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Patterns of Political Secularism in Italy and Turkey: The Vatican and the Diyanet to the Test of Politics

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Abstract: For centuries, Rome and Istanbul have been representing and epitomizing two empires and two entities with both significant spiritual and temporal power: the Papacy and the Caliphate. During the 19th and the 20th centuries, these institutions underwent significant changes in a context of state secularization: in the case of the Papacy, there was a loss of temporal power and its "reduction" to a mainly moral authority; the Caliphate, on the other hand, was abolished after World War I, succeeded by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), a bureaucratic body under state control, founded in the era of Kemalist secularism. Despite these changes, today both institutions still play a significant role in the public life and public policies of the Italian and the Turkish republics. While the Vatican is able to influence the Italian public sphere and public discourse through both its influence on common people and its lobbying activities in relation to political decision-makers, in Turkey the Diyanet has become the main tool in the reshaping of Turkish society (both by the Kemalists and, later, by Erdoğan's AKP). This paper will analyze their influence on the two countries' public policies in relation to religious pluralism and to family-related issues, to show how different ideas of secularism, institutional arrangements, and historical paths have led to a very different role of the two institutions in the Italian and Turkish political systems.

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INTRODUCTION

Secularization—defined as the idea "that religion would gradually fade in importance and cease to be significant with the advent of industrial society" (Norris and Inglehart 2004, 3)—is a multi-faceted process. It involves politics (with "the emancipation of state apparatuses from religious bodies and values"), society (with people less and less referring to religion in their everyday life), and religion itself (with changes in the organization and identity of religious organizations and their relations with the mundane world) (Ozzano and Giorgi 2016, 6). Secularization is today a very controversial concept, both because many regard it as inapplicable outside the western world or contradicted by the so-called "return of religion", and also because some scholars question the veracity of the concept itself (Casanova 1994; Huntington 1996; Haynes 1997; Stark 1999; Bhargava 2006). Yet, it is undeniable that political secularism has played a crucial role in the formation and development of contemporary European democracies (Norris and Inglehart 2004; Kuru 2009). Political secularism, an "ideology or set of beliefs advocating that religion ought to be separate from all or some aspects of politics or public life (or both)" is by nature a concept imbued with tension, because of its competition with religion for the control of the political agenda (Fox 2015, 2).

This paper tries to develop this point by analyzing the cases of Italy and Turkey. The two countries are particularly relevant in terms of relations between religion and politics because they were for centuries not only two of the main political centers of Europe and the Mediterranean world but also the seats of the area's two main religious institutions: the Papacy and the Caliphate. However, with the construction of the modern secular state, the two institutions underwent significant changes: in the case of the papacy, with the loss of any significant temporal power and—ultimately—the transformation into a transnational actor; and in the case of the caliphate, with the abolition of the institution, later replaced by the Diyanet (Presidency of Religious Affairs), a state agency directly controlled by the government (Berkes 1998; Gözaydın 2008). The paper will compare the Vatican and the Diyanet, in a "most dissimilar cases" perspective, trying to understand, first, which impact and consequences the different choices made by the Italian and Turkish state elites at the time of the creation of the two national states had on the development of the two institutions; secondly, it will try to understand if, despite the obvious differences, we can detect similarities between them and their strategies; and, finally, what these differences and similarities imply for the influence of the two institutions

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on state policies in some sensitive policy areas. More broadly, the concluding remarks will also sketch some reflections on what the comparison carried out in this paper means for the broader theories on political secularism and the role of religion in politics.

If we look at the literature, we can see a certain reification of the terms "religion" and the "state", as well as an essentialization of secularism as an ideology, which goes hand in hand with the elaboration of taxonomies pigeonholing different typologies of states. Ahmet Kuru (2009, 8–9) distinguishes between two notions of secularism: the first one is "assertive", where the state plays an assertive role in excluding religion from the public sphere, keeping it in the private domain and, thereby, protecting itself from religion; the second one is "passive", where the state plays a passive role, and does not prevent religion from engaging with the public arena. Describing a different kind of relationship between religion and the state, Rajeev Bhargava identifies three levels of connection and disconnection: (1) ends, (2) institutions and personnel, (3) law and public policy. While theocracies have a complete connection at each of the three levels, states with established religions have institutional disconnection (Bhargava 2006).

Although secular states are disconnected from religion at each of the three levels, as shown by many typologies of church-state relations (Haynes 1997; Enyedi and Madeley 2004), not all European states have secularized in the same way. Particularly, although most European countries today officially declare themselves "secular", some of them are marked by an institutional separation (insofar this is possible in the real world) between state and churches; others are instead marked by the presence of some kind of influence between the two institutions and/or by mechanisms of state control over religion (usually as the result of the predominance of an assertive idea of secularism). These institutional differences became particularly evident after the 1980s, with the "return of religion" to the public sphere (Kepel 1991; Casanova 1994; Haynes 2007), bringing back the sacred as a relevant factor and questioning the "post-secularity" (Bailey 2013; Wilson 2014) or the "multiple secularities" (Burchardt and Wohlrab-Sahr 2013) of contemporary societies.

Moreover, the fact that religious organizations can play an independent role or act as instruments of political power can imply very different consequences both in terms of the role of religion in the public sphere and in relation to public policies. Assessed from this angle, political secularism is a socio-historical process, rather than an ideology. Moreover, quoting Saba Mahmood (2009, 836–7), "secularism is understood not simply as

the doctrinal separation of the church and the state but the rearticulation of religion in a manner that is commensurate with modern sensibilities and modes of governance." This point is crucial since it helps us to conceptualize one of the main issues at stake in this contribution: the intertwined relation between power and religion is not only one of the conditions leading to the formation of the nation-state. As Talal Asad highlights, while "secularisation" is a historical process, "secularism" is a political doctrine (Asad 2003, 1–10). Therefore, the latter also epitomizes and call to fully investigate to what extent and how religion might be embedded, becoming an instrument of governance (Lascoumes and Le Galès 2005) or an independent actor and influential power.

The paper will show how different institutional developments have translated into different patterns of activity of the Vatican and the Diyanet in the domestic public spheres of Italy and Turkey, with the former acting as a powerful independent player, and the latter playing the role of a transmission belt to convey to the population the idea of religion of the power elite (with a secularist outlook during the 20th century, and today with an increasingly pro-Sunni Islamic attitude). The second part of the paper will show what this different role means in terms of advocacy and influence on public policies in relation to two particularly sensitive issues for religious organizations: the family, and the treatment of religious minorities.

The Vatican State and Italian Society Between Autonomy and Inference

The Vatican was for many centuries the main religious power in Western Europe, but also a very powerful power broker among European rulers. In the Italian peninsula, it enjoyed an even stronger leverage because it directly governed a large portion of central Italy through the Pontifical State. It was only with the revolutionary movements of 1848 and the process of unification, that led to the establishment of the Italian Kingdom in 1861, that the Vatican lost most of its territories. This process culminated in 1870 when the Italian Kingdom's conquest of Rome relegated the Vatican's power to a small portion of the city. Moreover, the authorities of the new national state were inspired by secularist ideologies: they introduced the separation between Church and State, revoked most of the Church's privileges, banished several religious orders, abolished ecclesiastic tribunals, and created new institutions such as civil marriage and a secular public education system (Verucci 1999).

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As a consequence, the Pope refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the new state and retired within the Vatican as a voluntary political prisoner. With the encyclical *Non Expedit* (1874), the Church prohibited Catholics from participating in the Italian state's political institutions and promoted abstention from voting. At the same time, the Church mobilized energies at the grassroots level, through the promotion of Catholic associationism in order to try to re-conquer society from below (Lyon 1967; Menozzi 1997).

Both this Catholic involvement in civil society, and the rising threat of the Socialist movement at the political level were crucial in inspiring the papacy to soften the *Non Expedit* in 1905, and then to utterly revoke it in 1919. Not by chance, this year also marked the birth of the first real Catholic political party, the Partito Popolare Italiano (PPI) led by Father Luigi Sturzo. The party, although promoting cornerstones of the Catholic perspective such as religious freedom and the family, was officially secular, without systematic connections to the Vatican and aiming at representing different social classes (Moos 1945; Almond 1948).

Although the party was rather successful in the 1919 and 1921 elections, the Church was ready to disavow it in exchange for an agreement with the new Fascist regime (The *Patti Lateranensi*, 1929), which recognized Catholicism as the state religion and gave back to the Church some of its prerogatives (Coppa 1995). However, the relation between the Church and the Fascist regime was also, at times, quite tense, especially in relation to the Church's youth activities.

Indeed, many of the future Italian political leaders grew up politically within Catholic associations such as Azione Cattolica and the Federazione Universitaria Cattolica Italiana (FUCI). The new Democrazia Cristiana (DC) party, created underground in 1942, became in the following decades the hegemonic power of Italian politics, and the point of reference of most Catholics until a pronounced political crisis in the early 1990s. Although the new party was also officially secular, and developed a "catch-all" outlook (Ozzano 2013) its "associational nexus" was evident, with the Church (and the powerful and widespread Catholic associational network) playing the role of a powerful mobilization resource for the Catholic vote, but also, at times, a source of tensions for the party (Scoppola 2006).

In the meantime, both Italian society and the Vatican underwent momentous changes: the former experiencing secularization processes (with very contentious moments such as the legalization of abortion and divorce, both involving popular referenda); the second updating its views on crucial points such as democracy and the role of laymen after

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Vatican Council II (1962–5). Catholic civil society also developed further with the birth and growth of new powerful religious movements such as Comunione e Liberazione and the Focolare movement (Garelli 2006; Faggioli 2008). Despite these changes, the DC managed to keep hold of power, also thanks to strategic alliances with center-left parties, until a major corruption scandal, Tangentopoli, swept away most of the Italian political class in 1992/1993, making possible the rise to prominence of new conservative and right-wing forces such as Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI) and the Lega Nord (LN).

New, smaller Catholic parties were thus created within both the center-left and the center-right coalitions, while also mainstream center-left and center-right parties often included strong Catholic wings, and new political entrepreneurs tried to exploit the Catholic vote (Giorgi 2013). At the same time, this situation paved the way for a new role for the Catholic Church, which, through the so-called "cultural project", promoted, since the mid-1990s, a "re-Christianization" of society from below, and cast itself as an autonomous power broker in Italian politics (Magister 2001; Garelli 2007). This became particularly evident in the mid-2000s, with an identity-oriented turn in Italian politics and public spheres, marked on the one hand by Catholic and right-wing engagement on controversial issues such as LGBT rights, the beginning of life, and the religious symbols in public schools, and, on the other, by a right-wing turn of the Italian political debate in relation to immigration and religious minorities (a position not shared, in this case, by the Church, but supported by many conservative grassroots Catholics) (Ozzano and Giorgi 2016).

A State Agency Governing Religion: The Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet)

During the Ottoman Empire, the caliph sultan was at the head of temporal and religious administration and responsible for appointing and dismissing the highest rank in religious affairs, the *Şeyhü'l-Islâm.* The *Şeyhü'l-Islâm* was supposed to legitimize the sultan's policies from a religious point of view; at the same time, however, the ulemas had a considerable influence on the Empire administration, at least until the mid-19th century.

In 1924, 1 year after the proclamation of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk) abolished the Caliphate and the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Foundations (*Şer'iye ve Evkaf Vekâleti*) which replaced the *Şeyhü'l-Islâm*. By the Law 429, the Presidency of Religious Affairs, *Diyanet*

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Işleri Reisliği (hereafter the Diyanet) was established as an administrative unit attached to the office of the Prime Minister. In accordance with Act 429, the Diyanet was given the mandate to a threefold duty: (1) to execute services regarding Islamic faith and practices; (2) to enlighten society about true (*doğru*) religion, that is Sunni Hanefi school of interpretation, and (3) to manage the places of worship.

According to Gözaydın, the Kemalist elite had arranged the Diyanet so that the people could accept an Islamic identity in line with the construct of the state itself (Gözaydın 2009, 278). Although secularism or better laicism (in Turkish *laiklik*) constitutes one of the core principles of Kemalism, the Republican foundation ideology, the civil and military westernized bureaucratic cadres constituting at the time the ruling elite "sought to adapt the religion of the majority into a new religion of the Republic as an instrument in socialising well-disciplined Republican citizens" (Berkes 1998, 495). In the impossibility to reach and wholly control the remote peripheries of Turkish society (Mardin 1973, 179–187), the Kemalist elite opted for an "assertive secularism" in which religion was subordinated to the state and absorbed into its revolutionary mission." (Kuru 2007, 582). This is the reason why merely to consider Turkish secularism as a state's assertive attempt to tame and control religion does not paint the whole picture. This mission was accompanied by the intent to transform religion into a set of "rational beliefs" far from superstitions and false beliefs. As Davison clearly expressed: "Islam was not disestablished; it was differently established." (Davison 2003, 341) Within this framework, the Diyanet epitomized the Kemalist elite's will to tame religion in accordance with the needs of the state (Yavuz 2000, 28–29). However, such a state control over religion should be attentively assessed to avoid one-way explanations relegating the Diyanet's bureaucracy to the role of an uncritical yielding actor (Sakallioğlu 1996, 236). The Diyanet's role and functions were anything but static and evolved according to the political opportunities structure shaping the power relations in Turkey.

The decision to set up an institution which subordinated the control of "official" Sunni religion to the government, created thus a very different situation than in the Italian case: while the Vatican, although disempowered at first, could remain an independent institution, the Caliphate—a "transnational" institution—was replaced by a national bureaucratic body under the control of the Turkish State. In the following decades, while the Vatican was able to pursue its own strategies, the Diyanet became thus little more than a megaphone for the current ruling elites.

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The introduction of a multiparty competition between 1945 and 1950, resulted in as a first attempt to reinvigorate the presence of Islam in Turkish public sphere. This occurred through measures such as the decision to open the Qur'an courses, the reintroduction of religious lessons in the state schools, the opening of the Faculty of Theology in Ankara and the religious vocational schools (*Imam Hatip Okullari*) in 1949 (Yavuz 2003, 59–81). Religious brotherhoods, as well as political entrepreneurs, contributed to the mobilizing of the religious conservative electorate, fostering the legitimacy of religion in politics. From the 1970s to the 1990s, pro-Islamic political parties[1] representing and mobilizing an "Islamic" and often marginalized electoral basin were established. Against the backdrop, the Diyanet's visibility and influence were fostered too: its duties now aimed "to carry out affairs related to the beliefs, worship and moral foundations of Islam, to enlighten Turkish society about religion and to manage places of worship" (Gözaydın 2008, 220).

In the same period, the elaboration of the Turkish-Islamic synthesis (*Türk-Islam Sentezi*), a doctrine which became the official ideology of cold-war Turkey, particularly in the aftermath of the 1980 military coup, concurred in officially reshaping the place of Islam in Turkey's national identity (Eligür 2010, 93–102; Birtek and Binnaz 2011, 14–18). The Diyanet's role evolved again: from an agency embodying a domesticated religion, to a ruling instrument in the hands of political power by which maintaining the conservative *status quo*. Moreover, the 1982 Constitution clearly stated (Art. 136) that the Diyanet is charged with the promotion of "national solidarity and integrity". The use of Islam as an instrument of social control against the leftist's ethnic (Kurds) and religious (Alevi) forces wavered in 1997. On February 28, a military coup restored a muscled laicism shutting down Erbakan's Islamist "Welfare Party" government, imposing a strict control religion and cleansing it from the public sphere. (Yavuz 2000, 39) In the aftermath of the 1997 Coup, what Cihan Tuğal brilliantly described as the moderation of political Islam through its of absorption by capitalism (Tuğal 2009) led to the establishment of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*, AKP). In the early 2000s, the party formed an alliance of convenience with a different group of actors, including pro-EU liberal intellectuals, and the Gülen movement— a religious, political, and economic network headed by the preacher Fethullah Gülen (Akkoyunlu and Öktem 2016, 511).

The dominant coalition's common goal was to bring Islam to a prominent position in Turkish society while disassembling the military's tutelage; therefore, in the early 2000s, the Diyanet "[…] strengthened its

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relations to religious publics and the party's domestic and international politics" (Tepe 2016, 178). From 2003 to 2010, at that time President of the institution, Ali Bardakoğlu, talked about religion as a "social phenomenon" (Bardakoğlu 2009) and invited Diyanet's male and female personnel to engage beyond the mosques to diffuse morality and religious knowledge among society.

The Diyanet has today become one of the biggest state agencies. Employing about 120,000 people, in 2016 it had competences over a total of 87,381 mosques all over Turkey[2]. However, little has changed in terms of independence and capability to carry out its own agenda. Moreover, while in the Italian case the Vatican has to deal with several political entrepreneurs from different political areas, willing to exploit religion for different ends, the concentration of power and religious legitimacy in the hands of a single party, the AKP, has made even more difficult for the Diyanet to escape political control.

This influence of politics on the institution has become even stronger from 2010 and, particularly from 2013, after the split between the AKP and the Gülen movement, which has led the AKP to establish itself as the dominant force in Turkey's politics (Başer and Öztürk 2017; Watmough and Öztürk 2018). In this context of hegemonic and authoritarian power grab, the Diyanet risks to lose its residual autonomy and pluralism (Öztürk 2016). The future of Turkish *laiklik* and the ontological meaning of the Diyanet as a state institution are at stake.

THE VATICAN AND THE ITALIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

As mentioned above, until the 1980s the Vatican could rely on a strong connection —although sometimes marked by disagreements and confrontational tones—with the DC party. With the demise of this latter, and the return of religion in the public sphere worldwide (Kepel 1991; Casanova 1994)—which provided more legitimacy to the role of religion in politics—the Holy See on the one hand had to face a plethora of political entrepreneurs willing to exploit the Catholic vote basin (Diamanti 2009); on the other, however, it had the opportunity to play the role of a powerful independent actor. This was also made possible by the wide popularity of the Church as an institution in Italian society, also among many secularized people (Diamanti and Ceccarini 2007; Pace 2007).

The influence of the Church in the past two decades and a half (after the end of the so-called "first Republic') has been wielded in several different

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ways. If we look particularly at the policy areas of family and immigration/religious pluralism, at least three different modalities emerge."

The first is direct lobbying of the Church hierarchies on policymakers, made possible by the presence of many Catholics among the political leaders of all major coalitions, all willing to tap the Catholic vote base (Galli 2004). Catholic-oriented parties often enjoyed good relations with the Church hierarchies, which the Vatican could exploit to summon them in times of controversy. This was particularly true during Camillo Ruini's presidency of the Conference of Italian Bishops (CEI) (1991–2007), when Ruini elaborated the so-called Cultural Project, aiming at restoring the Church's influence on Italian society (Magister 2001; Garelli 2006, 2007).

For example, between 2006 and 2007, during the liveliest phases of the negotiations on a draft bill aimed at legalizing same-sex civil unions, Monsignor Camillo Ruini and other high-ranking CEI cardinals had several meetings (despite a strong criticism from secular left-wingers) with Catholic leaders of the centre-left coalition such as Clemente Mastella, Francesco Rutelli and Prime Minister Romano Prodi himself. This lobbying activity, in addition to other strategies, managed to water down more and more the text of the bill and, ultimately, to block the project (Ozzano 2015; Ozzano and Giorgi 2016).

Another modality of influence frequently used by the Vatican are appeals to public opinion. This kind of influence is made possible by the legitimacy and credibility of the Church among wide sectors of the Italian population, also in times of advanced secularization, when, for example, church attendance has dramatically dropped. This is shown by recent surveys about Italians' most trusted institutions, which regularly show the Church around or above the 50% threshold: a result well above the European average, which has further increased in recent years, thanks to Pope Francis's popularity among many nonbelievers (Diamanti and Ceccarini 2007; Pace 2007; Martino and Ricucci 2016). This popularity is mirrored, and amplified, by a media system which is ready to report and emphasize statements by the Pope and other Church officials, as well as by politicians and other visible people commenting on them (Ozzano and Giorgi 2016). This does not mean that such statements are well received by all political forces, as shown by the strong leftist criticism against the Church's interventions in the debate on same-sex unions. On the other hand, in relation to the Vatican's position on immigration and religious pluralism, which welcomes immigrants and is rather favorable to their inclusion in the Italian society, we can witness a

strong right-wing criticism (voiced, for example, in the words of the leaders of the Lega Nord party) (Guolo 2011).

Finally, the Vatican is influent through the Catholic civil society. Italy has been in the past decades a fertile incubator for many kinds of Catholic movements and associations, from wide umbrella associations and groups such as Azione Cattolica and Comunione e Liberazione, to smaller specialized associations gathering parents, entrepreneurs, teachers, medical doctors, or jurists (Giorgi and Polizzi 2015; Faggioli 2016). This thick associational fabric grants the Church a twofold set of opportunities to intervene in Italian society. First, Catholic associations and charities are directly involved in social work. For example, associations such as Caritas are directly and significantly involved in providing many migrants with shelter, foods, drugs and other primary goods and services: an activity which is not appreciated by the traditionalist-communitarian right (Kriesi et al. 2008; Bornschier 2010), which would prefer all resources to be directed to poor Italians. On the other hand, the Catholic associational world can mobilize or be mobilized to support the Vatican's position on sensitive issues, or to try to prevent the approval of the undesired legislation. This latter was the case, for example, of the complex strategy deployed by Catholics in 2006/2007 which ultimately managed to stop the attempts to legalize same-sex unions (Ozzano 2015). This included the organization, in May 2007, of a massive Family Day rally in Rome, in order to demoralize the supporters of the law, and to convince Catholic legislators to back down (Ozzano and Giorgi 2016).

Despite the effectiveness of the Vatican in conveying to the Italian population and legislators its point of view and policy preferences, the Church is far from being monolithic (Garelli 2006; Pace 2007). This was very clear during the national and local debates about some mosque projects in the 2000s and 2010s. In this case, the Vatican had to mediate between very polarized positions among the grassroots clergy, which in some cases displayed strong pro-migrant positions—even granting parish spaces to the Muslim collective prayer—and in others participated in the Lega Nord anti-Muslim rallies (Bertezzolo 2011; Bombardieri 2011). This was also true, partly, at the hierarchy level, with conservative cardinals such as Giacomo Biffi arguing that immigration from Christian countries should be preferred to that from Muslim ones; and progressive ones, such as Milan's Archbishop Dionigi Tettamanzi, who supported the construction of mosques and openly clashed with the Lega Nord views (Allievi 2009; Guolo 2011; Ozzano and Giorgi 2016).

Such internal divisions, if above a certain threshold, can however sometimes compromise the capacity of the Vatican to convey a single, official position; or, rather, suggest a lower official profile. This happened, very clearly, during some phases of recent discussions on mosque projects and in bill drafts aimed at limiting the use of some kinds of the veil by Muslim women (Pastorelli 2012). It also occurred in the second phase of recent discussions on same-sex unions, during 2013–16, when the Church was less open in its interventions, not only because Pope Francis had inaugurated a more nuanced approach to LGBT issues, but also because many high-level prelates, such as card. Carlo Maria Martini, had expressed some degree of support to the idea of legal recognition of same-sex partners (Ozzano 2016; Ozzano and Giorgi 2016).

This internal pluralism, including the fact that the Church feels free to align with different coalitions and political forces (as shown above, the Vatican is aligned with the center-right on family-related issues, and with the center-left on immigration-related ones) clearly shows the independence of the Church from the positions of political parties (or at least a plurality of influences): which marks a very strong difference from the case of the Diyanet.

THE DIYANET AND TURKISH POLITICAL SECULARISM

Assessing the recent changes in the political influence over the Diyanet, we should go back to 2010, when, during the reforms concerning the ban of the Islamic headscarf, at that time Prime Minister Erdoğan asked the Diyanet to be consulted. Bardakoğlu, Diyanet's President at that time, responded that by virtue of the constitutional principle of secularism it was unconstitutional to consult the Diyanet for political issues, adding that the headscarf is not a formal requirement of Islam. However, this institution's claim for autonomy was not promoted by Mehmet Görmez who the same year succeeded at the Presidency. Moreover, in 2010 the institution underwent a structural reorganization, by the means of Act No. 6002. The 2010 Act is important because it legally shapes the organization's structure requiring a reconfiguration of the departments and, most of all, a modification of the Presidency that has been ranked at the level of under secretariat. In particular, the office is now limited to 5 years and the same official can be appointed only twice. Also, the procedure for the appointment has changed. Before 2010, the President was appointed by the President of the Republic (a formally *super partes*

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institution, at least until the early 2010s), upon the proposal of the Prime Minister. Today, the Religion Supreme Council (*Din Üst Kurulu*)[3] selects three candidates for the Presidency and the Council of Ministers chooses one of these nominees, proposing his appointment to the President of the Republic.

Between 2010 and 2017 the Diyanet raised to prominence as both a state apparatus and a ruling instrument. The 2010 bill promoted the creation of a Diyanet radio and a television broadcast (*TRT Diyanet*) aimed at a countrywide reach. If we consider the policies towards the family and religious pluralism, this aspect is crucial and it shows how the Diyanet has expanded its own domains of action. On the other hand, in the policy field, it is just a mere executor of the government's will; while, as we have seen, the Vatican has been quite successful in lobbying different parties to promote or hinder specific pieces of legislation.

The Diyanet's involvement in family-related issues should therefore be analyzed in line with the AKP political discourse, which, since the early 2000s, has been imbued with conservative values stressing on the ideal "strong Turkish family" founded on three generations (the elderly, the parents and the children) as the best agent of social protection (Yazıcı 2012, 110; Urhan and Urhan 2015, 253; Kocamaner 2017). Since the early 2000s, diffusing religious knowledge to female population (Tütüncü 2010; Maritato 2016) was concretely implemented by ad hoc seminars and conferences in mosques and municipal cultural centers, but also by new offices like the Family Consultation and Guidance Bureaus (*Aile Irşat ve Rehberlik Büroları*). Established in 2002 and diffused all over the country, in these offices, religious officers work as family counsellors on religious issues, community issues, health issues, wedding and children education. We can see here another difference from the Italian case, where powerful independent civil society organizations support the Church's positions; in Turkey this role is often performed by institutions under state control.

The family at the core of this project is, however, heterosexual and based on the notion of morality, honor, and respectability (Yazıcı 2012). Against this background, the place of homosexuality is wholly on the sidelines. Although dissimilar perspectives might be traced, the Diyanet Islamic doctrines not only prohibit same-sexual acts but also "some of the most popular religious discourses and interpretations, as well as the religious public, openly deny and ostracize gay men and lesbians as sinful people" (Özbay 2015, 872).

During the last decade, the traditional Turkish family raised to prominence in the government's agenda and the Diyanet not only acted in

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compliance with the AKP government's policies but also contributed in implementing them within the frameworks of agreements with specific Ministries. This is the case with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies, whose collaborations allow religious officers to provide services in orphanages, prisons, reformatories, hospitals, and women's shelters. In the attempt to diffuse and reinvigorate an Islamo-nationalistic identity among the population and particularly the new generations (Lüküslü 2016), the Diyanet is thus one of the state institutions most involved in many citizens' everyday lives.

As already noted, the Diyanet has been a tool and an opportunity for all governments in Turkey. This is because governments can use the agency's extensive network of mosques to diffuse its own ideas of values and morality among society: in the case of the current AKP government, this is a religiously conservative outlook. However, the institution is also the instrument by which governments control religion in its daily manifestations and in the formulation of dogma. Being officially the embodiment of Turkish Islam, the Diyanet plays a tricky role vis-à-vis religious communities, sects, and religious minorities. The state influence occurs in relation to a single religion, Islam, which is the religion of the majority of the population: the 1923 Lausanne Treaty regulates religious services of other religions. However, the Diyanet is included in the fiscal pressure of all Turkish citizens, either non-Muslims and/or non-religious people (this is not very different from what happens in Italy, where the Catholic Church receives a percentage of the Italians' revenues—including those of all the people who do not explicitly opt out—and other indirect benefits from the state, such as funds for Catholic private schools).

Moreover, as stated above, in providing religious knowledge the Diyanet relies on a particular tradition, which is one of the "official" Sunni Islam and, more specifically, the Hanefi School of Law. Therefore, the Hanefi-centered nature of the Diyanet raises concerns vis-à-vis "other" ways to practice Islam in Turkey, and questions the impartiality of this body. In relation to the different factions and movements of Turkish Sunni Islam, on the other hand, the Diyanet has sometimes acted as an "umbrella" institution, including also members of religious communities, such as the Süleymancı among its employees (Yavuz 2003, 146). Similarly, during the 1980s, the Turkish-Islamic synthesis forced a unification of the religious nationalist camp to oppose leftist ideologies. From the early 2000s until 2016, when there was an abrupt schism, the alliance between the ruling AKP and the Gülen movement entailed a common understanding of purpose and interpretations.

However, when the relations between the two former allies started to deteriorate, the Diyanet sought to distinguish itself as the repository of "true" Islam. In the aftermath of the July 15, 2016 attempted Coup, which the AKP considers orchestrated by the Gülen movement (Yavuz and Koç 2016; Yavuz and Balci 2018), this separation has been even stronger and a purge of religious officers recently concerned also the Diyanet[4].

A similar development occurred in relation to the Alevi issue. Estimated to be between the 10 and 20% of the Turkish population, the Alevis perform religious practices distinct from Turkey's Sunni Hanefi majority. For decades, the Diyanet asserted a "denial of any separate 'Alevi' religious identity" (Gözaydın 2014, 10). However, in the light of the Democratization Packages of the early 2000s, and with the aim to meet the Copenhagen criteria propaedeutic for the European Union accession, the AKP government launched the so-called Alevi initiative in 2007 (Bardakci et al. 2016, 97–128).

The process resulted in a mere symbolic attempt to enlarge the rights of the Alevi population. This can be gauged if considering the *cemevi* issue, that is, the Alevi place of worship. The Diyanet's leadership[5] opposed the recognition of *cemevi* as places of worship on the grounds that the move would turn Alevism, into an independent religion, separated from Islam. The case[6] raised debates and Alevi communities accused the Diyanet of acting as "the Vatican"[7]. The significant role played by the Diyanet in vetoing key issues like the recognition of *cem* houses alienated the Alevi community from the institution perceived as the emblem of a Sunni-Hanefi identity (Bardakçi 2015, 365–366). This circumstance is quite revealing of the way the Diyanet—formally a *super partes* state body—acts in reality as the representative of a single religious tradition. This way, its role is indeed not very dissimilar from the Vatican's.

When the AKP came to power in 2002, many envisioned that it would play a leading role in reconciling Islam and democracy by facilitating pious Muslims to participate in secular democracy (Somer 2017, 24–25). Fifteen years later, the silencing of the Diyanet's internal pluralism rather goes together with a blind orthodox Sunni-Hanefi Islam.

Concluding Remarks

The paper focused on two institutions, the Vatican and the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which are currently engaged in exerting influence on the Italian and Turkish societies. However, we have seen that the

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two institutions are the results of very different views of political secularism, and, consequently, very different institutional arrangements and historical paths. In the case of the Vatican, the secularization process and the formation of the Italian national state meant losing virtually all the territories it previously controlled as a state, and many privileges it enjoyed in Italian society; however, it was able to retain its independence from the Italian state. In the case of the Diyanet, we see instead a state agency, established with the primary purpose of ensuring the management and control of religion by Kemalist elites "as a fundamental ideological apparatus within the Turkish state" (Öztürk 2016, 620–622). This did not mean that the institution was completely deprived of a degree of autonomous influence on society and politics; however, its primary function was to be a belt of transmission to convey to society the ideology of the governmental power: which strongly compromised its capability to carry out an independent agenda.

Therefore, the Diyanet was at first a tool in the hands of the Kemalist project, while the Catholic Church managed to cope with the Fascist regime, and, after World War II and the return to democracy, to enjoy a privileged relation with the DC-led governments, with mutual benefits and influence. In both cases, the situation changed again between the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries. In Turkey, the rise to power of a conservative religious party such as the AKP did not change the function of the Diyanet as a belt of transmission between government and society: it just changed the institution's message, with the Diyanet becoming the tool for the re-Islamization and the moralization of society. On the contrary, in Italy, the 1990s gave rise to a more complex political system, with many political entrepreneurs and political movements (right-wing, conservative, centrist, and progressive) aiming at garnering the Catholic vote. On the one hand, this provided the Vatican with the opportunity to play an ambitious role and propose an autonomous agenda in the Italian political debate, without the mediation of a single party. On the other, it exposed the Church to attempts at instrumentalization as well as criticisms from different sides of the political spectrum.

This is particularly true because, as shown above, the Vatican has chosen not to align with the platform of a specific political party, but to pursue its own agenda. This means, for example, that it often supports 'centre-left' policies in relation to immigration and religious pluralism, and 'conservative' ones in relation to the family and sexuality. A situation that is very different from the Turkish context, where the Diyanet has been aligned with the AKP positions both on morality policies, and on religious

pluralism, by reaffirming a Sunni Hanefi-centered vocation excluding not only other religious traditions but even the Muslim Alevi minority. However, it is also true that the Sunni characterization of the Diyanet (which openly contradicts its nature of state, theoretically *super partes*, body) makes its attitude towards religious minorities at the practical level not so different from the Vatican's.

In theoretical terms, the comparison carried out in this paper clearly shows how different decisions about institutional arrangements (and particularly the influence of an assertive rather than passive secularist ideology) can have very deep consequences on religious bodies' capability to pursue an independent agenda. As the cases analyzed show, this is true both in times marked by a strong secularist vision of the state elites, as well as after the global "return of religion" in the late 20th century, when the Diyanet was strongly empowered, but—unlike the Vatican—did not gain a greater degree of autonomy. Moreover, it is evident that a separatist institutional arrangement enhances religious (as well as political) pluralism, while a strict state control over religion results in concentration of power and monism.

To sum up, in the case of Italy a secularization process aiming at erasing the influence of the Church from the public sphere, but respecting the Vatican as an independent religious institution has led to a current situation marked by the Vatican as a strong independent political player in the Italian public sphere. On the contrary, in Turkey a vision of political secularism as submission of religious power to the state has led to a situation in which the Diyanet performs the role of belt of transmission to convey to the population the values of the ruling elite: secular until the last decades of the 20th century, religiously conservative and authoritarian today.

NOTES

1. Parties like National Order Party (*Milli Nizam Partisi*), 1970/1971; National Salvation Party (*Millî Selâmet Partisi*), 1972–81; Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*), 1983–98 to name but some were soon after closed down for being against the principle of laiklik.

2. Statistics available on the Diyanet's official website: https://www.diyanet.gov.tr/tr-TR/Kurumsal/Detay//6/diyanet-isleri-baskanligi-istatistikleri consulted January 19, 2018.

3. The Religion Supreme Council is composed by a group of 120 individuals, including theologians, members of the Higher Council of Religious Affairs, and regional muftis (Sunier *et al*. 2011, 48).

4. Please see: https://world.wng.org/2016/08/turkey_s_post_coup_purge_rolls_over_religious_affairs_agency. Last consulted September 17, 2017.

5. About the Diyanet's vision over Alevi population's requests: please see http://www.diyanet.gov.tr/tr/icerik/aciklama-alevilik/5936?getEnglish= last time consulted, June 25, 2016.

6. Cemevi have been officially recognized as places of worship only in 2015, following the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruling against Turkey. Please see: http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yargitaydan-cemevi-karari-29834823.

7. On the issue, please see: http://odatv.com/diyanet-vatikanlik-yapiyor-0902111200.html.

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