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## Status of women in the Republic of Turkey

The Republic of Turkey is an exceptional country. Located in Western Asia and Southeastern Europe, it has an impressive ancient heritage, long Ottoman history and one of a kind Kemalist legacy. Nowadays it is recognised as a democratic, secular, constitutional republic (Official Gazette no. 17863), which aspires to become an European Union (EU) member.

Turkey is the most controversial candidate for EU Membership, as clearly it has problems with fulfilment of the so-called Copenhagen criteria (Europea.eu website). Like every candidate country Turkey must achieve stable democracy, well-functioning market economy and be able to adopt the whole EU's *acquis communautaire* (rights and obligations, which Members of the Union share) (Europea.eu website) in order to access the EU. Among these requirements it is also a matter of vital importance to ensure the equal status between women and men, according to the human rights standards. Progress Reports about Turkey, which are prepared regularly by European Commission, indicate many infringements in this regard. What is more, such situation gains in some cases social acceptance.

It is not easy to describe an actual status of women in Turkey in a few words, as it is quite ambivalent. On the one hand already in the early 1930s, thanks to Kemalist reforms, Turkish women gained full political rights as one of the first in the world. Permanent improvement of Turkish law contributed to founding an indeed extensive catalogue of rights confirming equality between both sexes. On the other hand, such procedure as the control of virginity, widely spread in this country (Awwad, 2011, p. 108), seriously damages women's dignity.

There are many reasons for undertaking research on status of women in Turkey. Why in a country with such a long existing catalogue providing equality between both genders discrimination against women is still a significant problem? What is the real character of Kemalist reforms? Do there exist procedures legitimated by the state, which harm dignity of Turkish women? To what extend Turkey as the state and as society respect human rights? What is the impact of history, culture and religion in this matter? And in general: what is the real status of women in Turkey? Complexity and relevance of the issue is certainly huge. The goal of this paper is to raise each of the mentioned questions. The main, which establishes a problem and gives it a structure is: what are the reasons of social acceptance for violating women's rights in Turkey?

Contents of this article are as follows: in the first section past and current legal status concerning women in Turkey is reviewed. In the second section instances of abusing women's rights such as honour killings and control of virginity are described. The last section is an attempt to answer the research question. Thus, the structure of this paper is clear. First and second sections show the contrast between legal status in Turkey and the actual situation there. Third section is an attempt to answer why does this contrast exists. Summary contains briefly described conclusions.

Various types of literature were helpful while writing this paper. Documents such as Turkish Constitution, Turkish Civil Code and European Commission's Progress Reports Towards Accession concerning the Republic of Turkey are fundamental for this issue. Also scientific articles concerning such matters as legal issues, instances of abusing women's rights and describing possible causes of existing situation in Turkey became precious source of knowledge. Newspaper articles were valuable in order to familiarise with the most current problems. Full bibliography can be found at the end of this paper.

Once again it is important to emphasise the relevance of the topic, which is women's status in Turkey and importance of the question: what are the reasons of social acceptance for violating women's rights in this country? If we find the answer to this question, we will be able to at least trying to solve the problem.

## **1. Women's legal status in Turkey**

This Section overviews the legal status of Turkish women. There are two the most important documents, when it comes to the status of individual: the Constitution and

Civil Code (both with revisions). Nonetheless, the latest changes in Turkish law are equally vital. After presenting in this way a full image of current women's legal status in Turkey, we will gain the answer, whether Turkish state obligates to respect human rights, including women's human rights, or not.

### **1.1. Women's rights in the light of Turkish Constitution – past and present. Kemalist reforms**

Since Turkey has been recognised as a republic, it was governed under four Constitutions: Turkish Constitution of 1921 (Republican Constitution), Turkish Constitution of 1924 (Revised Constitution), Turkish Constitution of 1961 and the current Constitution of 1982 (last amended in 2010). What may be interesting, some want to introduce a completely new one, constructed in a way, that would allow Turkey to comply with European Union's political criteria (Today's Zaman).

Turkish women gained right to vote and to be elected in the municipal elections in 1930, then to be elected in elections held for village councils and finally to be elected in the parliamentary elections in 1934 (Republic of Turkey Ministry for EU Affairs). However, such important changes in Turkish constitutional law, which are unique among Muslim countries, would not be possible without Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's reforms and Kemalist ideology. Kemalism promoted secular values and equality for all, including women (Kardam, 2005, p. 108). Among many milestones some are especially worth mentioning: change of headgear and dress (1925), closure of religious convents and dervish lodges (1925), law of family names (1934) and abolition of titles and by-names (1934) (Erkan, 2011, p. 1020) – they were all helpful for providing equal status for men and women. Mentioned reforms had not only a political character, but also a social one. These are words, which Atatürk addressed to Turkish women in the early days of the republic: "If henceforward the women do not share in the social life of the nation, we shall never attain to our full development. We shall remain irremediably backward, incapable of treating on equal terms with the civilisations of the West" (American Thinker).

Everything started with Kemalist reforms and now Turkish women may enjoy the most extensive catalogue of rights among all Muslim countries. However, these changes cannot be yet considered as leading to equality between women and men understood in the European/Western way. More about paradoxical character of Kemalist reforms in subsection 3.2.

In the preamble to current Constitution of 1982 it is written: “it is the birthright of every Turkish citizen to lead an honourable life and to develop his or her material and spiritual assets under the aegis of national culture, civilisation and the rule of law, through the exercise of the fundamental rights and freedoms set forth in this Constitution in conformity with the requirements of equality and social justice” (Official Gazette no. 17863). Expression “every Turkish citizen” should be understood in light of idea of equality by Atatürk (his person is mentioned in the first sentence of preamble as “the immortal leader and unrivalled hero”). It sets women on the same terms with men.

Another part of the Constitution of great importance for interpreting women’s status in Turkish society is Article 10: Equality before the Law:

“- All individuals are equal without any discrimination before the law, irrespective of language, race, colour, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such considerations.

- Men and women shall have equal rights. The State has the duty to ensure that this equality is put into practice.

- No privilege shall be granted to any individual, family, group or class.

- State organs and administrative authorities shall act in compliance with the principle of equality before the law in all their proceedings”.

In this light status of Turkish woman is the same as man. Women can enjoy all rights and freedoms guaranteed by the state to the citizen. In particular the following rights should be mentioned: right to life (Article 17: Personal Inviolability, Material and Spiritual Entity of the Individual), personal liberty and security (Article 19), privacy of individual life (Article 20), freedom of religion and conscience (Article 24). The state undertakes to protect these rights and freedoms.

In addition, there is also the Article 41 of the Turkish Constitution: Protection of the Family. It was amended on October 2001. It used to redefine the family as an entity “based on equality between spouses” (Women for Women’s Human Rights). Now its full content is: “The family is the foundation of the Turkish society and based on the equality between the spouses. The state shall take the necessary measures and establish the necessary organisation to ensure the peace and welfare of the family, especially where the protection of the mother and children is involved, and recognising the need for education in the practical application of family planning” (Official Gazette no. 17863). This part of the Constitution emphasises equal roles of women and men in a family.

## **1.2. Women's rights in the light of Turkish Civil Code – past and present**

The old Turkish Civil Code of 1926 followed the example of Swiss Civil Code and Swiss Code of Obligations (both in force since 1912). Therefore Turkish and Swiss Civil Code were identical, except for few modifications. It included several articles designating women unequal position in a family and giving supremacy to men. Husband was defined as “the head of the marriage union”. It was granted to him to have a right in giving final opinions in the matters of domicile, children and many others.

Throughout 2001 Turkish women's movement was intensively lobbying and campaigning in order to change such situation. Their efforts have paid off, resulting in reforms drastically changing legal status of Turkish women (Women for Women's Human Rights). Since January 1, 2002 there is the new Civil Code (passed by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on November 22, 2001) – the fruit of half a century's efforts to reform the old one. In its light full equality of women and men in the family became legally confirmed.

Lately Turkish Ministry of European Union Affairs published the document “Highlights of the new Turkish Civil Code with regard to the Copenhagen political criteria”. As it was described in the introduction, fulfilment of the so-called Copenhagen criteria is necessary to access European Union (Europea.eu website). New law brings the Republic of Turkey closer to EU Membership by compliance with its standards. In the document Ministry specified four areas of changes. The first concerns amendments on gender equality. The Ministry pointed out following Articles: 32, 124, 134, 173, 175, 186, 188, 189, 192, 193, 198, 202, 268, 336, 416, 661, which have particular importance for legal assurance equal status for women and men by new Turkish Civil Code (*Highlights of the new Turkish Civil Code with regard to the Copenhagen political Criteria*).

The most important changes concern position of woman in a family. Since the new Civil Code is in force, a husband is no longer a head of a family. Spouses have equal rights, also when it comes to a property acquired during marriage and representative powers. Minimal age for marriage changed (now it is 18, it used to be 17 for men and 15 for women). Place of residence of married woman is no longer “the residence of her husband”. Spouses decide together about their residence. Woman can now choose either to retain and use her surname in front of her husband's surname on marriage, or to take her husband's surname. She is free to work, whenever she wants and doesn't need permission for that (as it used to be). New Civil Code Guarantees also that she can freely travel (Women for Women's Human Rights).

New legal status of Turkish women is in the main points the same as in EU countries. It guarantees them equality with men and provides all the important human rights as also women's rights. But, as activist of Women for Women's Rights (WWHR - women's NGO founded in 1993 with the aim of promoting women's human rights in Turkey (Women for Women's Human Rights) notice: "legal changes are not enough to enable women to enjoy full human rights in their everyday lives" (Women for Women's Human Rights). Existence of a law is not the same as its effective enforcement. In the next section some instances of abusing women's rights in Turkey are described, which are in a contrast to rights guaranteed to them.

## 2. Abusing women's rights in Turkey

With reference to the European Commission's *Progress Report Towards Accession concerning the Republic of Turkey* written in 2005 there has been a little progress over the years in relation to women's rights. Yet, among the remaining problems in the Report there are enumerated: "domestic violence, 'honour killings', a high illiteracy rate, and low participation in Parliament, local representative bodies and the labour market" (Europea.eu website). In the latest Commission's Report, authors notice, that despite steps taken to improve legislation regarding women's rights, there is still a huge need to turn this law into political, social and economic reality (Europea.eu website). In this section examples of abusing women's rights are described that violate constitutional freedoms and liberties, mentioned before: right to life, personal liberty and security, privacy of individual life and freedom of religion and conscience. The whole section is constructed in a way that aims to emphasise the contrast between women's legal status in Turkey and violations that take place against them, despite all these legal protections.

### 2.1. Honour killings

"Cezvet Murat killed two of his sisters, Ayten Murat and Gülten Söylemez, because they came home late and he decided that they were prostitutes". "Senel Habesoglu was killed by her ex-husband because she divorced him". "Pregnant Ayse Tarhan was stabbed to death by her husband Behman Tarhan because he suspected that she was having an affair. After killing her he separated her flesh from her bones and then buried in the stove". These are instances of so-called honour-killings in Turkey

Definition of “honour killing” by Human Rights Watch (international non-governmental organisation, which conducts research and advocacy on human rights) is as follows: “Honour killings are acts of vengeance, usually death, committed by male family members against female family members, who are held to have brought dishonour upon the family. A woman can be targeted by (individuals within) her family for a variety of reasons, including: refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of a sexual assault, seeking a divorce – even from an abusive husband – or (allegedly) committing adultery. The mere perception that a woman has behaved in a way that “dishonours” her family is sufficient to trigger an attack on her life” (Human Rights Watch).

Honour killings are just one instance of whole catalogue of honour crimes, which are connected with so-called culture of honour – a political, social and economic ideology, carefully constructed to control and dominate powerless – because of its sex – segment of society (Awwad, 2011, p. 1005). Which is, of course, female segment. This culture of honour is connected with notion of *namus*, which may be roughly translated as sexual purity. In a wider context it means a family honour. It can be cleansed – because first it was dirtied – only by blood (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 309). *Namus* crimes are commonplace in Turkey, mainly in groups of lower socioeconomic status. In section three several reasons for this brutal violence will be described.

When it comes to statistics concerning honour crimes in Turkey, there rises a problem. As it is written in the latest European Commission’s *Progress Reports Towards Accession concerning the Republic of Turkey*: “detailed statistics on incidents of violence against women, including murder are not available”. (Europea.eu website). There is no official, or any other reliable statistic data in this matter, so the number of honour crimes victims is unknown, but it is at least 60 per year (BBC).

## 2.2. Control of virginity

In 1992 fifteen-year old G.’s father was called by her principal of the high school for a private meeting. The girl was asked to leave the office, while her father was talking with the principal. However, G. managed to overhear their conversation behind the door. Principal notified her father: “Your daughter has a very low attendance record for the past term. I have been informed that she meets with boys. She might not be a virgin. I suggest that you have her examined”. Girl fled and was not seen for a week. Finally,

she was found at the bottom of a cliff. Her father had performed the virginity exam. Upon her death body (Parla, 2000).

It is a laud instance of another kind of violating women's rights in Turkey – virginity control. Various human rights watch groups, including Amnesty International, characterise this practice as discriminatory against women, because it aims at controlling sexual behaviors of women and only women, cause it does not apply to men. It provides to a clear double standard (Awwad, 2011, p. 109), where a feminine segment is a victim here.

It is quite paradoxical, because Turkey had ratified all the most important human rights initiatives, as for instance: the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights or Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and despite that it does not abide them and officially gives legitimisation to practices violating human rights such as control of virginity (Awwad, 2011, p. 109). “What is more, “there were a number of cases in which the victim of violence sought help in vain from the authorities and ended up being killed” (Europea.eu website), as authors of the latest Commission's Report notice.

Procedure of virginity testing is discriminatory, highly invasive and involuntary. It involves physical examination of a woman's hymen to verify whether the woman is still a virgin or not (Turkish doctors use term “a girl”) (*Human Rights Brief*). People who can request virginity exams are usually parents of a bride (to prove parents of a groom, that their daughter is pure). But not only they. Head teachers, hostel directors, employers, correctional authorities of woman prisoners, justice department, law enforcement agents – they can all request virginity exams, as women's virginity and her sexual purity equates not only with her own honour, but with her family, community and state honour (Awwad, 2011, p. 108).

Virginity exam is a tool to dominate and control women in Turkish society (Awwad, 2011, p. 108). It distorts sexual identity and freedom of a woman. Again in this case we can use such notions as *namus*, culture of honour, honour/shame of a family etc. It links to a wider issue which is an essence of patriarchal heritage in Turkey (subsection 3.1).

But what is role of the state? Turkish Criminal Code tend to support social norms concerning virginity and family honour (Awwad, 2011, p. 108). In the situation, when family honour is more important, than women's dignity, there comes to gender-based violence. Powerful social control apparatus (especially physicians, who conduct gynecological exams and surgeries to restore a hymen) controls women sexual behaviour, despite all the good intentions of Atatürk's modernisation efforts (Awwad, 2011,



p. 108). The Republic of Turkey has failed when it comes to serious objection to virginity control. It gives quietly a legitimisation to this procedure, in the name of family honour and another cultural and social traditions (Awwad, 2011, p. 108)

### **3. Reasons of social acceptance for violating women's rights in Turkey**

Thanks to Kemalist reforms Turkish women gained an unique position among other women in Islamic countries. In the early 20th century Turkey was the only country in the region, which granted feminine part of society political, legal and social rights. There appeared a group of educated, professional, Western-orientated women. Today, its existence gives a fake and indeed harmful impression that women in Turkey are emancipated. Fake, because despite passing time there was no extension of this elite. Harmful, because it suggests that women's rights movements are no longer necessary in Turkey. There are still exist serious obstacles, which makes women's liberation impossible and unable them benefit from their rights as granted by the Turkish legal system (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 303). Reasons of these obstacles existing are described in this section.

#### **3.1. Patriarchal heritage**

Forms of oppression and subordination, which Turkish women have to deal with in their daily lives are both intangible and tangible. Intangible include legal discrimination and economic and social inequality. Tangible include sexual harassment, assault, insult, battering, rape, virginity tests (subsection 2.2), torture and murder (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 303) (subsection 2.1), very often so-called honour murder.

As reasons for all these forms of oppression in Turkey Meltem Müftüler-Baç claims: Mediterranean culture, Islam and Kemalism (family, religion, state). The first factor is the Mediterranean culture. As Meltem Müftüler-Baç writes: "in Mediterranean culture it is claimed that women are subject to oppression and exploitation by all religious groups". Family structure there is based on male superiority. But what is interesting, patriarchal system is also maintained by women themselves. Researches reveal that the most conservative part of Mediterranean culture societies are older (50–59 years old), married women with children of their own. They act like guardians of traditional values

and cultural traditions, being strongly against such practices like premarital sex, single women living on their own and extramarital affairs (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 303).

Men superiority in Mediterranean culture is based on such notions like honour and shame. They were mentioned in Section Two as the reasons for committing a gender-based crimes. In Mediterranean region we deal with all the culture of honour, which is carefully constructed political, social and economic ideology, aiming to control and dominate powerless segment of society, because of its gender (Awwad, 2011, p. 105). This ideology establishes concept, what does it mean to be a men and what does it mean to be a women. Such constructed system lends to legitimacy of gender-based violence.

Culture of honour refers not only to notions such as masculinity and femininity, but also to a social status. As American theorists explained: culture of honour aggression (particularly male aggression) is a response to social status insult (Awwad, 2011, p. 105), which can be erased only by women's blood. Hence, there exist a clear double standard, where women are dominated and discriminated, whereas men are honourable part of society with this bloody responsibility to enforce penalties on women, who bring shame. This duality leads us to conclusion that Mediterranean culture is patriarchal and patrilineal in its orientation (Awwad, 2011, p. 105). Therefore two realities co-exist: in the first one men control and dominate, in the second one women must remain obedient and sexually pure. They also have certain roles, imposed from above. Men are supposed to work and care about their homicide and women must obey them and remain sexually clean, no matter if they are old or young, married or single. It involves a number of limits in their behaviour, which makes them weak, powerless and easy to control. To sum up, we may say that Mediterranean culture is a basis for remaining patriarchal system in Turkey (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 305).

Another agent of oppression in Turkey is this country's dominant religion – Islam. Although Turkey is officially secular country for nearly 90 years, 99 percent of Turks are Muslims (Karakas, 2007). It also divides world into two – this for men and this for woman. Men's destiny is the public sphere. Women are supposed to stay at home. Strict rules of Islam traditionally incapacitated women by preventing them to even receive an education and hold jobs (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 306).

There are different views on women position in Muslim world. Some claim that equality between women and men is a basic Koran principle. It means that women are already liberated and there is no sense for women's movements existence. But however they are equal – they are still separated. Public sphere is for men and home is for

women, as two equal spheres (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 306). The others reckon, that equality in Islam is a fantasy – Allah’s world makes women subordinate and inferior (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 306). Nevertheless, equal or not – women are separated from the public sphere and that is human rights breaking. For instance this is contrary to the many articles of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and many others, which signatory is Turkey.

Islamic view is that “humanity is male and it has to be protected from the female” (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 306). And why does it have to be protected? Because women “have the potential power to upset the social order”, according to Fatima Mernissi (Mernissi, 1975, p.19). Sexual attraction of woman may be a reason for chaos in a public sphere, she explains. Because this sexual concept of women exists, women veil themselves, as their faces, bodies, hair and voice can be a reason of chaos in society. Islamic tradition forbids women even to pray among the men, as their presence would upset the public order (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 306). Summing up, Islam helps to sustain patriarchal system in Turkey when it views woman only in terms of sexuality and not as a part of humanity.

### **3.2. Kemalism as a new factor to help sustain patriarchal system in Turkey**

Important changes initiated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk resulted in legal equality between sexes in matters of divorce, child custody, education and work. They gave women political rights, including right to vote and to be elected. However, they failed to challenge existing duality in gender roles in general (Awwad, 2011, p. 108).

Integration of women in the public sphere is desirable in the light of Kemalist reforms. Nevertheless, their portrait is very similar to an Islamic image of femininity: women have ability to create chaos in community. Therefore they should be modest in their attire and behavior. The new Turkish woman is seen as pure, honourable, unreachable and serving the higher cause – modernisation in Turkey (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 307). Despite of being obedient wife and devoted mother at home, thanks to Kemalist reforms woman started to be portrayed as self-sacrificing, sacred creature, dutiful to the public cause. The price for Turkish women’s freedom is suppression of femininity (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 307). Woman is supposed to be man’s companion, modest in appearance, even stripped of sexuality – new stereotype of a Turkish woman.

Equality granted by Kemalist reforms does not mean that Turkish women are emancipated. They did not fight for their rights, like in other countries, where women enjoy equality with men not only on paper. These rights were given to Turkish women by the state. Reforms were not accompanied by women's movements campaigns or public debates (and because "they are emancipated already" they don't need them also today – say supporters of current system). Turkish society still looks at women through the lens of sexual purity, nothing changed in this matter. They live now in public sphere too, but still in an Islamic way (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 308), sustaining patriarchy in Turkey. That is the real paradox of Kemalist reforms.

### Summary and conclusions

In order to answer the research question posed in the Introduction, this paper was constructed as follows:

Turkish women's legal status – erstwhile and current one, were overviewed in section one. Special emphasis was put on two most important documents (and their revisions) for status of individual – Constitution and Civil Code. The character of Kemalist reforms was also described, which significantly improved Turkish law, being a beginning of a huge changes in this country. This section was supposed to answer the question, whether Turkish state obligates to respect human rights, including women's human rights. First general conclusion is as follows: the Republic of Turkey guarantees equal legal status between sexes and undertakes measures to ensure it. Turkish women's legal status is the same as men's. They can enjoy all rights and freedoms provided by the state. After many improvements (including recent introduction of the new Civil Code), legal status of Turkish women is in the main points the same as in EU countries. It guaranties them equality with men and provides all the important human rights as also women's rights.

Section two was constructed in the way to show the contrast between legal status of women in Turkey and examples of abusing their rights. It is the truth that violence against women takes place around the world, but what is interesting in Turkish case – women's right violations in this country gain very wide social acceptance, when at the same time Turkey provides modern and extended catalogue of women's rights. In the second section issues concerning law enforcement and the problem of its disregard were raised, as well as the dangerous phenomenon of

society's acceptance for abusing female's rights. Examples of women's rights violations were "honour killings" and control of virginity. Both cases (although they are different) lead to second general conclusion: Turkish state failed in the matter of ensuring women's rights, especially when it comes to violations against women in the name of cultural and social traditions, especially family honour (Awwad, 2011, p. 108).

Third section, the most important one, was constructed in a way to answer the research question: what are the reasons of social acceptance for violating women's rights in Turkey? Patriarchal heritage in Turkey is based on the following factors: Mediterranean culture, Islam and Kemalism (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 305). It occurs at every level: in family, religious life and in the public sphere. Family structure in Mediterranean culture is based on male superiority. Carefully constructed political, social and economic ideology, which is based on such notions as purity of women, shame and honour of a family, aims at controlling and dominating women in Mediterranean culture. Furthermore, Islam as the most widespread religion in Turkey helps to sustain patriarchal traditions. It helps to separate private sphere (women's sphere) and public sphere (men's sphere) in Turkish society. The last of three important factors, which help to sustain patriarchal system in Turkey is – paradoxically – Kemalism. Reforms initiated by Atatürk resulted in integration of women in the public sphere, however, they failed to challenge existing duality in gender roles in general (Awwad, 2011, p. 108). The stereotype of a new Turkish woman appeared. She is supposed to be self-sacrificing, sacred, pure, honourable, unreachable and serving the higher cause – modernisation in Turkey (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 307). The price for gaining freedom by women is suppression of femininity (Müftüler-Baç, 1999, p. 307). What is more, Kemalist reforms gave false and harmful impression that Turkish women are emancipated and because of that they do not need women's movements. Also, the third general conclusion and at the same time an answer to the research question of this paper is: all factors described above – Mediterranean culture, Islam and Kemalism – build and help to sustain patriarchal system in Turkey and they are reasons for social acceptance for violating women's rights in Turkey.

Overall, it is worth to say again that the Republic of Turkey is an exceptional country. On the one hand it is based on ancient, Ottoman and Islamic traditions. On the other – it has aspirations to become an EU Member, which means that it also shares western values. Without doubt Turkey is the most unique among all Islamic countries, especially when it comes to implementation of international standards. From the European

perspective it should become a role model for other countries in the region. However, the fact that Turkey is a leader in its region does not mean that it has already achieved everything and there is nothing left to improve. One of the issues where there is much left to do is women's situation. Again: on the one hand there exists an extensive catalogue of rights confirming equality between women and men in Turkey, on the other hand there is a worrying lack of respect for women's dignity in this country, manifested in many ways. What are the reasons of such situation? They are described in this paper. And what the Turkish state should do to improve the situation? This issue requires further inquiry and debate.

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### **Abstract:**

The article "Status of women in the Republic of Turkey" examines the issue of an ambiguous predicament of feminine part of the society in one of the European Union's candidate countries. The objective of the article is to attempt to answer the following question: what are the reasons of social acceptance for violating women's rights in Turkey? In order to examine the issue, this paper describes and compares legal status (past and present) concerning Turkish women and the instances of abusing their rights. Big contrast shown between them raises other questions. In the end all reflections lead to conclusion that patriarchal heritage and Kemalism's inadvertences are the two main reasons responsible for current predicament of Turkish women. The whole article refers to the efforts of Turkey to become an EU member, as it plays a significant role there in the process of law modernisation.

**Key words:** European Union, human rights, Republic of Turkey, women's rights.

## Pozycja kobiet w Republice Turcji

### Streszczenie:

Artykuł bada zagadnienie, jakim jest niejednoznaczne położenie kobiet w jednym z krajów kandydujących do członkostwa w Unii Europejskiej – w Turcji. Rozważania będące treścią artykułu oscylują wokół pytania o przyczyny społecznej akceptacji dla łamania praw kobiet w tym państwie. By na nie odpowiedzieć, z jednej strony poruszona zostaje kwestia stanu prawnego (niegdysiejszego oraz obecnego), dotyczącego kwestii równouprawnienia, z drugiej zaś zostają opisane aktualne przypadki naruszeń praw kobiet. Duży kontrast pomiędzy tym, co państwo tureckie gwarantuje w różnego rodzaju aktach prawnych, a rzeczywistą trudną sytuacją, w jakiej znajdują się tamtejsze kobiety, prowokuje do stawiania kolejnych pytań. Ostatecznie, rozważania prowadzą do wniosku, iż to patriarchalne tradycje oraz ideologia kemalistyczna są dwiema głównymi przyczynami, które doprowadziły do obecnej - dość ambiwalentnej – sytuacji, w której tkwią dziś tureckie kobiety. W całym artykule pojawiają się liczne nawiązania do starań Turcji, by zostać członkiem Unii Europejskiej – jest to bowiem istotny powód, który od wielu lat wpływa na modernizację prawa w tym kraju.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Prawa człowieka, prawa kobiet, Republika Turcji, Unia Europejska.