



2020_08_06_Europe's Largest and Most Influential Political Network Responds to Inflammatory Remarks by Turkish President

**“With his call to revive Islamic supremacism, President Erdogan is
stoking a fire that threatens to engulf the entire world”**

**“The global resurgence of identity politics is progressively undermining the rules-based
international order and fragile consensus on human rights”**

BRUSSELS, Belgium: On July 22, 2020, members of the largest political networks in the world, and Europe, set aside long-standing differences to join Indonesia’s National Awakening Party, PKB, in a call for “Muslims and people of good will of every faith and nation to prevent the political weaponization of religion.”

Centrist Democrat International (CDI) adopted—and the European People’s Party (EPP) publicly endorsed—a PKB statement issued in response to inflammatory remarks by President Erdogan of Turkey regarding the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

PKB is deeply rooted within Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)—the world’s largest Muslim organization with over 90 million followers—and is Indonesia’s largest Islamic political party. Through its membership in CDI, PKB is actively [promoting](#) NU’s Humanitarian Islam agenda worldwide.

The unexpected unity shown by EPP comes after years of intense public wrangling by its member parties—including Germany’s Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Hungary’s Fidesz—over issues related to Islam, terrorism and migration. PKB’s statement warned of the threat to “the rules-based international order [posed] by the emergence of authoritarian, civilizationist states that do not accept this order, whether in terms of human rights, rule of law, democracy or respect for international borders and the sovereignty of other nations.”

The PKB/CDI statement came in response to President Erdogan’s effort to present himself as a leader of the global Muslim community and restore political Islam to a position of dominance in the world order.

Prominently displayed on the home pages of both Centrist Democrat International and the European People’s Party, the PKB statement declared that Erdogan’s remarks “are attacking the rules-based international order; inflaming emotions ‘wherever Muslims dwell throughout the earth’; and threaten to rekindle a clash of civilizations that afflicted humanity for nearly 1300 years, along a fault line stretching ‘from Bukhara (in Central Asia) to *al-Andalus* (Spain).’ The effects of President Erdogan’s words and actions thus extend far beyond Turkey’s borders and threaten both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim nations worldwide.”

The unexpected unity of EPP member parties in supporting the PKB/CDI statement comes just months after a crisis in which President Erdogan threatened to breach the borders of neighboring Greece and flood Europe with millions of refugees and economic migrants. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis of Greece, whose political party belongs to EPP, mobilized the Greek military to defend his nation’s, and the European Union’s, border with Turkey. The EU’s senior

leadership, including Ursula von der Leyen—President of the European Commission and member of Germany’s CDU—stressed their support for Greece amid the refugee crisis.

In recent years Erdogan’s Turkey has emerged as a significant threat to the security of the European Union and its Member States, due to its support of *jihadi* groups in Syria; its unauthorized drilling in Greek and Cypriot territorial waters; its military intervention in Libya on behalf of a Muslim Brotherhood-backed interim government; its vow to liberate al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem; its destabilizing activities in sub-Saharan Africa; its democratic backsliding; and its problematic outreach to ethnic Turks and other Muslims in Europe, by appealing to Turkish nationalism and Islamic supremacism.

PKB and the Humanitarian Islam movement are uniquely positioned to address this threat, by delegitimizing the Islamist ideology that underlies and animates President Erdogan’s use of religious narratives to project both soft and hard power.

REMBANG, Central Java, Indonesia: Commenting in response to EPP’s endorsement of the PKB/CDI statement, Kyai Haji Yahya Cholil Staquf, General Secretary of Nahdlatul Ulama and co-founder of the Humanitarian Islam movement, remarked:

“For thousands of years, conflict has been inextricably linked to ‘identity politics’: the weaponization of history, grievances and ‘tribal’—whether ethnic, religious or ideological—identity, to mobilize support for one’s agenda while demonizing others.

“Conquest, genocide, slavery, economic and political disenfranchisement, colonialism and imperialism were standard features of the ancient, medieval and early modern worlds.

“Despite its numerous flaws, the post-World War II rules-based international order was intended to provide secure borders to sovereign nations and thereby foster global peace and security.

“The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) emerged from and represents a similar aspiration: to end the primordial cycle of hatred, tyranny and violence that has plagued humanity since time immemorial.

“Those who practice or condone identity politics within the context of their own society may benefit from contemplating how identity politics manifests in other parts of the world, including the Turkish, Arab and Persian cultural zones within the Middle East and North Africa.

“That is the message urgently conveyed by Indonesia’s largest Islamic political party—the National Awakening Party, or PKB—in response to remarks by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey regarding the conversion of Hagia Sophia to a mosque. In doing so, PKB succeeded in unifying the largest political networks in Europe and the world—the European People’s Party and Centrist Democrat International—in the face of Islamist aggression.”

Mr. Staquf further observed that:

“In issuing this statement, PKB is acting as a responsible member of the world community and fulfilling a commitment its Chairman made to the assembled leadership of Centrist Democrat International in January of 2020, that PKB will work ‘to preserve and strengthen a rules-based international order founded upon justice, freedom and

enduring peace.’ Mr. Iskandar closed his [keynote address](#) to the CDI Eurasia Forum by stating, ‘Allow me to take this opportunity to say that the National Awakening Party is determined to ensure that Indonesia plays its full part in this effort, and that PKB will carry the banner of Indonesia’s contribution, for the future of humanity and global civilization.’

“When authoritarian rulers violate international law and disregard the sovereign rights of other nations—as is vividly on display in Crimea, eastern Ukraine and the South China Sea—they re-enliven historical grievances and encourage the resumption of permanent conflict between peoples and nations. In the case of President Erdogan, his acts and statements threaten to [reawaken the West’s memory](#) of a bitter 1,300-year-long civilizational conflict, accompanied by renewed fear, hatred and violence directed towards Muslims. We must do everything in our power to prevent such conflict, not [encourage](#) it.

“With his call to revive Islamic supremacism, President Erdogan is stoking a fire that threatens to engulf the entire world. Unfortunately, similar behavior is on display in many parts of the world, including the United States and Europe, where various social and political movements seek to divide rather than unite an increasingly diverse and polarized society. The global resurgence of identity politics is progressively undermining the rules-based international order and fragile consensus on fundamental human rights, whose collapse would have devastating consequences for humanity.”

Statement by Indonesia’s National Awakening Party

in response to remarks by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey regarding the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque

JAKARTA, Indonesia: The largest Islamic political party in the world’s most populous Muslim-majority nation and democracy—Indonesia’s National Awakening Party (PKB)—has called upon Muslims and people of good will of every faith and nation to prevent the weaponization of religion for political purposes. Responding to inflammatory remarks by President Erdogan of Turkey, PKB warned that “the rules-based international order is under severe stress, challenged by the emergence of authoritarian, civilizationist states that do not accept this order, whether in terms of human rights, rule of law, democracy or respect for international borders and the sovereignty of other [nations](#).”

The PKB statement comes in response to an Arabic-language tweet, in which President Erdogan summoned Muslims “in every corner of the earth” to follow Turkey’s lead in reawakening the Islamic nation, or *ummah*, which was largely united under the political and military leadership of a caliph from the 7th century CE until the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924.

As PKB Chairman H. Muhaimin Iskandar warned members of the world’s largest political network, Centrist Democrat International (CDI), in January of 2020 at the CDI Eurasia Forum in Yogyakarta, Indonesia: “When religions are deliberately placed upon a collision course, it becomes extremely difficult to prevent universal conflict, for every religion claims to espouse a universal mission. When various religious groups live side by side, closely intermixed, religious conflict will inevitably provoke social unrest and violence, which in turn will lead to widespread enmity or even the expulsion of minorities unable to defend themselves, something that we can clearly see happening in various parts of the world today.”

President Erdogan has defended the conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque by citing Turkey's right, as a sovereign nation state, to do as it pleases with the former Orthodox Christian cathedral. However, Erdogan's statements to the Muslim world belie this argument. His remarks, in Arabic, are attacking the rules-based international order; inflaming emotions "wherever Muslims dwell throughout the earth"; and threaten to rekindle a clash of civilizations that afflicted humanity for nearly 1300 years, along a fault line stretching "from Bukhara (in Central Asia) to *al-Andalus* (Spain)." The effects of President Erdogan's words and actions thus extend far beyond Turkey's borders and threaten both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim nations worldwide.

This may be clearly seen by the fact that Erdogan's statements were swiftly endorsed by the Muslim Brotherhood, Iran and a wide range of Islamic supremacists worldwide, including Indonesian Muslims who seek to transform the multi-religious and pluralistic Republic of Indonesia into an Islamic State or caliphate.

Erdogan's remarks also threaten peace and security in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, where similar narratives employed by al-Qaeda, ISIS, al-Shabab and Boko Haram have led to countless terrorist attacks and produced millions of refugees. In February of 2019, at a gathering of some 20,000 Muslim religious scholars, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)—the world's largest Muslim organization, with over 90 million followers—endorsed the 2017 [*Gerakan Pemuda Ansor Declaration on Humanitarian Islam*](#), which states:

"25. The Islamic world is in the midst of a rapidly metastasizing crisis, with no apparent sign of remission. Among the most obvious manifestations of this crisis are the brutal conflicts now raging across a huge swath of territory inhabited by Muslims, from Africa and the Middle East to the borders of India; rampant social turbulence throughout the Islamic world; the unchecked spread of religious extremism and terror; and a rising tide of Islamophobia among non-Muslim populations, in direct response to these developments.

"26. Most of the political and military actors engaged in these conflicts pursue their competing agendas without regard to the cost in human lives and misery. This has led to an immense humanitarian crisis, while heightening the appeal and dramatically accelerating the spread of a de facto Islamist revolutionary movement that threatens the stability and security of the entire world, by summoning Muslims to join a global insurrection against the current world order."

In the midst of these circumstances, it is the height of irresponsibility for Recep Erdogan to further inflame Muslim emotions in pursuit of his domestic political agenda and to serve as a cover for his violation of international norms—by drilling for natural gas within the territorial waters of Cyprus and Greece; supporting al-Nusra (an affiliate of al-Qaeda) in Syria; and intervening in the Libyan conflict on behalf of the Islamist-dominated interim government—in an effort to enhance Turkish regional power and assert maritime rights in the eastern Mediterranean.

As Indonesia knows from its colonial history—and from recent efforts by China to claim "traditional fishing rights" within Indonesia's territorial waters near the island of Natuna—President Erdogan's actions and statements threaten to return human relations to a Hobbesian state of nature, in which the law of the jungle prevails. For if international law is no longer the yardstick for governing disputes between nations, any country that is sufficiently powerful may seize lands or waters internationally recognized as belonging to a smaller nation, and defy the weaker power to assert its claim by force.

**Remarks by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey about the conversion
of Hagia Sophia into a mosque, tweeted on Mr. Erdogan’s official
Arabic-language Twitter account on July 10, 2020**

Restoring life to Hagia Sophia [by converting it from a museum to a mosque] is an auspicious portent that foreshadows the liberation of al-Aqsa Mosque [in Jerusalem].

Restoring life to Hagia Sophia represents a new beginning for Muslims in every corner of the earth, [a step that we have taken] in order to precipitate our exit from the dark ages [of Islamic decline and domination by the West].

Restoring life to Hagia Sophia symbolizes the restoration of hope not only to Muslims, but also to all the maltreated, oppressed, crushed and exploited [peoples of the world].

Restoring life to Hagia Sophia constitutes a salutation of peace sent by us, from the depths of our hearts, to all the cities that symbolize [the former heights of] our civilization, from Bukhara to *al-Andalus*.

By re-conquering/re-opening [*i’adat fath*] Hagia Sophia—a sacred trust bestowed by God upon Sultan Mehmet the Conqueror/Opener [*al-Fātiḥ*] of Constantinople—as a mosque, after 70 years (sic), the return of the Muslim call to prayer constitutes a long-overdue re-awakening [of the Islamic nation, or *ummah*, which was largely united under the political and military leadership of a Caliph from the 7th century CE until the dissolution of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924].

This painting [of Hagia Sophia, when the former Christian cathedral served as an Ottoman mosque] constitutes the best reply [by Muslims] to the heinous assaults targeting our core [Islamic] values wherever Muslims dwell throughout the earth.

By taking this step, at this time and in this place, Turkey affirms that she is [dominant](#), and not subject to others’ domination.

As the will of God Most High is with us, we shall continue our journey on this blessed path without cease, without fatigue or complaint, and with steely determination, resolve and readiness to sacrifice, until we arrive at our desired objective. [NOTE: the language in this final sentence is calculated to echo the terminology of offensive *jihad*. It implies that the speaker will lead the global Muslim community to further “openings/conquests,” in a process that results in the continued expansion and ultimate triumph of Islam].

**Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
President of the Republic of Turkey**