

Ankara whips up Turkish nationalism over Dutch bans on Turkish officials

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The Dutch government's provocative bans preventing Turkish officials from speaking publicly in the Netherlands is playing into the hands of the most right-wing political forces in Turkey.

The bans' ostensible purpose is to prevent Turkish officials from advocating a "yes" vote in the April 16 referendum proposed by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on a constitutional amendment giving the Turkish president vast powers over all branches of government. Polls currently show a narrow majority of 52 percent of the electorate would reject Erdogan's reactionary referendum, which would effectively turn Turkey into a presidential dictatorship.

The Netherlands and other European governments imposed the bans after the Turkish government organised rallies in countries across Europe, encouraging Turks living in Europe to vote "yes" on the referendum. Some 5 million Turks live in Europe, including 1.4 million eligible voters in Germany alone. These voters could determine the result of the referendum.

Now, Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government is pointing to the anti-Muslim hysteria being whipped up across Europe in order to promote a "yes" vote, presenting the referendum as the target of anti-Muslim and anti-Turkish hatreds.

Yesterday, after the Dutch government's provocation preventing two Turkish ministers from addressing rallies in Rotterdam over the weekend, Ankara sent diplomatic notes protesting the incidents. According to the Foreign Ministry, Ankara's first note to the Netherlands decried the mistreatment of Family Minister Fatma Betul Sayan Kaya and Turkish diplomats. The second note dealt with "the mistreatment of the Turkish community and citizens who exercised their right to peaceful demonstration in

Rotterdam."

Speaking at the International Benevolence Awards ceremony in Istanbul on Sunday, Turkish President Erdogan described the bans in several European countries as "signs of increasing fascism, racism, and Islamophobia. On his Twitter account, Turkish EU Minister Omer Celik slammed the Dutch authorities for engaging in "complete fascism."

Along with the attempts to present the AKP as a champion of democracy against xenophobia and racism, Erdogan and his henchmen have also done their utmost to identify the "no" campaign with the European governments' reactionary bans.

Speaking to Turkish broadcaster Kanal 24, Turkish Justice Minister Bekir Bozdog described Germany, the Netherlands, Austria and other European countries as opponents of the proposed constitutional change in Turkey, and said that they were "on the No side in this referendum."

These statements were another attempt of the Turkish government and the fascistic Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) to demonize political forces calling for a "no" vote.

They previously claimed that the "no" campaign was an emanation of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and of the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The AKP and MHP denounced the HDP as the "legal extension" of the outlawed Kurdish separatist group, a claim designed to tar anyone voting against the presidential system as aiding or abetting terrorism.

Since the European powers began banning AKP officials from speaking in Europe, the AKP's mouthpieces in the media have wasted no time in presenting the Erdogan government's referendum as the victim of a European anti-Turkish campaign. The

Turkish government, Ilknur Cevik asserted in an article of the pro-AKP *Daily Sabah* newspaper, is the defender of “‘sacred supreme values’ that have made the continent a hub of civilisation in modern history.”

Cevik pointed to last year’s attempted July 15 coup, backed by Washington and Berlin, aiming to topple the AKP government and murder Erdoğan. In his article, titled “Europe captive to jealousy and racism, Turkey the victim,” Cevik stated that it was “clear that the coalition of countries led by Germany are extremely unhappy with Turkey becoming a rising star under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and have tried everything to stall it including supporting a military coup, but have failed.”

Appealing to Turkish nationalism, he pointed to bans on Turkish ministers speaking in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe as support to a “no” vote in the coming referendum in Turkey.

The fascistic Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the main ally of Erdoğan’s government in the campaign for a “yes” vote in the constitutional referendum, as well as in its military intervention in Syria, also lent its support to the AKP.

On March 12, the MHP’s Deputy Chair Semih Yalcin stated that Turkey should take more serious action against the Netherlands and other European countries. “We have no worries about that. The MHP will side with the measures that will be taken and that have been planned. We are overtly declaring this. Our friends will show their own stance in European countries,” he added.

The tirades of Turkish government officials and their mouthpieces in the media are reactionary and based on a fundamental political lie. The European powers are enforcing chauvinist and Islamophobic bans on Turkish officials as part of a broader agenda of militarism, social counterrevolution, and promotion of far-right nationalism aimed in the final analysis at the European and international working class.

Erdoğan’s referendum is not, however, directed against nationalism, austerity, or war. Rather, it aims to concentrate full powers in Erdoğan’s hands, so he can continue his military participation in the US-led, imperialist carve-up of Syria and moves to crush the HDP, the PKK, and any other source of political opposition inside Turkey itself.

Erdoğan’s principal advantage, as he tries to ram

through his constitutional amendments, is the bankruptcy of his bourgeois opponents. Kemal Kilicdaroglu—the chairperson of the pro-European Union (EU) Republican People’s Party (CHP), which backs a “no” vote in the referendum—reacted to the European bans by adapting to the AKP’s nationalist rhetoric.

Kilicdaroglu absurdly claimed that the European bans have “nothing to do with the referendum and ‘yes’ or ‘no’ votes.” He continued, “This is a national issue. It is every political party’s duty, regardless if you are rightist or leftist, to defend Turkey’s rights. We are ready to fulfil our duty.”

“Now, I am issuing a clear call to the government,” he said at a March 12 rally in the southern province of Adana. “If they do not allow Turkey’s minister to enter the Netherlands or they cannot go to the embassy, please suspend our relationship with the Netherlands. We will lend any support.”

The CHP’s nationalist rhetoric goes hand in hand with its longstanding support for the EU and its NATO military alliance with US imperialism.

The NATO powers see Erdoğan’s possible defeat in the referendum as an opportunity to replace the AKP government with a more pro-EU one. This would be an utterly reactionary event, which would not defend, but rather threaten, democracy in Turkey. Washington and the main EU powers supported four successful military coups in Turkey—in 1960, 1971, 1980, and 1997—and were outraged by the failure of the July 15 coup attempt.

For now, however, amid growing popular anger in Turkey and across Europe with their policies of social counterrevolution and militarism, the EU’s reactionary whipping up of nationalism is strengthening Erdoğan’s hand in Turkey.



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