

Constitutional changes necessary to solve chronic problems

Thursday 28 August 2008, by [Yonca Dogan Poyraz](#)

Kurdish intellectual Tarık Ziya Ekinçi has said as long as the Turkish military continues to play a powerful role in politics, the Kurdish problem cannot be solved, also suggesting that the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) needs to change the Constitution to deal with the country's long-standing problems.

"It can either convince the state or claim its governing power and change the Constitution to handle numerous issues, including the Kurdish issue," he stated. Ekinçi noted that the most recent government program of investing \$12 billion in the Southeast over the next five years is not sufficient to address the ethnic and cultural demands of the Kurds.

As for main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal's recent visit to the Southeast, he said: "Baykal has been politically erased in the region. He is trying to make a comeback, but his sincerity is questionable."

For Monday Talk, Ekinçi answered questions about the closure case facing the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), increasing support for the ruling AK Party in the mainly Kurdish Southeast and the level of control Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), has over the DTP.

Is another political party in the making to replace the DTP if it is closed down?

There has always been a standby party. If the party is closed down, outside of the politicians included in the political ban, the rest will join the new party. We have seen examples of this in the past, and the situation will be the same. The new party will have the same policy line as the DTP. There are a couple of other pro-Kurdish parties, such as the one headed by Şerafettin Elçi [Participatory Democracy Party, KADEP] and another headed by Sertaç Bucak [Rights and Freedoms Party, HAK-PAR] — the first one close to conservative, the latter socialism. They both believe in a federative system for the solution of the Kurdish issue. The DTP has a different stance and cannot join these parties.

What is the DTP's stance? Has it changed over time?

The DTP's roots go back to the establishment of HEP [Halkın Emek Partisi, People's Labor Party], and I was one of the founders of HEP [in 1990]. There were about a dozen deputies who resigned from the SHP [Social Democratic People's Party], led by Aydın Güven Gürkan. They sincerely wanted to establish a social democratic party deriving its strength from unionized workers, intellectual social democrats and Kurds. However, DİSK [Confederation of Revolutionary Workers' Unions] did not bring anybody to its first meeting. Kurds were there. Gürkan left and I followed. Kurds became candidates from the SHP later on, but they left it because of the Leyla Zana incident [in 1991 she became the first Kurdish woman to win a seat in the Turkish Parliament and then was imprisoned]. And after that several parties were closed and new ones were founded. In the end the DTP was founded. There has been a social democratic stance in the party from the beginning. Öcalan [serving a life sentence] and his cadres have gained ground in the party.

Does Öcalan control the DTP now?

Those who are close to Öcalan have influence in the party. They listen to what Öcalan says. But Öcalan cannot relay messages outside without the state.

Could you elaborate on this? Do you mean Öcalan relays his messages with help from the state?

Sometimes, some secret forces in the state may be in touch with Öcalan and steer the DTP. Öcalan's meetings with his lawyers are under state control, too. Without the permission of the state, it is impossible to relay messages outside when you are imprisoned. I served time in prison, too, and I know the conditions in prisons. When I was in prison, I once told my brother, who was a lawyer, to tell the authorities that there was no running water in my ward and that I'd like to be transferred to a ward where there was water. My brother communicated this message and the authorities were angry because they thought I was relaying an undercover message. I was just trying to gain access to running water in my daily life in prison.

So if this is the case, aren't the DTP members uncomfortable with the possibility of being in bed with the deep state?

This is also what the opponents of the DTP say. They say Öcalan is controlled by the state and that the DTP is cooperating with the deep state through Öcalan. DTP members do not take these claims seriously. They say what they want is clear and that is democratic rights for the Kurdish people — freedom to use their mother tongue, Kurdish, the rights to education in Kurdish and enrichment of their culture through educational and cultural opportunities.

Does the DTP consider Öcalan a leader?

Some figures close to the DTP mention his leadership a lot, and they say if Turkey wants to find a solution to the Kurdish problem, it needs to talk with Öcalan. This view is mostly voiced by Leyla Zana. She is not a member of the DTP, but she is a respected name among Kurds and the DTP. Because she has been saying all of this, there have been numerous cases filed against her. She has been backing a general pardon for the PKK members in the mountains and their leader, Öcalan.

What do you think of this idea?

I support everyone's participation in democratic processes but in Turkey's situation, a general pardon is not a realistic option.

Do the grass roots see Öcalan in the same light?

In the DTP's meetings, some people chant sympathetic slogans for Öcalan even though the DTP leaders do not want them to. Apparently there is some sympathy toward him.

How do you think Kurds will vote in the next elections, be it in an early general election or in local elections slated for next year?

In eastern and southeastern Turkey there are two trends. One of these is an Islamist trend in which various tarikats are quite strong. For example, Hizbullah is quite strong. Its past leader was from Batman and when the movement got out of control, the state shut it down. This time they have organized again outside of the state's control mechanisms. Most of the region's people are jobless and their only hope is religion. There was a religious celebration [Kutlu Doğum] in the region about a year ago in which 500,000 people participated — a number that needs to be taken seriously.

Another movement is the one spearheaded by intellectuals with ethnically based demands, and separate from tribe-state alliances. This movement is led by the DTP, and it also involves the aforementioned parties [HAK-PAR and KADEP].

As the Islamist trend grows stronger, the DTP loses ground. And the Islamist movements are within the sphere of the AK Party.

Do you think the AK Party is 'Islamist' enough for these movements you mentioned?

People don't have any other choices. There are so many destitute people. In that region per capita income is no more than \$1,000 a year. The government has been distributing goods to make their lives better so they have a reason to support it.

How much support could the AK Party garner in the region in the next election?

It could be as much as 60 percent. I would consider the DTP quite successful if they received 40 percent.

A columnist recently revealed a letter from Şemdin Sakık [imprisoned PKK leader] in which he predicted a scenario of Kurds separating from Turkey as the vacuum opened by the closure of the AK Party would be filled by the DTP and Hizbullah along with an upsurge of PKK militants. What do you think of this scenario?

It is extreme speculation and provocation. After all, since the arrest of its leader Öcalan, the PKK repeatedly has said independence is not an option under these circumstances.

Do you think Ahmet Türk could be a candidate for the party's chairmanship in the approaching DTP congress?

I haven't spoken with him, but I heard that he would be a candidate.

What would you think about his candidacy?

There are other influential names including Sırrı Sakık, Hasip Kaplan and Selahattin Demirtaş. I think Ahmet Türk is the most experienced. His chairmanship of the party would be good.

At the opening of Parliament following last year's general elections his handshake with the Nationalist Movement Party [MHP] leader was criticized by some while hailed by others. What do you think of that gesture?

It was a gesture made in the moment. It was a personal decision. We all know how the MHP sees the DTP. Therefore, Türk can judge for himself what kind of benefits this gesture has given the DTP. And we have all seen that the MHP has not moved an inch since to change its anti-DTP stance.

What do you think of the government's attempts to solve the Kurdish problem?

There has always been a rift between the political parties' approach to the problem and the state's. Politicians have pragmatic views. We have seen examples of this pragmatism in [Prime Ministers] Mesut Yılmaz, Tansu Çiller, Süleyman Demirel and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. When they come to power, they make important statements in regards to solving the Kurdish problem, but they abandon their approach in a short period of time. The words of the politicians contradict with the state's deep-rooted policies and the politicians cannot stand behind their words. Therefore, as long as the state's policies remain the same, the Kurdish problem cannot be solved.

Who is a part of that state?

It includes the National Security Council [MGK], the MGK General Secretariat, the chief of General Staff, MIT [National Intelligence Organization], the Higher Education Board [YÖK], the Council of State, the Supreme Court of Appeals and the like.

You had previously said the AK Party would not be able to solve the Kurdish problem before solving its problems with the state and the militarism in Turkey. Is a solution to the Kurdish problem hostage to these difficulties?

In Turkey, militarism is a powerful force. As long as it continues to be powerful, the Kurdish problem won't be solved in any comprehensive way. Of course, the military is not homogenous, but when military people are on active duty they support the state's policies. Long after their retirement some of the

high-ranking members confessed to [columnist] Fikret Bila that they made mistakes. The elected should have the power and are the only ones who would engage in a candid discussion of what has been going on in real life.

Do you mean that the MGK should be eliminated?

The MGK should be done away with and the chief of General Staff should be under the Ministry of Defense. Of course, the prime minister should have military consultants who would advise the government on military and defense matters.

As the AK Party faces a closure case, is it possible for it to reconcile with the state?

It can either convince the state or exert its ruling power and change the Constitution to handle a lot of issues, including the Kurdish issue.

Are you hopeful in that regard?

I am not. I think there should be a new political movement in Turkey that is not like the AK Party or the CHP [Republican People's Party]. And it should gather all the democratic forces behind it in this country, put an end to the militarism and the state nationalism, be at an equal distance to all ideologies, have a social democratic stance, change the Constitution immediately and adopt the Copenhagen criteria of the European Union.

Do you see such a movement actually occurring in Turkey?

No, democratic forces are dispersed in Turkey. They are mostly middle-class citizens; everybody says something different and there is no unity. When you are in a state of such disarray, you can't gather enough support to establish a new party. Other than that either the bourgeoisie or the working class can attempt such a thing, which is not likely in Turkey.

Tarık Ziya Ekinci: a life dedicated to political struggle

A medical doctor by profession, he has been active both in his vocation and in politics. He was born in the town of Lice in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır in 1925. After graduating from the İstanbul University School of Medicine in 1949, he went to the Southeast to do his residency. He moved to Paris and then became an internal medicine specialist in 1957. He has represented physicians in several professional associations. Before the 1960 military coup, he was involved with the CHP but later joined the Labor Party (EMEP). He became a deputy of EMEP in 1965 and was active in the party as a group spokesperson, defending the cultural and identity rights of the Kurds. Following the March 12, 1971 military intervention, he was imprisoned for two years, and he was in and out of prison several times in the period following the Sept. 12, 1980 military coup. He moved to Paris again in 1982 and practiced medicine there until 1989. He then returned to İstanbul. He has authored numerous books on the problems of the Kurds, including "Doğu Dramı" (Drama of the East) in 1966, "Vatandaşlık Açısından Kürt Sorunu ve Bir Çözüm Önerisi (Kurdish Problem from the Perspective of Citizenship and a Suggestion for a Solution) in 1997 and "Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorununa Eleştirel Yaklaşımlar" (Critical Approaches to Turkey's Kurdish Problem) in 2004.

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Sources

Source : Today's Zaman, 9 /06/ 2008