



Mustafa Akyol

Mustafa Akyol (born in 1972) is a political commentator, columnist and author. His work focuses on issues relating to Islam and modernity and Turkish politics. He is a frequent guest on Turkish talk shows and at international conferences. His new book, “[Islam without Extremes: A Muslim Case for Liberty](#)” (2011), is a plea for a synthesis of Islam, liberalism and democracy.

In his newest book Akyol describes how the Islamic education he received from his grandfather and the arrest of his father, the well-known columnist Taha Akyol, after the military coup in 1980 inspired him to learn more about his religion and its relationship to democracy and liberty.

Akyol attended the Nisantasi British High School in Istanbul and later graduated from Bosphorus University with a degree in international relations. He received a master’s degree in history from the same university with a thesis on the Kurdish question. In 2006 he published a book on the same subject, “[Kürt Sorununu Yeniden Düşünmek Yanlış Giden Neydi? Bundan Sonra Nereye?](#)” (Rethinking the Kurdish Question: What went wrong? What next?).

Since 2002, Akyol has regularly written commentaries for Turkish newspapers. In 2011 he was a columnist for [Hurriyet Daily News](#) and [Star](#). Akyol often speaks at international conferences organised by renowned think tanks such as the [Council on Foreign Relations](#) and the [Brookings Institution](#). He has also spoken at ESI events: in September 2011, he discussed [the results of the Turkish elections in Berlin](#), and in June 2011 he spoke at an [ESI conference in Vienna about European Islam](#).

In March 2011, Akyol gave a speech on "[Faith versus Tradition in Islam](#)" at a conference organised by TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design), the NGO devoted to "ideas worth spreading" in innovative ways. "We see in Turkey what I define as a rebirth of Islamic modernism," he said. "Now there's the more urban middle-class pious Muslims who [...] look at their tradition and see that there are some problems in the tradition. And they understand that they need to be changed and questioned and reformed."

Akyol has also studied the history of Islam. In a July 2011 article '[The Forgotten Liberalism within Islam](#)' in the Huffington Post, Akyol argues that a century ago most intellectuals and statesmen of the Islamic world were "self-declared liberals". He points to the Young Ottomans – a group of reform-oriented pious Muslims in the late Ottoman Empire – "who believed that the only cure to Muslim societies was to import the liberal democracy of the West and re-articulate it in Islamic terms".

In his video interview with ESI, Akyol talks about Turkish secularism versus Turkish Islam. Atatürk's secular revolution, he says, has created a false dichotomy: "Either you will be a pious Muslim or you will be a modern person, [but] you have to choose between Islam and modernity. And unfortunately this dichotomy has hunted the Middle East." He discusses Turkish Islam, "secular fundamentalism", Islamic movements such as the Gulen movement, and Turkey-EU relations. "Turkey representing the most modernised notion of Islam is, I think, the best candidate to be part of the European project," he tells ESI.