

The discussion in his office in Ankara was about the differences between the US and Turkey in terms of separation of church and state.

Question: Under the American constitution if the nation or a state were to prevent women from wearing headscarves in universities it would actually be seen as an infringement on their religious freedom.

ONUR OYMEN:

"Of course, because you don't have the danger of Islamization of American society or Sharia governments in America. You don't have such a threat. If some Indian students put their special traditional clothing in universities we don't mind because we don't see them as a threat to our society. But if in Turkey you use it as a symbol of religious state, then it's different. For instance, why Nazi clothings, uniforms, are prohibited in Germany? Isn't it a democracy, Germany? Why you prohibit such uniforms? Because they feel that there's a threat of a revival of Nazi tradition. You see the difference."

Question: "So you're equating head scarves with Nazi..."

OYMEN: "Of course, yes. Anything, not only head scarf, but anything, any uniform that will be used as a symbol of a political belief or religious belief is a sort of identification of a religious or national symbols to dominate the society. For instance, in the Hitler time, Hitler youth were put in black shirts, so they called themselves Black Shirts. So it was a symbol of Nazi ideology. In Mussolini time, in Italy, they were wearing brown shirts, so those who carry brown shirts are by definition supporters of Mussolini.

So only in authoritarian regimes do you have such things. Not in democracies. In a Western society you cannot identify the political philosophy or belief of persons while looking to their clothing only. It's what they are trying to do in Turkey. Not only putting the head scarf, but they put it in such a special way that only the believers of this party ideology do it. It's not a traditional head cover of Anatolian woman. It has nothing to do, it completely, never seen such a thing until 20-30 years ago in Turkey. There was not one single person covering their head in this format. So it is the symbol of the ruling party or, to say the truth, symbol of a certain political-religious ideology. And it is imported from Lebanon. It was originally used in Lebanon and they imported it to Turkey as a symbol. And the prime minister said, if it's a symbol what's wrong with that? So he accepts that it is used as a political symbol."

Question: But to sort of equate Black Shirts or Brown Shirts with a head scarf of billions of people with a religious party seems to be rather...

OYMEN: "Well you may believe that it's exaggerated. It may. It may be. But in the beginning, Hitler was elected as a political party. He got 44 percent of the vote, he got the support of any number of Germans who are not by definition Nazis. But by time he turned the country into an authoritarian system, totalitarian system and he created a mess who was responsible for, let's say, sufferings of millions of people. I cannot compare today our ruling party with Hitler. Of course not. But the matter, the fact that the party is elected does not mean that they would always observe the rules of democracy. So this is the difference.

So Hitler did it for political ideology or nationalist ideology. Now, in our country, they use their political backing in elections for an Islamic society. So, you cannot find one single week, look at the newspapers, you cannot find one single week in the last five years of more where one of the members of the government has not raised a religious issue."