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Necmettin Erbakan's Views on Turkey's Modernisation Process

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights Necmettin Erbakan's views on Turkey's modernisation process. Erbakan, the prime minister of the Republic of Turkey from 1996 to 1997, is an influential politician, engineer, academic, and intellectual. Also, Erbakan is the first devout president in the history of the Republic of Turkey. He examined Turkish modernisation, which he saw as one of Turkey's most important problems, and made important studies on this subject. He thought that the main mistake made in the Turkish modernisation process was to "imitate the West". Therefore, he thought that while Turkey wanted to modernise, it became Westernised, that is, modernisation and Westernisation were confused with each other in Turkey. This idea of his reveals that Turkey has taken very concrete steps towards Westernisation and, as a result, has lost the characteristics of traditional Turkish and Islamic culture. Trying to modernise by imitating the West, based on Erbakan's ideas, is a foreign model for the Turkish people who adhere to Islamic identity and values. Therefore, this study suggests that there should be a more inclusive alternative modernisation model for the Turkish nation based on Erbakan's ideas.

Keywords: *Modernisation, Turkish Modernisation, Westernisation, Necmettin Erbakan, National Outlook Movement, Fair Economic Order.*

INTRODUCTION

Modernisation is the restructuring of society considering discoveries and innovations. Traditional characters of a culture's political and economic institutions with modernisation are reshaped (Amir, Shuriye and Ismail, 2011). Historically, modernisation results from changes in Western Europe and North America's social, economic, and political systems from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. These changes later became a process that spread to other European countries and then to South America, Asia, and Africa (Eisenstadt, 1966). According to Alain Touraine, modernisation characterises "modernity in action" (Touraine, 1995). According to Marshall Berman, modernisation refers to the processes in which human beings live in a constant state of becoming, a mode of vital experience (Berman, 2002). Modernisation theory is based on the idea of human progress. Modernisation theory emerged in the Enlightenment era, believing that technological progress would give humanity increasing control over nature (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). Until the seventeenth century, modernisation was used as a term expressing the developments in secularism and rational thought and getting rid of the superstitious belief system (Weiner, 1966). However, this concept reached the same level as Western countries after the seventeenth century. It especially meant reaching the technological and scientific level of the West (Lerner, 1968).

Modernisation is a multifaceted process that includes changes in all areas of human thought and activity. At the psychological level, modernisation involves a fundamental shift in values, attitudes, and expectations. Traditional man expects continuity in nature and society and does not believe in the human capacity to change or control. On the contrary, modern man accepts the possibility of change and believes in its desirability (Lerner, 1958). At the intellectual level, modernisation involves the enormous

expansion of man's knowledge of his environment and the dissemination of this knowledge in society through increased literacy, mass media, and education. Demographically, modernisation means changes in life patterns, a marked increase in health and life expectancy, increased occupational, vertical, and geographic mobility, and rapid growth of the urban population instead of the rural population. Economically, there is a diversity of activities as a few simple occupations give way to many more complex occupations; the level of professional skill rises significantly; the ratio of capital to labour increases; subsistence agriculture gives way to market agriculture; and agriculture itself is losing its importance compared to commercial, industrial, and other non-agricultural activities. With the emergence of a national market, sources of the national capital, and other national economic institutions, there is a tendency to expand the geographical scope of economic activity and centralise such activities at the national level. Over time, the level of economic welfare increases, and inequalities in economic welfare decrease (Huntington, 1968).

As stated above, Modernisation is a concept related to increased industrialisation, urbanisation, literacy, education, welfare, and social mobilisation levels regardless of culture. Modernisation has been a global process that we can observe in most of the world's major cities, regardless of culture. At the societal level, modernisation increases society's economic, military, and political power and encourages its people to be culturally assertive (Huntington, 1996).

Non-Western societies, which could not provide a natural modernisation spontaneously, wanted to modernise to have the techniques and technology of the West. However, non-Western societies that want to modernise need clarification on the concepts of modernisation and Westernisation. In some countries, Modernisation and Westernisation are intertwined and used interchangeably. For example, in Turkey, these two concepts are intertwined, and the concept of Westernisation is directly understood in the same sense as modernisation (Kahraman, 2002). However, the concept of Westernisation is a concept attributed to the culture and values of Western society. Westernisation means cultural contact with and imitation of the West. Westernisation is the adoption of Western values by non-Western societies due to the superior prestige of Western lifestyles (Heath, 2004).

As can be understood from the definitions above, Westernisation focuses on culture. However, the focus of modernisation is to advance technologically and economically.

METHOD

This research aims to highlight the methodology adopted by Necmettin Erbakan and to understand how his method differs from the methodology of other researchers studying Turkish modernisation. This article also tries to explain the reasons behind Erbakan's methodology. The aims of this article were achieved through thematic content analysis of the author's works. The primary sources of this research are Erbakan's original books in Turkish, which are utilised to analyse his ideas and views on modernisation and Westernisation through a contextual analytical method. This study uses Erbakan's most significant books, including *Davamız* (Our Cause), *Türkiye'nin Temel Meseleleri* (Turkey's Fundamental Issues), *Milli Görüş* (National Outlook), *Adil Ekonomik Düzen* (Fair Economic Order). Causal and textual analysis methods are used to generate the research results and analyse these primary sources. Secondary sources, including books and journal articles, are also used to understand the thinker's methodology.

Turkish Modernisation

With the French Revolution in 1789 and its far-reaching consequences, the concept of the nation replaced the importance of religion in political and social lives, and this model was subsequently disseminated to the Muslim world. The concept of the nation became the instrument of modernity and secularism (Anderson, 2006). With the transformation of the Ottoman Empire, an Islamic form of government, into a secular nation-state, the Republic of Turkey was one of the most successful modern and secular nation-states that emerged from the Islamic world (Findley, 2010).

Having initially considered maintaining a ceremonial caliph, Turkey ultimately abolished the institution in 1924. It became a modern secular nation-state following the Treaty of Lausanne when the Republic of Turkey declared its sovereignty on 29 October 1923. The first President of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938). He was born in Thessaloniki (Salonika). He became the president of the new Turkish Republic, serving until he died in office in 1938 (Erickson, 2013). Atatürk made radical changes in Turkey to make it a secular state within a short period (Suna Kili, 2008). Following these radical changes, the Turkish state thought itself meaningful in a Western and non-religious civilisational path (Tüfekçioğlu, 1992).

Every nation has two civilisations. One is the official civilisation, and the other is the civilisation designed by humans. In other countries other than Turkey, there may be little inequality between the two. However, this situation shows itself immediately in Turkey. This dilemma is because Turkey abandons its own culture and institutions and adopts foreign cultures and institutions. Instead of creating their institutions by developing their own, the Turks borrowed the institutions of foreign peoples and produced an artificial civilisation from them (Gökalp, 1959). To understand this artificial and foreign civilisation, it is necessary to examine the intellectual structure of Atatürk and the staff who founded the Republic of Turkey. In this context, Atatürk and the cadre who founded the Republic thought that the reason for the superiority of the West was rationality. Therefore, according to them, a secular and rational culture had to be created first to modernise. According to this conception of modernity originating from positivism, the first condition for modernisation was the enlightenment of society. That is, they looked at the phenomena of “modernisation” and “progress” not as economic, social, and political progress but essentially as a movement for cultural change (Karpat, 2004).

According to Atatürk, who is in favour of total modernisation, the people of the Republic of Turkey who say “I am civilised” must show and prove that they are civilised with their mentality. Modernisation was expressed by Atatürk with the concepts of “being human”, reaching the level of contemporary civilisations and Westernisation (İnalçik, 2020). Mustafa Kemal’s adoption of European civilisation meant eradicating local cultural elements that conflicted with the Western understanding of modernity. Among these elements were tradition and Islam (Hanioğlu, 2011). To compete with the modern world, the Turkish nation must cut itself off from its recent past, especially Ottoman history. Atatürk and the cadre who founded the republic thought that the new values to be gained were superior and more acceptable than anything inherited from the past and defined as old (Bozdoğan and Kasaba, 1997). Thus, In the republic's early years, Atatürk made a series of reforms to create a modern and secular state. These reforms marked a radical transformation for Turkey, and the traditions of the Ottoman State were completely erased (Findley, 2010).

Cultural and Historical Reforms

Atatürk implemented several reforms in the cultural sphere as well. On 25 November 1925, the fez hat was banned by Atatürk; this had been introduced under Ottoman modernisation efforts in the

nineteenth century to replace the turban, but it was already considered an icon of the Islamic tradition by the 1920s. The Hat Law passed in 1925 made it compulsory for all men to wear Western-style hats (Qureshi, 2014). Atatürk organised meetings to explain these Westernisation reforms to the public. For example, he said in a public meeting with a community in *İnebolu* on 28 August 1925 that:

Gentlemen, the Turkish people who founded the Turkish Republic are civilised; they are civilised in history and reality. But I tell you as your brother, as your friend, as your father, that the people of the Turkish Republic, who claim to be civilised, must show and prove that they are civilised by their ideas and their mentality, by their family life and their way of living (Lewis, 2001).

Also, in 1927 he said,

Gentlemen, we should not wear the fez, the enemy of ignorance, heedlessness, bigotry, and progress. Instead of fez, we should wear the hat the civilised world wears and thus show that the Turkish nation is civilised (Atatürk, 2015).

With his public statements, Atatürk claimed that the hat is an integral part of civil and international clothing and wanted to convince the public (Atatürk, 1952). However, the fez has gained a religious connotation in Turkish society and has become a symbol that distinguishes Muslims from non-Muslim Westerners. In a society governed by a strictly enforced dress code for centuries, for a Muslim, wearing a Western hat meant apostasy (Turan, 2004).

Women are important political actors in the modernisation project of the Republic (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1988). In the Republic's first years, the images that best reflected the modernisation regime of the new state were the images of women performing in shorts and school gowns or dancing in ballroom dresses (Bozdoğan and Kasaba, 1997). But these visual images of the 1920s and 1930s were remote and unrealistic for the vast majority of their rural women (Graham-Brown, 1988).

Atatürk organised a public gathering in Kastamonu on 30 August 1925 and criticised the *çarşaf* (veil) as he had the fez:

In some places, I have seen women who put a piece of cloth, a towel, or something like it over their heads to hide their faces and turn their backs or huddle themselves on the ground when a man passes by. What is the meaning and sense of this behaviour? Gentlemen, can the mothers and daughters of a civilised nation adopt this strange manner, this barbarous posture? It is a spectacle that makes the nation an object of ridicule. It must be remedied at once (Lewis, 2001).

Such views and radical reforms of Atatürk angered the public, who were predominantly Muslim and socially conservative. Following the abolition of religious law and the prohibition of the fez, public rebellions became more severe. Mustafa Kemal enacted the Law of *Takriri Sükun* (Law on the Maintenance of Order) on 4 March 1925 to prevent upheavals (Mango, 2002).

By the 1930s, Atatürk created a new historical history for the Turks and Turkey. Atatürk established the *Türk Tarih Kurumu* (Turkish Historical Institution) for this purpose, seeking to airbrush anything to do with Islam and the Ottomans from Turkish historical consciousness (Karpas, 2012). According to the new identity, Turks were portrayed as the founders of civilisations in Anatolia and the Aegeans (Yesevi, 2018). The Turkish Historical Institution published a book called *Türk Tarihinin Ana*

Hatları (Main Lines of Turkish History), convening a large congress to introduce the book to all teachers and educators of the nation. This congress introduced this book to the audience, and the anthropological characteristics of the Turkish race were explained. Thus, because of this book, all Turkish students were expected to have a sense of nationalism (Cagaptay, 2006).

As can be seen, Mustafa Kemal saw no harm in importing European culture and lifestyle. He even promoted the adoption of European etiquette so that, over time, Muslim and Ottoman traditions were replaced by European culture and lifestyle (Hanioglu, 2011). In summary, under the name of modernity, the Islamic elements in the Turkish culture were eliminated, and an anti-religious cultural revolution intervening in personal privacy and choice was applied in the guise of a civilising secularism mission, which was adopted as the main direction of the state (Karpat, 2009).

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk created a new Turkey from the ruins of the Ottoman State and embarked on a great effort to both Westernise and modernise it. By taking this path, Atatürk rejected the cultural heritage of the Ottoman State and the Islamic past. He tried to substitute Turkey for a Western identity. He made Turkey, whose religion, heritage, traditions, and institutions are Muslim, a “torn country”. Both modernisation and Westernisation are desirable for Mustafa Kemal because the latter is indispensable to achieving the former, and both are possible (Huntington, 1996). Mustafa Kemal expressed this: “Countries are different, but civilisation is one, and for the progress of a nation, it is necessary to participate in this unique civilisation... We want to modernise our country. All our work is to create a modern and Western government in Turkey. What nation desires to enter civilisation but does not favour the West?” (Atatürk, 1961). With this thought, Atatürk tried to Europeanize Turkey by importing civilisation. However, non-Western societies can modernise without abandoning their cultures and adopting wholesale Western values, institutions, and practices. According to Huntington, political leaders who think they can fundamentally reshape the culture of their communities are doomed to fail. While they may introduce elements of Western culture, they cannot permanently suppress or eliminate core elements of their indigenous culture. They only produce torn countries (Huntington, 1996).

As can be seen, Turkish modernisation has taken all its inspiration from the West. Although many of Anatolia's defeated and exhausted people in the first years of the Republic adopted Atatürk's radical reforms, this thought began to change in the late 1960s. In fact, in the late 1970s, the word modernisation was perceived almost as a bad thing. In the 1980s, society began to criticise the Kemalist modernisation programme. Turkish people got tired of the “bright and prosperous tomorrow” discourse and began to question their history, past institutions, beliefs, identity, and culture. The reason for this pessimism in society was the identification of the concepts of modernisation and Westernisation. However, there is another concept of modernisation. In this concept, it was the approach of “non-Western modernisation”. (Bozdoğan and Kasaba, 1997). If the policy of modernisation without Westernisation is implemented in Turkish society, Turkish society can become contemporary without breaking the Turkish-Islamic tradition. moreover, this policy allows the state and society to meet on a more peaceful common ground in harmony and without conflict.

Necmettin Erbakan's Ideas about Modernisation

Erbakan (1926-2011), the prime minister of the Republic of Turkey from 1996 to 1997, is an influential politician, engineer, academic, and intellectual. Also, Erbakan is the first devout president in the history of the Republic of Turkey. Throughout his life, he studied the problems in Turkey and tried to produce solutions. In this context, he examined Turkish modernisation, which he saw as one of

Turkey's most important problems, and made important studies on this subject. He thought that the main mistake made in the Turkish modernisation process was to “imitate the West”. Therefore, he thought that while Turkey wanted to modernise, it became Westernised; that is, modernisation and Westernisation were confused with each other in Turkey. Erbakan believed a national modernisation model could be produced instead of this faulty modernisation.

According to Erbakan, the West is conceived as the “mother of all evils”. Therefore, Turkey must be different from the West. Erbakan’s desire to be different from the West does not mean it completely rejects the West. He argues that the technology and technical development of the West should be followed. However, he is against the adoption of the culture and values of the West. In other words, it is against Westernisation (Dagi, 2005). Erbakan thinks that Turkey’s main problem is to imitate the West. According to him, Western foreign powers aimed to make Turkey lose its identity by producing imitative mentalities in Turkey (Erbakan, 1991). In this context, Erbakan took a critical attitude towards the Westernisation of Turkey and set himself apart from other political party leaders. When Erbakan came to power before the 1995 general elections, he declared that he would end the Westernisation process. In his view, Westernisation was constructed by early Republican leaders as a rejection of traditional values and attitudes. The effect of Westernisation on the character of the state and society has been a more serious problem than the West itself. He saw the attempt to replace the Islamic-Ottoman civilisation with the Western civilisation as the source of the problems of Turkish society and aimed to liquidate Western civilisation (Dagi, 2005).

Erbakan is against Westernism, which imitates the customs and traditions of Western countries and considers those countries superior to ours. According to him, Turkey cannot leave its national identity and melt into Western countries (Erbakan, 2020). According to Erbakan, it was this Westernisation that destroyed the Ottoman state. This Westernisation has also been the cause of the moral, social, and economic crises that emerged in the Republican period (Macit, 2018). The reason why we are faced with material and moral crises in Turkey today is because of these Westernisation policies. If many young people today move away from our national values and are influenced by ideas such as materialism and anarchism, the reason for all this is a blind imitation of the West (Erbakan, 2020).

Despite this anti-Westernism, Erbakan has attached great importance to utilising all the possibilities of technology that the West monopolises today. For example, he envisaged that the technology of the West could be used to make heavy industry moves and attached importance to the progress of the nation in the material field as well as spiritual progress. Erbakan was never a person who wanted to be behind the times. Contrarily, it wants to reach the level of contemporary civilisation but wants to avoid this happening through imitation. It is not for him to blindly accept all the West’s principles and practices to modernise. He always favours the domestic and national modernisation model (Macit, 2018). According to Necmettin Erbakan, “Technology is not the legacy of the West, but the accumulation of humanity in the world”. Therefore, non-Western countries can develop their institutions and values and create domestic and national industries. Turkey, one of these countries, can eliminate the Western mentality and Westernisation with the idea of Milli Görüş Hareketi (National Outlook Movement), systematised by Erbakan, and become a modern state by establishing its domestic national industry.

Milli Görüş Hareketi (National Outlook Movement)

The main mission of the National Outlook Movement is to spread Islam and establish an “order of justice”. Also, the economic mission of the National Outlook Movement is to develop the country’s economy by developing the heavy industry and defence industry (Dalay and Friedman, 2013). More importantly, the most crucial goal of the National Outlook Movement is to get rid of the “imitative mentality”. In this direction, Erbakan aimed to stop material and moral destruction and to ensure the spread of national and moral values to society (Boyras, 2019). According to Erbakan, Turkey’s biggest problem is “the problem of imitation”. This problem is also the biggest obstacle to Turkey’s development. To eliminate this problem, it is necessary to eliminate the “imitative mentality” and replace it with the idea of “national vision”. The nation will ultimately lose its identity if this mentality is not overcome. An imitative nation cannot have advanced technology and industry, so it lags behind other societies. It is very natural for a backward nation to be economically exploited and culturally invaded by foreign cultures. As a result, that society is doomed to lose its independence. Therefore, to solve these problems, Turkey must first eliminate Western imitation. Instead of Western imitation, it should adopt the national view (Erbakan, 1991).

National Outlook Movement is an alternative modernisation movement against modernisation, which regards Western culture as superior, claims that modernisation can only be achieved by being included in this culture, and leads to alienation from the national culture (Çınar, 2005). This movement is to overcome the defeat against the West, as it was a century ago. Erbakan, the founder of this movement, never opposed the technology and science of the West while implementing this policy (Bora and Gültekingil, 2005). He opposes culture imported from the West (Yavuz, 2011). In this context, the modernisation project of the National Outlook Movement is to modernise by preserving culture and religion. Therefore, the national view is focused on development and industrialisation (Demir, 2017).

Erbakan, the founder of the National Outlook Movement, also touched upon the industrialisation movements in Turkey and criticised the post-Republican industrial policies. This is because Turkey cooperates with Western experts for its industrial policies. According to Erbakan, foreign experts tried to hinder the development of Turkish industry. For example, in 1925, the government planned to establish an iron and steel factory, and Belgian experts were brought in for the iron and steel factory. After examining Turkey for a few years, these experts brought by the state said that an iron and steel factory could not be established in Turkey. So, the construction of this factory was delayed due to the wrong advice of these experts. Then, in 1933, Austrian experts were consulted. However, their reports were similar to those of Belgian experts. However, despite all this, Turkey established an iron and steel industry factory in Karabük in 1938-1939, albeit late. As a result, Turkey lost thirteen years establishing an iron and steel factory. As can be seen, having a Western imitative mentality and admiration for Western countries has affected Turkey's industry (Erbakan, 2020). Erbakan, who thinks the industrialisation policies in Turkey are wrong, also criticises the assembly industry, another problem in Turkey. For Erbakan, the critical thing in industrialisation is real industrialisation and having the technological opportunities to make the product. For this reason, Erbakan has always supported the domestic and national industry (Erbakan, 2014).

Spiritual Development

The National Outlook movement, created by Erbakan as an alternative modernisation project, focuses on more than just material development. It focuses on spiritual development as well as material development. For Erbakan, material development is not essential without spirituality (Erbakan, 2015).

His aim in spiritual development is to oppose Westernisation and to resurrect national and spiritual values that have been forgotten because of imitating the West. According to Erbakan, Turkish government officials aimed to make Turkey a part of the West (Gülalp, 2003). In this context, Turkey has been trying to Westernise for two centuries, but it can neither Westernise nor preserve its Muslim identity. Turkish society has sought everything from education to family order, from state organisation to judicial system within Western culture, and has rejected its own culture, values, history, and identity to be Western. Thus, Turkey could not achieve spiritual development (Erbakan, 1996).

Turkey cannot unite with Western countries in the same political structure, as Turkey's social structure, worldview, history, and culture differ from the West. Therefore, according to Erbakan, the new generation must be raised free from the imitative mentality of the West (Erbakan, 1973). The way to achieve this is to base the current education system on national and moral values. In this way, new generations will not be strangers to their identity and culture. In this way, individuals who are proud of their past, protect their customs and traditions with respect, are away from all kinds of imitations, and have high national and spiritual feelings will be raised (Erbakan, 1975). In this context, the measures to be taken to preserve, sustain, develop, and transfer the national culture to new generations and the whole world are as follows:

1. The curriculum and contents of courses such as ethics, sociology, philosophy, and psychology, which are of great importance in providing young people with a worldview, should be rewritten to ensure adherence to national beliefs and spiritual values.
2. Positive sciences textbooks should include sections introducing our nation's services to these sciences.
3. Care should be taken to ensure that various programmes broadcast on television and radio are compatible with national culture, morality, and beliefs. Special educational programmes prepared by authorised experts in the field of spiritual sciences should be broadcast through radio and television.
4. Legislation should be prepared to eliminate the obstacles encountered in implementing spiritual development mobilisation (Arpacı, 2012).

As seen, Erbakan attaches great importance to spiritual and material development. The point to be noted here is that to modernise from the West, which we consider materially superior to us, we only need to take industry and technology, which are the cornerstones of modernisation. In this context, we can create a national model by blending our national and spiritual values with the material values of the West without losing our national and spiritual values.

CONCLUSION

In this article, Necmettin Erbakan's thoughts on Turkish modernisation are emphasised. According to Erbakan, who evaluated Turkey's modernisation process as both an academician and a politician, Turkey's biggest mistake in this process was imitating the West. Turkey has confused modernisation and Westernisation in its modernisation process. While it is necessary to focus only on the science and technology of the West to modernise, it has taken concrete steps towards Westernisation by incorporating the culture and civilisation of the West. However, according to Erbakan, this is the wrong way. This is precisely what destroyed the Ottoman state. Erbakan's anti-Western attitude does not mean rejecting everything in the West. He is against imitation of Western culture and institutions. However, he attached great importance to taking advantage of all the possibilities of technology, which the West now monopolises. For example, he argued that Western technology should be used to make

heavy industry moves. Again, the most important issue he always emphasised was the necessity of establishing a local and national industry by taking advantage of Western technology and science. Erbakan defended that eliminating underdevelopment and establishing a strong Turkey again was only possible through industrialisation. According to him, the issue of industrialisation is the basis of nations' political and economic independence. This is precisely the reason for entering politics.

One of the slogans that Erbakan repeated throughout his political life was “morality and spirituality first”. Erbakan thought that the deep-rooted problems in the country resulted from the society breaking away from its roots of civilisation and moving away from moral and spiritual values. For this reason, he argued that a development move was needed in the spiritual field as well as in the material field. Erbakan's goal in spiritual development is to resist Westernisation and eliminate the national and spiritual destruction caused by Western imitation. In this context, he supported the idea of “national vision”, an alternative modernisation project. In his opinion, Turkey can create a local and national model by combining its religion and culture with the technology and industry of the West. Thus, Turkey will become a materially and morally strong country by preserving its values.

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