

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **ERDOGAN AND GULEN: A FORMER FRIEND IS WORSE THAN AN ENEMY**

Recep Dogan, *Political Islamists in Turkey and the Gülen Movement*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, pp. 267.

Ever since the end of the 1990s and the publication of the first articles on the growing power of the new Islamic movement Hizmet, led by the charismatic leader and influential theologian Fethullah Gulen, this organization has been attracting increasing attention from the Islamic and world public (Cingilloğlu, 2017). The most intensive phase of its activities took place after 2002 and the coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). During this period, the two organizations continuously, subtly, and very successfully undermined the political, legal, and social foundations of the Kemalist order. The peak of interest in the Hizmet movement, which well-informed people describe as the Islamic version of Opus Dei, was noticed after the attempted military coup in Turkey in 2016 (Đurković 2013). The authorities, led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, identified Hizmet first as the inspirer and organizer of the coup and then as a terrorist organization. Soon after, the authorities carried out the largest-scale replacements and arrests in Turkey's modern history. At the same time, the authorities deployed a variety of instruments on a global scale to entirely limit this movement's political and economic influence.

For these reasons, but also for the unique principles on which it is based, the special vision of Islam it preaches, the specific methodology it follows, the branched structures and extraordinary powers, the research of the Gulen movement and its relationship with Turkey's ruling structures is an area of particular scientific interest not only for those familiar with Turkey's internal affairs, but also for researchers who follow the country's foreign policy. In this light, the study by Recep Dogan represents an important contribution to elucidating the complex relationship between the AKP and Hizmet, seen in the context of the broader relationship between political and civil Islam.

In the introductory part of this study, Dogan identifies the basic traits and manifestations of political Islam. Then, he provides a concise genesis of its social and political rise in Turkey, from the introduction of the multiparty system to the AKP's ascension to power. Political Islam, according to the author, is one of

the interpretations of Islam that does not recognize the distinction between religious and political sectors, which is why it continually insists on a more or less direct and stringent application of Islamic teachings in political and social life (pp. 9-11). Special attention is given to the Islamist policy and rhetoric of the AKP, which, with a skilful approach, managed to maintain the key principles and direction of the previous Islamist parties while also successfully applying and adapting their (tough) experience to accomplish their aims (pp. 17-23). Although the author assumes that Islam is an integral part of Turkish identity, he also notes the continuous process of re-Islamization, which began after the Second World War and intensified due to Islamist goals and the complex engagement of the AKP (pp. 17-34).

Dogan devoted two extremely informative chapters to Hizmet leader Fethullah Gulen and the period of the movement's origins and development, from the early 1990s, through the establishment of an alliance with the AKP (2002-2010), the first serious disagreements after accusations that Gulen was behind the trial against members of Erdogan's family (2013), to the culmination of the conflict after the failed coup in 2016. In this part of the study, the author criticizes simplified interpretations that reduce the struggle between the AKP and Hizmet to a predominantly ideological, political or interest factor, assessing them as inadequate and incomplete. In order to overcome the limitations of these explanations, Dogan adds a new religious dimension to the understanding of the problem, which, according to him, can be reduced to a simplified but essential distinction between political Islam advocated by the AKP and civil Islam preached and promoted by Hizmet.

Although he points out the common foundations and Islamic character of these organizations, the author draws attention to the significant difference between the two versions of Islam, which are characterized by different natures and scopes of goals, as well as the way of their realization and action. While the author defines civic Islam as an inclusive and liberal model that seeks to promote Islamic values, return the Islamic tradition to the social sphere, and remove legal and other restrictions inherited from the Ataturk period, he considers political Islam as an exclusive and authoritarian concept, predominantly focused on the policy field in which it strives to realize its Islamic conceptions and dogmas. This chapter presents a concise overview of the most significant achievements of the AKP-Hizmet strategic alliance (2001-2010). Pointing to the mimicry character of this relationship, the author illustrates the sophisticated ways in which this alliance weakened and almost abolished military and judicial restrictions and the political "tutoring" of the Kemalist order (pp. 54-62).

The central part of the study is Dogan's analysis of the complex dynamics and the increasingly intense conflict between the AKP and Hizmet. The first period of "silent confrontation" (2010-2013) was marked by growing

disagreements over fundamental political issues and the necessary level of democracy, while in the following years they took the form of open confrontation (2013-2016), which culminated after the failed coup, and attempts at systematic and complete extinction of Hizmet by the AKP at the domestic and international level (2016–2019). Dogan rightly does not place this rivalry, in which the author sees the conceptual, organizational and personal aspects, exclusively in the domestic political context, but brings its influence and consequences into direct connection with the opposing visions of Turkey's social development and state system and the key directions of its foreign policy orientation.

Special attention and the whole two chapters are devoted to the relationship between religion and politics, or as Dogan points out, “political theology of two key and opposing concepts”: political and civil Islam. Unlike Gulen's model of civil Islam, which is characterized by a tolerant approach limited to social space, the concept of political Islam is characterized by an exclusive and authoritarian model. In this context, Dogan believes that political Islam, through Islamist rhetoric, the introduction of a presidential system, and complete control of the political, media, and social spheres, seeks gradual re-Islamization in order to create an Islamic community or union similar to the Ummah. The author perceives the foreign policy of Turkey after the coup attempt in a similar way and points out that it is characterized by a stronger turn towards Islamic centres and a general strengthening of the (pro) Islamic factor (p. 66).

In a separate part of the study, Dogan places special emphasis on forecasting the tendencies and perspectives of the development of the Turkish political order. Starting from the above assumptions and the basic distinction between the two versions of Islam, the author warns that in the coming period, Erdogan's Turkey will be characterized by an even greater degree of authoritarianism and disrespect for human rights and freedoms, pervasive antagonism and national and religious exclusivity, which will significantly complicate already burdened political, ethnic and religious relations. From the point of view of the Balkan peoples, forecasts of the gradual and continuous return of the Ottoman heritage to political and social discourse and the consequent strengthening of the neo-Ottoman identity are of particular interest, which, in cooperation with re-Islamization, will have significant consequences for the political order and foreign policy orientation of modern Turkey (Tanasković, 2010).

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## REFERENCE LIST

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