



26.10.07
FRIDAY

What Made the Gülen Movement Possible?

by *Mustafa Akyol*

Panel:

The Gülen Movement in Redefining Turkey and Anatolian Muslimness

Venue:

Lecture Theatre,
Brunei Gallery, SOAS

26.10.07 Panels	Parallel Session 1	Parallel Session 2
9:30-11:30	Presentation 01	
13:00-15:00		
15:10-17:00		

Turkey's most powerful and popular Islamic community, the Fethullah Gülen movement, is also a very moderate one, which embraces liberal democracy and promotes inter-faith tolerance and dialogue. This paper asks what socio-political conditions enabled this movement to emerge, get established and grow as successfully as it has. The legacy of late Ottoman modernisation, which sought a synthesis of Islamic and modern Western values, assisted the Muslims of Republican Turkey to embrace democracy and establish good relations with the West. Post-war Turkey's peaceful interaction with the West — via free markets and international institutions — must have been a factor. So too it must be relevant that Turkey was never colonised by Western powers or even occupied for a long time (military interventions by the West in other Muslim countries have provoked quite radical, not moderate, Islamic responses). The paper discusses the historical roots and social dynamics in Turkey that enabled the kind of 'moderate Islam' represented by the Gülen movement. That effort could provide lessons for other Muslim countries. It is all but taken for granted that the Islamic world needs some kind of 'reform'. Élitist and autocratic calls for 'top-down' efforts to reshape Islam notwithstanding, what is really needed is to build the social environment (security, freedom, democracy, economic opportunity) that will enable a new kind of Muslim, who will, eventually, search for new meanings in traditional texts.

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Mustafa Akyol (graduated from International Relations and Political Science Department of the Bosphorus (Boğaziçi) University; MA in modern Turkish history from the same university's Atatürk Institute): columnist and editor in the Turkish press: deputy editor and a regular columnist for *Turkish Daily News*, Turkey's foremost English-language daily. His op-ed pieces have also appeared in international publications such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, *International Herald Tribune* and many others. He has given seminars on issues relating to Turkey, Islam and modernity for various universities and think-tanks. He has also written (in Turkish) 'Rethinking The Kurdish Question: What Went Wrong? What Next' (2006), in which he offered a liberal solution to Turkey's long-standing ethnic conflict.