

# 'Il Duce' Sultan: Will Turkey Turn Into an Islamofascist State?

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Global Research, April 26, 2017

[21st Century Wire](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

*Turkey's founding father **Mustafa Kemal Atatürk** (1881-1938) had the intention of moving his country away from the Middle East and its neighbouring Arab countries to transform Turkey into a thriving parliamentary democracy, following centuries of, in his view, backward Ottoman rule. But now, nearly eighty years after his death, the nation's first popularly elected president **Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** (aka the Prez) appears busy to do his utmost to reintegrate Turkey back into the Middle East, and within the region circle of influence of its Arab and Gulf neighbours.*

Erdoğan's latest strike in this respect was the realisation of a popular referendum on Constitutional changes that would increase the executive power of the figure of the President and supposedly usher in a stable political climate, unperturbed by coalition negotiations or ever party political disputes. Many weeks and months have passed in preparation and finally, on Sunday, 16 April 2017, the Turkish population went to the polls in an effort to determine the shape of things to come . . . and now, though the result was close (or a mere "51.4 percent" voting in favour), Tayyip Erdoğan and his AKP henchmen can continue to dismantle the Republic of Turkey... *at will*.

They will continue their efforts to deconstruct the Kemalist infrastructure to replace it with a pseudo-Ottoman state structure – a pseudo-Ottoman state that will defend the creed of Sunni Islam in a saccharine form that could be described as a '[Sultanate of Kitsch](#).'

**Islam in Turkey: Piety and Ottomanitas**



In a Turkish context, the religion of Islam is synonymous with the noun Ottoman (or *Osmanlı*, in Turkish) and, as written by the Arab-hating godfather of Orientalism Bernard Lewis himself in [1953](#), the “Ottoman Turks were indeed fanatical Moslems, dedicated to the maintenance and expansion of the Islamic state” throughout their long history (1299-1918, as popular opinion in Turkey has it). As a result, Turkish Islamists can easily be described as Ottomanist, or proponents of a largely imaginary Ottoman past when Muslims supposedly lived in peace and happiness under the care of the Sultan-Caliph (Süleyman the Magnificent, 1520-66, having been the first Ottoman to have been officially described as such). Hence, Turkish Islamists have always been vehement opponents of the nation’s founding father, Atatürk, his Westernising reform movement (known as *İnkılap*, in Turkish), and the parliamentary system he inherited from his Unionist forebears. Instead, Islamists looked towards the last absolute Ottoman Sultan as the ultimate object of their love and adulation:

Sultan Abdülhamid II (the 34<sup>th</sup> Ottoman Sultan, 1842-1918), whose 33-year rule (1876-1909), for them, represents a [mythical golden age](#) when Islam was (supposedly) victorious and (Turkish) society beholden to Muslim rules, regulations, and restrictions. And, it should not surprise anyone that Tayyip Erdoğan himself very much likes to cultivate an Hamidian image for himself and that his many followers eagerly participate in this cunning PR exercise [equating](#) their beloved leader to the Ottoman Sultan who died as a captive in the Palace of Beylerbeyi on the Bosphorus (10 February 1918).

### **Rehabilitating Sultan Abdülhamid II: Necip Fazıl Kısakürek**

**Abdülhamid II** came to the throne in 1876, even introducing a Constitution (or *Kanûn-ı Esâsî*) symbolising the apotheosis of the Ottoman reform movement known as the *Tanzimat* (or Re-Ordering, 1839-76). This First Constitutional period came to an abrupt end in two years’ time when the Sultan shut down the *Kanûn-ı Esâsî* and abrogated parliament (or *Meclis-i Umumî*), ushering in a period that has been termed Hamidian autocracy (1878-1908). In 1883, the French journalist Gabriel Charmes (1850-86) coined the term “panislamisme” to describe the Sultan’s subsequent policy of consolidating his hold over the remaining Arab provinces of the Empire, in view of the increasing loss of European

territories in the West. One could argue that these Islamist credentials led the poet and writer **Necip Fazıl Kısakürek** (1904-83) to commence the intellectual rehabilitation of Sultan Abdülhamid in 1965 – writing the panegyric book *Ulu Hakan Abdulhamit Han* on the Sultan and his reign. As a “Born-Again-Muslim,” Necip Fazıl’s poetic oeuvre has been long-favoured by Turkey’s Islamists, opposed to the permissive and modernist innovations introduced by Mustafa Kemal and the subsequent liberal atmosphere that has led many to speak of a “Turkish Secularism.” The independent journalist [Ayfer Erkul](#) characterises Kısakürek as an “Islamofascist poet and ideologue,” who dreamt of a “totalitarian country completely determined by Islam,” of a country inhabited solely by “Muslim Turks.”

Even before focusing on Sultan Abdülhamid, Necip Fazıl Kısakürek had already in 1951 introduced the concept of a “Supreme Leader” (or *Başyüce*, in Turkish) to head his ideal Islamic state. Kısakürek envisioned this ideal state as a place where alcohol, prostitution, and democracy would be prohibited as “corrupt Western values” and Shariah Law would instead rule supreme. The economist and Islam expert Aydın Tonga explains that Kısakürek pinpoints “Jews, Freemasons, Communist, Socialists, [and] atheists” as the “external enemies of the Islamic revolution.” Adding that, according to Kısakürek, this “Supreme Leader” was to be elected by a “Supreme Council,” consisting of notable men (with no woman in sight), Tonga points out that parallels with such historical national leaders as either “Il Duce” or “der Führer” are obvious (in fact, Erdoğan himself made a “reference to [Hitler’s Germany](#) as a presidential system model”). A clear Islamic framework would constitute the main difference, as Necip Fazıl himself clearly wrote that “behind the Council’s leader podium the phrase ‘Sovereignty belongs to God’ [or, if you will, Allah] is inscribed and [that] the law is His law, [and] the state His state.” In AKP-led Turkey the popularity of Necip Fazıl has been soaring, Erdoğan himself quoting and promoting the Islamist’s poetic output on many occasions; he “described the poet’s life and works as a guide for himself and future generations,” in late May 2013, as worded by **Sean R. Singer**.

Singer goes on to say that this

“was not an isolated reference. [In 2012], in an interview with a literary journal, Erdogan recalled that ‘the master and his ordeals helped us, like no other, to make sense of history and the present’.”

**“Democracy is like a streetcar, when you reach your destination, you get off”**

**(14 June 1996)**

After years and years of playing the political game, of throwing speeches and wooing voters, of going to the polls and winning election after election, and subsequently climbing balconies and addressing crowd after crowd, Tayyip Erdoğan and his henchmen have now finally formalised the initial step towards their ultimate destination – **“Our Reference is Islam. Our Only Goal is an Islamic State”** (6 December 1997). Even though the outcome of the popular referendum makes plain that nearly half the electorate (or “48.6%”) does not seem to favour scrapping the nation’s parliamentary system, the AKP nomenklatura is adamant that the people have spoken. The Prez’s proxy, the soon to be jobless but still hapless **PM Binali Yıldırım** declaring that efforts to thwart the will of the people (read, believers) are futile:

“There is no need to waste people’s time any more. Fundamentally, the YSK [or Supreme Election Board] has resolved objections related to the vote and that is it,” adding that the opposition CHP does not “respect the majority’s vote.”

Now, does a “narrow 51.4 percent to 48.6 percent victory” really denote that the Turkish people have spoken and that the outcome should be regarded as firm and final? There are precedents, with particularly the fairly recent Brexit and Scottish independence referendum votes acting as benchmarks – with 51.9% of the UK electorate opting to leave Fortress Europe (or the EU) and 55.3% of voting Scots preferring to stay true to Queen Anne’s Act of Union. In today’s Turkey, the AKP-led government now regards the outcome of the referendum as a clear affirmation of the fact that a majority of Turks is ready to get off a streetcar named democracy . . .



After all, as long ago as 1997, the then still-Mayor of Istanbul Erdoğan publicly declared that his “guide is Islam,” adding “If I cannot live according to Islam, why live at all?” . . . and, to his and his followers’ mind, it stands to reason that every other citizen of the Republic of Turkey (or every other Turk, if you will) necessarily shares this opinion, basically turning the party faithful into true believers and opponents into apostates. And the government is now cracking down hard on the latter, for instance, detaining the prominent Communist agitator **Abdurrahman Atalay** on Wednesday, 19 April 2017. In all, a total of 19 individuals have been detained since the referendum vote on Sunday, 16 April. Subsequently, Istanbul’s Security Forces’ Directorate of the Anti-Terror Branch issued a statement indicating that “19 people have been apprehended and taken into custody” on account of the fact that they “claim” that the ‘Yes’ outcome of the referendum is not “legitimate,” and were planning to use this as a pretext to “provoke . . . protest demonstrations” throughout the whole of the province, as well as other “unsanctioned” gatherings and manifestations using “social media” in order to “incite” the people towards “hate, antagonism and enmity” to cause unrest and upheaval similar to the “Gezi protests of 2013” to secure a “cancellation/repeat” of the referendum. Meanwhile, the

“CHP is currently evaluating four separate options to decide on whether to appeal to the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR),” as worded by the independent online news network and broadcasting collective [nsnbc](#).

## The New Pakistan

Rather than looking at the Brexit or Scottish referendum for context, I would suggest a parallel with the situation in Pakistan during the rule of General Ziya-ul-Haq (1977/9-88). About three years ago I posed the not so rhetorical question [whether](#) “**Turkey [will] become the new Pakistan?**” Or more precisely, whether the “**Republic of Turkey [is destined] to look like another version of Pakistan transported to the western**

**edge of Asia”?** These questions were meant to suggest that AKP-led Turkey was on the way towards adopting, what the liberal Pakistani journalist **Nadeem Paracha** has termed, ‘Maududi-ism,’ as a short-hand for a conscious re-application of “Islamic sources and beliefs, reinterpreting them to address modern realities.” Paracha coined the phrase in reference to the thoughts and teachings of the Islamist philosopher, jurist, journalist and imam Mawlana Abul Ala Maududi (1903-79). But the present situation offers even more striking parallels with events in Mohammad Ali Jinnah’s state established in 1947. Last summer I suggested that Syria’s not-so civil war next door was used by Tayyip Erdoğan as a kind of testing ground and [template](#) for implementing his “policy of Sunnification” back home in Turkey. Throughout the 1980s, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the U.S. support for the Mujahideen, which were to morph into the Taleban under Benazir Bhutto’s watch, provided Ziya-ul-Haq with a perfect pretext for implementing his very own dreams of forging a Shariah-based state and society in the Land of the Pure, established as a territorial safe-haven for sub-continental Muslims wary of a Hindu-dominated land in 1947. On 19 December 1984, a referendum was organised and the population of Pakistan was given the following question: “Do you endorse the process initiated by the President of Pakistan, General Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq, for bringing the laws of Pakistan in conformity with the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and for the preservation of the ideology of Pakistan, and are you in favour of continuation and further consolidation of that process and for the smooth and orderly transfer of power to the elected representatives of the people.” As expressed by the “author, scholar and renowned journalist” [Shaikh Aziz](#), Pakistan’s

“polling stations on the day wore a deserted look but when the results were announced, it was claimed that the general had bagged more than 60 per cent votes.”

Arguably, Tayyip Erdoğan and his AKP henchmen expected a similar result in Turkey. In Pakistan, the referendum was followed by the promulgation of the *Constitution (Ninth Amendment) Act, 1985*, which came into force on 8 July 1986, and added the following words to Pakistan’s constitution: “the Injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah shall be the supreme law and source of guidance for legislation to be administered through laws enacted by the Parliament and Provincial Assemblies, and for policy making by the Government.” As a result, the Holy Law of Islam or Shariah has since then been the law of the land in Pakistan. At the time, **General Zia** told the press that

“[i]t is not I or my government that is imposing Islam. It was what 99% of the people want... I am just giving the people what they want.” In Turkey, though, the process is not as straightforward.

## **Forging a New Turkey**

Following [last](#) year’s Coup-that-was-no-Coup, “anti-coup protesters as well as the AKP machinery” have oftentimes loudly spoken about ‘defending democracy’ and of reintroducing ‘capital punishment,’ which, I claimed, “should really be understood as [coded](#) messages.” Coded messages that impart a “veiled call for the re-introduction of Shariah law in Turkey.” And now that the referendum is out of the way, though the opposition still seems to cling to some hope of overturning the result, it seems very significant indeed that Tayyip Erdoğan subsequently – following [visits](#) to the grave sites of Turgut Özal (1927-93, the

political leader to have successfully reintroduced a more visible Islam in Turkey during the 1980s), Adnan Menderes (1899-1961, the PM who took first tentative steps to revive Islam in the country during the 1950s and who was executed by a military junta), and Necmettin Erbakan (1926-2011, the Islamist politician who acted as Erdoğan's mentor in the 1990s) - immediately started talking about his willingness to reintroduce the death penalty in Turkey. As I said last [year](#),

“the return of capital punishment could very well function as a catalyst that would convince wider swathes of the population that stricter and more stringent laws are in order . . . and no law is stricter than the law of God, or the Shariah in an Islamic context.”

Over the past years, the opposition in Turkey has been effectively silenced and rendered impotent and meaningless, and now, in the aftermath of the referendum and Tayyip Erdoğan's imminent return to the fold of the AKP, as part of the 18-point amendment package now “popularly” endorsed, it would stand to reason that the country will once again go down the path of a one-party state (1923-50, CHP and 1950-60, DP). And that opposition parties will all but join the ruling AKP or Justice and Development Party. Just the other day, the leader of the splinter rightist (or fascist, if you will) BBP (or Great Unity Party) **Mustafa Destici** appealed to the CHP to “desist from objecting to the will of the people in the law courts.”

Continuing his address to the party faithful, Destici expressed his full support for the Prez and his AKP designs for the nation:

“Our people . . . want the death penalty . . . and God willing it will come.”

In post-referendum Turkey the game of politics will arguably become but the preserve of the leading party and its supporters, and expressing an opposing view or even hinting at straying from the Path of the Righteous will become tantamount to committing a grave sin or possibly a punishable offence. As expressed by the Turkey specialist [Toni Alaranta](#), the

“AKP is a deeply anti-western political movement.”

And the issue of the death penalty is a definite red line in this context, as voiced by the European Parliament's Turkey rapporteur [Kati Piri](#) following the referendum outcome:



“this will have to lead to the formal suspension of the EU accession talks. Continuing to talk about Turkey's integration into Europe under the current

circumstances has become a farce.”

The nation’s founding father intended to elevate Turkey to the level of “contemporary society,” meaning Europe (and/or the West), and in September 1959, Ankara applied for associate membership of the then-European Economic Community (EEC), a political construct that was to become the EU on 1 November 1993. Eleven years later, the decision was finally made to open accession negotiations with Turkey on 3 October 2005. And that is basically still the state of Turkey-EU relations today. Negotiations are ongoing, arduous, and stalled. On 9 November 2010, Turkey’s then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan told the *Reuters* news agency that

“We have been kept waiting at the gates of the EU for 50 years. We are still waiting and waiting and still in the negotiating process”. Erdoğan added that public opinion in Turkey was becoming “offended with the situation”, and that “since the game [of accession negotiations] started, new rules have been brought into the game.”

But now, Tayyip Erdoğan or the Prez, if you will, has himself changed the rules of the game, and in all likelihood, Turkey’s accession to the EU will now never ever happen, come hell or high water. This also means that Atatürk’s vision for his country has now become a thing of the past, a bygone memory of wishes never fulfilled. Alaranta perceptively said that the “Turkish Islamic movement has now made its peace with the [Kemalist] state – by totally conquering it.”

Long ago, on 13 April 1994, the godfather of Islamist politics in Turkey Necmettin Erbakan told his party members that a “Just Order will be founded” (with the understanding that the phrase acts as a short-hand for the Ottoman expression *Nizam-ı Alem* or God-given state-of-the-world), adding the following query: “will the transition period be hard or soft, will it be bloody or will it be bloodless?” And the just-held referendum would seem to provide us with an answer...

Will Turkey now become an Islamofascist state in the mould of Necip Fazıl or will the opposition be able to do the unthinkable and thwart Tayyip Erdoğan’s designs once and for all?!?

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