

Turkey discussing

Wednesday 14 January 2009, by [Beril Dedeoğlu](#)

For a week now, Turkey has been the scene of debates regarding three texts.

These are: the “Apology to Armenians” campaign, “Being Different in Turkey: Alienation on the Axis of Religion and Conservatism,” a joint study by the Open Society Institute (OSI) and Boğaziçi University, and the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) report, “A Roadmap for the Solution of the Kurdish Question: Policy Suggestions to the Government from the Region.”

Although this came about unintentionally, the simultaneous release of these three texts is very good because each of these debates gives us the opportunity to consider authoritarianism, violence, discrimination and inequality in a different way. The apology campaign involves considering the pains suffered and caused in the past as part of a social conscience, showing empathy and, at the same time, settling an account with the political regime and system. In its present form, the campaign has made possible the identification of those who are in favor of authoritarianism and subsuming differences, allowed us to question today a mentality that has roots in the past and reminded us what the total cost of intolerance in society can be. Naturally, one person’s loss became another person’s gain; this campaign disturbs many by calling them to account for this gain and demanding, at the same time, the socialization of the costs and benefits.

Basically, the second study also measures the behaviors and attitudes in Turkey toward differences, but from another angle. Here, what is being examined is whether those who are not pious, those who prefer to remain outside conservative life and those who belong to other religions or ethnicities are subject to oppression by public authorities and the social environment in Anatolia. Or rather, what is being implied is the impact of the Sunni-nationalist majority on others. Although it is a contentious study, which has been criticized with regard to its methodology, its findings are important and need to be considered. The study reminds us of — although it does not prove — the possibility that discrimination toward non-Muslims can be applied to every group with a different lifestyle. In its present form, it tells us about the probability that intolerance could be transformed to the point of violence, and it actually fits well within the same framework of the “apology campaign.”

“Ingrained in the country’s social fabric”

The third study, on the other hand, is more of a report on policy suggestions than an examination of the current situation and is built on the main points commonly shared by Kurds in southeastern Anatolia. The study warns about the environment created by discriminatory practices and cautions that a point could be reached that may engender conflict. It has been shown that conflict and “othering” practices serve no aim other than to strengthen authoritarian and ethnic nationalist movements on all sides and that this promotes violence. Consequently, the most basic proposals are made within a context under which violence and arms are given up by all parties. When the tools of violence have been given up, the study says, the government has to take social, political, cultural and economic measures, while Kurds should develop soft policies within their political diversity. In other words, it is shown that when the system uses democratic methods, this would also contribute to the democratization of the Kurds.

The “Muslim-non-Muslim,” “Sunni-Alevi” and “Kurdish-Turkish” disparities are historical problems for Turkey. These problems, ingrained in the country’s social fabric, have also constituted the core of its

political regimes. It is, therefore, natural that such kinds of studies would stir up a storm because, on the one hand, people find the opportunity to question discrimination they themselves have been involved in or have been silent in the face of, while, on the other, people have the chance to observe the flaws of the system in which we live.

Many have said that reforms in Turkey have slowed down, but reforms are not only legislative changes prepared by governments and approved by Parliament.

Sources

Source : 27 December 2008, Saturday Today's Zaman