

Enhancing reforms

Monday 12 November 2007, by [Yusuf Kanli](#)

Should Turkey continue its reform drive or should it halt the process, fight separatist terrorist threats, create a suitable atmosphere and resume the process again? This must be the question we should try to find an answer to nowadays if the assumption that the escalation in separatist terrorist activity is to stall, if not stop, the reform movement in this country which is eradicating the reason of existence for the gang.

Just remember the issues we were discussing when all of a sudden the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist attacks started to escalate? We were talking about a "*civilian constitution*" attempt by the ruling Justice and development Party (PKK). As part of that push of the AKP government, we were discussing a new description of Turkish nationality, the official language and education language issue, enhancing religious liberties, redefining and clarifying secularism and such...

Of course there were sides in those discussions. Some were pro, some were against; some were talking about a more democratic and participationist Turkey, while some were claiming that the AKP was in a bid to take Turkey away from the founding principles of the "Kemalist republic."

For or against, all such discussions are now being shelved and a nationalist uproar is continuing against the separatist heinous attacks. Without thinking "the day after" we are bogged down into a discussion of how many kilometers should the Turkish Armed Forces enter into northern Iraq, should it only target the PKK or should the collaborators of the gang in northern Iraq - the Massoud Barzani-led local administration there - must be targeted as well.

As if they are all military strategists, people are appearing on TVs with maps of northern Iraq behind themselves and issuing instructions for the Turkish military. The northern Iraq incursion is yet a probability for the military, but if one looks at the TV programs, it is as if a war is continuing in full force.

It is indeed a fact that because of the immense public pressure the Turkish government is coming fast to a point of no return regarding an operation on separatist dens in northern Iraq. Turkey is under a psychological aggression. Can we afford to let this continue? Even if the Turkish government and military -with possible contributions of the U.S. and the Iraqis - present the nation some prominent members of the gang on a golden plate, it appears that the nation will not be satisfied with that and demand a military operation, at least an aerial one.

Reform drive must continue

Talking about the need to continue reforms, particularly about reforms aimed at easing the problems of the ethnic Kurdish population of the country might be nothing less than shooting itself in the foot for the AKP government. However, the country and its reform process cannot be allowed to be held hostage by the gang either.

If reforms in one area might not be possible, the government might concentrate on reforms in some other areas - for example on the elections and political party laws - which are related to the general democracy problems of this country and eradication of them will help to solving the Kurdish problem as well.

It must be clear for everyone that whatever move Turkey may make in other areas, as long as it does not undertake a radical reform in its laws on elections and political parties this country will not have a full democracy.

Walking the tight rope between justice in representation and stability in governance, many democracies have introduced electoral thresholds discriminating against the smaller parties and serving the interests of the bigger parties. That is, introduction of an electoral threshold is not just in Turkey, it is an international phenomenon, seen in many democracies. The problem here, unfortunately, is the high 10 percent threshold which must be taken down to a reasonable level, allowing minority views getting represented in Parliament.

The law on political parties, on the other hand, is empowering an elected dictatorship of the party leaders within the parties. How can we talk about freedom of speech in a country if within the political parties of that country freedom of speech is limited to compatibility with the leader and anyone criticizing the leader or the leadership clan faces expulsion?

As there is no election in the horizon now, and as such reforms are not related at all with the fight against terrorism, can we concentrate on them?

While Turkey must try to contain, on the one hand, the "terrorism fire," it must go beyond firing killer reform bullets against the gang.

Sources

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