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A New Concept of Republican Türkiye

Nowa koncepcja republikańskiej Turcji

• Abstract •

In the political life of modern Türkiye, in the 20th and at the beginning of the 21st century, the issue of creating and then changing the new state administration was on the agenda; in the scientific literature, it was called the concepts of Kemalism and Erdoğanism. The term ‘Erdoğanism’ first appeared after Erdoğan’s victory in the general elections in 2011 and gained more recognition on the world stage due to active foreign policy ideals based on neo-Ottomanism. When comparing Kemalism and Erdoğanism, it was revealed that these two political doctrines share some common features, but there are also significant differences between them. There are similarities between them in terms of authoritarianism, the neopatrimonial system and populism, as well as in the issue of nationalist rhetoric. The fundamental differences between them are expressed mainly in the replacement of secularism, which is characteristic of Kemalism, by Islamism. At the same time, the principle of Westernization of Kemalism was replaced by the policy of separating Erdoğanism from the West and opposing it, which had a significant impact on the formation of a new political course for the country.

In this paper, we consider the analysis of Kemalism and Erdoğanism in a continuous chain, which make it possible to visualize both

• Abstrakt •

W życiu politycznym współczesnej Turcji, w XX i na początku XXI wieku, na porządku dziennym znalazła się kwestia stworzenia, a następnie zmiany nowej administracji państwowej; w literaturze naukowej zagadnienia te określano mianem koncepcji kemalizmu i erdoğanizmu. Termin „erdoğanizm” pojawił się po raz pierwszy po zwycięstwie Erdoğan’a w wyborach parlamentarnych w 2011 roku, a uznanie na arenie międzynarodowej zyskał dzięki ideałom aktywnie prowadzonej polityki zagranicznej opartej na neoosmanizmie. Porównanie kemalizmu i erdoğanizmu pokazało, że obie doktryny polityczne mają pewne cechy wspólne, ale też dzielą je istotne różnice. Podobieństwa ujawniają się w zakresie autorytaryzmu, systemu neopatrymonialnego i populizmu, a także w kwestii retoryki nacjonalistycznej. Zasadnicze różnice między nimi wyrażają się zaś głównie w zastępowaniu sekularyzmu, charakterystycznego dla kemalizmu, islamizmem. Jednocześnie zasada westernizacji kemalizmu została zastąpiona polityką oddzielania erdoğanizmu od Zachodu i przeciwstawiania się mu, co miało istotny wpływ na ukształtowanie się nowego kursu politycznego kraju.

W artykule zanalizowano kemalizm i erdoğanizm w sposób ciągły, co pozwala na wizualizację zarówno historycznego aspektu problemu, jak

the historical aspect of the issue and its modern reality. In the present research, we draw a clear line on the problems that actively appeared in the relationship between them.

The analysis of the two main political doctrines of modern Türkiye – Kemalism and Erdoğanism – and the examination of the above-mentioned issues using the method of critical analysis allowed us to clearly understand the key issues and historical aspects of the problem.

Keywords: Republic of Türkiye; Mustafa Kemal Atatürk; Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; „Kemalism”; „Erdoğanism”

i jego współczesnej postaci. W niniejszych badaniach wyraźnie zarysowano problemy, które aktywnie pojawiały się we wzajemnych relacjach obu doktryn.

Analiza obu głównych doktryn politycznych współczesnej Turcji – kemalizmu i erdoganizmu – oraz przebadanie wspomnianych zagadnień z wykorzystaniem metody analizy krytycznej pozwoliły na jasne zrozumienie kluczowych kwestii i aspektów historycznych problemu.

Słowa kluczowe: Republika Turcji; Mustafa Kemal Atatürk; Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; kemalizm; erdoganizm

In the first decade of the 21st century, the events taking place in Türkiye showed us that a new state doctrine is being formed in the country. The question is whether the Republic of Türkiye will continue to follow democratic and European values and retain the state government of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, or whether it will be presented as a new different state unit.

For Türkiye and its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Islam is the tool with which he wants to stabilize the political system and turn Türkiye into a traditional conservative society with less room to generate social, ethnic and other civil rights protests.

The coming decades will give an answer to the question of whether a country with a Muslim culture will be able to adapt to a democratic Western civilization and what the outcomes will be.

Any country that decides to embrace the values of democratic development needs strong public and political will. By the decision of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), the founder of the Republic of Türkiye, the path of state development of a country bearing Muslim culture was directed to the West, and the path of Europeanization was proclaimed an unshakable foreign policy principle. Six principles developed by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, known as Kemalism, i.e., republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, etatism, revolutionism, are written in the preamble of the Türkiyeşh Constitution, and they are not subject to revision at this stage (Makaradze, 2009, p. 8).

The political ideology of Kemalism for decades has been Türkiyeşh nationalism and secularism. An important characteristic of Kemalism was also the personality cult of Atatürk, a certain proof of which is his surname (in Türkiyeşh: ‘Father of the Turks’), as well as the name of the ideology that arose on behalf of Atatürk (Manchkhashvili & Makaradze, 2014, p. 23).

The founder of the Republic of Türkiye, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founded the new Türkiye on the principles of secularism and Europeanism. The political life of modern Türkiye has largely become the reason for the struggle of this principle with the so-called “Türkiyesh traditionalism” of a religious nature.

In modern Türkiye, there are two main political doctrines – Kemalism and Erdoğanism – which, despite fundamental differences, have some general characteristics.

For the past twenty-three years, together with the rest of the world, we have been following the political events taking place in the Republic of Türkiye, and observing its charismatic leader, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, as well as the activities of the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – AKP), which professes Islamic values.

The Justice and Development Party has Islamic roots. Political Islam has a long history in the country, when it arose in opposition to the doctrine of Kemalism back in the 1970s.

Political parties with Islamic ideology (National Salvation Party, Welfare Party) opposed the principles of Kemalism, including secular nationalism, Westernization and modernization. One such party was the Welfare Party (RP), under which mandate Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won elections in 1994 and became mayor of Istanbul (Beridze, 2020, p. 97).

In 1995–1997, the Welfare Party of Islamic Ideology came to power. On February 28, 1997, President Süleyman Demirel convened a meeting of the National Security Council, which marked important changes in the political life of Türkiye. As a result, the Welfare Party lost power, but the young reformist generation of Türkiyesh Islamists, among whom was the young R.T. Erdoğan, soon announced a change in their views in favor of democracy and other Western values.

Appealing to democratic values, in 2001, with the support of Erdoğan, the Justice and Development Party was founded. It won the 2002 parliamentary elections and came to power. After this, accession to the European Union was declared the main priority of the country’s foreign policy, despite the fact that the manifesto of the Justice and Development Party, in the so-called “strategic depth”, declares EU membership as a desirable, but not the main strategic goal of Türkiye.

In the second period of the Justice and Development Party’s rule (since 2007), there began the process of weakening democratic institutions and the growth of re-Islamization, which the party officially denied (the abolition of the permanent wearing of *paranja* by women, the introduction of restrictions on the consumption of alcoholic beverages, the opening of religious schools, the introduction of Islam as a compulsory subject in general education schools and higher educational institutions, including the military academy, etc.).

The government of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is actively changing a number of provisions of Kemalism today. Erdoğan supports the transformation of a democratic, secularist society into a traditional Islamic one and rejects social modernization. He has introduced the so-called “New Türkiye” concept, which is referred to as “Erdoğanism” in scientific literature and is characterized by the following features: authoritarianism as a form of government; neopatrimonialism as an economic system; anti-elitism/populism as a political strategy and Islamism as a political ideology, nationalism and moralism.

Authoritarian countries are characterized by three main factors: the unequal field of activity left to the opposition, the conduct of elections with serious violations, and the facts of massive human rights violations.

Since 2011, after the Justice and Development Party took over the leadership of the state government for the third time, all of the above signs of authoritarianism were already observed: the field of action for opposition parties and politicians was extremely limited, there were arrests, repressions of independent media.

Although liberal democracy was never established in republican Türkiye, free elections have always been held in the country since the 1950s. In the event of a defeat, the authorities peacefully left their ruling positions. But the June and November 2015 elections, and especially the 2017 referendum, showed that this electoral tradition is a thing of the past.

There is no doubt that the essential characteristic of Erdoğanism as the political rule of the New Türkiye is classical authoritarianism.

An important factor characteristic of Erdoğanism is “neopatrimonialism”; in a neopatrimonial system, any relationship between the rulers and the ruled, including political and administrative ones, is reduced to a personal one. This relationship includes loyalty and tacit submission to the ruler (Makaradze, 2023, p. 340).

Another characteristic of Erdoğanism is anti-elitism/populism, which is a kind of moralistic perception of politics, when society is divided into morally holy and other parts. By other, the populists mean the corrupt ruling classes, as well as people with a different identity. In addition, populists are not only anti-elitist, but also anti-pluralist. They reject representative democracy and its institutions. They consider themselves the only legitimate representatives of the people. Those who do not support them are their enemies.

It should be noted that for populists, the authoritarianism and neopatrimonialism discussed above are proven methods of governing the country. Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party also run the country in classic populist ways and methods. With the help of this doctrine, they divide society into honest citizens and a corrupt elite, while Erdoğan positions himself as a people’s politician. In addition,

since 2011, the importance of the personality cult of Erdoğan has increased, which put the issue of the savior of the nation, new Atatürk, on the agenda in modern Türkiye (Sıtkı, 2014, p. 33).

Erdoğan, as a charismatic leader, actively uses nationalist rhetoric, striving to achieve utopian political goals both in domestic and foreign policy (for example, the revision of the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne and the return of some territories of the Ottoman Empire to Türkiye, which are now located within other sovereign states).

Part of Erdoğan's political populism is also the repeated accusations of Türkiye by the West, as well as the United States, of participating in various conspiracies. The reason for Erdoğan's anti-Western rhetoric is the creation of the image of an enemy for the West, the attempt that he successfully uses to strengthen his own positions in the domestic political arena and divert the attention of the population from the real problems of the country.

Islamism is a form of instrumentalization of Islam by individuals, groups or organizations that have political goals. It should be noted that Islamists are exclusively rational actors who turn theological ideals into political points of view. They use ideology to win electoral votes and justify their policies once they come to power.

According to the ideology of Kemalism, Türkiye was a constitutional and secular republic, where the role of Islam in society was minimized. Nevertheless, Islam has not gone anywhere from Türkiyesh society. In Türkiye, Islam began to secretly strengthen itself after the coup on September 12, 1980 (Makaradze, 2019b, p. 230).

Islam began to gain visible strength in 2002, when the Islamist-oriented Justice and Development Party and its leader, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, came to power in the country (Makaradze, 2019b, p. 230). It was since this period when 17,000 new mosques have been built in Türkiye. Today there are twice as many mosques in Türkiye as there are in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Since 2007, the vision of Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party has become exclusively Islamist, and after consolidating power in 2011 (Warning & Kardaş, 2011), the party embarked on an ambitious plan to Islamize Türkiye society and politics. It should be noted that this process does not mean that Türkiye has become a theocratic state, since the religious establishment of the country is completely subordinate to politicians and does not have independent political positions. In addition, Islamists formulate their doctrines mainly from the national context, so the ideal form of government for them is either the Ottoman Sultanate, or the Sunni Caliphate, or the Shiite Imamate, depending on the respective nationality. This is explained in the strategic depth of A. Davutoğlu, who attaches such great importance to the Ottoman past in the formation of both domestic and foreign

policy and thus explains the fact of the formation of neo-Ottomanism as a new identity of the country as a whole.

Islamism, as well as its populism in the ideology of the New Türkiye, manifested itself in the country's foreign policy activities. After the failed coup d'état in Türkiye in 2016, Erdoğan's anti-Western rhetoric went so far that he directed the conflict between Muslim Türkiye and the Christian West into a religious-civilizational direction, what once again confirms the fact that his government uses religion for political purposes (Bokuchava, 2020, p. 256).

The country pays special attention to the fact of the formation of Türkiyesh national identity. The Erdoğan government dealt a revolutionary blow to the identity of the Türkiyesh nation created by Atatürk, which came as a shock to part of Türkiyesh society.

After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, which was a multinational entity, Atatürk began to build a new Türkiyesh nation in order to prevent the further collapse of a weakened Türkiye. Anyone, who lived in the territory of the Republic of Türkiye and was born in this country, was a Türk. For hundreds of years, Türkiyesh nationalism was based on this paradigm, various ethnic minorities were secretly sacrificed to the process of solidity of the Türkiyesh nation, and the question of their origin gradually became taboo. In this regard, it is interesting to consider the opinion expressed by the President of Türkiye.

The President of Türkiye made the secret information base of registration of citizens, supervised by the State Security Service of the country, publicly available. Every Türkiyesh citizen has been given the opportunity to know the origin of their ancestors since the mid-19th century to the present day. In just a few days since the launch of the base, 8 million Türks have researched their family tree. It turned out that until now some Türks had Armenian, Greek, Jewish, Laz, and Arab origin.

This event reversed the policy of creating the identity of a single Türkiyesh nation that had existed since the time of Atatürk.

The confrontation between Kemalism and Erdoğanism was also reflected in foreign policy. Atatürk's European Westernization has been replaced by Erdoğan's harsh anti-Western rhetoric and distancing from the Western world.

Today, Erdoğan is leading a liberation movement that should bring Türkiye out of the shadow of the West and give birth to a new, sovereign republican Türkiye, driven by its own democratic and independent interests.

An example of a retreat from the principles of Kemalism was the constitutional referendum held in Türkiye on April 16, 2017, by the ruling Justice and Development Party and its founder, President Erdoğan. The electors voted for 18 amendments to the Türkiyesh constitution, which included the transition from

the country's parliamentary system to a presidential one, the abolition of the office of prime minister, as well as an increase in the number of parliamentary mandates from 550 to 600, and the reform of the Supreme Court and the Collegium of Prosecutors of Türkiye (HSYK) (Yılmaz & Bashirov, 2018, p. 1820).

After the referendum, the president became head of state and government. He was given the power to appoint ministers and the vice-president. The president can issue decrees.

In fact, after this referendum, Kemalist Türkiye faced big challenges. It depends on the Türkiyesh society which path republican Türkiye will choose in the future.

A striking example of the rejection of intercultural dialogue is the conversion of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul into a mosque. According to the decision of the State Council of Türkiye dated July 10, 2020, Hagia Sophia was converted into a mosque and Muslim services began here. The government reversed a 1934 decision to convert Istanbul's Hagia Sophia into a museum. As a result, Hagia Sophia, an important symbol of Christendom, became a mosque again. This decision of Türkiye received a great response from the international community. The World Council of Churches called on Türkiyesh President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to reverse the decision. Former US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo also urged the Türkiyesh President to lift the sanctions. According to members of the US Senate, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jim Risch and Robert Menendez, such an act by Erdoğan was an insult to all Christians. In response, the Türkiyesh President stated that Hagia Sophia is a matter of Türkiyesh sovereignty and no one can interfere in this matter; Erdoğan also noted that by changing the status of Hagia Sophia, the Türkiyesh government corrected a historical mistake.

Events in Türkiye, including the first decade of the 21st century, have shown that the country is becoming a strong state. The question arises as to what extent it will continue to move forward along with democratic values, and to what degree it will retain public administration with the European values of Kemalism.

The main goal of Erdoğanism is the creation of a neo-Ottoman state. Despite the fact that modern Türkiye does not consider itself a full-fledged successor to the Ottoman Empire, it wants to return the strength of the Ottoman era to the state, which is tantamount to changing the path of Kemalism.

We can say that the main difference between Kemal Atatürk and Erdoğan is that the first one came to the head of government with the rank of military general, while Erdoğan came through elections, a democratic mandate. Accordingly, here he encounters the greatest obstacle to his revolutionary intentions. The crisis in Türkiye was created precisely because of this fact. We can say that Türkiyesh society is divided into two groups: pro-Erdoğan and anti-Erdoğan. And due to the fact that

democracy is still very popular in Türkiye, this factor hinders the implementation of Erdoğan's ideas, which, in turn, became the reason for Erdoğan's antiliberal approaches. He severely restricted democracy and liberalism in order to achieve his goals, and instead of caring about the development of a multicolored, pluralistic society, he began to arrest various opponents and give them the status of dissidents (Makaradze, 2024, p. 163).

When comparing Kemalism and Erdoğanism, it was revealed that there are both similarities and significant differences between these two political doctrines. There is resemblance between them in terms of authoritarianism, the neopatrimonial system and populism, as well as in the issue of nationalist rhetoric. The fundamental differences between them are expressed mainly in the replacement of secularism, which characterizes Kemalism, by Islamism. At the same time, the principle of Westernization of Kemalism was replaced by the policy of separating Erdoğanism from the West and making promises to it, what had a significant impact on the formation of the country's new political course.

2023 is a decisive year in the history of the Republic of Türkiye as the country celebrates its 100th anniversary. A striking example of this is the presidential and parliamentary elections held on May 14 and 28, 2023, in which Recep Tayyip Erdoğan won and was elected for a third term, which determined the future of a country of 85 million people for another five years. The President took the oath to the Türkiyesh people and noted that, as President, he would defend his honor and decency before the Türkiyesh people, history, independence, and sovereignty of the state.

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