THE MIDDLE EAST, THE KURDISH PEACE PROCESS IN TURKEY, AND RADICAL DEMOCRACY

The resolution of the Kurdish Problem is part and parcel of Turkey's democratization and vice versa. Despite claims made by the AKP government that the process is close to resolution, there have been limited concrete and practical gains. According to the author, the Peace Process requires a historical understanding of the key dynamics of the conflict, the opportunity for dialogue, and a transparent negotiation process. The author presents democratic autonomy as an idea that goes beyond the nation-state, and represents a further demand: a progressive step for Kurds as well as for the people of the Middle East.

Selahattin Demirtaş*

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* Selahattin Demirtaş is Co-Chairman of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). He was a presidential candidate in the 2014 election.

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One of the main principles we have been advocating for the 24 years since our political representation in Parliament began with the Democracy Party (DEP), is to ground our policies in the understanding that the resolution of the Kurdish Problem cannot be considered separately from the democratization of Turkey. We would like to emphasize once again that we see the process of Turkey's democratization as part of the resolution of the Kurdish Problem, and vice versa: the resolution of the Kurdish Problem as part of Turkey's democratization.

This does not imply that the Kurdish Problem is the only problem of democratization in Turkey. It is therefore necessary for us to create a multidimensional front of struggle and to organize ourselves accordingly. Without the resolution of the Kurdish Problem, it becomes harder to create movements for advancement in other fields necessary for the democratization of Turkey such as labor, identity, culture, and the environment. Considering the tension that the Turkish political atmosphere brings about, we can say that the Kurdish Problem is still one of the foremost determinants of Turkish politics.

This fundamental problem has strong historical roots, and these roots are interpreted differently depending on one's definition, understanding, and approach to history. The process of dialogue today also constitutes an important step for those who approach the issue from a historical point of view.

However, the context and form of discussions in the mainstream media are unfortunately not based upon any historical background or reference to it. This is due to both indifference and a lack of historical awareness. In fact, this is a kind of political stance, too. Especially among racist segments in Turkey, such avoidance of historical background during discussions is indeed a political stance. Thus, the process of dialogue takes on a considerably reductionist interpretation. This results in a disregard of deaths, executions, and arrests – in brief, a covering up of the history of the Kurdish movement's struggle in an instant. However, we have paid enormous prices and sacrificed greatly in order to reach this point; this is one dimension of the historical significance of where we are right now.

Although we repeatedly highlight the historical side of the issue, as an object of the Peace Process ourselves, we often may not have been able to successfully demonstrate this fundamental context to the public. For us, however, the manner of discussion of the Kurdish Problem is too important to be cut off from its historical context or fall victim to cyclical debates. Despite not having seen any concrete steps from the government, the process is historically significant because of the transformation it induced within society. Thus this process today has reached a further historical level.

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The discourse of a nation-state ideology has generated a highly polarized society. Denial, extermination, assimilation, marginalization, "other"ization etc. – these are all the state's ideological tools that have been systematically organized for decades. Military coups created an apolitical society. Racism and nationalism are very prevalent.

In such a society it is not easy to facilitate Kurds' access to their rights to any reasonable extent. However, we have come along a long way in the past year and a half, even longer than over the past 24 years. Large segments of society began questioning, discussing, and understanding the "others," and are seeking answers to what the Kurdish Problem is, what the Kurds demand, and who the Kurds are for the first time. Surveys show that 85-90 percent of the society initiated such a process.

In our opinion, this is the most significant and permanent dimension of the process from a historical point of view. The process of dialogue has broken down the marginalization in society, creating a need for understanding each other through dialogue. Being able to even talk about a "dialogue" itself is an achievement.

Additionally, neither Kurds nor Turks have ever experienced a dialogue such as this during the course of their respective histories. Looking back at history, we see that the leaders of Kurdish rebellions were either executed, exterminated, or deported. It was the same case during the Ottoman Empire as during the Republican era; we do not have a tradition of a modern negotiation in this country.

It is very hard to find the Turkish definition of "consensus," which we frequently encounter in the political terminology of Western societies. This is because, unfortunately, we have not experienced a culture of compromise arrived at by different parties giving something of themselves and debating. But now that this process is

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creating a new experience of dialogue, it is an achievement both of a historical nature and a current one.

On the other hand, the Peace Process has not yet provided us with any concrete and practical gains in terms of democracy and freedom. The AKP government is currently preparing "internal security laws," which would create a police state and reverse the process of democratization. Within the last two and a half years of Peace Process discussions, there have been no concrete gains besides those mentioned above. The party responsible for the lack of any concrete gains is the government. Its inadequacy blocks the process, of course. The solution to this is transparency. Transparency during negotiation processes ensures societal support and enhances the chance of success of the negotiation, because it also generates the participation of civil society in the process.

However, the process is currently being carried out behind closed doors, where anyone can easily create conspiracy theories. Despite our objections, the government insists on this. However, we are aware that without transparency, the process may be blocked at any time. Real political and social transformation is only possible through transparency and a participative approach. It is the politicians' responsibility – and particularly that of the government – to act responsibly and accelerate this transformation, putting forward the steps for a permanent resolution of the problem in a transparent and participatory manner.

As the process begins to quickly move forward, the Kurdish Problem and its interlocutors – as decisive factors in Turkey's democratization process – will expend more energy in the struggle for democracy, and create new areas within this struggle. Today, both in Turkey and in Kurdistan, there are new opportunities for struggle, ranging from labor to identity to the environment. It is important to analyze the structural problems creating the current negative aspects in these areas and create alternatives to them. Within this context, we are working to create a political line representing the main dynamic of change within Turkey and the Middle East in order to provide policies and solutions in such fields.

Nowadays the Middle East is going through a process in which new borders, forms of governance, and social orders exist along with wars and massacres. The govern-

ments of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Syria, and most of all Turkey – which intersect with each other in the context of power relations but, on the other hand, whose sectarian politics serve to reproduce each other – are now considered in many foreign policy circles to be the main reasons for the complexity in the Middle East. The situation is even more tragic for Turkey because the past ten years of Turkey's foreign policy, which is referred to as the "Davutoğlu era," is also a story of failure. Considering the situation in Middle East, this story of failure is now at a very dangerous stage.

It is possible to see reflections of the irrational and neo-Ottoman foreign policy fantasy of the AKP, to the extent of seeing itself as the "protector" of all nations in the Middle East, in every sentence of former Foreign Minister and current Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. This approach is put into practice in the foreign policy of Turkey towards the Middle East, and especially Syria. According to the foreign policy approach employed by the AKP, new models created by the peoples of the Middle East such as the Rojava Revolution should not take place in Syria. In this context, the knot of the new social order forming in the Middle East is tied up in the Peace Process and in Kobani.

As seen by everyone throughout the Kobani protests, this foreign policy approach has become the target of tremendous anger and disappointment for the Kurds living in Turkey. People wanted to show the gap between the greed of Turkey in the Middle East and the reality in Rojava and Kobani. If the Peace Process had accelerated, none

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of these events would have happened. In fact, a victory in Kobani would have been a bigger advantage for Turkey. The Peace Process would have spread its voice amongst its people with enthusiasm and dynamism.

Yet, it is not late for any of these, provided that we focus on transforming the ongoing dialogue into an actual negotiation process with an integrated point of view towards Turkey and the four parts of Kurdistan. The Kurdish movement is trying to take a progressive step in the Middle East's turmoil, in a land thrown into disarray by racism, fundamentalism, and imperial interventions. The cantons of Rojava are trying to experiment with the practice of democratic self-governance, trying to overcome its ethnic, sectarian, and gender identity divides.

This is a political movement for which women's freedom is central – an exceptional feature in the current climate of the Middle East. An economic model based on participation that is sensitive to women's rights and the environment is trying to be created. This is the most serious and courageous step within the Middle East since the experience of socialism in the beginning of 1900s. If it is sustained, understood, and supported, a significantly more progressive point of view than that of the current world order will become a reality.

In this respect, the democratic autonomy that we recommend as a form of government for all peoples of the Middle East is not something we are debating or defending for the first time. There are many examples of this in practice in the world; there are autonomous regions in China, Spain, and many other places. We have read about, examined, and observed these experiences where they take place. Mr. Abdullah Öcalan is trying to develop this idea through his books, writings, and discussions.

Considering all of the above, democratic autonomy and the idea of going beyond the nation-state idea represent a further demand, a progressive step for Kurds as well as for the people of the Middle East. Such a demand does not mean backing away from the idea of the nation-state, but rather constitutes a further demand.

What we are talking about here is a governing system in which groups of people govern through their own autonomous laws and the nation is ruled by a model of

democratic autonomy. This is important because within the geography of Kurdistan it is not only the Kurds who live. Even if they were the only ones, autonomous governing rights granted to society would provide the people with constraining power over the government, which is necessary to prevent potential dictatorships and strictly centralized governments. A parliament where decisions are taken by representatives who are subject to public approval only at the time of the elections is inadequate by itself. The Parliament should also be supervised by democratic, local, civic "assemblies." Without the existence of neighborhood assemblies, civic councils, city councils, and women and youth assemblies, along with their organized pressure on Parliament in order to defend their rights, a democratic existence cannot be achieved.

With the progression of the process of dialogue towards a process of real negotiations and resolution, we can facilitate a move towards democratization as the main objects of this tremendous transformation, be it in Turkey or the Middle East. We do not consider this front of struggle independent from the multidimensional democratization process of Turkey. We design our political struggle in consideration of multidimensional, multicentrist politics. The victories of Kobani and that of the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA) in Greece inspire us. The solution is to merge the two of them in order to gain dynamism, which will ultimately be an achievement of all peoples.

In this context, there is no doubt that the HDP has its eyes on becoming the governing party as the true and only main opposition party of Turkey with multilingual, multi-identity, and pro-participation views.

However, it should be noted that, as a party with an eye on the seat of governance, coming into power is not our only goal. Today, from its least significant organization to its most centralist one, in every arena it enters, the HDP will organize radical democracy. It will build such a system, putting into practice a truly democratic understanding through concrete policies.

What Turkey's polarized political atmosphere fundamentally needs is a participatory and direct democracy, which can be organized all together only through a radical democratic system based on labor and resistance. The HDP will become the new opposition base for all the peoples of Turkey, and a place where a new understanding of life is produced.