

## NEO-OTTOMANISM AND ERDOGANISM AS A NEW IDEA OF TURKISH IMPERIALISM

### НЕООСМАНИЗМ І ЕРДОГАНІЗМ ЯК НОВА ІДЕЯ ТУРЕЦЬКОГО ІМПЕРІАЛІЗМУ

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The article deals with the emergence and formation of several modern ideologies that dominate the modern Turkish narrative, in its domestic and foreign policy. These two ideological narratives are neo-Ottomanism and Erdoganism. These two paradigms serve to set out tactics and strategies for the development of Turkish society in the future. The concept of neo-Ottomanism is based on nostalgia for the former greatness of the Ottoman Empire. It implies on a historical and spiritual connection between the modern Republic of Turkey and the Ottoman Empire. The regional policy of the Turkish Republic is based on its interests in such regions as the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia, the Crimean Peninsula, the Caucasus and the Balkan Peninsula. The Arab Spring gave Turkey a chance to take control of the Arab countries, which were plunged into chaos, anarchy and civil wars. Also, in 2015, Turkey received a mechanism to put pressure on the European Union with the help of Arab refugees. Thus, Turkey was able to increase its influence not only in Muslim countries, but also on European countries. Gradually, Turkey was able to take the position of not only a regional leader, but also an influential country, but also a state that can influence many regions. In symbiosis with neo-Ottomanism came the ideology of Erdoganism, named after the leader of the modern Turkish Republic, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The charisma and populism of the Turkish leader, as well as his religiosity, have become a feature in his foreign and domestic policy. The ideology of Erdoganism and neo-Ottomanism is aimed at the conservative part of the Turkish population, and implies a departure from the reforms and ideology of Kemalism. The author comes to the conclusion that these two ideologies, plus the geopolitical situation, allow Turkey to increase its political potential and help achieve its goals.

**Key words:** Ottoman Empire, Turkey, ideology, Neo-Ottomanism, Erdoganism.

У статті розглядається виникнення та становлення кількох сучасних ідеологій, які домінують у сучасному Турецькому наративі, у її внутрішній та зовнішній політиці. Два ці ідеологічні наративи, це неоосманізм і ердоганізм. Ці дві парадигми служать для вистоявання тактики та стратегії розвитку турецького суспільства на майбутню перспективу. Концепція неоосманізм будується на ностальгії за колишньою величиною Османської імперії. Воно має на увазі історичний та духовний зв'язок між сучасною Турецькою республікою та Османською імперією. Регіональна політика Турецької республіки будується на її інтересах у таких регіонах як Близький Схід, Північна Африка, Центральна Азія, Кримський півострів, Кавказ та Балканський півострів. Арабська весна дала Туреччині шанс взяти під свій контроль арабські країни, які поринули в хаос, анархію та громадянські війни. Так само у 2015 році Туреччина отримала механізм для тиску на Європейський Союз за допомогою арабських біженців. Таким чином, Туреччина змогла збільшити свій вплив не лише в мусульманських країнах, а також у країнах Європи. Поступово Туреччина змогла вийти на позиції не лише регіонального лідера, а й впливової країни, а й держави, яка може впливати на багато регіонів. У симбіозі з неоосманізмом прийшла і ідеологія Ердоганізму, названа на честь лідера сучасної Турецької республіки, Реджепа Тайіпа Ердогана. Харизма і популізм Турецького лідера, а також його релігійність стали особливістю у його зовнішній та внутрішній політиці. Ідеологія Ердоганізму та неоосманізму спрямована на консервативну частину населення Туреччини, і має на увазі відхід від реформ та ідеології Кемалізму. Автор приходиться до думки, що ці дві ідеології, плюс геополітична обстановка, дозволяють Туреччині нарощувати свій політичний потенціал і допомагає досягати поставлених цілей.

**Ключові слова:** Османська імперія, Туреччина, ідеологія, Неоосманізм, Ердоганізм.

**Introduction.** After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, Turkey found itself in a new geopolitical reality. On the one hand, it lost its geopolitical significance for the West, as an ally of the United States against the USSR, on the other hand, new opportunities appeared for Turkey due to the change in the political map of the world, the emergence of new Turkic-speaking states, a power vacuum in the Middle East region and geopolitical changes at Balkan Peninsula. The Turkish elite has not forgotten the former greatness of the Ottoman Empire. In the early nineties, on a reflexive level, the Turkish leadership tried to formulate a new ideology of neo-Ottomanism and pan-Turkism. These two ideological

concepts meant that Turkey should become the leader of the Muslim and Turkic world.

**Main material.** From the point of view of scientific terminology, among the scientific world, there is no clearly developed concept that explains the term neo-Ottomanism. On the other hand, according to the actions of Turkey in its domestic and foreign policy, one can notice the strengthening of national radicalism. Over the past quarter of a century, Turkey's domestic policy has shifted towards the development of a conservative, Islamic and traditional society, which was reflected in the rejection of reforms and the ideology of Kemalism. Turkey's foreign policy has taken the form of aggressive and expansive

state activity. The country began to play a passive and active role of intervention in the social and political life of the Balkan countries, the Caucasus, the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia. If you look at these regions, you will notice that many of these territories were part of the Ottoman Empire in the past.

Burashnikova A.B., in her article “Neo-Pan-Turkism and Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey’s Foreign Policy”, compares the ideological concepts of Neo-Ottomanism and Pan-Turkism. In her opinion, these ideological paradigms were formed under the influence of nostalgia for the former greatness of Turkey (the Great Turan, the Turkic Khaganate and the Ottoman Empire). The author concludes that pan-Turkism is based on such ideas as the unification of peoples by ethnicity to the Turks, Islam, common language and Eastern mentality.

The ideological platform of Neo-Pan-Turkism did not justify itself for Turkey, A. B. Burashnikova believes, since the young Turkic states of the Caucasus and Central Asia wanted to pursue a more independent and sovereign policy. For domestic and foreign policy, neo-Ottomanism proved to be more convenient to use. Through the ideological prism of neo-Ottomanism, Turkey is able to become a guide and leader for Muslim countries, but at the same time, it is forced to compete for this right with the kingdoms of the Arabian Peninsula, in particular with Saudi Arabia and Iran, which professes Shiite Islam, and whose ideology is built on the concept Islamic fundamentalism and the former greatness of Persia [1, c. 65–69].

Mehdiyev E.T., in his article “Neo-Ottomanism in the regional policy of Turkey”, defines neo-Ottomanism as a strategic course aimed at returning the “Ottoman past” taking into account modern realities. This ideology is based on four principles: blood, Ottoman thinking, soil and language. The main task of the ideology is the complete rejection of the ideology of Kemalism, the formation of a new Ottoman thinking and the construction of a supra-Turkish identity through the application of the mechanism of humanitarian and economic policy. Also, military methods can be used. The ultimate goal of neo-Ottomanism is to make Turkey the new supra-regional leader [2, c. 32–39].

The American political scientist George Friedman, in his book “The Next 10 Years”, although he does not give a clear definition of the concept of neo-Ottomanism, describes the ideological concept of Turkey, which coincides with the ideology of neo-Ottomanism. He writes: “In the coming decade, we will see the beginning of Turkey’s rise to regional dominance” [3].

The former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoglu, in 2009, at a meeting with deputies from the Justice and Development Party, called Turkey the “New Ottoman Empire” and added that: “We have the legacy of the Ottomans. They call it

neo-Ottoman. Yes, we are neo-Ottoman. We have to deal with the countries of our region” [4].

In the last decade, Turkey has been actively pursuing a policy of neo-Ottomanism. Its political decisions both within the country and its foreign policy clearly indicate that Turkey intends to expand its territories, subjugate Turkic and Muslim countries to its influence, and also reach a new level of influence in the international arena.

Today, the dominant political party in the Republic of Turkey is the Justice and Development Party. It was founded in 2001 by former members of the Islamic Virtue Party Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his supporters.

In the early nineties, there was a surge in the popularity of Islam in Turkey. Islamic schools began to open across the country, the wearing of Muslim clothing became fashionable, gender segregation began and support for religious Sufi orders began. In 1995, the Virtue Party won a landslide victory in parliamentary elections and became the first Islamic political organization to win the Turkish general election. In the same year, Recep Tayyip Erdogan became the mayor of Istanbul. However, already in 1997, a military coup took place in Turkey, and in 1998, the Constitutional Court banned the Virtue party, accusing it of violating the secular order.

In 2002, the Justice and Development Party, in the elections to the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Mejlis), received an absolute majority of seats. The main political opponents of Erdogan’s party were Turkish secular parties, with which, in 2007–2008, political conflicts arose. In 2010, the Justice and Development Party was able to implement a package of reforms through a nationwide referendum that included the subordination of the military to civilian courts. This allowed the legislature to have more powers to appoint judges. By such actions, the Party marked the beginning of the gradual removal of the military from the constitutional right to exercise control over the activities of political parties aimed at overthrowing the secular constitutional order.

The leaders of the Justice and Development Party were the neo-Ottomanist ideologue Ahmet Davutoglu, who in different years held the government posts of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister of Turkey, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, also the Prime Minister and President of Turkey [5].

Today, among political scientists, the topic of discussion remains the question of how close the Justice and Development Party is in its content to the religious and political ideology (Islamism). Many researchers believe that the party charter of the Party, nevertheless, reflects its commitment to the ideology of democracy and Kemalism [6].

Other scholars, such as Ihsan Dagi, believe that the party adheres to the ideology of conservative centrism. But at the same time, elements of not political, but social Islam are observed in the party.

This is explained by the fact that political Islam is not able to compete in the era of globalization [7, c. 88–106].

On the other hand, the gradual departure of the Justice and Development Party towards political Islam, in the first decade of the 21st century, may testify to the confirmation of Samuel Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations. In this paradigm, modern Turkey, its leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is trying to assume the role of a common Islamic leader, and the ideology of neo-Ottomanism, is trying to resist the ideology of globalization, as a paradigm of Western Christian, Catholic and Protestant civilization.

In the early years of its existence, the Party could not afford to use Islamist rhetoric and Islamic slogans until the moment of usurpation of power.

Turkish researcher of political Islam Recep Dogan believes that the Justice and Development Party was able to transform and modernize political Islam so that it could meet today's realities of the country's political life. We should also agree with the author's opinion that, despite the primary rhetoric of the Party, based on the democratic principles of loyalty to the ideas of Kemalism and the protection of human rights, after a full-fledged usurpation of power, it nevertheless began to carry out a total Islamization of social life in the country and its foreign policy.

At present, the Justice and Development Party hardly hides the fact that it has taken a course towards desecularization and the gradual rejection of Atatürk's reforms [8, c. 89–101].

In order to understand the modern political course of the Republic of Turkey, the ideology of the Justice and Development Party and the concept of neo-Ottomanism, one should also analyze the life path and political development of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Recep Tayyip Erdogan was born on February 26, 1954 in the city of Rize in the northeastern part of the country. He spent his childhood in Istanbul. In 1973, the future president of Turkey, he received his secondary education at the Imam Hatip Religious Vocational School. From his youth, Erdogan was a very religious person, which influenced his political life in adulthood. While still at university, he took an active civic position, in 1976 he was elected chairman of the youth branch of the National Salvation Party in the Beyoglu district of Istanbul, and later, in the same year, he headed the party branch in Istanbul. Erdogan held this post until 1980, until a military coup took place, after which all political parties were banned.

During the period of the prohibition of political parties, Recep Tayyip Erdogan went to work for the city transport council, as a consultant. An interesting fact is that his boss, a retired colonel of the Turkish army, demanded that Erdogan shave off his mustache, to which the future leader of Turkey refused and was fired. The fact is that at that time, wearing a mustache

was not welcomed in Turkey, since this attribute emphasized nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire, when they were common among subjects.

After 1983, Erdogan continued to be active in Turkish politics. On March 27, 1994, he was elected mayor of Istanbul. During his time as mayor, Erdogan solved the problems with the supply of clean water to the city, the problems of garbage collection, cleaning the city's air; more than 50 bridges, driveways, motorways were built. By taking over the city with a \$2 billion debt, Erdogan was able to attract \$4 billion worth of investment. Through his actions as mayor of Istanbul, Erdogan has earned trust and respect among the population of the city and recognition in the country.

On December 12, 1997, in the city of Siirt, Erdogan read out an excerpt from a poem recommended by the Ministry of National Education: "Mosques are our barracks, domes are our helmets, minarets are bayonets. Our soldiers are full of faith". After this event, Erdogan was removed from his post as mayor of Istanbul and convicted of inciting religious hatred.

Although the future leader of Turkey was sentenced to ten months, he spent only four in prison. With the beginning of the 2000s, Erdogan changed his political rhetoric from tough Islamic to conservative-democratic and pro-Western. This allowed the Justice and Development Party to win the elections in Turkey. From that moment, Recep Tayyip Erdogan began to rapidly advance to the political Olympus of the Turkish Republic. In 2003, he was elected Prime Minister of the country, and in 2014, the twelfth President of Turkey.

It is believed that Erdogan is a deeply religious person. Nostalgia for the former greatness of the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, as the center of the Islamic world, left an imprint on his formation, both as a person and as a politician [9].

After 2016, Erdogan began to pursue an already open domestic and foreign policy of Islamization of Turkey. Many researchers of political changes in modern Turkey and its president note that the country has an ideology of political Islamism, neo-Ottomanism and Erdoganism. The term "Erdoganism" means the policy and reforms of the current President of the Republic of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, by analogy with the term Kemalism – the ideology and reforms of the first president and founder of the Republic of Turkey.

An essential explanation of the concept of the term "Erdoganism" is currently missing, since scientists interpret the meaning of the ideology of Erdoganism in different ways. At the same time, all scientists agree that in modern Turkey there is an autocratic regime with a personality cult of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It should also be noted that despite the fact that Turkey is regarded as an autocratic state, it continues to be considered a democratic country by Western countries.

A number of scholars believe that there is a conservative democracy in Turkey, but not a liberal one. For example, on the website of the organization “Open Democracy”, which is funded by the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the George Soros Foundation, as well as other private individuals, it is reported that in Turkey there is a personality cult of President Erdogan, and the country is a tribal state. The elite of the country does not always comply with the norms of laws, and the laws themselves are often rewritten [10].

Erdoganism takes its foundation from Turkish conservatism. The ruling Justice and Development Party interprets its ideology as a conservative democracy. Thus, the current conservative Turkish democracy does not accept social and political reforms that could lead to a liberal democracy. Turkish conservatism is essentially the opposite of Kemalism ideology. Turkish-type conservatism, criticizes secularism, statism, populism, and rejects the pro-Western reform of Turkey [11, с. 1–9].

The ideology of Erdoganism has a hybrid construction, which consists of such paradigms as Erdogan’s personality cult, political Islam, Turkish conservatism, neo-Ottomanism and pan-Turkism. In this construction, Turkish conservatism plays the role of a narrative that proposes to abandon Atatürk’s reforms and return Turkey to the social construction of an Islamic state. Political and social Islam is designed to return Turkey to

the role of the leader of Islamic states, which it was in the era of the Ottoman Empire. The project of neo-Ottomanism, as part of the Erdoganism ideology model, is aimed at returning Turkey’s influence in regional geopolitics, which was once controlled by the Ottoman Empire, as well as expanding influence on the European continent, primarily as a mechanism for influencing the European Union. All these elements are the components of the ideology of “Erdoganism”.

Erdogan’s religious rhetoric is often criticized by the conservative Islamic community, which believes that ordinary political populism is hiding behind religious slogans. Erdogan himself and his party are interested in the conservative and religious mood of the voters. The main element of criticism to which the ideology of “Erdoganism” is subjected by Turkish Islamists is the personality cult of the president, propaganda glorifying his actions and his personality. Turkish Islamists perceive these processes as an attempt to put Erdogan’s personality above Allah [12].

**Conclusion.** Summarizing the above, it can be argued that “Erdoganism” is a modern stage in the development of the political life of the Republic of Turkey and, by all its signs, is aimed at curtailing Atatürk’s reforms, rejecting the ideology of Kemalism, more prone to skepticism of the model of liberal democracy, returning to conservative and religious narratives, as well as an attempt to build a new Turkish empire, based on reflection on the historical greatness of the Ottoman Empire.

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