

Turkish Professor under Assault for Criticizing Kemalism

Atilla Yayla, a politics professor at Gazi University of Ankara leads a think-tank to promote limited government, civil liberties and liberal democracy in Turkey as well. He was invited to a panel discussion on the November 18th, 2006 on “*Social Influence of the Relations between EU and Turkey*” by a local branch of the governing Justice and Development Party. One local newspaper pointed him as “**Traitor**” in its headlines claiming that Yayla accused Kemalism as a back-warding ideology in the sense of enhancing the institutions of human civilization. Dr Yayla was also accused of “calling Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founding president of the Turkish republic as ‘this man’”. Following that, national newspapers and TV channels of the mass media sent out this news and announced that “*howcome a professor of the Turkish Republic who owes his career and his existence to the modern Turkish Republic created by its grand leader Ataturk, ignores the inevitable role of Kemalism and Ataturk in modernizing the country and calls Ataturk as ‘this man’*”. Well, this probably sounds quite nonsense for those who are aware of the fundamentals of a free and democratic system. Some people expressed their reaction with slogans and curses among the readers’ letters.

His claims and arguments have totally been crooked by the mass media which supports the reservations of the establishment restricting civil liberties. And the mass media started a **lynching campaign against Dr Yayla**, instead of supporting freedom of expression. Columnists and reporters used slogans and curses to attack Yayla, but no philosophical arguments at all to destroy his approach. They provoked people to insult him using such claims that he and his institution would be spies to other countries like US and EU and manipulated by their funds.

Not only the media, but also the hosting head of the local branch of the governing party left their panelist alone. Indeed, here the governing party feels on tender hooks. They kept silent in every other critical turning point for democratization and liberalization. However, this attitude has never done good for the Turkish government. Only the head of the Grand Assembly among the Party executives, blamed what the media has done.

On the other hand, more dreadfully, the lynching campaign over Dr. Yayla did not stop at the media. The university he lectures could not resist the pressure and **the Rector of Gazi University** commenced an investigation about Dr Yayla and dismissed him lecturing until the investigation is over. The rector also claims that he is going to be sued

to object the article obliging the academicians “to educate the Turkish students in accordance with Ataturk’s principles and revolutions”. The situation is unacceptable at least in terms of academic freedom. In addition, a rector in Turkey could still consider himself in a position to make a judgment prior to any legal procedure.

Actually what Dr. Yayla did in the panel was to list the fundamental institutions of human civilization, as freedom of expression and freedom of religion, limited and responsible government, rule of law, freedom of contract, private property, free exchange, division of labor etc. And he compared the yields of the Turkish Republic with these parameters. In this respect, he argued that Kemalism and the single party era of Turkish Republic from 1925 – the founding of the Republic-, until 1950-the transformation of the system to democracy- had not done much in promoting constitutional democracy and prosperity. Instead after the democratization and liberalization of the system in 1950s, in 90s and lately in the integration process to EU, Turkey has moved ahead. Dr. Yayla mentioned the pictures and statues of Ataturk being put everywhere due to legal regulations and asked what if the EU officials points the oddness of putting “one/this man”’s picture everywhere and asks the reason of this. He was suspicious about how Turkish people would legitimize the idolization of one person to the people’s of other countries as such things have only been regarded in former communist and some other present totalitarian countries.

This event seems to be an oppression over the opposition against the collectivist official ideology of Turkish Republic. Meanwhile, Dr. Yayla asserts that the reaction against him is exaggerated, instead the supporters of his ideas are the majority, and however they don’t get organized to fight and stand upright for their civil liberties and freedom of expression. The numerous phone calls, and visits from individuals and NGOs to Yayla and the newspaper columns in three days might be a vital sign of the support both to the disperse of Kemalism from the position of officially imposed ideology, but also to the freedom of expression. If Turkey wants to be part of the pluralist democratic society, this would be the right time for the Turkish people to pass the examination.

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