

The Association of Atheism on Legal Personality in Turkey

The Association of Atheism is, historically speaking, legally the first of its kind not only in Turkey, but also, in the Middle East and among all countries with predominately muslim populations.

The name Atheist does not solely represent the individual Atheist but in a broader sense is a reaction the the abuse of the term “Atheist” in defamation and application toward all non-muslims.

We are comprised, even among our board members, of Pantheists, Theists, Agnostics, Ignostics and Atheists.

By our understanding of the term “Atheist” we can include non-religious and non-theists as well as our namesake, Atheists.

We are not the first Atheist group to aspire to become a legal organization (In fact, most of us have been personally involved with previous ventures, which failed to legally organize). However, we are the first to succeed.

In reflection, we can deduce, it has been the interference of agendas and politics responsible for the vanities of the past attempts to move forward.

Richard Dawkins said, “Organizing Atheists is like herding cats!”

Therefore, we began our journey with a firm “Leave your politics at the door” policy, backed by a constitution intolerant towards promotion of agenda or politics both within and via the Association of Atheism.

We have three main goals:

1. First, to give the Turkish public an unbiased, objective and intelligent identity concerning who is and what it means to be an Atheist.

There is a strong and widespread misinformation about what it means to be Atheist.

There is a strong and widespread need for proper free-thinking and Atheist guidance and authority, as religious followers receive via their religious teachers and advisors.

It is for these reasons we sought to institutionalize Atheism.

2. No Atheist should stand alone in the streets!

As we expand our organization ans ask fellow Atheists to “come out of the closet” so-to-speak, and join us, we realize the risk and burden such a request carries.

Our second goal is to stimulate and foster and thriving community that supports, promotes and protects the rights of individuals and groups identified as Atheists; and to combat negative

attitudes toward such individuals and groups.

3. Our third goal is to stand up for the victims of the haranguers of Atheists and free-thinkers in the courts, either as active council or as a supporting party to the defendant.

Out of the aforementioned three goals, we can state our current priorities as follows:

- To amend certain laws that violate the human and civil rights of Atheists and Non-Theists
- To apply for certain bills that protect or create freedoms for Atheists and Non-Theists.
- And to defend the rights of victims of religious and non-religious discrimination.

Specifically, the Association of Atheism plans to establish a legal action group to advocate the rights of Non-Theists and to visit the Grand National Assembly to announce and lobby for appeals to policies and standards.

Furthermore, we intend to organize regular academic events such as panels, seminars, conferences, and debates; on the topics of free-thought, Atheism, non-religion and religious oppression.

Likewise, we will organize and promote social and cultural activities to simulate a community among Atheists, Non-Theists and free-thinking intellectuals free from outside judgement and discrimination.

Our Policies and Agenda can be accessed though our website soon. The report will outline the Association of Atheism's five to ten year plan in Turkey.

As food for thought, please consider that secularist Safak Pavey notes these findings in Turkey, honor killings have increased 14 times in the last 7 years, one in three Turkish marriages involves a child bride, religious tests are being required for civil servants and certain job applications and Turkey has been ranked 154th out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Act. The information is startling at least.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LEGAL PERSONALITY FOR ATHEISTS IN TURKEY:

I. Censorship and Criminalization of Press, Education, Free-thought and Free-speech

Article 216 of the Turkish Penal Code: Inciting the population to enmity or hatred and denigration.

(This Law is commonly used to try Atheists in the Turkish court systems. Almost all cases where this law was cited concluded against Atheists)

1. “Anyone who openly incites sections of the population to enmity or hatred towards another group on the basis of social class, race, religion or sectarian or regional difference, in a manner which may present a clear and imminent danger in terms of public safety, shall be sentenced to imprisonment of from one to three years.”
2. “Anyone who openly denigrates a section of the population on the grounds of their social class,

race, religion, sectarian, gender, or regional differences, shall be sentenced to imprisonment of from six months to one year.

(The most relevant point is the third clause which states...)

3. “Anyone who openly denigrates the religious values of a part of the population shall be sentenced to imprisonment of from six months to one year. Where the act is sufficient to breach public peace.

The law is used to try Atheists in response to the denigration of Islam. However, these cases posed no real threat to the breaching of public peace which is included in the same article. Only the anti-Islamic nature is cited, which on its own is not sufficient to be classified as a violation of this law.

Various individuals, websites and publications, as well as the writers, publishers and sharers of Atheist content have had their rights violated by this law.

LIST OF LAWSUITS AGAINST ATHEISM IN TURKEY:

Ertan P. <i>teacher</i>	Sentenced to 15 months in prison for using the nickname “Allah C.C.” on his personal twitter account. P. claimed his account was hacked. However, prosecutors rejected his claims.
Fazil Say <i>pianist</i>	Sentenced to 10 months in prison for “retweeting” lines of the poet, Omar Khayyam.
Sevan Nisanyan <i>Armenian writer/linguist</i>	Sentenced to 58 weeks in prison for insulting the prophet Mohammad in a blog post.
Bahadir Baruter <i>cartoonist</i>	Sentenced to 1 year in prison for a cartoon in <i>Penguen</i> , with the slogan, “There is no God, religion is a lie.”
Edip Yuksel <i>reformist Islamic writer</i>	Website shut down.
Mehmet Duzenli <i>caracturist</i>	Prosecuted for insulting Adnan Oktar
A.M.S. <i>website user</i>	Sentenced to six months to a year for a comment contributed on Eski Sozluk (Sour Dictionary) entitled “Absurdity of Religion”
<i>Metis Publications</i> Semih Sokmen Muge Sokmen Ozge Celik Tuncay Birkan Ozde Duygu Gurkan Emine Bora Eylem Can	Prosecuted for the publication of <i>Illallah Diary</i> , which stated the right to believe is protected by organized religion, state budgets, police and military forces. “We who have prepared this Diary, respect the right to believe. But we have to say that we have a bit more respect for the right not to believe.”
Kuzey Publications	Prosecuted for publication of the Turkish translation of <u>The God Delusion</u> , by Richard Dawkins.
Nedim Gursel <i>writer</i>	Prosecuted for the novel, <u>Daughters of God</u> .

Burak Ozdemir <i>writer</i>	Prosecuted for the novels, <u>God's Birthday</u> , <u>One Thousand Year Ku'ran</u> and <u>Children Prophets</u> .
Cagan Celik <i>Greener Nautilus</i>	Prosecuted for making videos about evolution which were deemed anti-religious.
Richard Dawkin's website	Shut down from 2008 to July 2011, after court ruling. Adnan Oktar influenced the decision citing he was personally insulted.
Ateizm.org & Ateizm1.org <i>Aydin Turk</i>	These websites are no longer accessible in Turkey. The founder's homes were searched and materials, including personal computers were seized. The third version of the site, Ateizm2.org is currently accessible in Turkey.
The Voice of Freedom From Religion <i>website</i>	The website was created in dedication to Turan Dursun, a Turkish Atheist murdered in 1990. The website is currently hosted abroad since the original Turkish host of the site shut it down in 2002 without reason or warning.

A. Censorship in Education

Access to Atheist and biology/evolution websites is denied in schools. On the other hand, access to websites that criticize Atheism and evolution is permitted as are creationist text books. In private homes, anti-evolution websites run by Adnan Oktar (a.k.a. Haru Yahya) are accessible for children, but scientific websites teaching evolution are blocked.

B. Anti-Atheist Attitudes via the Media

Mehmet Baransu, *Taraf Daily* columnist, publicly attacked Eski Sozluk and antagonized the situation via his Twitter account without reprimand.

Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan has made numerous anti-atheist comments in the media, a few are listed below:

“...atheists [are] terrorists...”

“...the German President supports Atheists in Turkey.”

“[I] want to raise a religious generation as opposed to an atheist one.”

Furthermore, at least 57 Journalists are under arrest in Turkey. We are currently ranked number one world wide, surpassing China and Iran.

About the topic of freedom of Religion and thought, we can assume that in the current situation the only thoughts are of pro-Islam and anti-religious minority (more specifically, atheists and non-theists). We can also note the double standard, where an Atheist insults religion he is punished, where a Muslim insults Atheism, he is applauded. Furthermore, we should point out the greater threat to public peace lays where political leaders insult individuals and groups on the basis of non-religion.

C. Suggestions for Reformation

1. We can suggest the clause of breach to public peace be observed uniformly in the interpretation

of this law and applied equally to all religions as well as non-religions.

2. We should also amend the article (TCK 216) to specifically include the non-religious in order to put an end to the current double standard displayed.
3. It is urgent, that while we wait for such processes to take place, the Judiciary system interpret the law as unbiased and objectively as possible and disallow the use of law as a tool of extrinsic religious oppression for the non-religious as well as religious minorities.
4. If this law cannot be adequately amended it should be completely abolished.

Members of society must equally be granted and have their rights protected in matters of religion and thought. Freedom of speech and expression are basic human rights according to international human rights conventions to which Turkey is a party. Refusal to amend Article 216, can lead to a conviction of Turkey in the United Nations Court of Human Rights, it violates both human rights and international law, specifically Article 18 of the United Nations ICCPR, and will serve to injure European Union accession.

II. Education and Children's Rights in Turkey

Article 24 of the Turkish Constitution: Freedom of Religion and Conscience

Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction.

Acts of worship, religious services, and ceremonies shall be conducted freely, provided that they do not violate the provisions of Article 14.

No one shall be compelled to worship, or to participate in religious ceremonies and rites, to reveal religious beliefs and convictions, or be blamed or accused because of his religious beliefs and convictions.

Education and instruction in religion and ethics shall be conducted under State supervision and control. Instruction in religious culture and moral education shall be compulsory in the curricula of primary and secondary schools. Other religious education and instruction shall be subject to the individual's own desire, and in the case of minors, to the request of their legal representatives.

No one shall be allowed to exploit or abuse religion or religious feelings, or things held sacred by religion, in any manner whatsoever, for the purpose of personal or political influence, or for even partially basing the fundamental, social, economic, political, and legal order of the State on religious tenets.

Article 10 of the Turkish Constitution: Equality before the law

Everyone is equal before the law without distinction as to language, race, colour, sex, political opinion, philosophical belief, religion and sect, or any such grounds.

(Paragraph added on May 7, 2004; Act No. 5170) Men and women have equal rights. The State has the obligation to ensure that this equality exists in practice. (Sentence added on September 12, 2010; Act No. 5982) Measures taken for this purpose shall not be interpreted as contrary to the principle of equality.

(Paragraph added on September 12, 2010; Act No. 5982) Measures to be taken for children, the elderly, disabled people, widows and orphans of martyrs as well as for the invalid and veterans shall not be considered as violation of the principle of equality.⁵

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

State organs and administrative authorities are obliged to act in compliance with the principle of equality before the law in all their proceedings.

Article 90 of the Turkish Constitution: Ratification of International Treaties

The ratification of treaties concluded with foreign states and international organizations on behalf of the Republic of Turkey shall be subject to adoption by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey by a law approving the ratification.

Agreements regulating economic, commercial or technical relations, and covering a period of no more than one year, may be put into effect through promulgation, provided they do not entail any financial commitment by the State, and provided they do not interfere with the status of individuals or with the property rights of Turks abroad. In such cases, these agreements shall be brought to the knowledge of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey within two months of their promulgation.

Implementation agreements based on an international treaty, and economic, commercial, technical, or administrative agreements, which are concluded depending on the authorization as stated in the law, shall not require approval of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. However, economic, commercial agreements or agreements relating to the rights of individuals concluded under the provision of this paragraph shall not be put into effect unless promulgated.

Agreements resulting in amendments to Turkish laws shall be subject to the provisions of the first paragraph.

International agreements duly put into effect have the force of law. No appeal to the Constitutional Court shall be made with regard to these agreements, on the grounds that they are unconstitutional. (Sentence added on May 7, 2004; Act No. 5170) In the case of a conflict between international agreements, duly put into effect, concerning fundamental rights and

freedoms and the laws due to differences in provisions on the same matter, the provisions of international agreements shall prevail.

Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights: Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.
2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Article 18 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil Rights and Political Rights

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
2. No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
3. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.
4. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

A. Compulsory Religious Education

Religious Culture and Morality compulsory courses only teach Sunni Islam. This is not an objective religious education. No information on other beliefs or philosophies is taught or promoted. In fact, Sunni Islam is promoted as the ONLY faith.

New, optional religious courses are also Islamic. Schools cite lack of teachers and/or student involvement as excuses for not offering alternative classes. As a result, students are enrolled in courses regardless of their wishes and with the objections of their families. Parents and students are hesitant to speak out for fear of negative reaction and pressures.

The situation about compulsory and optional religious education creates issues not only with Atheists, but tensions among Christians, Jews, Alevi, and all other religious minorities in Turkey.

B. Religious Education via Non-religious Courses

Biology courses teach creationism which is not science. Creationism only has a place in religious education. Evolution is taught throughout the world in developed nations. However, in Turkey it is seen as optional or an opinion.

We can, however, submit to the teaching of religion in history courses as it applies to respective cultures throughout world history, providing it is objective and unbiased and none of the accounts on religion throughout history are promoted over any others or belittled, criticized or disparaged.

C. Applications for Exemption from Compulsory Religious Education

Application for exemption from compulsory religious education courses require declaration of one's faith or denomination. Furthermore, not all faiths and philosophies are considered valid for exemption. Exemption is only granted to Christians and Jews and in order to claim exemption, the applicant must not only declare his/her faith, but is also required to submit official records or documentation to support the claim for exemption based on conflicting religious belief. At this time, Alevi do not qualify for exemption as the state considers them to be Muslim, it is mandatory for them to take the course. Likewise, Atheism is not considered a valid philosophical view, therefore Atheists must also take the course. The state dictates what or who constitutes as a valid and/or legitimate religious body or philosophical view.

D. Forced Religious Rituals in Regard to Minors of Public Boarding Houses

Public Boarding homes have forced minors to participate in religious rites and rituals.

Y. K. (a minor) applied to the Association of Atheism for help after being victim of such acts. We fully intend to see to it that the boarding home manager responsible is investigated.

Turkey is a party to two important human rights conventions which guarantee the right to freedom of thought, religion or belief, the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR).

Application forms for exclusion from compulsory religious education courses directly conflicts with Articles 10 and 24 of the Turkish Constitution along with Article 18 of the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights as well as Article 9 of the European Convention of Human Rights. In violating the latter two, Turkey also violates article 90 of the Turkish Constitution.

F. Solutions for Reformation

1. An exemption from compulsory religious education procedure that does not require declaration of religious identity and is equally observed regardless of religious denomination, philosophy or non-belief in accordance with the desires of the family and the student.
2. Optional religious courses should be optional not only in theory but in practice.
3. Schools should be prevented from registering students in optional religious courses without the agreement or cooperation of the family and the student.

4. Trust and abide by family decisions regarding these types of courses regardless of faith or philosophy.
5. Any courses of religious nature should be abolished in state schools altogether or taught briefly in regards to the cultures of peoples throughout world history.
6. If such courses are to remain compulsory, they must be more equally inclusive and teach an objective curriculum in respect to all religions, faiths and philosophies, not limited to those specifically mentioned in the Lausanne Treaty, and in accordance with the TOLEDO Principle.
7. School, work and prisons should never force upon, but instead respect the beliefs and philosophies of individuals.
8. There should be no minimum requirements as to the amount of students for alternative courses in the place of religious ones.
9. Guidelines by the Ministry of Education should clearly outline proper conduct in schools to be sure there are no pressures, discrimination or force in regards to religious practices and ensure that the practices and right of the families and the students must be respected regardless of belief or philosophies.

III. LEGAL STATUS OF ATHEISTS AND IRRELIGIOUS PEOPLE IN TURKEY

Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Participation Rights: Having an Active Voice Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion

Children have the right to think and believe what they want and to practice their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. Parents should help guide their children in these matters. The Convention respects the rights and duties of parents in providing religious and moral guidance to their children. Religious groups around the world have expressed support for the Convention, which indicates that it in no way prevents parents from bringing their children up within a religious tradition. At the same time, the Convention recognizes that as children mature and are able to form their own views, some may question certain religious practices or cultural traditions. The Convention supports children's right to examine their beliefs, but it also states that their right to express their beliefs implies respect for the rights and freedoms of others.

Article 16 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Participation Rights: Having an Active Voice Right to Privacy

Children have a right to privacy. The law should protect them from attacks against their way of life, their good name, their families and their homes.

A. Declaration of Religion on State Identification Cards and Birth Certificates

Although it violates Articles 14 and 16 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the religion of children in Turkey is stated both on state identification cards and birth certificates issued in Turkey.

There is no choice given to irreligious people concerning this matter as the Presidency of Religious Affairs does not recognize Atheist philosophies as valid. For that matter the Presidency of Religious Affairs only recognizes the religious minorities specifically mentioned in the Lausanne Treaty.

As we know, religion is not transferred via DNA or genetics. Therefore, such assumptions should not be made by the state or the family of a child. Such declarations of faith should not be made until the child is no longer a child, and is able to acquire a belief or philosophies on his/her own accord, and make this declaration for his/herself.

Identification cards and birth certificates are used in virtually every aspect of one's personal and professional life. The revelation of religious affiliation or lack thereof automatically creates bias and prejudice for individuals who do not affiliate themselves with the majority belief system, in this case Sunni Islam.

B. Hate Crimes and Speech Targeted at Atheists and Non-Muslims in Turkey

It is no secret that being irreligious or Atheist carries a connotation of immorality. Even politicians use the term to express slander and insult. Unfortunately, these negative sentiments have taken root in society as polls show Atheists as the most undesirable neighbor. Again considering the abuse of the term "Atheist" by politicians, we can note the correlation between the attitudes of politics and society and must also note the ways in which such horrendous comments provoke a section of society against another based on denigration.

Examples of statements made to this affect are listed below.

"Even an Atheist wouldn't..."

"Atheists [are] terrorists"

Hate crimes are committed against Atheist without hesitation because we are targeted in the media by prominent members of the Muslim society in Turkey. Atheists are portrayed as violent and unfairly discriminated against.

In Turkey Atheists are personally harassed, attacked or even killed for simply revealing their philosophies or supporting their beliefs. These crimes are often dismissed as Muslims responsible claim they are also supporting their beliefs (Islam) by harassing, attacking or murdering non-believers.

C. Individuals Whose Rights Are Restricted

Prisoners belonging to a belief system or philosophy that is not clearly stated in the Lausanne Treaty are not granted the ability to exercise their freedom to thought, religion and conscious while incarcerated. Religious culture and morality classes, similar to the compulsory religious education in schools, that teach Sunni Islam and no other belief, are a part of a program in prisons which determines the nature of the behavior of inmates as "good" or "bad". Refusal to

attend such classes results in a denial of “good” behavior review, which means and otherwise “good” inmate may be forced to serve the entirety of his/her sentence simply for refusing to attend these religious classes.

D. Conscientious Objection in the Turkish Military

Individuals required to serve in the military are not assigned to non-combat duties based on conscientious objection where their religion is not clearly outlined in the Lausanne Treaty. Atheists and non-theists must also be granted the right to conscientious objection as these individuals do not follow a specific set of “rules” as outlined in organized religions, it is up to the individual to decide his moral path and therefore each individual regardless of religion or non-religion, should be able to claim this objection without discrimination and it should be carried out with the respect and desires of the individual claiming the objection on these grounds.

C. Solutions for Reformation

1. The religion box on birth certificates and identification cards should be left blank until the individual has reached the age of 18.
2. As per the advice of the European Human Rights Court, the religious sections on all forms of identification should be removed completely
3. The Lausanne Treaty should be amended without hesitation, to include all non-Sunni Islamic beliefs and philosophies and must not remain limited only to Christianity and Judaism.
4. The Presidency of Religious Affairs of the Turkish government should not only be in communication with religious minorities but also with the Association of Atheism and the Freedom of Belief Initiative when making any and all decisions, legislation or policies that in any way involve any and all issues and topics related to and/or including beliefs, as to be more democratic and objective.
5. We call for new laws and amendments that put an end to and penalize discrimination against Atheists, Non-Theists and all religious minorities, which gives recognition to the rights and legal status of all Non-Muslims.
6. The Presidency of Religious Affairs should be more cautious when formally or informally addressing the public and in their declarations and must be required to deliver messages of tolerance, as the Presidency of Religious Affairs is responsible for representing all religions and philosophies in the Turkish government.
7. There should be new laws drafted and put into practice concerning the irreligious and Atheist discrimination and/or forced compliance concerning laws and policy which violate the freedoms of thought, religion and conscious in respect to individuals and groups in the workplace, schools (on all educational levels), boarding houses, the military and prisons.

IV. FUNERALS, CREMATION AND BURIALS IN TURKEY

A. Current Policy and Procedure Regarding Funerals, Cremation and Burials in Turkey

Currently, the matters of funerals and burials are handled by local municipalities which act in accordance with identification cards and government records. For Atheists and the irreligious, no special applications are considered valid or legitimate. In most cases, Atheists as well as non-theists and other religious minorities not specifically mentioned in the Lausanne Treaty, are buried alongside Muslims, Christians or Jews.

Meral Okay, a Turkish actress, was victim of such policy. Despite clearly stating in her will the desire for cremation upon her demise, she was not cremated but instead, buried as a muslim within a muslim cemetery.

We should also consider the equally disrespectful nature of such actions where all religions, and philosophies are concerned.

B. Solutions for Reformation

1. Municipalities should serve both the religious and non-religious, as we are all human, and create proper burial grounds that absolutely and accurately represent the Non-Muslim minorities in Turkey, including but not limited to; Atheists, Non-Theists and all other religious minorities.
2. The will of irreligious and atheist individuals in regard to their own human bodies should be carried out without interference, discrimination or objection.
3. Organ donation and the donation of one's deceased body to science should be encouraged and made fully understandable for the general public of Turkey.
4. Functional crematoriums in all seven regions of Turkey should be made legal, reopened, and utilized in the case of any individual that expresses such desire to be cremated regardless of his/her religion or philosophy, and legal guidelines should clearly outline the procedure concerning the ashes of the deceased.

V. RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEMS CREATED IN ATHEISTS NOT HAVING A LEGAL PERSONALITY IN TURKEY

A. Does Not Having a Legal Personality Create Problems and What Kind?

a We have outlined, to the best of our ability the problems Atheists face in not being legally recognized by the Turkish government and the Presidency of Religious Affairs as belonging to valid and legitimate philosophy, in the above paragraphs.

In summary we can say that Atheists belong to the outcast portion of Turkish society. According to a recent poll (<http://www.msersdark.com/mazallah-siperde-yanina-bir-ateist-dusse/>), 66% of the public do not want an Atheist neighbor.

This view can be observed in the daily life of Atheists as we are forced and compelled to keep silent when it comes to our faithlessness and obey the routines of the faith we are surrounded by. We are regarded as aliens or satanic for protesting the existence of God or supporting

science above religion and creationism, or not joining our colleagues and families in the rites and rituals of religion. Most of us are fearful of our private information being indexed by the government and worry we may be subjected to discrimination in public services and courts once our identity as Atheists is revealed.

Recent examples of Atheists being sentenced to imprisonment, hold the rest of us back from expressing our views about faith. When political parties refrain from openly supporting Atheists rights, and instead suppress them, a legal body to depend upon is needed. An NGO founded by and led by fellow Atheists in the only hope of solidarity and support. This is why we have established the Association of Atheism.

B. Do You Implement Readily Available Models for Societies and Foundations?

At the moment, we are concentrated on creating a controlled environment where everything is kept as legal as possible. Readily available models are the only source of reference to adhere to in order to remain on the safe side. We are worried, however, that in the future we might be harassed by legal bodies which will seek out our flaws and could eventually lead to closing us down. We don't want that, so we search for the tried-and-true or legally sanctioned methods when receiving funds, documenting expenditures and accepting donations. It is also the same in accepting new membership.

VI. Purported “Myths” in the Legal Statistic Concerning the Percentages Within Turkish Religious Demographics

We would like to address a “myth” that is being passed as “fact”: the population of Turkey is 99% Muslim.

This is a “mythical” but legal statistic because the government fills in the religious identification of newborn babies. Currently, the majority of Turkish citizens believe in some form of creator or deity. However, most do not comply word for word with the respective “holy” books and scriptures of their respective faith or religion. Due to the knowledge of literacy rates in Turkey, we can attribute the acquisition of religious understanding to families, word of mouth or environment and not through actual reading, study and interpretation of religious text.

Due to this misinformation, the Association of Atheism plans to requisition a research on the percentages of Non-Muslim minorities so we can know with some absolutism, for the first time in our history, the percentages of Deists, Theists, Atheists, etc.

On Turkish I.D.s, the blood-type box is left blank in the absence of a hospital report that clearly states one's blood-type. This practice is reversely applied where religion is concerned, as we are labeled Muslim until some further action is taken.

Our plan for research will be conducted within the seven regions of Turkey, and among 30 cities. It will be comprised of the population which is more than 18 years of age and of equal parts male and female (50% male and 50% female). Our aim is to survey at least 5,000 Turkish citizens. And in the name of fairness and objectivity would be conducted through an independent survey company.

We estimate this will cost approximately 90,000 tl. So we ask for the cooperation of the ambassadors of the European Union States, the European Union Delegation of Turkey, the Norwegian Helsinki

Conference, the Freedom of Belief Initiative, the heads or authorities of the three major religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism) as well as those of the religious minorities, and any other facilitating national and/or international collaboration, to help us fund such research through an independent and objective channel. Finally putting to rest this myth.

Thank you for your support, consideration and attention in allowing us to address the issues mentioned in this report. We look forward to any and all cooperations with parties interested in eradicating the injustices we have illustrated and committed to the forward advancement of human rights world wide, especially in concern with the freedom of religion, thought and conscience. We anxiously await your contact and involvement in helping us to make Turkey a more tolerant and free-thinking society.