

Human Rights, Democracy and The Middle-East: the role of Turkey

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Prof. Dr. Hurşit GÜNEŞ

CHP Deputy

Turkish Grand Assembly

Your Excellency Chairman George Papandreou, Secretary-General Luis Ayala and distinguished participants,

Dear Comrades,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you at the Council Meeting of the Socialist International in Istanbul.

I shall briefly address on what we can do as the Socialists or humanitarians on the current crises in the Middle East and North Africa related to the struggles for democracy. Yet, I regret to admit that repression, deprivation and sorrow in the region, which has been going on for decades, did not culminate after the Arab Spring.

Dear Comrades,

The Middle-East has long been thought or known as a region consisting of a sole monolithic characteristic; Sunni Arabs possessing a prime natural resource; petroleum. Until the very recent socio-political uprisings in this region, the multi-ethnic and multi-religious nature of the Middle-East was not well recognized.

This blindness or sheer generalization was primarily due to the oppressive and even sometimes absolutist monarchical regimes which veiled all kinds of socio-cultural differences and which left no room for individual freedom.

Now that some of these oppressive regimes are cracking down as a result of the Arab Spring, the multi-ethnic differences are surfacing or sprouting in a very reactive, severe and often lethal way. Due to these sudden and often animus uprisings causing ethnic and/or sect clashes, democratic stability cannot be attained. Besides, despite the high per capita income – due to rich energy resources, a dominant industrial bourgeois class has not emerged in these countries which would reproduce an organized, conscious working-class that would struggle for the development of liberties.

It is true that Arab Spring has unveiled all of these cultural differences as this social phenomenon is basically an insurgence, but unfortunately it does not convey itself into a stable democracy. Hence there is a vital need for the establishment of a system that would enable the co- habitation of these different cultural identities in an amicable and tolerant way. In other words, we need to offer a political system that would enable *a cohesive plural society*.

Dear Comrades,

First and foremost, we as socialists should *condemn all kinds of armed foreign interventions* into the region wherever, whomever or whatever it aims. Such interventions have aggravated atrocities by the infiltration of Al-Qaida forces. The Middle-eastern societies should constitute democracy with its indigenous civil social forces.

We witness violation of the right of objection in Bahrain, oppression of women in Saudi Arabia to the extent that they are banned from driving, the lack of women's participation in the executive power of Iran and the financial support of Qatar to Al Qaeda etc. No need to mention the human rights violation made by the oppressive Syrian regime and the absence of free elections in most countries. We as Socialists should *decry all of these regimes irrespectively*.

Thirdly, despite the economic standards reached in some countries due to rich energy resources, meagre human capital has not been alleviated and thus poor democratic conditions still prevail. Furthermore, there is a lack of democratic civil institutions which should indeed be deep-rooted in the society. For such an institutionalization process, there is an urgent need for *a widespread educational reform*. A reform that would not only contribute to the institutionalization of democracy directly, but also to the social conscience of democracy and freedom.

Despite the recent deterioration of human rights in Turkey, i.e. as witnessed in the case of Gezipark protests, Turkey still seems to be the closest role-model a democratic regime for the Middle-East. Turkey also shares a multi-ethnic social structure. It has a multi-party representative democracy and enjoys many contemporary rights and freedom. Again masses have attained basic education, and gender equality is progressing relatively better.

All of these achievements are primarily due to existence of *secular democracy*, thanks to the founder of Republican Peoples Party (CHP), Kemal Atatürk. Although the current AKP government has been detrimental on such social and political assets of Turkey and has approached to the region by sectarian objectives, i.e. by supporting the extremist Sunni armed movements, CHP is still the sole opportunity for contributing to the modernization and establishment of democracy in this region, as it is triumphant in the Turkish model.

Dear Comrades,

Indeed, CHP has already initiated an attempt towards this purpose. We have resisted very firmly against the support of the extremist armed rebels in Syria by the present AKP government. Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has recently visited Iraq which suffers from stability problems, again due to ethnic animosities. Later, a mission from CHP has visited Egypt and has contacted all political and social parties, recommending them a rapid transition to democracy.

These recent courageous efforts of CHP attempting to contribute to democratic stability in this region by amicable means should be applauded and encouraged. We should persistently recommend educational reform and propagate democratic secularism for the stability and modernization of this region.

Comrades,

I must again express my pleasure to host this Council meeting in İstanbul. I would like to express my gratitude to all participants for their contribution to this meeting. I hope the collective will that we shall put in this Council meeting for the Middle East will contribute to the progress of democracy, human rights and social justice.

Thank you,