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by Carlo Sanna

Erdoğan's Rhetoric on the Reconversion of Hagia Sophia: An Analysis and a Comparison with the Milliyetçi-mukaddesatçılar Circles of the 1950s

Abstract

This article examines the rhetoric employed by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in addressing the reconversion of Ayasofya (Hagia Sophia) into a mosque, situating it within broader political and historical contexts. While much scholarly attention has been given to the AKP's ideological transformation and its alliance with the nationalist MHP, little has been written on how this shift is reflected in Erdoğan's discourse. Through qualitative content analysis, this study compares Erdoğan's speeches — particularly his 10 July 2020 Address to the Nation — with the nationalist rhetoric of the early multiparty period, focusing on the milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı intellectuals of the 1950s. By tracing references, figures, and ideological themes in Erdoğan's discourse, the article explores the extent to which his rhetoric aligns with past nationalist traditions, reinforcing the AKP's repositioning within the right-wing conservative electorate. The findings suggest that Erdoğan's framing of the Ayasofya issue is not merely a product of contemporary political contingencies but is deeply rooted in long-standing nationalist narratives.

Keywords

political discourse, nationalism, Ayasofya, Erdoğan, rhetoric

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> The layers of meaning the building acquired over the centuries transcended the specificity of the original context in which it was created […]. To penetrate its historically mediated meanings one has to consider the influence and reception of Hagia Sophia after the Ottoman Conquest of Constantinople and its sheer capacity to stand through time. The life of the monument involves a dynamic interaction with changing audiences and a lively dialogue between the past and present.
>
> (Necipoğlu 1992: 195–6)

Introduction

With the decision number 2020/2595 issued on 10 July 2020, the Turkish Council of State (*Danıştay*) ruled the cancellation of the 1934 decree of the Council of Minister (*Bakanlar Kurulu*) with which the government led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk converted Hagia Sophia (from now on its Turkish name will be used: *Ayasofya*) into a museum.[1] While the court ruling is grounded on a legal basis, claiming that the 1934 act illegitimately revoked the property of Ayasofya from the Foundation of the Sultan Mehmed II "the Conqueror" (*Fatih Sultan Mehmet Han Vakfi*) and transferred it to the civil institutions of the Republic, the debate that surrounded this ruling of the *Danıştay* had very little to do with legal technicalities.[2] On the contrary, it has been highly politicized, and not only it involved internal actors but also had a wide resonance at an international level, with both political and religious leaders, as well as international organizations, showing their will to have a say on the issue of the reconversion. Most of the Western partners and/or European neighbours of Turkey (from Greece, to the United States, to Russia), and the European Union (EU) itself *via* its foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, called the decision "regrettable", raising their concerns on the future of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, tolerance and co-existence.[3] The UNESCO blamed Turkey for having carried on a unilateral move on such a universal heritage, underlining possible infringements of the 1972 World Heritage Convention.[4] Even Church leaders (from the Russian Orthodox to the Catholic Church) made public statements expressing their "pain" and worries in regard.[5] However, treating it as "an internal affair, [since the only] decision-maker on Ayasofya is the Turkish Nation, not others"[6] Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan rejected all the international criticisms (as well as the internal ones, which have been rather feeble in comparison) and signed the Presidential Decree number 2729 that gives execution to the ruling of the Danıştay and transfers the property of Ayasofya to the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet* İşleri *Başkanlığı*, from now on: *Diyanet*).[7]

Having drawn this brief overview as a necessary framework, many interesting and stimulating insights come out that would be worth exploring further, concerning – for instance – the role and effectiveness of the (domestic and international) oppositions, the persistence of the topic of Ayasofya in the Turkish political debate, or even the aspects related to the cancellation of Atatürk's decision of 1934 and its meaning. However, this article does not aim to address any of these questions in detail, or the meaning and implications of the reconversion itself. As stimulating and interesting as they are, citing them will just serve to provide a more detailed context for the real focus of the article, that is the analysis of the rhetoric employed by President Erdoğan in addressing the issue of the reconversion of Ayasofya. The interest on this subject stems not only from its links with the peculiar current political situation of Turkey (which will be addressed in more detail later), but also from the substantial void in academic literature on this specific aspect, mainly due to its being so recent.[8] However, the perspective within which this article is placed is not just the analysis of Erdoğan's speeches to the nation related with Ayasofya, and neither a mere contextualization of its discourse in the contingent socio-political situation. The main aim of this work is to compare the narratives and recurrent figures implemented by Erdoğan with the nationalist rhetoric adopted in the earliest years of the multiparty system in Turkey (which started in the second half of the 1940s): the period in which — not by chance — the current crucial ally of Erdoğan's AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* — Justice and Development Party, from now on *Ak Parti* or AKP), the far-right nationalist party MHP (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* — Nationalist Movement Party), has its deepest roots. As it will be further detailed, the vote share granted by the party ruled by Devlet Bahçeli (a veteran in Turkish politics and former staunch opposer of *Ak Parti*'s Islamist agenda) has been fundamental in order for Erdoğan to win crucial elections, to change the Constitution establishing an executive presidentialism as the form of government, and ultimately to keep himself at power.

To what an extent has Erdogan's rhetoric on the issue of the reconversion of Hagia Sophia been influenced by the nationalist right milieu? Given the substantial consent among scholars and analysts on the shifting of the AKP from its initial outlook of "conservative democracy" with an Islamic perspective on social issues and moral connotations (Çınar 2008; Hale, Özbudun 2010; Yavuz 2006) towards a more nationalist agenda,[9] linked to AKP's increasing dependence on the MHP's vote share and the currently binding alliance between these two parties (Esen and Gümüşçü 2017; 2018; 2019b; Uzer 2018), have

these developments had an impact on the rhetoric adopted by Erdoğan on Ayasofya, by bringing it to be more coherent with, and adherent to, the nationalist cultural terrain? What kind of references did Erdoğan use in promoting and carrying out the Ayasofya issue, and from what kind of authors, intellectuals, journalists has he drawn inspiration? How innovative is his rhetoric, or vice versa how much linked to the nationalist tradition?

To answer these questions could not only serve as a contribution to the debate on the most recent political developments: this article mainly aims to shed some light on the existent links with previous periods of the Turkish republican history, welcoming the urge made by scholars of the recent historiographical trend of "Post-Post Kemalism"[10] to the need of "shifting the focus […] to the Cold War era, where today's right-wing elites were born and completed their political socialization" (Aytürk 2015: 47). In order to do so, the article is structured as follows, reflecting the way in which the research has been conducted.

Structure and Methodology

In the first part, a brief explanation of the scenario in which the reconversion of Ayasofya took place will be provided. To do so can be useful on the one hand to appropriately highlight the political context in which the Erdoğan's speeches examined are set and, as a consequence, also the narrative and rhetoric that come with them. On the other hand, to briefly provide an adequate support to one of the main assumptions that underpins the development of the article itself: the existence of an ongoing process of re-definition of the electoral basis of the AKP, aiming to rally the nationalist-conservative constituency into a single bloc now represented by the People's Alliance (*Cumhur* İttifakı, that binds AKP and MHP together) that started, *grosso modo*, since Erdoğan's survival from the 15 July 2016 coup and its *entente* with the MHP in the same year. Given these premises, Erdoğan's agenda and — most importantly for the purpose of this article — the high number of nationalistic and right-wing references in the speeches hereafter examined can be explained as both coherent to these processes, and functional to them.

In the second part, the attention will be drawn to the other main premise of the article: the validity and appropriateness of a comparison with the discourse on Ayasofya produced by a specific fraction of the right-wing milieu of the 50s, namely the so-called *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçılar* (roughly translatable as "nationalists who respect and uphold sacred Islamic values"), rallied around the *Türk Milliyetçiler Derneği* (Turkish Nationalists Society) and the journal

Komünizme Karşı Mücadele (Struggle Against Communism), and prominent figures such as Nihal Atsız, Bekir Berk and Osman Yüksel Serdengeçti (just to anticipate three relevant names). The reasons will be explained why this particular rightist élite that İlker Aytürk defines as "non-kemalist nationalists" (Aytürk 2014: 697) has been chosen as main object of the comparison.

In the third and main part of the article, the analysis of the figures, authors, quotes made by Erdoğan will be carried on, in comparison with the writings of the just mentioned nationalist intellectuals of the 1950s. The main object of this study will be the *Millete Sesleniş Konuşması* [Address to the Nation] made on 10 July 2020 to announce the decision to re-open Ayasofya as a place of worship, as it is the most significant, and thick with rhetoric and references. However, other speeches (such as those made during party rallies or interviews) and writings (such as those of the booklet distributed by the Turkish Presidency to celebrate the re-opening of Ayasofya as a mosque (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı İletişim Başkanlığı 2020)) will be taken in account, having been chosen according to their relevance and contents.

These texts will be analysed through the technique of qualitative content analysis. An inductive approach has been chosen, due to the substantial lack of specific and comprehensive studies of this subject, in order to derive content/meaning categories from the messages delivered by the authors of the texts and speeches (Elo and Kyngäs 2008). After the organisation of the data contained in the texts, a first coding phase has been conducted, aimed at grouping relevant contents, figures, references, meanings which are similar to each other into rough categories (Dey 2003; Weber 1990). The categories were then refined by abstraction (Robson 1993), thus providing more precise and comparable elements to assist the final process, which is the comparison. The final aim of this technique has indeed been to compare the discourses and evaluate how much the recurrent elements in Erdoğan's narrative tap into the nationalist references of the past and particularly of the early 1950s, in order to point out that — beyond the contingencies of the present — the deep roots of the processes unfolding today are visible and worth to be brought to light.

Erdoğan and the *Cumhur* İttifakı (People's Alliance) towards the Re-conversion of Ayasofya

As already pointed out, following the decision of the *Danıştay*, with the decree no. 2729 of 10 July 2020 President Erdoğan ruled the reconversion of Aya-

sofya into a mosque. To investigate on the links that the rhetoric implemented by Erdoğan has with the shift of his political axis and agenda aiming to attract the more nationalist-oriented constituencies in the country, it is necessary to briefly summarise the political context in which this shift has occurred. In order to do so, resort will be made to the wide literature that studies the dynamics of the Turkish political arena, its party system and the developments that took place since 2015. This date can be seen as a watershed, as many authors point out (Esen and Gümüşçü 2016; Kalaycıoğlu 2018; Sayarı 2016), since it is the year in which the *Ak Parti* failed, for the first time since its foundation, to gain the electoral majority to form a single-party government (Kalaycıoğlu 2018; Öniş 2016), and therefore necessarily had to start relying on other actors (eventually, the MHP) to be able to govern the country, with all the ensuing set of consequences, among which those covered by this article find place.

One of the most evident transformations that went on in the post-2015 political environment is the one that brought, between the years 2016 and 2018, to the formation of two opposing alliance blocks, within which the main parties represented in the Turkish Grand Assembly (except for the HDP)[11] are positioned. On the one side, the *Cumhur* İttifakı (AKP-MHP); on the other side, the *Millet* İttifakı (Nation Alliance, that binds the CHP,[12] İyi Parti[13] and other minor parties[14] together). There is an ever-growing consensus in the academia on the fact that these alliances are placed, rather than at the diverging poles of an ideologically oriented political axis, on the two opposite sides of a burgeoning democracy-authoritarianism divide in a democratic system which is increasingly backsliding towards being a competitive authoritarianism (Esen and Gümüşçü 2016, 2017; Kemahlıoğlu 2015; Özbudun 2014). In other words, a trend could be traced such that, starting from 2016[15] and more markedly in the occasion of the 2018 presidential elections, all major opposition parties started to adopt a clearly anti-governmental stance, so that ideologically disparate[16] oppositional parties and groups began to systematically coordinate their actions (Sözen 2019: 309) and to form a bloc knitted together by its anti-governmental/anti-authoritarian stance (rallied around the *Millet* İttifakı). On the other side, inside the populist-nationalist authoritarian bloc represented by the *Cumhur* İttifakı (Esen and Gümüşçü 2019b; Selçuk and Hekimci 2020; Sözen 2019) the *Ak Parti* has grown more and more dependent on the share of nationalist/right-wing votes granted by the MHP. The support of the nationalist electorate has been fundamental for President Erdoğan not only to maintain its power, but also to implement the 2017 constitutional reform and all the other measures he

deemed necessary to preserve it in a political environment that was becoming more and more threatening for its stability, as economic grievances and social discontent were growing larger. The need for the bundle of votes ensured by this tactical pact grew stronger as the 2019 local elections approached. The stakes of the March 2019 electoral round would have been extremely high, not only for the value itself of winning and renewing the control of local administrations — that, as many authors point out, have traditionally offered an array of patronage sources for political parties, via the management of public services and distribution of expenditures and resources at the closest level possible to the citizens/electors (Kemahlıoğlu and Özdemir 2018; Sayarı 2014). Local elections have proved to be crucial for the construction of AKP's consent in the country: municipalities formed the origins of *Ak Party* and the primary sources of its popularity (Eligür 2010; Esen and Gümüşçü 2019b), as the political career of Erdoğan himself demonstrates. Finally, these elections were also a testing ground for the cohesion of the People's Alliance, as AKP and MHP pursued the strategy of nominating joint candidates and supporting each other in fifty-one cities.[17]

It is in this context that we find what constitutes the main hypothesis of this analysis: a *crescendo* towards a more nationalistic and assertive agenda and narrative made by Erdoğan. As many authors point out, this process had already started in a clear manner even before the formal constitution of the alliance and had shown its most evident signs already in 2016 (Uzer 2018), due to a sum of factors, the most evident of whose are: the increasing levels of "ontological insecurity" (Geri 2017) of the government linked to the end of the peace process with the Kurds (Kaya and Whiting 2019); the various economic downturns (Öniş 2016); the security threats posed to the stability of Erdoğan's power after the rupture with the Gülenists and the failed coup (Bölükbaşı 2019; Esen and Gümüşçü 2018; Sözen 2019). Furthermore, the nationalistic overtones of this *entente* are clarified precisely in the founding document of the *Cumhur* İttifakı, that labels the alliance as a "unified front against heinous conspiracies that aim to undermine Turkey's national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity".[18] The rhetoric of Erdoğan himself, as the head of this alliance, especially during the most critical moment of the electoral campaigns has been characterised by an ever-increasing resort to the use of nationalistic terms and references, aiming to mobilise identity politics by polarising and delegitimising the oppositions, depicted as a national threat (Esen and Gümüşçü 2019a; 2019b). The recurring theme of the "*beka meselesi*" (translatable as "matter of

national integrity"), inherited from the ultra-nationalist rhetorical weaponry, has become a *leitmotif* of Erdoğan's discourse and one of the clearest examples of this change (Esen and Gümüşçü 2019b: 324). Many authors point out how this transformation in themes, references and discourse marks the final cornerstone of a precise political project. In this way he aims to address an electorate that in terms of voting behavior historically exhibits strong rightwing and/or conservative tendencies (Çarkoğlu and Kalaycıoğlu 2007), by blending his traditional religious outlook with strong nationalist appeals (Yabancı 2020) in order to consolidate the nationalist and conservative voters within the AKP-MHP coalition (Esen and Gümüşçü 2019a).

All of this considered, one could then conclude that up until now, as a fundamental pillar of Erdoğan's power that provided indispensable political and electoral support in the process of securing of his power and of transformation of Turkey's regime towards personalistic and hegemonic electoral authoritarianism, the MHP has had great influence on the AKP and on Erdoğan himself. This influence is evident not only in the political agenda (the analysis of which falls out of the scopes of this article), but also in the discourse of the current President of the Turkish Republic and leader of the *Ak Parti*. His brand-new islamo/nationalistic rhetoric is a direct consequence of this, as it has proved effective in putting himself and his party in contact with the wide conservative-nationalist constituencies that are the natural vote basis of a thus composed *Cumhur* İttifakı (Esen and Gümüşçü 2018). It is to this political and rhetorical repositioning of Erdoğan that the discourse around the case of Ayasofya — which forms the core focus of this article — must be traced back. Before coming to its analysis, it is necessary to shed some light on the element of comparison that have been chosen to emphasise the nationalistic elements in Erdoğan's speeches on Ayasofya: who are the so-called *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçılar,* what links do they have with the MHP leader and current ally of the President, and why can they be used to trace this parallel.

The *Milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı* Roots of the *Cumhur* İttifakı's Nationalism: A Valid Element of Comparison

To briefly summarise why it is worth to trace parallels with the rhetoric implemented in previous periods of the Turkish republican history, what Bilge Yabancı (2020: 110) points out could be perfectly explanatory. When she writes about the fact that, in his discourses, Erdoğan "does not invent the symbols and

myths anew, but often pillages and 'recycles' them from history — including the republican history created by the 'secular elites' that the AKP loathes incessantly", she pinpoints the core reason behind the need of such an analysis. But to explain why it has been chosen exactly the period that follows the first multiparty opening in Turkey, and precisely the years 1950–52, it is necessary to resort on what İlker Aytürk elaborates on in his works. First of all, he stresses the need of new studies to focus on the Cold War, aiming to rethink the one-party/multi-party periodization of the Turkish republican history (Aytürk 2015: 47) in order to shift the attention on a period whose transformations constitute the fertile ground where modern processes are rooted. Among these processes, one of the major and the most linked with the topics of this article, is that which regards the birth of the Turkish Right's elites. Since the turning point of the year 1944, in which for the first time in the Republican history of Turkey there was a split within the nationalist bloc as Kemalists purged Racists-Turanists from the CHP,[19] it started the grounding process of the modern Turkish rightwing milieu (Aytürk 2011; 2014; Cizre Sakallıoğlu 1994; Güngor 1986; Uzer 2016). It is in this moment, well before the foundation of the MHP in the Adana Congress in 1969, that the Racist-Turanist nationalists were born as a separate entity from the Kemalists, and in which their political socialization started to take place.

Under the new political, social and cultural climate brought in Turkey in the late 1940s and in the 1950s with the multi-party opening, a new generation of intellectuals emerged under the broad banner of *milliyetçi-muhafazakar* (nationalist-conservative) or *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı* (nationalists who respect and uphold sacred Islamic values),[20] composed of a new generation of both Islamists and Turkists (Çetinsaya 1999: 368). The variety of labels juxtaposed on these groups of nationalists (whose diversity was previously smothered within Kemalism) is itself an evidence of the wide range of nationalist perspectives that emerged after the multi-party opening. As an example, with regard to the role of Islam within the Turkish national identity, their heterogenous views ranged from the "assertive secularism"[21] of the Racist-Turanists represented by Nihal Atsız,[22] to those closer to the views of Ziya Gökalp and Yusuf Akçura, the two main ideologues of Turkish nationalism that (leaving aside the wide academic debate on their positions, whose reconstruction falls far beyond the scope of this article)[23] attributed a central role to Islam as a key element of national identity — albeit separated from politics and meant as cultural cement (Davison 1995; Georgeon 2002; Parla 1985; Yavuz 1993).

As many scholars point out, one of the main reasons for this re-conciliation between Turkists and Islamists lies in the cultural and political environment of the Cold War, in which Islam stood as a social and cultural barrier against the danger of Communism (Duran 2004; Lord 2018; Mert 2004) and, in the view of the staunchest Turanists (as Atsız was), the lesser of the two evil (Çetinsaya 1999; Erdal 2020; Taşkın 2002). Moreover, the cultural gap that divided these various sectors of the "non-Kemalist nationalists"[24] can be easily overlooked as the different groups around Atsız's circle had an interest in uniting against the common "High-Kemalist"[25] adversary (at least this was valid throughout all the 1950s),[26] making it possible for us to summarse by referring to them as "*milliyetçi-mukaddesatçılar*". A further evidence to support this conclusion is that, despite the many controversies with (and within) the figure of Atsız, he proved to be a crucial intellectual in the formation, in 1948, of the first political party that gave a unitary shape to the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçılar*: the *Millet Partisi* (Nation Party, MP). Albeit short-lived and unsuccessful in electoral terms, it can be considered a milestone, as it fostered new projects towards unity inside this new heterogenous nationalist field. The first of these projects to be relevant started in April 1950 with the establishment of the *Milliyetçiler Federasyonu* (Federation of Nationalists), explicitly meant as a first step toward unification (Aytürk 2014: 699–700). A first step quickly followed by others, as the leader of the Federation, the young Istanbul lawyer Bekir Berk (1926–93), promoted a process aimed to abolish all the constitutive nationalist organisation and redesign the Federation as a society, in order to better represent the newly-found unity, thus giving birth to the *Türk Milliyetçiler Derneği* (Turkish Nationalists Society, TMD).[27] Thus united, they managed to carve out a space in a scenario dominated by the *Demokrat Parti* since the 14 May 1950 elections. In this way, after the disbandment of the *Millet Partisi* but also from within it, its grassroots and the intellectuals organic to it continued to exist as a rather unified voter group inside the DP (Çinar and Gencel Sezgin 2013: 333), rying to exert as much pressure as possible on the party to push it toward a more conservative, Islamist, and ethnonationalist stance.

One of the most explicating examples of this kind of pressure is precisely the issue of the reconversion of Ayasofya. As the 500th anniversary of the Conquest of Constantinople approached (29 May 1953), within a campaign launched by the TMD the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçılar* gave rise to a striving and passionate production of articles, verses, interviews asking the DP government led by Adnan Menderes to take the necessary steps to reopen Ayasofya as a mosque.

Their intellectual and political activity around this topic contributed in a determining way to coin new discourses and slogans to disseminate nationalism among those segments of the Turkish society who had thus far been unreceptive to secular nationalist propaganda: it is in this period that the nationalist worldview, which could not penetrate the Turkish periphery in its Kemalist version, now started to make significant inroads in its newly fashioned Islamic guise (Aytürk 2014: 702). And that's why, coming to the scope of this article, it can be useful to trace parallels between the discourse implemented by Erdoğan in 2020 and that built up in the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçılar* field in the 1950s, which has been the breeding ground for the élite that, following the events that unfolded after the 1960 coup, eventually founded what now is the crucial and highly influential ally of Erdoğan's *Ak Parti*, the MHP (Aytürk 2011; 2014; Çetinsaya 1999; Cizre Sakallıoğlu 1994). It is indeed after the closure of the *Millet Partisi* in 1954 that the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçılar* gave birth to the *Cumhuriyetçi* Köylü Millet Partisi (Republican Peasant-Nation Party, hereafter CKMP).[28] This was the direct predecessor of the MHP, as it was born from the 9th Congress of the CKMP itself, organised in 1969 in Adana.[29] These events marked "the most important turning point in the history of Turkish nationalism since 1944" (Aytürk 2014: 711), giving the final shape to this nationalist environment, and bridging it towards the modern-day MHP.

However, for the purpose of analysing the rhetoric implemented by these nationalist circles, as already said this article will not take into consideration the more modern and mature form in which they found place after the events of the Adana Congress. On the contrary, the focus will be on the earlier manifestations of the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı* claims on Ayasofya, when the political and intellectual environment that would have given birth to the MHP was still in its formative and settling-down phase. In order to do so, some authors have been chosen who have pressured on the issue of Ayasofya. As already mentioned, as the 500th anniversary of the Conquest of Istanbul — "the most meaningful and valuable" among national recurrences, according to the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçılar*[30] — was approaching, a multitude of publications emerged from their circles, asking for its reconversion and appealing both to the government and the public opinion. In their references and rhetoric, it is possible to find parallels with those implemented by Erdoğan. The most relevant among these authors have been selected for this analysis: the already mentioned Bekir Berk, the journalist and writer Osman Zeki Yüksel (Serdengeçti)[31] (1917–83) and the historian and linguist İsmâil Hâmî Dânişmend (1899–1967).[32] These authors

have been decisive in shaping the discourse and coining the slogans that were used not only in *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı* environment of the 1950s, but that are still today tangible in the contemporary discourses around Ayasofya (Aytürk 2014: 702). Erdoğan's speeches, as it will be clearly pointed out later in the text, contain both explicit and implicit references to these authors: he quotes them, makes use of their verses, touches the same strings of positive and negative sentiments as they do. Among their writings and speeches, some specific selected articles, interviews, poems have thus been selected for their prominence with regard to the scope of the analysis; in particular those published in the most important journals that "played a major role in supporting Islamist activities within the right-wing political parties and associations and contributed to the countrywide dissemination of Islamist-Nationalist mobilisation frames and identity from the late 1940s onwards" (Çinar and Gencel Sezgin 2013: 331). The first of these publications is the flagship organ of the TMD, the bimonthly journal *Komünizme Karşı Mücadele*, where some of the most fervent articles have been written on this matter. Among the articles published in this venue, two by Dânişmend[33] (together with one written for the newspaper Milliyet[34] on the same topic) and one by Berk[35] have been selected. The others are *Büyük Doğu* [The Great East], *Serdengeçti* and *Sebilürreşâd* [Path of Guidance]: their respective editors/owners, Necip Fazıl (Kısakürek), Osman Yüksel (Serdengeçti) and Eşref Edip (Fergan), are still revered in Islamist circles as the pioneers of Islamist activism, especially Kısakürek (Kocak 2002). The first of the writings from these periodicals is the poem titled *Ayasofya*, written by Serdengeçti (1952a) in the homonymous journal.[36] Finally, a statement published on the pages of the weekly *Sebilürreşâd*[37] and one on the monthly Büyük Doğu[38] by the Istanbul Branch of the TMD, listing the requests and the reasons why they asked the reopening of Ayasofya as a mosque, have been selected. Some other articles have been taken into account from these publications but, compared to those just mentioned, they contain less relevant and original arguments.[39] The suitability of an analysis that puts together these journals and authors, assuming that they worked together to build common opinions and ideas on the issues examined, is rooted not only in the aforementioned historical processes, but also in the mutual endorsement that can be found in their pages. An example of this is the section dedicated to new publications in *Sebilürreşâd*, in which the writers endorse the then newly published journals: *Komünizme Karşı Mücadele* ("this journal is a masterpiece, an exceptional example of national and religious grace. If we had enough pages available, we would host

all the articles of this precious magazine"[40]) and *Serdengeçti* (describing Osman Yüksel as an "heroic young man" and his journal as "a vivid example of Islamic sake Turkish strength"[41]).

These texts have been analyzed in order to examine how they operate, the ways in which they are structured, in which meanings they are produced, which references, figures, quotes, *clichés* are frequent, the nature of all of those meanings and references (Lockyer 2008: 865). After having defined both the contexts in which the texts are analyzed and rooted, it is now possible to display and compare the "sense-making structures" (McKee 2003) to answer the questions posed in the opening of this article.

Nationalist References in Erdoğan's Rhetoric on Ayasofya

The textual analysis of the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı* writers' texts and of Erdoğan's speeches[42] led to the recognition of many parallels and similarities, especially in terms of common themes, references and meanings. As already pointed out in the introduction, this work has been carried out through the technique of qualitative content analysis (QCA), aimed at grouping relevant figures, references, meanings which are similar to each other into "content categories" (Weber 1990; Dey 2003), in order to highlight comparable elements and thus confront them. Through such a comparison it has been possible to evaluate how much the recurrent meanings/themes in Erdoğan's narrative tap into the nationalist references of the past. This last section of the article will be divided in three parts, each corresponding to one of the "macro-categories" identified through the aforementioned QCA technique, that contain the most useful elements to trace parallels and shed light on the issues relevant to this analysis.

Mahzunluk

The term *mahzunluk* means forlornness, sadness: it is not only a word that often recurs in the texts analysed, but rather a general atmosphere that permeates the references to specific periods in the past of this "great temple" (*ulu mabet*, as Ayasofya is often called) and of its transformation into a museum in 1934. The reference to this word to describe the feelings linked to Ayasofya can be traced back to the nationalist poet Arif Nihat Asya (1905–1975) and specifically to his poem titled precisely "*Mahzun Ayasofya*" [Grieved/gloomy

Hagia Sophia]. With regard to the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı* writers, they insist much on the fact that:

> Bu hal, müslüman Türk çocukları için bir ıztirap kaynağıdır, manevî bir işkencedir.
>
> This situation (Ayasofya as a museum) is a source of suffering for Turkish Muslims, a spiritual torture (Berk 1952: 1).

Berk, as the other authors,[43] believed it was a duty of the government[44] to pursue the will of the nation and put an end to such a "campaign against Islam, which is an evidence of the oppression on freedom of conscience" (Berk 1952: 4). A pervasive feeling of *mahzunluk* is evident also in Serdengeçti's verses (which have been taken up by the Turkish national television *TRT* in a promotional video for the first prayer of 24 July[45]), who asks Ayasofya "Why are you so bare" [*Neden böyle bomboşsun?* (Serdengeçti 1952a: 3)], "who put you in this state; who left you completely naked?" [*Seni bu hale koyan kim; seni* çırılçıplak *soyan kim?* (Serdengeçti 1952a: 3)]. The TMD too, through its Istanbul branch, expressed all of its grievance for the desolation that characterizes Ayasofya as a museum:

> yüzyıllarca içinde insanların Tanrıyı andıkları bir binanın müze yapılması hem insan ruhuna bir tecavüz, hem o binaya karşı en alçaltıcı muameledir.
>
> To make a museum in a building in which people worshiped God for centuries is both an offense to the human spirit, and the most degrading treatment of such a building (TMD 1952b: 1).

Erdoğan, when he refers to Ayasofya as a museum, insists on portraying the same atmosphere of melancholy and sadness for its *status*: deprived of the praying crowd on its sacred soil, empty and bare, "the walls and domes of this great temple do not resonate anymore with the ezan" [*Bu ulu mabedin kubbeleri ve duvarlarının, [...] ezanlarla, salalarla, tekbirlerle, salavatlarla, hatmi* şeriflerle*, mevlid-i* şeriflerle çınla*[maması]*][46] and the name of Allah. This recurrent feeling is not only implicit in the references Erdoğan makes to its period as a museum: he also uses directly the term *mahzun*(*-luk*), for instance to express his gratitude to whoever "did not leave Ayasofya in sorrow (*mahzun birakmayan*) on this meaningful day".[47] But, most importantly, he explicitly quotes the poem *Mahzun Ayasofya* and its author A.N. Asya. Introducing it as one of the most striking poems on the theme of Hagia Sophia's sadness

[*Ayasofya'nın mahzunluğu konusundaki*],[48] he recited:

> Ulu mabed, neye hicrana büründün böyle / Fatih'in devrini bir nebzecik olsa söyle / Beş vakit loşluğunda saf saftık / Davetin vardı dün ezanlarda / Seni ey mabedim utansınlar / Kapayanlar da, açmayanlar da.
>
> Great temple, why are you so covered in sorrow / talk a little bit about the age of the Conqueror for a little bit / We used to pray five times in your shadowy light / Yesterday you were calling us for prayer / Oh my temple, they should be ashamed / Those who closed you, and those who don't (want to) open you.[49]

Moreover, with respect to the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçılar*, Erdoğan adds one meaning to the feeling of *mahzunluk*. They mostly focused on the period in which Ayasofya was transformed into a museum, using this feeling to describe not only the sadness that derived from the transformation itself, but mostly the depravation and moral impurity that populated the "great temple" since 1934:

> Şu temiz yerde, şimdi hangi kirli ayaklar dolaşıyor!
>
> What dirty feet are now walking on that clean ground (Serdengeçti 1952a: 3)!
>
> *Ayasofya'nın zemininin artık karanlık ruhlu insanların kirli ayaklariyle (sic)* çiğnememesini *[istiyoruz].*
>
> (We want) the floor of Ayasofya not to be trampled anymore by the dirty feet of dark-spirited people (Berk 1952: 1).

Erdoğan too takes up this feeling of forlornness which the nationalist authors of the 1950s used in relation to the period when Ayasofya was closed to worship. He employs it in order to claim that the treatment given to "this ancestral masterpiece" has been a "great slaughter of history".[50] Additionally, he channels the feeling of *mahzunluk* not only to the disrespect and wickedness that characterize the transformation into a museum and the years of closure to worship, but also to the period before its first conversion into a mosque in 1453. By making reference to the historical chronicles and myths about the first time that the Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror stepped inside Ayasofya and assessed the conditions in which the Byzantines left the monument, he affirms:

> *Sultan Fatih*, İstanbul'un incisi bu ulu mabedi zemininden çatısına kadar büyük bir tit-

> izlikle inceler. Tarihçilerin yazdığına göre, Ayasofya'nın kubbesine çıkan Fatih Sultan Mehmet Han, yapının ve çevrenin harap görüntüsü karşısında, şu meşhur Farsça beyti söyler: "Perdedâri mîkoned ber kasr-i kayser ankebut / bûm novbet mîzened der tarem-i efrâsiyâb" […] Evet… Fatih Sultan Mehmet Han, işte böylesine harap, bitap, perişan bir İstanbul ve Ayasofya devralmıştır
>
> Sultan *Fatih* carefully examined this great temple, the pearl of Istanbul, from the ground up. According to historians, *Fatih Sultan Mehmet Han* who climbed to the cupola of Ayasofya, at the sight of the building and its surroundings in ruin, recited the following famous Farsi verses: "The spider serves as a gatekeeper in the Arch of Chosroes / the owl plays martial music in the Castle of Afrasiyab"[51] […] Yes… *Fatih Sultan Mehmet Han* took over such a devastated, worn-out and miserable Istanbul and Ayasofya.[52]

The "slaughter" experienced — from a spiritual point of view — in the Republican era becomes comparable to this ancient disrespect. Who wanted Ayasofya to be turned into a museum and to be filled with "dirty feet" and "dark spirited people", is just another modern abuser of this great temple, similar to those who left it in a "devastated, worn-out and miserable" (*harap, bitap, perişan*) state before 1453. And, just as Mehmet II did with the Conquest, the reconversion of Ayasofya into a mosque aims to initiate a new age of splendor and moral rectitude, as if it was "a second conquest" (*ikinci bir fetih*).[53]

İkinci fetih

The conquest of Istanbul represented a major turning point (*dönüm noktası*) for Turkish and Islamic history, and for Ayasofya as well.[54] As just mentioned, this has been portrayed both by Erdoğan and the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçılar* as the event that, by marking the end of the misery and carelessness that characterised the Byzantine Hagia Sophia, as they believe, "opened a new era" (*yeni bir devir açan*) of splendor and glory (TMD 1952a: 386). It is worth to delve further into this aspect, as the feeling of *mahzunluk* linked to the moral/physical decay of the Byzantine basilica leaves space to quite another narrative referred to the conversion into a mosque.

First of all, both the authors of the 1950s and the current President of the Republic start by explaining the highly symbolic value that the Ottomans attributed, whenever conquering a city, to the act of turning its biggest temple into a mosque (Berk 1952: 1; Dânişmend 1952b: 23; TMD 1952a: 386; T.C.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2020: 2, 11).[55] This act, together with the celebration of the first Friday prayer, was a way in which the Ottoman sultans used to "sanction/seal (*fethini tescillemek*) the conquest" (Berk 1952: 4; T.C.C. İletişim Başkan-

lığı 2020: 2).[56] Just as Dânişmend (1952a: 2; 1952b: 23) does by describing in great detail the myth of the Kızıl Elma ("Red Apple"), the booklet published by the Turkish Presidency too dwells on the same Ottoman traditions, emphasizing their relevance in history and myth:

> *Adetâ bir kanun gibi daima riayet edilmiş muhteşem bir* Türk *an'anesi vardır [...]: en büyük kilisenin camie tahvili de iste bu ilk fetih gününün ilk işidir. Eski Türk işte bu suretle (Kızıl – elma) sına kavuşmuş sayılır ve ilk Cuma namazı işte o Kızıl – elma camiinde kılınır.* […] *kiliseden* çevrilmiş *cami demek, Türk ordusunun bir zafer abidesi ve milli ideal timsali olan (Kizil – elma)'nin en büyük mümessili demektir.*
>
> There is a great Turkish tradition that has always been observed like a law […]: the conversion of the biggest church into a mosque is the first act of the first conquest day. In this way the ancient Turks considered the *Red Apple* taken, and inside this *Red Apple* mosque celebrated the first Friday prayer. […] A mosque converted from a church means the greatest representative of the *Red Apple*, which is a monument to the victory of the Turkish army and a symbol of the national ideal (Dânişmend 1952a: 2).
>
> *Osmanlı'da asırlar boyu sürdürülen geleneğe göre, fethedilen şehrin en büyük mabedinden ezan okunması ve ilk Cuma namazının bu mabedde kılınmasıydı. Böylece, o* şehrin *fethedildiği tescillenmekte* […].
>
> According to the tradition preserved for centuries in the Ottoman Empire, it was from the biggest temple of the conquered city that the *adhan* was to be recited and the first Friday prayer held. In this way, it was registered that the city was conquered […] (Altun 2020: 2).

The conversion of Ayasofya by Sultan Mehmet *Fatih* was not only a showcase of the Ottoman military and spiritual power: it meant much more. As said, it ushered a new era, under the banner of — in Erdoğan's words — another "ancient tradition" of the Turkish people: to make the most of what they inherited.[57] To this purpose he highlights how crucial the Conquest and the transformation into a mosque have been for the preservation and improvement of Ayasofya (and the whole Istanbul). Ruined by centuries of neglect ("*bakımsızlık*", as already pointed out when talking about *mahzunluk*), "it was with the Conquest that it has been revitalised"[58] since — in its 481-year long period as a mosque — the Ottomans enriched and refined it both by building "its *mihrab*, *minbar*, pulpit, minarets, *hünkâr mahfili*, plates, embroideries, candlesticks, carpets, *şadırvan* (fountain)" making it a complete religious complex, a *külliye*[59] and, in the light of the "great importance [they gave] to the internal decorations" (T.C.C. İletişim Başkanlığı 2020: 9), by allowing them to last to the present days.

All of this has been claimed by President Erdoğan with the purpose of highlighting the existence of a parallel. As said, just as the 1453 Conquest of Constantinople and subsequent conversion into a mosque opened to the resurgence of (the Ottoman) Ayasofya, the modern-day reconversion will produce a similar effect. In its 10 July speech, Erdoğan aims to put emphasis on this aspect. This is evident in the structure of his 36-minute speech itself: first, he talks about the state of disrepair which Ayasofya was in (for a time that amounts to the 6.5 per cent of his speech[60]); then he praises the glory of the Ottoman period (17 per cent[61]); then again moves back to the outrage committed to Ayasofya, this time not the Byzantine one but that ushered by the wretched "decision taken in the single-party period" (*tek parti döneminde alınan bu karar*) (6.5 per cent[62]); finally, he concludes with a series of nationalist references of the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı* authors analyzed (from Kısakürek, to Asya to Serdengeçti) and with a poem of 11 verses, each starting with the expression "*Ayasofya'nın dirilişi*" (the resurrection of Ayasofya).

The time dedicated to this last part weighs for 22.5 per cent of the total time of the speech,[63] meaning that almost one fourth of it has been dedicated to these kinds of nationalist references and allusions to the reconversion as a "resurrection" (*diriliş*) and "second conquest" (*ikinci bir fetih*). And it is precisely the selection of some of these references that adds even more emphasis to the concept that:

> bugün Ayasofya, inşa edildiği tarihten itibaren defalarca şahit olduğu yeniden dirilişlerinden birini yaşıyor.
>
> today, Ayasofya experiences one of the resurrections it has witnessed many times since it was built.[64]

In conclusion, it is possible to argue that — in Erdoğan's rhetoric — just as the 29 May 1453 landmark ended the physical decay of Ayasofya, this "second conquest" aims to put an end to the moral and spiritual decay already described when talking about *mahzunluk.* Before delving on these aspects and before declaiming his 11 verses on Ayasofya resurrection, he sets the stage of these concepts, introducing them as developments of the long-awaited "second conquest". And he does so with another citation of a *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı* authors: this time by reciting these verses of O.Y. Serdengeçti:

Ayasofya, ey muhteşem mabet. Merak etme, Fatih'in torunları bütün putları devirip seni camiye çevirecekler. *Gözyaşlarıyla abdest alıp secdelere kapanacaklar. Tehlil ve tekbir sadaları boş kubbelerini yeniden dolduracak, ikinci bir fetih olacak. Ozanlar bunun destanını yazacaklar, ezanlar ilanını yapacaklar. Sessiz ve* öksüz *minarelerden yükselen tekbir sesleri fezaları yeniden inletecek.* Şerefelerin *yine Allah'ın ve Hazreti Muhammed'in* şerefine ışıl ışıl *yanacak. Bütün dünya Fatih dirildi sanacak. Bu olacak Ayasofya, bu olacak.* İkinci *bir fetih yeni bir ba'sü ba'del-mevt. Bu muhakkak. Bugünler yakın. Belki yarın, belki yarından da yakın.*

Oh Ayasofya, oh magnificent temple. Don't worry, Fatih's grandchildren will overthrow all idols and turn you into a mosque. They will perform ablution with their tears and prostrate. Many *tahlil* and *takbir* will replenish your empty domes, it will be a second conquest. This epos will be written by the bards, the announcement of this will be made with the ezan. The sounds of takbir rising from the silent and orphan minarets will resound again in the skies. Your minaret balconies (şerefeler) will shine again in honor of Allah and his Prophet Muhammad. The whole world will think that Fatih is resurrected. So it will be, Ayasofya, so it will be. A second conquest, a new resurrection. This is for sure. These days are close. Maybe tomorrow, maybe sooner than tomorrow (Serdengeçti 1952a: 3).[65]

Historical, Moral, Juridical Rights of the Turkish Nation

The last "content category" relevant to this analysis deals with the insistence on the vindication of alleged rights of the Turkish nation on Ayasofya. In order to underline the validity of the reconversion and the legitimacy of the Turkish people and government in taking such a decision, both Erdoğan and the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı* authors insist on claiming various rights pertaining to the Turkish nation, grounding them on a number of different bases. Apart from differences related to the different political contexts in which they write, the vindication of these national rights constitutes a strong and evident point in common, that again is claimed by Erdoğan by tapping precisely on the nationalist rhetoric built in the 1950s.

First of all, the right of the Turkish nation is rooted in the treatment that the Ottomans reserved to Ayasofya, that has been highlighted previously and which will not thus be explored further. The thoughtfulness and moral rectitude with which the Sultans took care of the great temple is a first element to assert a national right exclusive to the Turkish people, the sole to be entitled to decide on Ayasofya. On this aspect, the polemic is directed to different events linked, as said, to the different contingencies in which the texts were written/recited. More specifically, the authors in the 1950s lamented the fact that the transformation into a museum was done "to please the Greeks"[66] and the absence of

support by the DP government to the reconversion was due to their will "not to offend Greece" (Dânişmend 1952b: 23). The "modern version" of these claims comes in response to the international opinions, that were becoming more vocal as Erdoğan's statement on the reconversion were growing in frequency and intensity.[67] He spoke in defense on the right to decide of the future of Ayasofya, that "belongs only and exclusively to our beloved nation",[68] since:

> *Ayasofya'nın hangi amaçla kullanılacağı konusu, Türkiye'nin egemenlik haklarıyla ilgilidir. [...] Bu konuda, görüş belirtmenin* ötesindeki *her türlü tavrı ve ifadeyi, bağımsızlığımızın ihlali olarak kabul ederiz.* […] *Türkiye olarak, nasıl diğer* ülkelerdeki *ibadet mekanlarıyla ilgili tasarruflara karışmıyorsak biz de tarihi ve hukuki haklarımıza sahip* çıkma *konusunda aynı anlayışı bekliyoruz.* […] *Türkiye'nin kararını, sadece kendi iç hukuku ve tarihi haklarıyla ilgilidir.*
>
> To which aims Ayasofya will be used is a matter of Turkey's sovereign rights. […] On this topic, we consider any attitude and expression that goes beyond expressing an opinion as a violation of our independence. […] Just as we, as Turkey, do not interfere with the decision of places of worship in other countries, we expect the same understanding on the matter of claiming our historical and legal rights. […] Turkey's decision is solely related with its own internal legal and historical rights.[69]

Speaking about these legal and historical rights, there are many similarities not only in the fact that both Erdoğan and the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı* authors attribute a great importance to them, but also precisely in the way in which they claim them. First of all, there is a recurrent use of the term "*ecdat*" (ancestors), aimed to emphasise the generational connection between the current Turkish people and those who took care of, prayed in, and glorified Ayasofya. Just to make a few examples, the term is used to underline the need of "respect for our ancestors" (*ecdat saygısı*)[70] and for "ancestral heirloom" (*ecdat yadigarı*)[71] that Ayasofya is. And, in President Erdoğan's words:

> Ayasofya'nın dirilişi, Alparslan'dan Fatih'e ve Abdülhamit'e kadar ecdadın tamamına vefamızın gereğidir.
>
> The resurrection of Ayasofya is a requirement (stemming from) our loyalty to all of our ancestors, from Alparslan to (the Sultans) Fatih and Abdülhamit.[72]

Moreover, there is a striking similarity in the way in which İ.H. Dânişmend and Erdoğan underline the length of the possession of Ayasofya, counting it with pinpoint accuracy:

481 sene, 5 ay, 16 gün de câmi halini muhafaza etmiştir.

It has preserved its mosque status for 481 years, 5 months and 16 days (Dânişmend 1952a)[73]

Bu, öyle 50-100 yıllık değil, tam 567 yıllık bir haktır.

This is a right of 567 years, not just 50-100 years (Erdoğan 2020b: 9.35).[74]

This lasting and "strong possession" (*güçlü sahipleniş*) and the "contributions made" (*yaptığı katkılar*) by the Turkish people throughout history make their rights on Ayasofya even stronger than those of who built it 1500 years ago.[75]

For all of these reasons, both the nationalist authors and Erdoğan rail against the Atatürk-signed decree of 1934, starting precisely from these claims and pointing at the same, essential, conclusion: the reconversion of Ayasofya is, before anything else, an act that would reinstate justice towards the legitimate rights of the Turkish nation, the legacy of the ancestors, and that most of all would extol the spirit of *Fatih*.[76] What truly is remarkable are the similarities between their criticism against the 1934 decree. For Dânişmend (1952a: 2), it was an unnecessary, arbitrary decision[77] disrespectful (*hürmetsizlik etmiş*) towards Turkish history. Berk (1952: 4) insists almost on the same lines, labeling it as an "assault to the spirit of [our] past [*geçmişin maneviyata taarruz teşkil eden [haller]*]". According to the Istanbul branch of the TMD (1952a), it was a "clear violation of freedom of conscience and an infringement of the constitutional principle of 'secularism' [*Vicdan hürriyetine açık bir tecavüz ve Anayasadaki 'lâiklik' prensipinin de* çiğnenmesidir]". Finally, Erdoğan too comes to analogous evaluations and judgements on Atatürk's 1934 decision:

Esasen, tek parti döneminde alınan bu karar, tarihe ihanet olmanın yanında hukuka da aykırıydı. […] çağdaşlık *kisvesi altında* çağ *dışı bir anlayışın tezahürüdür* […].

In fact, this decision taken during the one-party period, besides being a betrayal to history, it was also against the law. […] It is the manifestation of an outdated understanding under the guise of modernity […].[78]

And he goes much further: since, as the *Danıştay* states in its ruling (No 2020/2595), the 1934 decision is illegitimate as it violates the right of property of Ayasofya contained in the 1453-dated *vakfiyename*,[79] Erdoğan — reading a part of that 1453 document — labels the transformation of the temple into

a museum as "the biggest *haram* […] and sin"[80] that could ever be committed. In conclusion, as a logical consequence of all of this, the Erdoğan-signed reconversion of Ayasofya into a mosque saves the Turkish people from the *vakfiyename*'s curse, and satisfies the requests claimed already in the 1950s by the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı*: essentially, in the words of Dânişmend:

> milletin hakkı millete ve tarihin hakkı tarihe iade [etmek]
>
> to return the right of the nation to the nation and the right of history to history (Dânişmend 1952a).

Conclusions

As shown throughout this comparison, the narrative that President Erdoğan built around the issue of Ayasofya is dense with nationalist references and rhetoric. The "*pantheon*" of nationalist authors explicitly cited by Erdoğan is in great part composed of the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı* ones mentioned in this article, at the point that almost one fourth of the 10 July speech to the nation has been dedicated to this kind of references. Apart from the explicit mentions (such as those of Serdengeçti, Asya, Atsız), as shown by analysing these three "content categories", in many other cases the rhetorical/narrative elements are the same employed by the nationalist circles of the 1950s: the selection that Erdoğan makes of a certain terminology and the summoning of certain feelings; the reference to precise periods in history, traditions, events; the emphasis he puts on claiming particular *national* rights. These circles, as pointed out in the second section of the article, constituted the first forerunners (after the multiparty opening) of the racist-nationalist milieu that would give birth to the MHP in the 1960s, and the cultural background in which the current ally of Erdoğan's *AK Parti* is rooted. Their authors and intellectuals (some of which have been the subject of this article) animated the associations and published in the journals of that milieu.

The binding alliance with the MHP which Erdoğan has been forced into as a consequence of the electoral backlash of 2015 had an impact not only on the political agenda of the government, but also on the rhetoric of the President himself, who aims to address and shape the islamo-nationalist constituencies into a single bloc led by the *Cumhur* İttifakı (Çağaptay 2006; Esen and Gümüşçü 2018; Halpin, Werz and Hoffman 2018). In the light of this, not only the rhetoric on Ayasofya, but also the change in Erdoğan's opinion towards

the issue of the reconversion has evident links with this process. It is in the context of the People's Alliance that the President started to openly advocate again the transformation of Ayasofya into a mosque. And, even if it is not possible (nor useful) to locate the precise moment in which this shift happened, it can be argued that it took place during the 2019 local elections (Bianet 2019). Erdoğan started that electoral round (whose political importance has already been underlined) in continuity with his previous rhetorical tendencies: quite ambiguous, but tendentially contrary to the reconversion.[81] However, as the crucial vote approached and the result in the city of Istanbul (among the others) appeared increasingly uncertain, he vehemently started to advocate the need to turn Ayasofya back into a mosque with sudden urgency (Anadolu Ajansı 2019a; 2019b).[82] Whether the impact of this change on the electoral results has been positive or not was not a subject of this analysis. What was important to highlight here is the fact that Erdoğan's rhetoric on Ayasofya makes a large use of nationalist references, tapping into the cultural *humus* where the MHP is rooted, and that this change in agenda and narrative is part of a wider process of redefinition of its electoral base in an effort to compact the nationalist and religious conservatives within the new boundaries of the *Cumhur* İttifakı.

Although central in its aims, this article seeks not only to contribute to the discussion of the nationalistic and authoritarian drift of Erdoğan and his *AK Parti* as a consequence of the alliance with the MHP. It also wants to underline how long-standing is the debate on the reconversion, and how linked it is to the various social/cultural climates and political contexts in which it took place. In this sense, it is easier to understand why so many references are necessarily made to early modern and modern Turkish history when talking about this ancient temple. As Necipoğlu (1992: 195–6) perfectly summarizes, the life of Ayasofya has always "involved a dynamic interaction with changing audiences and a lively dialogue between the past and present". In fact, the debate on the status of Ayasofya pre-existed the birth of the Islamist parties linked to Necmettin Erbakan and the *Milli Görüş*, to which the main roots of the AKP are commonly linked by the literature (Çınar 2011; Guida 2011; Gümüşçü and Sert 2009; Yavuz 2009). Naturally the MG is of key importance in AKP's history and formation, both politically and ideologically. However, as a part of academic literature is beginning to stress out (Aytürk 2015; 2019; 2020; Bakiner 2018; Demiralp 2012), some of its (at least equally important) early precursors can be already found in the political environment of the 1950s. As already underlined, Aytürk (2015) stresses the importance to investigate on this

period (the Cold War era, beginning with the multiparty opening) of Turkish history, which until now has been quite neglected in the academia (if compared to the single-party era and the period starting with the 1980 coup), to discover new links and roots of the current political/social/cultural environment. In this sense, this article ultimately aims to contribute to this need, and to the current and future discussion around it.

Carlo Sanna is an Adjunct Professor at the University of Sassari and is affiliated as subject expert at the University of Cagliari.

Notes

1 - T.C. Danıstay Onuncu Daire: *Esas No. 2016/16015. Karar No. 2020/2595*, 2016.

2 - *ibid*., pp. 10–18.

3 - EEAS Press Team, *Turkey: Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell on the decision regarding Hagia Sophia,* "European Union External Action"*,* 2020, bit.ly/3kJJMIV (last accessed 7 April 2025).

4 - UNESCO, *UNESCO statement on Hagia Sophia, Istanbul*, 2020, bit.ly/32PxHLS (last accessed 7 April 2025).

5 - During the Angelus of 12 July 2020, Pope Francis said itself to be "deeply saddened" by the decision regarding *Ayasofya*. The full text of the Angelus can be retrieved on the Holy See's website: Pope Francis, *ANGELUS Piazza San Pietro - Domenica*, 12 luglio 2020, "La Santa Sede"*,* bit.ly/3pww3IR (last accessed 7 April 2025).

6 - Anadolu Ajansı, *Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Ayasofya'nın statüsüyle ilgili nihai karar mercii Türk milletidir* [President Erdoğan: the final decision maker regarding the status of Ayasofya is the Turkish Nation], "Anadolu Ajansı", 2020, bit.ly/3puELrf (last accessed 7 April 2025).

7 - T.C. Resmî Gazete, *Sayı: 3118. Cumhurbaşkani Kararı, No: 2729 10 Temmuz 2020*, 10 July 2020.

8 - There are of course works on the specific issue of Ayasofya in the Turkish nationalists' imaginary, some of the most relevant to this article being M.İ. Özekmekçi (2020), Azak (2014).

9 - This shift is unprecedented in *Ak Parti*'s history since, as many authors point out, its nationalist faction has always been weaker than that spearheaded by the same Erdoğan who in 2013 stated "we are a power that trampled upon all sorts of nationalisms" [*Biz her türlü milliyetçiliği ayaklarının altına almış bir iktidarız*]: Erdoğan, R.T. 2013, *Her Türlü Milliyetçiliği ayaklar altına aldık*, "YouTube", 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlPsRL_Kc_0, (last accessed 7 April 2025). The re-emergence of nationalism at the forefront of the Turkish political spectrum has been much debated inside the academia, but to focus on this point would go beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, I find

it necessary at least to point out that, before the formation of the *Ak Parti* in 2001, most of the academic world was talking about a crisis of identity in Turkish nationalism (Cizre Sakallıoğlu 1998; Sibel and Kasaba 1997; Yavuz 1998), a "nationalist schizophrenia" (Poulton 1997: 322) stemming from the "opening", in late 1980s and 1990s, "of the Kemalist Pandora's box out of which have emerged multiple identities" (Çetinsaya 1999: 350). The *Ak Parti*, seen for much of the time as the representative of these peripherical identities (Dağı 2006; Gümüşçü and Sert 2009; Kuru 2007; Yavuz 2006), apparently prolonged the duration of this identity crisis, of this "weakening of nationalism" (Uzer 2016: 222). However, seeing the crucial year of 2016 — in which the 15 July failed coup happened and then the tactical alliance between AKP and MHP started to be built (Uzer 2018) — as a watershed, we can observe how from that point "due to the tactical alliance with the nationalist MHP Erdoğan has changed his discourse to some extent, with nationalist slogans becoming part of his rhetorical arguments" (Uzer 2018: 343), and how nationalism in general has begun to re-emerge with a more prominent role in the public sphere.

10 - See Aytürk (2015; 2019; 2020).

11 - *Halkların Demokratik Partisi* (Peoples' Democratic Party), that with its share of votes of 11.7 per cent is the third biggest party in the Turkish Grand Assembly in terms of number of MPs, behind AKP and CHP.

12 - *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Republican People's Party).

13 - İyi Parti (Good Party).

14 - *Saadet Partisi* (Felicity Party) and *Demokrat Parti* (Democrat Party).

15 - The reference is mainly to the failed coup of 15 July 2016, when a fraction of the Turkish armed forces attempted to overthrow the government. Consequently, President Erdoğan rushed in its goal of securing his power by pushing for a set of constitutional amendments to create an executive presidential system, that eventually allowed him (together with the decrees implemented during the state of emergency period that followed the failed coup) to increase its control over state apparatus and political system. In order to do all of this, the votes of his ally — the MHP — were (have been) indispensable, as shown by the results of the 2017 constitutional referendum, won by the "*Evet*" (yes) option with a narrow margin (51.2 per cent). See Esen and Gümüşçü (2019a; 2019b: 319–20).

16 - İyi Parti is a nationalist formation born from the 2017 split from within the MHP itself, *Saadet Partisi* can be briefly mentioned as an Islamist party, while CHP is more leaning towards social democracy especially since its change of leadership in 2010, in favor of the current President of the Party Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu.

17 - For all of these reasons, despite the overall victory in terms of total percentage of the *Cumhur* İttifakı on the oppostions, the loss of the majority of the larger cities (including the three biggest: Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir) has represented a serious blowback for the AKP.

18 - Milliyet, *Cumhur* İttifakı Protokolü'nün tam metni [Full text of the Protocol of the People's Alliance], "Milliyet", 2018, bit.ly/3pUSuYk (last accessed 8 April 2025).

19 - In May 1944, the Turkish government took 47 prominent racist Turanists and sympathisers into custody and began a trial process that lasted three year. For a more detailed overview of the importance of the events of 1944 in the wider context in which they took

place, see Güngor (1986: 152ff.); Aytürk (2014: 694–6); Ter-Matevosyan (2019: 214–16).

20 - This translation is to be attributed to Aytürk (2014).

21 - Labeling it with the well-formulated definition of Ahmet T. Kuru (2007).

22 - Nihal Atsız (1905–75) has been a leading Pan-Turkist ideologue and the most prolific writer of works with an ultra-nationalistic character (Günay-Erkol 2013). A staunch opposer of Kemalism and harsh critic of its most significative representatives (starting from Atatürk and İnönü themselves), despite his strict secularist views gained significative credit also within the new generation of *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı* intellectuals as one of the very few openly anti-Kemalist figures in Turkey (Aytürk 2011: 320).

23 - To find a very brief summary of this debate, see Çetinsaya (1999).

24 - As Aytürk labels them, addressing the issue of the problems of finding an appropriate definition to summarise their multi-faceted outlook. See Aytürk (2014: 696–7)

25 - "High Kemalism" is a definition that Soner Çağaptay uses to describe the hardening of the single-party regime under the banner of "Kemalism par excellence" during the 1930s, and that continued in the 1940s in a different fashion under the leadership of İsmet İnönü after Atatürk's death in 1938. See Çağaptay (2006: 43–4).

26 - The differences grew larger and irreconciliable with time and eventually led to a full-blown dispute that emerged in the post-1960 coup environment. See Aytürk (2011: 320).

27 - These processes are summarized in Aytürk (2014: 697–701). As he suggests, a more detailed source is Darendelioğlu (1968).

28 - Actually, the CKMP was the product of the 1954 merger of two smaller parties, one of which was the *Cumhuriyetçi Millet Partisi* (Republican Nation's Party) that — under the leadership of Osman Bölükbaşı — took up the legacy of the MP.

29 - In the Adana Congress not only the new statute and symbol were voted, but also the renaming of the CKMP as *Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*. After colonel Alparslan Türkeş took the leadership of the CKMP in 1965, he carried it to this congress in which, partying for the so-called *hilalci* faction ("crescentists", those who supported the three crescent as a new symbol, which displayed the consolidation of its foundational synthesis of Islam and Turkish nationalism), he defeated the *kurtçular* ("wolfists", led by Atsız, who wanted the grey wolf, symbol of Pan-Turkism, as the emblem of the party) and established the new MHP as a party not only of ethno-nationalistic, but also of Islamic opposition. This is particularly clear in Türkeş's expression "*Türklük gurur ve şuuru, Islam ahlak ve fazilet*" (The pride and consciousness of Turkishness, the morality and virtue of Islam). See: Tepe (2000: 62–63); Bora (2002: 693–4).

30 - Tevetoğlu F., *500üncü Yılı Karşılarken: Ayasofya Camiimiz* [Welcoming the 500th Year: Our Hagia Sophia Mosque], "Sebilürreşâd", 5 (105 - Haziran 1951), 1951, p. 69.

31 - A penname he used, translatable as "Daredevil", which was also the name of the islamist/nationalist weekly journal he published since 1947, as it will be further analyzed later in the text.

32 - For a brief biography of the two authors, see: Küçük (2016), Karaçam (2016).

33 - Dânişmend, İ.H., *Ayasofya camii* [The Hagia Sophia Mosque], "Komünizme Karşı

Mücadele", 33 (1 Nisan 1952), 2; Dânişmend, İ.H., İsmâil Hâmî Dânişmend Bey'le Yaptığımız Konuşma, [The conversation we had with İsmâil Hâmî Dânişmend], "Komünizme Karşı Mücadele", 34 (15 Nisan 1952), 23.

34 - Dânişmend, İ.H., İstanbul Fethinin Üç Cephesi [Three Aspects of the Conquest of Istanbul], "Milliyet", 6 Şubat 1952.

35 - B. Berk, *Başbakan Adnan Menderes'e Aç*ık Mektup [Open Letter to the Prime Minister Adnan Menderes], "Komünizme Karşı Mücadele", 34 (15 Nisan 1952), 1, p. 4.

36 - From the same journal it has been selected also: Serdengeçti (1952b).

37 - Türk Milliyetçiler Derneği İstanbul Şubesi, *Ayasofya camii* [The Hagia Sophia Mosque], "Sebilürreşâd", 5 (125 - Nisan 1952), p. 386.

38 - Türk Milliyetçiler Derneği İstanbul Şubesi, *Ayasofya*, "Büyük Doğu", 5 (Mayıs 1952).

39 - Articles of these kind are mainly anonymous, whose contents cannot be thus linked to the thoughts of an author in particular, but just to the *milliyetçi-mukaddesatçı* current of thought in general. One example is the article N.A. (1952b: 398); albeit developed on different issues, its first section contains almost the same words as İ.H. Dânişmend, *Ayasofya camii* [The Hagia Sophia Mosque], "Komünizme Karşı Mücadele", 33 (1 Nisan 1952), 2.

40 - N.A. (1952a: 384).

41 - *ibid.*

42 - Here's a list of the videos that report the speeches analysed in this work: Erdoğan R.T., *Kanal 7'nin "Cumhurbaşkanı ile Seçim Özel" programında görüşme*, "YouTube", 2019, bit.ly/34bb2uf (last accessed 8 April 2025); Erdoğan R.T., *Beyaz TV'nin "Cumhurbaşkanı ile Seçim Özel" programında görüşme*, "YouTube", 2019, bit.ly/348waBg (last accessed 8 April 2025); Erdoğan R.T., İstanbul'un Sultanbeyli ilçesinde düzenlenen seçim mitingde konuşma, Periscope, "You Tube", 2019, bit.ly/3oBteoO (last accessed 8 April 2025); Erdoğan R.T., İstanbul'un Fethinin 567'nci Yıl Dönümünde konuşması, "YouTube", 2020, youtu.be/48PXjIKQd1E (last accessed 8 April 2025); Erdoğan R.T., *Millete Sesleniş konuşması*, "YouTube", 2020, youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

43 - See for instance TMD (1952a: 386).

44 - The *Demokrat Parti* was the party in power at that time, led by the Prime Minister Adnan Menderes.

45 - Haber, T.R.T., *Ayasofya: İstanbul'un kalbi* [Ayasofya: the heart of Istanbul], "Twitter/X", 2020 bit.ly/3401LFt (last accessed 8 April 2025).

46 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation]*, "*YouTube", 2020, min. 13:46, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=826 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

47 - Quote from the opening speech made by President Erdoğan at the "Feast of Conquest" (*Fetih* Şöleni), celebrating — inside and outside Ayasofya — the 567th anniversary of the Conquest of Constantinople. Erdoğan, R.T., İstanbul'un Fethinin 567'nci Yıl Dönümünde Ayasofya'da *"Fetih Şöleni"* ["Feast of Conquest" in Hagia Sophia on the 567th Anniversary of the Conquest of Istanbul], "YouTube", 2020, min. 24:10, youtu.be/48PXjIKQd1E?t=1451 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

48 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation]*,* "YouTube", 2020, min. 34:38,

youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

49 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", min. 34:47, 2020, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=2087 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

50 - "İbadete kapalı bulunduğu yıllar boyunca ecdat yadigarı bu eser, büyük bir tarih kıyımına maruz kalır [During the years when it was closed to worship, this masterpiece, an ancestral heirloom, was subjected to a great history slaughter]". *Ibid.*, min. 23:01.

51 - Translation from Persian retrieved in Necipoğlu (1992: 196).

52 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", min. 11:43, 2020, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=703 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

53 - This expression is used both in Serdengeçti (1952: 3) and in Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", min. 33:53, 2020, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=703 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

54 - In a booklet published by the Turkish Presidency, celebrating the reconversion of Ayasofya, the Director of Communications Fahrettin Altun, in line with what Erdoğan says in his speech on 10 July, highlights this aspect. See Altun (2020: 2; 11).

55 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", min. 33:53, 2020, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=703 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

56 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", min. 33:53, 2020, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=703 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

57 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", min. 16:38, 2020, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=703 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

58 - "*fetihle birlikte yeniden ayağa kaldırılmıştır*" in Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", min. 14:08, 2020, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=703 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

59 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", min. 14:08, 2020, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=703 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

60 - 2.34 minutes, from 11.43 to 14.17.

61 - 6.00 minutes, from 14.17 to 20.17.

62 - 2.47 minutes, from 22.27 to 25.14.

63 - 8.10 minutes, from 30.52 to 39.02 when ends his speech and starts making the final remarks.

64 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", min. 14:08, 2020, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=703 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

65 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", min. 33:35, 2020, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=703 (last accessed 8 April 2025).

66 - "*Yunanlıları memnun etmek için*" (Berk 1952: 1), "*Yunanlıların hatırını hoş etmek için*" (Dânişmend 1952a: 2).

67 - Speaking of the last years, Erdoğan re-started to openly speak of Ayasofya's possible reconversion during the 2019 local elections, and already in that period he firmly refuted international interference on the matter. One example can be found in his electoral speech

in Sultanbeyli (Istanbul), when he said (in front of a cheering crowd): "Someone from 16500 kilometers away wants to discuss Ayasofya. We have been very patient, but as I recently explained: […] god willing, after the election we will turn it again from a museum into a mosque" [*16 bin 500 kilometre öteden birileri Ayasofya'yı ele almak istiyor. Çok sabrettik ama geçenlerde açıkladım*: […] *inşallah seçimden sonra tekrar müzeden isim olarak camiye çevireceğiz*]. See: Erdoğan, R.T., İstanbul'un Sultanbeyli ilçesinde düzenlenen seçim mitingde konuşma (Speech at the electoral rally organized in Sultanbeyli district), "You Tube", 2019, min. 00:55–01:27, bit.ly/3oBteoO (last accessed 9 April 2025).

68 - "*Ancak ve ancak aziz milletimiz[e ait]*", in Erdoğan, R.T. (2020a), İstanbul'un Fethinin 567'nci Yıl Dönümünde konuşması, "YouTube", 2020, min. 13:15, youtu.be/48PXjIKQd1E (last accessed 8 April 2025).

69 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", 2020, min. 8:13, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=493 (last accessed 9 April 2025).

70 - Traceable in Berk (1952) and Erdoğan, who, in this regard, quotes some verses of the nationalist poet Yahya Kemal: Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", 2020, min. 29.55, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=493 (last accessed 9 April 2025).

71 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", 2020, min. 23.01; 24.49, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=493 (last accessed 9 April 2025).

72 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", 2020, min. 36:42, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=2202 (last accessed 9 April 2025).

73 - Almost the same words are traceable in: *Ayasofya Camii Hakkında Bazı Notlar*. "Sebilürreşâd", 5(125), 398.

74 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", 2020, min. 9:35, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=575 (last accessed 9 April 2025).

75 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", 2020, min. 18:50, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=1130 (last accessed 9 April 2025).

76 - The references to *Fatih* are of course recurrent in all the authors analysed, as well as the implication that the reconversion would be an act of respect for his legacy. These claims are particularly explicit in Dânişmend (1952b), for whom it would "please the soul of *Fatih*" (*Fatihin ruhunu şad edecek*) and in Erdoğan, R.T., İstanbul'un Fethinin 567'nci Yıl Dönümünde konuşması, "YouTube", 2020, min. 13:15, youtu.be/48PXjIKQd1E (last accessed 8 April 2025), who, during the celebration for the 567th anniversary of the Conquest, expressed his hope to be able to "leave a Turkey that is worthy of *Fatih*" to the future generations (*Fatih'e layık bir Türkiye bırakacağız*).

77 - "*Mabed olmuş bir binâ keyfi bir kararla hiçbir lüzumu olmadan birdenbire müzeye tahvil edilmiş demektir*" (a building that has been a temple is suddenly converted into a museum by an arbitrary decision without any need).

78 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", 2020, min. 24:57, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=1497 , min. 28:33, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=1713 (last accessed 9 April 2025).

79 - A *vakfiyename* is a document stating the conditions of a foundation (*vakıf*): in short,

the Turkish Council of State stated that, since — as the *Fatih vakfiyename* dated 1 June 1453 demonstrates — the property of Ayasofya belongs to a fused (*mazbut*) foundation registered in the name of *Fatih Sultan Mehmet* himself, Atatürk's government did not have the legal right to dispose of the property of Ayasofya and to issue such a decree. See: T.C. Danıstay Onuncu Daire, *Esas No: 2016/16015. Karar No: 2020/2595*, 2020, namely the points (i), (ii), (iii), at page 17. For a thorough analysis of the legal framework and an explanation of this decision, see: Çorhulu, Uzun and Yıldız (2020).

80 - "*En büyük haram ve [...] günah*", Erdoğan, R.T., *Millete Sesleniş* [Address to the Nation], "YouTube", 2020, min. 27:08, https://youtu.be/m_LYTCx9XX8?t=1628 (last accessed 9 April 2025).

81 - Erdoğan, R.T., *Kanal 7'nin "Cumhurbaşkanı ile Seçim Özel" programında görüşme*, "YouTube", 2019, bit.ly/34bb2uf (last accessed 8 April 2025).

82 - *Başbakan Erdoğan'dan Ayasofya cevabı*, "Hürriyet", Ankara, 6 June 2014, https://bit.ly/3mgRaft (last accessed 8 May 2025); *Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: 'Seçimden sonra milletin önüne gelince çok ciddi bedel ödeyecek'*, "Hürriyet", Ankara, 18 March 2019, https://bit.ly/3aaIQeO (last accessed 8 May 2020). Erdoğan, R.T., İstanbul'un Sultanbeyli ilçesinde düzenlenen seçim mitingde konuşma (Speech at the electoral rally organized in Sultanbeyli district), "You Tube", 2019, bit.ly/3oBteoO (last accessed 9 April 2025); Erdoğan, R.T., *Beyaz TV'nin "Cumhurbaşkanı ile Seçim Özel" programında görüşm*, "YouTube", 2019, bit.ly/348waBg (last accessed 8 April 2025).

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