

Turkish people support parliamentary system, demand more freedoms

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A comprehensive public opinion survey has found that an overwhelming majority of Turkish people support the parliamentary system and a unitary state structure for Turkey, and they demand more individual rights and freedoms.

By *Bİlgesam* President Atilla Sandıklı

The parliamentary system is the best administrative system according to 68.7 percent of participants in the survey titled "Societal demands from a new constitution," which was conducted by the Wise Men Center for Strategic Studies (BİLGESAM) in July, with about 7,000 respondents from 16 provinces in Turkey's 12 main regions.

According to the poll, only 24.4 percent of survey participants support a "presidential system" and 6.9 percent support a "semi-presidential" system. Along ethnic lines, while a parliamentary system is supported by 70.4 percent of Turks who responded to the survey questions, while 56.9 percent of Kurdish and Zaza poll respondents support it. On the other hand, while only 23.3 percent of ethnic Turks support a presidential system, among Kurds and Zazas 33.2 percent support that idea.

Akyürek pointed out another interesting result in yesterday's press briefing : There is great support for the parliamentary system among adherents of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party), even though Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has said that he supports a presidential system. "Even among AK Party supporters only about 40 percent voiced support for a semi-presidential or presidential system," Akyürek said.

The poll results also revealed that two out of three support a unitary state system, but that ratio falls to one out of three among Kurds and Zazas. Demands for "federation" are supported by only one out of every four to five people of Kurdish or Zaza origin.

Atilla Sandıklı, the chairman of BİLGESAM, points out that support for a federal structure remains at around 40 percent even among supporters of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which has made demands for federation. "Kurdish demands for federation and autonomy have increased since we first asked about such demands in 2009, but it is obvious that all Kurds do not think the same way the BDP does. The demand for autonomy within a unitary structure comes to the fore," Sandıklı said.

According to BİLGESAM's recent survey, Kurds are generally in harmony when it comes to their demand for education in their mother tongue, and for more rights and freedoms.

Sandıklı said that the poll's findings further show that the establishment of a "constitutional compromise commission" is supported by most of the survey's participants, but even if a compromise solution is not found, the public's interest in a new constitution, and in compromise, is keen. "The constitution should be a text in which every citizen will find something meaningful for him- or herself. In other words, it should be pluralist and promote freedom."

Highlights from the 2011 BİLGESAM poll

Ethnic issues

“Should the constitution refer to ‘Turkishness’ in addition to other ethnic groups ?”

One out of every three people supports the idea, including 57.4 percent of Kurds and Zazas.

“Should the new constitution not refer to Turkishness or any other ethnic groups ?”

One out of every three people supports this idea as well, together with one out of three Kurds-and Zazas.

Civilian-military relationship

Should reforms to grant power over the military to the civilian government continue ?

In general 55-66 percent of respondents agreed that reforms should continue, while Kurds and Zaza support the reforms more strongly with 68-80 percent.

Should civilian authorities be more involved in the appointment of generals ?

About half of respondents said “yes.”

Religious expression

49.5 percent of respondents support retaining the Religious Affairs Directorate (“Diyanet”), with 11.9 percent opposed. 38.6 percent of survey participants said the directorate should serve all belief groups.

82 percent of respondents said students at the university level should be free to wear the headscarf, with more Kurds supporting this.

Support for the freedom to wear the headscarf at the primary school level decreases as the respondents’ education level increases.

When it comes to the right to wear the headscarf in public service, 59 percent of respondents support it for all public servants, while 17.6 percent say some public service officers should have this freedom, but not all. 22.6 percent of people said the headscarf should be banned in public offices.

Sources

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