

Turkey: How to Lose a Democracy  
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Once more, supporters of \342\200\234democracy\342\200\235 in the Muslim world do not understand the issue. Majority rule, when there are no institutions to temper it (such as the courts or free press), does not provide a \342\200\234liberal democracy.\342\200\235 Rather, it offers abuse of power or anarchy.

Turkey, the one seemingly genuine participatory republic, is teetering on the edge of losing it. The European Union, which rides herd on Turkey's evolution toward a European-style democracy, mistakenly regards the current Islamist governing party as \342\200\234mildly Islamist\342\200\235 (the Economist Magazine). Mildly Islamist is like mildly pregnant.

Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the first Islamist to head the state (as Kamal Ataturk turns over in his grave) has managed his administration's economy well, getting him re-elected three times. However, he has been instituting a policy of creeping, gradual Islamism that bodes ill for Turkey. Over his tenure, he has done the following:

\342\200\242 Transform Turkey's mutually beneficial relationship with Israel into hostility. This gets him points with the Arab world, a world that the non-Arab Turks (Ottoman Empire) once ruled. One wonders at Arab historic amnesia.

\342\200\242 Reversed a ban on religious garb (veils and fezes) established 90 years ago by the republic's founder, Mustafa Kamal Ataturk. Erdogan has lifted the ban on headscarves in government buildings, including the parliament and universities. Europeans do not see that the headscarf is the forward banner of Islamism, not just a personal choice. Perhaps if women were allowed to wear a headscarf and a miniskirt, that would be free choice. This is not the case.

Ataturk, made it clear that there was no room for religion in official life (separation of church and state). Nobody was to wear identifying signs of Islam or any religion in public buildings, parliament, schools, or universities. (The French model.) This cornerstone of a secular state is now in reverse, which should alarm Europeans.

\342\200\242 A TV newswoman was condemned publicly for appearing on camera in a \342\200\234revealing\342\200\235 dress. Vice President Huseyin Celic complained that her cleavage was visible through a keyhole neckline. She was fired the next day. Worse, however, is the news by the Committee to Protect Journalists that Turkey has the world's worst persecution and jailing of journalists.

\342\200\242 University housing is often raided because the male and female students fraternize at night. An apartment housing three young women was raided and the women arrested and fined for entertaining male guests (no, they were not prostitutes).

\342\200\242 Alcohol sales are prohibited after 10 p.m. Goodbye tourist industry.

\342\200\242 The Prime Minister has scolded Turkish women for not staying home and having at least three children for their country. He frowns on women's shelters because battered women (horrific numbers in Turkey) should just stay home and put up with it.

Erdogan has also resurrected that old Middle Eastern paranoia that the recent revelation of his and his cronies' financial corruption is a \342\200\234plot by America and Israel.\342\200\235 Not even Turks believe that one.

Those of us, including educated secular Turks, are criticized for being paranoid about the creeping Islamization of Turkey, a sad thing for this Muslim World role model. The irony may be that as Iran starts to throw off its oppressors, Turkey may soon be the next really Islamic state. Kemal Kilicdaoglu of the opposition Republic

People's Party recently observed: \342\200\234Women in Saudi Arabia are struggling to be granted the right to drive. If you come across such a ban [in Turkey] tomorrow, don't be surprised.\342\200\235

I would be surprised. Turkey will never be like Saudi Arabia, which is unique even in the Muslim world for having the most backward and oppressive culture in its region. However, it is very sad to see a truly modernizing secular country sliding back into its oppressive past.

It is easier to get rid of a dictator than get rid of a headscarf, once it is made mandatory. This will be just one issue roiling the secular and intellectual factions in Turkey who have begun to fight back. They demonstrated loudly last summer. They will do so again.

671 words

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