



News Releases Articles Editorials Reports Books Maps Forums Letters Search Permissions Services Links Contact



Guest Editorial

Turkey and Secularism: Myth or Reality?

Lee J. Walker

Posted GMT 10-20-2008 6:31:9 PRINT PRINTER FRIENDLY TEXT ONLY EMAIL READER COMMENTS

Digg

(AINA) -- The nation of Turkey is often praised for being a secular role model for other Islamic societies. It is claimed that the land of Turkey is a beacon of hope and that democracy and secularism can exist within a mainly Muslim nation state. But is this based on reality?

If we concentrate on the founding father of modern day Turkey, Ataturk, then it is clear that he himself supported the destruction of Christianity via the Assyrian, Armenian and Greek Christian genocide of 1915. Turkish nationalism was the potent force behind modern day Turkey and secularism is tainted by its anti-Christian nature, and also by its anti-Kurdish nature. Turkey was founded on Turkish nationalism and secularism and it did not protect the Christians of or give them equal rights.

Despite this the myth of modernity and secularism remains and Western nations stick to this mantra. Yes, Ataturk faced many difficulties and from a Turkish point of view he was very astute because he preserved a Turkish state when it was threatened by others. Yet in order to do this he crushed millions of Christians via massacres, starvation, and by destroying countless numbers of Christian villages and communities.

Ataturk did implement many reforms in order to modernize Turkey and he did lay the foundation for a secular state. In this sense he crushed thoughts of a Sharia Islamic state and he gave more rights to females. But his legacy of modernity and secularism is tainted by the events of history and by overt nationalism. Therefore, we must never forget the Assyrian, Greek and Armenian genocide of 1915 and the continuing legacy of anti-Christian forces in modern day Turkey.

So if secularism means having the right to crush Christian minorities, moderate Muslim minorities like the Alevi, and ethnic minorities like the Assyrians Armenians, and Kurds, in modern day Turkey, then it is not the secularism which I support. Turkish secularism is tainted by this overt nationalism and the Sunni orthodox mindset means that religious inequality is the norm.

The rights of Christians and the Alevi Muslims are not equal in today's Turkey. In recent times many Christians have been murdered. For the more numerous Alevi Muslims, it is clear that they face huge discrimination. Secular Turkey is a myth because under the surface we find a different Turkey based on preserving the dominance of orthodox Sunni Islam.

So why do democrats and secularists praise Turkey for being a shining example and evidence that democracy and Islam can work together? Turkey favors Islam over any other religion and religious equality does not exist. On the contrary, modern day Turkey supports Sunni orthodox Islam and persecution of minorities is endemic. Given this, Islam still controls society and Christians and other minorities face harsh times.

It is apparent that many Western democrats and secularists are ignoring the reality of Turkey. Turkey is tainted by Sunni Islamic thought, which are based on mass discrimination. If Turkey is secular and moderate, what does this say about the rest of the Islamic world and equality?

Lee Jay Walker serves as Tokyo Correspondent of The Seoul Times. He specializes in international relations and geopolitics. He is also involved in analyst work and research on business. After finishing BA degree in East European Studies at the University of London, He earned MA degree in Asia Pacific Studies in Nottingham Trent University. He also studied business at London Institute.

Views and opinions expressed in guest editorials do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of AINA. [Guest Editorial Policy](#)

© 2008, Assyrian International News Agency. All Rights Reserved. [Terms of Use.](#)