

## **“Erdoğanism” as Fabrication of Hostility**

It's been a while now that some journalists produce nothing but inventing new hostilities and enemies to Albanians as if their actual enemies are not enough. The "analysis" (if it could be called such!) has only two or three sentences and a full basket of venom and hatred. The name of the hatred is "Turkey and Erdoğan". To justify their "analysis" they don't forget to mention me too as the main culprit who disturbs their waters. Although the level of such articles may not be worth any serious attention, the Albanian public deserves to know these people who wear the robes of Albanian patriotism while being on a purely anti-Albanian agenda are just mercenaries for the enemies of Albanians.

### **"Erdoğanism" as a Gogol**

I have put the term "Erdoğanism" in quotes because it represents nothing in political studies and public communication besides being tendentious and having no real ideological or political content whatsoever. Therefore in this article, I am going to use it as a metaphor for the hatred and of the insinuations made by the fashioners of this needless enmity.

Let's go further! A Gogol is a mythological figure of the oral tradition, a horrifying creature often revoked to frighten children to sleep. In the political sense, the Gogol is a horrifying and dangerous creature through which the author arouses panic and fear in readers about "an enemy at your doorstep coming to swallow them." Such a Gogol today, according to some opinion leaders especially in Kosovo, is the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. His name is used by them to produce the fear that he poses danger for Albanians, entertaining expansionist plans for us, wishing our assimilation, aiming at the Islamization of our nation, and wanting our withdrawal from the European agenda, our alienation and so on.

For people who think with their brains, these are of course fairy tales that couldn't even fool children, but they continue to relate them shamelessly. First, there is no indication whatsoever that Turkey and President Erdoğan have territorial claims on Albanian lands. If anything, the recent history of the relations between the two countries has shown that whenever these lands had to be protected, Turkey has shown itself on the side of Albanians. The claim that he aspires the assimilation of Albanians does not stand too because the Albanians lived for five centuries with the Turks and were not assimilated, even while they had no books and schools. So how could it possibly happen now that the ethnic Albanian identity is so strongly crystallized? The allegations about Islamization or certain political agendas also have no basis, much less the accusations against the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), which has invested in development, educational, scientific, and cultural projects and which, as the suggestions go, has renovated some mosques, something that Albanians should have done themselves without donations from abroad. The claim that Turkey wants to separate us from Europe is also a lie since Turkey is a NATO member country which has been waiting for years for EU integration and has not given up on this agenda. Any attitude of Turkey towards Albanians is public and transparent, and there is nothing worrying about it. Therefore, the claim that Erdoğan is "the dangerous one" and "the enemy of Albanians" is a false and malevolent claim, a gogol so to speak, which however deserves an analysis as to what really lies behind it.

### **"Erdoğanism" as an anti-Albanian agenda**

When analyzing Albanian relations with Turkey a paradox emerges. The leaders of the two Albanian states, Albania and Kosovo, as well as Macedonian politicians, speak with praise about Albanians' relations with Turkey and with President Erdoğan, because they appreciate the support that this country and its leader have given Albanians in the Balkans in recent years, whereas these journalists speak all day long about how Turkey poses a danger to Albanians. Albanians also all over Albania, Kosovo and Macedonia, feel admiration for the friendship shown by President Erdoğan and the Turkish state to Albanians, that's why they go out to greet him with great affection when he visits the region, while those journalists sing to themselves the song "Flee, Erdoğan is coming!" So while the Albanian states have declared the co-operation with Turkey and President Erdoğan as a strategic interest and the Albanian people supports that policy, what does that rhetoric of hatred serve for? Who is interested in alienating Albanians and Albanian states from Turkey? Why do Albanians need an enemy in Turkey? Which are the forces that do not want such a friendship? While Albanians have confirmed enemies in Serbia and Russia who try to keep back and fight Kosovo, why does one need to produce another enemy for? Or to ask more

concretely, is this perhaps in Belgrade's interest: that enmity with Serbia is replaced by enmity against Turkey and thus the state of Milosevic yesterday and Vucic today may appear as the "savior of Albanians" in the time of Pashic when violence, deportations, massacres and the annexation of our lands were justified to the world in name of the "mission for the civilization of Albanians?" It's worth considering, however, the truth is that we have read from time to time in the media that big money is thrown in Kosovo by Russia and Serbia for pro-Russian and pro-Serbian propaganda. It is naive to believe in such a coincidence. Because there could hardly be any more anti-Albanian agenda than producing a great enemy for Kosovo at this time. Only those who are hostile to Albanians and Albanian states would want to produce more enemies in order to hinder the development and progress of our nation. No other explanation is possible. This is similar to the time when Kosovo was being emptied out of Albanians, as Serbs were forcing them out, while Enver Hoxha was calling them (the Serbs) "brothers" and enemies in that period were the Westerners. In his memoirs, "Rezistenca kosovare mes dy zjarresh," Sabri Maxhuni-Novosella relates that one of the things that had astonished him the most in the conversations he had had with senior officials of the Labor Party and with different people in Albania during that period was their warning that he should not speak badly about the Serbs. "They are our brothers in arms and war comrades. Together with the Serbs we fought against Germans. Our enemy is Tito and his followers who betrayed Stalin and Communism!" the Enverians told him.

### **"Erdoğanism" as Islamophobia**

"Erdoğanism" is also synonymous with Islamophobia. All Christian extremists or sworn atheists, as well as the European right wing, hate Turkey and its president because, in its success, they see the expansion of Islam and, as they see it, of anti-civilization, terrorism and so on. Besides ignorance –Islam was in Spain for 800 years (even before Christianity arrived in Scandinavia!) and it helped the European Renaissance – they also demonstrate a phobia to the point of hatred. It is evident that there are many Muslim extremists, as there are in other religions, but building absolute postulates based on that spirit is both ignorance and wickedness.

The subtext of the hate against Turkey and President Erdoğan in the Albanian environment can be explained as "from there comes Islam, a dangerous religion for the nation." They forget that Albanians have been Muslims for more than five centuries and it hasn't posed any danger, on the contrary, it has been an advantage. Let me remind the League of Prizren, led by a Muslim cleric, or the Manastir Congress, where hodja Rexhep Voka of Tetova applauded and embraced Gjergj Fishta. Or yet: It is now well accepted academically that the national identity of the Albanians who remained in Yugoslavia was saved only by Islam which distinguished them from the Slavs. Albanians, who are mostly Muslims, throughout their national history have shown that their religion makes them benevolent and tolerant towards their compatriots of other faiths. The examples abound. For instance, we can recall the historic speech of Hafiz Ali Krajaat in the funeral of Father Gjergj Fishta as an example that shows that not only there was no religious animosity among Albanians but there was mutual cooperation and respect. We could also recall another interesting case that foreigners have also appreciated. At the meeting of the League of Nations on December 17, 1920, a delegate of India would declare: "While the world was rife with interfaith wars, Muslims, Catholics and Orthodox in Albania were living in harmony and it was indeed a great feature for a country with an overwhelming majority of Muslims to be represented here by a Christian and a priest." In Skopje, Albanian Muslims used to respect Catholics and there were never any problems recorded. It is sufficient to recall that a Catholic like Gjon Sereçi was side by side with the madrasah student Azem Morana at NDSH (the Albanian National-Democratic Organization) and find out that interfaith tolerance was only natural in the diverse Skopje. And we should say it openly that the merit for such tolerance and respect is due to Albanian Muslims since they were the majority. Therefore maligning the nation's majority because of a few extreme ignorants who make noises on Facebook but who don't even represent 1% of Albanian Muslims, is tendentious. To incite interfaith hatred among Albanians is to throw gasoline on fire. Besides being Islamophobic, it is also an anti-Albanian attitude. Because, trying to disenfranchise Muslim Albanians only because one is ignorant of the religious doctrine or an atheist, Christian extremist or mercenary, is a provocation against the nations as such. Albanians have invested years and effort to preserve interfaith tolerance, therefore any effort to ruin it is nothing short than hitting the nation in the heart. For this reason, Prime Minister Edi Rama stated a few days ago: "Expressions of Islamophobia or Turcophobia are expressions of arrogance stemming primarily from ignorance. Attacking Islam and serving Islamophobic attitudes implies attacking a significant root of the Albanian tree and the source of our nation's existence itself."

This division has been fought against in the past by both Christian priests and Muslim clergy (ulama), that's why I have always insisted that Albanian Christians and Muslims should cooperate; first because they belong to the same nation and secondly because they both belong to an Abrahamic religion (in the

Qur'an, Christians are described as "People of the Book"). As I said during the promotion of Dom Viktor Sopi's books, it is an offense to Albanian believers, whether Christians or Muslims, that atheists and liberals should teach them about tolerance while they have been raised with mutual national and interfaith love.

### **"Erdoğanism" as a mercenary movement**

After "Erdoğanism" is deconstructed to show that the fight against Turkey and its president is essentially a battle with an anti-Albanian agenda, we inevitably come to questions. What are the forces that wish for the alienation of Albanians from such an important ally and for fratricide among Albanians? It may sound like a conspiracy, but for such a question, the first logical answer that comes to one's mind is: "the enemies of Albanians, Serbia and Russia." Only the enemies of the Albanians would benefit from an internal division from within that would end up in fratricide and only the enemies of Albanians would wish for more enemies to Albanians. In addition to Serbo-Russian forces, the second in the line one could sponsor to this language are the extensions of the FETÖ organization, led by Fethullah Gülen, declared as a terrorist one by the Turkish state. The list includes some so-called liberals who in the name of freedom of expression stage Albanians in "movies" about the protection of democracy, of human rights, freedom of expression, etc., as if the Albanians have finished their affairs and now is up to them to solve world's affairs. While Serbia is struggling against us every day, while crime, corruption and drugs are flourishing, some miracle-working people among us will deal with the right-wing dictatorship of Orbán in Hungary, the rights of journalists in Turkey and the extreme right in Austria. Irony without borders! This is similar to the time when Enver Hoxha almost annihilated Albanians while trying to save Communism in the USSR, China, Venezuela and Vietnam.

From this perspective it turns out that all this anti-Turkish opinion produced in the Albanian media, especially in Kosovo, is a mercenary movement that is heavily paid by Serbia (or Russia), by the FETÖ or by some Western liberal extremists who still believe in Father Christmas, yet fail to see what is happening in their own yard in the West. Even in the United States, there are some professors who come and sell such bumps in the Balkans, frightening the Albanians about Turkey and even about BESA Movement, and when asked where do they get their information (as one was asked in Skopje), their answer is: "From the media." The typical logic of defamers: Slander as much as you can for something will remain!

Here maybe we should ask why the most typed name by some journalists is "Erdoğan", while Albanians have dozens of problems that they never talk about? Surprisingly they never write criticism about the names of Vučić, Đacic, Seselj, Zajednicë, demarcation or Putin! Either these issues do not concern them at all or they have a duty to write as they do, because Serbia now – at the final stage of talks on Kosovo – having gained the sympathy of Russia, China, and even of EU, especially of Germany, by also exploiting the false animosity of these pathetic people wants to beat Albanians in their friendship with Turkey, to leave them empty-handed and to make them as many enemies as they can. Therefore the anti-Turkish campaign does not seem to me to be quite casual. I repeat: We must not believe in coincidence! What it means is that they write for those who pay them. Otherwise there is no explanation as to what is bothering so much a Kosovar journalist who seems to be worried about human rights in Turkey.

### **Albanians and Turkey as allies**

However, the good news is that the leaders of the Albanian states do not fall under the influence of this rubbish and are concerned with their national and state interests. In this context, they see Turkey, along with the United States of course, as an ally on the Euro-Atlantic path. Both Albanians and Turkey have declared support for a pro-European agenda and the European perspective is the line that connects these two nations. Secondly, but most importantly, is that Turkey is an important power in NATO. For a nation that has almost no army at all and with all its neighbors armed to their teeth, a friendly state as Turkey – which has so far proved to be a military ally of Albanians – is as indispensable as a candle in the darkness of the night. Faced with a Serbia that arms itself as it wishes, only NATO membership can save Albanians while NATO in our region indisputably implies the United States, Croatia and Turkey. Therefore the Albanian cooperation with Turkey must first and foremost be on a Euro-Atlantic line. Then comes the cooperation for economic development also much needed in the region, and then come the possibilities of cooperation in education, culture, arts, sports, as well as in Turkish and Islamic thought, which fits very well with Islam in the Albanian tradition.

The wise look for friends and allies while mercenaries will do their job. I am confident that our nation

needs allies and as few enemies as possible and the ones who are trying to sabotage this are no other than mercenaries.

***\*This article was first published in Daily Sabah on June 23, 2018.***