

# **Gouvernement overcomes psychological barrier to Kurdish initiative**

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**Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and representatives of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) met yesterday in Parliament for about one hour to discuss the government's Kurdish initiative.**

Pundits underlined that the meeting signaled that a psychological barrier standing in the way of the solution had been overcome. Both Erdoğan and DTP leader Ahmet Türk noted that the meeting was very important for the future of the country but did not release details about what transpired. However, sources said the DTP's message was that the DTP is not only a party whose views should be taken into consideration for the resolution of the long-standing Kurdish problem, but they should also be treated as one of the main actors in the process.

The meeting took place at a time when the government has decided to accelerate efforts to shape a plan to solve the decades-old Kurdish problem. The government has not announced the details of the plan yet, but it has acknowledged that it will be based on democratization and will be uniquely tailored to the country's own history and conditions.

The meeting was the first of its kind, as the prime minister had previously declined to meet with DTP officials, pointing to the party's refusal to describe the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) as a terrorist organization.

Erdoğan participated in the long-anticipated meeting yesterday not as the prime minister but as the chairman of his ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party), according to an announcement from his party. Interior Minister Beşir Atalay, the coordinator of the government's Kurdish initiative, was also present at the almost-one-hour meeting in Parliament. The DTP was represented by its chairman Türk, co-chairwoman Emine Ayna and parliamentary group chairman Selahattin Demirtaş.

After the meeting, Erdoğan noted that they held a very important meeting within the democratic parliamentary system, adding that his hopes for the future had increased.

"Our nation wants solidarity and unity. It wants to stop the crying of mothers. It does not want blood and death. We are all in expectation of this. For this reason, we have begun to work, and we want to listen to academics, civil society and media representatives who have a say on the issue," he said.

But he underlined that the removal of some doubts might take time.

"It is not easy to overcome them in the short run, but in the medium and the long run we can," he said.

Türk, after the meeting, stressed that in this process, everyone has important responsibilities and tasks to assume, and they will continue to act with this awareness. Türk did give details about the meeting, but mentioned that they did not present any plan to the government nor speculate on what must be done.

"This is an important day. We are so happy to see a suitable atmosphere for dialogue," he said.

Both leaders hesitated to give further details, but sources say that at the beginning of the meeting, the DTP representatives clarified that they were pleased and happy with the government's initiative. They also stated that the decision of the government to listen to views from different segments of society while

shaping a plan for a solution is very positive, but they voiced their expectation that the DTP should not be only listened to, but should also be treated as an important actor in the process. The DTP conveyed the message to Erdoğan that they “are a party which has the role of representing the Kurds and have worked much on the Kurdish question. Kurdish issue is our area, so we want to be an important actor in this process. ”

Prior to the meeting, the DTP’s Demirtaş, who was present at the meeting, said the DTP does not intend to “bargain” with the government but to have “deliberations” instead.

Warning against provocations

DTP representatives also warned against possible provocations aimed at interrupting the process and advised the government to act with steadfastness and speed.

They recalled that the PKK declared a unilateral cease-fire until mid-September and urged the government to avoid military operations in order to prevent clashes and death, which might cause anger in society.

The meeting, which was seen by pundits as a major step in overcoming a psychological barrier to the solution to the Kurdish problem, also took place only a week ago before the PKK’s imprisoned leader, Abdullah Öcalan, is expected to announce his “road map” for a solution to the Kurdish problem. Öcalan, who is serving life in prison on İmralı Island in the Sea of Marmara, is preparing to present his “road map” for a solution in mid-August, on the anniversary of the PKK’s first terrorist attack in 1984.

Some analysts imply that the government wanted to speed up its efforts and meet with the DTP representatives before Öcalan presents his plan. Otherwise, the opposition might suggest that Erdoğan is taking Öcalan’s demands into consideration by meeting with the DTP representatives.

However, the opposition still made the same argument regarding yesterday’s meeting and claimed that Erdoğan, by meeting DTP officials, has started to negotiate with the PKK and Öcalan on the issue.

Republican People’s Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal said Erdoğan did not keep his promise not to hold talks with the DTP until they denounce the PKK as a terrorist organization.

“Actually, it is very obvious with whom this meeting is taking place,” he said. Baykal recalled an interview conducted in May with PKK leader Murat Karayılan in which he suggested that the government should address the PKK or Öcalan when searching for a solution. Karayılan had added that if addressing Öcalan was not possible, then the government should address the DTP, and if not the DTP, then a group of “wise men” composed of Kurdish intellectuals.

Regarding the meeting with DTP deputies, Erdoğan had said on Tuesday that he does not consider the DTP and the PKK the same, since the former is a party in Parliament.

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## Sources

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