

The ethnic structure of Turkishness

Friday 16 March 2007, by [Bülent Kenes](#)

Source : Today's Zaman, 14/03/2007

Turkey's ethnic and religious structure has always been a matter of controversy. For some reason or another, the heterogeneous demographic structures of the US, Canada and Australia, where numerous different ethnicities, religious groups and races have only recently gathered together to create a patchwork-like social design, do not attract attention, whereas the ethnic and religious structure of Turkey with its long past of peaceful coexistence is taken under close scrutiny.

It would be naïve to consider those attempts as a reflection of good faith, though it is normal to regard them as attempts to determine Turkish society's weaknesses in regards to the its divisibility along ethnic and religious lines. However, the likelihood that Turkish society will scatter with a crosscutting of identities as a result of these attempts is zero. They are simply a waste of time. Why ? Let me give you a personal example.

I consider myself a hundred percent Turkish. My wife is a woman of Circassian origin who also considers herself hundred percent Turkish. Likewise, her family members of Circassian origin regard themselves as one hundred percent Turkish. The husband of one of my wife's close relatives is a man of Kurdish origin who makes no compromise from his Turkishness. Two of my brothers are married to two women of Kurdish origin who speak Kurdish at their families' homes while considering themselves more Turkish than ourselves.

My father's mother's side considers themselves hundred percent Turkish. My grandfather's father side is Turkish and his mother's side Kurdish. My grandfather was able to speak both Turkish and Kurdish, but he had no doubts about his Turkishness. Likewise, my mother's father's side was Turkish and his mother's side was of Kurdish origin. Just like her parents, my mother does not doubt her Turkish identity.

Different combinations and millions of similar examples could be found across Turkey. You should only replace Circassian with Georgian, Abkhaz, Bosnian and Kurd with Albanian, Arab and so on. That is, a scenario to divide this country along ethnic lines will not work on this soil, so there is no reason to be paranoid about this division, given Turkey's tightly integrated society. Such a scenario would come into reality only if we deny ourselves and our identity.

A cultural mosaic

It is impossible to anticipate anything else from this geography, the legacy of an empire that eagerly adopted the culture of cohabitation and peaceful coexistence. What matters most today is to preserve Turkishness as an asset we are proud to have and to demonstrate remarkable achievements on behalf of Turkishness, not instigating division paranoia. Only when we are lauded for our achievements will those who attempt to draw attention to the Kurdish, Circassian or Arab identities of Turkish citizens today refrain from going further.

No doubt, Turkey is a cultural mosaic in the sense that colorful and vibrant parts constitute an indivisible whole. I should note this mosaic is rich and strong rather than ordinary and boring. For this reason, I don't really see any point in the recent attempt by respected politician Hasan Celal Güzel, who in his column in Radikal daily, asserted that the Kurdish population in Turkey was about 6.5 million, not 20-25

million as alleged. It is a vain attempt to base counter arguments on scientific studies just to disprove exaggerated allegations.

If we take the allegations of certain groups with extensions abroad seriously, it will be impossible to talk about the existence of Turkish population in Turkey. It will be more meaningful to work hard to make our citizens with different backgrounds who adopted Turkishness as their umbrella happy living in this country.

In short, there is no such thing as either a 25-million-strong Kurdish population or a 15-million-strong Alevi population in Turkey. What is important is to underline that there are 74 million Turkish citizens living in Turkey without relying on statistics.

Nobody should be afraid of stressing that Turkey consists of 74 million Turks with different cultural pasts and backgrounds. Quite the contrary, Turkey should be able to enjoy this diversity. Owing to these diverse cultural backgrounds, "Turkish culture" is rich and colorful; owing to this diversity, "Turkish cuisine" is unique and incomparable to others; and owing to this diversity, "Turkish music" penetrates through our souls and brings us to another world.