

Islamic Calvinists...

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Since summer 2004, The European Stability Initiative (ESI) has been working on three issues in Turkey:

1. The socio-economic development of different areas in Turkey
2. Reforms related to the EU membership process
3. Enlargement of the European Union and debates about Turkey in various member states. As a result of this work, a report was published. The title of the report is "Islamic Calvinists: Change and Conservatism in central Anatolia". Now, in Turkey, it is this report which is being debated.

The main theme of this report is as follows: Kayseri leads in terms of centres of development in Central Anatolia. Economic development, in the Kayseri example, also represents development in a conservative city with religious values. This example demonstrates that economic development and the values of the modern world can unite. The best summary of this situation is "Islamic Calvinism". The last sentence of the report is meaningful:

"economic success and social development have created a milieu in which Islam and modernity coexist comfortably. It is the Anatolia shaped by these values that is now pressing its case to join the European Union."

The naming of successful entrepreneurs in Central Anatolia as "Calvinists" brings back to the agenda a discussion that has coloured the modern era: Generally speaking the relationship between religion and economic development, and more specifically the relationship between Islam and modernization. The relationship between religious and economic development is one of the most important complex issues of modern social science. Scholars of the 19th century who developed theories about economy and sociology put forth various theses on this issue. From A. Comte to Marx, Durkheim to Weber, almost every scholar developed theories.

Among these, I think Marx and Weber's were the most impressive. Marx is famous for the negative role he attributed to religion in economic development and his attributing development to modes of production. According to him religion is the opium of poor people. At the beginning of the 20th century, Weber brought a totally different perspective. The famous German sociologist explained the differing development levels in European countries by the variable of religion. According to his findings, countries where Protestants were dominant were more developed than Catholic countries. The main reason for this was the mentality which Protestantism brought to its followers. While Catholicism gave importance to the after world and solitary life, Calvinism attributed value to this life, working and producing. These two different mindsets rendered economic behaviours different and effected development...

So, what is the effect of Islam on economic development and modernity? This question is an ancient one, and not easy to answer. Every kind of speculation can be made upon this question. And it is. Moreover, this is not an issue for only scientific discussion or to explain economic development but also an important issue for global politics. What role does the mentality that Islam creates in Muslims play with regards to economic development and modernity? The fundamental question this report aims to answer is this. And it tries to do so on the basis of the Kayseri example. The report speaks to the entrepreneurs there and speaks about certain values, and tries to identify the effect of religion on these peoples' economic success. As a last word, it claims that it is the Anatolia "shaped by the values" Europeans are familiar with that is pressing its case to join the European Union. The report tries to tell Europeans "there is nothing to be afraid about; this is not a clash between Anatolia and the West". The question the report probably tries to answer is: Can one be at once religious, rich/entrepreneurial, and European?