

How Turks and Kurds see each other and Kurdish question

Thursday 30 June 2011, by [Orhan Kemal Cengiz](#)

I am currently reading a report by the Konda research group titled “Kürt Meselesinde Algı ve Beklentiler” (Perceptions and Expectations on the Kurdish issue). The report was prepared based on interviews conducted with Kurds and Turks in 2010 with 10,393 subjects being interviewed in Turkey’s 29 provinces.

The data gathered from these interviews provide extremely eye-opening information towards understanding both Turkey and the Kurdish issue. I would like to share with you some of the information made available by this report.

According to the research, 26 percent of Kurds have never received any formal education, whereas this figure is only 6.5 percent among Turks.

Approximately 16 percent of Kurds in Turkey have a Turkish member of their family while inversely (and as a result of Kurds being less in number) this figure drops to approximately 6 percent of Turks.

One out of five Kurds indicated that they have migrated from their homes as either a direct or indirect result of armed conflict in Turkey’s Southeast over the past three decades.

When it comes to contact between ethnic groups, the research found that 47.4 percent of Turks (this figure is 22.1 percent in Kurds) do not want a neighbor, 53.5 percent do not want a business partner (this figure is 24.8 percent in Kurds), and 57.6 do not want a daughter-in-law (this figure is 26.4 percent in Kurds) from the other ethnic group.

An interesting picture emerged when the same questions were asked of voters who were affiliated with particular parties. Results showed 42.9 percent of Justice and Development Party (AK Party) voters don’t wish for a Kurdish neighbor, 48.8 percent don’t want a Kurdish business partner and 51.7 percent of them don’t care for a Kurdish daughter-in-law. The same figures for CHP supporters respectively are as follows: 38.7 percent, 43.4 percent and 47.2 percent. When it comes to supporters of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), intolerance peaks at an all time high with those who don’t want a Kurdish neighbor, business partner or daughter-in-law being 70 percent, 68.4 percent and 60.4 percent, respectively.

The discrepancy between Kurds and Turks as to where the Kurdish problem stems from is quite interesting. While 84 percent of Kurds believe that it is a problem of provocation by foreign states, 82.7 percent believe that the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) is responsible, while 71.3 percent say the problem is caused by Kurds wanting to establish a separate state; 64.8 percent blame the lack of economic development in the country, while 56.3 percent say the root of the problem is that fundamental problems in Turkey are often depicted as concerning Kurds alone.

According to Kurds, on the other hand, the root of the Kurdish problem is not the PKK or the desire for a separate state; rather, 78.3 percent of Kurds say that that a lack of economic development in the region is the main cause of the problem, while 53 percent say that the problem is a result of provocation at the hands of foreign states. The other answers given by participants about their perception of the problem shows significant discrepancy from the answers provided by Turkish respondents. While 63.3 percent of Kurds believe that the state treats Kurds differently, 61.2 percent say that they believe Kurds have a problem regarding their identity.

There is also a great difference between Kurds and Turks when it comes to expectations of solutions to the

Kurdish problem are concerned: Turks show their highest rates of approval of solutions to ending the problem by way of providing financial development (77 percent) and a one way solution to ending terror (74 percent). While only a mere 14 percent say agree on constitutional approval of the Kurdish identity, 72 percent object to it entirely. When it comes to the issue of Kurds gaining education in their native language, 59 percent of Turks are opposed to the idea, while 30 percent approve. Further, 52 percent of Turks object to media broadcasting in Kurdish while 35 percent approve of it. Similarly, 56 percent oppose the lifting of the election threshold, while 27 percent approve of it.

As for Kurds' expectations of a solution, they can be listed in order as; providing financial development (94 percent), state-level assistance in Kurdish traditions (89 percent), rights to broadcasting in their native language (87 percent), the constitutional recognition of the Kurdish identity (74 percent), the lifting of the election threshold (59 percent), expansive authority being granted to elected assembly (71 percent).

These are some of the results that I gathered from the report which point to the fact that levels of discrimination and intolerance are hitting an alarming level in Turkey and the will to coexist is noticeably weakening. Similarly, I think that there is a serious deficiency of "empathy" where Turks are concerned. The answers given by Turks indicated that Turks are still quite far off from understanding the Kurdish problem.

I think that the Turkish educational system plays a serious role in creating this lack of empathy. Unfortunately, respect towards other cultures, tolerance and putting oneself in another's shoes are not taught in Turkey. For example, it is not taught that at the end of the 19th century, a quarter of the Turkish population was comprised of non-Muslims and that Turkey was a culturally and ethnically rich mosaic. As is evident through the information provided above, I am of the opinion that there is dire need for revolution in thinking to solve the Kurdish problem. I also believe that in order for such a revolution to take place, there needs to be a serious revolution of the Turkish educational system. Otherwise, we might be forced to wait for a much longer to resolve the Kurdish issue.