

Erdogan “clinches” muted victory in disputed National Referendum vote

by Jerry Gordon



Turkish President Erdogan and wife Ermine at AKP Rally after National Referendum vote, April 16, 2017

The news from Turkey is disquieting. *The Guardian* reported; "[Erdogan clinches victory in Turkish constitutional referendum](#):"

Turkish president, [Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#), has achieved victory in a historic referendum on a package of constitutional amendments that will grant him sweeping new powers.

Sadi Güven, the head of Turkey's high electoral board (YSK), confirmed the passage of the referendum on Sunday night, based on unofficial results.

The yes campaign won 1.25m more votes than the no campaign, with only about 600,000 votes still to be counted, Güven told reporters in Ankara, meaning the expanded presidential powers had been approved.

However, disparities persisted into Sunday evening, with the opposition saying not all ballots had been counted and they would contest a third of the votes that had been cast.

Güven said the YSK had decided to consider unstamped ballots as valid unless they were proved to be fraudulent, after a high number of complaints – including one from the ruling Justice and Development party (AKP) – that its officials had failed to stamp some ballot papers.

The no campaign said the YSK's last-minute decision raised questions about the validity of the vote. But Güven said the decision was taken before results were entered into the system and that members of the AKP and the main opposition were present at almost all polling stations and signed off on reports. He said official results were expected in 11-12 days.

The result of the referendum sets the stage for a transformation of the upper echelons of the state and changing the country from a parliamentary democracy to a presidential republic, arguably the most important development in the country's history since it was founded on the ashes of the Ottoman Republic.

Erdogan said he would immediately discuss reinstating the death penalty in talks with the prime minister and the nationalist opposition leader, Devlet Bahçeli. The president said he would take the issue to referendum if necessary.

Not a resounding mandate was achieved in today's "muted victory" in the Turkish national referendum leaving the country divided:

The narrow victory will nevertheless come as a disappointment for the country's leadership, which had hoped for a decisive mandate for the plan that could see Erdogan remain in power until 2029 if he wins successive elections.

The result will set the stage for a further split between Turkey and its European allies, who believe Ankara is sliding towards autocracy. The European commission said on Sunday night that [Turkey](#) should seek the "broadest possible national consensus" in its constitutional amendments, given the yes campaign's slim margin of victory.

Results carried by the state-run Anadolu news agency showed the yes vote had about 51.3% compared with 48.7% for the no vote, with nearly 99% of the vote counted. Turnout exceeded 80%.

The country's three largest cities – Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir – voted against the changes, and so did the vast majority of Kurdish voters and many of the coastal cities, indicating a general decline in the ruling party's support

In a press conference in Istanbul following his party's declaration of victory, Erdogan said that unofficial results showed there were about 25m yes votes, 1.3m more than no.

But in an unusually muted victory speech, Erdogan said foreign powers should respect the referendum's outcome. He said: "We've got a lot to do, we are on this path but it's time to change gears and go faster ... We are carrying out the most important reform in the history of our nation."

Erdogan claimed support for constitutional change had risen in south-east Turkey and hailed a "profound" jump in support for a presidential system that was unpopular just two years ago. Overseas votes were a "big part" of that success, he said, adding that his new executive presidency

would probably come into effect after the 2019 election.

Erdogan called the prime minister, Binali Yildirim, and other political allies to congratulate them on the victory, although, in an indication of the ruling AKP's disappointment, the deputy prime minister said they had received fewer votes than they expected.

Our comment

Erdogan and AKP celebrate while concerned opposition challenges alleged narrow victory requesting a recount of 60 percent of votes cast.

Was there the expected jiggery pokery over the ballot counting in the nation referendum? Without independent foreign monitors present, how do we know if this vote count wasn't tampered with? How can Turkish voters trust the integrity of the ballot system under the Islamist autocracy of the neo Sultan Erdogan and his cronies conspiring to overturn the 1923 Constitutional legacy of Turkish Republic founder Kemal Ataturk. In a land of Islamic ascendancy under Erdogan, dystopia will follow today's referendum under cover of darkness at noon.

Darkness at Noon in Erodgan's Turkey

If you want to know what was at stake in today's National Referendum in Turkey read this *New York Times Magazine* article, "[Inside Turkey's Purge](#)". The article by Suzy Hansen rivals the paranoia portrayed in the thinly disguised world of Stalin's Great Purge of the 1930's in Russia in former Communist Arthur Koestler's classic novel, [Darkness at Noon](#).

Great swaths of lives swept aside by the dystopian vision of President Erdogan, that if implemented by today's outcome would end the last vestige of freedom of thought, free expression with random imprisonment, torture sending those

desperate to leave to opt for refugee smugglers to bring them to exile in Europe and elsewhere.

All because Erdogan brooks no opposition following his faux coup of July 2016 allegedly perpetrated by exiled former ally Sheik Fethullah Gulen's mythical FETO network. Then there are the Kurds whose liberal Peoples Democratic Party leader, (HDP) Selahattin Demirtas and thousands of elected officials he accuses of being stalking horses for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party, PKK, the cease fire of 2013 which he struck with jailed leader Abdullah Ocalan he overturned in July 2015 with open warfare against the largely Kurdish southeastern region turning cities there into virtual moonscapes.

Erdogan's quest of becoming autocrat for life will denude Turkey of its educated class, industrialists, journalists, educators, jurists, prosecutors and secular military. It will likely lead to oppression of significant religious and ethnic minorities, prominent among them, Alevis and Kurds. The economy will suffer from lack of foreign investment, unemployment rising and real income plummeting. The Erdogan family and AKP operatives will reap enormous wealth from corruption. Foreign relations with the EU, UK and US may enter a dark period, with the threat of loss of NATO membership and alliance with another dystopian country Putin's Russia.

Read this opening stanza of Ms. Hansen's riveting and disturbing profile of Darkness at Noon :

The police officers came to the doctor's door in Istanbul at 6 a.m. – dawn raids usually start then, sometimes 5:30 – and one of them said, “You are accused of attempting to kill President Erdogan.”

The doctor couldn't help it; he laughed. “Really? I did that?”

The police officers smiled, too. “Yes. Also for attempting to destroy Turkey and for being a member of a terrorist

organization.”

“Really?” He looked at them. They carried pistols. “Can I have a cigarette then?”

The police seemed surprised. They didn’t expect a Gulenist to smoke. I’m not a Gulenist, the doctor insisted. That didn’t help him. He would soon be one of the many thousands of people in Turkey caught in the machinery of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s purge.

The police searched the doctor’s house and his books and overturned his things, looking for evidence that he was a Gulenist, or a supporter of Fethullah Gulen, an Islamic cleric who began preaching in Turkey in the 1960s and whose followers number as many as five million. Gulen has been living in exile in Pennsylvania since 1999, which partly explains why the police were looking for American \$1 bills whose serial numbers start with “F” – the Turkish government claims that these were used in some mysterious way by something it has branded the Fethullah Gulen Terrorist Organization, or FETO, which it blames for the attempted coup in Turkey on July 15, 2016.

At present, several pieces of evidence can suggest that you may be a member of FETO, including having had an account at Bank Asya, which was founded by Gulenists; running the ByLock encrypted communication app on your phone (thought to have facilitated planning for the coup attempt); possessing those F-series dollar bills; sending your children to a school associated with Gulen; working at a Gulen-affiliated institution (a university, say, or a hospital); having subscribed to the Gulen newspaper Zaman; or having Gulen’s books in your house. One action implicated the doctor: When he returned to Turkey after living abroad for three years and moved into a new house with his wife and children, he opened an account at the nearest bank up the street: Bank Asya.

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