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## Tek Millet, Nationalism Religious Edoganism

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#### Abstract:

This article aims at examining forms and characteristics of Turkish nationalism under Erdoganism, a relatively new term which has been devoted to leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The notion of nationalism has not been the main focus on the full range of the political rhetoric and the social interactions demonstrated by Erdogan. However, generally considered as a fundamental element in Turkey's social and political development, nationalism always remains a hot topic which cannot be separated from social dynamics and society itself. For this reason, nationalism will endlessly continue to look for a dynamic form and, at the same time, becomes an instrument of the ruling to control the distribution of power. Erdoganism itself has various distinct approaches towards the narrative and development of Turkish nationalism. This research used a qualitative approach with discourse analysis method by elaborating symbols, languages, writings, and speeches demonstrated by Erdogan in the political activities. The findings of this research are expected to be able to comprehend nationalism of Erdoganism.

Key Words: Nationalism, Erdoganism, Turkish, Nationalism and Religion

## INTRODUCTION

Erdoganism has been a term beginning to be spoken of widely in the context of Turkish politics and leadership. This term begins to be used widely by authors and commentators in studying Turkish politics, related to the dynamic of political, social, religion, cultural, and education system in Turkey, by observing the policy implemented during Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's reign, particularly after occupying the position of Prime Minister (2003-2014), President (2014), and President of Turkey (2018-today), with presidential system. In the long period, Erdogan has expressed social-political actions with a variety of monumental policies introduced to Turkey so far. Those policies have been main gate to authors in reading and articulating Erdoganism.

Viewed from the track record of Turkish political dynamic, Erdoganism appeared in 2014, particularly following the first direct presidential election event in the Republic of Turkey history, on August 10, 2014. Presidential election at that time, as reported by Sabah daily (https://www.sabah.com.tr/secim-sonuclari, accessed on May 17, 2019), won by Erdogan, gaining majority votes (51.79%), defeating his two opponents: Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu from secular group and Selahattin Demirtaş from Kurdi community. Since then, predicates clarifying Erdogan as *tek adam* (the only man) and *reis* (leader) confirming his



positional power at national level have appeared. The predicate *tek adam* hooks up with the accusation as dictator (https://tr.sputniknews.com/turkiye/201503251014621737/, accessed on May 17, 2019). Erdogan responded to such situation in one of his twits in his official Twitter account @RTErdogan on August 27, 2014, at 05.08.

"AK Parti, bir tek adam partisi olmadı ve olmayacak. Kurulduğu günden itibaren AK Parti, istişareyle, ortak akılla karar alan bir parti oldu (AKP did not want to be a party to an individual, now or tomorrow. Since its establishment until today, every decision of party is made based on consensus and national consciousness)."

In his column in *Cumhuriyet* daily entitled *Erdoğanizm Türkiyesi* (Turkinya Erdoganisme, July 10, 2018), Ahmet İnsel recognized that it cannot know certainly when the term Erdoganism was used for the first time, but the term is used after the Presidential Election on August 10, 2014. By screening the mass wave, Insel mentioned that the definition developing behind Erdoganism wave is similar to the support to president Erdogan with the values he has fought for such as *dindar* (religious), *muhafazakâr* (conservative), milliyetçi (nationalist) and sadık (loyal). As a journalist, Insel observed thoroughly the concepts constructed behind Erdoganism and found three principles: muhafazakâr, milliyetçi and dinî kimliği (religion identity).

At international realm, erdogan phenomenon has been raised as a special topic with varying terms and perspectives: *Time* magazine released a special report entitled *Erdogan's Way* (28 November 2011), *The Economist* entitled *Erdogan's New Sultanate* (February 6, 2016) and other international media. Their presence in the discourse of personage study – with experts and authors contributing considerably to it – can investigate the important aspects becoming the key to Erdogan's movement dominating Turkey since 2003. Erdogan has been the strongest Turkish figure perfectly following Mustafa Kemal Ataturk with varying narrations developing in Turkey internally and at international realm. The open statement of NATO's former 12<sup>th</sup> Secretary General in a symposium in Hasan Kalyoncu University, Gaziantep, on December 19-20, 2014, that *Erdoğan, Atatürk'ten sonraki en güçlü lider* (Erdogan is the strongest leader after Ataturk) has increased Erdogan's personage legitimacy in international public.

In a long progress interval of leadership domain, the question about nationalism character and formula under Erdogan becomes the focus of question in this study. This research employed a qualitative approach with discourse analysis method to symbol, language, and maneuver of discourse appearing in and produced by Turkish local mass media up to 2019.

#### DISCUSSION

## Foundations of Erdoganism

As an ism, Erdoganism has a foundation that can be investigate generally through varying implementations of mainstream policy in Turkey. Erdoganism's foundations can be investigated through varying terms discussed commonly by Turkish authors and political commentators. Firstly, the term is (post) Islamism. Some Turkish authors discussing this topic are: M Hakan Yavuz, Ihsan Yilmaz, Ahmet T. Kuru and Mustafa Akyol. Those names actively contribute to delivering critical reading and reflection on politics and religion in Turkey to international readers. The mainstream narration of authors justifies ideological basis of AKP (Justice and Development Party) and Erdogan



as (post-Islamism) in which such claim is accessible widely. Such a broad claim is acceptable because the political party established from fraction of Islamic party named *Refah Partisi* with *Millî Görüş* (National Perspective) can be associated obviously with *dindar* (religious) party.

Meanwhile, Mustafa Akyol's perspective clarifies the Islamism motif held on by Turkey through Erdoganism with *an Islamism adopted to the Turkish context*, actually more appropriately called post-Islamism. Akyol explains that since the AKP ruled, there has never been attempt of introducing or shariah-campaign for legal law, but merely a form of reinterpretation corresponding to Turkish secular constitution's mandate in a more Islam-friendly way. Nevertheless, the tendency to Islamize Turkish citizens is felt through political policies introducing Islamic values such as education realm, minimizing the consumption of alcohol with very high tax and prohibiting alcohol advertisement particularly on television all at once (http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/06/21/erdoganism-noun-erdogan-turkey-islam-akp/, accessed on March 27, 2018).

The author wants to enclose Erdogan's commentary directly to confirm the concept of post-Islamism as the basis of Erdoganism movement, in which the attempt of contextualizing Islam that is up to date and Turkish local context can be investigated obviously. The following statement is contained by pro-government media *Daily Sabah* on March 8, 2018, when Erdoğan gave welcome speech on *International Women's Day*:

"Recently, some people claiming to be clerics issued statements contradicting the religion. It is hard to understand. They have no place in our times. They don't know Islam needed an update and is accordingly updated. You can't apply the practices applied 15 centuries ago today. Islam changes and adopts to the conditions of different ages. This is the beauty of Islam."

The statement above elicits critique particularly from conservative Islam group. They declined the statement "Islam needed an update" by keeping idealizing that Islam is a perfect religion and does not need update. Responding to such critique, Erdoğan reconfirmed his statement on the following day (Hurriyetdailynews.com, March 09 2018) by stating "You cannot implement provisions dating back 14 or 15 centuries ... Carrying out the regulations and traditions of a specific society at a specific date can only spoil them."

Secondly, Yeni Osmanlucluk (Neo-Ottomanism) is a term very inherent to the presence of Erdogan on Turkish rule. Actually, this term did not result purely from Erdogan and AKP, but it had appeared far before it, particularly since Turgut Özal's (1989-1993) reign, in which the consciousness wave of Turkish top leadership at that time has begun to discuss again the understanding on New-Ottomanism). New Ottomanism approach during Özal's period begun with the need for understanding not only the history of Turkey but also that of states formerly under Ottoman Empire's flag, such as Balkan, Middle Asia and Africa. Özal began to optimize its foreign political approach (*dış politika yaklaşımi*) by establishing bilateral relationship with states in the region. In addition to foreign relation approach formulated precisely, at the same time, Turkey worked on infrastructure development in military field.

As the historical power that can revive their glory narration, the memory about Ottoman Empire remains to be most Turkish's pride and such situation becomes a capital that was not wasted by Erdogan and AKP government. In the term of Ottoman memory management, there is an interesting not from Selim Kuru, the Director of *Turkish and Ottoman Studies* of University of Washington di *Theatlantic.com* entitled *How Nietzsche* 



Explains Turkey (June 21, 2018), finding Friedrich Nietzsche's keywords, "ressentiment", in online merriam-webster.com is defined as deep-seated resentment, frustration, and hostility accompanied by a sense of being powerless to express these feelings directly. The feeling of being declined, resented, and alienated, particularly by the West, became Erdoganism's fuel to wake the Turkish up. This feeling, according to Selim, has been present in Turkey for centuries, and spans the entire political spectrum. And it's a feeling that Erdoğan has mobilized to serve his needs.

Thirdly, the term is vatan haini (traitor). As the ruler, Erdogan era utilizes rhetoric about the traitor of states widely to confirm those in line with the state or otherwise. To Akyol, the term *treason against Turkey* was considered as a very fundamental topic as pro-Erdogan's propaganda engine leading to the utilization of support to the government in sectoral manner, no longer about nation and state's interest in general. Akyol (2018) stated that there are two types of state traitors developing under Erdoganism. The first one is those out of AKP such as left group and Kurdi tribe working for *evil mastermind* (i.e. UK, France, and America, becoming the rhetoric of Erdogan government's enemy); the second is the traitor in internal AKP that will reveal its genuine identity when criticizing Erdogan and resisting his decision.

Fourthly, parallel state (paralel devlet) is a term dressing adorning Turkish media and public, particularly after the dispute between AKP and jamalah Fetullah Gülen surfaced since late 2013. Actually, parallel state or also called derin devlet (deep state) is not a new term in their discourse of political and social history and movement, and even it can be traced back into the last times of Ottoman Empire, for example when there are lobbies behind Crimea War occurring on September 14, 1854 between Ottoman, British, and French troops Bahadıroğlu. 2015: 32). The book entitled Deep State Masa Osmani dan Abdul Hamid II (Deep State during Ottoman and Abdul Hamid II periods) explains in fairly detail the potential lobby and mafia networks occurring since Ottoman time. Even Atilla Akar in his book entitled Derin Devlet, Devletin Paralel Iradeleri tried to investigate the typical derin devlet likely present in Turkic peoples' ancestor time and he found a group named Börü Budun meaning Wolf's Offspring (Turkish: Kurt Kavmi) moving, lobbying, and waging war (Akar. 201: 48). In Turkish context, derin devlet conducted coup d'etat not militarily but militaristically by creating chaos and terror shaking the public's emotion. Derin devlet network in Turkey was getting tenser around Cold War era. Historically, intelligent agents such as CIA and Mossad played fully to compete for the influence. In Turkey, derin devlet surfacing includes, among others: Kontrgerilla, Kenan Evren, Ergenekon, Balyoz gangs, military espionage, and now jamaah Gülen (Sujibto, 2017: 165-166).

Fifthly, the term is populism. Cambridge Dictionary Online defines it as political ideas and activities that are intended to get support ordinary people by giving them what they want. Erdoganism in Turkey has distinctive typical method by utilizing popular emotion and predisposition based on what is called (national will//milli irade). The Populism of Erdoganism, as suggested by Mustafa Akyol, is considered as a philosophy underlying the governance by confirming that Erdoğanism is mainly a story of populism (Ihsan & Galib Bashirov, 2018). Populism behind Erdogan reign has been the mainstream narration through which each of Turkish authors and political commentators will not pass through surely.

*Milli irade* is a weapon becoming Erdoğan's strong rhetoric all at once, particularly following the coup d'etat attempt in 2016. This phrase *milli irade* finds its stronger meaning amid the people's mourning and emotion in resisting the troops attempting to carry out



coup d'etat. Tragedy occurring on the night before July 15 taking hundreds life tolls has squeezed the people's energy maximally. So, it is very logical that national consciousness and solidarity arose to safeguard the state and democracy they have established very difficultly, for example by coming to the city parks throughout Turkey in the end of each weekend until some following months. Amid such mourning and emotion demonstration, *milli irade* can be read as people power born naturally – although it cannot be fully claimed so. It is because in some aspects, Erdoğanism can utilize such people emotion and populist wave to stake its influence. Erdoğanism's populism aspects were tried to read broadly by Bülent Keneş by commenting on Yılmaz and Bashirov, seeing the similarity between Kemalism and Erdoğanism in the context of affecting and attracting the people's sympathy by smoothing the *makbul vatandaş* approach (acceptable to/preferred by people) (http://www.tr724.com/erdoganizm-ve-uzerine-oturdugu-dort-ana-sutun/, accessed on June 7, 2018).

Sixthly, there is a term neopatrmonialism. In the history of world political leadership, a figure surviving in the top rule until many decades is very vulnerable to the accusation of dictator. Although it cannot be generalized, those figures tend to be patrimonialism, according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, meaning the form of political organization in which authority is based primarily on the personal power exercised by a ruler, either directly or indirectly (https://www.britannica.com/topic/patrimonialism, accessed on September 7, 2019). Patronal characteristics are usually closely related to a figure of patrimonial leader with monopolistic predisposition having network in the power circle.

Erdoganism is viewed as the leader with combined neopatrimonial-populist characteristic (Ihsan &Bashirov, 2018). The author agrees to set forth the term *neopatrimonialism* – rather than authoritarianism often used by Turkish opposition group and Western media – as the form of author's preference and view on Erdogan. The strongest Turkish leader after Mustafa Kemal has been beyond patrimonialism, the leadership characteristic in which the authority remains to be held fully but the practices in the field do not break the law and the state's agreement.

#### Erdoganism Nationalism Model

#### 1. From Ethnic Nationalism to Civic Nationalism

The aspects of Erdoganism nationalism movement have not been discussed seriously yet by researchers. It can be understood because the presence of AKP did not buzz Turkish nationalism issue originally (in the sense of leading to ethno-nationalisme, as activated by nationalist group) as the party's ideology or campaign before the public. Nationalism played by AKP is open nationalism, in which all Turkic people have equal chance to love and to have the sense of belonging to the state. Such populist approach has been actually popular in the years when Democrat Party became the ruler by promoting slogan *önce millet, sonra devlet* (people first, State later). The main objective, wrapped in *Yeni Türkiye* packager as cited by Hasan Karakaya from Erdogan's own statement in *Yeniakit.com.tr*, is to be "a democratic state, prosperous Turkey, and a developed state" (*Demokratik bir ülke, Müreffeb bir Türkiye, ve öncü ülke*). Nationalism built and developed by AKP finally can be acceptable to the people.

As a party promoting democracy, it can be understood when AKP keeps continuing secularism (but not secularism model used by Atatürk and CHP) and developing nationalism (but not MHP model). Turkic revival approach (including the



strongest one concerning Turkey-Islam and *yeni Osmanli*) in the frame of conservative democracy has been the main narration taken up by Erdoganism.

However, since there was a rumor about the potential coalition with MHP nationalist party appearing since 2015, Erdogan and AKP might not use populist movements to redefine the word nationalism (*milliyetçilik*). Erdogan did so because AKP in the fourth election period began to lose vote and as a result, they could not establish power with one party in the parliament. The fact of decreased support to AKP could be seen from the Election on June 7, 2015 that only gave national vote of 40.9%, and the result was not sufficient for AKP to establish government within the parliament just like that in two previous periods. With a variety of social-political violence drama that has shaken people's emotion, at the same time the process of coalition could not achieved with parties getting through the parliament (particularly MHP), and eventually reelection became the answer that should be performed, on November 1, in the same year. This Election on November 1, benefited AKP again, with the significant increase in its vote to 49.5%, and this party symbolizing with bulb could be the single ruler again. About 9% additional national vote was obtained from MHP and HDP all at once.

Perhaps, the phenomenon of *bikmis* (feeling tired) with AKP that had dominated Turkey in nearly two decades could not be covered up and people attempted to find the refreshments by turning to other parties. However, such situation was read quickly and dealt with immediately by Erdogan and AKP, one of which was by means of creating coalition (*ittifak*) signed officially by AKP and MHP. The last election on June 24, 2018 proved that the predicted vote and the measure of establishing coalition were evidently appropriate, by obtaining national vote of 53.66% (AKP 42.56% and MHP 11.10%). Meanwhile, the chair of president was secured by Erdogan, with 52.59%.

Coalition between AKP and nationalist party MHP is a risk, surely leading the AKP's strategy and approach to change, including their public communication, one of which is about Kurdi. Although it cannot be read openly concerning internal agreement of AKP-MHP coalition, the rhetoric changes using nationalism word raised before the public shows AKP's populist method to get more proponent mass. In an AKP congress event in Mersin Province on March, 2018, Erdogan for the first time shows *bozkurt* signal (wolf symbol) with three fingers being the Turkic Nationalist Group's pride symbol. Everyone, of course, understood directly that the action shown by Erdogan was merely a political action around the election on June 24, 2018. But interestingly, Erdogan did not stop there – with *bozkurt* signal symbolically belonging to nationalist group only – but he continued by elaborating "Erdoganist nationalism" project through a very well-known slogan *Tek millet, tek bayrak, tek devlet, tek vatan*.

As the evidence related to Erdoğan's attitude and stance in Turkic nationalism rhetoric, we can restudy his speech on the 40<sup>th</sup> meeting with village heads (*Muhtarlar toplantsi*) on October 18, 2017, in which Erdogan said: *Kürt'üm demek en tabi hakkındır, ama Kürtçülük yapmak hakkın değildir. Türk'üm demek en tabi hakkındır ama Türkçülük yapmak hakkın değildir. Çünkü bunlar bölücülüktür* (saying that I am a Kurdish is of course right, but that I have *Kürtçülük* understanding and action [perception that Kurdish tribe is on other tribes) is wrong. Saying that I am a Turkish is right, but that I have perception and act like *Türkçülük* (perception that Turkish is on other ethnics) is wrong. As all of those are troublemakers (https://odatv.com/turkculuk-yapmak-boluculuktur-1810171200.html, accessed on September 7, 2019).



Actually, it was not normal for Erdoganism and AKP's political movement to utilize nationalism issue *an sich* as the rhetoric to attract constituents' sympathy, because nationalism as the national interest should have been achieved by itself, through its development policies and hard-work in building Turkey since they ruled. Erdoğan has a distinctive composition related to Turkic nationalism, the nationalism accommodating all elements of citizens from diverse backgrounds. Slogan *tek millet, tek bayrak, tek devlet, tek vatan* is Erdoğanism's method of framing national interests. This slogan does not contain the elements of glorification for one certain ethnic, but instead it accommodates the plurality of modern Turkic citizens. Such rhetoric has been used by previous liberaldemocrat politicians such as Adnan Menderes, Turgut Özal and Islamic politician Necmettin Erbakan, through more democratic approach to nationalism system. Nevertheless, viewed from the context of political approach and policy, Erdoganism has nearly perfect measure and breakthrough, through slogan opposing the national interest on behalf of Turkey state.

## 2. Tek Millet

Tek millet is literally defined as one nation. Millet here is different from the approach taken by Milli Görüş in which the word milli is defined more in Islam perspective, similar to ummah. Erdoğan's Millet is limited to Turkic citizens with about 81 millions populations. In his speech in Mersin province, Erdoğan said that Erdoğan he intends is Turkic citizens, including Turkish, Kurdish, Laz, Arab, Circassian and etc. It means that Erdoğan's millet is in national territorial frame named Turkey state in which Erdoğan and AKP have national vision and mission on behalf of Turkey state. Nationalism in such approach needs a sturdy democratic practice so that minority can show off its existence and will never be the one discriminated by the majority.

However, on the other hand, Erdoğan also often uses *millet* in relation to Islamic issues, for example Islam millet. In some cases, Islam milleti intended contains the definition of ummah, or nation of Islam in which territorial borders no longer function. However, there is an interesting critique delivered by Kerem Çalışkan in Odatv.com, stating that Erdoğan did not understand because there is no concept of *millet* in Islam – the existing one is *umat* concept, *Islam ümmeti*. Turkish language has two synonymous vocabularies: *ümmet* and *millet*, but with different uses. It should be underlined that Erdoğan's political movement does not belong to Islamism ideal with extreme model, for example, promoting sharia into the legal law and proclaiming the concept of *ümmet* or caliphate. He uses *Islam millet* by contextualizing it into local vocabulary, the synonym of *Türk milleti* (keep maintaining the word *millet*) that has been very well-known in Turkic people's daily activity and memory. It is because the phrase *Türk milleti* (Turk ethnocentric-oriented) cannot be used in all places in Turkey, particularly in east and south east areas. For that reason, Erdoğan changed it into Müslüman milleti or Islam milleti, just like what he has done in the campaign in Divarbakır, on April 2017. Such stance flexibility indicates pragmatic characteristic (Görener & Ucal, 2011: 357) often demonstrated in critical situations.

## 3. Tek bayrak, tek devlet, tek vatan

Tek bayrak, tek devlet, and tek vatan are one symbol unity of a state. Administratively, flag, state, and homeland are the requirements to be called a state (country) and Erdoğan made the elements the national power by embracing all citizens coming from diverse backgrounds. There is a very famous slogan in Indonesia, particularly among NU citizens,



*vatan sevgisi imandandur* (loving homeland is a part of *iman* or faith). The slogan offers an interesting perspective on Islam and nationalism, in which both of them are compatible and can strengthen each other for the sake of creating a progressive Turkey, as seen today. Turkic people' love to their state is also demonstrated with slogan *sehitler ölmez vatan (syahids* [soldiers defending the state] live forever, the State cannot be broken). The slogan later becoming the symbol of national movement aforementioned does not need ethnonationalism claim, and is produced smartly by Erdoğan and AKP into the context of national emotion on behalf of Turkey state.

In addition, the flag becomes the most sacred symbol to Turkey. Slogan *tek bayrak* shows national commitment wanting to be built by Erdoğan under one state and Turkic flag. Flag is the most intimate and closest to Turkey, the existence of which is defined specially and treated like a holy sheet. Turkey can be surely stated as the state with the largest number of flags waving in both public and private spaces like house and etc. All ideologies developing in Turkey can unite when they are in front of the flag, because generally the have shared perception on the flag as the sacred flag that has been fought four by heroes and taken millions life tolls. *Tek bayrak* is a certainty to any party group in Turkey except, of course, to those indeed not wanting the existence of Turkey and wanting to separate from it.

## CONCLUSION

Erdoganism perspective's approach to nationalism offers populist solution, the presence of which is more acceptable to all Turkic people with all backgrounds. *Yeni Türkiye* project itself becomes the frame of Erdoganism-typical nationalism inculcation process under AKP that in practice can confront left and right extremists and make them sitting down together for the sake of national interest. The two most extreme groups always involved in tense sectarian conflicts, secular (both left and pro-West) and conservative Islam, are bridged by *Yeni Türkiye* with an offering of moderate "Muslim democracy", by synthesizing Islam, nationalism, and liberal-secular democracy (Alaranta, 2015: 10).

Such populist political policy benefits AKP and can persist in the government. AKP also got many significant votes from Kurdish community, e.g. in Urfa and Gaziantep province. In addition, AKP can also accommodate the representative of minority community such as Markar Eseyan (Armenian descent) to be the members of Legislative Assembly and the administrators of party. As such, AKP becomes a party representing not only Muslim-Turkish community but also Turkic people in general.

The progress shown by AKP under Erdoğan's control indicates the national commitment trying to accommodate more widely the Turkic people with diverse backgrounds. The democratic slogan it has brought can be responded to positively so that the slogan *tek millet, tek bayrak, tek devlet, tek vatan* becomes a national project acceptable to the public. Thus, nationalism concept and rhetoric offered by Erdoğanism can activate the new consciousness with broader and more flexible nationalism perspective, in which national interest and will (*milli irade*) are actually positioned to be the basis of political policy project and movement it builds.

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