

Dutch government bans Turkish ministers from speaking in Netherlands

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After local German authorities banned Turkish officials from speaking in Germany last week, the Dutch government provoked a major diplomatic incident with Turkey this weekend, provocatively blocking two Turkish ministers from speaking events in the Netherlands.

This attack on democratic rights is part of a reactionary anti-Muslim campaign by Prime Minister Mark Rutte's government in the run-up to the March 15 elections, attempting to stem the electoral rise of far-right candidate Geert Wilders by appealing to anti-immigrant and far-right sentiment. It came only after Wilders accused Rutte of being "too weak" to stop rallies by Turks in the Netherlands.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and Family Minister Fatma Betul Sayan Kaya were denied entry to the Netherlands, whose officials mounted a growing war of words with Turkey. The two ministers were due to speak at meetings to ask Turks living in the Netherlands to vote "yes" in President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's constitutional referendum, scheduled for April 16, on transferring full powers to the Turkish presidency. People of Turkish origin in Europe, including 1.4 million in Germany and several hundred thousand in the Netherlands, are eligible to vote in the referendum.

Cavusoglu was to attend a pro-Yes rally in Rotterdam Saturday, but the venue owner cancelled the rally, citing safety concerns. When Cavusoglu said that he would come anyway and threatened the Netherlands with economic sanctions if he was refused entry, the Dutch cabinet blocked his flight from landing, citing the risk of clashes between supporters and opponents of Erdoğan in the Turkish immigrant community. "We are of the opinion that Dutch public spaces are not the place for political campaigns of other countries," Rutte

declared.

Erdoğan denounced the Dutch government's decision in a statement to a crowd of supporters in Istanbul, declaring: "They are very nervous and cowardly. They are Nazi remnants, they are fascists." He added that Turkey would now block Dutch diplomatic planes from landing in Turkey.

Only a few hours later, Kaya travelled into the Netherlands from Germany by automobile to speak at the Turkish consulate in Rotterdam, which, according to international law, is Turkey's sovereign territory. In an extraordinary action, armed Dutch police were dispatched to detain Kaya and expel her from the Netherlands back to Germany.

Kaya issued a statement declaring, "The whole world must take action against this fascist practice! Such treatment against a woman minister cannot be accepted." She added that the Netherlands were "violating all international laws, conventions, and human rights by not letting me enter."

Wilders proclaimed that the humiliation of the Turkish ministers was a victory for his neo-fascist Party for Freedom (PVV). "Great! Thanks to heavy PVV pressure a few days before the Dutch elections, our government did not allow the Turkish minister to land here!!" he wrote on Twitter. "I say to all Turks in the Netherlands that agree with Erdoğan: go to Turkey and never come back."

Wilders also posted a video denouncing Turkey and Muslims and insisting that Turkey would never be allowed to join the European Union (EU). "You are no Europeans and you will never be. An Islamic state like Turkey does not belong to Europe," Wilders said. "We do not want more but less Islam. So Turkey, stay away from us. You are not welcome here."

Erdoğan's spokesman Ibrahim Kalin responded by

writing on Twitter, “Shame on the Dutch government for succumbing to anti-Islam racists and fascists, and damaging long-standing Turkey-NL [Netherlands] relations.”

Clashes broke out as Turkish inhabitants of Rotterdam protested the expulsion of the two ministers, and protesters outside the Dutch consulate in Istanbul pelted the building with stones and eggs.

Cavusoglu spoke from a meeting in Metz, France to demand an apology and warn the Netherlands that Turkey would retaliate. Erdoğan made similar warnings on Sunday. “If you can sacrifice Turkish-Dutch relations for an election on Wednesday, you will pay the price,” he said. “I thought Nazism was dead, but I was wrong. Nazism is still widespread in the West. The West has shown its true face.”

The crisis in Turkey-EU relations is set to escalate. Turkish officials raised the possibility of economic sanctions against the Netherlands and said that the Dutch ambassador to Turkey, who is on leave, should not return to Ankara “for some time.” Venues in Denmark, Switzerland, Sweden and Austria are now also reportedly cancelling Turkish officials’ meetings.

Danish Prime Minister Lars Rasmussen has ruled out a planned visit by Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım to Denmark, due to “the current Turkish attack on Holland.”

On Sunday morning, in a tacit acknowledgment of the provocative character of his government’s actions, Rutte said that he wanted to “de-escalate” tensions with Turkey. However, he angrily dismissed as “bizarre” any suggestion that he would offer Erdoğan an apology, declaring: “This is a man who yesterday made us out for fascists and a country of Nazis. I’m going to de-escalate, but not by offering apologies. Are you nuts?”

European governments’ blocking of Turkish officials’ travel and speaking plans is an outrageous attack on free speech, appealing to anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment. Erdoğan’s referendum to set up a so-called “executive presidency” is undoubtedly a reactionary bid to set up a presidential dictatorship in Turkey. However, this is a matter for the Turkish people to decide—not Dutch, Danish, or other EU officials.

The political significance of Rutte’s intervention is unmistakable. He has increasingly run on the basis of anti-Muslim rhetoric, inciting the same reactionary

prejudices as Wilders to divide the working class and shift the political atmosphere far to the right, amid elections marked by deep popular disaffection with his policies of austerity and war.

In January, with Rutte’s People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) trailing Wilders’ PVV, Rutte issued an extraordinary public letter demanding that immigrants totally integrate into Dutch society or leave the Netherlands. Those who “refuse to adapt, and criticise our values [should] behave normally, or go away,” Rutte said. “If you so fundamentally reject this country, then I’d prefer it if you leave.”

Such remarks reflect the broad shift far to the right in all shades of European bourgeois politics, as the Netherlands and France go into critical elections dominated by the rising electoral weight of neo-fascists like Wilders in the Netherlands and Marine Le Pen in France.

In Germany, Left Party leader Sahra Wagenknecht issued a statement aligning herself with Rutte’s reactionary attack on the Turkish government. She declared, “Chancellor Angela Merkel and Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel are in a position to stop Erdoğan’s propaganda tour for dictatorship and the death penalty, at least on German soil, as the governments of Austria and the Netherlands have decided for their countries.”



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