

# The arduous business of peace

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At this Kurdish conference organised in the European Parliament I am speaking in Turkish as a Kurd. This is because, as is the case in all institutional domains, the European Union cannot overcome the issue of Kurdish interpretation due to its approach which takes states rather than peoples as a basis. Thus, in order to be understood correctly, I need to speak in a language other than my mother tongue.

The global crisis the world is going through does not detract from the importance of the European Union as a peace project; on the contrary, it puts it in sharp relief. That the European Union provides support for peace initiatives undertaken in its neighbouring geographical areas also has to do with its vision of peace, which is shaped by European values. On the occasion of this conference, which is an effort to seek peace, I would like to congratulate the European Union for receiving the Nobel Peace Prize this year. The fact that the Nobel Peace Prize is given to Europe is testimony to the fact that the EU is a peace project as well as being an economic union. At a time when the Middle East is being reshaped, democracy, freedom and the yearning for peace, as values created by the European Union, continue to be crucial for humanity.

In 2012, poverty and inequalities in income distribution are on a global scale. Nuclear weapons, weapons of mass destruction, and policies giving priority to security shake the world. Therefore, continental Europe has to clarify its position *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world, and in relation to the Kurds in particular. The call for freedom of these people who live in

the heart of the Middle East needs to be taken into consideration and supported by Europe.

Kurds, whose geography was fragmented one hundred years ago, are crossing a historic threshold today. In all the countries in which they live, they are raising the struggle for democracy, rights and freedoms. The Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq is a guarantee not only for Kurds but also for the freedom and voluntary co-operation of all the ethnic and religious groups in that area. Western Kurdistan is a candidate for being a haven for all people escaping the wrath of the Baath Party and Assad. Kurds of Eastern Kurdistan continue to voice pleas for freedom while taking the risk of being executed by the Iranian regime. The Kurds of Northern Kurdistan, on the other hand, influence the policies of Turkey and the Middle East as the most important element of Turkey's process of democratisation.

Finally, in 2012, Kurds demonstrated to the whole world that they are not a fragmented people living separately from each other. In all the countries in which they live, they are struggling not against people but against the cruel face and authoritarian character of those states.

The gains achieved during the last one hundred years in the Kurdish people's search for rights, justice and freedom, for which they gave their lives, are still coming under attack. The recent tensions between Iraqi Kurdistan and the central Iraqi government, where the central government has violated the constitution by which it is bound and has massed arms and troops in the Kurdish region, give rise to concerns. One cannot and must not remain silent in the face of a situation where people seeking democracy and stability could be drawn into a new conflict.

The fact that Syrian Kurds have not become a party to the crisis that country is in, that they have negotiated with patience and maturity, is an exemplary demonstration of responsibility that should be supported. Any attempts to block them from obtaining their rights, which entitlement stems from their status as a people, will constitute a far from just and fair solution.

Meanwhile, the gains achieved by Iranian Kurds are becoming lost amongst the undercurrents of the regime. For Iranian Kurds to institutionalise their gains they should, first and foremost, put into practice an *esprit de corps*, and those sensitive to their claims should speak up.

Turkey's trial with the Kurdish issue has not shaken that country's hundred-year-old cliché-ridden rhetoric. 'Improvements' in the Kurdish issue amount to no more than arrangements without an infrastructure; 'improvements' put in place with a mentality that says 'this is how I've

done it; it's done!' Not only is there no constitutional or statutory initiative aimed at returning confiscated rights, but also the police and judiciary pressures on the Kurdish political movement are gradually increasing.

The report card of the Turkish state on the Kurdish issue during the last decade comprises cross border military operations; the statistics of our people who have been killed; the dialogue initiated with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) was not continued; the unlawful imprisonment of Mr Abdullah Öcalan goes on; military operations continue; arrests of politicians, with new ones being made day by day; the murder of Ceylan Önkol and dozens of children; the Roboski massacre has been covered up; and, lastly, the recent threat to remove the political immunity of Kurdish Members of Parliament. These are some of the serious obstacles to creating an environment of confidence.

Today, about ten thousand political detainees and convicted persons are held in Turkish prisons because they are active in the Kurdish political movement. These political detainees have, in recent months, risked their lives by subjecting their bodies to hunger for 68 days as the only remaining instrument in their hands to overcome the impasse in the Kurdish issue. As a result of national and international public opinion taking some ownership of the hunger strikes, channels of dialogue between the two parties were opened and, upon Mr Öcalan's call to the detainees, which was regarded as a positive initiative, the action was ended. A threshold, which could have swept the country into deep chaos in case of loss of life in the hunger strikes, was not crossed through wisdom and common sense. This is pleasing for the peace of country. Ending the hunger strike has placed on the agenda the achievement of a lasting peace. It has also increased hopes of solving the issue through dialogue and negotiations.

Peace is a very arduous business, and establishing an environment of confidence is the *sine qua non* of such a process.

That issues are actually being discussed is a positive development. However, words and rhetoric are no longer adequate in our society, and it is seen clearly that a process of moves two steps forward and one step back cannot heal any wounds at all.

In solving the Kurdish issue we need sincere and concrete steps focused on finding a solution. To this end, the government must, as soon as possible, put in place its concrete proposals for solving the Kurdish issue through dialogue and negotiations within the framework of a 'Peace Project' in which all parties' effective participation is ensured. In order not to delay this anymore, all friends of the Kurdish and Turkish people must joint their efforts for such a crucial project.

The human rights, political rights and basic freedoms of the Kurdish people that were seized must take their place in the new constitution. We do not want a new constitution that is 'just a new constitution no matter how it is', but one which includes all organs and foundations of the state. While solving the Kurdish issue, we are insistent on a democratic constitution that will check and limit the ruling party, and one that will prevent the state from being cruel to its citizens.

Take a look at the on-going debates in Turkey, which is on the brink of developing a new constitution. There is no talk of democratic initiatives that will open up the clogged system, that will help the people to breathe and that will solve chronic problems, first and foremost the Kurdish issue. With the existing 10 per cent electoral threshold, the political parties law and electoral law, proper democratic mechanisms are not even on the agenda.

The new constitution must guarantee peace and equality legislation for the peoples of Turkey. While Turkey tries to solve its chronic problems, it needs the European Union route and motivation. This is because the system in Turkey believes it needs to solve the Kurdish issue, but due to the character of the regime, it cannot develop an initiative for a solution as it cannot give up statism and nationalism. It is, therefore, trying to defer a solution to the problem, and trying to manage it to save the day. It simply cannot demonstrate its goal and its will to solve the issue.

Above all, if a future that includes Kurds is wanted, short, medium and long-term goals must be declared to the people and to the political institutions. Kurds should not be expected to forgo all their legitimate demands in return for a few palliative measures. Kurdish people should absolutely have political status in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Otherwise, we may have to place on our agenda some actions in line with the 'Twin Conventions' signed by Turkey in 2003, which include the right to self-determination. Turkey has to move on to the concept of dialogue and negotiations instead of war and terrorism in relation to the Kurdish issue. To this end, we expect an open demonstration of political will that will transparently continue the interrupted Oslo Process, even though it may not be called the Oslo Process.

Politically motivated police and judiciary pressure targeting Kurdish politicians must end. A general amnesty that will open up the way for political solutions must be placed on the agenda. The initiative launched by the government under the names of the Kurdish Initiative or the Democratic Initiative must continue, with channels of dialogue to be established with the negotiating parties.

The state must refrain from making confusing strategic moves. There is no problem regarding negotiating partners and roles. It must be emphasised that, in solving the Kurdish issue, the general strategy must be negotiated with Mr Öcalan, the arms issue with the PKK, and constitutional and legislative arrangements with the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and all other Kurdish political circles. Efforts other than these simply lose time. Therefore, the state must develop an open solution strategy with the PKK, must open up the way for Mr Öcalan's effective participation in the process and demystify Imrali, where Mr Öcalan is kept in prison. It should be recognised that 'there can be a war without Öcalan, but there cannot be peace without Öcalan'.

We expect the European Union, which is founded on hundreds of years of experience, to take on a more active role in the process of solving Turkey's Kurdish issue. For Turkey, the Kurdish issue has completed its phase of finding recipes. The actors are clear and open. What's needed is to be realistic. The solution lies in the political institutions. Turkey cannot solve this issue by pressurising Kurdish politics and laying asphalt over it. Flowers cannot blossom in asphalt.