

## Time to talk

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*Mr Aydar was one of the Kurds negotiating via the Turkish intelligence services in Oslo, until talks broke down in 2011. He is a member of the Executive Board of the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK), and spoke of his experience at the Oslo negotiations to a conference at the European Parliament in Brussels in December 2012. This was the ninth International Conference on the European Union, Turkey and the Kurds, organized by the EU Turkey Civic Commission and the United European Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) political group.*

I will try to express the Kurds' point of view on dialogue, negotiations, a road map, a political solution and peace. I will try to answer what Kurds understand by these concepts, what our approach is, have we done any work on them, and how we see the current situation.

Without going into the history, I will evaluate the last 34 years and will try to put forward a solution. Furthermore, I will speak in the context of the last Kurdish revolt, which has been developing under the leadership of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Discussions on the solution to the Kurdish question began in the early 1990s with the efforts of the then President, Mr Turgut Ozal. The Kurdish side's response has always been positive; hence, on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1993, the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire to search for solutions to pave the way. But, after the suspicious death of President Ozal, the response of the other party was not positive. Thus, this initiative failed and the cease-fire broke down.

In 1995 and 1998, similar initiatives took place and again, both times, the Kurdish side responded positively by declaring a unilateral cease-fire. However, the state's negative approach meant the attempts failed, as previously.

At the beginning of 1999, Mr Abdullah Öcalan was captured in Kenya as a result of an international conspiracy and handed over to Turkey, unlawfully. Despite this, the Kurds continued to search for solutions. After discussions with Mr Öcalan in prison, another cease-fire was declared in July 1999. Unlike other cease-fires, guerrilla forces had withdrawn beyond Turkey's borders in order to offer the least

provocation. This situation continued until 2004. Unfortunately, the Turkish state and its actors took no further steps towards a solution during this time. When the conflict was suspended due to the cease-fire, the government said the problem was solved. On the other hand, Kurds shared many declarations with the public on how to solve the Kurdish question, such as road maps. These demands were extremely reasonable and acceptable, but they were ignored. The Kurds' well-intentioned calls were not heard; our behaviour seen, rather, as weakness.

Therefore, in June 2004, the conflict restarted. The government ignored it at first, but, from mid-2005 onwards, began again to discuss solutions. In 2006, the search for new solutions and initiatives became operational. The Kurds responded both times, when discussions began in 2005, and to the initiatives that took place in 2006, and accordingly declared cease-fires. To this day, including the first in 1993, the Kurds have declared eight cease-fires in total. All the cease-fires have broken down, due to the Turkish military's practice of abiding by the cease-fires very little or not at all, and the Turkish state's attitude in the face of deadlock.

The consultation process, and the developing dialogue of 2006 and its aftermath, should be separately assessed. At the beginning, this process was started indirectly by agencies who were delivering the messages. From the end of 2007, it developed into face-to-face consultations – known publicly as the Oslo Consultation. This consisted of two sides, one of whom was Mr Öcalan, who is in Imrali Prison, and the other being representatives of political organisations. These talks were carried out in parallel communication so as to support each other. The form of communication between the two sides was executed by exchange of written documents. Throughout this time, despite interruption and blocking, the process continued until July 2011. This process was prevented from reaching agreement because the government counterparty did not keep its pledges/promises, and did not try to resolve problems; instead, postponing arranged appointments.

Everyone can rightly ask: 'what has been discussed during this period, who has been talking, and why has there not been any significant progress?' The Kurdish side, who sought a political solution, approached the matter cordially and did their duty. In the first place, the most important step for the Kurds was a cease-fire. Apart from failed talks, it was only the Kurds from their side who declared a cease-fire, and complied with it – however, the Turkish military also, informally and partly, complied with the cease-fire process. The Kurds had no other agenda than resolving the political predicament with peace and dialogue, and all demands/claims

were addressed. Those claims were very reasonable and logical; they wouldn't even need to be discussed under normal conditions of democracy. The road map for the resolution and protocols, including practical stages, were prepared and offered to the counterparts. The road map and claims were made public.

As regards the Turkish demands, with the purpose of being sincere about the peace deal and showing a non-violent way of solution (and also empowering the Turkish government in the peace process and dialogue), the Kurdish side sent back to Turkey a group of people consisting of guerrillas and people from the Maxmur Refugee Camp with a letter which included peaceful intentions. Although the counterparty promised not to arrest or try them, these people bringing the peace message were arrested and sentenced to heavy terms in prison.

Although the Turkish counterpart repeatedly made promises in this process, they never sat around the table with the peace group. They usually said 'we will discuss these points with our government and, at the next meeting, we will bring their response', but they never came back with a satisfactory answer. When the main subjects were discussed they claimed that they were not fully authorized. The Kurdish side proposed bringing a fully authorized committee in order to finalise the consultation, but the counterparty has not agreed on this subject at all.

While the consultations were becoming more frequent, the government was proposing a solution of the Kurdish predicament, a cease-fire was declared by the Kurds, which meant everyone; we were full of hope for a positive outcome. On 14 April 2009, the government's KCK operation against Kurdish politicians targeted even elected ones – we called this a 'political massacre' – and started a rush to arrest many people. When this matter was raised at the discussions, the counterparty's response was 'this is not our government's attitude, it is just some interfering prosecutors who carried out the operation and the arrested people will be at liberty, shortly'. Despite their promise, the arrests continue on a wide scale. Today, the number of arrested people continues to increase and has reached the tens of thousands.

At the beginning of 2011, the Turkish counterparty renewed the anti-Kurdish alliance with Iran, Iraq and Syria. According to their plan, based on the 'Sri Lanka-Tamil' model, those countries were to attack from all sides together, and aim to destroy the Kurdish Freedom Movement. In July 2011, this plan was put into action.

In face of all that has happened, the perception occurred on the Kurdish side that the Turkish side needed a cease-fire to conduct the elections in a comfortable environment, is in the process of gaining time through

negotiation delays, and is working to make the final hit when they find the opportunity to do so. Actual practice validates this perception.

Today the negotiations have stopped. There have been heavy battles since July 2011. The Tamil-Sri-Lanka model, to which the AKP government has clung, did not work in Kurdistan. Once again, there are debates about the solution in Turkey. The answer will be positive to the question 'if there is a demand for new debates, how will the Kurdish side look at it?' However, we will look particularly for seriousness and sincerity; we have had enough of delays.

In Turkey, especially amongst those close to government, there are debates about the 'PKK is something else to the Kurdish quest', 'Imrali is different, Qendil is different, Europe is different', 'the organisation is the vendor of other powers'. These arguments are developed in the psychological war centres. They are made to muddy the issues and deepen the deadlock in the Kurdish question. Let's say this very clearly: without taking the movement that is fronted by the PKK into account, it is impossible to find a solution to the Kurdish question. There are no different views or heads in the organization; the organisation is a whole and its leader is Mr Abdullah Öcalan. The agenda of the organisation is the Kurdish question and Kurdistan; the welfare and freedom of the Kurdish people. There are no other agendas apart from this; in particular, it has no act or aim that will serve foreign powers.

On the question of foreign powers, we need to touch especially on the attitude of European and western powers. The attitude of the West to date has not been to serve the cause of solution; on the contrary, its attitude is to support those who are against the solution. All those with a conscience will know that the struggle for freedom of the Kurdish people is a just and legitimate movement. Accusing this struggle of terrorism is an injustice; lawlessness is on the side of cruelty. The West accuses the Kurdistan freedom struggle of terrorism and inclines against Kurdish politicians and institutions while providing arms and support to Turkey. It is obvious that this attitude deepens the deadlock. It is not possible to reach a solution without removing the terror listing and the actions that are carried out on that basis.

Our attitude on the Kurdish side is open and clear. Our demands are a minimum that should happen in a democratic country. The suggestions that I will present now, even if they are not the same word for word, are those that we have provided to the other side and the public on many different occasions. In this framework, I would like, once again, to present our proposals for a solution.

1) Representatives of all people with a different background should

participate during the preparation of the new constitution in order for it to be democratic. On this basis, the new constitution should either be based on constitutional citizenship and be neutral to all ethnic identities, or Kurdish identity should be recognized and take its place in the constitution.

2) With recognition of Kurdish identity, the Kurdish language is to be regulated in education and used from primary school to university. The Kurdish language to be recognized as a second official language in the heavily Kurdish-populated areas.

3) Removal of all obstacles to survival and development of Kurdish culture, and all the rights afforded to other cultures to be recognized for Kurdish culture. There must be no restrictions on TV, radio or press.

4) Freedom of thought, belief, expression and association by removing barriers to free politics.

5) Introduction of a Democratic Local Government Act. Democratic local authorities, including local councils, particularly by increasing the on-site management approach to ensure democratic autonomy.

6) Abolition of the village guard system based on economic and social measures.

7) Social wounds must be dressed and healed in order to restore crippled social balances to a healthy state again by removing all obstacles that obstruct those who were forced to leave their villages and encourage their return. Damages incurred by war victims must be met. In addition, administrative, legal and financial support must be made available to the villagers so that they can rebuild their villages.

8) Commitment to launch in the Kurdish areas a campaign of economic development and government-backed investments. Private sector investment, mainly in the form of cheap credit, tax cuts and incentives should be provided from other sources.

9) Social peace and democratic participation of Kurdish and Turkish communities on the basis of the enactment of law should pardon one another mutually. Everyone, including all political prisoners, and Mr. Abdullah Öcalan, should be free to join in social and political life. Political refugees living abroad should also be included in democratic political life.

10) Together with the provision of a permanent solution within the framework of existing laws, guerrillas or the local police force to protect the new arrangements in the presence of a democratic status.

Practical tasks are:

1) The two sides, including representatives of political parties and non-

governmental organizations and the establishment of a Constitutional Council, which will discuss the constitutional and legal issues.

2) Representatives of the two sides and the relevant powers, and the establishment of a Peace Council that will address issues regarding security and the armed forces.

3) In order to ensure confidence in the democratic peace and reconciliation process, a Research and Justice Commission must be established to investigate and reveal truths about any human right violations that have been committed.

4) Through these councils and commissions direct communication with Mr. Abdullah Öcalan must be ensured.

The position of Mr. Abdullah Öcalan needs to be clarified. Mr. Öcalan is the leader and founder of the movement, and has the legal right to veto decisions. At the same time, he is the only person with wide authority throughout the overall organization, the armed forces, and the youth structure, as well as the people. He is the chief negotiator for the Kurdish side. In order for the negotiations to be productive, his free movement, as well as his health and safety, must be ensured.

In our opinion, all these things are possible. These are our suggestions. We are ready to listen, evaluate and consider all suggestions made by others.