

Turkey : Mr Prime Minister and Diyarbakır

Friday 21 November 2008, by [Cengiz Candar](#)

The date: Aug. 12, 2005. Place: The southeastern Turkish city of Diyarbakır. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was speaking: "Turkey is Diyarbakır as much as it is Ankara, Istanbul, Samsun and Erzurum ...

A big and strong country like Turkey has been through so many difficulties. Therefore, to assume that past mistakes never happened doesn't suit a big country. A big state and a strong nation have the self-confidence to confront one another and to walk to the future after laying mistakes on the table. I, as a prime minister who believes in the self-confidence of his people and state, awareness of history and geography, am before you ...

To name every issue is unnecessary. Problems belong to all of us. If you want to name them, the Kurdish issue is not the problem of a certain group but of all. For this reason, I am telling people who are asking 'What will we do with the Kurdish issue?' that before anyone else this is my problem, as the prime minister of this country. We are a big state and we will resolve every single issue with more democracy, more law and more prosperity. We don't deny any of the problems. We accept them all and are ready to face up to them ..."

These were the boldest and the most exciting remarks of a prime minister of the Republic about the Kurdish issue.

Date: Oct. 21, 2008, Place: Diyarbakır (Dicle University) Prime Minister Erdoğan is speaking:

"As I was coming from the airport I looked at the roads. Is this appropriate for a modern city? Don't administrators in Diyarbakır have garbage trucks, cleaning staff? Here my people, a lesson must be taught. Civilization is roads, cleaning, love and respect ... We have taken a new step forward in democratization and human rights in Turkey. Starting in January, the Turkish Radio and Television (TRT) is beginning broadcasts in Kurdish. We have planned to have 12-hour broadcasts at first, and then it will be increased."

As local elections are approaching, these are ordinary statements of an ordinary prime minister in the number one city that is most sensitive about the Kurdish issue. On Aug. 12, 2005, the governing Justice and Development Party, or AKP, organization in Diyarbakır hung a banner in Kurdish "Brez Seroke Vezir, em jite hezdikin" (Mr. Prime Minister, we love you). On Oct. 21, 2008, community buses are not in service and stores are closed. Life had come to a halt in Diyarbakır to protest Mr. Prime Minister.

PKK gaining upper hand

Just 10 days ago, I wrote about impressions from Diyarbakır. I emphasized that the outlawed Kurdish Workers' Party, or PKK, has gained a "psychological upper hand" in the city. By looking at the present, Erdoğan's dream to win Diyarbakır would remain only a dream, I had stressed.

A week later, Erdoğan's performance in Diyarbakır, which was way too low compared to his Aug. 12, 2005 appearance, confirmed my impressions.

Two days ago at the colloquium I attended in the Austrian capital Vienna I delivered a speech to the panel

titled "Turkey's role in the new Middle East," then answered questions asked by the Austrians. Some of them insisted that the Turkish military wants to get into northern Iraq and imposes this on to the government.

I explained that is not so. I reminded them that the demand voiced by the opposition that the military should get into northern Iraq and form a "buffer zone" was not heard again after the leaders of the two opposition parties met the Chief of General Staff Gen. İlker Başbuğ. Following the meeting with the northern Iraqi regional administration's leader Massoud Barzani in the Iraqi capital Baghdad, Ankara and the Kurdish administration decided to take up the PKK issue in terms of taking steps to develop cooperation, and both the government and the military have agreed on that.

During a break, I surfed on the Internet to see what is going on in Turkey; then I shared a few lines with Ahmet Davutoğlu, Erdoğan's chief adviser. The statements were:

"Massoud Barzani answered the questions asked by reporters at the airport upon his arrival to Arbil. He said, 'We broke down the walls between us and Turkey. We have thawed the ice and opened a new page. Turkey has taken a step to improve the relations. Our way for dialogue is open.'"

It is accurate that regarding the international dimension of the Kurdish issue and the government, you may read this as Erdoğan took steps to improve the relations with Kurdish region of Iraq and the Kurdish administration over there - though he didn't use the phrase. This is late and still irresolute improvement but it is in the right direction.

To the more, if you believe that the latest escalating terror attacks by the PKK are aimed to ruin potential good relations between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish administration and if you are determined not to fall for this, you should believe that you are taking the steps in the right direction.

This is accurate but insufficient. Unless these steps are supported by the steps to be taken inside the country they are not enough to minimize the PKK terror. Yes, weakening the PKK in northern Iraq through military operations is worth something but the steps that will prevent people joining to the PKK up in the mountain, the steps that will prevent the PKK to regain power, are those to be taken inside.

The "psychological upper-hand" the PKK has gained in the Southeast, which we saw during Erdoğan's latest trip to Diyarbakır, must be eliminated. How?

By removing all legal obstructions standing in front of free expression of Kurdish identity and by implementing some of Kurdish rights that are only on paper, beginning with the language for instance. Without showing any respect to the Kurdish language you cannot have respect for Kurdish identity.

And respect for the language means right of education in Kurdish and of broadcasts in Kurdish.

TRT broadcast not enough

At this point, the 12-hour TRT broadcast in Kurdish, which will be effective from January on, will be meaningless for people who are watching Roj TV, Kurdistan TV and Kurdsat around the clock. If you believe so, that means you don't know your own country and people at all.

There is no project introduced by the PKK; there is not any other tool but the bloodshed they commit. This terror organization is losing sympathy among the leftist liberal circles of Europe.

Then, how come they have the "psychological upper-hand" in the Southeast? How come they manage to spread the word among shop-owners to close their stores on during Erdoğan's visit to Diyarbakır?

How realistic could it be to say that this is because citizens in the region are afraid of the PKK as almost there is one security force per person.

It could be more accurate to say that the PKK's "psychological upper-hand" in the Southeast is rather due to the disappointment people have toward Ankara.

If the Erdoğan we saw on Oct. 21, 2008 manages to go back to the Erdoğan we had seen on Aug. 12, 2005, he would realize how life was easy both for himself and for Turkey.

Sources

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