



9th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
"THE EUROPEAN UNION, TURKEY AND THE KURDS"
Brussels (B), European Parliament, 5th & 6th December, 2012

**THE KURDISH QUESTION IN TURKEY:
TIME TO RENEW THE DIALOGUE AND RESUME DIRECT
NEGOTIATIONS**

CONFERENCE'S OPENING SPEECH

of MP Ms. Leyla Zana

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(English version / the full text is attached)

Ms. LEYLA ZANA

My esteemed Friends,

Distinguished participants,

Welcome to the ninth 'EU Conference on Turkey and the Kurds'.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our esteemed friends who have contributed to the organisation of this conference.

European values which were formed as a result of hundreds of years of bitter experiences provide the background for the Kurdish issue based on principles of common wisdom and dialogue in every fora. I would like to express my profound happiness for being here with my esteemed friends in the context of this meeting, which has become a symbol of peace and democracy.

At this Kurdish conference organised in the European Parliament I am speaking in Turkish as a Kurd. This is because, as is the case in all institutional domains, the European Union cannot overcome the issue of Kurdish interpretation due to its approach which takes states rather than peoples as a basis. Thus, in order to be understood correctly, I need to speak in a language other than my mother tongue.

Everyone present here knows or is at least familiar with the issues comprising the agenda of this conference. The global crisis the world is going through does not detract from the importance of the European Union as a peace project, on the contrary, it puts it in sharp relief. European Union's providing support for peace initiatives undertaken in its neighbouring geographical areas also has to do with its vision of peace shaped by European values. On the occasion of this conference which is an effort to seek peace, I would like to congratulate the European Union for receiving the Nobel Peace Prize this year. The fact that the Nobel Peace Prize is given to Europe is testimony to the fact that the EU is a Peace Project as well as being an economic union. At a time when the Middle East is being reshaped, democracy, freedom and the yearning for peace, as values created by the European Union, continue to be crucial for humanity.

In 2012, poverty and inequalities in income distribution are at a global scale. Nuclear weapons, weapons of mass destruction and policies giving priority to security shake the world. Therefore, continental Europe has to clarify its position vis-a-vis the rest of the world and in relation to the Kurds in particular. The call for freedom of these people who live in the heart of the Middle East needs to be taken into consideration and supported by Europe.

Distinguished participants, esteemed friends,

Kurds, whose geography was fragmented one hundred years ago are going over a historic threshold today. In all the countries they live, they are raising the struggle for democracy, rights and freedoms. The Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq is a guarantee not only for Kurds but for the freedom and voluntary cooperation of all the ethnic and religious groups in that area. Western Kurdistan is a candidate for being a haven for all people escaping the wrath of the Baath Party and Assad. Kurds of Eastern Kurdistan continue to voice pleas for freedom while taking the risk of being executed by the Iranian regime. The Kurds of Northern Kurdistan on the other hand, influence both the policies of Turkey and The Middle East as the most important element of Turkey's process of democratisation.

Finally, in 2012, Kurds are demonstrating to the whole world that they are not a fragmented people living separately from each other. In all the countries they live, they are struggling not against people but against the cruel face and authoritarian character of those states.

However, the gains achieved during the last one hundred years in the Kurdish people's search for right, justice and freedom where they gave their lives are still coming under attack.

The recent tensions between the Iraqi Kurdistan and the Central Iraqi Government where the central government has violated the constitution by which it is bound and has massed arms and troops in the Kurdish region give rise to concerns. One cannot and must not remain silent in the face of a situation where people seeking democracy and stability could be drawn into a new conflict.

The fact that Syrian Kurds have not become a party to the crisis the country is in, that they have resorted to negotiations with patience and maturity is an exemplary demonstration of responsibility that should be supported. Any attempts designed to block them from getting their rights stemming from their being a people will be far from a just and fair solution.

Meanwhile, the gains achieved by Iranian Kurds are trying to be lost amongst the undercurrents of the regime. For Iranian Kurds to institutionalise their gains they should first and foremost put into practice an *esprit de corps*. And all sensitive circles should add strength to their voice.

Esteemed friends,

As you have been following closely also, Turkey's trial with the Kurdish issue has not shaken this country's hundred year old cliché rhetoric. Improvements achieved regarding the Kurdish issue amount to no more than arrangements lacking an infrastructure, improvements put in place with a 'This is how I've done it and it's

been done' mentality. Not only there is no constitutional or statutory initiative aiming at returning confiscated rights, but also the police and judiciary pressures on the Kurdish political movement is gradually increasing.

The report card of the Turkish state on the Kurdish issue during the last decade still comprise of operations, cross border military operations and the statistics of our people who have been killed. The dialogue environment initiated with the PKK was not continued and the unlawful implementations against Mr Abdullah Öcalan still continue.

The continuation of military operations, the arrest of politicians and new ones being arrested day by day, the murder of Ceylan Önkol and dozens of children and the fact that the Roboski massacre has been covered up and lastly the recent threat of lifting the political immunity of Kurdish members of parliament are among some of the serious obstacles in front of creating an environment of confidence.

Today, around ten thousand political detainees and convicts in Turkish prisons are imprisoned because they have taken place within the Kurdish political movement. These political detainees have in recent months risked their lives by subjecting their bodies to hunger for 68 days as the only remaining instrument in their hands to overcome the impasse being experienced in the Kurdish issue.

As a result of the national and international public opinion taking ownership of the hunger strikes, channels of dialogue between the two parties were opened and upon Mr Öcalan's call to the detainees, which was regarded as a positive initiative, the action was ended.

The fact that a threshold that could have swept the country to a deep chaos in case of a loss of life in the strikes was not crossed through common wisdom and common sense is pleasing for the peace of country.

The ending of the hunger strike has placed on the agenda the achievement of a lasting peace. It has also increased hopes of solving the issue through dialogue and negotiations.

Distinguished participants,

I would like to state clearly that peace is a very arduous business and establishing an environment of confidence is the sine qua non of such a process.

The fact that issues are actually being discussed is a positive development. However, words and rhetoric are no longer adequate in our society and it is seen clearly that a process that moves forward two steps and moves back one step cannot heal any wounds at all.

In solving the Kurdish issue we need sincere and concrete steps focused on finding a solution. To this end, the government must as soon as possible put in place its concrete proposals for solving the Kurdish issue through dialogue and negotiations

within the framework of a “Peace Project” where all parties’ effective participation is ensured. In order not to delay this anymore, all friends of the Kurdish and Turkish people must joint their efforts for such a crucial project.

The human rights, political rights and basic freedoms of the Kurdish people that were seized must take their place in the new constitution. We do not want a new constitution which is ‘just a new constitution no matter how it is’ but one which would include all organs and depths of the state. While solving the Kurdish issue, we are insistent on a democratic constitution that will check and limit the ruling party and one that will prevent the state from being cruel to its citizens.

Take a look at the on-going debates in Turkey which is on the brink of developing a new constitution: there is no talk of democratic initiatives that will open up the clogged system, that will help the people to breathe and that will solve chronic problems first and foremost being the Kurdish issue. With the existing 10% electoral threshold, the political parties law and electoral law, democratic mechanisms are not even on the agenda.

I would like to let it be known that the new constitution must be a guarantee for the peace and equality legislation of the peoples of Turkey. It should be reemphasised that while Turkey is trying to solve its chronic problems, it needs the European Union route and motivation.

This is because the system in Turkey believes it needs to solve the Kurdish issue, but due to the character of the regime, it cannot develop an initiative for a solution as it cannot give up statism and nationalism. It is therefore trying to defer a solution to the problem, and trying to manage the problem to save the day. It simply cannot demonstrate its goal and its will to solve the issue.

Above all, if a future that includes Kurds is wanted, short, medium and long term goals must be declared to the people and to the political institutions. Kurds should not be expected to forgo all their legitimate demands in return for a few palliative measures. Kurdish people should absolutely have a political status in the 21st century. Otherwise, we may have to place on our agenda the actions in line with the “Twin Conventions” signed by Turkey in 2003 which includes the right to self-determination. Turkey has to move on to the concept of dialogue and negotiations instead of war and terrorism in relation to the Kurdish issue. To this end, we expect an open demonstration of a political will that will transparently continue the interrupted Oslo process, even though it may not be called the Oslo Process.

Politically motivated police and judiciary pressure targeting Kurdish politicians must be put an end to. A general amnesty that will open up the way for political solutions must be placed on the agenda.

The initiative launched by the government under the names of the Kurdish Initiative or the Democratic Initiative must continue with channels of dialogue to be established with the negotiation parties.

The state must refrain from making confusing strategic moves. There is no problem regarding negotiating partners and roles. It must be emphasised that in solving the Kurdish issue, the general strategy must be negotiated with Mr Öcalan, the arms issue with the PKK and constitutional and legislative arrangements with the BDP and all other Kurdish political circles. Efforts other than these are simply a loss of time. Therefore, the state must develop an open solution strategy with the PKK, must open up the way for Mr Öcalan's effective participation in the process and demystify Imrali, where Mr Öcalan is kept in prison. Because it should be recognised that "There can be a war without Öcalan but there cannot be peace without Öcalan".

We expect the European Union which is founded on hundreds of years of experience to take on a more active role in the process of solving Turkey's Kurdish issue.

For Turkey, the Kurdish issue has completed its phase of finding recipes. The actors are clear and open. What needs to be done is being realistic. The solution lies in the political institutions. Turkey cannot solve this issue by pressurising Kurdish politics and laying asphalt over it. Because flowers cannot blossom in asphalt.

I extend my sincerest regards to you all.

Leyla Zana