

## **Turks, Serbs and Arabs.....**

Tuesday 29 June 2010, by [Barçin Yinanç](#)

**While chatting with a Serbian colleague before attending a press conference by the Gazprom CEO, I told her that I found many similarities between Serbs and Turks. We tend to avoid seeing the mistakes we commit and instead put the blame on the outside world. I was surprised when she told me that a Turkish TV series broadcasted by Fox TV in Serbia, which is owned by a Greek company, has become a big success in the country. "Serbs watch it and say 'look how Turks are like us," she said. At one stage another Turkish series was also a hit in Greece. Can you imagine? Turkish series, made specifically for Turkish audiences, can appeal both to those living in the Middle East and the Balkans. That in itself shows the cultural diversity of Turkey.**

Yet Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's vision seems to be limited solely to the Arab world. "A Turk cannot do without an Arab," Erdoğan said, adding that "We are like meat and bones with the Arabs." While talking about the improving relations with the Arab world, Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek asked, "Why should we not go back to our roots?" I did not know that Turks' roots lay in the Arab world.

I can understand up to a certain point criticisms voiced by the current Justice and Development Party, or AKP, of the previous government's indifference to the Arab world. Yes, at one stage we turned our back to the Middle East. But the examples given by the Prime Minister to show what he thinks of Turkish "disdain" of the Arabs goes beyond rational thinking. He criticized Turks for naming their dogs "Arab."

The dog in the garden owned by my neighbors in my previous house was named "Arab" for the simple reason that he was black. My uncle, who is in his mid 80's, and who has been living in the United States for more than half of his life, uses old Turkish. He used to call African-Americans "Arabs." That there is a misconception that equates "black" with "Arab" should change - and is in fact changing - can't be contested. I am not an expert on languages. But I do not believe that equating "Arab" with "black" stems from a negative connotation about Arabs in general.

My cat's name is Bekir. It's a common male name. According to the rationale of the prime minister, I must hate all people carrying the name Bekir. But most people have pets because they love animals. Why would someone name something it likes with a name that supposedly carries a negative connotation?

The only explanation I have for the Prime Minister's comment is that for certain sects in Islam, dogs are not liked. And this again proves that the prime minister's main reference in life is "religion."

The AKP circles' main explanation of its engagement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the human tragedy suffered by the Palestinian people. If it was the case, then the government would not have remained indifferent to human suffering in Kyrgyzstan. Is it because Uzbeks and Kyrgyz do not pray five times a day?

I believe Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu disclosed the real reason behind the government's policy by saying, "Jerusalem will one day become a capital, and we shall all one day pray in Mescid-i Aksa."

The AKP is no longer talking about the Palestinian problem, but about the problem in Gaza. While advocating the rights of Hamas, no one is talking about the Palestinian Authority, or PA. Is it due to the secular nature of the PA? Is Hamas' radicalism more appealing to the AKP?

If the main reference of the AKP is not religion, but a genuine desire to see the Palestinian suffering end, then it is high time to see Israel as not the sole cause of the problem. The government should tell the PA that the days when the actions of its leadership were not questioned are over. They should end the

corruption that has cost them the trust of their people. The government should then turn to Hamas and say: "Look I have even dared to come to a point of breaking my ties with Israel. It is high time for you to curb your radicalism and accept the existence of Israel." And it should direct at least one-fifth of the criticisms that it voiced against Israel to the disunified Arab world. Even if it is the case that the AKP has lost all hope about the Arab world and the PA, it just can't solve the Palestinian problem with waging a war with Israel and supporting Hamas.

One last word on the Arab world. The reaction among the Arab societies towards the AKP should be carefully examined. If crowds are going to the streets to praise Turkey's stands, it is not so much they are thrilled with the idea that Turkey will lead the Arab world to solve the Palestinian problem. They are doing it to show their reaction to the hypocrisy of their government. They can't go to the streets of Cairo, chanting slogans against Mubarek. They know well that the answer will be violent oppression of protests. But they all know well that Mubarek can't order his security forces to act against those changing slogans for Erdoğan.

Some radicals within Arab society might genuinely applaud Erdoğan, as they might see in him a real brother in arms. But I believe there are others who do so because it is a way to show their reaction to their rulers. What makes me say that is the popularity of Turkish TV series in Arab societies. Those series are not reflecting Turkey dominated by radical tendencies. They reflect a society that has a lifestyle that keeps religion in the private domain and avoids putting religion as a main reference of life.

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## Sources

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