

Proposals for a Solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey

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I consider all efforts to democratically resolve the Kurdish question and to create a lasting peace to be very precious. Due to my responsibilities to you and our people I also find it necessary to summarize my thoughts in relation to its resolution.

The Kurdish question is the most complex and important question in the Middle East. This characteristic of the question stems from the way this issue came into being. If the Kurdish phenomenon is not defined properly, just as in the past, today and in the future, too, it is inevitable that the question will become even more complex and will lead to all sorts of new problems.

The scope and form of the Kurdish question are much deeper and graver than the much dealt with Arab-Israeli conflict. The fact that this question has not been fully revealed leads to incomplete and erroneous judgements. It is not only geographically, socially, politically and in terms of population in the most strategic position of the region, but it also leads the way in terms of diversity of problems and their gravity. The fact that it has been fragmented between the three fundamental national entities, the Arabs, Persians and Turks, naturally leads this problem to have a regional impact. A resolution in one part influences the other parts and countries towards a resolution or if there is a deadlock in one part it affects the other parts in the same but negative manner.

Due especially to Turkey but also Syria and Iran's inability to move beyond their traditional strategies to the question, the stage of a resolution to the conflict has not been reached and this has led to great suffering. Blocking all channels for the solution to the Kurdish question has led violence as the only alternative. The reason behind the 25 year-long confrontation in Turkey is the profound denial and annihilation policy. Because these policies have not been yet superseded over 30,000 people have lost their lives, thousands of villages have been burnt, millions of people have been forced into exile, thousands of extra-judicial killings were committed and the Turkish economy suffered millions of dollars of losses. Hence both sides have experienced a great tragedy. Such a comprehensive phenomenon cannot be characterized as one of terrorism. The reality is that this is a medium-level conflict. This fact alone makes it a prerequisite to see the two parties of the conflict to come together on the basis of their common social, national and political interests on which the country was founded in order to arrive at the right and proper decisions.

The depth of the Turkish regime's conflict generation goes to the root of the Kurdish question. Both its lengthy history and the social, religious and ethnic conflicts in the last 30 years have exposed this reality. The Republic's official ideology and its oligarchic administration have tried to suppress and cover-up the differences within the society but they were indeed not successful. The conflicts and contradictions have totally exposed this cover-up.

The concept behind the establishment of the Republic of Turkey was the strategic alliance between the Turks and the Kurds. However, today in Turkey, the Kurdish question stems from the inability to adjust this in the period of democratic society. The history is full of Turkish-Kurdish alliances. Alpaslan was able to enter Anatolia through the Kurdish-Turkish alliance. Sultan Selim was able to transform his empire into an empire of the world because of this alliance. Mustafa Kemal established the republic with this alliance. Why shouldn't we adopt the essence of these three historic strategic alliances to the present? The alliance of the Kurds and the Turks should also be developed today. All must realise that neither Turkish nationalism nor Kurdish nationalism is the solution. Only through democratic devel-

opment in Turkey one can create the assurance of democracy in the Middle East. The strategic partnership can be formed provided that the Kurdish-Turkish relationship is on an equal footing. Hence there is a need for a democratic re-organisation of the relationship.

Therefore peace with the Kurds is inevitable. Any wars imposed should not be expected to be more than a Pyrrhic victory. Hence it is both necessary and realistic to talk about peace in a war that has continued for too long already. Just as in the examples of modern models it is in the interest of the Turkish state to take the necessary steps. The Kurds only want recognition of their existence, and freedom for their culture and the operation of a full democratic system. One cannot think of a more humane and a moderate solution than this.

Examples such as South Africa, Palestine-Israel, England, Wales, Ireland and Scotland, France-Corsica do not only show us how similar problems are handled and resolved in the history of many modern states and the importance of the resolution of such questions, but also the conclusions drawn and assessments and analyses made from their experiences can also enable us to take an objective point of view.

For violence to cease to be a part of the solution to the Kurdish question, for policies of denial and oppression to be overcome albeit limited, there is a need to leave the option of democracy open. Prohibition of education and prohibition on language and culture is not only fanatical terrorism but is also always an invitation to violence. Violence has been used uncontrolled and in excess of legitimate defence. It is clear that many movements today have turned to more fanatical methods of struggle. However the fact that we have resorted to unilateral ceasefires repeatedly and have taken our forces outside the borders of Turkey adopting predominantly legitimate defence position gives the lie to the terrorism accusations. For many years without end our efforts for peace have been ignored. All our attempts have been left in vain. Even the friends of ours that went as peace emissaries were arrested and put in prison. Of course there are reasons behind why all our attempts have been in vain. This is because they were judged to be a 'weakness'. There was much propaganda and evaluation each time how the PKK and Ocalan was just about finished and/or they were only tactical and if they pushed harder the PKK would be eradicated. They acted in accordance with these evaluations. There were major operations, however no result was achieved. It is not possible to resolve the Kurdish question through arms and violence. Therefore seeing them as a 'weakness' is indeed, a very wrong evaluation. If a result was not achieved such an evaluation has a major role in it.

If the ceasefire which began on the 1st October 2006 did not achieve the desired results it was once again largely due to these evaluations. In this period, which was initiated in consideration of the expectations of public opinion, calls made by the intellectuals and NGOs, but they were also made to fail. It was not handled with necessary seriousness and attempts for permanent solutions were not made. On the contrary the reply was the escalation of racism and chauvinism and a policy of increasing tensions. One should also take into account the compromise of the AKP with the Army and its calculations vested in a deepening of the conflict. The approach and actions of the government until now have not exceeded palliative measures in order to win concessions from the EU. Harmonisation laws that have come about during the EU accession period have only been handled so as to save face and to gain time. Besides this, there have not been any serious steps.

I would like to reiterate once again that I have grave concerns about the continuing confrontation and its results. However, though I would like to once again emphasize that I have not lost my hope for the development of peace. Despite the gravity of my conditions and my health problems I continue to make an effort, give warnings and generate suggestions for a solution. There is a need to lend meaning

to such a stance. If our peace efforts lead to progress and positive results they can be transformed into the establishment of a Democratic Republic. We may then be able to recapture the excitement, emotion, dynamism and unity of the days when the republic was founded.

The proposal for a resolution I make to those who are sensitive to the issue and have responsibility to the society of Turkey. What we want is a Democratic Nation. We have nothing against a unitary state or republic. We accept the republic, unitary state and secularism. However we do believe that there is a need to redefine the democratic state on the basis of respect for peoples, rights and cultures. Within the scope of this definition the Kurds should be able to realise their democratic association together with democratic expansion in cultural, language, economy, ecology and other aspects. Kurds, Turks and other cultures all together form the Democratic Nation of Turkey. This can only be possible through grasping the notion of a democratic nation, a democratic constitution and an advanced multicultural legal order. Our concept of a democratic nation does not have any problems with the flag and/or borders. Our understanding of democratic nation is a nation based on democracy instead of a state. There is a need to define the nation of Turkey that includes all ethnic groups. A model nation that relies on human rights and not only does it not rely on Turks alone but also it should not solely rely on any religion and race. Our understanding of the notion of a democratic nation is bringing together all ethnicities and cultures.

My understanding of Kurdistan freedom movement is as follows: By becoming a state you cannot achieve freedom. I do not believe that the Kurds will become free by establishing a state. Philosophically, politically and also due to present political conditions seeking a statehood for Kurdistan can lead to tragic outcomes. A state itself generates oppression. From this point of view I interpret the principle of self-determination right differently to my predecessors. This right is the right to establish its own democracy and its own non-state administration. It is the right of those communities without a state to create a new model whereby all their problems can be discussed and decided upon in their villages, communities and cities. We can also call this democratic self-rule. I have no intention of establishing a state. All I care for is democracy. The Kurdish people also need democracy. Hence I propose Democratic Self-Rule for Kurdistan for the Kurds. To me the essence of the whole thing is the freedom of Kurds within the present borders and states. Democratic self-rule has no problems with borders and states. It can be envisaged to be the local peoples expressing themselves within the state and that alongside the state's institutions it will be a structure that can take up the demands of Kurds themselves. This model also promotes democratisation as opposed to the internal backwardness and feudal remains.

This conference will discuss the Kurdish question and discuss ideas and proposals in search for its resolution. I would also like to present my concrete proposal once again, on the basis of the intellectual and philosophical background that I have just discussed, for the solution to the Kurdish question.

1. The Kurdish notion should be handled as the fundamental notion of democratization. Kurdish identity should be guaranteed through law and constitution. Moreover if within the new constitution will include an article such as 'The Constitution of the Republic of Turkey accepts that all cultures express their existence and themselves democratically' is then this will meet our requests.
2. Language and cultural rights should be guaranteed by law. There should be no restrictions on radio, TV and other media. The procedures that apply to the Turkish radio and TV should also apply to broadcasts in Kurdish and other languages. Cultural activities should also be bound by similar procedures and regulations.

3. Within the basic education Kurdish should be used as a language of education. Those who wish should have the choice to educate their children in Kurdish. In high schools, Kurdish culture, Kurdish language and literature should be listed as selective lessons and should take place as part of the curriculum. In the universities there should be faculties for Kurdish language, literature and history.
4. All obstacles to freedom of expression and association should be removed and all conditions should be prepared for unrestrained political activity. All these freedoms should be respected when it comes to the Kurdish question.
5. Regulations on political parties and elections should be democratized and the Kurdish people and all its democratic forces should be able to participate in democratic politics.
6. Democratic local administration laws should be formed so that democracy can be deep-rooted and widespread.
7. The village guard system and illegitimate gangs within the state should be abolished.
8. The return of those villagers who were forced into exile during the war times should be allowed to return to their villages. To this end all the necessary administrative, judicial, economic and social measures should be taken. Along with these, an economic development campaign should begin and Kurdish people's economic prosperity should be increased through incentives and other measures.
9. A social peace and democratic participation bill should be passed so that the guerrillas, those in prison, all those forced to go into exile can participate in the democratic political life without any restrictions.

We should also consider the things to be done at present. A Democratic Action Plan could be implemented immediately. I find it important that a Commission for Truth and Justice be established. There is a need to expose the errors made on both sides, a need to expose the truth. Reconciliation can only be reached through this process. Within this commission, intellectuals, legal experts from the bar and union of physicians together with scientists from universities should take their place. If we come to the stage where we can lay down the weapons then these weapons can only be laid down before such a commission. This commission should be able to procure justice, and promise justice. Without justice where should we lay down our arms? When the state or an organisation is at a deadlock that is where the intellectuals should step in. In many countries around the world like Sierra Leone, Ireland and South Africa there has been such experiences. Their role is more like an arbitrator and to justly bring both sides to peace and a solution.

The start of such a practical process depends on a desire to do so and on dialogue. If there is a dialogue then we can develop a period like that of the previous unlimited period of ceasefire. I would like to reiterate that I am prepared to do all that falls upon me. I have the will-power. The government on the other hand needs to be more sincere in its conduct and the responsibility to initiate an initiative falls before it. If they do not act within their responsibilities then they would be totally responsible for any negative consequences.

If the efforts for peace and a solution end negatively and if these are made a player within daily politics, profit conflicts and internal power games then we will end up with a worse situation than the present

one. This will lead to such chaos that we shall all be crushed under it. All these dangers should be considered and all should approach the situation in a responsible manner.

Turkey should show that it has the ability to see and analyse its own realities, the Kurdish reality and the changing dynamics in the world for what they are. States that fail to see the plain truth will inevitably face a crisis. Turkey must understand that they need to respond to the Kurdish people's need for freedom and that this is only possible in a just and democratic Turkey where justice and freedom are shared equally. What is important is to take courageous steps to not only establish a permanent peace in this land but also to succeed in doing so.

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İmralı Sole Inmate Closed Prison