‘colour-blind’ rights. The multiculturalist critique on the liberal view is that there can be no universal or ‘colour-blind’ rights. Taylor illustrates this point when he says that the multiculturalist claim is that the hypothetically universalist principles in fact reflect one hegemonic culture. Therefore the supposedly universalist principles of ‘equal treatment’ are indirectly suppressing minority cultures and consequently discriminatory in and of itself.\textsuperscript{110} Kirisci and Winrow also point to the discussion concerning whether ‘prevention of discrimination’ is enough to protect minorities, or if ‘positive action’ is necessary, which they say is linked with the issue of whether minorities need special rights. Prevention of discrimination, they say, means equality of treatment with the majority, whereas positive action entails differential treatment such as special measures to protect culture and language.

An important question here, is what is meant by ‘prevention of discrimination’ and ‘positive action’ in the Turkish context. Prevention of discrimination can mean different things. In the Turkish perspective, it has traditionally implied that everyone has an equal right to be Turkish. But it could also indicate everyone’s equal right to one’s own mother tongue. Barry acknowledges that when a single state contains more than one linguistic community because it has been put together in a way that cuts across a historic linguistic frontier, then forcible imposition of a single language would be both oppressive and a violation of international covenants. In these cases certain group rights must be accepted.\textsuperscript{111} Positive action can also mean different things. Kirisci and Winrow referred to an article suggesting that in order to find a solution to the conflict between the principle of equal treatment and differential treatment one could deal with the issue on a case-by-case basis, since some minorities may need special rights to protect their language and culture in cases where these are threatened by extinction. In the Turkish context then, this would mean not only to lift the ban on the liberal rights to exercise one’s language, but also to introduce positive measures to encourage the use of other languages.

\textsuperscript{110} Taylor, 1994, p. 43
\textsuperscript{111} Barry, 2001, p. 226
The issue of assimilation is a complicated question because on the one hand, integration with wider society is often desirable, but on the other hand diversity must be respected. Yegen says that Kurds have been seen as prospective-Turks, and that the Kurds generally have been subject to assimilationist practices rather than discriminatory ones. This implies that integration has been possible, but that the respect for diversity has been neglected. Parekh says that since no multicultural society should ignore the demands of diversity, the assimilationist form of political integration would be an inappropriate solution to achieving this. The assimilationist, Parekh says, has the nation state as an ideal and thinks that no polity can be stable and unified unless its members share a common national culture. In the assimilationist view, minorities have two choices. Either they wish to become part of wider society and be treated like everyone else, in which case they should assimilate, or they insist on keeping their separate culture, in which case they should not complain if they are treated as strangers or are discriminated against.

Dilek Kurban’s point that there is a difference between voluntary and forced assimilation is crucial. Minorities might voluntarily assimilate into the majority culture, and that is not a problem. Parekh also believes there is nothing wrong with assimilation, provided that it is chosen. The important question, he says, is whether assimilation is necessary to ensure political unity and if it should be a precondition for equal citizenship. Unsurprisingly, his answer to the question is ‘no’, above all because minorities have a right to maintain their separate culture, but also since – as is also pointed out in the text – it is often the case that when a State pursues a policy of recognition and inclusion, minorities do not have a reason to stay away from interaction with the majority out of fear of the extinction of their culture. Yet if a State pursues oppressive policies, then this often leads to a scenario where minorities reduce their interaction with the dominant culture. Such oppressive State policies thus often have the opposite effect.  

Barry also mentions the matter of assimilation. He rejects the argument that since liberalism is ignoring demands for difference, it is assimilationist. He argues that assimilation often occurs as a result of differentiation between groups, and when this is disadvantageous for a certain group, persons belonging to this group may choose to assimilate. Therefore, he says, the whole point of egalitarian liberalism is to ensure that people who are different are treated equally.  

In sum, both approaches condemn forced assimilation and agree on the fact that voluntary assimilation is accepted.

112 Parekh, 2000, p. 196 f
113 Barry, 2001, p. 76
Nas writes that in the Turkish context, cultural rights are seen as falling in the private sphere, and that so called ‘ethnic languages’ may be spoken in private but not in public offices or schools. The separation of private and public is a central concern that provides a contrast between the culturalist and egalitarian approaches. Tariq Modood’s emphasis of the importance of including both public and private spheres illustrates this division. He says there seem to be two separate conceptions of equal citizenship, where he distinguishes between the right of assimilation to the majority culture in the public sphere and the toleration of “difference” in the private sphere on the one hand, and the right to recognition and support of “difference” in the public and private spheres on the other hand. Modood argues that these two categories are not mutually exclusive, but rather that multiculturalism requires support for both. Whereas liberals tend to support only the former, multiculturalists assert that the latter is also necessary.

Kymlicka says that when it comes to language, the liberal idea that the government could be neutral with respect to various groups is fundamentally mistaken. He says that one of the most important determinations of whether a culture survives or not is whether its language is the language of government. Therefore, the government cannot avoid deciding which culture it will support. It is not the same thing as separation between State and religion. A State can choose not to support a particular religion, but it cannot avoid supporting a culture when it decides which language is to be used in public schooling, or within any other public domain. Kymlicka says that if a national minority forms a majority in a part of the country, they should be able to decide to have their mother tongue adopted as an official language in that part.

Barry admits that where language is concerned, a State cannot adopt a neutral position. But he argues that this does not necessarily lead to inequality. Barry says that egalitarian liberalism is primarily committed to equality of opportunity. He says that equality of opportunity in this case means the opportunity to acquire the official language, to achieve educational success in the language and to gain employment on the basis of those without suffering discrimination. However, Barry is here referring to immigrant groups where a comparison with the Kurds in Turkey is hardly analogous.

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115 Modood, 2005, p. 135
116 Kymlicka, 1995, p. 111-112
117 Barry, 2001, p. 107
Baskin Oran poses a significant question when he asks the rhetorical question what would have happened if the State had not been violating article 39 in the Lausanne Treaty until today. He says that if this article would have been implemented, then there would not be a problem concerning broadcasts in ‘languages other than Turkish’. Moreover, he says, Kurdish nationalism might not have gained strength.

Whereas perhaps only the culturalist would be in favour of the positive rights given in the last sentence of the article (“Notwithstanding the existence of the official language, adequate facilities shall be given to Turkish nationals of non-Turkish speech for the oral use of language before their own courts”), the egalitarian would definitely support the negative rights given in the first (“No restriction shall be imposed on the free use by any Turkish national of any language in private intercourse, in commerce, religion, in the press, or in publication of any kind, or at public meetings.”)

As shown above, the inherent conflict between the culturalist dimension and the egalitarian dimension is not always applicable on the Turkish case. Sometimes it seems they are rather on the same side of the Turkish controversy, only with slightly different perspectives.
7. CONCLUSION

In this paper, it has been concluded that there are forces in Turkey working for a change in the
tonition of Turkish citizenship. Whereas there is consensus on the fact that Turkish citizenship
ought to be an ethnically neutral category, the opinions differ of whether the traditional
Turkishness is adequate for this purpose or whether a new concept such as Türkiyelilik should
be introduced. It has also been concluded that the minority concept is problematic for a
number of reasons. First, there is no consensus on the definition of minority in international
conventions. Second, many Kurds dislike the idea of being labelled minority. Third, it is the
State that chooses what cultural groups they want to give minority status and official Turkey
appeals to the Lausanne Treaty. Moreover, the tension between assimilation and identity is
significant. Some Kurds and other minorities have adopted a Turkish identity over time.
While voluntary assimilation is fine, forced assimilation is certainly a problem.

Whereas some of the ideas put forward in the discussion can easily be applied to the
multicultural framework, others do not fit in. The theoretical debate on multiculturalism is
largely a Western debate where the most important matter in dispute is whether cultural
minorities are best protected by certain group-specific rights or not. The multiculturalists
argue that group rights are required, whereas the liberals think that these groups are better
protected by liberal equality. There is no major disagreement however of whether there is
such a thing as minorities or whether cultural diversity is desirable or not. The Turkish reality
differs from this in the sense that the main dividing line is between the prevailing Kemalism
and plural democracy. Thus, there is a mismatch between the theoretical framework and the
case studied.

The theoretical debate over multiculturalism also departs from the actual debate in Turkey in
the sense that the debate on multiculturalism, which is mainly pursued in a Western context, is
for the most part concerning societies where the cultural diversity derives from immigration,
which is obviously not the case with the Kurds in Turkey. In addition, while the minority
rights referred to in the debate on multiculturalism often concern religion, the minority rights
that are in focus in the Turkish discussion instead concern linguistic rights.
Furthermore, where the debate on multiculturalism presupposes liberal democracy, Turkey is a semi-democratic State\textsuperscript{118} where basic liberal rights, such as the right to speak one’s mother tongue, have long been denied.\textsuperscript{119}

In the light of this reality, the inevitable contrast to any discussion on minority rights in Turkey will be the predominant Kemalism. That is, even if there are differences in the various positions of the discussion, where some tend towards the culturalist side, and some towards the egalitarian, they are nevertheless doing so within the scope of the Kemalist discourse.


\textsuperscript{119} Kurban, 2003, p. 193 f
Afterword

Whereas many studies have been carried out on the Kurdish issue – this one focusing on the minority aspect – fewer have paid attention to the other minorities. Therefore I would also like to add some notes about two other minorities in Turkey.

The Gypsies in Turkey (and the Ottoman Empire) have traditionally not been viewed entirely as an ethnic group, but as a ‘half’ group. This is illustrated by the saying: “in Turkey, there are 17 ½ millets”. This saying demonstrates what I encountered during my field study in Turkey. In my interviews, only two of the respondents mentioned the Gypsies as a distinct group when asked to name the minorities in Turkey. But when I added the question “what about the Gypsies?” they all knew them as a distinct community.

Another minority that was rarely mentioned in the interviews that were carried out during my field study is the Christian Assyrians/Syriacs. Their case is unique in the sense that they are a non-Muslim community, but since they are not included in the Lausanne Treaty, they are not recognized as a minority. They are for the most part ignored as a distinct group, although displaying ethnic, linguistic and religious differences as well as being a victim of the Armenian genocide.

The study has been focusing on an alternative discussion on minority rights in Turkey, pursued by a small number of people within civil society and the academic sphere. Parallel to this discussion there is the prevailing Kemalist discourse, which has been largely ignored in this study. Whereas this study does not claim to give explanations, it can provide us an advantageous point through which we can pose questions. A question that comes to mind here is to what extent this alternative discussion may ultimately affect official Turkey? The Kemalist discourse has been treated as something static in this paper, but maybe a further study will find that this reality is about to change. This brings us back to the point where we started, where I intended to look at the changes of the Turkish minority policy. Perhaps this would be an interesting study in a few years from now?

121 Only two respondents, Olgun 2006-12-11 and Ünzile 2007-01-18, mentioned the Gypsies without the additional question. I have not counted the interview with Adrian, since he himself is researching Gypsy issues.
122 McDowall, 2004, p. 103
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Appendix

Enclosed are the questions that worked as a guideline during the interviews. All questions were not used in every interview and sometimes supplementary questions were added. The respondents were asked to give there nationality, leaving it open to interpretation. This way, their definition of nationality can be seen as a tenth question of the interview guide.

Name:
Nationality:
Email (optional):

1. What is your relation to this matter, i.e. cultural diversity in Turkey? Do you represent an organization or a political party or have you been working with these issues in your profession?
2. How would you describe the official Turkish policy towards cultural diversity today?
3. How would you define the term “minority”? 
4. Which are the minorities in Turkey?
5. Are there any problems with minorities or cultural groups in Turkey?
6. Have there been any changes in Turkey’s policy towards cultural diversity during the past two years? If there has been a change, is it good or bad? What else do you think should be done?
7. If there has been a change, do you think this change is an effect of the EU-negotiations?
8. Should minorities or cultural groups be granted any cultural or linguistic rights, in your opinion?
9. Is there anything you would like to add?