

## WAS THERE, IS THERE, WILL THERE BE A KURDISH PLAN?

*The article explores whether the current Turkish government has a comprehensive plan towards improving the situation in Southeast Anatolia and granting cultural and political rights to Kurds. Since the landslide victory of the AKP in the July 2007 general elections, there has been much talk about such a plan, but hardly any concrete steps have been apparent. Though there is an abundance of ideas, the political will to implement them seems weak. Close cooperation with the military in the fight against terrorism as well as AKP's effort to cater to Turkish nationalist segments of society narrows the possibilities for political maneuver.*

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**T**he Prime Minister of Turkey announced on 12 March 2008 a plan to address the problems of Southeast Anatolia in an interview with the *New York Times*, which called the plan “new”. There has since been heated debate about the merit of the plan and whether it is infact new or not. Finally on 27 May 2008 the government substantiated its intended policy with a package for the Southeast and the Kurdish population. The lion share of this “new” plan is the old GAP, the Southeast Anatolia Project, an infrastructure, irrigation and rural development project, which was developed in the 1970s. The government committed itself to finalize GAP until 2012, allocating a total of 27 billion YTL to create 3.8 million jobs and increase the GDP per capita by 209 percent. However, scrutinizing the different party documents and statements as well as the actions taken, doubts arise whether these goals can be met. There are technical doubts about the possibility to reach the intended figures, but also ideological doubts regarding whether the AKP is really ready to act independently from the military on issues concerning cultural and political rights for the Kurds. The Kurdish question is more than economic underdevelopment and separatist terror. It is about the difficult question of how to politically organize a multiethnic state without endangering the unity of the state. As some AKP documents show, the party has acknowledged this; the question is, whether it also has the courage to implement a policy for the Southeast that is more than infrastructure and irrigation.

### ***The “First AKP government” (2002-2007) and the Kurds***

The AKP (Justice and Development Party) won the 2007 elections with almost 47 percent, which meant an increase of around 12 percent compared to the previous elections in 2002 and a continued absolute majority in parliament. In the Southeast the result was even more impressive where the AKP won 54 percent of the votes in the 13 predominantly Kurdish provinces against 24 percent for the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP). Such a result after five years in power could be interpreted to demonstrate that the Kurds know or at least hope that the AKP will improve their economic and political situation and be more receptive to their demands for increased rights in terms of use of Kurdish language and in the area of culture.

During the first AKP legislature from November 2002 to July 2007 the Kurds profited from several legal changes. Despite the fact that AKP government got credit for the reforms, the laws had infact been passed by the previous government. Concerning the Kurds the most important changes were the lifting of the constitutional bans on broadcasting and education in languages other than Turkish. As part of the first EU Reform package, rights for both broadcasting and education in different languages and dialects were passed by the late Ecevit government (May 1999-November 2002) in early August 2002. The wording in the new laws on this issue was as follows:

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“Television programs may broadcast in languages other than Turkish but must not contravene principles of national sovereignty laid out in the constitution.

Private schools may teach in languages other than Turkish provided they do not compromise constitutional principles.”<sup>1</sup>

Both changes were passed with a broad majority: of the Parliament of 550 MPs, 267 voted in favor of the broadcasting article and 235 in favor of the education component.

The AKP did not prepare these laws. It did, however, implement them, albeit often with long time-lags. TRT started broadcasting in languages other than Turkish on 7 June 2004 with a program in Bosnian as a part of the series called “Our Cultural Richness”.<sup>2</sup> This program also includes broadcasts in Kirmanci and Zaza, the two main Kurdish languages spoken in Turkey. The program still broadcasts on week-days on TRT3 at 7:30 AM and on TRT Radio1 at 6:10 AM.

Two years later, on 8 March 2006, the Supreme Board of Radio and Television of Turkey (RTÜK) allowed two TV channels (Gün TV<sup>3</sup> and Söz TV<sup>4</sup>) and one radio channel (Medya FM) to carry out limited broadcasts in Kurdish. Medya FM got five, and the television stations four weekly broadcast hours, but with many limitations concerning the content.<sup>5</sup>

On the front of education, again the progress is at best patchy. Some private schools opened Kurdish courses in Şanlıurfa, Adana, Diyarbakır and Batman in 2004, but authorities found obstacles to their functioning and the courses were closed down. (For example in one case the size of the doors was deemed not fitting with the laws, in another case the fact that security needs were not met was put forth). Currently there is only the opportunity to have private lessons with teachers of Kurdish institutions, e.g. Kürt Kav or the Enstituya Kurdi in Istanbul. There is no Kurdish education in schools, not even elective, nor are there Kurdish Institutes at universities.

In August 2005 Prime Minister Erdoğan made a historic statement in Diyarbakır, being the first Turkish Prime Minister to admit that the state had made mistakes in the past in its relation with the Kurds: “The Kurdish problem is everyone’s problem and mine in particular.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1. AB Uyum Yasaları (1. EU Convergence Laws), July-August 2002, [http://www.belgenet.com/yasa/ab\\_uyum-1.html](http://www.belgenet.com/yasa/ab_uyum-1.html).

<sup>2</sup> “Anadilde yayın haftaya başlıyor” [Broadcasting in the native language will start next week], *NTV*, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/272889.asp>, 4 June 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Gün TV Homepage: <http://www.gunradyotv.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> Internet site with a link to the TV program: <http://www.diyarbakirsoz.com>.

<sup>5</sup> Yerel kanallarda Kürtçe Mart’ta” [In regional channels Kurdish in March], *NTV*, 21 February 2006, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/362107.asp>

<sup>6</sup> “Two Steps Forward, One Step Back”, *Qantara*, [http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show\\_article.php/\\_c-476/\\_nr-881/\\_p-1/i.html?PHPSESSID=5](http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/_c-476/_nr-881/_p-1/i.html?PHPSESSID=5), 19 November 2007.

A brave step towards the Kurds. However, this happened during a time when the use of Kurdish was still persecuted intensively. There were hundreds of trials for the use of Kurdish, e.g. in New Year's greeting cards in 2006, for writing with w, q or x, and during the election campaign. In 2007, the police started an investigation because DTP politician Sırrı Sakık asked to have a glass of water in Kurdish during a political rally in Muş.<sup>7</sup>

During the election campaign in 2007 tensions rose and Kurds were frequently the target of Turkish nationalists, e.g. there were several attacks against Kurdish shops after the so-called "Republic Demonstrations", MHP chairman Devlet Bahçeli toured the country with a rope calling to hang PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. CHP chairman Deniz Baykal did not contribute to ease the tension either when he talked about the possibility of a civil war. As a result, those Kurds that were afraid of a CHP-MHP coalition voted for the AKP, the rest for the independent candidates of the DTP. At least this is true for the majoritarian Kurdish provinces. For Diyarbakir this meant that six of the ten MPs came from the AKP and four from the DTP, together the two parties reached 88.6 percent, the other parties hardly exist.<sup>8</sup> Commenting on this result, Prime Minister Erdoğan said that the Kurds are best represented by the AKP and not by the DTP, Erdoğan spoke of 75 Kurdish AKP MPs.<sup>9</sup>

### ***What Does the "Second AKP government" Have to Offer the Kurds?***

Before coming to the question of whether the AKP has a new and comprehensive Kurdish plan, let's look at what the AKP party program and government plan say about the topic. The party program is surprisingly outspoken and direct:

"The event, which some of us call the Southeastern, others call the Kurdish or the Terror problem, is unfortunately a reality in Turkey. [...] The cultural diversity in this region is considered richness by our Party. On the condition that Turkish remains the official and instruction language, our Party regards the cultural activities in languages other than Turkish, including broadcasting, as an asset which reinforces and supports the unity and integrity of our country, rather than weaken it. [...] the way to end terror requires an approach by the State, respectful of basic rights and freedoms, and a way of thinking, which sees economic development and security as pieces of the same whole. [...] being a citizen of the Republic of Turkey is the cement of our society."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> "Kürtçe 'bana su getirin'e fezleke" [Police report for "bring me water" in Kurdish], *NTV*, 8 March 2008, <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/438381.asp?cp1=1>.

<sup>8</sup> Mustafa Akyol and Serdar Alyamaç, "A sea change in cultural politics", *Turkish Daily News*, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/vote2007/article.php?enewsid=56>.

<sup>9</sup> Nafiz İlfazoğlu and Mesut Hasan Benli, "Kürtlerin temsilcisi AKP mi DTP mi?" [Is the representative of the Kurds the AKP or the DTP?] *Radikal*, 8 November 2007; <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=238214>

<sup>10</sup> AKP Party Program, 2.6. The East And The Southeast, <http://eng.akparti.org.tr/english/partyprogramme.html>

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The original text is much longer, but these short sketches show that the problem is acknowledged and solutions foreseen concerning cultural and economic aspects. The term, “being a citizen of the Republic of Turkey” instead of “being a Turk” reflects a ‘conciliatory’ approach and was met with huge criticism from nationalist and Kemalist circles who had also attacked Erdoğan for his ideas on supra and sub-identities in late 2005.<sup>11</sup>

In the government program, which was announced on 30 August 2007 in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, the Kurdish question was mentioned only in one sentence: “We will continue our nationwide service campaign in the fields of education, health, justice, road construction and drinking water especially in our Eastern and Southeastern provinces, which were neglected for years.”<sup>12</sup>

The stress is clearly on the economy and infrastructure; political or cultural aspects are not mentioned. Yavuz Önen, chairman of the Human Rights Foundation commented on the program during the first meeting of the so called “Peace Parliament”: “This is a program which ignores Turkey’s most important problem, the Kurdish issue, pretending it is not there.”<sup>13</sup>

An important contrast, however, was the draft for a new Constitution, popularly called a ‘Civilian Constitution.’ The draft was prepared by a group of law experts under the guidance of Ergun Özbudun, law professor at Ankara’s private Bilkent University and a well-known liberal intellectual. Several points in the Constitution lay out the notion of citizenship and cultural and civic rights for different groups.

In the current constitution, Article 66 notes “Everyone bound to the Turkish State with the bond of citizenship is a Turk.” In the prepared draft, this is changed to “Everyone bound to the Turkish Republic with the bond of citizenship is called a Turk regardless of religion or race.”

The draft does not refer to Turkish as the language of the state, instead it is denoted the official language of state, thus leaving room for “non-official” languages. Concerning Kurdish broadcasting, the draft constitution does not include some of the obstacles the current constitution does. Moreover, according to this draft, the current Law of Political Parties, banning political speeches in Kurdish would be unconstitutional.

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<sup>11</sup> “Kimlikte tartışma” [Discussion on identity], *Sabah*, 22 August 2005, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2005/08/22/siy107.html>; “Alt kimlik-üst kimlik tartışması” [Sub-identity supra identity discussion], *Hürriyet Almanak* 2005, <http://dosyalar.hurriyet.com.tr/almanak2005/details.asp?sid=5&nid=121>.

<sup>12</sup> AKP government program: <http://www.akparti.org.tr/programm.doc>, see also “İşte 60. Hükümet” [This is the 60th government], *NTV*, 3 September 2007 <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/418610.asp>.

<sup>13</sup> Tolga Korkut, “Turkey Peace Parliament: Do Not Ignore Kurdish Question”, *Bianet*, 4 September 2007, <http://www.bianet.org/english/kategori/english/101557/turkey-peace-parliament-do-not-ignore-kurdish-question>.

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Article 42 of the current constitution bans education in any language other than Turkish as mother tongue. This is one of the most sensitive issues and is dealt with in the draft as follows: “The language of education and teaching is Turkish. Education in other languages than Turkish will be arranged in accordance with the democratic societal order.”<sup>14</sup> This would open the possibility of Kurdish as an elective course in schools.

This draft was expected to be presented as a package to parliament in early 2008, there to be discussed with the opposition parties and then voted on in spring 2008.<sup>15</sup> As of June 2008, this had not happened.

On 10 January 2008 the government presented the “Action Plan of the 60th government”. In this action plan, among other things, a strategy for regional development (UBGS) that foresees setting up development agencies especially in Eastern and Southeastern Turkey is laid out. The emphasis is on health, road construction drinking water and education.<sup>16</sup>

The next step in this inconsistent approach was an interview by Erdoğan with *The New York Times* published on 12 March 2008. Erdoğan said:

“The state will invest between 11 billion dollars and 12 billion dollars over five years to build two large dams and a system of water canals, complete paved roads and remove land mines from the fields along the Syrian border. [...] Plans for the project will be completed within two months, at which point construction of the two dams will begin [...] one channel of state television TRT will broadcast in Kurdish, Persian and Arabic and be running in several months: This will be the most important step providing cultural rights to the region.”<sup>17</sup>

The reception of this interview abroad differed from its reception in Turkey. In fact it was presented as a new plan by the correspondent. However observers in Turkey were aware of the history of this project.

Concerning broadcasting in other languages, a whole channel would be something new, even if the idea was first formulated by Turgut Özal.<sup>18</sup> But this suggestion does not address what is additionally needed. The real demand is for

<sup>14</sup> Kemal Göktaş, “Sivil Anayasa’da ‘Kürtçe eğitim’ adımı” [“A step towards ‘Kurdish education’ in the Civil Constitution], *Vatan*, <http://www9.gazetevatan.com/haberdetay.asp?tarih=24.08.2007&Newsid=133797&Categoryid=1>, 24 August 2007; Gökçer Tahincioğlu, “İşte AKP’nin yeni anayasa taslağı” [the AKP’s new constitution draft], *Milliyet*, 13 September 2007 <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/09/13/siyaset/asiy.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Ertuğrul Günay together with Der Spiegel correspondent Annette Großbongardt.

<sup>16</sup> 10 January 2008, [http://www.akparti.org.tr/60.Hukumet\\_Eylem\\_Planı.pdf](http://www.akparti.org.tr/60.Hukumet_Eylem_Planı.pdf),

<sup>17</sup> Sabrina Tavernese, “Turkey Set to Invest in Better Relations With Kurds”, *The NY Times*, 12 March 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/12/world/europe/12turkey.html?scp=3&sq=tayyip&st=nyt>.

<sup>18</sup> There are currently about 50 different Kurdish channels by different political and regional groups that can be watched in the Southeast. That is why at this point a TRT channel does not have much importance and would have little contribution to the situation.



independent Kurdish stations, not a state channel that would be regarded as a vehicle for state propaganda.<sup>19</sup>

Most of the proposed steps are anything but new. Erdoğan simply stated that he would go on implementing GAP (Southeastern Anatolia Project), an irrigation and hydroelectric power project covering nine provinces of southeastern Turkey in the basins of the Tigris and Euphrate Rivers, first formulated in the 1970s and implemented starting from the 1980s. The GAP homepage, updated on 3 July 2007 says:

“The water resources development component of the program envisages the construction of 22 dams and 19 hydraulic power plants and irrigation of 1.82 million hectares of land. The total cost of the project is estimated as 32 billion USD.”<sup>20</sup>

GAP is currently about two-thirds finished. The dams, irrigation channels, and paved roads mentioned by Erdoğan are all part of the uncompleted project. Therefore Gareth Jenkins commented:

“It is difficult to see how the completion of a project that was originally formulated in the 1970s will be interpreted as demonstrating the AKP’s commitment to the region.”<sup>21</sup>

However, abroad Erdoğan’s words were taken more literally. On 10 April 2008 EU Commission President Barroso addressed the Turkish Parliament:

“It should combine efforts for the socio-economic development of the region, and ensure cultural and political rights for Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin. I know that the Government is working on a plan in this direction and I look forward to hearing the details about it as soon as possible.”<sup>22</sup>

This was not the first time in recent months that foreign politicians assumed that the government was working on a comprehensive plan addressing the problems of the Southeast. Before Barroso, Condoleeza Rice, during a visit to Ankara on 2 November 2007, referred to such a plan. And later, so did US Vice-President Dick Cheney.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> “Erdoğan’ın ‘Kürt paketi’ son derece tamdik çıktı!” [Erdoğan’s “Kurdish package” turned out to be well known], *Radikal*, 13 March 2008, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=249997>.

<sup>20</sup> GAP Homepage, “What is GAP?” [http://www.gap.gov.tr/gap\\_eng.php?sayfa=English/Ggbilgi/gnedir.html](http://www.gap.gov.tr/gap_eng.php?sayfa=English/Ggbilgi/gnedir.html).

<sup>21</sup> Gareth Jenkins, “New York Times Touts Old Kurdish Investment Plan As New Initiative”, 13 March 2008, [http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article\\_id=2372883](http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2372883),

<sup>22</sup> José Manuel Durão Barroso, “Turkey: Master of the Straits, Master of its Destiny”, Turkish Grand National Assembly, Ankara, 10 April 2008; available at <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/08/188&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>.

<sup>23</sup> Murat Yetkin, “At this rate, a Kurdish Hamas might be on its way”, *Turkish Daily News*, 15 April 2008, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=101827>.

In Turkey the question of whether there really was such a plan or comprehensive Kurdish package has been raised frequently since November 2007. Murat Yetkin summed the question up on 15 April 2008 as follows: “Month long discussions in Ankara raise doubts about the existence of such a package.”<sup>24</sup>

The long awaited “package” was finally presented by Prime Minister Erdoğan when he visited Diyarbakir on 27 May 2008. In a two and a half hour speech at the Ziya Gökalp sports hall Erdoğan talked about what he called the GAP Action Plan: “What we are announcing here today is not a report or a project or a case file. It is an absolute plan of action with a certain schedule and dates and with the necessary resources for it already acquired.”<sup>25</sup> This GAP Action Plan is comprised of four main pillars: economic development, social development, development of infrastructure and development of institutional capacity. According to the plan, until 2012, 3.8 million citizens in the region will find work and the per capita income will rise by 209 percent, the total budget allocated will be around 27 billion YTL (20 billion USD), including 12.2 billion YTL from sources not included in the standing GAP budget. The lion share of 20 billion YTL will go to infrastructure investments.

These numbers are impressive, but are they realistic? 3.8 million jobs would mean that more than half of the working age population would be employed by 2012 by a workplace related to GAP, an increase of the per capita GDP by 209 percent would make the citizens in the Southeast more wealthy than the most developed regions’ citizens are today (in 2007 the GDP per capita was 5200 USD in the Southeast, in the richest Marmara region it was 14,500 USD, with an increase of 209 percent the Southeast would reach 16,068 USD).<sup>26</sup> Can it be expected that an irrigation project, which started in the 1970s and is finished only 15 percent now, will be finished 100 percent by 2012?<sup>27</sup> These are technical doubts, but there are also ideological ones.

The doubts about Erdoğan’s sincere commitment to also cultural, let alone political adjustments in the Southeast were fueled by two meetings of Erdoğan with NGOs from the Southeast. First there was a quarrel when Erdoğan visited Diyarbakir after a bomb attack on 3 January 2008. During a discussion, Erdoğan asked Sezgin Tanrikulu, president of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, what he would do about the region if he were prime minister. Tanrikulu said “I would allow mother tongue education and Kurdology faculties at universities.” Erdoğan’s answer was, “if tomorrow the Circassian and the Laz want the same, what should

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<sup>24</sup> Murat Yetkin, “At this rate, a Kurdish Hamas might be on its way”, *Turkish Daily News*, 15 April 2008, <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=101827>.

<sup>25</sup> “Erdoğan vows to remake Southeast”, *Today’s Zaman*, 28 May 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=143191>.

<sup>26</sup> A yearly economic growth of 6 percent would mean by 2012 an increase from now on of about 26 percent. This would mean growth had be 8 times higher than the average.

<sup>27</sup> “Turkish gov’t reveals its long-awaited southeast plan” *Hürriyet*, 28 May 2008, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/turkey/9031990.asp?gid=231&sz=34874>.



happen then? Everybody will demand something. How will we then be able to establish togetherness?”<sup>28</sup> Tanrıkulu voiced his disappointment: “Prime Minister Erdoğan is resistant concerning the Kurdish issue.”<sup>29</sup>

The second dispute on the same topic was witnessed when Erdoğan met with 17 NGOs<sup>30</sup> from Southeastern Turkey on 8 April 2008 in Ankara. The NGOs presented a report suggesting 20 concrete steps for the solution of the Kurdish problem. The emphasis was clearly on economic measures such as tax reliefs, low interest rates and infrastructure investments in an international airport, better roads and increased trade with neighbouring countries. Infact because of the emphasis on the economy, the Human Rights Association had refrained from joining the group. But in the report, there were also three points of cultural/political nature: the opening of Kurdish Studies faculties at universities and the use of Kurdish in local administration as well as in schools as elective course.<sup>31</sup> The teaching of Kurdish as a mother tongue again caused a big argument between Erdoğan and Tanrıkulu. Erdoğan harshly responded to the demand for Kurdish in school education: “The right to receiving an education in one’s mother tongue is for minorities only.”<sup>32</sup> Tanrıkulu and Erdoğan went so far to exchange personal attacks and the discussion ended with Tanrıkulu angrily walking out of the room.

This is not the only development which raises doubts about how much the AKP is really ready to accommodate Kurdish demands for cultural and political rights. The other is the close cooperation between the AKP and the military in the region.<sup>33</sup> There seemed to be a consensus on the cross-border operation into Northern Iraq against PKK camps in February 2008. Because of this agreement Koray Düzgören commented in *Yeni Şafak*:

“There is no ‘comprehensive plan’ [for the resolution of the Kurdish issue], we clearly understood that between the AKP and the military a ‘comprehensive’ cooperation exists concerning the Kurdish issue and the PKK.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “Siz başbakan olsaydınız ne yapardınız?” (What would you do if you were prime minister?), *Zaman*, 6 January 2008, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=633864>,

<sup>29</sup> “Tanrıkulu: Erdoğan Kürt sorununa kapalı, Baykal yok sayıyor” [Erdoğan is closed to the Kurdish problem, Baykal ignores it], *Aktüel Bakış*, 7 January 2008, <http://www.aktuelbakis.com/news/5944.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Organizations represented in the delegation include the Diyarbakır Chamber of Trade and Industry, the Diyarbakır Trade Exchange, the Diyarbakır Bar Association, the Diyarbakır Industrialists and Businessmen’s Association (DİSİD), the Southeastern and Eastern Anatolia Businessmen’s Association (GÜNSİAD), the Association of Human Rights and Solidarity for Oppressed Peoples (MAZLUM-DER), women’s organization KAMER and the Turkish Doctors’ Union (TTB).

<sup>31</sup> For the whole 20 points see: Haber Diyarbakır, [http://www.haberdiyarbakir.com/news\\_detail.php?id=9252](http://www.haberdiyarbakir.com/news_detail.php?id=9252), 8 April 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Only non-Muslims are considered minorities by the Turkish state.

<sup>33</sup> First signs towards this were when newly elected president Abdullah Gül’s visited the Southeast in his first domestic journey in September 2007. It was striking that he met mostly with military personnel high generals and the gendarmerie.

<sup>34</sup> Koray Düzgören, “Plan var mı yok mu? Varsa ne biçim bir plan bu?” [Is there a plan or isn’t there one? If there is one, then what kind of plan is it?], *Yeni Şafak*, 14 March 2008, <http://yenisafak.com.tr/Yazarlar/?i=9818&y=KorayDuzgorenPlanvarmuyokmu?>

An agreement with the military is infact possible and also necessary in the fight against terrorism. But, on cultural and political rights for ethnic non-Turkish groups it appears impossible to make progress if approval from the military is to be sought. One day after Barroso's speech in the parliament the commander of the Turkish Land Forces, İlker Başbuğ, stated during a visit to Northern Cyprus: "Nobody can demand or expect Turkey to make collective arrangements for a certain ethnic group in the political arena, outside of the cultural arena, which would endanger the nation-state structure as well as the unitary state structure."<sup>35</sup>

If the government really wants to change something beyond economic development and infrastructural improvement, it has to act independently from the military and proceed despite its opposition. As the party program and the draft of the civil constitution indicate, the AKP knows what should be done in the cultural and political field.

A detailed plan was presented by Altan Tan in *Taraf* newspaper on 13 March 2008, including a different interpretation of citizenship in the constitution, education in languages other than Turkish, Kurdology faculties at universities, private TV and radio stations in Kurdish, a social rehabilitation program for internally displaced people and village guards, and a limited political amnesty. For Tan the biggest obstacle to these steps not being implemented is "politicians lacking courage."<sup>36</sup>

It is definitely not easy to be courageous concerning the Kurdish issue. Cultural and political rights will not only be opposed by the military, nationalists and Kemalists, but also by the PKK whose support grows in proportion to the state's repressiveness. Şahin Alpay commented on this phenomenon with the following words: "Moves towards enhanced integration of the Kurdish minority in Turkey have greatly upset the PKK."<sup>37</sup>

However, if the government continues to see-saw on the issue and doesn't implement the concrete steps mentioned in the GAP Action Plan, then the chances are high that the European Commission can, when writing the Progress Report 2008, just copy the phrase it wrote in 2007 about the situation in the Southeast:

"No steps have been taken to develop a comprehensive strategy to achieve economic and social development in the region and to create the conditions required for the Kurdish population to enjoy full rights and freedoms."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Today's Zaman*, 12 April 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=138834>.

<sup>36</sup> "10 Maddelik Çözüm Planı" [A 10 article solution plan], interview by Nefle Düzel with Altan Tan, *Taraf*, 13 March 2008, [http://www.haberpanorama.com/news\\_detail.php?id=592](http://www.haberpanorama.com/news_detail.php?id=592).

<sup>37</sup> Şahin Alpay, "Turkey's Kurdish problem and the PKK", *Today's Zaman*, 5 November 2007, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/yazarDetay.do?haberno=126283>

<sup>38</sup> European Commission, Turkey 2007 Progress Report, {COM(2007) 663 final}, Brussels, 6 November 2007, [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2007/nov/turkey\\_progress\\_reports\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2007/nov/turkey_progress_reports_en.pdf).

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