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## **The Administration of Religion in a Majority Muslim Nation-State:**

The Case of Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) and Pakistan's Ministry of Religious Affairs

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### **Abstract:**

The Republic of Turkey has a formidable and well-financed establishment for the management of Islam, which offers a vigorous and active state-society relation at both the state and at the grassroots levels. What is perhaps most notable concerning this type of governance of Islam is Turkey's national history. It is most remarkable that Turkey with its majority Muslim population and its designation as a secular republic has established such a massive and effective bureaucracy for the administration of Islam, which is far larger and more extensive than that of Pakistan, a state that describes itself as an Islamic republic, and officially acknowledges the Islamic law in its constitution. The main institutions for the administration of Islam in Turkey, the Directorate of Religious Affairs [*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, commonly abbreviated as *Diyanet*] not only has a substantial administrative bureaucracy across the country for religious services related to Islam but also oversees a vast staff of religious personnel such as *imams*, *hatips*, *vaiz*, *muftis*, Qur'an teachers, counsellors, and administrators. It is well known that the budget of *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* has been rising since its inception, especially in the last two decades, making it a substantial budget currently. It must be acknowledged that the current high level of expenditure on religious affairs reflects the AK party of President Erdogan, yet it is also true that the origins and expansion of this religious bureaucracy took place by an authoritarian secularist Turkish government during the early 1920s. Whereas in Pakistan, a nation-state built for the Muslims in the Indian sub-continent, the Ministry of Religious Authority (MRA) was not even built during its inception in 1947. Instead, its establishment took place 27 years after the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's birth. Moreover, during the next half a century MRA did not develop much in becoming a successful bureaucratic institution for administering Islam at both state and grassroots levels. It is important to try to explore the reasons

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behind this stagnation and attempt to pinpoint the various impediments and obstacles lying in the path of MRA in Pakistan becoming as successful as the Diyanet in Turkey.

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Turkey, Ministry of Religious Authority (MRA), Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*), governance of religion, nation-state.

## **Introduction:**

*The Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* in Turkey

Whereas Pakistan's nation-state journey began with Islam at its centre in 1947, the transition of the Turkish nation-state from the Ottoman state in 1923 had secularism at its heart. In fact, the notion that secularism was the answer to the current problems of the Muslims began as early as the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the late Ottoman intellectuals who believed wholeheartedly in the replacement of the Islamic worldview with secularization for the successful advancement of society. This whole mentality was based upon a credence in the universal applicability of the Western secular experience from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. What is ironic is that whereas the European problems with religion arose from the rivalry between religious authority, i.e. the Church, and the political power, i.e. the State, such an experience cannot be found in the history of the Muslim states such as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Republic of Turkey.

Consequently, the main focus of the rising secularism in Europe was to curb the social and political power of the Church in order to avoid the fate of confessional wars that Europe went through during the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. In order to truly follow the trajectory of the European experience many nation-states, including Turkey, in its early days seems to have used Islam as a scapegoat for the backwardness of the newly independent Muslim nation-states. In the new republic of Turkey, the remedy for this 'backwardness' was interpreted to comprise of excessive secularism of both the state and the society. Yet the fact is that the Ottoman state never acquired in its long history a Church-like authority-institution that could lead to a mass rebellion as ensued in so many European nation-states. Yet, due to several social and political challenges, the new Republic of Turkey went on to create a national identity and solidarity-much of it based upon the aggressive secularism appropriated from France. The Arabs siding with the allies against the

Ottoman state during World War I just aided in solidifying the secularism thesis of the intellectual elite in the late Ottoman state.<sup>1</sup>

This secular approach was radical and assertive that did not only marginalize political affairs from religion but also separated public affairs from religion.<sup>2</sup> This type of excessive secularism went on to replace the religious society with a more secular society by the banning of the *cemaat* (Muslim religious-social communities, Ar. *jamāt*) in 1924, the banning of the fez and proscribing the *Sufi tariqāt* (orders) and all their institutions in 1925, the removal of the Arabic script and adoption of the Latin alphabet in 1928, and the conversion of the Hagia Sophia, the symbol of Islam's conquest of Constantinople, into a museum in 1935 as a symbol of secularism.<sup>3</sup> Even as late as the 1980's the headscarf of Muslim women was banned from public institutions forcing many *hijabi* women in Turkey from foregoing universities as students and teachers and many other government careers.

Historically, the Ottoman State was not theocratic governance but rather a Muslim empire that had embedded in it both *Shari'ah* and *siyasa Shari'ah*, which means that governance in Islam was not a matter simply of rule by the religious texts and their derivatives but of politics and administration by judicious rulers whose decisions were guided by the overall *Shari'ah*. Over time the Ottoman state did evolve whereby the Ottoman constitutionalists elaborated the concept of *dawla* (*devlet* in Ottoman Turkish). By the sixteenth century, the Ottoman authors began to call their state Sublime Eternal State (*Devlet-i Aliyye-i Ebed Mudded*) and by the first half of the eighteenth century the terminology Islamic State (*Devlet-i Islamiyye*) entered the Ottoman lexicon. It is well known that the Ottomans used to pray for the continuation of both religion and state (*devam-i din devlet*). In this Ottoman empire, the *Sheikh-ul-Islam* was recognized as the highest religious authority, and was appointed and served at the pleasure of the Ottoman Sultan. According to the historical sources, one hundred and thirty-one scholars were appointed to this post across the approximate 600 years that the Ottomans ruled.

Yet, by the time of the Tanzimat reforms commenced in 1839, the role of *Sheikh-ul-Islam's* began to be limited to only religious affairs, a new Ministry of Shari'ah and Pious Endowments (*Şeriat ve Evkaf Vekaleti*) was founded, and by 1917 the Committee of Union and Progress rule (r. 1913-18) put all religious courts under the Ministry of Justice and in addition removed the office from the control of Muslim endowments. By 1920, after the First World War, the Ottoman state formed a new

cabinet, which included a Ministry of Religious Affairs and Charitable Foundations headed by *muftis* that were supposed to carry out the limited functions of the historical *Sheikh-ul-Islam*. Yet, only four years later, at the birth of the Republic, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Charitable Foundations was also abolished with the institute of the Caliphate. Still, two religious institutions were created to replace it entitled the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*, *Diyanet* for short) and the Directorate of Pious Foundations. From this time onwards the *Diyanet* had the obligation of the supervision of all mosques and religious personnel across the Republic of Turkey, while the Directorate of Pious Foundations was set the task to administer the numerous religious endowments leftover from the Ottoman era. But shortly afterward the Law of Unification of Education was enacted that removed all control of education from the religious establishment clerics and in this way all the *madrassas* and religious educational institutions were transferred to the Ministry of Education – only to be promptly terminated.<sup>4</sup> So, it is evident from the historical sources that the religious office of the *Sheikh al-Islam* and its late *Tanzimat* Ottoman heir, the Ministry of Shari’ah and Pious Endowments, was replaced during the republic era by a later institution that has no known Western equivalent.

Diyanet became the Republic’s major institution for the governance of religion. For its proper functioning and its social reproduction – especially when it gained importance after 1950 – it came to depend on the institutions for the education of religious personnel, the lycée-level *Imam Hatip* Schools, the Institutes of Higher Islamic Studies [*Yüksek İslam Enstitüsü*] and the Faculties of Theology [*İlâhiyât Fakültesi*].”<sup>5</sup>

It is apparent from the historical sources that the same extreme secularization that led the secular elite to early on begin to close down certain religious authorities and institutions were fully aware that a need existed to satisfy the religiosity of the masses. Moreover, they were fully aware that there was a need to protect the state from possible unconventional religious authorities. Ironically, it is the result of the making of a secular state that a real danger of alternative religious authority appeared in the Turkish scene since during the Ottoman empire there were really no alternative religious authorities to challenge the Sunni Ottoman state. Yet, this could not be the only reason for promoting a *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* (Presidency of Religious Affairs), which from its inception in 1924 only insisted on representing Sunni Islam.

It seems that although some of the motivation behind the *Diyanet* in the early years for the secular state was to combat alternative religious authorities, establish control, and even limit Islam's role in the society, it also seems to be ironically a link to the Ottoman past. After all, though the secular state founded the *Diyanet* it provided only for the religious needs of the Sunni Muslims throughout the period when *Kemalism* was at its height, ignoring all other denominations. In fact, the monopolization and organization of the *Diyanet* in the early 1930s was extensive in such a way that made any other public religious activity in Turkey outside the control of the *Diyanet* unlawful. Therefore, there is much evidence that points to *Kemalist* nationalism somehow always having Islam, specifically Sunni Islam, as a focal centre of Turkish national identity.<sup>6</sup> In fact, there is evidence that the *Diyanet* released early on books on religious education for schools, which were useful to the national elite because they promoted a Sunni Islam within a secular Turkish state nationalism. Ironically, the organization and structure of the *Diyanet* were, therefore, one of the most advanced structures in the then Muslim world, whereby the *Diyanet* by 1935 had a law that bound each city and district to have a *mufti* and a working committee of Islamic scholars.

This historical evolution can be demonstrated by looking at the early history of the Republic of Turkey. By 1918 the elite of the Ottoman state saw their state as politically, socially, and culturally backward that needed to undergo radical change to be able to assert itself among European powers in a post-war political order. This political change was accomplished in two major stages. The first stage includes the final years of the Ottoman state, during World War I and the onset of the Turkish War of Independence in 1918 until the abolition of the Sultanate and two years later the caliphate in March 1924. This stage also includes the proclamation of the republic and the new constitution.<sup>7</sup> The second stage followed from 1924 to 1927, where excessive secularism, which later would be termed *Kemalism*, institutionalized itself. As soon as the republic had been established, the focus of most reform was the extensive and far-reaching secular social and cultural changes.<sup>8</sup> Yet, since this took place through an imposed change, it was clear to the architects of the modern nation-state that the Turkish national identity, like all national identities, could not be deconstructed and constructed entirely in a vacuum. The social reality of the majority of people in Turkey was deeply rooted in the Sunni Islamic tradition and this could not be ignored.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the state attempted to limit the religion within society by imposing the numerous

bans mentioned above, but at the same time attempted to nationalize and control the faith to support the new secular nation-state, for instance in 1932 the *adhān* was banned in Arabic only so that it could be called instead in Turkish as an alternative. The ban lasted until 1950 but due to strong opposition from the Turkish Sunni Muslim sensibilities, this forceful ban and change did not succeed. Yet, even with so many attempts to control, reform, and limit Islam in Turkey, ironically Islam became solidified within the state through the state bureaucratic department *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* (Presidency of Religious Affairs) because it became a part and parcel of the state apparatus. Ironically, the *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* was established as the highest authority over religious matters in the same law that abolished the caliphate.

This evolution of the *Diyanet* is also connected to the wider political history of the Republic of Turkey. By the late 1940s, Turkey moved towards a multi-party democracy from a single-party system. Due to the prospect of possible failure in the forthcoming elections, the reigning party from the start of the republic began to ease its strict policies concerning Islam. For example, in 1949 the first faculty of *İlahiyat* was opened in the Ankara University and by 1950 people were finally allowed to visit tombs and shrines that had been closed since the 1920s. The coming to power of the Democrat Party (DP) in 1950 led finally to the re-appearance of Islam in the public sphere. For instance, the *adhān* in Arabic was officially reinstated; a certain amount of religious education was made part of the school system; radio programs concerning religion were allowed to air on state radio, and *İmam-hatip* high schools began to incorporate religious curriculum. Moreover, the *Diyanet* profited from an expansion of departments such as the pilgrimage branch, a publications section, and a wider budget. By the 1960s, during a strong secular inclined martial law, the *Diyanet* still grew in appreciation of its expediency in creating a sense of unified and integral nationalism. By the second martial law in Turkey in the 1980s, a law was passed that required all *Diyanet* employed imams working officially at mosques to be graduates of official educational institutions.<sup>10</sup>

The role of the *Diyanet* grew even more after the 1980s since the Turkish government felt that it was important to counter both Kurdish separatism and political Islamism in their ranks. At that time the European nations were fully compliant with the wishes of the Turkish nation-state for similar reasons. The Turkish consulates began to have a *Diyanet* branch as early as 1978 in West Germany and after the fall of the Soviet

Union, the new Muslim republics also felt the need for the services of the *Diyanet* that would be not prone to extremism and radicalism.<sup>11</sup> The AKP that came to power during the early 2000s under the then Prime Minister Erdogan represented a majority Muslim conservative population's emancipation movement that had been exceedingly marginalized under Kemalism.<sup>12</sup> By the year 2008, the *Diyanet* was present in more than thirty countries and grew even more in the later years. With the coming of the AK party and the leadership of Tayyip Erdogan, the status of the *Diyanet* also got elevated to the undersecretary level, the *Diyanet* has gotten several established radio and television channels, the staff that includes both females and males increased prolifically, and the *Diyanet* employees work, besides mosques, rose across the state sector such as in diplomacy, hospitals, prisons, retirement homes, women shelters and so on.<sup>13</sup>

The *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* continues to exist today with the mission to “execute the works concerning the beliefs, worship, and ethics of Islam, enlighten the public about their religion, and administer the sacred worshipping places.”<sup>14</sup> Instead of separating religion from the state in order to avoid the influence of religion on government, politics, and education like France and the United States, Turkey went a different direction with the state taking over control and organization of religion and religious life. Partly this was done out of a need of the masses for religious pastoring and partly so that no alternative religious authority could counter the growth of *Kemalist* secularism. A further reason is perhaps because of the direct historical development and evolution of the Turkish republic from the Ottoman state. The Ottoman state from its beginning had created a space for Islam officially and over six hundred years that space evolved and developed. By the end of the Ottoman empire, a type of *Diyanet* was already created which automatically became the blueprint for the *Kemalists*. The agenda of keepsake Sunni Islam as the character of the nation continued in Turkey, but the main agenda for the *Kemalist* was, however, to contain Islam so that it did not create any impediment to the rising secular nation-state. Thus, the state needed Islam because it was so deeply rooted in society but the *Kemalists* set out to redefine Islam in terms of a national religion.

Yet, despite such a program, the indirect result of this was ironic that the Turkish identity was wedded to the notion of Islam at the state level. This can be seen from the Turkish Identity cards that were launched in 1972 by law, whereby article 43 states that it is a requirement from all households in Turkey that all Turks be identified with Islam in their ID

cards.<sup>15</sup> As Waxman puts it, “For both [secular and religious Turks], to be a Turk basically means being a Muslim.”<sup>16</sup> However, it is truly in the last twenty years with the new Turkish Islamic-conservative party (AKP) led by Tayyip Erdogan that the faith of Islam has begun to be used as a guiding principle for state policy and administration.<sup>17</sup> With the rise of a political party like AK party, which is affirmative towards Islam’s role in society, the role of the ministry of *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* was certain to grow in importance and by 2014 the budget of the Diyanet has become a very large ministry by reaching 1.24% of the total budget. Furthermore, by 2014 the personnel number of the Diyanet had risen to around 120.000.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Ministry of Religious Affairs in Pakistan:**

In comparison to Ottoman and the Republic of Turkey’s uninterrupted and linked history, the Muslims’ role in the Indian subcontinent is that of intermittence, first as a newcomer to the highly multi-religious Indian subcontinent, then its wider Muslim imperial role, followed by British colonialism and ending with the partition and the making of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The Muslims first entered certain parts of the Indian subcontinent during the 8<sup>th</sup> century and continued to intermittently arrive in a number of waves over the next five hundred years. At their arrival during this period, the Muslims found the Indian subcontinent<sup>19</sup> to be the home of ancient civilizations and the hub of major world religions. Both Hinduism and Buddhism had flourished there in the form of the Vedic tradition that arose during the 15<sup>th</sup> century BCE and Buddhism that flourished especially through the reign of Emperor Ashoka in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. With the arrival of the Muslims, Islam also became part and parcel of people’s lives and it influenced this multi-religious society for more than a thousand years.

Yet, it was during the 13<sup>th</sup> century that the Muslims achieved a real political power base in the Subcontinent. In the year 1206, Sultan Qutb-ud-Din Aibak established a Muslim empire in India with Delhi as its capital. At the beginning of the 13th century, the following Sultan Iltutmish (reign 1211-36) was the first to appoint a religious leader to deal with religious affairs under the title of *Sheikh-ul –Islam*<sup>20</sup> as well as certain state affairs. Afterward, his successors changed the title of *Sheikh-ul –Islam* to *Sadr-al-Sudur* and *Qazi al-Quzat*, the highest judicial officer in the realm, but the duties remained the same and generally combined within one person. However, just as in the Ottoman empire the highest religious authority was based upon *Shari’ah* and *siyasah Shari’ah*, and this religious authority was appointed and served at the pleasure of the



Sultan.<sup>21</sup> Afterward, during the reign of the great Mughal emperors between 1526 and 1713 the same structure and administration seems to have been maintained. It appears only two of the great Mughal emperors tried to change the state's relationship with Islam. It is said that Sultan Akbar (reign 1556-1605) adopted a very eclectic religious policy and tried to reduce Islam's influence in the state, while his great-grandson Aurangzeb (reign 1658-1707) did the opposite by focusing on the Sunni character of the nation and the application of the principles of the Hanafi Legal school. However, by the time of the later Mughal emperors and the decline of the Mughal Empire, much of this religious affairs administration began to break down. The British political rule of the East India Company during the 18<sup>th</sup> century across the subcontinent led to a gradual replacement of all of the Muslim customary and Hanafi legal system with British laws. By 1858 the British government took direct control of the whole of the subcontinent bringing in reform policies whereby religious leaders could only administer issues relating to personal status whereas all other issues were by the indiscretion of the British government.<sup>22</sup> This meant that the Muslims in the subcontinent lost any sense of centralized state-sponsored religious affairs from the mid of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. For that reason, Muslims in the subcontinent have continuously been managed by *jamāt* (religious sects), imams, and religious institutions without any integrated system for more than two hundred years.<sup>23</sup>

During the colonial period, different Islamic movements emerged and different religious schools came into being such as Deoband, Bareilvi, and Ahl-e-Hadith. Having a difference of opinion on different *fiqh* issues gave way to the creation of private *madrāsas* of each school of thought, which became a source of major sectarian division in contemporary Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> The nation-state of Pakistan came into being based on the two-nation theory, which was the foundation stone of the Independence movement from colonialism. It claimed that Muslims were wholly different from Hindus in religion, culture, and ideology, and therefore deserved their own independent democratic nation-state. On that basis on the 14<sup>th</sup> of August 1947, the Muslim majority areas of the Indian subcontinent were given the status of a new nation-state called the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Islam through its history in the subcontinent had in fact become an integral part of Indian society, and it played an important role in the creation of Pakistan. The majority of the Muslims in the newly made Pakistan were Sunni Muslims and were expecting a nation-state that

would safeguard their faith and create an ideal Islamic society. Yet, the political elite of this new nation-state was not necessarily very religious but was well-educated in the British colonial system. Still, it is startling to observe that for the first quarter of a century of Pakistan's existence, no type of ministry of religious affairs existed. The first-ever Ministry of Religious Authority (MRA) was created twenty-seven years after the creation of Pakistan in 1974. There are a few reasons for such a long delay in creating the MRA in the new nation-state. The first reason is more likely the already absence of any state regulation of religion during the British colonialism in the subcontinent. The distinct distance in time between the Muslim rule in India with a well-identified religious authority and administration, and the creation of an Independent Muslim nation-state was more than two hundred years. Since the Muslims in the subcontinent had been dealing with their religious affairs through their divided sectarian camps during this period, no such concept of centralized religious authority existed in their or even their grandparents' living memory.

Furthermore, most of the founding fathers of Pakistan had worked in or with the British Indian government and were highly influenced by its policies and administration. For that reason, the Pakistani elite and leadership felt it was congenial to continue the colonial distinction between the personal status issues, i.e. separation between the domain of religion and the religious leadership, and all other state matters. In fact, the notion may even have existed that an MRA may offend the various religious sectarian leaders who were regarded to be very influential with the various Muslim populace of the subcontinent. It could be said that they did not want a MRA that threatened their status as educational and partisan leaders. Finally, it could be argued that the establishment of an MRA would not have been seen as beneficial for the landowners who now controlled most of Pakistan. After all, they had successfully controlled the populace, who were mostly illiterate, through the labour force and the religious leaders for more than two centuries. Any centralised nation-state MRA would jeopardize their well-controlled labour force and challenge the folk religion of the masses that rejected much of textual high religion. It is evident that an MRA could over time lead to the centralization of mosques and madrasa that would lead to better salaries and living standards for the *imams*, religious edification to remove superstitions, and an overall new religious scholarly elite that would not be under the control of the landowners.<sup>25</sup>

Some historians claim that there was an initial attempt to create a politically powerful MRA. It is said that in January 1948, a religious party, Jamiat-al-ulema-i-Islam did pass a non-published resolution that demanded that the government of Pakistan should appoint a religious scholar as *Sheikh-ul-Islam*, with executive powers nationwide over the nation's *qadis*. For whatever reason, such a resolution never saw the day of light.<sup>26</sup> Two years later in 1950, the twenty-two-point constitution of Pakistan was signed by more than thirty prominent *ulama* where there was no mention of a Ministry of Religious Affairs. More than two decades passed and nothing was done to create a Ministry of religious affairs. The most that took place state administratively was the creation in the early 1950s of the Hajj Directorate in order to manage Hajj arrangements. Surprisingly, it was the highly modernistic and westernized Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that would establish the first-ever MRA in Pakistan at the peak of his powers in 1974. It is argued that during this period, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was created in order to hold onto his political gains. It may also be linked to the sectarianism that boiled over to the political arena. It was in summer 1974 that the anti-Qadiani riots took place and no doubt triggered the creation of the MRA in order to deal with what seemed to be a religious status case. Yet, the MRA made no real effort to administrate or deal with basic religious affairs such as centralised mosque management and religious edification of imams and population. In fact, the functions given to the MRA in 1974 were the administration of pilgrimages which already had existed separately since the 1950s, the printing of the Quran, *ruat-e-hilal*, tabligh, zakat management, Islamic studies and research, and liaison with international institutions on religious matters. Yet by 1976 the MRA was merged with the Ministry of Minority Affairs and Overseas Pakistanis, leaving its work very unfeasible. Later in Zia ul Haq's military rule, three changes were made to the MRA. First, in October 1977, responsibility for (welfare of) overseas Pakistanis was transferred to Manpower Division and the Ministry was re-designated as the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Minority Affairs, thus making it supposedly more focused on religious affairs. Second, it made the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) the main policy think-tank of the government and, finally, it again established a zakat system under the MRA. Yet, for nearly twenty years this Ministry of Religious Affairs and Minority Affairs continued mostly as an ineffective ministry.

By October 1991, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Minority Affairs was again separated into two ministries, the MRA and the Ministry

of Minority Affairs. Yet, for some unfathomable reason these two ministries were merged again by 1999, but this time with a third Ministry of Culture and Sports; making the whole of the ministry unrecognizable as anything truly to do with religion. By 2015, with the status quo of MRA in Pakistan still the same, the *Diyanet* of Turkey made direct contact. It seems there was an attempt by the *Diyanet* to establish the *Nizam-e-Salah* program in the mosques of Islamabad in order to centralise the *adhān* and prayer timetable. This attempt also, unfortunately, failed, more likely due to the non-existence of any real management of religion in the MRA due to its inefficient structure based upon its erratic history.<sup>27</sup> It can perhaps be argued that by leaving all the religious affairs to *jamāt* in the nation-state of Pakistan, all the mosques, the madrasas, and other religious institutions have been plunged into a chaotic scenario where different sectarian religious communities espouse radically different beliefs and practices within Sunni Islam without any true unity. A situation like the Covid 19 pandemic or even a basic issue like the timing of Eid makes it clear that no major step can be taken by the state concerning religion simply due to the multiple voices that command the population's attention. For instance, as early as 2010 in an interview, Mustafa Çağrı, the Mufti of Istanbul, defended the state centralisation of the *Diyanet* claiming that it prevented radical and sectarian ideas of Islam and brought about unity. In order to support his claim, he offered the example of Pakistan, where the lack of just such a central religious institution had created a fragmented religious society in turmoil.<sup>28</sup>

## **2-The Role of Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı and Ministry of Religious Affairs:**

### *Contemporary Role of Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*

By 2016 *Diyanet* employed 112,275 personnel across all of Turkey and in a survey during the same year, 60% of the population responded that they view the Imams of the mosques as prime authorities in religious matters.<sup>29</sup> As has been discussed earlier, *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* was established in 1924 just after the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. "It was given the mandate to carry out religious affairs pertaining to faith, worship, and moral principles, to inform society on religion, and to administer places of worship."<sup>30</sup> So it was created to administrate religious affairs, to deal with the issues related to faith, religious practices, and moral principles. The *Diyanet's* jurisdiction was decided by the office of the prime minister at that time.<sup>31</sup> Since then, the *Diyanet's* establishment has been responsible for a number of tasks such as employing imams,

awarding their salaries, employing preachers, founding mosques, offering *fatwas* through muftis, and the employment of administrative staff of the *Diyanet*. Most of all, the main task of the *Diyanet* was to administer the faith according to the nation-state-policy. In this case, it was based in the early years on offering the nation a new and reformed version of religion based upon *Kemalist* nationalism and social unity, i.e. it was one of the important roles of *Diyanet* to reinforce the secular nation-state's ideology of a modern Turkey.<sup>32</sup> Yet, it also played an important role in the unity of Turkish society. Especially, after 1980 there was a major shift in the government's policy towards *Diyanet* and it was utilised to create a more Turkish-Islamic synthesis in order to propagate loyalism between the faith of Sunni Islam and Turkey in order to suppress the different Islamic sectarian groups that were at a rise. Similarly, it played a vital role in resolving the ethnic conflicts among the people through balanced teachings of Islam for all. In a way, it worked during this time as a positive state apparatus to ensure social coherence and solidarity in the republic of Turkey. Ahmet Erdi quotes in his article, "After the coup of 1980, the *Diyanet* was assigned the duties of consolidating national solidarity and unity while undertaking the functions assigned by its special statute placed in Article 136 of the following (1982) Constitution."<sup>33</sup>

Still, this constitution created under a full martial law, which recently the governing parties of Turkey has begun to campaign to change<sup>34</sup>, was seen as a tool of too much control by the elite non-religious society of the civilian life. However, the coming of power of a party positive towards Islam has made the *Diyanet* one of the most active institutes of Turkey. Since the AK Party, the *Diyanet* has proving to be very influential in society and has been very successful in building a close link with the populace by meeting their religious and social needs. For instance, in 2010 the legal act 6002 was legislated, which enhanced the bureaucratic status of the *Diyanet*.<sup>35</sup> Over time the *Diyanet* has evolved to include three major features, which are public, free, and civilian. In structural terms, it is an institution that is located within the state, a public administrative institution that is free of political alliances and focused on the organisational aspects of religion in society. In this capacity, the focus is therefore on the services concerning religion that it can provide the people in the public space. It has a Sunni scholarly discourse and is in theory free from any interference from the state and due to its link to scholarly tradition, it avoids all types of extremism and radicalism. Finally, the civilian aspect of the *Diyanet* is that it offers sound religious knowledge

and information to educate the people without any imposition to a certain model of religiosity on the people.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, today anything related to religion in the public space is related to the *Diyanet*. All the mosques of the country, large and small, are officially registered in a centralized system of the *Diyanet*. The *Imams*, *Muezzins*, and all staff, even staff for mosques, are employed by *Diyanet*, which means a religious staff that has a good government salary and the required educational level to work in these positions.<sup>37</sup> Today the *Diyanet* has a big share in the religious education of the nation. It is linked with religious high schools (imam hatip) Theology faculties of Universities and also runs Quran learning centers across the country. *Diyanet* has its special training centers where it organizes special training for its officials which makes them compatible with the contemporary needs of society. In fact, the *Diyanet* has its research institutes, libraries, and a publishing house so as to become an active stakeholder in the Islamic research that is taking place in order to lead the nation in the field of Islamic Sciences. Moreover, the *Diyanet* is now actively using all new social media and technologies to reach people through, for instance, Radio, Television, YouTube, and other social media platforms<sup>38</sup> There is also a *fatwa* committee of the scholars, which gives a collective *fatwa* on fiqh issues, and in general, their *fatwa* is respected and followed by the people. *Diyanet* through its big network has in the last twenty years come to influence society in a powerful way, with the building of mosques, Qur'an teaching institutions, social institutions, and welfare institutions. By merging religious and social activities together it has appealed to the general community. Yet, such a bureaucratic institution as *Diyanet* has not eliminated the several *jamāt* (*cemaat*) in Turkey, but any Sunni sectarianism has been successfully distanced from the arena of Imam training, Imam occupation and income, the mosque administration, the *khutba*, and the festival and five-time ritual prayers that take place in all mosques across Turkey. In this way, the Turkish nation-state has successfully created a unified Sunni religious life that is involved through the mosque, and yet the Sufi orders and *jamāt* are thriving providing social brotherhood, spiritual fellowship, and religious solidarity through their own individual social institutions.

What the *Diyanet*'s role has become is bringing a unified atmosphere to the mosques and the administration through the social organization of religious officials, religious services, and the conservation of both religion and the public trust. This stability and strength in the field of religion come through a balanced understanding of Islam in the nation's psyche

with a population educated through the many organisations of Diyanet and its partner institutions such as the Imam-Hatib schools and Ilahiyat faculties at university. In fact, the success of Diyanet in the last two decades is such that women have been included across the Diyanet as administrators, religious preachers (*vaizeler*), vice-muftis, and Qur'an teachers. For instance, in the year 2018 in just the city of Istanbul 2224 women and 549 men worked as designated teachers of Qur'anic recitation. Moreover, the Diyanet has over the last two decades been very successful in opening family guidance and counselling bureaus as well as women groups in mosques and even sponsored recreation and sports amongst the general population.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Contemporary Role of Pakistan's Ministry of Religious Affairs**

Today, Pakistan has the world's largest population of Muslims after Indonesia. Yet, even Indonesia has a formidable Ministry of Religious Authority (MUI) just like Turkey. So, although Pakistan has a Ministry of Religious Affairs, according to Bruinessen, it appears to be concerned with little more than the organisation of the *hajj*. He adds further that "The Council for Islamic Ideology and the Federal Shariat Court are influential but small institutions".<sup>40</sup> A study carried out on the Religious Authority and the Promotion of Sectarian Tolerance in Pakistan in 2014 concluded that in Pakistan, due to its few institutionalized mechanisms, the believers are compelled to follow the teachings of a particular cleric or holy man. The report carries on to assert that this state of affairs makes Sunni religious authority highly fragmented and it means that such authority, in general, is in the hands of those lacking formal religious accreditation, but yet often are people that can acquire a significant following.<sup>41</sup> As far as the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Pakistan is concerned, it was created in 1974 almost twenty-seven years after the creation of Pakistan. Its leading task was to administrate religious affairs in the country but as stated earlier by 1976 its tasks involved also the minorities and overseas Pakistanis.<sup>42</sup>

The Auqaf Ministry, which was established in 1976, also came under the umbrella of the Ministry of Religious Affairs five years later. In the late 1970s, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was perceived to become an influential ministry as it was directed to draft the program for the Islamisation of the whole nation. Although by 1977 the Ministry of Religious Affairs flourished for a short time through an Islamization program by the military government where privileges were given to Islamic scholars and even included them in state-affairs, such as the

Council of Islamic Ideology, yet it did not last long nor did it create any long-lived policy. It is also clear observing the history of the Ministry of Religious Authority in Pakistan that in most of its history it unfortunately either was left a mere symbolic institution or a highly politicised organisation attempting its Islamisation project.<sup>43</sup> However, when it comes to religious authority at the grassroots level of Pakistan, such as working with social communities, mosques, and education, no such groundwork truly took place. Moreover, any steps that were taken and results acquired only remained for a limited time period, and unfortunately no policy truly developed so as to advance this ministry at the same level as that of the Diyanet in Turkey. Moreover, while Diyanet today is attempting to connect with the population of Turkey at all grassroots levels, the Ministry of Religious Affairs is still perceived to be very aloof.

It is for that reason that some studies have maintained that MRA simply worked for the political elite of Pakistan, or for its own political gain.<sup>44</sup> During the 1990s and 2000s, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was in fact confined to only the arrangement of pilgrimage to Makkah, Madinah, and other religious places. Thus, it is clear from its history that MRA was a token, a symbolic ministry, having no real connection with one of the largest Muslim-populated nation-state in the world. It is evident from the above description and discussion that MRA could not be developed as an active and successful ministry due to both the political history of Pakistan, where it was just confined to marginal tasks, as well as its inability to zero in on the local communal Muslim life, where it could have potentially provided some beneficial service to Islamic education, imam training, and mosques in general. By 2013 the Ministry of National Harmony was merged with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and was given a new name, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony. Today it appears the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony is in charge of four major fields, which are Hajj, Da'wah and Zakat, Research and Reference, and Interfaith Harmony.<sup>45</sup> It is clear from this description that the Ministry is woefully inadequate in both focus and structure to be compared to its counterparts in both Turkey and Indonesia.

### **3-Obstacles and Impediments Facing the MRA in Pakistan:**

Perhaps before speaking of the obstacles and impediments facing the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Pakistan, it would be beneficial to highlight a very important general point with regard to religious service, structure, and organisation in Islam. As is well known there is an established agreement amongst Sunni Muslims that there is no such thing



as clergy in Islam like that of Christianity for example. Yet, this established agreement must be understood within its context and not severed from historical facts. It is important to recognise the fact that this theological principle of there being no clergy in Islam does not impede creating a centralised nation-state religious authority where the *imams*, *qadi*, *muftis*, and other religious administration personnel are employed. It has to be made clear that this notion of no clergy in Islam refers specifically to there being no special class of people equipped with holy abilities and skills to speak on behalf of God and religion, as, the Catholic priesthood claim for Catholicism or the Brahmins, the highest Hindu caste, have claimed for Hinduism.<sup>46</sup> Yet, since the early days of the Prophet, there have been countless *imams*, *fuqaha*, *qadis*, and religious officials who rendered religious services and administered practices of worship for the whole of society as their occupation. Therefore, it has to be said that the notion of no clergy in Islam is specifically a theological concept that pertains to the divine origins of Islam and to the message conveyed by prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). Meaning that no one person after the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) may claim to be the authority in Islam, which now lies in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Still, the existence of a group of people employed or designated to render religious services related to everyday religious life has always been available throughout Muslim history.<sup>47</sup>

It is clearly evident from numerous Muslim historical sources of a group of people employed as religious officials. In this sense, there has always been a class of religious officials, for instance in the Prophet's time, the Umayyad period, the Abbasid era, in Mughal India, and during the Ottoman empire. The organization of this cadre of *imams*, *qadis*, *fuqaha*, and *muftis* shaped the social structures, institutional culture, and Muslim traditions.<sup>48</sup> It is in this sense that the contemporary nation-state requires a centralised institute that deals with religious affairs. This type of institution does not contradict the idea of there being any clergy in Islam but instead continues the long-standing tradition of having stable, organised, and structured religious service of Islam, which protects the Muslims from fragmentation and sectarianism. Therefore, the non-existence of clergy in Islam theologically does not mean that religious services of all types were historically delivered in a free haphazard fashion, or that they were not subject to any type of checks and balances and administrative organization in the historical experience of Muslim societies.<sup>49</sup> This logical and coherent argument above, we believe,

responds to any question or hesitancy about the notion of centralised religious authority in a contemporary Muslim nation-state as being contrary to Islam.

Yet, Pakistan is facing many other impediments in being able to create a vibrant and successful MRA. Perhaps, one of the main impediments to be able to develop a central system for religious affairs is the lack of a shared national vision about religion and its potential role in creating a balanced society. As has been reflected in this article, neither the government nor the several religious groups in Pakistan have been successful in creating Islam as a focal point for Pakistani society. This vision of creating unity among different sectors of the society for common objectives is unfortunately not been stressed in Pakistan by MRA. However, the main point here is that the focal point of MRA should be at the grassroots levels where it can be beneficial for the general Muslim society, and not at the level of politics for grandstanding or for ideology at the state level. Basically, following the Diyanet as an example, the MRA should be recognised and advanced as a centralized bureaucracy for the administration of Islam in Pakistani society.

A third important problem that Pakistan as a nation-state faces in this context is the gap that exists between the political elite and the various religious groups. This gap has created distrust between the state and religious groups. Both groups have failed to work together much time through Pakistan's short history. This situation has unfortunately caused much harm within the society ranging from sectarianism in Pakistani Sunni Muslims, wider intolerance, and constricting interpretations. In comparison to the fragmented and divided Sunni Pakistan, Turkey's Sunni Muslims are very unified in their religious ritual lives across Turkish mosques and religious communities due to the grassroots role of the Diyanet. In fact, the various *jamāt* in Pakistan have at times hindered the creation of a central model because they seem to be unable to agree to any kind due to conflicting ideologies and even political and financial concerns.<sup>50</sup>

A further obstacle to the success of MRA has been in fact the economic aspect. The nation-state of Pakistan does not support any religious institutions financially and as is well known the madrassas are run purely on donations. In contrast, the Diyanet in Turkey funds and upkeep the standards of religious institutions by employing, paying handsome salaries, and training imams and other officials of the directorate, which creates a source of connection and trust between the

directorate and the various religious institutions. Martin van Bruinessen recently provided an estimate about the budget of the Directorate of Religious Affairs in Turkey and estimated that Turkey has allocated at least the equivalent of 2.9 Euro billion to the governance of religious affairs in the year 2018.<sup>51</sup> It is clear that financing and creating standards for the wide range of religious institutions must play an important role in the governance of religious affairs in Pakistan for MRA to be successful.

In fact, the mosques in Pakistan rely mostly on the surrounding communities to meet their expenses and most are under major financial responsibility. The unfortunate aspect is that those who offer or provide regular support financially also then wield more authority in the mosques, to the point that the agenda of both the mosque and the imam is decided by them. The committees, who are in charge of the mosques, are sadly fixated on social status, ideology, sectarianism, and financial standing. The education level and ability of the imam recruited is unfortunately not the criterion for selection at all. For that reason, many of the imams are barely educated, and their employment is related to communal politics. Some imams are even selected due to their hereditary association with the respective mosque<sup>52</sup> It is beyond a shadow of a doubt that a national agenda is needed to achieve an employment standard for the Imams of Pakistan so that the selection of imams can be freed from communal and sectarian politics. Only a centralized MRA bureaucracy could achieve this in cooperation with educational institutes.

Moreover, in Pakistan, especially in the rural areas, the social position of the imam truly has fallen both in the sense of education and economic level. The majority of the imams appear “to perform their roles in relative poverty. Low salary packages and the absence of job security are the defining features of their economic vulnerability.”<sup>53</sup> It is clear that if Pakistan like Turkey begins to create a system and administration for religion, it will ultimately offer social, educational, and financial development for imams and the public across Pakistan.

#### **4-Conclusion:**

Although according to a Pew survey it is evident that 54% of respondents in Pakistan believe that religious leaders should have at least some influence in politics<sup>54</sup>, it is important to note the distinction between politics and administration. In this article, the argument is put forth that just like the Diyanet in Turkey, an administrative bureaucratic institution is required in Pakistan, which could provide the necessary religious

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services to the Pakistani population. It is believed that the MRA should be such an institution. This does not exclude religious leaders from being involved in the political arena, but it does mean that the MRA and its employers should be independent of politics in their role of carrying out their administrative tasks. This was also clearly highlighted amongst the Diyanet leadership, for instance, both Mehmet Görmez, the previous head of Diyanet, and his predecessor, Ali Bardakoğlu were clear about the administrative role of the Diyanet being separate from politics. Yet, this does not mean that the Diyanet personnel do not get involved in current affairs and even take a political stance, but without it affecting the day-to-day activity of the Diyanet. Therefore, in order to create a balanced and harmonious religious society in Pakistan, there is a dire need to create a system according to the needs and nature of the Pakistani society, which can regulate religious affairs and bring unity among the religious sectors of the society. Although such an institution would be representing the majority Sunni Muslims of Pakistan, it should be noted that this institution must demonstrate impartiality and respect towards legitimate Muslim minorities such as the Pakistani Shiites, and legitimate religious minorities such as the Pakistani Christians, so as to create good interfaith and inter-denomination relations.

It is interesting here to note the most recent political changes that have been taken concerning the Diyanet in Turkey. It appears the last major reorganisation to the Diyanet was in 2010 when following the passage of Act 6002 it became part of the under secretariat, and the leadership of Diyanet was limited to five years and only twice appointment. Moreover, instead of as in the past of being appointed by the President of the Republic of Turkey directly upon the proposal by the Prime Minister, from 2010 three candidates are elected by the Religion Supreme Council, a group of 120 members comprising of muftis, theologians from University Ilahiyat faculties and members of Higher Council of Religious Affairs. Then the Council of Ministers nominate one nominee and proposes him to the President of the Republic for the leadership of the Diyanet. This change clearly demonstrates that the

Diyanet is becoming more and more autonomous from the political arena in Turkey.<sup>55</sup>

From the changes made above it is clear that the Diyanet is strongly supported by the muftis and imams in Turkey, but it is also important to highlight the role of the *Ilahiyat* faculty towards it as well. Through this link, productive results are brought to society in general. Contemporary research about religious issues in university faculties is now able to be disseminated through religious scholars to the masses. This connection between academia and the public brings tolerance and inclusiveness in the society, and the quality of knowledge and information being disseminated to society is enhanced in Turkey. This is again a truly good model for Pakistan to emulate. Diyanet has carried out a lot of work in connecting academia to society by having strong relationships with academic institutes like *Imam Hatib* schools, *madrasas*, and theology faculties. In fact, the Diyanet has successfully used academia to disseminate a soft image and tolerant teachings of Islam throughout the local society and in the international arena. The Diyanet also offers an opportunity for students to get introduced to modern research in Islam by building abundant libraries and research institutes, where researchers are busy attempting to solve the contemporary religious issues faced by Islam in general and Turkish society in specific. Also, many of the *Ilahiyat* graduates become teachers in *Imam-Hatib* schools, imams, muftis, and administrators in the Diyanet. Such links amongst all level of Pakistani social strata is urgently required in order to create a stable, religious, and cultured Islamic society.

Finally, and perhaps the most significant *raison d'être* for having an advanced bureaucratic institution like Diyanet in Pakistan is that it is the basic requirement of a nation-state to bolster a stable and cohesive national unity. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan as a nation-state is responsible for all its citizens, including its majority Sunni population. It is evident that religious freedom is an important right that should be provided by the state to the people, meaning Sunni Islam should be protected from becoming a tool of competing authorities that create instability and sectarianism. In the scholarly tradition of Islam, Muslim

scholars throughout history have done much to shape social order, stability, and peace, and it is the revealed and acquired knowledge that has always been the foundation of an Islamic society. It is therefore the responsibility of Muslim society and its appointed representative, in the contemporary case the nation-state, to safeguard and generate sound knowledge and rebuff misrepresentation and distortion of the Islamic tradition, while still promoting improvements, initiatives, and protecting scholarly freedom. It is obvious that such an intuition of the nation-state must be kept outside the party-political arena, and instead be linked to the governance of Islam through administration and bureaucracy without curtailing all basic rights.

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