

Essay:

ORATION OF THE NATION IN TURKEY. FROM SECULARIZATION TO RE-ISLAMIZATION¹

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Ever since President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan came to political power in Turkey, he has tried to reconcile different ideological and cultural elements of communication. These elements have to do with a hierarchical way of organising power as well as with attempts to legitimise a specific form of Turkish modernity that is linked to the beliefs and culture of traditional Islam. By mainly referring to a speech made by Erdoğan at the third National Culture Forum in Istanbul on 3 March 2017, this chapter aims to show the ways in which modernisation, Europeanisation, and civilisation are perceived by the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP, turkish *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) elite in Turkey. Together, these components form a belief system marked by an ambivalence that can best be covered by the theory of multiple modernities, in which Europe plays an ambiguous role and which emphasises the foundation of an alternative cultural hegemony reintroducing an ethno-religious content. Underlining the ambivalences and ruptures with modernisation undertaken under JDP rule in relation to the Kemalist projection of modernity, the arguments made by the Turkish president also reveal the historical genealogy of modernisation since the late Ottoman Empire. This context highlights the ways in which the JDP's populist and Eurosceptic manoeuvres challenge societal and political transformation by insisting on older forms of societal organisation in the age of globalisation.

In general, modernisation processes include economic development, industrial development, differentiation of political structures, recognition of ethno-cultural diversity, increased social-political activity, and social mobilisation. Elites play a key role in this process as centres of modernisation.² The social groups that are distant from this socio-political and economic centre are known as “peripheral”. Uneven participation in modernisation leads to conflicts between the ruling elite and the neglected periphery. In Turkey, centre-periphery relations inherited from the Ottoman Empire era continue to shape the country's political dynamics, leading to participation of the neglected masses in political affairs. By the same token, uneven participation also enables the rise of populist political discourses by taking advantage of the centre-periphery relations constructed during the modernisation process. To elaborate on this further in the context of the Turkish modernisation process, Kemalist

¹ Essay zu der Quelle: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: We Should Set New Cultural Goals for Ourselves in Accordance with the 2023 Vision (March 3rd 2017), in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte, URL: <www.europa.clio-online.de/quelle/id/q63-75001> , 2021.

² Eisenstadt, Shmuel N., The Kemalist Revolution in Comparative Perspective, in: Kazancıgil, Ali; Özbudun, Ergun (eds.), Atatürk. Founder of a Modern State, London 1981, pp. 127–144.

governments, most significantly the Republican People's Party (RPP, *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*), followed a top-down approach, or what Anthony Giddens calls "simple modernization", to homogenise the nation.³ This process constructed the secular military elite and bureaucrats as drivers of modernisation and secularisation and the traditional working class and peasantry as the secondary, or peripheral, groups.

Following a devastating financial and economic crisis in 2001, when the coalition government composed of the Democratic Left Party (DSP, *Demokratik Sol Parti*), Nationalist Movement Party (MHP, *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*) and Motherland Party (ANAP, *Anavatan Partisi*) was in power, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the leadership of the JDP, a party newly established that same year, entered a very fertile political landscape for victory in 2002. Erdoğan, a former mayor of Istanbul, became a hero in the eyes of conservative segments of Turkish society after being imprisoned for four months in 1998 because of a religiously loaded poem he had recited in Siirt, a southeastern province of Turkey, in 1997. One should also be reminded of the fact that subaltern, conservative and religious circles saw him as one of their own: distant from the aristocracy, the military, the oppressive state, and elitist Kemalist republicanism.⁴ Due to his family background and the conservative neighbourhood he was raised in (Kasimpaşa, a suburban district of Istanbul), his Islamic discourse in everyday life, his sermon-like public speaking style, the slang-like language that he uses from time to time in Istanbul, and his Sunni-dominant rhetoric make him very appealing to a large audience.⁵

Re-Islamisation of the Nation

On 3 March 2017, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan gave a speech in Istanbul at the third National Culture Forum. The speech is of special relevance because it provides us with some clues about Erdoğan's emphasis on the formation of an alternative cultural hegemony in opposition to Kemalist modernity. Erdoğan's longstanding complaints about his failure in establishing a cultural hegemony are publicly known. This is why his address at the third National Culture Forum is particularly remarkable, in the sense that he underlines the Islamist *and* neo-Ottomanist aspects of Turkish culture:

"Culture is not just about a book, music, or architecture but is a lifestyle that includes all these things. From our greeting, to the way we sit down and stand up, what we wear, eat, drink, and the order of our house, we have many different elements shaping our culture. For the last few

³ Giddens, Anthony, *Beyond Left and Right. The Future of Radical Politics*, Cambridge 1994.

⁴ Tuğal, Cihan, *Passive Revolution. Absorbing the Islamic Challenge to Capitalism*, Stanford 2009, p. 176; Tuğal, Cihan, *Fight or Acquiesce? Religion and Political Process in Turkey's and Egypt's Neoliberalizations*, in: *Development and Change* 43 (2012), No. 1/6, pp. 23–51.

⁵ Tuğal, *Passive Revolution*.

centuries, the world has been progressing rapidly on the path of cultural uniformity. This situation is a great threat not only for Turkish culture but also for all other cultures. Actually, we can turn this into an opportunity.”

“Our generation, from idioms to some tools, is the last witness and user of a significant portion of our local culture. Newer generations are unfortunately left devoid of this richness and will continue to be so if things go on like this. *We will be left in the claws of a cultural drought if we cannot understand the culture of a person walking in the streets of Istanbul from his clothes, shoes, hat, and posture.* Sitting at a dinner table, looking at the tablecloth and plates, the dishes and the way they are presented, if we cannot figure out which nation it belongs to, then the situation is really grave.”

“These debates are held in many parts of the world; the same pains appear everywhere. However, we have a difference. We are a very different nation in terms of civilizational and historical past as well as of the state tradition. *As the descendants of glorious ancestors who changed the age and opened an era, we have the power, the will and the possibility to build a new and great future for ourselves. Here, we chant ‘great, powerful Turkey’. We want to achieve our 2023 goals. For this reason, we inherit the visions of 2053 and 2071 for our youth.*”

“We are struggling to bring our country a new administrative system with constitutional amendments. This is the reason why we place the native and the national at the centre of our policy, our point of departure. Within the framework of the 2023 vision, we have to set new cultural targets for ourselves. This is why the third National Cultural Council that we are attending today is of great importance in this respect.”⁶ [Emphasis by the author]

His speech is an explicit depiction of his nostalgia for the Ottoman way of managing cultural and religious diversity in this geography, which was based on the idea of negotiating between different ethnicities, cultures, and faiths. Such public speeches by the president seem to correspond very well to the feelings of his followers, who have been going through a kind of nostalgic deprivation resulting from the Western, modernist, and Kemalist intervention in the Ottoman past. These words of Erdoğan can be read as an indication of his Ottoman nostalgia, as he is believed to be referring to the differentiation in the code of clothing in the Ottoman Empire in accordance with religious differences as part of the *Ottoman millet system*. Such attempts at revitalising the Ottoman millet system are also an indication of the ways in which

⁶ [Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip, We Should Set New Cultural Goals for Ourselves in Accordance with the 2023 Vision, in: Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, URL: <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/72201/we-should-set-new-cultural-goals-for-ourselves-in-accordance-with-the-2023-vision> \(22.04.2019\).](https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/72201/we-should-set-new-cultural-goals-for-ourselves-in-accordance-with-the-2023-vision) Hereafter all citations, if not marked otherwise, originate from the source printed below.

the Kemalist way of constructing the nation on the basis of *ethno-national* parameters is now being replaced with *religio-national* parameters. One should pay attention to the fact that this kind of transformation takes place in a global context in which a religiously defined civilisational paradigm is being magnified everywhere.⁷

In the Turkish context, modernisation has often been defined as a transformation process along the lines of (Western) European civilisation, which inevitably meant the strengthening of Turkey's ties with the West and the weakening of ties with Eastern countries. Modernisation is often equated with Europeanisation, Westernisation and secularisation in a linear notion of progress from traditional to modern society. "Europe" therefore often stands for a rather naïve form of advancement. Particularly in the Kemalist era, the introduction of a Roman alphabet-based Turkish alphabet (replacing the Ottoman alphabet) and the establishment of the secular state (restricting the role of Islam in the public sphere) changed the dynamics of Turkey's relations with Middle Eastern countries and served to endorse the assumed superiority of Western civilisations.⁸ In more recent times, however, the JDP government has emphasised Turkey's orientation between Western (European) and Eastern cultures. For instance, in a speech delivered at the Turkish Arab Tourism Summit in Bursa on 22 April 2012, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan noted that Turkey has responsibilities towards the Middle Eastern region stemming from historical ties and stated the following:

"Although Turkey is turned in a direction towards the West ... it will never turn its back on the East and South. We believe that the distances, boundaries, and barriers erected between us in the last century are virtual. We cannot accept separation through artificial barriers from our friends, neighbours, relatives, or even brothers, with whom we have lived together for centuries. Based on this understanding, we have established very different communication and cooperation with our ancient friends and brothers over the last nine and a half years."⁹

This speech is a depiction of the ways in which the JDP elite perceives political, societal, cultural, and economic links with the Middle East, Africa, the Caucasus and, in particular, the Arab world. Kemal Kirişçi has already discussed that there may be different drives shaping the JDP's strong links with the Arab world. According to Kirişçi, Turkey's changing role in the region, specifically in the Arab world, is mainly shaped by four different kinds of drives it embraces: a) its *political drive*, made obvious by Erdoğan's discourse on the Palestinian issue

⁷ Brubaker, Roger, *Between Nationalism and Civilization. The European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective*, in: *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40 (2017), No. 8/15, pp. 1191–1226.

⁸ Bozdağlıoğlu, Yücel, *Modernity, Identity and Turkey's Foreign Policy*, in: *Insight Turkey* 10 (2008), No. 1/4, pp. 55–75.

⁹ Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip, *Sırtımızı Doğu'ya, Güney'e dönmeyiz*, in: *Dünya*, URL: <<https://www.dunya.com/gundem/sirtimizi-dogu039ya-guney039e-donmeyiz-haberi-172151>> (13.06.2018), translation by A.K.

and the JDP's gradual distancing from Israel; b) *its cultural-religious drive*, visible in the JDP's cultural-religious affinity with the Arab world rather than the Kemalist laicists; c) *its economic drive*, springing from the willingness of the JDP's electorate and the newly growing Anatolian bourgeoisie to open up to emerging markets in the Middle East, Africa, the Caucasus, and Central Asia at a time of growing Euroscepticism since 2005; and d) *its transformative drive*, or European Union (EU) anchor, which prioritises its appearance as a stable, democratic, liberal, peaceful and efficient country.¹⁰ Retrospectively speaking, the last drive seems to be rather weak, while the others remain quite strong.

Erdoğan attributes an Islamic and Ottoman meaning to the kind of civilisation constituted by his antecessors, from the founders of the Ottoman State to the historical actors who strengthened it. In the Istanbul speech on 3 March 2017, he poetically explains the ways in which cultural hegemony can be installed in Turkey against the Kemalist regime – a regime that he considers to be alienated from the authentic Ottoman and Islamic composition:

“If you don't look at Istanbul from Fatih's eyes, you'll see a city that is just a mixture of stone and concrete and sea. If you do not look at Bursa from the eyes of Orhan Gazi and Edirne from the eyes of Sultan Murat, you will not know the secrets of these cities and the civilization they represent. Once you do not look at our waving flag with the eyes of our martyrs, veterans, that colour, that crescent, that star cannot say anything beyond being a graphic.

However, what does Arif Nihat Asya say? ‘O white and red ornament of blue skies, / My sister's wedding dress, the last cloth of my martyr, / My bright and waving flag! / I have read your epic, I will write your epic.’ Yes, what we need is a consciousness of national culture to see our flag like this. Remember, you can rule by elections, votes and polls, but cultural hegemony needs labour, hard work, and sweat.

We must rediscover and reconstruct our cultural values with a universalist perspective against cultural alienation and imperialism. The fact that the form of a cultural product is indigenous and national does not preclude the universalization of its meaning and message.”

Reciting the names of the Ottoman sultans, as well as a popular conservative and nationalist poet renowned for his poems about the national flag and martyrs, Erdoğan delivers the message to the public that he wants to see upcoming generations on the side of Islamic civilisation enmeshed with the Ottoman legacy. In the same speech, he gives clues about what he means by “civilisation”. In another speech delivered at a newly opened university in Istanbul, Ibn

¹⁰ Kirişçi, Kemal, Turkey's “Demonstrative Effect” and the Transformation of the Middle East, in: *Insight Turkey* 13 (2011), No. 2/4, pp. 33–55.

Khaldun University, on 21 October 2017, Erdoğan makes clear what he understands by civilisation: An Islamic civilisation, and Turkey unquestionably belongs to it.

“The essence of civilisation is faith, and religion constitutes an umbrella over civilisation [...]. The prophet Mohammad created the pillars of Islamic civilisation, and its roots are laid in the Quran [...]. Civilisation is not only composed of science and technique; faith and social solidarity are even more important constituents. In this respect, the style and dimensions of Western civilisation and Islamic civilisation are different. For example, for a city to be considered civilised according to Western civilisation, there should be city lights on roads, no mud on the streets, whereas according to Islamic civilization, the main indicators of a civilised city is to be able to go out without locking the door, to extend the hand to everyone in need, and even to care tenderly for street animals. This is what we call civilisation. Having 40-storey buildings or 100-storey buildings does not make you civilized. Unfortunately, we have also fallen into this trap.”¹¹

Erdoğan’s understanding of civilisation utterly differs from the earlier understanding of civilisation in Turkish politics. The Kemalist elite believed that the advance of the Western, and hence European, civilisation is mostly based on material and scientific progress. This is why Islamists believed that Islam had to be retained carefully through the end of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of the Turkish nation-state. The leading ideologue of Turkish nationalism, Ziya Gökalp, also drew a distinction between “*hars*” (culture) and “*medeniyet*” (civilisation) in his works. The former constitutes the bundle of local-national moral, religious, traditional values that make the Turkish nation distinct from other nations, while the latter is perceived as a set of material processes such as development, progress, urbanisation, science, and technology.¹²

In this regard, the founding motto of the new Turkish nation was put forth by Gökalp: “We belong to the Turkish nation, the Muslim religious community and the European civilization.”¹³ Hence, the Kemalist mythology claims that Turkish ethnicity, Islamic faith, and European civilisation are the main constituents of Turkish national identity. In contrast to the Kemalist view, Erdoğan’s understanding of civilisation is essentially composed of Islamic faith overruling ethnic and material components, which are attributed to Western and European civilisation. In the following extract, again taken from the speech in Istanbul on 3 March 2017, he highlights the ontological importance of remaining within the confines of civilisation, in other words, within the confines of the Islamic faith. Addressing the members of the Forum, he

¹¹ Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip, Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan, Medeniyetler Şurası’nın resmî açılışında konuştu, in: İbn Haldun Üniversitesi, URL: <<http://www.ihu.edu.tr/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-medeniyetler-surasinin-resmi-acilisinda-konustu>> (10.11.2018), translation by A.K.

¹² Berkes, Niyazi, Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization. Selected Essays of Ziya Gökalp, New York 1959; Gökalp, Ziya, Türklesmek, Islamlasmak, Muasirlasmak, Istanbul 1976.

¹³ Gökalp, Türklesmek.

urges them to work on a roadmap that will prepare the Turkish nation to be devoted to its authentic faith:

“My expectation from you is as follows: Prepare for us a practical road map with a depth and a vision of the future. You need to work for this very well. Let’s work it out and put it into practice. I would like to say that I will be a follower of every reasonable and feasible proposal that will be put forth here. I will form a delegation to this end.

It is for this purpose that we are gathered here today for the National Culture Forum. Let’s not forget that if we forget our civilization, we lose everything. If we lose our culture, we disappear. If we leave our identity, our personality, our authenticity, we will be lost in the masses. In every occasion, we are chanting ‘*One nation, one flag, one homeland, one state.*’ These principles constitute the security valve of our independence and our future. In order to be able to look confidently to our future, not to be dispersed to fragmentation, and in the face of those who want to divide us, we need to be much more alive, intact, and strong as brothers. We will all be one Turkey.

In order to address this goal, we must protect our national culture. As the deceased Cemil Meriç once said, when we are stormed, we should take care of our books, our culture and our civilization. As we move away from our culture, we know that we will alienate ourselves, and as we become alien to ourselves, we will enter the yoke of those who are stronger.” [Emphasis by the author]

Erdoğan’s understanding of civilisation has a strong religio-cultural bias towards Islam, and he endeavours to distance the belt of civilisation to which Turkey belongs from European civilisation.

Furthermore, he introduces another *mythopractice* that is an alternative to Kemalist myth-making.¹⁴ To that effect, the selection of the aforementioned prospective dates (2023, 2053, and 2071) is also made in reference to the historical events constituting essential milestones in Turkish national mythology. The year 2023¹⁵ refers to the centennial anniversary of the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923 following the end of the War of Independence in 1922. At first glance, the selection of 2023 may seem to be an attempt to celebrate the Kemalist victory. However, to replace the Kemalist, laicist, and militarist narrative with a rather more

¹⁴ Friedman, Jonathan, The Past in the Future. History and the Politics of Identity, in: American Anthropologist 94 (1992), No. 4/4, pp. 837–859.

¹⁵ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced the JDP’s vision for 2023 prior to the parliamentary elections held in 2011. For further details on the 2023 vision, see N.N., 2023 Political Vision, in: AK Parti, URL: <<https://www.akparti.org.tr/english/akparti/2023-political-vision>> (03.11.2018).

neo-Ottoman, Islamist, and conservative one, the JDP leadership has systematically challenged the commemoration of secular and republican days institutionalised by the Kemalist state, such as 19 May (Youth Day, marking the beginning of the War of Independence in 1919), 30 August (Victory Day, marking the end of the War of Independence in 1922), and 23 April (National Sovereignty Day, marking the foundation of the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1920).

Instead of these republican days, the JDP elite has emphasised the celebration and commemoration of an alternative historiography such as 29 May (Conquest Day, signifying the occupation of Constantinople in 1453), 18 March (Çanakkale Victory Day, commemorating the Ottomans' victory over the Allied powers during World War I in 1915), 29 April (marking the victory of Kut al-Amara by the Ottoman army against the British army during World War I in the city of Kut, Iraq, in 1916), and 15 July (recalling the failed coup attempt in 2016). What is mostly highlighted in these commemorations is the nation of Islam and the Ottoman imperial legacy rather than Turkish nationalism. The formation of an alternative national historiography is an attempt to transform Turkish statehood as founded by the Kemalist elite that embraced a secularist and militarist legacy.

Other than the centennial commemoration of the establishment of the Republic in 1923, there are two different dates often mentioned by the JDP elite: 2053 and 2071. The former is approximately the sixth centennial of the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453. The latter is the millenary of the victory of the Seljuk Turks over the Byzantine Empire in Manzikert in eastern Turkey, which opened the doors of Anatolia to the Turkish tribes. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has started to mention both dates frequently, particularly since he became President in 2014.¹⁶ Both dates are perceived by the president as a homage to the civilisational distinctiveness of the Turkish nation that is the bearer of the nation of Islam against others, particularly against Christian civilisations. In a speech delivered at the opening of the new Istanbul airport on 29 October 2018, Erdoğan once again reiterated his emphasis on these three specific dates, bridging the alleged gap in Turkish historiography:

“We will, inshallah, crown our great journey, which has been going on in a historical continuity from the Seljuk Empire to the Ottoman Empire and from there to the young Republic of Turkey, with our 2023 goals, and raise it to an upper level with our 2053 and 2071 visions. Every development, from our victories, which have started with Manzikert and have been continuing

¹⁶ For further details on the use of these two dates, see the official website of the Turkish Presidency, Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip, I Believe in Our Youth to Whom We Have Entrusted Turkey's Visions for 2053 and 2071, in: Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, URL: <<https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/75101/2053-ve-2071-vizyonlarimizi-emanet-ettigimiz-gencligimize-inaniyorum>> (02.11.2018).

over the last century in Çanakkale, Kut Al Amara, Dumlupınar and Cyprus, to our humanitarian approach in Syria, is a testament to our nation's noble stance."¹⁷

Turkey's centennial political vision for 2023 is more practical and less political than the public deployment of the other two dates, as the former involves various objectives to be met with regard to domestic politics, societal projections, and international politics. However, the sexcentenary vision of 2053 and the millenarian objective of 2071 are bound to remain at a rhetorical level.¹⁸

The past that effects the present is a past that is constructed and/or reproduced in the present. This is what Friedman calls "mythopractice", which is not about the realisation of myth in practice but about the practice of myth-making.¹⁹ As is clear from the ways in which the myths of 1071 and 1453 have been deployed by the JDP, the imposition of a model of the past on the present occurs as a wilful act in the right-wing populist trajectory. It is a wilful act because the artisans of mythopractice know that myths flatten the complexity, the nuance, and the performative contradictions of human history, which is instead presented as a simplistic and often univocal story.²⁰

Conclusion

Erdoğan's speeches, especially that from March 2017 in Istanbul, display significant ruptures from the Kemalist understanding of modernity as they erect barriers between Western and European civilisation, on the one hand, and Islamic civilisation, on the other. Both Erdoğan's actions and discourses seem to be based on the idea of undoing the political and societal changes made by the Kemalist elite. To be more precise, his political discourse celebrates Islamic civilisation, the country's Ottoman past, authentic Turkish culture, and religious education. Erdoğan wilfully retreats from what the Kemalist elite wanted to achieve. In other words, his speeches underline the will to turn away from Western civilisation and to return to an "authentic" Islamic civilisation. This reactionary act of going back to the basics is a sharp rupture from what Ziya Gökalp introduced in the name of the formation of modern Turkish nationalism prior to World War I. In his article "New Ottomans/*Yeni Osmanlılar*", Ziya Gökalp

¹⁷ Erdoğan, Recep Tayyip, President Erdoğan's Message on 29 October Republic Day, in: Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, URL: <<https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/speeches-statements/558/99431/president-erdogan-s-message-on-29-october-republic-day>> (02.11.2018).

¹⁸ Zan, Tao, "Turkey Dream" and the China-Turkish Cooperation under "One Belt and One Road" Initiative, in: Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies 10 (2016), No. 3/4, pp. 50–72.

¹⁹ Friedman, The Past in the Future, p. 853.

²⁰ Barthes, Roland, Mythologies, New York 1972; Bell, Duncan S.A., Mythscapes. Memory, Mythology and National Identity, in: The British Journal of Sociology 54 (2003), No. 1/4, pp. 63–81.

stated that Ottoman civilisation would emerge from Eastern spirituality and Western materialism.²¹ For him, the Ottomans should neither be imprisoned within Eastern civilisation nor should they be blind imitators of the West. In his book titled *Türkleşmek, İslam, Muasırlaşmak* (Turkification, Islam and Modernisation), he argued that it was time to head towards Western civilization from Islamic civilization and described the Turkish nation as a member of the Altaic language family, Islamic congregation, and European universalist civilization. Gökalp saw no harm in adapting Western science and technology.²²

The Kemalist modernisation project has been defined as composed in equal parts of Europeanisation, secularisation and universalisation. In this regard, the Kemalist projection of modernisation, or Europeanisation, has been shaped by future-oriented projects of internationalisation, technological advancement, urbanisation, and secularisation. In contrast, the JDP's alternative modernist projection is more likely to highlight tradition-oriented concepts such as re-Islamisation, re-nationalisation, de-Europeanisation, and a deep-rooted scepticism towards progress, science and technology.

Atatürk wanted to break with the past at the expense of creating ambivalences in the formation and expression of Turkish identity. His reforms constituted a coherent and systematic inclination towards the West and aimed at reaching the cultural, industrial, and economic level of the European states. Atatürk expressed his desire for Westernisation “to reach the level of contemporary civilizations.”²³ Western civilisation was chosen “not for it is the civilization of the West, but because it represents the modern civilization which incorporates values created by entire humanity in thousands of years by adding an independent, scientific, and rationalist philosophy of life.”²⁴

By today, however, we know that the project of Europeanisation has itself not been free from contradictions and ambivalence. In the relationship between Europe and the outer world, Europe has become used to exercising dominance to countries it perceives as peripheral. This development stretches from the time of colonial practices, for example, in the Middle East, to the period of post-colonial hegemony, for example, in the Maghreb, and on to the EU's contemporary policies to keep applicant countries at a distance if the EU's political and economic interests are not fully accepted by third countries – for example, with regard to Turkey. Within Europe, certain societal groups have increasingly been side-lined by technological and economic progress. They form a part of the population that has little prospect of a prosperous life, and Turkish migrants are rather likely to belong to that group.

²¹ Gökalp, *Türkleşmek*, p. 64.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 42.

²³ İnan, Afet, *Mustafa Kemal Atatürk'ten Yazdıklarım*, Ankara 1971, p. 37.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

These elements do not fully explain the shift in Erdoğan's model of civilisation as developed (mainly) in the speech on 3 May 2017. However, they indicate that shortcomings of Europeanisation have facilitated a line of argumentation that attributes an Islamic and Ottoman meaning to civilisation that can be constructed from the writings of the Prophet Mohammad to those of the founders of the Ottoman State. For Erdoğan, the essence of civilisation is not science and technology but faith. In this sense, his understanding of modernisation is utterly different from that of the Kemalists, and the ambivalences of Europeanisation help to weaken the Kemalist interpretation of the West. While the Kemalists made a clear distinction between *hars* (culture) and *medeniyet* (civilisation), similar to the current interpretation of civilisation in the age of globalisation, Erdoğan is more inclined to reduce civilisation to culture and religion, thus erasing the distinction made by sociologists of the 19th and 20th centuries between culture and civilisation. In contrast to earlier sociological and philosophical trends defining civilisation on the basis of the material processes of industrialisation, capitalism, colonialism and urbanisation²⁵, Erdoğan's statements are more in line with Samuel Huntington's culturalist attempt to reduce civilisation to religion and culture.

JDP's current emphasis on Islam, neo-Ottomanism and non-scholastic thinking denotes that Erdoğan and his companions are keen on forming a belief system that is marked by a rupture that can best be understood by the theory of multiple modernities, which explains the foundation of an alternative cultural hegemony on an ethno-religious basis. Shmuel Eisenstadt's definition of the idea of multiple modernities "presumes that the best way to explain the history of modernities is to see it as a story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs."²⁶ Hence, the ongoing attempts among the JDP elite to form an alternative cultural hegemony show the relevance of the theory of multiple modernities in translating the political discourse of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Ayhan Kaya, Oration of the Nation in Turkey: From Secularization to Re-Islamization, in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte, 2021, <www.europa.clio-online.de/essay/id/fdae-113103>.

Dieser Essay bezieht sich auf folgende Quelle: Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: We Should Set New Cultural Goals for Ourselves in Accordance with the 2023 Vision (March 3rd 2017), in: Themenportal Europäische Geschichte, 2021, <www.europa.clio-online.de/quelle/id/q63-75001>.

²⁵ Elias, Norbert, *Civilization, Power and Knowledge. Selected Writings* (Heritage of Sociology Series; 1998), Chicago 1998.

²⁶ Eisenstadt, Shmuel N., *Multiple Modernities*, in: *Daedalus* 129 (2000), No. 1/4, pp. 1–29, here p. 2.