Starting from 2002 and until March 2016 396 commentaries of mine were published in Zaman newspaper in Turkish. Fifty seven of these articles were published in Today’s Zaman in English, too. These articles were translated into English by the newspaper itself and later were slightly “fine-tuned” by me to include them here. Most of these commentaries (37) were on current Turkish affairs. Five were related to theoretical issues of history, ten to Greece and five to minority problems. The last three groups are marked below as (HISTORY), (GREECE) and (MINORITIES).

These articles if read taking into consideration the time they were written may give a picture of the stages Turkey passed through the last years. Personally for me, they remind me of the stages I have passed and of my own development experiencing Turkey, Greece and the world around me. (January 2017)

Terrorism and Nation Building, 2 December 2003

EU (or Ithaca) Articles, 27 October 2004

Two Years with Zaman, 3 November 2004

Are We Confronting The Past?, 28 September 2005 (HISTORY)
A Painful Summer Monologue, 16 August 2006

Debates over Headscarf and Genocide, 19 October 2006

The So-Called Cyprus Problem, 15 November 2006 (GREECE)

Celebrities abroad, 6 June 2008 (MINORITIES)

Republic and coups, 5 August 2008

Boğaziçi University and Our Reflexes, 26 September 2008

A crisis of values in Greece, 14 December 2008 (GREECE)

Authoritarian, Totalitarian, Populist, 19 March 2009

The road to the EU & ‘Heritage’, 30 April 2009

Insults, mockery, satire, criticism and a different point of view, 14 June 2009

Are the people mature?, 20 August 2009

How to be a well-behaved Rum, 8 January 2010 (MINORITIES)
The lesson of the Greek crisis, 18 February 2010 (GREECE)

Who’s who in Turkey?, 5 March 2010

Stalemate, 1 April 2010

Conflict between identities in Turkey, 24 April 2010

A Greek tragedy?, 8 May 2010 (GREECE)

Turkey Greece and Aporia, 28 May 2010 (GREECE)

A Stable Axis in Turkey?, 23 June 2010

The 3CHP, 0.5AKP, 1MHP, 0.2BDP…formula, 30 June 2010

The Abant Atmosphere, 21 July 2010

Teaching Religion, 18 August 2010

AKP’s Historic Role, 15 September 2010
Native Language and Demagoguery, 15 October 2010

Views on the headscarf, from America, France and Greece, 11 November 2010

From Myths to National Legends, 5 January 2011 (HISTORY)

Revolutions and Models, 3 March 2011

A ‘Blank Check’ and Guardianship, 1 May 2011

Socialism and other words that make no sense, 7 July 2011

‘Atatürk’ by M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, 18 July 2011

Praise for the Zaman daily, 11 October 2011

Elections in Greece: repercussions of rage, 10 May 2012 (GREECE)

Leadership syndrome, 5 July 2012

Until that day…, 29 August 2012 (MINORITIES)

Underdevelopment, 16 September 2012 (HISTORY)
Why could the West develop but not the East?, 22 November 2012 (HISTORY)

What’s changed in Greece, 9 December 2012 (GREECE)

The EU and the lesson, 3 January 2013

Racist attacks in Greece, 25 April 2013 (GREECE)

Violence, 25 September 2013

Scandal in Greece: Millas’s letter, 17 December 2013 (MINORITIES)

Conspiracy theories, 5 January 2014

The delicacies of demagogy, 7 May 2014

Minorities in Turkey: a vicious cycle, 15 May 2014 (MINORITIES)

To my friends at the other pole, 14 June 2014

Keeping silent about the 'parallel' thesis, 13 August 2014

Nationalized consciences, 28 August 2014
A brave New World in Turkey, 3 September 2014

Human conditions are the same, but the reactions are different, 10 October 2014

Who discovered America? Well, who didn’t?, 30 November 2014 (HISTORY)

The feeling of déjà vu, 2 December 2014

What do we see in Greece?, 5 February 2015 (GREECE)

Greece: revolution or romanticism?, 17 February 2015 (GREECE)

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Terrorism and Nation Building

By

H. MILLAS
Why do societies cling together overcoming past grievances and even skirmishes forming a united front when confronted with a threat? The first explanation that comes to one's mind is the feeling of 'otherwise we will all be on the loss'. In similar situations the existence of the Other is the precondition for 'our unity'; and to live thereon next to an enemy is the heavy price.

Some academics believe that the sense of 'we' is possible only when the Other exists too. This is a rather pessimistic view. We are trapped: either we face internal strife or we fight against a real or constructed Other. There may be, however, another explanation of communal unity: when a great danger appears the justifications of internal strife may be reconsidered and reevaluated. Vendettas and unnecessary bitter feuds are left behind.

National building

The complex process of national building has such a dimension too. Communities that faced economic problems, that were exploited or were threatened by extinction losing their traditional cultures, came together raising a flag of a new identity and forming a national state. In the
Balkans nation building started at the end of 18th century. The Muslims of Ottoman Empire, about a hundred years later were the last to join the process. The signs of this delayed national building are still noticed in the modern Turkish society: the precondition of a nation state, i.e., the minimum consensus on main issues, is not fully established. A shortage of tolerance in political issues, extended discussions on national identity, a lack of trust between the state and the citizens and the widespread concept of internal and external 'enemies' are some of these signs.

Strives expressed with an ethnic or religious discourse, authoritarian attitudes, perceiving the different views as a threatening challenge may be interpreted as signs of a delayed nation state building. In this perspective, the terrorist acts in Istanbul apart from their terrible effects may have a beneficiary aspect too. Society may think anew what really sets people apart and what brings its members together. Fights on symbols and stubborn insistence of parties to impose their views may be overcome. In other words ethnogenesis may be speeded up. This may be partly a consolation for the recent great loss.

Naming the Terror

There is a widespread discussion in Turkey nowadays if the recent terrorist phenomenon should be characterized as 'Islamic' or not. I personally believe that this characterization should not cause a new split within the Turkish society and retard its development towards a more harmonious society. If there are citizens that feel insulted for the adding of an adjective associated to their religious belief to these abhorring acts of terrorism, this sensitivity is enough to justify the avoidance of the adjective 'Islamic' altogether.
The use of the affix 'Islamic' is wrong too. We do not talk about a 'Catholic' terror in North Ireland, nor of a 'left' or of a 'Marxist' terror in Europe even though there are acts of violence that are carried out in the name of a religious group and/or of an ideology. Ku Klux Klan is not a 'Christian' racist movement even though the cross is its symbol. The avoidance of generalized adjectives is correct because these acts do not include all adherents to these said beliefs. We do not call capitalism and imperialism (and racism) 'Christian attitudes' either, because, even though they appeared in Christian societies, these social phenomena are not the direct outcomes of a religion but of special historical circumstances - as it is with the case of terrorism that is widespread in the Eastern/Muslim countries in our days. (This does not mean that the Muslim countries should not exert special efforts against terrorism.)

The name of terrorist organizations can be used instead of the affix 'Islamic' to avoid unnecessary social strife: as Al Qaeda or Hizbullah, for example. In case of doubt, there is no problem anyhow; it is an anonymous act of an unknown terror organization. The tendency to call 'Islamic' any unspecified act of terror is, apart from an insult to many believers, a suspicious act of prejudice, too.

In Turkey of the sixties a joke of black humor circulated among the leftists: the police had arrested and 'interrogated' a suspect communist. The poor man was screaming that he was not a communist but an anti-communist. The police were adamant. They made it clear that they did not care what kind of a communist he was! In Turkey of the two thousand it seems that some people do not care to distinguish what kind of Muslims some believers are.
The European Union (EU) is naturally on the agenda and will remain on the agenda for the next decades. Can you guess the number of articles that will be written in Turkey during this period? Considering the first ten best-selling newspapers and at least two articles daily, this makes about 100,000 articles in 15 years. Assuming 5-10 expressed opinions on the EU daily in the entire media, including magazines, radio and television, too, this number reaches to millions.
However, the different basic theses are actually limited; they may be reduced to a few opinions, (hence we may save time and ink, limit the "indefinite problems" within humane dimensions and also calm down our nerves!). We may deal roughly with two major groups: a) Those who trust the EU and b) those who do not trust the EU.

Articles against the European Union

Those who do not trust the West inevitably are also against the EU; even though the degree of trust and opposition may differ. Some may not even know why they oppose the EU, as we generally do not know the reasons of our emotions. Trust is a complicated issue. It is related to our past and especially to our identity. We cannot be impartial, as a computer can, vis-à-vis the "enemy" if our identity has been molded by hundreds of years’ assaults and wars, exiles, occupations, bloodshed and suffering, and it is indirectly related to these concerns, phobias, feelings of shame and “historical” pride.

What some call “hypocrisy, double standards, prejudices of the EU” are related to this inner world of ours. However, as it takes two to tango or for wrestling and fighting, two sides are needed to have stereotypes. There were always (at least) two parties in the past, whether they were Crusaders or fighters for the Islamic faith, or at times defenders or attackers. And one always finds the Other in one’s identity, the Other who does not belong to “us.” And thus, those who define their identities through this method see an "enemy" in the face of the EU. This may be a mirror image of the stereotype that some Europeans develop vis-à-vis Turkey. The insecure “self” does think that he is himself a source of insecurity for the Other. If he could, he would have controlled his own prejudices to a large extent and would not always place the responsibility on the Other.

Some do not want the EU in any case, some others have "conditions." The reasons of their objections are the reflections of their inner lives on the outside world: they are excuses and pretexts. They claim that “They don't like us; they hate us". (They do not see that this means "why should we like them, we dislike them, too!"). “They have prejudices, they will not admit us into the EU, anyhow; if they ever admitted us, they would do so in order to harm us (to split, to weaken, to assimilate and to exploit us etc…).” When the Annan Plan does not bring
destruction, Verheugen does not prove to be “our enemy” and their predictions are proved wrong they build new defense lines. They either “forget” what they said in the past or they find new arguments: “The negotiations with the EU will not be concluded, anyhow.” Naturally the falsification of this last argument can be feasible only after many years.

Some seem to support accession without believing in the EU and by considering only their short-term interests (feeling secure being close to a powerful economic group or by expecting that political pressures will decrease): "Yes to EU, but…", and their so-called conditions are expressions of the same lack of confidence. The discourse of "we-have-our-unique-characteristics" is the expression of such feelings of mistrust. It is obvious that every single state has its own peculiarities, as every regional, language, religion, and "minority" group may present its own special features. But these peculiarities are protected by the EU, are not endangered. By some the EU is not liked whatever EU does: when the EU supports individual liberties, they say, "they interfere in our internal affairs, our unity and our regime are threatened"; when measures are proposed to protect minorities, they oppose by claiming that "our liberties are threatened." As a consequence they are always against.

Problems are not handled rationally because the emotions are sovereign. To try to understand why one is insecure on issues of identity may prove more meaningful than trying to discuss these negative views on the EU. What kind of relations do we want to build with our environment? Can we have mutual interests? Is history always repeated? Debating on whether the EU is good or bad avoiding the above questions may prove unproductive.

As for the EU supporters…

I see myself within this group. When I visit the "West", I always sigh, "why aren’t we like them?" Streets, universities, houses, dresses, daily lives, entertainments, average age, infant mortality rates, traffic accident rates, unemployed people, personal consumption are all better than ours. The people jailed because of their ideas are fewer than the ones in our country. People from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Turkey try to take shelter there by obtaining visas or as stowaways. Nobody from the “West” ever attempts to come to "our part." To summarize, it is better over there. When I look at them, I say, "I wish we had been like them"!
These differences between the East and the West may have created feelings of inferiority. But the remedy is not the overall rejection of the EU having converted these feelings into an ideology of insecurity. The problem will be solved by achieving what they have achieved.

I trust the EU as much as I trust any humane institution. The EU project seems meaningful and beneficial to me. Any step towards the EU is a "benefit," not a "concession". The EU supporters express a different identity. Their emotional world is different. They have self-confidence. As a matter of fact, they do not suffer any difficulty in accepting that Turkey's accession and harmonization efforts with the EU are not reasons for "shame", irrespective if Turkey will be ultimately admitted into the EU or not.

The road to the EU is very constructive, beneficial and full of adventures. It reminds me of the poem by Cavafis called "Ithaca," which is full of symbols. The arrival of Odysseus to Ithaca (you read to the EU) is a long and undetermined way. The island of Ithaca is the means, not the end; read the poem. During this journey ….

The fierce Poseidon you'll not encounter

unless you carry him along within your soul,

unless your soul raises them before you...

Always keep Ithaca in your mind.

To arrive there is your final destination…

And once you're old, cast anchor on the isle,
rich with all you’ve gained along the way,

expecting not that Ithaca will give you wealth…

If then you find her poor, Ithaca won’t have fooled you.

Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,

you’ll have understood by then what these Ithacas mean.

*
I have completed two years of writing in Zaman. This is my 53rd article. My first contact with the paper was through a young Zaman correspondent in Athens ten years ago. This meeting was developed into friendship and was followed by our visit to Athos Monasteries. An interview followed. Later, as I stopped over in Istanbul, I met with the staff of the newspaper and made new friends. Finally, the offer for me to write was made.

This is not an ordinary cooperation. I believe that for both parties it carries a meaning of essence and symbols. The paper is associated with a circle and stance we could describe as conservative or Islamic. On the other hand I am a person who grew up and worked in a Turkish leftist environment. Moreover, I had and still have a “shortcoming” that is impossible to change: I
am a member of the “non-Muslim” minority group that inherited the Lausanne legacy - which is one of the hot topics of debate nowadays. For me, the rendezvous in Zaman is interesting and meaningful because it symbolizes the road Turkey has gone through.

In the 1960s and 70s, neither could I have been offered to write in such a paper nor could I have written in a newspaper I regarded as a "rival." In those years, an undeclared “cultural civil war” was going on in the country. That conflict was not political. It was the result of not being able to agree on common grounds necessary for the existence of any nation-state. With the terminology of social sciences, it was a sign of the uncompleted process of nation building. Then, the purpose was not only to criticize the opposite side or beat it at the parliamentary level; it was to eliminate the other party, wipe it off in the public domain. It was not a race; it was a kind of war.

Zaman's contribution to social peace…

We, as leftists, believed that we had started a revolution. This was a justification to push democratic methods to a secondary position. Not only did the "revolution" thesis made respect, tolerance and reconciliation unnecessary, it also paved the way for these "Western" concepts to be interpreted as weaknesses or even as betrayal. Those who still consider themselves Jacobins are remnants of those bygone days.
The other party was not very different from the "left." When innocent youths (because everyone was not innocent) and others were subjected to unjust or arbitrary treatment by either the state or other organized forces, the "rightists" and "Islamists" were completely unmoved. Human rights and democratic concepts were popular in these groups. For instance, when I and my close relatives were persecuted as members of an ethnic minority, they exhibited apathy and even incited this suffocating course of events. In short, those were bad times and most of us in those days were not innocent.

The rule of thumb for existing as a society is to achieve social peace and harmony. In practice it is not possible to ensure this by ignoring the existence of differences within the society. The only way out is to try methods accepted as the essence of modern societies. Portraying traditional societies of the past as examples has limited use because most of the societies at that time were traditional and closed ones. They "solved" the problems by subjugating the people; whereas in our time, human needs, relations and expectations are many and different.

In my opinion, Zaman by a conscious choice has followed a different path against this negative past of the last few decades: Beyond suggesting "peace," it began to actually practice coexistence with diversity. The commentary pages in particular are examples of these efforts. With a pioneering initiative, diversity has been given the right to speak.

Zaman is a reflection of Turkish society
Diversity means being “open” to all. It means being open to "knowledge" and "learning," and moreover, to criticism. Those who “know everything” inevitably remain closed to new ideas. It is natural for them to approach different views with reservations. Diversity can only be practiced in an environment of tolerance.

I think there are old friends who consider my writing for Zaman very odd. It is very difficult to speak persuasively to them because most of them do not read Zaman. They read their "own" newspapers where they read views close to their own! On my part, I am much perturbed if I happen to be closed and comfy. Being in contact with different views keeps me alive. And that might be my romantic side.

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Are We Confronting The Past?

by

H. MILLAS
Recently we have been experiencing two events in Turkey, expressed as, "confronting the past" or "reconciliation with our history." Exhibitions, panels, and several articles were prepared for the 50th anniversary of the 6/7 September 1955 riots. This week we will be witnessing a conference titled "Ottoman Armenians during the Decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy" at Boğaziçi University. In my opinion, such events are indexed more towards today than the past and reactions occur because they are based on current evaluations.

Facing the past or reconciliation with our history (or any other word to describe "confronting the past") is not associated with the past; it has to do with our present day. The goal is to confront people alive today and to create a kind of common ground with them. Past events were either kept alive for decades within a framework called "national history" or were left to oblivion. However, such interpretations were not validated outside the national framework. The plan at the domestic level did not match the plan of the outside world. As a result, Turkey has undergone an alienation process vis-à-vis her wider environment. For certain citizens the historical interpretations that do not match with Turkey's outer environment have turned into a daily problem.

However, this problem did not become everyone's problem. Those who did not feel the contradiction did not move their pens, did not organize any panel or exhibition, nor watched any such event. In fact, some even did not remain indifferent; they positioned themselves at the other side and expressed their reaction in proportion to their distance to the problem. Some conveyed that these "confronting" events were untimely while others made harsher protests. When the spectrum of all these reactions is analyzed it becomes clearer that the situation is more related to an anxiety in adjusting oneself to a larger milieu.

The conflicting sides of this "history war" form two groups on other issues, too: those perceiving the European Union (EU) with confidence and those with mistrust. This is weird. Those who are enthusiastic about "reconciling with our history" and those who are confident with and for EU are the same people. The people who are against the "reconciliation with the past" and who react against the conferences, panels or other activities on this issue, are either pessimistic about the EU process or close to the groups that absolutely reject the EU.
I do not argue that these discussions on history are political. Rather, I argue that there is an identity problem and that this is directly related to political preferences. Our confidence and mistrust, as well as our desire to be in "harmony" with some agents on issues of history are directly associated with the identity of the "self": Some search for their identity and for "those who are close to us" in a wider area and others do the same in a rather limited national framework. Thus, while some try to reconcile different perspectives, to "adjust" to the world and attain a more general recognition, others do not highlight what the "other" says, they give credit only to his/her own interpretation of history and do not allow any criticism against a supposed "perfect and superior past of ours". They never want their history (or we might say 'their perfect story') upon which they have built their identity to be questioned, shaken and above all to be denied.

I think there will be some who would claim that those in the first group, who seek a common ground with the world, are insecure, have low self-esteem and are ashamed of their identity; and that therefore they make concessions to the "foreigners". Perhaps, such people also exist in this camp. But, one can look at these two groups from a different perspective as well. The behavior of those who do not seek to be in harmony with the broader environment and do not believe that this is required might stem from their lack of confidence in their neighbor or the "other". I do not give the final word on this but I myself favor harmony with the wider environment. The narrow, limited and local consensus appears to me as a sign of a xenophobic introvert society: Something like a belief, which is easily shared with "our" villagers but has no validity outside the village.

Relationship between consensus and nationalism

I will also touch upon the importance of consensus. Disputes during nation-building were encountered in every society. But "consensus" is not a choice or a preference; it is the formation of a nation itself. It is one of the basic aspects and processes of every nation. Nations were formations which in practice expressed their willingness to co-exist. Those, who do not or cannot apply this in practice, are the societies that are still in search of a national identity. That is to say, the irony is that those who create a fuss about the "nation", act aggressively and attack every dissident are the ones who show that the nation has not been formed yet. Those who see enemies and traitors everywhere are the ones who retard nation-building. From this point of view, I believe that those favoring "harmony" and dialog in issues of history are in fact closer to a modern model of a national society. The search for harmony within a broader framework is an additional expression of modernity.
Similar identity issues are not special to Turkey and occur in all countries across the world. Also a general consensus outside a narrow environment is an old and universal aspiration. But people tend to accuse those who do not think like themselves with disloyalty and ignorance. I suppose, however, that the majority of those who bring these issues to the agenda, in other words, those who are willing and those who are unwilling to confront history and perceive conspiracies in these matters, are both sincere in their intentions. They are not malevolent in their demands. Both sides pursue an attitude favoring the side called "us". Only, while one side tries to pursue its course not allowing any criticisms against “our past”, the other side tries to achieve its ends by “self-criticism”, in harmony "with the world" and by achieving through these means a social fulfillment.

Maybe in the future we will understand that this conflict over "history" was an unnecessary one just like so many other fights among human beings. Perhaps in the future we will also understand that when dialog is not hampered all sides benefit in terms of their national projects.

*

A Painful Summer Monologue

by

H. MILLAS
Instead of writing articles about social problems, bottlenecks and international conflicts, I frequently wish to express the nice sides of life, in fact, the unimportant but joyful daily and personal details. But, for whatever reason, a “seriousness” that makes me uncomfortable dominates my agenda. This discomfort has two dimensions. At first, the value I give myself appears as a problem: I wonder if I perceive myself as someone who will resolve the huge problems that haven’t been solved over the years and the one to make recommendations. Such self-image isn’t at all pleasant; it is in direct contradiction to the humble self-image I prefer. The agenda reflected in my writings denies the modesty I appropriated to myself, doesn’t it?

I don’t like writers who talk about themselves, constantly shouting “me, me.” Sometimes I think that although they appear to be spokesmen of egocentrism, in the final analysis they may not carry any more narcissism than those writers who seriously look down upon them and see themselves as the source of inspiration for problem-solving. Of course, we’re in a dilemma. Each approach, in its own right, requires us to look at ourselves in a huge mirror. Perhaps real humility only proves itself in silence and isolation.

While innocent babies are being killed...

These “serious” and mainly political articles of mine imply a question of value. The writer’s agenda is a sign of the writer’s values and priorities. Sometimes our field of expertise and social status determines the contents of our writing. But what we put in writing are the things we consider more important. And when I confront myself, I frequently see that the agenda pictured in my head is very different from my writing. For example, my family problems, that is, some tense expectations created by our sons, the inflammation on my hand that kept me away for three weeks from the computer, the problems of someone close or personal depression and exuberance, my feelings and anxieties are not usually appropriate for a writing topic. Why? There’s a different order of priority dominant in writing. I guess because the subjects of writing are coded in the value system imposed by society. In such cases insincerity becomes problematical and discomforting: Not what we want, but what is “wanted” is written. Isn’t the connection between the writer and reader a little too official and artificial?
Recently what I don’t want to write about is the political side of a political war; it’s the other facets of this event I contemplate on. What really bothers me is the social pressure to write about the political side of this war instead of the human and animal blood flowing in Lebanon and Israel. Yes, I have to admit that animals have a place in my nightmares prompted by this war. The black and brown dog I saw under the rubble, for example, seemed to be a dog I loved. Cats that will die days later from thirst under the ruins come to mind. Of course, it’s impossible to drive the babies from my mind. Fathers and mothers are holding their children in their hands before they bury them and showing them as evidence of criminal acts to the world. To the world which nowadays, from Bush to my neighboring grocer, think of the approaching holidays. In my nightmares I cannot detect the color of their skin nor their religion; they’re covered with dust and blood and are not heard. This summer in that region all creatures are dying untimely and collectively. I wanted to write about this discomfort without judging at this moment who is right.

The leaders have risked dying for the values that they hold sacred and, consequently, they risk killing, too. Those who believe in the leaders are also following this path. But most of the dead were souls not knowing about the “sacred.” They are the involuntary victims of the sacred. Offerings at altars. In the past people were sacrificed. The basic principle of all wars in the modern era is this. Sacrifice of the innocent became the contemporary face of war. Haven’t all wars, especially beginning with World War II, shown this in the clearest possible way? The romantic times when armies fought hand-to-hand on green plateaus have passed. Those who chose force over reconciliation and maximalist policies over concession, in short the “kill or be killed” paradigm and war as their form of struggle are now complaining about the results of today; is this hypocrisy, ignorance or stupidity resulting from hopelessness?

Just as it is in the whole world, the question of “who is right?” is being debated in the Greek press where I found the opportunity to follow events more closely. In one article the writer, pushing his opponent, asked, “What would you do if an uncontrollable military force settled in Bulgaria and occasionally fired deadly rockets on Salonika?” In other words, killings on the northern front become kind of legitimate. The response is immediate: “But the Greeks didn’t usurp that country’s land!” So, we tacitly understand that when conditions are ripe, the killings in the south can be legitimate. Of course, in addition, some people from neighboring populations can always come and say, “You first took our land.” Thus, when “sacredness” appears under these conditions wars take the place of life. Opposition to war is also generally mentioned with conditions: while unjust wars are opposed, just wars are considered sacred. And everyone sees his own struggle as just. In recent days I feel like I’m not on the side of those fighting, but on the side of those who don’t fight and don’t want to fight (but are dead) – regardless of religion and lineage.
Debates over Headscarf and Genocide

by

H.MILLAS

Today’s Zaman, 19 October 2006

This week I had actually wanted to write an article on the damage inflicted upon the “scientific thinking” by Article 301 of Turkish law which restricts the freedom of speech. However, I thought it more appropriate to tackle that topic some other time and decided to write about France when the law passed recently became a more urgent issue.
The prohibitory law of France is more important because it involves more than one country (France, Turkey and Armenia) and carries the potential danger of engulfing the whole EU. The Article 301, in the last resort, is not an “expansionist” one.

I have not been able to digest France’s action; and still worse, I have a hard time understanding it. Not understanding puzzles me. Opposing the other party after having understood its aim is a consistent and safe action. Reacting after having a full grasp of the issue means ones’ judgment is not a result of a moment of rashness triggered only by sentiments. So not understanding becomes my problem.

By “understanding” I mean knowing what sort of a thought system and belief an attitude stems from. The influence of the Armenian lobby, the strategy of getting more votes from a small segment of the society and the desire to prevent Turkey from getting closer to the EU could all be explanations to a certain degree; but they are far from being adequate. How can mighty France be so blind not to see that it has struck a sharp blow at the most basic principle of human rights? This is France where “The Declaration of the Human Rights” was issued in 1789. Article 10 talks of a right that “No one may be disturbed on account of his opinions, even religious ones, as long as the manifestation of such opinions does not interfere with the established Law and Order.” Can this principle be interpreted as “any opinion can be prohibited passing a suitable law”? Liberty and independence have long been the national symbols of this country. How can those who claim to be proud of Voltaire criminalize a different view?

When we look at France’s past actions and compare them with those of other European countries, for example England, we seem to find some clues that will deepen our understanding. The French nation-state came to existence as a result of an extremely bloody revolution, not of a compromise, and the killing of innumerous people was legitimizied on the bases of a “sublime” ideal and a series of “truths.” This understanding and limitless self-confidence became the dominant elements in the model of the French nation-state. The truths welcomed by the nation acquired claims to a sort of universality. On the other hand, the truths accepted by the Parliament were recognized as the truths of the “abstract” nation. The
diversity, the marginal sections and the minorities got lost in this vicious circle. “Citizenship” was perceived as the general entity that should be followed by everyone, and opposing these “truths” was perceived as opposition to the “nation.”

Recently, it has been frequently said that the headscarf ban at schools and public domain became more widespread in France because of this understanding. (We have not forgotten those who in Turkey hailed France’s prohibitive practices at that time!) Some proudly said that Turkey emulates France and its state model within the context of secularism. Now, we have seen and experienced the outcomes of this model. We are watching similar practices both in France and Turkey and at the same time in a particularly interesting conjuncture. The headscarf issue is a problem in both countries, freedom of expression too. In both cases prohibitions are based on the “state legitimacy” discourse. The contradiction between the two countries is not in the understanding but in the aims. There is a consensus on the headscarf issue at the states’ level now. However, there is seemingly a difference of opinion over the genocide issue: One side says there was no genocide while the other says the opposite. Both opinions are the same when evaluated from the point of view of social life: They consider different views as an offense and specify punishments.

Punishing those who deny genocides was first regarded as a sign of respect for the victims. Respect, without any doubt, is a good thing and no one is against it. But, when should a different view be considered a crime and when should it not? The important thing is not whether or not an event is considered genocide, but being able to express our views explicitly and fearlessly on any issue and not being jailed or threatened. Because, if the list of events that we should “respect” increases tomorrow, new laws may be enacted. And we may end up living in a fascist environment with a list in our pocket of the things we can say.

I did not understand the essence of the clash between the two countries, either. Does the objection refer to the limiting of liberties, or does the problem lie in the fact that the parties
What I have at least begun to see is this: In both countries, a group of people, who know what is “true” and “real” and constitute the majority, either ignore or try to suppress diversity, pluralism, small groups and the weak. The results of the debates over the headscarf and “genocide” issues are evidence of this. Those who oppose this approach are a small but struggling minority in both countries. From this viewpoint, the conflict is not between France and Turkey but between these two different approaches. Those who silence individuals in Turkey by means of a panel code and Article 301 and those who put a gag order on people in France with a threat of sentencing them to jail are not in conflict in terms of human principles but, on the contrary, are in agreement. They are not against compulsion but are only trying to impose their own truths on a similar mentality.

If those who criticize in Turkey the new bill in France, they dislike it not because it bans diversity but because “it supports a wrong interpretation of history,” they are acting as their counterparts in France. This is the same for those who oppose the ban on headscarves. Those who oppose this ban not because this practice is against human rights but because it is a “correct” choice are also acting in the same way, since they try to implement their own “truths” at any given opportunity. In other words, defending our own truths may be an altogether different behavior from defending principles for all.

If we look at the issue and at the parts in conflict from this perspective, we can determine who the friend is and who the foe correctly. The implementers of Article 301 and those restricting the freedom of expression in France are the same, and are harbingers of a dangerous future. European Commission President José-Manuel Barroso, European Union Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn, Turkey-EU Joint Parliamentary Commission Co-chair Joost Lagendijk and Turkey rapporteur Camile Eurlings, and thousands of European individuals, are closest to those who oppose the bans in Turkey and in France. This is a human rights struggle; it is not a
struggle among nations.

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The So-Called Cyprus Problem

by

H. MILLAS

Today's Zaman, 15 November 2006
Whenever I went to Cyprus something always bothered me there. The first was seeing four different national flags waving at the same time in central Nicosia. I always thought that the Turkish, Greek, and Northern and Southern Cyprus flags were too many.

Crossing a street through customs is another problem. In the past, even this used to be impossible. There were two ghettos, and fighters determined to keep their ghettos intact. To discuss this situation was also odd. There was no common language. On one hand, there were those who believed they had become a legitimate political entity by virtue of a self-proclaimed identity; on the other hand, there was a mindset prone to refuse the facts by prefixing a bunch of words with “so-called...” Hence, a “dialogue of the deaf” seemed to be the best expression to describe what was going on.

However, what I experienced and sensed through Nov. 8-11 (2006) was quite different; not because Cyprus has changed, but because of the uniqueness of the environment I visited. The Peace Journalism Conference organized by the Faculty of Communication at the Eastern Mediterranean University was attended by scholars and intellectuals from Turkey, Greece, both sides of Cyprus, Israel and Palestine, and presented an alternative and different framework. The attendees knew that the nationalist clashes – be it in Cyprus or in the Middle East - resembled each other strongly. The speakers created an environment based on “conflict resolution” paradigm, where understanding and dialogue were given a chance to blossom. This was a peaceful experience.

Suffice it to say that the organizers (S. Alankus, B. Azgin, S. Irvan and many others) should be congratulated, but I will return to these issues when the minutes of the conference are published. To me, the main message and approach of the conference were its openness to utopian thoughts. I am aware of the negative connotation of utopia. However, I am referring instead to its positive meaning: I draw on the vision to achieve utopia as an understanding that refuses to accept the given in the name of “reality,” and as the shift toward a currently-non-existent better and happier future that could be built via the beliefs and endeavors of the people. It is such a dream that moves the people to improve their lives.

A two-community chorus for peace in Cyprus
Some were upset by this conference, including those from the Greek side. An administration eager to perpetuate the ghetto spirit raised its voice asserting that the participation of Greek scholars in the conference held in the “so-called university” legitimized it. This administration saw the citizens as its tool and made its existence heard. And so did an indirect fascist threat. However, the Greek participants were of a different opinion and understanding: Above all, the administration is accountable to the citizens, not vice versa.

I had the opportunity to meet with Mehmet Ali Talat. We have known each other for a long time. How could I not be delighted to see him unchanged, with all his qualities intact? He eloquently explained the necessity to lift the long-imposed isolations on the Turkish side. From this and a number of conversations I have had with other politicians, I concluded that unlike the Turkish side, the Greeks had no plan, no proposal and no initiative on resolving the Cyprus issue.

But what was actually amazing was the “Two-Community Chorus for Peace in Cyprus” which joined us at the dinner. The chorus was founded by Salih Öztoprak’s initiative in 1997. For years, in order to meet, both Turks and Greeks had to sidestep the bans. They could only meet in the buffer zone. Today, because passage through “borders” is permissible, they can meet on either side and sing their songs. Their performance was an unforgettable and emotional moment for me. Above all, they were the most cheerful persons I have ever met. They greeted each other by hugging and kissing, they sung their songs hand-in-hand. The amateur gathering was composed of people from virtually all ages. They sang in both Turkish and Greek.

I asked psychologist Kostas Kiranidis if he dreamed of a world that did not exist. He replied, “Yes!” and he further added, “We do not represent the majority. But we want to. We seek to live together with differences without experiencing discrimination, and we are not bothered by this; on the contrary, we are happy about such differences. We do not sing alone, but we are enjoying the taste of a different life.” The concert was followed by a surprise performance by Salih Öztoprak. He, along with his young partner, Yesim, staged a vibrant mambo show. I then discovered that Salih was a dance teacher, not just a locksmith.

While watching the different chorus members, I could not help comparing them with the conference participants. We made such modest speeches, perhaps laced with many insights. However, what often came to mind was that the career concerns of the academics, the ambition of journalists, the short-term interest of politicians and the pursuit of fame by the activists, were behind this “peace” discussion. We have offered a world of peace. However, they have already built and live in it.
While listening to them, I thought how different not only Cyprus but also the whole world could be. I asked myself why we couldn’t create a borderless world, where we could live without rifts, mutual concerns and express our love and respect. When talking to these people, I realized that they did not have such expectations. They were aware that Cyprus was not yet ready for such a future. However, they have the opportunity and ability to live the way they wanted in their narrow and limited environment, and I think they make the most of it.

If only they would not be spoiled by external interference, I thought as I drifted off to sleep. I had nice dreams in Nicosia.

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**Celebrities abroad**

*By H. MİLLAS*
Today's Zaman June 2008
It is both joyful and ironic: Two influential foreign magazines have picked four Turks as “important” persons.

Three of the four currently live in the US. Öz is a very successful doctor. The other two prefer to live as expats. One of them is a scholar and the other is a professor. The fourth is a religious cleric. The list, of course, is published in the French language.

I just recalled the Young Turks era (at the beginning of the 20th century). Back then, those who became famous used to flee to Western cities like Paris. In the later stages, the list of those who sold their country opted to leave whereas the murderers, traitors and other criminals were supposed to do so. Is all this a coincidence?

The ironic part of this case is that two religious clerics have become two of the most influential Turks in the world. One of these clerics is the patriarch; I should note in Turkey many do not regard him as a Turk. In addition, these two clerics have become popular among religious groups in the West.

One of these clerics is the patriarch; I should note in Turkey many do not regard him as a Turk. In addition, these two clerics have become popular among religious groups in the West.

Why should a person have to be a good Muslim, do something good for his country, become a promoter of his country free of discrimination and get qualified in the West? This is an ongoing campaign of self-defense in this country. However, saying “I am an ordinary citizen” should be sufficient.

But the grave question is something different. Who is answering to whom? Against who are we defending ourselves? Why did a religious seminar become a place that has ever been a place of intellectual freedom? What will be the reaction of the religious community? Will those who sit in this institution still be a religious community?

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Common denominators and diversity

by

H. MİLLAS

Today's Zaman 18 June 2008
It is not fulfilling to write about Turkey in present times when words are no longer influential. So let’s take a look at history.


Civil war is defined on Wikipedia as follows: armed conflicts based on cultural, social, religious, political or economic interests in which there should be at least 1,000 deaths in such an event or 100 from each party to call the incident a civil war.
We can find interesting details on the civil wars with religious motives on the same web site. The conflicts between the religious tendencies as they become more educated? What is relieving is that the major religious wars were fought centuries ago.

Common denominators

From a certain point, reading does not suffice, you will want to contemplate and determine your own perspective, as well.

Achievement of a minimum consensus is not the formation of homogenous citizens within the nation-state. Such entities would only be formed, if there is a lack of differences. However, that is not the case.

The societies with obvious differences base their national unity on this diversity. Respect for diversity ensures unity. Submission or domination (be it from a different race, or from a different belief, very cosmopolitan, insulting, etc) simply retards the formation of the nation-state.

The nation-building process also includes a paradox. As the social engineers proceed with exclusions, bans and atrocity, mutual respect and understanding. There is no consensus though in the concentration camps. Submission is something else.

*
Republic and coups

by

H. MiLLAS

Today’s Zaman August 2008
The Sept. 12, 1980 coup was the third open intervention by the Turkish Armed Forces.

The actual problem isn't that military coups have occasionally taken place. It's not that there exists a risk of a coup. It's not that there exists a risk that new political forces would change the order. It's not that any of these coups failed. The actual problem is that these coups are considered legitimate and justifying the coups makes their recurrence possible, even natural.

Their legitimacy is considered a call for new interventions. Political forces provide this legitimacy on their own. After a coup, no one is prosecuted. Instead, they are even respected and some of them have been honored. Academics, journalists, politicians and business persons say every coup created a legal order of its own, iterating it as its own legitimacy. This order is not limited to the period of the coup-makers. They try to sustain what it builds. So what regime or legal order did the coups bring so that they would be considered legitimate?

If consecutive coups are staged to sustain the same regime - the Turkish Republic - this would mean that the coup-makers control both the constitution and the courts. The protected regime is a coup regime. There is probably no need to clarify that this is not a democratic regime.
In fact, this is not a paradox. It is an expression of the situation. The paradox is in another sphere. What can be said about the coup-makers; in other words, they are those who base their legitimacy on the illegitimate.

In the end, we have come to a point where we try to understand the essence of the regime and tell it to the enemies and friends. İzmir Airport is given the name of the prime minister who was elected by people's vote and executed for treason after the 1960 coup. The accusation was a phony one but those who executed the prime minister are still respectable. This is an environment where both the ones who keep the Parliament open and those who close it down are legitimate.

However, in democracies - and, of course, in republics - coup-makers can never be exonerated. They are prosecuted when the coup-makers have been convicted. The justification of coups is an incorrect political decision related to the core of the regime.

The message of Ergenekon case

Currently, it is not possible for us to know what the outcome of the Ergenekon case will be. But undoubtedly, a message is being conveyed to the people. The question is whether they will understand it. The Ergenekon case is about the coup-makers, those who assist the regime and those who protect the regime.

There are some who wish a coup would be staged so they are “relieved.” We all know that those who call on the army to stage a coup are asking for trouble. We have seen all kinds of coups in Turkey. In fact, we got used to this because we considered everything to be legitimate.

Ordinary citizens are different; the stance of politicians is far different because politicians and parliamentarians are different. When the representatives of the nation become part of the anti-democratic practice the republic comes to an end.

Unfortunately, political circles are unable to convey this message strongly and in a unified manner. At a time when we got so much used to the coup-makers, we have to do this at least to declare that we favor the legitimacy of the republic.

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Boğaziçi University and Our Reflexes

by
H. MİLLAS

Today's Zaman 26 September 2008
When asked “Where are you from?” these days I want to say “I am from Boğaziçi University,” or more correctly, “I am from ... for four years. During those 11 years, I matured from childhood to a married man. I am the product of this campus.

People tend to assume self-induced personality or originality in themselves, yet they are also products of their upbringing. I believe that the Boğaziçi school has this unique feature; it would respect us all and our beliefs. This was I think the most important quality of that school.

In the Cold War years I was an active member of the Turkish Workers’ Party (TİP) but no one ever bothered about it. We ... about US imperialism. “Your ideas are very interesting”, they would say. And I would conclude that I have beaten them.

Eventually, to express my views, wrong or right, has become a spontaneous habit for me. I have come to do this by forcing me to memorize mottos like “the sovereignty unconditionally belongs to the nation” – “egemenlik kayıtsız şartsız milletindir” in Turkish. I internalized democracy in practice. I am talking of “automatic reflexes” and I am indebted to this school ... you know to whom sovereignty belongs or that freedom is a virtue. At the critical moment, your reflexes will be despotic.
Later, years after I had graduated, what touched me most was when I was invited to this school as a speaker. Among the... picture of what Sabancı University Rector Tosun Terzioğlu, one of my closest classmates, is trying to achieve in office.

Bans in abundance

I don’t know much about him but I heard that Kadri Özçaldıran is the first non-Robert College graduate in

A democratic attitude means to quiver when you hear a call for help or to empathize with a crying person.

When I heard that there are interventions nowadays in my old school, I thought about these things and felt sorry for my... Perhaps I have remained marginal within my wider society, but I have never felt myself “outdated” in the world.

A crisis of values in Greece

by
H. MİLLAS
Violence has overtaken Greece since Dec. 7. Police killing of a teenager, threatening the stability of Greece's government.
Greece has been in a state of turmoil since December 7 (2008). People took to the streets for demonstrations and vandalism when the police killed an adolescent during a protest. The opposition held the government responsible for the ongoing situation, recalling that the administration and the security forces failed to take adequate measures.

It is really difficult to explain these developments to Turkish readers because Greek society is pretty different. Even the Greeks are appalled, and they can’t explain what has been going on. The government calls for calm; the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) makes reference to the impotence of the government to repress the riots; the Communist Party alleges that the incidents are due to the plots by illegal circles of interests, and the Leftist Union (Siriza) views the violence as a social explosion caused by growing economic problems. These are inadequate and superficial explanations with no significant reference to the actual reasons.

Greece experienced the repressive military dictatorship between 1967 and 1974. I observe that some balances have been reestablished with extensive support. Young people, who were repressed during the dictatorial rule, were granted additional rights. However, these positive developments have gradually amounted to extreme practices endorsed by all governments.
These collective rights were also granted to young people. For instance, the practice of immunity at the universities is also extended to student groups. These collective rights were subsequently given to high school students. Their violent actions are not opposed and are considered part of the culture. These are considered regular incidents in Greece and a substantial part of the society sees these as part of democracy.

The number of such tragicomic events is pretty large whereas those who attempt to deal with this state of turmoil face an uphill battle. Those who are not familiar with Greece think these developments are part of a protest against a murder. Some even see this as a part of the culture of democracy. Unfortunately, political and social forces are not currently available to draw a new course of actions.

A small anarchist group of 1,000 members which has resorted to violent actions for years now exploits these incidents to further their cause. They claim they are fighting for the values crafted for many years and that these recommendations or repressive measures will not change this. Provided they act collectively, they now consider those who try to stop them as an enemy of the people.
Authoritarian, Totalitarian, Populist

by
H. Millas

Today’s Zaman 9 March 2009
We think using concepts. We describe a man as, say, good, honest or witty. We may depict a situation as dangerous, good, or politicians as left, right, democratic or traitorous and decide to follow them or not according to these titles.

These concepts (qualifications, attributes, labels) are both useful and restrictive. Without them we cannot make our thinking very rich set of tools. We may say that such a man is less likely to shift toward stereotypes and prejudiced assessments.

It may be useful to keep these in mind at a time when politics are high on the agenda. We may need to add details to our concepts to make them sufficiently rich enough to contain all the necessary information.

When people are regarded as clients
Totalitarian regimes have additional characteristics. The first is related to the type of government (be it a junta or a one-party regime) and is more focused on the personality cult of the leader. The second is related to the type of ideology, usually as a totalitarian ideology, which is supported by the following two: (1) Ideologies that attempt to destroy civil society and communities working independently of the state; and (2) Ideologies that attempt to target the population's ideologies on the population's will, beliefs, and values, and attempt to control the population's ideologies indirectly by controlling the population's beliefs and values.

Populism - here is another concept - is generally not noticed if it is seen by the masses as democracy. Populism is a social movement where the masses want to be the decision-makers. Populism is generally not noticed if it is seen by the masses as democracy. Populism is a social movement where the masses want to be the decision-makers. Populism may comprise anti-regime politics and may merge with nationalism, racism or fundamentalism in right-wing tendencies.

When we base our thinking on the above-mentioned concepts, we start to view the political parties not according to their ideologies or political positions but according to their actions and the way they act. Populism may be a way to escape the political system and may be seen as a form of political protest. Populism may be a way to escape the political system and may be seen as a form of political protest.

Also, it may be misleading to regard political struggle as being between authoritarian or totalitarian forces. It may be seen as a struggle between political parties, political ideologies, or political positions. It may be seen as a struggle between political parties, political ideologies, or political positions. It may be seen as a struggle between political parties, political ideologies, or political positions. It may be seen as a struggle between political parties, political ideologies, or political positions. It may be seen as a struggle between political parties, political ideologies, or political positions.

Like authoritarianism, populism is against democracy. At any time, we may encounter it while it is wearing a lovely mask. Populism may be a way to escape the political system and may be seen as a form of political protest. Populism may be a way to escape the political system and may be seen as a form of political protest. Populism may be a way to escape the political system and may be seen as a form of political protest. Populism may be a way to escape the political system and may be seen as a form of political protest.

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The road to the EU & ‘Heritage’

by
H. Millas

Today's Zaman 80 April 2009
Some words, phrases and concepts create positive associations in our minds. "Our traditions," "the heritage of our ancestors" and "the memory of our parents" are examples of such wordings.
But what comes from the past may also be bad and harmful. The nostalgic “good past” is the characteristic of romanticism. These were my primary thoughts while I was giving a speech at the 2nd International Balkan Congress held in Tekirdağ (Turkey) in April on the theme of “Socioeconomic Cooperation and Development in the Balkans.”

I recalled that with the collapse of the socialist experiment in the Balkans and the fall of the Iron Curtain, the countries of the region were disoriented. They were in search of new models of development that could move them toward greater prosperity, democracy, and a better quality of life. In the new environment, the European Union and its project became a reference point for the Balkans.

Closeness in the Balkans had been observed prior to the emergence of the nation-states. This was made possible by the Ottoman empires. The Ottoman Empire had been a civilizational and political entity for many centuries and was a hub of diverse cultures. The empire was characterized by cultural and religious tolerance and was able to integrate different ethnic and religious groups.

In other words, the Balkans and the Balkan peoples have become objects of different social projects over time: Empires, nation-states, socialism, and today the convergence is on the “free market economy.” The European Union is the result of the last project.

One still can see traces of these four projects coexisting. However, these “heritages” do not have the same weight in all countries. The Balkan states are in different stages of development and have different histories and cultures, which influences the way they interpret their common pasts.

This differing perception of history reached its peak during the era of nation-states. Behind the wars in the Balkans and elsewhere, there was a conflict of interests based on the desire for nationalism and state-building. It was a “zero-sum game” in which one nation’s gain was considered another nation’s loss.

The confrontation of “us versus others” that makes up the essence of national identity is conveyed as an element of national character. This is reflected in the symbols and narratives used by different countries. The Balkan people are still divided by their histories and a sense of belonging to one of the four projects.

The purpose of the EU project, which is regarded as one of the most ambitious and influential social initiatives of our times, is to create a community among the Balkan states. The EU aims to promote economic development, political stability, and cultural exchange. It is a process that requires the participation and cooperation of all the countries in the region.

When the distinction between real and imaginary heritages is recognized the EU project and process will be understood in a more realistic way. Real heritage is based on objective facts and evidence, while imaginary heritage is based on the perceptions and interpretations of individuals and groups. The potential for socioeconomic cooperation will further be boosted if these obstacles can be overcome.

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Insults, mockery, satire, criticism

and a different point of view

By
H. MİLLAS

Today’s Zaman 4 June 2009
There are certain modes that we use to express ourselves, words and stances that can even stretch all the way to what is sometimes perceived as insult or mockery.

Of course, perspectives change from person to person. Of course, the concept of what these stances mean is chaotic and... crisis. Taliban forces and anti-Rasmussen factions maintain that Rasmussen supported the insulting caricatures.

And thus came evidence of just how right Turkey was in expressing its own opposition to Rasmussen to head the NATO. But... to oppose the controversial caricatures was of course wrong. By failing to oppose them he took an unnecessary risk.
But why did Rasmussen behave as such?

His stance could be linked to the following reasons: a) He might actually be a deep-seated, judgmental enemy of Islam, b) He might not have been aware of the fact that Rasmussen is frequently used in plays to show human emotions, c) He might have wanted to show respect for the freedom of expression in the Western world. I do not know which of the above choices have had a more influential role in affecting Rasmussen’s stance. Do you?

There may be some people who would wish to offer up an easy and dependable answer to the above question/problematic: a) Freedom of expression is everyone’s right. If you wish to take advantage of this freedom, you should not have a problem with the fact that others are using this freedom as well. b) Freedom of expression is a right, and it is enjoyed by everyone. Therefore, the freedom of expression should also be respected.

Much discomfort can be created through the expression of different life views, especially when they stretch all the way to expressing satire and insulting mockery. And as we see, this particular line is the constant topic of debate in our courtrooms.

Similarly, as you might appreciate, the drawing of these lines in two nations with cultures as completely different as that of two cats can be done in a number of ways. One of these ways is to paint a picture of respect for our freedom of expression. The shocking difference brought about by globalization

In the Western world, it is quite usual to see that which is sacred used in theatrical plays or films to show human emotions. But respect must be reciprocal, and respect is everyone’s right. Freedom of expression should also be respected.

What we must also recognize is that respect cannot be forced on people, that instead, respect emerges - or in some cases, is created - through mutual respect. So, we can conclude that clearly respect must also be shown to people like the above who are labeled as “disrespectful.”

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Are the people mature?

By
H. MİLLAS

Today’s Zaman 0 August 2009
I heard and I read it so many times the last years in Turkey; but I was sure that this issue was beyond discussion... people“ that was built up by the aristocracy and this problem is resolved for good in our days, at least in Europe.

The thesis of “people without consciousness” was occasionally promoted by fascist and communist regimes, but the idea... And so the argument concludes that “the affairs of the state cannot be left to those illiterate and immature actors.”

Actually, this thesis referring to the immaturity of the people is being served as though it favors the people...
Who decides whether the people are mature or not? With a Parliament ignored and taken out of the political sphere, this question remains unanswered. Is it the political parties, the bureaucracy, or the judiciary? These principles are all about the core of a regime that has been tried out the last decades.

Assuming for the sake of argument that the world is saved from immature people via a “civil” or military coup, doesn’t it imply that the mission is superior to all other consents. But wouldn’t such an argument cause a breach of confidence and trust?

The thesis voicing the immaturity of the people is like a bomb at the foundations of the state. The people will never vote for those who believe in this thesis. On the other hand, some politicians – and “mature” individuals – lose hope for and faith in the people.

This is a vicious circle.

Actually whether the people are mature or not is not an issue. It should be noted that there is not an absolute maturity; people are sometimes immature, sometimes mature. The same people harm the unity of the people and of the nation via this discourse. Sadly, they believe they serve the people, too.

Sometimes I ponder to advise those who are skeptical with the people: Try to distribute a few pounds of coal for free, I will bet these people do not get it; they insult people on every occasion! Who will the people vote for after seeing such a flier?

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How to be a well-behaved Rum
When recently during a visit abroad, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew voiced some of his complaints in reference to Turkey. Here is my list:

- A wise Rum never speaks about Turkey when abroad. And of course, the wisest stance of all is to simply never mention Turkey. This is also sometimes referred to as “knowing your place.”

- If a Rum feels he absolutely must voice complaints related to minorities or human rights, then he could speak about the unfairness of the policies applied by Greece to the minorities in Western Thrace.

- The fact that it is a TURKISH minority residing in Western Thrace must be particularly highlighted. There is no such thing as a Greek minority in Western Thrace. The other side must be asked to stick to basic principles, and must also be asked to show understanding for “our” decisions and actions.

- The double standard at hand must be used in a creative and beneficial (for us) way: The other side must be asked to show understanding for our actions and to respect our sovereignty. And there is also always some gain to repeat how we, the ungrateful Rums, betrayed the Turks.

- The advice “Be wise!” is valid for issues of history, too. Emphasize that ever since the Turks arrived in these parts, they showed us great tolerance. And there is also always some gain to repeat how we, the ungrateful Rums, betrayed the Turks.
- The more the Greeks and the Rums are condemned and criticized and the more the Turks are praised, the more harmony ...

- Rums must not take up with the subject of their own history from a one-sided and egocentric or ethnocentric ...

- As we've all witnessed, there have been some Turkish intellectuals who have, in recent years, brought up ...

- The Rums should grab every opportunity they get to talk of the deep sense of gratitude they feel towards ...

- The Rums also need to give up on their stance of denial and simply admit that their real aim has always ...

- There is no real benefit for the Rums bringing up over and over again that they have lived in İstanbul for ...

- And of course, the Rums must not provoke the Turkish society by leaning their backs on foreign power ...

- The Rums also need to understand how meaningless it is for them to bring up their complaints about present-day ...

- What the Rums really need to understand now is that the more they complain about their status in Turkey, ...

- The Rums, should take the sensitivities of some of our more racist citizens into consideration and stop ...

- The Rums also need to remember to earn only a measured amount of money in Turkey. A rich member ...

- The Rums should feel absolute love for the majority, which tells them, “We love you.” Otherwise, they do ...
- The most emotional and sensitive words on this subject this far were spoken by a politician who is also


The lesson of the Greek crisis


By

H. MILLAS


Today’s Zaman 8 February 2010
Other countries such as Portugal, Spain and Ireland are experiencing economic problems similar to those of Greece, yet Athens is receiving the harshest warnings from the EU.

There are two reasons for this.

The first is Greece’s reluctance, indecisiveness and delay in taking precautionary measures. It took the new government a month to decide to block the revision of the electoral law. But it is too late, as the budget for 2011 has already been approved. Moreover, the opposition parties refuse to vote for any austerity plan. They seem incapable of determining who is responsible for the current crisis and who will be held accountable. Meanwhile, the Greek financial markets are suffering from the indecision of government and banks. However, in the midst of insecurity it has become difficult to find an optimist who will extend a loan.

Failed to conform to EU philosophy

Another reason for the indecisiveness is the fear of social resistance. The Greek nation is fixed on the method of making promises to voters. They believe that a political program can be altered at any time. For example, this year the government was unable to find an agreement between the public sector and the agricultural sector. When the strike by public sector employees failed, there were indications that the public sector and the agricultural sector were among the two areas that needed to be limited. However, in the midst of insecurity it has become difficult to find an optimist who will extend a loan.

According to the EU policies, the public sector and the agricultural sector are among the two areas that need to be limited. However, in the midst of insecurity it has become difficult to find an optimist who will extend a loan.

This practice placed a major burden on the state, and inevitably this burden was shifted to the markets, incurring losses. The crisis was like a predictable accident.

According to the EU policy, the agricultural sector would be limited and workers would be shifted to other sectors. However, in the midst of insecurity it has become difficult to find an optimist who will extend a loan.

The last major problem is with banking. The era of low-interest borrowing from the EU has ended. In brief, Greece failed to conform to EU philosophy.

Scope of lies unclear

There is a second reason for the EU’s concern and distrust. There has been speculation about the reliability of Greek data. The EU’s problem was that they did not have evidence of the extent of the crisis. There were reports of tax evasion, corruption and mismanagement, but the EU could not verify these claims. Greece’s ability to undertake new ventures is being questioned. In brief, Greece failed to conform to EU philosophy.

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Even though it’s not officially or widely mentioned, the people in Greece want to believe that a miracle will happen. Greece is a country that has been going through an extraordinary number of crises. But despite this, the citizens still hope for a better tomorrow. The EU is constantly sending the message that “Greece needs to solve its own problem” and that it has the “ability to do it.”

The economic crisis in Greece is obviously going to have a negative impact on the people. But this does not mean that they will lose hope. The crisis has taught them a valuable lesson about the importance of being self-sufficient and independent. Lessons are always beneficial. But sometimes the cost of learning late can be very high.

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Who’s who in Turkey?

By H.MILLAS
Today’s Zaman, 05 March 2010
If you live in Turkey it is easy to explain the political situation in the country: you decide which side you belong to and you judge the situation with self-assurance.

However, if one is a foreigner and asks questions to understand the surroundings one faces a paradox. That each person holds the same principles, aims and the guarantee of these are mentioned. (For example, “modernism” is the common motto of those who are for or against a) the headscarf; b) the court trials against the military; c) integration with the West.)

One of the main aims of the government is the full accession to the European Union. The same is declared by the parties and the guarantee of these are mentioned. (For example, “modernism” is the common motto of those who are for or against a) the headscarf; b) the court trials against the military; c) integration with the West.)

Law is treated as if it is sacred but courts are condemned as sources of ills. It is rare to find a country like Turkey where the law is respected but the courts are condemned.

Then the foreigner will think the country enjoys full harmony: same principles, same targets, same sensitivities! The “intentions” are explored. Theses are advanced by a selective approach, exaggerating some facts and silencing others.

The political strife in Turkey is not of the left versus the right or about the nature of the regime. The arguments form the political course. This may mean absence of real politics; and in this absence the fight becomes personal and abstract.

Another explanation of this political race, whose dialogue aspect is weak and fighting aspect is strong, may be related to the historical context of the present-day situation was reached: instead of a political confrontation a confrontation of groups is experienced.
Three reminders seem necessary. First, a crisis of confidence appears to be the main problem. Trust crisis has reached a new high.

The third point is that this article is written by a writer who feels he is a part of this debate. The readers have

Stalemate

By

H. MİLLAS
Today's Zaman April 2010
Chess players know the situation. Stalemate is a position in which a player is unable to move but the king...
Metaphorically, it means a situation in which neither group involved in an argument can win and no action can be taken. The initiation of constitutional change in Turkey seems to have reached a stalemate. It is a case where politics is in a deadlock.

Until recently, it was clear how the Constitution of Turkey could be amended: either through a parliamentary decision or a referendum. Over the last months, it has become understood that the approval of a high court is also required.

This became apparent with what followed the constitutional amendments of Feb. 9, 2008, allowing women to wear the headscarf. There has been a movement to prohibit it in the public sphere. There is a battle within the country over the interpretation of “the nationalism of Atatürk” and “secularism,” which are interpreted differently by the social actors of the country.

The legal power of the Constitutional Court is stated in the Constitution: “The Constitutional Court shall examine the... “substance” and on the interpretation of notions such as “social state,” “the nationalism of Atatürk” and “secularism.”

An approval by referendum

Analysts predict that the proposed constitutional amendments will not receive the required support in the Parliament but will pass the referendum. It might be that the amendments will be judged as ill-intentioned measures contrary to, say, “nationalism” or “secularism.”

If this analysis is correct, it means that articles of the Constitution, even laws, cannot be amended unless the high court approves. However, such a system in the running of state affairs will cause a deadlock in the long run.

In a game of chess when a stalemate occurs the solution is easy: one can start a new game. But it is not possible to start a new Constitution. It only witnesses that the amendments will be judged as ill-intentioned measures contrary to, say, “nationalism” or “secularism.”

The change of this image is more important than a probable amendment to the Constitution. A shift in perception may be more powerful than an amendment. It might influence the current positions and encourage the social actors and the lawmakers to shift their previous positions anew. But this may happen only in a friendly milieu. Such an environment may make a great difference.

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Conflict between identities in Turkey

By
H. MILLAS

Today’s Zaman 4 April 2010
Why is there such a widespread and persistent conflict of identities within the Turkish society? The Kurds ask for the right to self-determination. There is no national sense for the Kurds and they consequently ask for the separation of their own state. But why is there such a conflict involving the Ottomans, the Turks, and the Kurds? The Ottomans are a non-Turkish people who, under the leadership of the Turks, established the Ottoman Empire. The Kurds ask for the right to self-determination. There is no national sense for the Kurds and they consequently ask for the separation of their own state. However, many Turks complain about a potential “cultural coup d'état” that will deprive them of their way of life and modern identity. However, instead of speaking of “freedom” their “identities” are on the agenda.

There must be a reason why these different segments of society come forward with such similar demands and discourses. The differences are not only over religious or political ideologies, but also over cultural and national identities.
That is so because the basic ideological emphasis, as understood by the founders of the modern Turkish state, was to create an all-embracing national identity free from differentiations.

During the nation-building period, the goal was to create a common national identity that would be all-embracing and free from differentiations. All (real or imagined) ethnic, religious and ideological groups were perceived as forces counter to this ideal, as a potential danger and even as enemies. Thus their rights and freedoms were restricted. However, the restraints were legitimized due to an “alien identity” discourse. The restrictions of basic human rights were defined as measures against anti-state identities and forces. The discriminated citizens were first characterized as foes on an identity basis - extreme Islamists (mürteci), heretical (Alevis), separatists (Kurds), nationally foreign (the minorities), etc. - and then they experienced the restrictions.
The aggression against the “dissidents,” actually against the citizens that could not be readily assimilated in the project of ideological engineering, created an opposing force. This reaction was expressed on the basis of identity, too, simply because the oppression was initiated and carried out on an identity basis to start with. The identity issue grew and spread because the citizens were perceived and treated as agents of supposed alien identities. The phobia against (imagined or exaggerated) dangerous anti-national groups gave rise, on the part of the state apparatus, to discriminatory policies and to violations of basic human rights. This led to a vicious circle of perception-action-reaction-confirmation of initial phobias; in other words, to a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Eventually, all human rights issues were expressed as identity issues. In the Kurdish case, for example, it has been claimed that the identity of the Kurds has not been “recognized,” whereas it could be argued that it was the “acknowledged” feared Kurdish identity that caused the problem. The fear turned into phobia and that into oppression and denial of basic rights. It was the perverted identity perception which caused the Kurdish reaction as well as the present-day identity issue, not the identity itself. It was the exaggerated importance of identities which caused the prohibitions, the limitations, the violation of liberties and the various oppressions.

Actually, the conflict of identities is a fight for human rights. There are efforts to create an environment where freedoms are fully enjoyed and are acknowledged by each section of the society and this is done under the banner of an “identity” instead of as a demand for human rights. This endeavor, however, has been unproductive because it disperses (splits) the forces that face similar problems on a basis of various identities, whereas all are in need of a more democratic society. It should be added that human rights incorporate the right to associate with others and form groups, i.e., to act collectively if required. A fight for individual rights cannot get in the way of the collective rights. When all kinds of “identities” are approached with this understanding, then the problem seems to be an issue of democratization. In other words, focusing on “identity” may not be the shortest route to securing the aspirations of so many. A banner of “human rights” may prove a more effective way to protect all groups that want to perceive themselves with an “identity,” too. Once liberties are secured, then issues such as who speaks what language or who wears this or that will seem redundant.
A Greek tragedy?

By
H. MILLAS

Today's Zaman, 8 May 2010
The leitmotif of ancient Greek tragedy is the approaching, imminent, but unpreventable disaster. For example, in ... things we cannot understand or feel today, such as the futility of a persistent effort or a masochistic satisfaction.

What is happening in Greece is actually not a complete tragedy, but a half tragedy. Although it was foretold by a small ... aging population will not be able to retire at an increasingly younger age. But, no measure was taken in this regard.

The welfare brought about by easy and cheap money is very pleasant but it does not support entrepreneurship, ... in advance, or the businessmen who seek profit in a capitalist system, or bad luck. Really, what makes them so angry?

They just go out to find a scapegoat when things go wrong and they end up bankrupt. Yet the whole flock is to be blamed. ... who are supposed to know quite well what capitalism and market economies do, do not sound constructive at this time.

In fact, Greece’s main problem at this stage is not economic, but political and social. The economic roadmap - drawn by ... They do not want to sacrifice their gains. The groups that are in the opposition always make maximalist demands.

No one is innocent in this regard and no group is better than the other. As he announced early elections last fall - ... of printing money, as it has joined the Eurozone. Fewer and fewer creditors are inclined to lend money to the country.

I argue that the basic problem is not economic, but social. The country is overwhelmed by mentalities and practices that ... days and are now urging us to make such decisions. I am sorry, but I no longer want to watch this downhill progress.”
Turkey, Greece and Aporia

By
H. MİLLAS

Today's Zaman, 28 May 2010
After nine months in Istanbul, where I taught courses on nationalism with references to Greece and Turkey, this week I moved back to Athens. It was pleasant to travel around the country and to experience Turkey daily and from within, but it was also a good luck to be able to move back for a number of reasons.

An “aporia” in this sense is a word used in postmodern philosophy to denote a puzzle in thinking, a surprise in inquiry, a mystery which eludes one’s ability to settle. Aporia wipes away all preconceived notions and triggers fresh curiosity. Here are some of my latest cases of aporia.

In Greece, especially the leftist political parties and groups oppose the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union, which demands structural reforms, such as privatizations, the reorganization of the state, etc. This has led to a situation where the country is facing a financial crisis and the economy is on the brink of default.

Coup d’état and conspiracies against the civilians
In Turkey aporia is related to the discussions of coup d’états and conspiracies against civilians. All are against these.

Especially aporetic is the controversy related to the sex scandal that caused the resignation of Deniz Baykal, the former prime minister who was hanged only yesterday and there is a prime minister who was imprisoned because he read a poem publicly.

Aporia was felt in Greek-Turkish relations too, especially after the visit of the Turkish prime minister to Athens.

My sense of aporia may be due to my character. I have been all along in a bit of a loss, facing my environment with a sense of helplessness and having accomplished a harmonious conformity. They look to be in such comfort! But still, I do not want to change.

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A Stable Axis in Turkey?

By

H. MILLAS
These days in Turkey the term 'shift of axis' refers to foreign policy. Minor contingent shifts of axis should be seen as swings. If needed, subsequent readjustments are always possible. Foreign policy often contains such swings. No doubt in a sense there is a shift, but this is vis-à-vis Turkey and how Turkey is seen by some: in alliance with Hamas against Israel, not being an ally of the US.

The real worry, however, should be directed towards an unshaken axis: to the domestic policy, to the main issue of modern Turkey. There is a struggle over who is right. Two captains who are in bad terms steering simultaneously are worse than an authoritarian captain.

In the case of Turkey both sides perceive an adversary and they annul decisions taken by the “other”. No wonder the concern is real.

A tradition of uprisings always existed in Turkey (e.g., the Jelali revolts of the 16th and 17th centuries), but... who is right. Two captains who are in bad terms steering simultaneously are worse than an authoritarian captain.

I am not neutral in this strife. I only try to look impartial because I am aware of the ills of condemning any of the sides. It is not in my nature to argue in this milieu that a fault of one side does not prove the correctness of the other! Also, both may be wrong!

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The 3CHP, 0.5AKP, 1MHP, 0.2BDP...formula

By
H. MiLLAS

Today's Zaman June 2010
I participated in a meeting of the Abant Platform held on June 25-27 titled “Tutelage and Democracy.” The meeting was informative, the participation high and it was nice to see how consensus can be attained. This column is inspired by this meeting.

The general characteristics of the political system in Turkey called “tutelage” can be described as follows: Some political parties have dominated the political scene for years and even eliminating persons perceived as opposition or enemies. In short, they resort to anti-democratic behavior. This system of tutelage was periodically desired and supported by some political parties (traditionally by the Republican People’s Party) and was deemed necessary to prevent any threat to their rule. Therefore, one has to cope with an understanding that is widely espoused by the general public.

As it was reiterated at the meeting, some benefit from this system and others experience the harm done. However, sometimes some of those who voice complaints about tutelage may be expecting that their term will come, that there will be someone who will have the control and will take advantage of this system. We see signs of this. Those who once complained about tutelage are now working to maintain the system, choosing to try the 10 percent election threshold method over the previous system. As they turn to be the beneficiaries, they do not change this method when they turn to be the beneficiaries.

Coefficient of obsession
The problem has to do with the citizen-state relationship, the equality between citizens, in short, with the regime and those who are not considered ethnically “normal”, etc. There are probably coefficients lurking in the subconscious of some. I fancy that if votes were multiplied by proper coefficients the tutelage system may work “democratically”.

But the current electoral system is “traditional”; so what is left are party closures, political bans and the 10 percent threshold. But the current electoral system is “traditional”; so what is left are party closures, political bans and the 10 percent threshold. It seems that the issue that is still not settled is who will be kept inside and who outside of the system. In modern parlance the core group included in the system is the target group. The consensus obtained is the aim while the special law of such titles, are widely used. Each Ahmet is at a different level. This is a mutually accepted inequality.

The process of democratization was also a process of becoming a nation or of nation-building. The consensus obtained is the aim while the special law of such titles, are widely used. Each Ahmet is at a different level. This is a mutually accepted inequality.

The problem is not “tutelage” itself as it is defined but the shortage of democracy; and it’s not limited to political matters either. During this delay some institutions and individuals may be opposed. And when these are toppled the tutelage system will still live on. The tutelage system survives thanks to the conviction that some have exceptional qualities to judge what is best for the majority. These administrators exhibit a tendency to disrespect democratic and human rights.

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The process of democratization was also a process of becoming a nation or of nation-building. The consensus obtained is the aim while the special law of such titles, are widely used. Each Ahmet is at a different level. This is a mutually accepted inequality.
The Abant Atmosphere

By
H. MILLAS

Today's Zaman 1 July 2010
The Abant Platform is a free intellectual foundation that works for the expansion of social consensus and the coexistence of society's rich cultural resources within a peaceful environment.

I participated twice (March and June 2010) in the Abant Meetings and in each case I was astonished: It was as if the meetings were taking place in another country.

There were no groups in controversy, no mutual mistrust, no feeling of insecurity and no aggressive political discourse. ... Tolerance, or if you prefer, the spirit of democracy, was dominant in the meeting room and in the corridors, too.

Trying to find an explanation of what I perceived as utopia, the first thing that came to mind was that the participants...

A second plausible explanation is that a common rival or enemy keeps this group in cohesion. The first reason may help one understand the source of the stress and the shortage of tolerance that exists in the county.

Even if some are against certain proposals advanced in Turkey, why should this lead to clashes and fights? It is also of... they are at the Abant Meetings. I mean that the hypothesis “a common enemy unites this group” is not fully satisfactory.
Whoever joins an Abant Meeting knows in advance that he/she will not be discriminated on grounds of belief, gender, race, or nationality. If this is correct then we should consider anew our own behavior and role, too, every time we encounter hostility. Do we contribute to a positive or to a negative environment or do we not even notice what we are met in certain environments, but - this is often not noticed - we and our role are part of this “environment” too.

The participants of the Abant Meetings know in advance that they will be welcomed with an agreeable mode. The expectation of a friendly attitude on their part encourages them to continue with the more democratic approach: We will know that the more we behave the more the environment will be democratic and tolerant.

Actually what we call a negative milieu or a hostile environment is a vicious circle: You don’t trust them, therefore your normal behavior is suppressed. It is the tranquility of the peaceful Lake Abant. One cannot but be influenced by the milieu that one chooses to be part of.

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Teaching Religion

By
H. MİLLAS

Today's Zaman 8 August 2010
Generally five different approaches are proposed when the teaching of religion in public schools is being discussed worldwide:

1) The dominant religion of the country should be taught to all students; 2) This lesson should not be obligatory but voluntary; 3) The religion selected should only be taught to students of that specific religion; 4) The religions selected to be taught should be those who are in a minority; 5) The religions selected should come from a different belief system.

I noticed an interesting similarity when I studied Turkish and Greek textbooks on religion. Actually, the likeness goes deeper: while the religious texts are presented in the same language, the moral text is in the language of the majority. What has been presented is a language of belief, which is an important issue with the language and the morals to be learned. The majority of the books aimed at producing texts they sincerely believe correspond to what is true and useful for their students.

The end result is that the social groups that follow “a different belief” are annoyed. Limiting my views to my experience, I often find a strong feeling among them: the majority ignores the minority. Technically, this situation is known as violation of human rights.

The textbooks presently used contain information about the other/different religions, but in each case through “our” and “standard” religion is being indirectly recognized. Isn’t this approach technically a discriminatory approach?

So often the secular character of the state and its need to be at equal distance from all beliefs is recalled. It is, however, very difficult to reconcile the religious viewpoints with the human rights. An expectation of a relativist approach in such matters is both unrealistic and an unsafe approach for social peace.
On the other hand, the “equal distance” that cannot be totally secured on the individual basis, i.e., the miss...
Today’s Zaman 5 September 2010
The September 12 referendum further cemented polarization within the Turkish society along “yes” voters and those who opposed the “yes” or boycotted the referendum.

Prior to voting the political views, the ideologies, the programs, the virtues and shortcomings, the apparent and hidden forces that can develop in the life of a society irrespective of the conscious acts of the politicians and of their will.

The discourse of those who opposed “yes” votes was the following: The constitutional amendment package recommended by the AKP is not modernity and democracy and is taking Turkey backward away from the progress Turkey has made over the past ten years.

Not all of the naysayers defend all of these views; the discourse opposing the AKP has not been so deeply hostile all the same.

But I am among those who do not believe that this sort of “for or against” argumentation is convincing. To discuss the intentions, subconscious, mental states etc. and these seem to be imputations related to phobias and to feelings.

The AKP’s intentions, subconscious, mental state etc., must be taken off the agenda. It is more rewarding to discuss its policies, programs, programs, the virtues and shortcomings, the apparent and hidden forces that can develop in the life of a society.

But all the same, the historic role of AKP is beyond these intentions, even in practice it is the opposite of similar discourse.

What I want to say is that the opponents of the AKP have cut off their criticism from the real world and slipped into an argumentation.

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Native Language and Demagoguery

By
H. MILLAS

Today’s Zaman 5 October 2010,
When is demagoguery necessary? When we are wrong or when we cannot defend our point. In short, when we feel stuck. Instead of saying "Sorry" or "I was wrong," we prefer to beat around the bush.

It is said that there are two forms of demagoguery: conscious demagoguery and unconscious demagoguery. I had always ... develop lines of defense to justify ourselves. This is demagoguery. Demagoguery has a twin brother, too: double standard.

I thought about these while reading and listening to the debates on education in one’s native language. If demagoguery is ... attempt of defense in an assumed strife. And being a method of a strife it is perceived as an attack by the other side.

If the above are read as my intention to present myself as coolheaded and empathetic towards demagoguery, I gave the ... forty smart men cannot remove it.” Here are a few examples of demagoguery concerning education in one’s native language:
-- “If students are taught in their native languages in schools, we won’t be able to communicate and understand each other.

The issue of ‘minority rights’

-- “But the Kurds, the Circassians, the Laz and others are not minorities. The treaty of Lausanne defined them as minorities. This is simple.

-- “The education in Kurdish is not a pedagogical issue but a political one; it cannot be taught as a native language.

-- “What if everyone (the Laz, the Circassians, e.t.c.) demands the right to education in their native language? What is the state going to do? This is a constitutional problem. But the state has to decide if there is one.”

-- “So, is education in one’s native language going to be in Kurdish (Kirmantsi) or in Zaza?” What this question means is the state's collective decision. Some people say yes and others say no.

‘Constitutional and legal barriers’

-- “There are constitutional and legal barriers.” According to Article 42 of the Constitution, “no language other than Turkish is to be used in official business.”

-- “If a person doesn’t learn Turkish well, he cannot advance in society.” Actually this is what this sentence means: “If a person doesn’t learn Turkish well, he cannot advance in society.”

-- “Some court decisions in the EU stipulate that the state is not obligated to teach every native language.”

-- “We have suffered a lot. We demand the right to use our language.”

There are also examples of double standards: When “our people” (such as the Turks in Germany and in Western Thrace) demand the right to use their language, the state says yes. But when other people demand the same right, the state says no.
Prohibitions are pedagogically wrong, too. A person who does not know how to speak his native language will not be able to assimilate. Unnecessary phobias are the result of bias and racism. Demagogy is their conscious and unconscious defense.

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Views on the headscarf

from America, France and Greece

By
H. MILLAS
John Bowen’s book *Can Islam Be French? Pluralism and Pragmatism in a Secularist State* was reviewed in Greece by Dr. Panagiotis Vogiatzis for the Greek language journal *The Books’ Journal*, published in Athens in October. Vogiatzis, who teaches law in Paris and is connected to the European Court of Human Rights, argues that discussions about integration currently being carried out worldwide may be useful to shed light on similar issues in Turkey and other countries.

The main argument by Bowen is that Islamic organizations such as mosques, societies, schools, etc., are centers where in some cases religious education is taking place, but on the contrary, he sees their existence as a human right and as a necessity that secures survival in a modern state.
Bowen explains the segment of society that thinks differently from himself with reference to “the Islamophobic atmosphere both in contact with the “state” and they preserve their legitimacies at the same time, being trusted by the believers.

The prerequisite in accomplishing an open Muslim community, according to Bowen, is that the state takes some specific measures to accommodate the needs and desires of the Muslim community. Such measures include the establishment of special Islamic schools where they will learn Islam. It should be understood that these measures are in harmony with a democratic state.

Bowen has a clear view about the headscarf. The state has no right to decide what is proper and useful for the Muslim citizens. They should wear what they consider proper and useful, and the state should not dictate what they should not wear. Both of these stand for authoritative states.

Greece should follow this route

Vogiatzis, however, extends this article to the case of Greece. He proposes significant methods for the Muslim minority to be integrated into the society. His ideas include fostering open communication lines and strengthening multiculturalism.

Vogiatzis notes the following: “These issues should not be understood as special to the French state. They may be applied to any country where Muslim communities are present.”

Vogiatzis evaluates the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights against Greece with respect to the Muslim minority. He argues that the integration of this group into the society is essential for the cohesion of the Greek state.

What I personally gather from the publications that range from the US to France and Greece and from Bowen to Vogiatzis is that there is a need for international allies in every society. Therefore, allies should be sought out not locally but internationally.
From Myths to National Legends

By
H. MILLAS

Today’s Zaman January 2011
When children get older they stop believing in fairy tales and start believing in legends. Adults used to believe in mythologies and nowadays they believe in national myths.

Just like as children we used to take fairytales seriously and thought they were real, nowadays as grownups we take national myths as well. National myths have led to wars and the wars have claimed the lives of millions. This is why I am against myths.

Recently, particularly in the “West” Ottomanism or its “new” version is being discussed. Clearly, the “Ottoman” is a creation of the West. It does not refer to an entity that existed, but to a way of thinking about history and politics. The “Ottoman” Empire included states that were not necessarily part of the Ottoman Empire. For example, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, England and France are often included in the discussion of Ottomanism.

But all modern states do not base their current policies on national myths. Some have a more realistic and distant view of their past. The selection of events that are considered national myths is not based on a logical or consistent approach. Examples that counter the myths are carefully and discretely ignored.

Contradictions, inconsistencies and omissions

But this discourse (of myths) is laden with contradictions, inconsistencies and omissions. On the one hand, it is said that the “Ottoman” Empire was a unified and powerful state. On the other hand, it is not clear how it was able to maintain its unity and power for so long. On the one hand, it is said that the “Ottoman” Empire was a multicultural state. On the other hand, it is not clear how it was able to maintain its multicultural character while suppressing other cultures. On the one hand, it is said that the “Ottoman” Empire was a tolerant state. On the other hand, it is not clear how it was able to maintain its tolerance while suppressing other religions.
But while the Ottoman experience is perceived as “hell” in these countries, in Turkey is described as “heaven”. During ... movies, speeches delivered by politicians and official historians consolidate the national myths in the same direction.

Examining the whole picture

However, all empires have both good and bad aspects. All of them expand by taking into consideration their economic ... to approval which was very difficult to obtain, etc. Due to this heritage some of these practices continue even today.

These deficiencies are not mentioned in the national myths. However, starting with Enlightenment, the French Revolution ... Empire were not solely a result of prejudice. The issue is about being fair vis-à-vis the hell/paradise discourse.

We should also learn how to experience empathy. This practice includes trying to understand the national sensitivities and how it overpowers trying to...
Revolutions and Models

By

H. MİLLAS

Today’s Zaman March 2011
The chain reaction of revolutions is not a first in human history. The years between 1789 and 1848 were just like today. The French Revolution was taken as a model for a number of national or class uprisings. In particular, the social uprisings that started in France in 1848 spread to Western and Central Europe and even reached the Netherlands. The rebels were defeated. The long-term social and cultural effects of these uprisings could only be understood over time.
In Europe, there were few regions left unaffected by the 1848 wave: Britain, the Netherlands, the Russian and Ottoman Empires, and the Papal State were among those left unscathed.

The major rift in the period from 1789-1848 was between the dynasties and the parliaments. This dichotomy can be recast as a battle between the old and the new. The old possesses power and tradition, while the new represents progress and change. The only option for the old is to introduce some cosmetic changes to survive; the only option for the new is to replace the old system with their own. The last option is the most reasonable way, but it is rare.

The movements of 1848 had been triggered by economic problems and by new ideas, as is the case today. Actually, the fear of being shown to the world, the fear of not being news, and the fear of being broadcasted are stronger than ever in our time. In our time we sense and experience the rapid changes of our world directly and personally.

As in 1848, the rebels of our time may be defeated and the old system may introduce some cosmetic changes to keep up. This is the most dangerous option. The old system will attempt to suppress the new ideas and to prevent the new ideas from spreading. But the new ideas will continue to spread and the new system will continue to grow. The old system will continue to resist and the new system will continue to advance. This is the natural order of events.

Turkey should not be a model

I hope Turkey will not be a model or example to follow for the Muslim countries after their revolutions. The Christian world and Europe are not open to positivism, democracy, industrialization, entrepreneurship, secularism, etc. Using a model or example from a country that is not open to these things is not wise.

Turkey should look for its own model. Using an analogy from sports one can conclude that in order to win a race it is not wise to be in the lower ranks of the first league. It is better to be in the lower ranks of the first league than to be the leader of the second league. This is because the lower ranks of the first league have a better chance of winning than the leader of the second league.

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A ‘Blank Check’ and Guardianship

By

H. MILLAS

Today’s Zaman May 2011
The elections are approaching and as voters and writers decide whom to support I am stuck on the idea that I am not going to give a "blank check", a "carte blanche" to anyone.
You know how it is; you write out a check but leave the money section blank for someone to complete it whenever he wants to. This is how I understand authority, individual or institutional. I am afraid, I usually view voting this way.

While I don’t want to give anyone a blank check I also know with certainty for who I will be voting. I am only concerned about the decision or consensus that comes about as the result of popular consensus. When the above listed factors are not present and all that is left is trust to people and parties then guardianship pops up. Certain circles have been given blank checks. Guardianship operates because people accept this.

I don’t wish my vote to act as a blank check nor to elect those who act like spiritual leaders or as charismatic leaders. In conjunction with the high opinion that they may start having for themselves the guardianship starts appearing.

Criticism should not come only from the ‘others’

Those we elect must get the message that we see them not as our “elders” but as our government clerks. The “disciple” approach leads to guardian relationship. The elected official soon starts to impose his/her views and never criticize them, we play a large role in opening up the way towards guardianship; we give the wrong message.

Some may claim that the timing is critical and that now it is elections and a favorable propaganda period. I think, one should not wait for any period but should try to rectify their shortcomings. One sounds more convincing. On the other hand a “leader” may count every period as a “critical” one.

The above are some thoughts that came to my mind during this election period. Some cast votes in ballot boxes, others in blank checks. And those on the receiving end of these messages become either our clerks or our guardians.

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Socialism and other words that make no sense

By

H. MILLAS

Today's Zaman, 7 July 2011
Athens hosted a meeting of the Socialist International (SI) between July 1 and 2. The representatives of two political parties from Turkey attended this meeting: Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu from the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) and Professor Büşra Ersanlı, representing the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP).

In Turkey, political parties cannot come together under the same roof nowadays; therefore, their coming together at this meeting is a positive development. The host of the meeting was, of course, Georgios Papandreou, Greece’s socialist prime minister who has recently been fighting tooth and nail to save his country from the brink of total bankruptcy. But what I find hard to understand is why is a socialist government trying to save its country using the most “capitalist” methods also receiving support from the SI.

How many times have we witnessed such a contradictory situation? When the Soviet Union entered an economic impasse in the early years of its establishment, it “backpedaled” within the framework of the New Economic Policy (NEP), providing relief for its economy. What it did at that time was to make a partial return to a market economy. The Soviets became better off financially when they made the full transition to capitalism. Socialist China is growing rapidly by embracing capitalism. Even Castro’s Cuba is said to be embracing a market economy. Who knows? It may even become like Albania or the former East Germany, which are communist socialists. There are also capitalist socialists, who are in full harmony with such organizations as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. It is not easy to distinguish the socialists in Europe, say, those in the UK, from those who are not socialists, or to understand the socialist aspects of their approach to the economy. At least, I find it hard to do.

The meaninglessness of words

My quest to find the common characteristics shared by those who band together under the SI’s banner takes me only to “socialism.” But what does this word mean? People communicate not
only by talking to each other, but also by using signs, body language or even grunting. Words are our most advanced tools for communication, but when words start to have multiple meanings, it becomes harder for us to understand one another. In recent years I have been trying to not to use the word “socialism” - which is the subject matter of this article - and its related terms, such as left, communism, progressive, etc., because I no longer can understand what this word refers to.

In my youth, if I am not deceiving myself, things were much clearer. Marxist literature was used as a reference. Of course, there were different approaches: Lenin, Trotsky, Mao, Castro, Tito and Euro-communism were being discussed. Social democracy and CHP-like leftism also existed, but they were scorned, at least in my circle, and they were considered forms of capitalism. There was a consensus on the basic tenets of socialism. For instance, nationalization was considered as a basis, while privatizations were seen as temporary deviations. Interest, rent and profit were demonized. The workers belonged to “us”, while the rich were seen as unreliable. Foreign investments were regarded as the main causes of disaster. But most importantly, discussions were conducted with references to different models that were already being applied. Thus, many of us could point to one direction and say, “I want this.” This would save us from the obsession of words. Whereas now?

Another sign of the current uncertainty surrounding socialism and the left is that aging former leftists like myself are convening to discuss “How should we define a leftist policy?” However, groups should not go looking in search for policies; but rather, those who have a similar political line – who have found a policy – should form a group. When this is not the case, what we do is to “invent some occupation for ourselves.” If we do not have a policy or we don’t have any idea of what we should do, then we should just enjoy our retirement. Otherwise we may find ourselves in the situation of Miguel de Cervantes’s romantic chivalry, through ascribing to ourselves greater values than we deserve.

If the words “left” and “socialism” can be used to refer to an endless range of people, from Kılıçdaroğlu and Workers’ Party (İP) leader Doğu Perinçek to outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan or from Marxist politician, author and sociologist Behice Boran to Fidel Castro and the regime in China, then it is no longer possible to use these words to communicate with each other. It is equally useless to talk about “true socialism” because every socialist believes his/her own brand of socialism is true and calls his/her personal vision “left.”

But let us go back to the question we asked at the beginning. Why do socialists resort to
capitalist methods when they are faced with an economic crisis? The answer to this question is perhaps that, as we observed in the socialist and even social democratic practices of the recent decades, the left is unsuccessful in production and extremely generous in distribution. In a sense, they are very much like Robin Hood. The case of Bülent Ecevit in Turkey and the experiences of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) and the New Democracy in Greece can be given as examples. There are numerous benefits to having a close look at Greece's latest socialist experience and at the consequences of this policy. If we are to extract a leftist definition from these practices, we can say the following: Socialism is to offer bounteously to people whatever is earned though capitalist methods.

It was actually very painful to write this article because I placed high hopes on socialism for a good deal of my life. But I do not want to be part of the deception, hypocrisy and, especially, the meaninglessness of the recent decades. An indication of thinking with old patterns in a changing environment is having contradictions. I am not against private romanticism, but I think it is dangerous and harmful to make the masses adopt a utopian ideology. Unattainable goals lead to disappointment, which in turn result in not only demoralization but also in the inability to achieve realistic and attainable goals. Those who do not have anything new to say are making a pathetic sight by trying in vain to be at the forefront of everything. I, too, want to live in a better society but I am not inclined to define this dream with meaningless words or an uncertain route.
‘Atatürk’ by M. Şükrü Hanioğlu

By

H. MILLAS

Today’s Zaman 8 July 2011

As the writer states in the introductory pages, the more scholarly and authoritative biographies of Atatürk have been written by scholars from the Ottoman era as well as from the contemporary age. Hanioğlu aims to produce a book that is both scholarly and accessible to a broader audience. He wants to create a book that is not only written but also “explained,” in the sense that the reader can understand the context and the reasoning behind Atatürk’s actions.

In this biography Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is not only presented but also “explained,” in the sense that the reader can understand the context and the reasoning behind Atatürk’s actions.

In the military academy his teacher was the German theorist Colmar von der Goltz, who had written “Das Volk in Waffen” and who had also influenced the Young Turk movement. Von der Goltz believed in the idea that the future of Europe lay in the military, and he taught the Young Turks that parliaments are not to be entrusted with a say in politics and wield political power just like that.

The Young Turks were influenced by the German physiologist Ludwig Büchner and “Vulgarmaterialismus” as well. Büchner believed in the power of science to explain all phenomena, and this belief was shared by Atatürk as well. Science was seen as the key to progress, and Atatürk believed that an epic struggle between science and religion defined history.

Hanioğlu reminds the reader that John William Draper’s “Conflict Between Religion and Science” became a bestseller in the Ottoman Empire upon its translation into Turkish at the end of the 19th century.

Atatürk’s upbringing and accomplishments
The book is composed of eight chapters, an introduction and a conclusion. It has a total of 273 pages and consists of ... the founder of modern Turkey, on his efforts to build and shape a nation and on how his legacy presently affects Turkey.

Modern Turkey as a nation-state officially started in 1923, but the Young Turks' experiment (1908-1918) and the years of ... the Christian weekend, language reform with which Arabic words were discarded from Turkish, European civil law, etc.

However, it was as if the phantoms of Goltz, le Bon, Bühner, Draper and some others, for example Eugene Pittard, whose ... believe in ghosts. Turkey will not be fully understood unless the ideas that shaped its history are fully understood.

It is of interest to notice which of the visions of Atatürk have fully prevailed and which of them were rejected.

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Praise for the Zaman daily

By

H. MILLAS
Today's Zaman

1 October 2011
I want to praise the Zaman daily because it has not been acting as “partisan”. Partisanship (“yandaş” in Turkish) carries a negative connotation. It often implies a cautious approach based on the evaluator’s view and stance with regard to situations it has never been a “partisan” in a sense this word is used by some in Turkey.

Many of my columns were critical: to the government, to some social groups and circles and sometimes to the views held by some faculty members of the Bosphorus University.

I would like to turn the attention to the existing prejudice against Zaman. This biased discourse is similar to the self-centered attitude of the president of a university.

Traditional foreign policy is the least criticized domain in Turkey; it is considered a “national issue”. Especially when leaders are left all alone but with those who butter them up - that criticism proves valuable.

In recent weeks Turkey forgot to fortify its defense while scoring points in foreign policy. It is common in Turkey to make analogies by using football terms. On my part I wrote about the risks of excess self-confidence.
But I also realized that some other columnists at Zaman have adopted a similar critical approach. One of them wrote: “It was the time when we were a soft power, then by the not wanted Turkey-Syria-Iran line we have shifted to the hawkish power mode.”

Zaman’s “partisanship” is actually based on the faith and the foresight of those who make this paper possible. These columnists are trying to steer our country in a positive direction. When all columnists do not hold the same view, the accusation of partisanship becomes redundant.

On the other hand, most of the columnists of the other papers who do not consider themselves as “partisans” did not make their mark in the past years in every occasion. Their criticism has turned to routine at the end. They never noticed anything positive in AKP.

The most constructive criticism and warning regarding the foreign policy was raised in Zaman and some other papers. The foreign minister invited those columnists who raised criticisms and listened to their complaints.

I am aware that there are some ready and eager to make inferences out of what I wrote. Let me underline what I do not say: I am not criticizing my paper. I am not saying that all newspapers should have the same views. I am not saying that Zaman is a mouthpiece. I hope these recent developments would help all to understand better the function of the Zaman daily.
Elections in Greece:

repercussions of rage

By

H. MILLAS

Today’s Zaman, 10 May 2012
A protester shouts slogans during a May Day protest in Athens on May 1, 2012.

Some people are pretty pleased with the most recent election results in Greece (May 6, 2012). For the first time, the far-right Hrisi Avgi Party (Golden Dawn) has won seats in Parliament, receiving a surprising 7 percent of the votes in last week’s Greek elections.

The Golden Dawn’s supporters are enjoying this winning moment. Nikolaos Michaloliakos, chair of the party, which places particular emphasis upon nationalism, in his first press statement, said: “Beware! We are coming,” and further questioned the patriotism of the media and of other parties.

The Independent Greeks Party led by Panos Kamenos is also pleased with the results, with 10.5 percent of the votes. This party was set up a few months ago by those who left the center-right New Democracy Party. The new party was created in opposition to the austerity plan, which was devised by the troika of the European Union, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank. The party’s discourse is also based on extremism. They perceive the West and the neighboring countries - particularly Macedonia and Turkey - as sources of major problems. Kamenos frequently draws attention to the danger posed by aliens, the West which allegedly undermines the national interests of Greece, and particularly the Germans.

The far-right People’s Orthodox Rally (LAOS) led by Georgios Karatzaferis, which was represented in the Parliament until the 2012 elections, however, is not satisfied with the results. It failed to pass the 3 percent election threshold. This is seen as the price for their support of the austerity plan offered for Greece’s economic recovery.
Parties that are pleased with the results include those in the Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza), which displayed a surprising performance by receiving 17 percent of the votes, and in turn being ranked second in the overall standing of the parties. Its main policy is to remain within the EU but to reject the memorandum issued by the troika. The young leader of the coalition, Alexis Tsipras did not make it clear how to achieve this. What he implied was that the coalition would stand against the EU plan so that the troika would not insist on the implementation of the plan. The political standing held by the Independent Greeks Party is similar to this position: Yes to the EU, no to the memorandum. For this, the troika needs to say, “Let us forget about the memorandum and make resource transfers to Greece.” But this does not seem likely.

The Democratic Left, which received 6 percent of the votes in these elections, could be included in the list of political groups that prefer remaining within the EU without paying the bill. This party, founded two years ago, is also pleased with the election results. The Communist Party, which preserved its popular support with 8.5 percent of the votes, declared its satisfaction with the outcome. The view of this party is clear: It promotes separation from the EU and dismisses the idea of any sort of alliance with the other parties. In other words, the left, which represents 31 percent of the popular vote, is opposed to the memorandum. (It should be noted that 35 percent of the registered voters did not go to the ballots, which means the votes the parties received should be reduced by one-third to calculate actual popular support.)

As for the disappointed...

And of course some parties are disappointed with the election results. The two center parties which have ruled the country for decades experienced a grave defeat in the election. Both took part in the implementation of the memorandum. Even if they form a coalition government, they will not be able to secure a majority in the 300-seat parliament. Their deputies number 108 and 41, respectively. (The New Democracy Party won 50 extra seats because of its first-place finish). The three liberal parties should also be included in the list of parties displeased with the election outcome. Dora Bakoyannis’ Democratic Alliance, Stefanos Manos’ Action-Liberal Alliance and Thanos Tzimeros’ ReCreate Greece party failed to pass the 3 percent election threshold (2.6 percent, 1.7 percent and 2 percent, respectively).

These three parties promoted the same argument: that the memorandum should be observed in order to remain within the EU and the euro currency; in other words, harsh measures and structural transformation are inevitable. Despite strong efforts, the three parties failed to make a pact, most probably out of personal ambitions and in the end the liberal political line was left out of parliament.
This overall outlook is not promising for Greece. There are two major problems going on in the country. Above all, it is now hard to form a majority government. Theoretically, it is possible that the New Democracy, PASOK and maybe the Democratic Left parties could form a coalition. However, even if this is achieved, they will need to make tough decisions on economic measures in the days to come; it is doubtful that the Democratic Left will extend support to the implementation of the memorandum. But the actual problem is different. The total popular support for those who opposed the memorandum is above 50 percent. In particular, leftist forces control the unions. These forces, which have prevented the structural transformations envisaged in the memorandum through street demonstrations and strikes, have become more popular. Following the elections, the legitimacy of the supporters of the memorandum has come into question. This suggests that force may be used as an instrument outside parliament. In other words, it is doubtful as to whether a government will be able to rule the country effectively.

In addition, it also seems that there are problems with the relations between Greece and the EU. There will be problems within the EU if Greece decides not to implement the austerity plan. It is not easy for European politicians to convince their voters to finance Greece through further taxes. Leniency in the implementation of the plan will attract the attention of countries experiencing similar problems, including Ireland, Portugal and Spain, which would likely make similar requests. It does not seem possible for the EU to change its policy at the moment.

The EU and the IMF are already signaling that they are determined to insist on the implementation of the plan. There is almost no room for changes to the set of measures. There is a big difference and disagreement between the opponents of the memorandum and the troika. While the Greek political actors and society believe that the memorandum is the main cause of the ongoing problems, the EU considers it the outcome of the crisis. Holding early elections is not seen as a plausible solution. An early election will most probably make the opponents of the memorandum stronger. It is also possible that the crisis will get out of control because if an agreement is not made with the troika, the financial aid needed to address the budget deficit may be blocked or suspended. And if this happens, the state may not be able to pay salaries.

Since respect for the Greek people’s preference is a requirement of democracy, the possibility of such an option should not be viewed as unlikely. In such a scenario, it is also possible that Greece will leave the euro and issue its own national currency in order to pay state salaries. But, of course, Greece will not be able to pay its debts and receive loans from external sources. And this will exacerbate the overall economic crisis. In other words, the final word will come from outside the country and the EU will have to make a decision on how to proceed with respect to Greece.
Leadership syndrome

By

H. MILLAS

Today’s Zaman, 5 July 2012
As I was sorting through books on the early years of the Turkish Republic to outline a subject, I took another look at the textbooks of the 1930s. I became intrigued with the issue of leadership. I thought that when the books aim to describe a historical period, they actually tell more about the internal world of the writers. These writers might not have even understood the period they lived in or their own prejudices. However, what they wrote reflects their perceptions.

In the 1931 textbook “Türkiye Cumhuriyeti” (Turkish Republic), Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic) was naturally and fairly praised, as at that time a painful social adventure had finished thanks to his leadership. But why was the praise so extreme? Atatürk was not only depicted as a model ruler who rose to the top of the heap but also as a person who acts on behalf of the entire nation and bears mysterious powers. The writers of the textbook view Atatürk in this light and assume it is correct to pass their views on to the students. I felt ready to admit the exaggerations of the 1930s but I suspected that there are today people who still share similar views. I started to read through the book more carefully.

The Hat Law of 1925, one of the most important of the reforms, is described in the book as follows: On Aug. 24, 1925, Mustafa Kemal sets off from Ankara towards Kastamonu. “As was known nationwide, before taking a decision he used to go out on a trip; so what his journey was going to lead to was a matter of curiosity.” He appears in Kastamonu “with a Panama hat in his hand while the cheering ‘long live the great leader!’ goes on.” So far no one had thought that the
“fez could be removed at a stroke.” The public (according to the book) “felt relieved that they were getting rid of the fez.” That night “the public relentlessly cheered him by taking off the fez, the sarık (turban) and the ağbani (a type of turban).” Mustafa Kemal delivers his renowned speech about headwear. According to the book, “public confederations applauded him saying, ‘Long live our opinion guide!’” After the speech, the tailors of Kastamonu started sewing hats night and day. Then M. Kemal travels to İnebolu and there the public shouted, “We are ready for whatever you want.” During this journey, the tekkes (Islamic monasteries) are “asked to close themselves down immediately, voluntarily.” The book says that while all of this was taking place “the public responded in accordance with the pledge that every signal by the Leader was to be considered an order.” On September 2 the Representative Assembly (Vekiller Heyeti) gathered and the relevant decrees were released (pp. 231-238). In other words, after the leader stated his decision, everyone was mobilized and the decision was put into practice within a week.

The leader(ship) in schoolbooks

What interests me is how these actions were perceived. The importance attributed to the leadership of Atatürk is surprising. The abolishment of the caliphate was announced on March 1, 1924, via a sermon and the required laws were enacted on March 3 “after a hot debate that endured for five hours.” The legitimacy of the leader taking such initiatives and his ability to enact change immediately is explained in the book as follows: The leading party had a special characteristic: “not a group of people but the entire nation was a part of the leading party” (p.168). We can understand Atatürk’s characteristic nature from a young doctor’s address to him: “You are not only an individual but an entire nation. Your personality and party are the personality and party of the whole nation. M. Kemal, long live!” Mustafa Kemal listens to these and adds only a couple of sentences: “The staff of the Republican People’s Party consists of members of the entire nation. Those who can’t grasp this fact are the unfortunate few who can’t accustom themselves to this understanding.” (p.174)

These thoughts were developed in 1925 and were expressed in the textbooks of the 1930s. For years, such statements about Atatürk have been repeated at schools. However, such an image of a leader should not be only the product of Turkish Republic. There should be a background. Maybe it was the result of a “sultan” and “padişah” culture; maybe the “sheikh” and “baba” (celebrated leaders in Sufism) tradition; the habits concerning “mursid-murid” (mursids are spiritual guides in Sufism and murids are those who commit to them); the traditional family’s strict hierarchy and its legacy; the lack of individualism – the creation of the Enlightenment; maybe it is the combined effect of all these factors. The republican regime couldn’t brush these understandings aside but sustained them.
This is the way I can explain why and how leaders interfere in individuals' private lives, in personal choices and in the family lives of others; why the leaders feel they have the legitimacy to behave like this: these are due to a legacy of authoritarianism from which the people cannot free themselves. In the aforementioned book we read the following sentence: “The core of social life is the family life. I will not say many things about our women, about our men. I will utter only a few words and you will immediately understand what I mean” (p. 227). From now on what was uttered about this issue is of a secondary significance. What is of importance is the didactic and authoritarian way of speaking of the leaders who are meant to fulfill the public's wishes and defend the weak and the minorities against possible oppression by the strong.

The padişah, the murşid, the intellectual tyrants, the authoritarian politicians and each link of the military-like tutelary chain have always been “pedagogical” and “moral” in a self-proclaimed way and interfering with the citizens’ privacy. The reason and legitimacy of this drive do not need to be very persuasive.

Convenient excuses can satisfactorily relieve the leaders’ consciences. But the individual who feels oppressed has nowhere to hide. He is alone and defenseless. Referring to such situations as “a necessity of democracy” or “the will of the majority” is a rationalization, just like the “a necessity of science” was once used as a rationalization. The situations mirror each other. The actual reason for interference in private lives is the “leadership syndrome.” It is the fact that interfering is considered normal and acceptable by the leader, by the people around the leader and by the society as well. The syndrome is internalized by those around the leader and it is difficult to be recognized. The syndrome then turns into a tradition.

Has it ever happened that such leaders, big or small, realized their position and changed themselves? What does “respect for traditions” mean? Can’t a person be allowed to reject tradition? What do those who oppose the person that opposes tradition represent? Don’t we remain unchanged if we don’t leave our traditions behind? While leafing through the textbook, I thought about these questions. However, the book didn’t even have these questions, let alone the answers.

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Until that day...

By

H. MİLLAS

Today's Zaman, 29 August 2012
Debates over Islam and Islamicism tend to center around the topic of “rights,” as various factions see them. What will befall the “others”? How will the lifestyles of people with different beliefs be affected? Will that which is seen as the “true/legitimate/normal” way by some be followed by all?

Will implementation of new ways be “forced” - and, if so, who will supervise this implementation, and how will they actually be made legitimate? Might there not be more than one right way at a time? In the end, questions like these turn into a problem of the actual exercise of rights. I suppose most people sharing their views on these topics have similar concerns, but there are also those who view this topic differently. Some bring them to the agenda as a result of their religious beliefs and duties. One can immediately sense the existence of these different perspectives in debates and arguments: Some refer to religious texts to support their arguments, while others use principles - generally secular - from the modern world around them.

It is generally impossible to come to an agreement as to “what is right” on this topic. After all, it is due to basic differences in principles that this dialogue and all its disagreements exist. The arguments are almost always rooted in personally accepted philosophies. In other words, we are talking about beliefs. People have the right to their beliefs; this is something with which most people agree. And as part of this right to perceive the world as they like, people also have the right to envision the world, the future and the society around them as they wish. In fact, this right also means that a person has the right to “wish that everyone else would accept the way he or she sees things.” Note, however, that I said the right to “wish,” not to “force.”

In the end, the problem comes to rest on this simple question: “How can we exist together?” Because whether or not people like or accept it, differences do exist between us all, and we can all see these differences, and have come to the point of accepting their existence. The real question lies not in which principles one bases right or wrong; after all, everyone perceives their own “right way” as the “most and only right way.” As it is, the question of which principles are right or wrong could lead us towards a sort of tyrannical positivism; even though those participating in this debate do not look warmly upon positivism, whether it is the positivism of the East or the West.
The debate should thus be carried out on a different arena altogether. How do we all live together without damaging our own views, our convictions, our beliefs, our dreams for the future, our private lives? How do we do this without rejecting our authentic identities? I actually found a stance that is similar to my own on these matters in a column by Ali Bulaç published on Sept. 3, 2011. As Bulaç expressed it, the real reason for the problems experienced by members of the society who are in some way different from the majority - for example, by non-Muslims in Turkey - lies in “Turkey’s using the West as a reference point, and thus removing non-Muslim members of the society from the ‘millet’ system, and instead sticking them into a status as minority members.” In his column, Bulaç says quite plainly that he rejects the reference points taken from the West. He writes: “Those who regularly follow this column know that I have written over and over about how the ‘Western idea of absolutely equal citizenship’ is in fact not a solution to the various clashes we experience between ethnicities, sects and identities. A constitutional citizenship which takes absolute equal citizenship as its basis only places the current problems into new molds, where they can multiply and continue on. What ought really to be taken as a reference is a new view of citizenship or nationality which places people as equals in the face of the law, but which also takes socio-cultural differences as its basis.”

Equal citizenship even when beliefs are different

As for me, I am not on the side of “a stance that takes socio-cultural differences as its basis.” Instead I favor “citizenship that takes absolute equality as its basis.” I agree with the Western perspective on this front. But in his column, Bulaç manages to solve the deadlock created by these differing references of ours.

Bulaç writes: “However, until this [ideal situation] is brought about, it is the natural right of all those non-Muslims who live within national borders in peace to be treated as ‘equal citizens’ like all others.” I believe the key words in this sentence are “until this is brought about.” Each one of us may carry around our own ideals in our minds. There are the Kemalists, nationalists, social democrats, socialists, Islamicists, liberals, conservatives and people of all different religions, and all of these different factions may have different expectations for the future, different dreams and hopes. And, of course, these are all factions which may view the past differently, and will have different points of reference to one another. But until “these ideals are brought about,” it is certainly possible to do what is necessary to ensure that people can coexist. Whether or not the reference points are the same, the practical implementation of the principle of “equal citizenship” will satisfy all. After coming to an agreement on this equality, and even bringing about this equality in practice, pursuing the “why’s” and exploring the points of
Rather than placing constant focus on our own ideals - on the leaders we favor, the principles we favor - it would be more beneficial to talk about ways of living together and trying to relocate those ways when we become lost. In doing this, the real question moves away from the contest to decide who is right and who is wrong and moves into a totally new arena. If only we would each work on our own relations with others - with neighbors, with friends, even with those we don’t know well - we would make such great strides. For example, what do we do when our daughters do or do not wish to wear headscarves, or when they fall in love with young men from other sects of our belief? How do we approach our neighbors when they do not join us in celebrating the same holidays? What do we say to families who do not wish to see their children take the same religion lessons as the other children at school, as they may be from a different religion? Will we arrange for Quran lessons for some, even when there are those who do not wish to see them taught? Do we invite neighbors who drink alcohol on their balconies into our Muslim homes? These sorts of questions bring the practical aspects of this problem to our attention and force us to think about how we should act and behave until our ideal worlds “are brought about.” And so the real problem moves away from the question of who is right and instead focuses on how we can make our surroundings harmonious. In choosing this path and this approach, we may encounter some surprises. We may see that even those with the most extreme beliefs and ideologies are able to bring about harmonious relations.

There are some who refer to this as “tolerance.” But what we call it is not important; what is important is what we are searching for, and the real goals and objectives of our dialogue. It will only become clear after a long while - perhaps after 100 years, perhaps thousands of years later - who was right. And there is no way that we can ever prove this to one another at this present time. Thus our real job now is to learn to coexist, at least until our ideal worlds are “brought about.”
The underdeveloped nature of the Ottoman state has been so over-discussed that it is not easy to add original arguments to this discussion. Still, I am going to try, concentrating on the
argument that religious fanaticism was the main setback.

While I do not know much about what the Ottoman Empire was, I do have some ideas on what it was not. According to some philosophers of science proving what is not true is quite easy, but proving that something is true is much more difficult. For example, you cannot prove the thesis that “swans are always white” simply by showing how many white swans there are around; doubts will linger in people’s minds. Someone might say: “Who knows? Tomorrow we might encounter a black swan.” On the other hand, a single black swan can disprove the “white swans” thesis.

When it comes to the possible reasons of the underdeveloped condition of the Ottoman state, it can be easily shown that the reason for this status was not “religion” as is often claimed. If Islam had been the fault then in the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries Muslim societies would not have been so advanced while the Christian ones lagged behind. If religions were behind the good, the advanced and the successful - as well as to the contrary, the bad, the backward and the failures – faiths would have displayed their characteristics from the time they emerged until today. Associating religion directly to “underdevelopment” or “development” seems fairly meaningless. Religions do not guarantee neither success nor failure.

However, there will always be some Christians or Muslims who will refer to their religion and argue that “our religion was (or is) wrongly implemented and that is why we had been in the past (or we are presently) so underdeveloped.” The same, but mirror-image mentality will be used by both sides in reference to their own societies and beliefs. This mentality is worth noting carefully.
Out of the 2,000-year history of the Christian religion, for example, certain periods and sections that seem appropriate may be chosen to highlight and claim to be representative to Christianity: “This is Christianity!”. If one wants to portray Christianity as successful, periods such as the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution or the Enlightenment may be chosen. If failure is needed to be “proved” one will focus on the courts of the Inquisition or the ignorance of the Middle Ages. This is the eclectic aspect to perceiving history: Choosing and pointing to that which works while ignoring and silencing that which does not work. As for the question “Why our religion did not have the power and the will to prevent wrong doings?” is not asked.

Defining “underdeveloped” status

This is the wrong way of thinking. It is much more difficult, however, to talk about what is the right way. This is because we are faced with the reality of an Ottoman state that was really “underdeveloped” and the West which is now very “advanced.” There is the constant need for a model that can explain these things. But from the very start, it is necessary to define the terms “advanced” and “underdeveloped.”

There is a sort of tension between technological developments and an overarching ethical state. Attempts to follow, to explain or to copy that which has “developed” can create doubts and lack of trust when it comes to identities. Favored lifestyles can change from person to person, and thus the idea of what makes for a “model society” may not be open to consensus. Despite everything, the most important priority for some people may be to believe in their own world views and thus “concrete realities” may not interest them. In other words, this topic in a sense may not be even open to debate because in the end it may be too tangled up in our personal identities and preferences.
These questions nagged my mind. In particular, the very widespread view I encountered while living in the western reaches of Turkey that “it is because of Islam that the East and particularly Turkey has not developed” seemed to contain some fallacies. What do “underdevelopment” or “backwardness” actually mean? These terms seem to imply that societies “normally” should develop, almost as a necessity. In cases that progress does not occur for any reason this is seeing as a surprising abnormality. In other words, if looked at with this mentality, Europe’s development is the “norm” and those who do not move in harmony with it are questioned. The question asked is: Why were some underdeveloped, why didn’t they develop?

The European exception

The truth, though, is that (Western) Europe is an exception. Almost the rest of the world is “backward”! All of Africa, all of Asia, and all of South America, are left out of Europe’s development. “Development” occurred in Western Europe and in the places and the societies that were directly connected to Europe, like North America and Australia. The right question to ask is not in fact “Why some are underdeveloped?” but rather “How did a small number of countries make a leap?” The development we have seen over the last century is not in fact “normal” but rather exceptional.
This same situation unfolded in ancient Greece. A very cultural atmosphere occurred “all of a sudden,” especially in the areas of philosophy and literature. While in other places in the world “normal” lives and ways carried on, ancient Greece experienced an “advanced” atmosphere - though one which disappeared in a manner that could also be considered sudden. As it is with the case of ancient Greece, the question should not be “Why did the world not follow Athens?” but rather “What happened in Athens that led to the birth of this atmosphere?”

Incorrect questions impede the right answers. The question “Why are we underdeveloped?” infers the oblique message that “we are behind and abnormal”, too. And this is not something easy for people to swallow. The acceptance being underdeveloped is neither easy nor beneficial for a society. Societies which lose their self-confidence enter into a mindset that “the essence of ours causes us to be behind” and this leads to other problems.

Those struck by being accused of being “backward” may turn defensive and even aggressive, which can in turn produce a completely opposite thesis: No, it is not us but rather you who are backward! The “reasons” of the “West-East” differences and being developed or not will be dealt with in my next column!

**Why could the West develop**

**but not the East?**
We all pretty much know how the “West” developed: the Renaissance and the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the accompanying discoveries, inventions, colonialism and imperialism. Why have these things happened in the geographical region we refer to as the West but escaped the other regions of the world?
It is utterly flawed to link development to the so-called superiority of races or religions. If it were this simple, less advanced nations would not move forward over time and advanced nations would not be subject to regression after a while. In one of my previous articles, I tried to clarify that due to our national identity we are unable to adopt a neutral perspective on advancement or underdevelopment. For instance, we like to see ourselves as superior to others or perceive others as less successful. As a matter of fact, all national education systems in all nation states are built upon this premise. Consequently, we attempt to outfox others with regard to the criteria of success and advancement. Thus, we either adopt a selective approach to history choosing those elements we like and consider the rest as secondary or we fabricate criteria for “advancement” as we wish. In the end, we see prejudiced interpretations dominate both the West and the East.

It is easy to define developments but difficult to explain their reasons. The whole matter is complicated and there are virtually no completely convincing theses on it. The theses that are in wide circulation are racist, nationalist and religion-oriented explanations to which the “we are superior” mentality is pivotal. When this “we are superior” mindset is swept aside, we are left with historical and social reasons. The ones that I find the most convincing are as follows:

The literacy of societies is a major factor. When we look at the visible difference between the north and the south of Europe from this angle, we see the ensuing picture emerge. In the 1850s, it was possible to group the peoples of the European countries into three main categories: those with a rate of literacy above 70 percent (Denmark, Norway, Germany, Switzerland, etc.), those where this rate was between 70 and 50 percent, and those where this rate was below 50 percent (Italy, Spain, Romania, the Balkan countries). In 1913, the situation had improved somewhat and those countries in the middle group were promoted to the first group (England, Austria and France, for example). However, those which were “backward” in the 1850s are still Europe’s problematic countries after 160 years. (Hobsbawm, “The Age Of Empire: 1875-1914” Abacus, p. 345). The argument that the main problem revolves around education has some merit, but we still cannot explain why education could not be improved.
An interpretation of history at variance with ‘national’ history

A historian sees Europe (and Japan) being special in terms of “development.” According to this view, the feudal social structure and the lack of a powerful center created a “free” environment. In this setting, the families and dynasties that were capable of accumulating wealth formed the first capital cores. The emergence of capitalism and the Industrial Revolution in the West prevented the rest of the world from developing in the same manner. (Braudel, “Civilization and Capitalism,” Fontana, p. 2, 592, 533)

Such explanations do not seek to associate social dynamics with races or religions of people. The contradictions and inconsistencies of this thesis are fewer. Nations’ “heritages” - i.e., their cultural pasts - are certainly important and this past must be kept in mind in attempting to explain fast developments. However, it is rather flawed to explain the developments that last for thousands of years with reference to “culture.” Over the long haul, culture cannot explain developments; instead, social developments that lasted over long periods explain culture. Of course, such sociological explanations tend to be at variance with the national stories people love to hear. As is the case with all identity-oriented explanations, national interpretations provide people with a sense of pride. Yet, when our “past” is retold as economic, historical and, most importantly, social developments that go beyond basic human character (and human “essence”), the “allure” of our past is undermined! In such cases, people no longer search for the truth but for mental peace. A good example is “A Global History: From Prehistory to the Present,” a book written by Greek-Canadian historian Leften Stavros Stavrianos (1913-2004).

The distinguished scholar’s book created much reaction and controversy. He did not place Greece at the center of the world; rather, he discussed the country as any other country. As he was talking about human species, he referred to Charles Darwin. However, I think his most striking thesis was the one explaining the developments in the West. For him, the empires in the East had established powerful states with effective central administrations, such as the Byzantine and Ottoman states, which survived for more than 1,000 and 600 years, respectively. However, in the West, after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, small cities created a different environment. Every city established its own administration and started to compete with one another. Different ideas clashed. City councils emerged as the preliminary cores of democratic governments. In this environment and over a long time, a dynamism that could not be found in the East was seen; the discoveries and inventions that were the driving forces of development were the result of this dynamism. Empires were powerful, but they were simultaneously clumsy structures that were not open to development and different views in the long term.
The straw that finally broke the camel’s back was Stavrianos’ interpretation of history that did not correspond well with the “national” history: “If the Byzantine Empire had not defended itself and had not survived in the face of Arab attacks in the eighth century, the positive developments of the West could have emerged in these lands as well.” Yet, according to the contemporary Greek state that unquestioningly adopts Byzantine history and heritage, the successful wars against the Arabs comprise “the glorious pages of national Greek history.” He faced harsh criticisms and his book was not read at schools but rejected instead. Now, do I have the leeway to suggest that if the Ottomans had not united the Anatolian prince demes, they might not have conquered lands up to Vienna, but Anatolia itself would have experienced a sort of Renaissance or industrial revolution?


What’s changed in Greece

By

H. MİLLAS

Today’s Zaman, 9 December 2012
Employees of the Technological Education Institute display a banner reading

“Enough. No to firings, I've had enough” in Athens on Nov. 30.

For three years Greece has been on the world’s agenda. She is famous, in fact it might be more correct to say notorious. The country is on the brink of bankruptcy; according to many she is already bankrupt. Watching this unfold is both interesting and saddening. Unemployment, the uneasiness about the future, the rage, lack of confidence and the resulting widespread pessimism prevail.

Habits are changing, but slowly. To begin with, expenses that can be counted as luxuries are being cut, some purchases are being postponed, workplaces that can barely hold on are closing, children’s allowances are being debated; old pensioners are struggling to live as they did 10 years ago, the unemployed are relying more on their families, young people are asking their elders about how to get a job abroad, vacations are spent at old family homes in villages instead of on islands.

These are interesting changes taking place in daily life and are a sign of what’s to come. Who are these changes working to the advantage of, and who are they working against? I see these changes break down into five basic categories: 1. an increased awareness of finance and numbers; 2. acquired rights; 3. the heavy wounds of the Greek political sphere; 4. the increasing amount of racism; and 5. the discussion of violence. Let us take a closer look at these issues.
To learn the existence of figures and accounting is an important breakthrough, one on par with the discovery of fire. For decades, economic figures such as income, expenditures, budget explanations and debt figures were never written about in Greek newspapers. Political races focused on the topic of which party was closer to the people. Who would increase wages, who would employ people, who would extend which businesses’ lines of credit, what type of support the government would give to different segments of society were oft-discussed, but what was never mentioned was the money that would be used. Above all, how the money would be provided was never mentioned, or vague statements like “taxes will prevent smuggling” were made. The intent was basic and aimed at one segment of the society, but insinuated that if the one segment did well everyone would benefit.

Recently, newspapers have been filled with numeric news bulletins. Information on the budget deficit, unemployment rates, how civil servants must be removed from their jobs so as not to increase taxes, interest rates, cuts being pushed by the Troika, foreign debt, the scope of the government’s privatization scheme, and the amount of civil servants’ pay are all being discussed. Watching the news is both difficult and grueling. However this must be counted as a very positive development, to have learned about finance and the importance of numbers.

The second big change is the recognition of situations in which those who had “acquired rights” which were actually not earned. Those that worked for the government - those working in the private sector already knew a bit about this - considered their salaries to be their most reliable, unalterable possession. For decades they understood that incomes would increase faster than inflation, that there was no way they would be decreased, even as they watched the rise and fall of the market in the capitalist system they were a part of. But they finally saw that the market economy could cause enough insecurity that it could even touch civil servants. This is a huge awakening and the end of an enjoyable dream.

**The defeat of Greek politics**

The great injury conceded by the Greek political realm, racism gaining ground and the discourse surrounding violence have all become intertwined and are developments that are feeding one another. Politicians have lost their prestige as a result of bad administration. Actually, it is more accurate to say that they have made fools of themselves. Public surveys have demonstrated that voters do not trust politicians. Even the most successful of politicians has the trust of only 20 percent of the population. As a result of this negative outcome, the far right, which is considered “outside” the system, suddenly made itself felt in the political arena.
Chrisi Avgi (Golden Dawn) along with his aides - let’s call them “military brigades” - suddenly started attacking foreign workers with aides by their side. But the sad part of this is that they are occupying the arena of public order, which has been abandoned by the state. They, in essence, took over for the state, which for years has not done very much regarding foreign workers. In a few weeks they “purged” city centers of foreign workers by beating, knifing and even killing them. And we frequently witnessed support by the public of this muscle flexing. According to public surveys and research in the last few months, the only force that increased its support base is this “political” movement, which has a Nazi-like body.

The far right was not an unknown entity in Greece. However, these “military brigades,” which took on state leadership and exerted physical force, shocked many people. And the government has now rolled up its sleeves on illegal workers. It has rolled up its sleeves in an effort to have them gathered in camps. However, Golden Dawn continues to provide its “services,” for free at that. According to what I have learned from papers in Greece, a patient who complained to the hospital manager about a doctor who asked for a bribe was encouraged by the manager of the facility to “go ahead, file a lawsuit if you like.” The patient then resorted to Golden Dawn, who injured the doctor, ironically, placing him in hospital.

Violence is being increasingly discussed as of late. Everyone is against it. However, discourse on the topic differs. While some are opposed to the violence coming from the Nazi-like formations, some are saying that the “shade” of violence really shouldn’t matter. This claim argues that those in the last few years who have pushed aside the law, blocked off roads, set things on fire, passed free through roads requiring payment, rushed “right wing” theaters not allowing plays to take to the stage, chased and beaten employees that wanted to actually work in workplaces, harassed and taken hostage faculty members at universities, occupied ministries and other state buildings have all in their own ways legitimized violence. And this view I agree with. Those who have resorted to type of acts I just listed state that their “motives are different,” but this argument is refuted by those who say that despite the reason they are still utilizing the same violent tactics of those who oppose them. Both sides, in a way, see themselves as having good intentions: On the one hand there is the work being done for a more “egalitarian order,” while on the other it’s for the “benefit of the nation.” This curse of a crisis is better than advice. These changes and new lessons will be beneficial in the long run. They can even function as useful lessons for other countries and peoples as well.

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There are lessons to be learned from neighboring Greece's experience with the European Union. The EU has transformed the country a lot, for some in a positive way, for others in a very negative direction. In this article, I will try not to jump to a conclusion by making a black or white choice between the two. However, I first have to evaluate this black or white approach. Decisions people make are based on right/wrong, yes/no, or black/white. For example, you either hire a job applicant or not, marry a person or not, like and invite a person to your house or not, buy an apartment or not. Decisions are black or white in nature. A decision is either 100 percent yes or 100 percent no, and there is no third choice.

However, situations are not like decisions at all. A job applicant could be 70 percent
appropriate, the candidate for being the groom might have a few flaws along with many virtues, you could regret not buying an apartment or inviting a person to your place during your whole life and ask yourself whether you did the right thing or not. However, tons of decisions we make every day are based on that 100 percent principle. The answers we look for and the conclusions we reach in the EU case are either “yes, the EU is good” or “no, the EU is bad.” However, even though our decisions will be based on a black or white dichotomy, our method of thinking and analysis should not be so. We could call the black or white approach an instance of biased thinking as well.

One of the leading negative impacts of the EU is that it changed the country at a very fast pace. In addition, the Greeks found themselves with excessively easy loans and cheap money. The standard of living rose rapidly as the salaries and pensions increased above the rate of inflation. Certain jobs were outsourced to foreign workers. The expectations for a better life went hand-in-hand with an expectation that it could be achieved with less effort. Business life could not adapt to the rapid change. Governments chose incurring massive debt to meet expectations. As a result, a situation that recalls circumstances from "Hannibal in Capua" arose. Hannibal defeats the Roman forces and spends the winter comfortably in the town of Capua in southern Italy. However, after that, his army was not victorious. It is said that “comfort” ruined the army's fighting spirit.

When the financial crisis began in Greece, the society - which was resistant to difficulties in the country's recent history - had a hard time adapting to the new conditions. In other words, either the EU signaled wrong messages or Greece opted to hear the wrong ones. For instance, billions of Euros were given to the country so that investments could be made or structural changes could take place, but the money was used for consumption. It is still debated whether this erroneous policy is a fault of the EU or of the Greek politicians.

Looking at EU membership privileges

On the contrary, Greece has enjoyed many privileges that came along with its EU membership. In terms of politics, in this country that saw many military takeovers in the past century, the era of coups d'état ended. It is largely thanks to the domestic laws but also within the EU family that no one even contemplates military coups as an option. In fact, the Greek membership in the EU (formerly known as the European Economic Community [EEC]) was primarily desired with political motives by both Europe and Greece: The country needed to have close ties with the West in the face of a communist threat.
Greece is now faithful to democracy. However, democracy is still troubled and not complete. The problems in this regard stem from the society that failed to adapt to the abovementioned rapid changes. (Frequent violent incidents and racist behavior are examples of this.) Against all odds, however, which direction to go is obvious. The Greek society is looking towards the West and aspires to adopt the positive features of the West. There is no other alternative. Those with a different outlook are marginal groups. Even those who oppose the EU's policies abstain from proposing another route.

The positive developments enabled by the EU membership are in countless, small yet important areas that cannot be seen at first glance but are life-changing. The amendments that allowed all state institutions to function could not have been established by Greece alone and they have been realized thanks to EU standards. State-citizen relations have changed in a much better way. From TV to tenders, from banking to the municipal system, all kinds of economic activities have become more transparent. Free movement of people within the EU borders made every Greek citizen more European. In other words, the Greeks transformed from being members of a closed society into being citizens who are able to establish close ties with others. Arguably the most important of all is that the country now has an example to follow.

These all mean that the Greek public finally said “yes” to the EU; but this answer was not given because the EU brought only 100 percent positive outcomes. The EU was both useful and harmful in various areas. I have tried to say that it would not really make sense to reach a conclusion on whether the EU is completely good or bad. Such a monochromatic conclusion will be open to demagogy. It is easy for one to pick examples that suit his or her argument best. We should both see the overall picture and analyze the percentage of positive and negative aspects.

If Greece is ever to rid itself of the crisis, it will be thanks to the EU's help. A future outside the EU holds much uncertainty and risk. Similar comments can be made for Turkey as well. The EU is neither solely a good thing nor a bad thing in itself: This depends on how opportunities are used. An answer of “yes” to the EU can be uttered as long as opportunities are used relatively well. Even if the EU does not promise welfare 100 percent, one should be able to say “100 percent yes” when he or she says “yes.” Analysis of the EU can be made with percentages and details, but the final decision can be nothing except a “yes” or a “no.” Any other answer would be invalid, as is the case with any marriage ceremony.

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Racist attacks in Greece

By

H. MILLAS

Bangladeshi and Greek workers demonstrate outside the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection to protest the shooting of 28 migrant workers, most of whom were from Bangladesh.

I know what will follow: There will be official declarations, the police and the prosecutor will be
mobilized and some will be arrested. The situation, however, will not change. Racism will not subside. Not only because its roots are deep, but because still it is not noticed; its existence is not recognized; the notion that “racism does not exist in this country” is widespread.

In the western part of the Peloponnesus, laborers from Bangladesh who work in the fields were shot last week because, reportedly, they asked to be paid. Many were wounded, some seriously. They had not received their earnings for six months. When they asked for payment for working overtime, they were threatened with claims that the authorities would be contacted and they would be deported from the country. When migrant workers protested collectively, they were shot by people wielding shotguns. There are thousands who work under these conditions in Greece. According to official declarations, this kind of situation is against the law. I gather the understanding is that once the laws are good, the state has no other responsibilities. As for the local people living in the area, they say that they get along well with the foreign workers and that this incident is an “isolated” one.

There are hundreds and thousands of illegal foreign workers in Greece - thousands in the cities, hundreds in the towns and tens in each village. They work in jobs that the Greeks do not like to do - in spite of the economic crisis. Most of them do not have work permits. They have no documents of any kind and, as a consequence no voice, either. Their employers take advantage of this situation. They pay them a low wage and refrain from paying the total due, if they so please. I have noticed that curtailing the total amount is a widespread practice. The understanding that “You work illegally, so you have to pay for this,” is somehow stoically accepted by the laborers, too. The illegal workers do not risk facing the authorities so that they may receive a relatively small amount. But even if they did want to complain, to whom could they apply?

This situation is accepted and tolerated by the wider society. These shy foreigners serve the local people perfectly, they cost little and they are totally obedient. When a disagreement occurs they are reminded that they are illegal. This illegality is not taken into consideration when they are being employed. Hypocrisy prevails in this deal. I think racism characterizes the whole situation.

This last racist incident was heard worldwide. It was “condemned” in Greece. Naturally, it shocked the Greek public and it has been widely protested - with officials especially declaring their opposition to such acts and condemning racism. These reflexes are surely sincere, but their beneficial outcome is disputable. The most popular motto has been, “The country is discredited; our image was harmed!” This shows how the problem is still not understood. The issue is one of human rights, not one of image. Unless this becomes clear, the solution will be
examined from irrelevant angles: Who said what? Who wrote what?

How to protect the country?

I often remember what a Greek diplomat said: “We diplomats have been trained and assigned to act like lawyers: Right or wrong, we defend our country.” Many people behave like that, too, trying to protect their country. So they present each racist incident as an “isolated” one, trying to downplay it. They think that this way they are helping their home country. They also ask others not to bring forward these kinds of events to save “us” from harm. I am not a diplomat, and if I ever were to act as a lawyer, I would prefer to defend human beings over national flags.

The reputation of a country cannot be preserved by sweeping problems under the carpet. In our world, which has been turned into a huge village, no one can fool everybody for long. Such an effort is harmful for the country in the long run, because the citizens start believing that they are altogether free from vices. That is why the escalating racism in Greece should be brought to our attention often. These “isolated” incidents recently have been occurring quite often. It is why the voices that shout “Racism is on the rise in our country!” are the ones that protect the honor and image of the country. Such voices are the signs of consciousness in this area.

Germany is exemplary in this. It has clearly settled its accounts with the racist aspect of its history, and now it can proudly face the world. An attitude of, “Our society is not racist; these were isolated incidents,” would have created a negative image and a negative reputation for Germany. Racism in our world today is widespread. It is more dangerous when this is not recognized and is denied.

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Violence is a rule in life. Living beings eat each other, particularly in the animal world. Coexistence is an exception in this world. But people have always acted in a conscientious manner to change this trend. Philosophers, clerics, political thinkers and ordinary people have tried to formulate rules and establish a system to prevent this. And they have been successful to a certain extent.

But there is still violence. When some people linked to the far-right, or the neo-Nazi Greek party Golden Dawn, recently knifed a young person to death in broad daylight in Athens, Greece started to debate how to oppose violence. Although everyone stood against violence, it soon became clear that there was no agreement on the definition of violence. I found this debate interesting, instructive and beneficial, so I am writing this article.

It appears that some people have a violence scale in their minds. Thus, certain acts are regarded as violent if they pass above a certain level. Knifing or beating someone to death is
considered violence, but slander or making a rude remark or hurling threats are considered normal behavior.

Another source of disagreement is on “legitimate” violence. Police are authorized to resort to violence and the army can even bomb a country. Of course, the resisting groups reject this mentality. They sometimes call it “revolutionary violence,” and the throwing of Molotov cocktails or stones is not considered a problem.

The sphere in which violence occurs is another point of disagreement. Thus, a specific act that is considered an offense in the public sphere can be regarded as part of “house discipline” in the family sphere. Thus, it is an offense for a citizen to beat another citizen, but if a mother beats her child or if a husband beats his wife, this may not be considered violence (at least by some people).

We can also look at violence from the perspective of the law. This area is characterized by total disagreement. Any government can change the law in accordance with its ideology, thereby defining any act as “violent” or “terror” or “a measure taken in the public interest.”

Although in Greece everyone seems to agree that what the Golden Dawn member did was violent, still differing opinions on violence are expressed openly or indirectly. At the same time, political considerations are also involved. Rallying with sticks in hand, which is popular among leftist parties, is not considered violence by some people, but others clearly see it as “violence” as it is a threat based on power. Why do police use tear gas? This question is interpreted differently not only depending on the amount of the gas used and the reason why it was used, but also based on the ideological position of those who answer the question. Accordingly, those who order the police to use tear gas - who are the rulers - and those who are exposed to the gas interpret it differently.

Can different commentators and interest groups come to an agreement and oppose violence? The real question is whether everyone can really and frankly oppose violence. Aren’t there groups that seek to benefit or profit from violence? But what concerns me are those who vilify violence. Do they do so in the name of certain principles, or because they have an interest in doing so? In other words, will they promote other instances of violence in a double standard?
I ask these questions because those who criticize violence tend to be selective. They defame acts of violence perpetrated by their opponents (generally after exaggerating these cases), but define violent acts by their supporters as legitimate, legal, beneficial and inevitable or, if these justifications do not hold, as exceptional, secondary, mild or singular. In a sense, “yours is bad and mine is good.” Those who oppose violence in this manner fail to take note of their shortcomings.

My view is as follows. Violence is not a matter of good or bad or mild or serious. Violence is a form and method of establishing relations with the environment and with human beings. It is even a worldview (Weltanschauung). It is a mood attributable to human beings. Sometimes people just laugh away certain things, in some cases they react unnecessarily with violence. They chew the other side out when just a kind reproach would be enough. Instead of patiently waiting for the tension to ease, they attack immediately. Such cases of violence may come in different doses, but their source is the same: an authoritarian personality, and of course, a lack of democratic understanding. They act with the urge to make other people accept their views as true at all costs. Thus, we can see a commonality between parents who beat their daughters when they come home at a late hour and rulers who bomb neighboring countries: a lack of tolerance.

Several justifications or excuses may be offered for this intolerance: to protect the interests of the country or of the public, to protect honor, to implement laws or not to let threats go unanswered. Yet there are authoritarian people or mentalities at the very heart of violence. To oppose violently the violence from the other side is a method commonly employed by pro-violence people or groups. There are other ways to oppose violence. “Violence breeds violence” can be rephrased as “pro-violence people pave the way for pro-violence people.”

The scale of violence starts at the lowest steps and climbs up to the Golden Dawn. If a mother slaps her child, then that kid will kick the cat in the garden. Do preschool teachers box kids’ ears? Are children made to memorize heroic poems at school? Is bullying appreciated in the neighborhood? Are army privates subjected to violence by sergeants? Do politicians make a premium by stressing the country's power? Is “manhood” associated with quarrels? Is criticism perceived as insults, leading to disputes? If you answered “yes” to these questions, then it means violence is making headway deep into the social fabric. Then incidents that could have been laughed away or dodged with patience will lead to violence.

What the Golden Dawn did was translate a widely accepted mentality into an act. Violence as a political method aims to convert a mood or a theoretical atmosphere into a tangible policy or action plan. All systematic acts of violence originate from or use such an environment. To
oppose violence, one should be wary of all levels of it, starting from the lowest step - for instance, by watching what you say at home. When we criticize, we should criticize the cause, not the effect.

Let us remember the past with an emphasis on the Golden Dawn. First, small groups of children occupied schools, and this was perceived as normal. Then, throwing things at the heads of people who were not tolerated was considered an ordinary act. Next, deputies were beaten, and this was seen as the result of the justified rage of the people. Neighborhood residents attacked the police, and this was justified with reference to the economic crisis. Then, an “agitated” Golden Dawn member knifed someone. We are now looking at the final link in the chain.
YAVUZ BAYDAR
Scandal in Greece: Millas's letter

17 December 2013

My last article on the scandal in Komotini - where journalist Evren Dede, a public figure of the Turkish minority - was arrested after he participated in an event celebrating the 30th anniversary of the first open referendum in Western Thrace.

I also received a letter from Professor Hercules Millas, a dear old friend who was also present at the conference. Here below, I devote my space to his voice:

“I agree with almost everything you wrote about the incident in Western Thrace [Greece], where on Nov. 22-23, a bust of national hero Andreas Papandreou was overturned. There was a flag burning too. This was the result of a police operation after a demo of the Turkish minority.”
“Unfortunately the representative of the ministry harmed the conference almost irrevocably. The Turkish speaking minority...

“Worse, a few days prior to this event the administration of a hospital in the area prohibited patients and doctors...

“I do not agree, however, that ‘no Greek participant, many of them intellectuals, raised an objection,’ that...

“True, one wishes there was wider support for minorities. My intention, however, is not to support a few and...

“Contrary to what it is usually said in Turkey, in Greece there are a number of people who do raise their...

“There appeared two lines after the tragic event. One was to boycott the conference and walk out. The other...

This is the message from Millas.

My column was based on talks with and readings of the minority press in Rodopi. Thanks to him, there is...

Yet, this is a big national scandal, no doubt. I meant to refer to Greek intellectuals and not Greeks for what I...

Second, there is a difference between “Kurdish is now normalized” and “is being normalized,” the latter being...

Millas and I have always stood for minority rights. The rest is up to those responsible who should draw less...
Conspiracy theories

By

H. MILLAS

Today’s Zaman, 5 January 2014

I confess that I both get angry with conspiracy theories and secretly admire them. When I hear a
conspiracy theory I think I would write tantalizing novels had I such an imagination. I even feel jealous. I wonder also if those who conceive those intricate scenarios really believe in them. I think there are two answers to this question.

Those who treat their fictional scenarios as if they are real must be living in a state of paranoia. On the other hand, there are others who know that their scenarios are not real. They are the normal people. By “normal”, I mean they don't have mental disorders and their stories of conspiracies are imaginative elements in art (in novels, scripts, etc.).

When conspiracy theories are restricted to art I like them. Detective stories are of this sort. I envy their writers. Some readers of fiction and spectator of films, however, sometimes they take them as historiography and meddle with them: “That incident did not occur as told in that book” they say. Conspiracy stories should be accepted as pieces of arts and they should be respected. Provided they are clearly presented as fiction.

Conspiracy-based claims have been frequently debated in philosophy. As imaginary theses are impossible to prove, they cannot be refuted either. For instance, if one says “There are two invisible elephants behind this building,” he cannot be proved wrong. (The elephants cannot be proved either.) One cannot show to a paranoid person that he is not being "secretly" pursued. In the Middle Ages, the inquisition tribunals would demand that people prove they are not magicians and that the devil was not inside them. How could they show it? "Grab that hot iron. God will protect you if you are innocent," they would say. Then they burned the suspects at the stake.

Not being able to prove guilt beyond reasonable doubt

Because of this ruthless past, no one today is asked to prove that s/he is innocent; rather, those who accuse someone are asked to prove their claims. If it is impossible to prove that someone is guilty beyond doubt, the accusations are considered invalid or slanderous. In such cases, courts declare such people innocent or acquit them because of "doubts."

The rationale behind this is that to prevent a single innocent person from receiving punishment, hundreds of criminals can go unpunished. Due to its experience of the Inquisition, the Western world is extremely sensitive in this regard and has improved its law accordingly. I am afraid that,
in the East, every possible scenario is considered probable and even convincing. Yet culpability must be substantiated beyond any doubt, even if it is possible or probable. But this is not enough either, as evidence must be collected through legitimate means, too. This requirement is intended to protect the rights of people.

Conspiracy theories may be multiplied ad infinitum and it is impossible to refute them. One can pick up certain facts, devise a suitable story using them and make the claims look "convincing." One can justify the potential contradictions of the theory by formulating additional stories. For instance, think about the recent corruption crisis (17, 25 December crisis). Some people claim that foreign forces are collaborating with internal conspirators in order to weaken and overthrow the government and block Turkey's progress. Is it possible to refute this thesis? No. You cannot show that it does not exist. Is such a thing possible? Yes, it is possible. But everything is possible in life. Is it probable? It is not, but we cannot rule it out altogether. In such a case, if you believe in theories that cannot be proven, this will drag us into a chaos, paralyze society and undermine the country. This is already what is happening. Conspiracy theories may spread slowly to engulf the entire society.

Let me present my own "irrefutable" conspiracy theory: Those who are accused of corruption deliberately committed crimes, and exposed their own crimes. Their purpose is to create chaos in the country. The real collaborators are those who are accused of corruption and they are the ring leaders of an international conspiracy. As part of their insidious plans, Zionists collaborated with people close to the government and used them as their cat's paw. "Why would they do this?" one might ask. They want to sow seeds of dissension in order to prevent Turkey's tremendous achievements. They don't want Turkey to become stronger. I can add the usual suspects to the mixture: Armenians, Greeks, Russians, Kurds, communists, Shariah supporters, the pope, various lobbies, etc.

Conspiracies are like this; they pull people into an eternal abyss of paranoia. They start to see everyone as potential enemy. They grow suspicious. As the suspicious administrations start to take measures against these "probable" dangers, reactions increase. In response to the reaction that is building up, the administrations become more suspicious. This breeds a cycle of insecurity, measures, increased insecurity and so on. Eventually, those fake threat scenarios become real dangers. In political science, this is called a "self-fulfilling prophecy": The perceived threat leads to measures which in turn result in dangerous and real reactions. For this reason, conspiracy theories are dangerous. I wish you a New Year without conspiracy theories.

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It is really strange that we sometimes admire the evil rather than the good. For instance, a guy can rob a bank, con many people and even beat family members very badly, and interestingly, he somehow becomes admirable. I have been amazed by the incredible talents of some recent demagogues to accomplish something similar. I often think that I could not be so masterful. Looking for an answer to the question of how they do this, I identified the following principles. I am not a master of demagogy, but I am hoping that I have produced something useful, I offer the following list. Maybe someday you'll need it.

Do you have an enemy? The most common method you would employ to target your enemy is to associate him with something inappropriate. Then you make frequent references to this inappropriate quality to present your enemy as evil. You then further argue that he has done
something terrible that he actually has not. A great number of people will believe your allegations if you repeat them frequently enough. The rest is easy; your enemy and opponent is finished.

Occasionally you find the most suitable part of a sentence or a statement from among thousands to prove your point. It does not matter whether or not the excerpt you take from the text corresponds to the overall idea and argument of the whole document; who is going to read the whole text anyway? Just use that excerpt over and over again. It will eventually influence people.

If you are in a defensive position, change the subject. Are you being called a liar? Just talk about how good you are at backgammon. Are you being called chatty or gossipy? Say something about how well you could swim when you were a child. Of course, you should be careful to choose different subjects that allow you to praise yourself and your abilities. Tell lies suggesting that you help poor people, that you are very honest, that you are humble and that you help people in need. The audience usually does not notice that there is no link between the accusation and your defense. They only remember the nice things you tell them, your abilities and your talents. They will eventually conclude that you are a nice guy who is doing great things. The gist of this method is enshrined in a commonly held conviction: If a man is good, he is always good and if he is one of “us,” he will never make any mistakes.

Proving the witness is not reliable

If somebody objects to your actions, do not respond to their allegations. You just attack him without addressing his questions. This is a classic technique and often used by lawyers in courtrooms. Proving that the witness is not reliable is a shortcut to success. If you beat a man and he is bruised and has a medical report verifying his victimization, obviously you committed an offense. But do not pay any attention to this. For instance, just talk about how this young man was a reckless driver in the past. You might ask whether or not his recklessness proves that he was not beaten. Well, maybe not; but if he is unreliable, then he is a liar and his statement is also a lie. A liar could do anything, right?

Let’s say you are in big trouble. You were caught holding a knife in your hand standing over a stabbed dead body. You should rely on strong demagogy so that your argument cannot be discredited. Philosophy, particularly that of Karl Popper, may be helpful in this instance. This thinker proposed something on infallibility, noting that there are some arguments that cannot be verified. Popper holds that if you make such statements, you are not acting scientifically. Just ignore him because only a few people know of Popper. Go ahead and do what he urges you not to do and say something that cannot possibly be verified or proven wrong. Conspiracy theories may work here. You may, for instance, argue that aliens brought this man here or that you are holding the knife because the man who sharpens knives for you just left. Or argue that there is
blood on your knife because your enemies are framing you. Well, that's all there is to it. No one could possibly prove that this is a fabrication. The aliens have already returned to their planets, the knife grinder is already gone and the dead person cannot talk. No one can prove you are responsible. And if you have a lot of supporters, it is over and done with. Those who make accusations should consider what comes next, because you are now able to accuse them of lying or damaging your image.

Wordplay is also another tool of demagogy. Let's say that you are being referred to as a terrible boss. Propose new definitions of words and terms. Translate your cruelty into calmness, authoritarian tendencies into determination, recklessness into risk-taking and ignorance into intuition. If you are accused of not being appreciative, just argue that your appreciation is ordinary; they won't understand or be able to refute this. If you are blamed for managing the factory without consulting anyone, claim that there is nobody to consult with. The writer George Orwell invented this method. He shows his mastery in his book “Animal Farm.” But some people have even improved on this method; they are able to successfully call a coup a popular uprising, legal action becomes a coup, criticism is an insult, etc.

Mind reading is another influential method of demagogy. Refer only to people who never criticize you and who praise your actions and statements all the time; misinterpret every constructive criticism made by others. If a police officer is going to fine you for speeding, claim that he wants to undermine your image. You might also argue that he is a relative of a person who does not like you. When you make the point that the police officer has bad intentions, your innocence is proven, regardless of whether or not you were speeding.

Offering an analogy without shame

Analogy is also another approach. For instance, tell people that just as some other person was subjected to mistreatment and accusations when he attempted to do certain things, now you are being subjected to similar accusations. It does not matter whether or not your analogy makes any sense at all. What matters is to offer your analogy without shame.

I should also note that those who want to make use of the suggestions on this list might also use the power of insolence. You should be so confident in this respect that those who hear you will be asking themselves if you have lost your mind or if you are a great actor. But in any case, they will admire your talent. Do not ever attempt to maintain a dialogue in such debates, always prefer a monologue. The outcome of a dialogue cannot be predicted, but you always win in a
monologue.

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Minorities in Turkey: a vicious circle

By

H. MILLAS

Today’s Zaman, May 15, 2014
This file picture of the "Sept. 6-7 Pogrom" of 1955 shows Turks looting stores belonging to minorities.

There are whole categories of topics on which the chance of being misunderstood is quite high; it's always best to stay away from these topics. At the same time though, these are invariably the most interesting. In any case, I've gathered my own courage, and decided to address a subject that has always made me uncomfortable; let's see whether I'm able to explain my stance clearly, and get away from it all without too many bruises and scrapes.

In recent years, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government has taken some highly visible, concrete steps on the topic of minorities in Turkey. Three examples of this include the restoring - if only partially - of some possessions belonging to minority foundations, permission being granted to reopen places of worship that were closed to services and the “acceptance” of some of the terrible pain that occurred in the past in connection with minorities. One more symbolic but extremely important change that has occurred is the sort of recognition that has been granted to minorities. It is clear that some of the country's more prominent political leaders no longer see it as a risk to either visit or be seen with certain minority religious leaders.

A large percentage of minorities in Turkey applaud these positive changes, and are pleased with the changes that they are witnessing in regards to how they are approached. At the same time, minorities still have many unmet demands, as well as things they would like to see take place. Still though, this does not detract from the importance of some of the steps that have been taken in relation to the ones in recent years. It would be quite unjust to ignore the actual steps that have been taken while recalling only that which remains deficient.
This takes me through the easier part of this column. The difficult part has to do with my own discontent, as a member of a minority. There is no question that the steps, which were taken to positively affect the day-to-day life of minorities, are good; everyone is satisfied on this front. But personally speaking, I have experienced the whole minority problem in a different way. The topic of foundation possessions never really bothered me, nor did I much follow the topic of the re-opening of certain historical places of worship or political visitations to religious leaders. I was also never in pursuit of an apology from anyone. No, my personal problem was always in connection to the principle of modernity. I have always been concerned with equal citizenship, and perhaps more importantly, being an equal citizen in an atmosphere of democracy. As it is, equality can only exist in a democratic atmosphere; turned the other way, we could say if there is no equality, democracy is impossible no matter what. And this is where the problem lies for me: the gains made in recent years do not bring about equality.

My personal problem lies with the system. Let me use history to put forth a comparison. In an era when there were villagers who were actually serfs, there were some tyrannical landowners and some kind and fair landowners. The serfs would love the kind and fair landowners because, of course, their lives were easier under such men. At the same time, these villagers were only able to become equal citizens when this entire feudal system came to an end. Because the real problems they faced had not to do with goodness/evil, but with a hierarchy that placed some people on top and some below. It is one thing to talk about doing good deeds or being treated well; it is another thing altogether to build a modern society, and to live within the definition of such. (Note: I am not saying that feudal systems exist today!)

It should be quite clear from what I have said that my own expectations have not been met. For example: You look one day and see that the top authorities in your country have turned your rights into a bargaining chip with other countries. Things like: You build a mosque in your country, and I will permit “my citizens” their rights! I guess this shows what sort of a citizen I really am. So, does allowing religious masses in a monastery really get rid of these stains? Bülent Ecevit, widely recognized by many for being a humanist and a democrat, once noted that it was a great mistake for so many Greeks to have left Turkey. But I wish he had not completed his thought. Because in the continuation of his comments, he made a very concrete point of what the “mistake” really was: “Now we will no longer be able to ensure the balance that keeps the rights of the Western Thracian Turks protected!” I have always lived with the sense that they see me as a hostage and as someone to keep the balance. Even worse, I have also always felt like someone with my palms open, just waiting for some high-minded leader to drop my “rights” into my hands.

Let me say clearly for myself: I have never pursued either personal privileges or rights for my own community. I have always only been interested in all citizens being granted their human rights. Included among these are certain rights to worship, to form foundations, to dress as one wishes, to join or form organizations as one wishes and to demand - or not demand - apologies. After all, individuals in free atmospheres decide on their own how they will use their own rights. Rights cannot be distributed according to groups; you cannot grant one group rights while telling
another group “wait for your turn.”

Rights for all

When granted, rights must be given to all citizens. If you pass out rights by turn, and in different doses, it means that equality does not exist. What's more, those at the back of the line will certainly feel excluded. Even worse, those rights that are then granted are not even constitutionally or legally backed rights; they are more like gifts or donations made from the heart by those at the helm of the ship. But in a democratic country where equality reigns, rights are protected within a legal framework, and everyone, from a Greek to the president, has equal access to these rights. By comparison, rights that are granted when it is appropriate and when the desire strikes from time to time are not really rights at all; they are more like small gifts of mercy, or favors passed out. This is the feeling that I have always been made to have, and this is not a good feeling.

There are two topics that get mixed up, and I don't think it's on purpose. It also provides happiness for some, who see themselves as somehow superior after having done said deeds. But a democratic society cannot be built on this method: when rights are distributed according to ethnicity, belief, community, etc., and in different doses, then the citizens - or rather, those waiting to be citizens - experience true discrimination. The idea of giving certain groups their rights in a step-by-step fashion rather than ensuring that everyone has equal rights all at once, is reminiscent of the millet (nation) system of the past. In a true, modern nation state, it is unthinkable that one group would have fewer rights than another. Of course, the whole nation state project is marked by many deficiencies. But since the French Revolution, the first principles on the agenda have always been equality and freedom. These are not goals to be casually tossed away.

And so, this is what I have some difficulty explaining sometimes. The whole millet system from the Ottoman times has been so fully internalized by so many that this column may seem to some not only utopic and overly romantic, but even full of its own ignorance. To others, the desires I have stated above might seem resonant with ingratitude and an insatiable appetite for more. There are also those who might ask why I am in such a hurry. As for me, all I can say is, I have been waiting since the time of the Tanzimat. (Tanzimat was the name for a period of reforms under the Ottomans; it lasted from 1839-79.) I should also note that some minorities here in Turkey might even respond to all this by reminding me that things are better now. “Eat the grapes, don’t ask about the arbor,” they might warn. But I have always wanted more than just the grapes anyway.
To my friends at the other pole

By

H. MILLAS

Today's Zaman, 14 June, 2014
People who complain about polarization in Turkey are fanning the flames of polarization. Those who shout, “People are insulting me without respecting the principle of presumption of innocence,” are hurling insults at people they don't like, treating them like criminals. This is exactly what polarization is: criticizing the other side without seeing one's own faults. Aware of this fact, I frequently check myself to see if I am blinded as well. There are several methods to test our soundness. One way is to look at what the people we trust are doing. But polarization is already making this impossible, as our closest friends - not all of them, though - have ended up at the other pole.

When a person whom I have so far considered a close friend and colleague starts to vilify me - in a self-assured manner - without understanding my mood and without empathizing with me, this is nothing but polarization. I am referring to Halil Berktay, who has been a close friend of mine since my youth. In an interview he gave to the Yeni Şafak daily on June 2, he briefly described the opponents of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP):

"The opponents are those who hate the AKP and [Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan. The hostility against the AKP led to the Gezi incidents and the Dec. 17 'narrative.' These opponents don't believe in democracy and they despise people; they long for a coup d'état; they use violence. Therefore, we are going through polarization. They don't care about Turkey's future. They are heartless. This subversive opposition recklessly uses hate speech, profanity and insults. They try to prove their revolutionary credentials by clashing with the police. They don't seek to promote their democratic rights; they stage protests for the sake of protesting only. There are youth groups who are filled with anger and hatred. These protesters don't have any vision. They are obsessed only with forcing Erdoğan to quit his political career. The AKP is under siege both by domestic and foreign forces. Some people are waiting for an opportunity or excuse to take to the streets and start fires and clash with the police. As a social scientist, I adopt an objective approach to the developments."

Supposing that all of these remarks are true, can we say that there is not a single person who criticizes the AKP in a sound and justified manner? Is there no one who can do this? Is there no reasonable "group"? Why are dissidents categorically portrayed as sick, spiteful, anti-democratic and unscrupulous enemies of the public? Where in this discourse is the skepticism that we should expect from intellectuals? We can find no such skepticism in the interview published by Yeni Şafak, as all "dissidents" are depicted as evil. Nowadays, it is riskier to be a dissident, as a dissident person is seen as the source of all evil because of his or her criticisms. Worse still, the interview was censored - or abbreviated, in polite terms. The original text posted on the author's website is different from the one published on the paper. On the website, you can read about what Berktay doesn't like about the AKP and the prime minister:

"It was a wrong move to proceed with the project to establish a shopping mall in Taksim. The police used intense violence." Berktay is "possibly" against the projects to build a third airport and a third bridge over the Bosphorus in İstanbul. He says it is wrong to reduce relations with the West and Europe as has been done in recent years. He does not like the prime minister's language becoming harsher at times. He finds the prime minister's meddling with everything
wrong. The prime minister can be very stubborn on some issues, he thinks.

A good example is the prime minister's insistence on building a shopping mall in Taksim. It was wrong for him to order the demolishing of a statue in an arrogant manner, Berktay says. And he thinks that Erdoğan's meddling with people's lifestyles, even at the discursive level; his interventions into women's freedoms regarding their bodies; and his meddling with the right to abortions and C-sections were wrong. His suggestion that people should drink ayran [a traditional yogurt-based drink] instead of raki [an anise-flavored alcoholic drink] was incorrect, according to my colleague; calling German President Joachim Gauck "an old pastor" was wrong as it meant walking into the trap of reviving typical hostility against Christians. It was wrong to criticize the Freedom House report saying, "It is presided over by a Jew," because it meant walking into the trap of anti-Semitism; "The prime minister contributes to polarization and tension," Berktay writes.

Problems with this interview

There are several problems regarding the two versions of the interview. First, I think it is unethical to censor the interview and not publish Berktay's criticisms of the AKP. This is a problem that the newspaper in question must address. It may be perceived as the newspaper's "politics" or "mission." Second, it is hard to understand Berktay's saying "I saw and approved the abbreviated form of the interview." How can an intellectual not feel uneasy about the removal of his criticisms of the prime minister from the interview? Let us suppose this is a personal choice. Personally speaking, such an abbreviation of an article of mine would certainly bother me, especially at a time when polarization is at its peak, but I cannot ask everyone to think and act like I do. Everyone is free to choose their own standards.

The most serious problem, I guess, is our attitude toward people whom we take as our opponents or foes. The mistakes, errors and incorrect moves listed above bother me and many other people I know considerably. Really, who is setting these traps? Extreme violence by the police, bad relations with the West, harsh discourse targeting "internal and external enemies," interventions into private life and art may not bother some people - they have certainly a right not to be bothered by them - but these developments may make others quite uncomfortable. Failure to understand this discomfort - or treating it with contempt, scorning it with so-called psychoanalysis and spewing your hatred and anger for your foes are not democratic actions. You may find any critique targeting the rulers exaggerated, but if you don't say this, but opt to portray dissidents as subversive, unscrupulous and anti-democratic agents of internal and external enemies, this will certainly add to polarization. Words turn into weapons and lose their meanings and social communication is broken.

As you might notice, I haven't touched the Dec. 17 “narrative.” All the other mistakes and faults are sufficiently worrisome for me. This is because all of them indicate a certain direction. If mistakes are pointing in the same direction, we can start to talk about “tendencies.” A person may choose to lend support to the government, taking into consideration the positive steps it
has taken so far, but also taking note of these tendencies. This is a constitutional right. But other people may take these mistakes more seriously and choose to stress or highlight them. This is another democratic right. This applies to the freedom of assembly and demonstration and the freedom of expression. Such people should not be treated as traitors.

In other words, in order to be able to talk to each other in the future, we should not create stereotypes through generalizations. We should also remember that the ideologies we had advocated in the past may prove to be worthless in time.

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Keeping silent about the 'parallel' thesis

By

H. Millas

Today’s Zaman, 13 August, 2014
I carefully read and listen to the arguments made by those who are against the "parallel state" trying to understand what they are advocating. This is because among the proponents of this thesis are people I would respect and whose views I agree with. Their arguments can be summed up as follows: An organized group of people engaged in certain unlawful attempts targeting the government and the society and eventually they staged a coup - they refer to the graft and bribery investigations of December 17 and 25. This group (or gang, network, etc.) was influential within the judiciary and police, causing certain unlawful court decisions to have been issued in recent years - they refer to the Ergenekon and Balyoz (Sledgehammer) decisions. They say that this "gang" is linked to outside circles and promotes the interests of the US, Israel and the Vatican. This amounts to espionage and treason.

This is a very serious allegation. But it is nothing but a hypothesis unless it is proven. And this has to be done via court trials. But at this point there is a vicious circle.

First, they said that the judiciary was being controlled by the "parallel state" and therefore, it was partial and could not be trusted. So they reshuffled the entire judiciary. Now, other people raise objections, saying, "This judiciary is created by you and they are partisans, and cannot be trusted." In the end, the court's decision won't be respected. Just as a significant portion of the society didn't pay any respect to the Independence Courts (İstiklal Mahkemeleri); to the court that sentenced Adnan Menderes and his colleagues to death; to the courts established during the military regime of September 12, 1980; and to the courts that heard the Ergenekon/Balyoz cases, the decisions passed by the court in connection with political contentions will be considered as questionable.

Yet there is a difference to the recent court decisions. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) will have the final say about them. We will have to wait a long time for the Strasbourg court, but in the final analysis, it represents the only reliable authority in this respect. In other words, the "parallel hypothesis" will remain unproven for many years to come.

But in the meantime, we have to understand, know and make sense of developments. I would really want to discuss this matter with some sane people, but this does not happen. I can understand the reason why. The parties to this conflict are not uttering different things, but they certainly talk about different matters.

One group continually asserts that a "parallel structure" is a very bad thing - OK, I, too, condemn all sorts of unlawful clandestine efforts - while the other group claims that the first
thing that should be done is to prove the existence of such a gang, if any. These are two different matters. When I look at the words of those people I would have felt close to in the past but now are far away from me, I see they tend to keep silent about certain points. I want to bring these points to the forefront.

First, they never mention the principle of the presumption of innocence. Even the person who is caught red-handed with a knife on the body of a murdered person is referred to as a "suspect." A community has been labeled as a traitor (and many other unwanted descriptions) for months. These people don't make any comments about this deficiency. Another thing associated with this "deficiency" is that the top government officials are violating this principle in a way to influence the judiciary. They are silent about this matter as well.

If there is really such a parallel structure, they don't talk about the responsibility of the government about this failure to deal with it. It is the responsibility of the government to ensure the smooth functioning of the state apparatus. If a "gang" had influenced the judiciary for years, causing courts to pass unfair lengthy sentences to senior commanders of the army, the government officials are as responsible as the parallel state for this. Government officials cannot evade responsibility by declaring themselves to be naive. Indeed, a naiveté-induced crime is still a crime. In fact, all crimes stem from naivété.

Moreover, the opposition parties have been harshly criticizing unfair trials. Therefore, the government officials cannot hide behind the excuse, "We didn't know it." However, many intellectuals opt to keep silent about this matter.

Another matter they "overlook" is that certain individuals and organizations that would have supported the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) until very recently do not find this "parallel" thesis at all convincing. These form two groups: The first group is the AKP’s Western (former) friends, such as the EU and the US. This group does not voice any criticism about the parallel state, but voices concerns about the increased authoritarianism of the Turkish government. They continuously stress the need for a fair trial.

Many people who had supported the AKP until recently are not warm to the "parallel" thesis and note that this claim is manufactured to conceal the government's corrupt practices. I am talking about those people who used to be the AKP’s friends and who are connected to the "Community." What happened to them? Our intellectuals do not talk about this, either.

They also don't talk about how this so-called parallel state can be accused of being spies or traitors. For whom do they work as spies? Those intellectuals who still maintain a certain level of dignity forget about this matter altogether. Their silence, on the other hand, implies that they don't believe in the truth of this claim. If the espionage component of this parallel thesis is not convincing, why don't they criticize it? What is this frenzy for?

They don't discuss why the opposition parties do not care about this "parallel state" that threatens the state, the county and all of us and why they don't lend support to the government. Of course, there is the convenience of declaring anyone who is against the AKP as a member of the parallel state, the lobby, a self-seeker, vindictive, etc. Moreover, there are breaches of
law, interventions with the media and corruption and bribery, but they produce excuses to cover them up.

The most striking comment came from Bülent Arınç, who, calling on the "Community," said, "Say, 'Some of us engaged in wrongful acts and they are not from us,' and be saved" (Radikal, July 25, 2014). Is it really so simple and easy to get rid of the terrible charges? When they will say, "They did it," the spies, agents of outside circles, the parallel state that undermined the judiciary, "Pennsylvania," etc. and they will be free to go their way.

Aren't the advocates of the "parallel state" thesis supposed to comment on this statement? How can they forgive traitors? As part of the same statement, Arınç also said, "They tried to secure votes for another political party and they voted for another party." Is the real problem about not supporting the AKP?

Finally, our intellectuals avoid any discussion of a "coincidence": When the corruption allegations became manifest on December 17 and 25, the government became suddenly very sensitive about this so-called parallel state. One is urged to think about another hypothesis that is firmly held abroad: The government's sole intention is to intimidate those who made these allegations manifest, even if there were certain unlawful acts involved - such as unlawful wiretapping. Those who advocate the "parallel state" thesis carefully avoid any discussion of this hypothesis.

In my opinion, this second hypothesis is simpler and more convincing. It does not have points that have not been discussed and contradictions such as those I mentioned above. It does not talk about foreign lobbies or enemies as reminiscent of paranoia. Moreover, it explains the extreme and hurried anger exhibited against the suspects.

I don't expect those people who nurture small self-interests and those who adore certain political figures to be fair in their comments, but I would certainly expect those who find it wrong to hide behind silence to discuss these matters and express their views. They are already late.

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Nationalized consciences
Our consciences have been nationalized. I cannot explain the situation that we are going through in any other way. We hear the sound of our consciences when one of us is persecuted, but we remain silent when others are persecuted. How can we define this kind of conscience? When racism hurts one of us, we cry out. We are sensitive about human rights if there is an attack against our people, our flag or our faith. We all know what racism, prejudice, shame and sin are when the people we are connected to through bonds of kinship or religion are attacked in another country. However, we do not raise our voice when others are subjected to the same attacks. I call this kind of conscience, which has grown completely indifferent toward those who are different from us, a nationalized conscience.

Let me recall the infamous caricature crisis with Denmark. Now, where are those who cry out, saying that we need to respect the sacred values of people? Places of worship and holy places that belong to different Islamic sects, Yazidis and Christians are being destroyed, and these people are being forced to convert to Islam in Iraq. They are being subjected to bloodcurdling
and horrifying practices, including beheading, burying alive, rape and selling people as slaves when they refuse to denounce their beliefs. What we face is not a caricature published by a magazine but genocide. We are not talking about five or ten people; tens of thousands of people are being tortured. When Turkish people were killed in Germany, the newspapers ran headlines about the incident, our statesmen made angry statements, and people staged demonstrations in the streets to protest the incident. So why is the reaction against these incidents in Iraq so limited, despite the gravity of the situation? Excluding some elites, we have adopted a “cool-headed” approach toward these incidents.

‘Other humans’ rights’

Throughout history, people have always struggled for their rights. I mean, only for their own rights. In the past slavery was legal or women had no right to vote or slaves and criminals were subjected to torture. Now it is claimed that things have changed. We say that there are fundamental rights and freedoms inherent in all human beings, regardless of their race, sex, ethnic origin or religion. This also means that all human beings have to be human rights advocates. Everybody will protect, advocate and guarantee all others’ rights. Based on this principle, we raise our voices against injustices done in any other country. If we remain silent against the new injustices in Iraq, how can we stage a demonstration and ask for justice when “we” need to? Based on what legitimacy? How will we explain our double standards?

What is currently happening in Iraq is among the most barbaric practices that we have witnessed in the recent history of the world. It may be the worst, because those who have committed similar crimes in the past used to conceal their genocides and pathological actions. Some of them were aware of what they were doing. The Nazis tried to conceal the crimes they had committed from the rest of society. At the end of the war, many people argued that they had not heard about these crimes. Now it is different. Those who commit the crimes in Iraq publicize their actions. We cannot claim we have not been aware of what is happening in Iraq.

How can we explain the fact that our conscience has grown so insensitive toward others’ sorrows? I think it is the identity of "us" that we have been trying to form for decades and we have finally formed. Our education system and our textbooks show what we were trying to create. The whole system is established on the basis of “us” versus the “others”. “Us” does not mean the people, children and mothers, our neighbors or peers, or the people who experience similar problems as us. The notion of “us”-“others” is designed on the basis of ethnic and religious differences; and worst, as a relation of conflict and war. In order to instill the so-called “national consciousness” in society, a special dominant discourse in education, in political
views, in literature and even in daily small talk has been prioritized. Paranoid arguments of "they
have attacked us, they have killed us, we have defeated them, they hate us, they want to harm
us," have established a culture of killing and defeating the real or imaginary “others”.

Thus, our consciences have grown insensitive. Not feeling pity for those who are different from
us has become normal; even more, those who respect and love the others are met with
skepticism.

Why aren't people demonstrating?

If the same incident took place in a Western country and these crimes had been committed
against Muslims, there would be major demonstrations. This identity of "us" is paramount but
not as an identity of humans. Our humanity has become secondary. The lethargy of us stems
from the fact that we have chosen a narrow local identity instead of a universal one. Once we
adopted only a national identity, we classified human beings as “ours" and the “others”. We do
not see people any longer, but ethnic and national groups.

In other words, societies across the world have not internalized "human rights". In the future we
will be criticized for these selfish actions of "us"; just as we criticize medieval practices and the
people who carried out those practices. To be realistic, I am aware of the fact that there are not
many things we can do. This is the reality of this world. I wrote this in order not to feel ashamed
of myself while settling accounts with my conscience.

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A brave New World in Turkey
We see a new Turkey before us. Or at least, we have a new wealthy class, a class with its own unique perception of the world, with its own tastes, its own expectations and its own demands. We also see that this class has its own particular style of rhetoric, its own values, its own traditions and ways of seeing things. These are all new.

Deep-rooted changes and contact with different cultures - in short, the unfolding of new eras - can cause revolutions in language. And in fact, we see that the revolution in this arena is quickening these days; words are taking on new meanings during this period. For example, the word “haşhaşi” in Turkish (a word from which the more commonly used word ‘assassin’ is derived) now appears to be synonymous with the political “opposition” in Turkey. The moment we hear someone described as a “haşhaşi” in Turkey these days, we immediately understand that this person is someone who is vocal in his or her critiques of the government, someone
who opposes all that is “new.”

The same goes for the word “darbe” nowadays. It used to mean “a blow,” or even “an event or scandal that makes someone's life difficult.” And of course, “darbe” has also been used for a long time as “hükümet darbesi” or a “coup d'etat.” The new usage of “darbe,” though, has transformed this word into one used to describe every scandal, every disgraceful incident that might cast a dark shadow over the government, as a “coup against the government.”

Constitution not a reflection of one political party

What we are now observing in Turkey is a whole series of new situations, each of which deserves its own separate article. I listen with great surprise to talks about the new goal stated by this government: to attain enough votes (through elections) to change the Constitution. I am surprised! The Constitution is a special set of laws; it binds, even unifies, everyone. It forms the basis of national unity. It cannot and ought not to be changed through the power of one political party. As a written text, it is certainly not the reflection of one political party. No matter where you go in the world, constitutions are created through widespread consensus. And so it is that the goal in Turkey on this front should be different than just picking up enough votes to change the Constitution: What we need, in fact, is consensus in Parliament, consensus between the political parties, and of course, consensus within society itself; not a majority of votes, but widespread consensus. A constitution created by virtue of the attainment of a majority of votes is destined to be a constitution of conflict. Despite all this, though, we can note that new regulations have been implemented with regards to this topic. And so it is that the government's view seems to be: We'll create this new constitution after grabbing the legal opportunity to do so. This government views 50 percent of the vote as two-thirds. By these same standards, the government's thinking seems to be: Consensus can come along later… we'll import it later into the situation, if necessary.

This whole process carries a risk of highs and lows. We all know the dialectic of the fight at hand: At the beginning, there is a small, rather secondary sort of misunderstanding. Later, the opposing sides become more stubborn in their positions, their differences -- which of course predate the smaller conflict -- suddenly growing larger and more distinct. In the end, the seemingly small difference between the two sides is transformed into an essential difference. The Kurdish problem is fast heading down this road. For years and years, the Kurdish problem
was debated along the lines of two basic axes: the military solution as opposed to the political solution. In the end, a decision was made to abandon forcing people to do things, with a resolution for dialogue instead. And now -- and this is also new -- the style of the dialogue, manner, actors and even reasons have taken center stage, threatening to derail the entire “process” through arguments over these facets of the process. It will be such a shame if this is what happens.

The true essence of democracy is being discussed these days in Turkey as “fighting for rights” or “attaining rights.” Rather than saying, “We gained these things,” these successes are portrayed as democratic gains. But the truth is, democracy has no connection to these things! After all, fighting for and attaining rights are things that have always existed in this world. And in addition, not every attainment of rights is a democratic gain. For example, kings, privileged classes, powerful groups, ethnic classes, religious communities, even influential individuals, have always been good at attaining certain rights. This sort of thing even happens within the animal world. For example, lions don't let other animals into their hunting area; they are fierce about protecting their source of prey and their relative privileges when it comes to catching these prey. So yes, democratic gains are something different all together. These rights are strongly connected to equality. When rights are equally accessible for everyone -- that's when they are democratic!

A new piece of rhetoric we have been hearing lately is: “Those who have been accused should head to court to be acquitted. Why don't they act on this?” This is a ridiculous suggestion; more than that though, it is sly, as well as being full of irony and suggestion. The real message inherent in this rhetoric is, “If you weren't guilty, you would have gone to court, but since that’s not what you did…” In the end, people simply are not expressing themselves clearly. All the talk we hear is full of implied and ambiguous messages. This too is new. What do you think?

'The old is always bad, the new is always good'

Listening to and observing all this new rhetoric, these new ways, these new plans, I start thinking about what “new” really means. I looked at the dictionary. There are a variety of definitions provided therein: unused, something recent, something that has never happened before. What you really don't see in the dictionary when it comes to the word “new” is some sort of positive meaning attached to its definitions. Clearly, attaching a positive meaning to “new” is the business of a certain kind of philosophy. What's more, this positive meaning is meant to be symbolic or metaphorical in nature; it stands to illuminate the difference between the old world
and the new era, highlighting a phantom difference therein. The word “new,” used in this way, is the result of the view that “the old is always bad, and the new is always good” (of course, conservatives don't really agree with this view.) The truth, of course, is that the new can be very, very bad. For example, entire systems such as imperialism, communism and fascism were themselves, not long ago, new. So perhaps this new take on “new,” with all its implied connotations, is meant to be an expression of the new wealth we see all around. So the “old” becomes inherently linked to the poor life of the past, while the new is the modern life of abundant consumption. I suppose this is the root of all the praise for “the new.”

It certainly never occurred to me that I would write like a conservative. Oddly, this is a “new” kind of me! But lately, I've been thinking strongly about Aldous Huxley's “Brave New World.” In it, Huxley writes about a new world that is truly nightmarish. I personally don't believe that all the talk of “new” is in and of itself explanation enough. Alright, perhaps it is important that some things are new, but is everything being new what we really want?!

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Human conditions are the same,

but the reactions are different
It is normal for those who are in office to get involved in some undesirable business. By
“normal” I mean that cases of nepotism, favoritism, bribery and other illegal activities are
frequently observed. Such sinful and immoral actions have always been seen in communities
throughout history. The famous 10 commandments stress that man shall not kill, commit
adultery, thievery or perjury and shall not be greedy toward what his neighbor possesses. This
means that these bad ethics have been observed at least since then. Likewise, Bias of Priene
(B.C. 625-540) made some wise remarks on this matter. Bias is referred to as one of the seven
wise men of ancient times. He lived in Priene, a town close to present-day Söke (Turkey). Now
this ancient city is far away from residential areas due to the disruptive impacts of nature. But what he said still remains fresh and valid: “Arhi andra dhiknisi” (Power exhibits the nature of man).

Others have subsequently confirmed it. For instance, Abraham Lincoln said, “If you want to test a man's character, give him power.” A man is considered honest not when he is unable to become corrupted; he is considered honest when he does not go corrupt even if he has the opportunity to do so. Bias of Priene made other crucial remarks that took me by surprise, because they sound pretty contemporary: “Democracy is a state of affairs in which everybody is afraid of the laws as if they were tyrants”, “Arrogance prevents you from becoming a wise man”, “Win by persuasion, not by force”, “A man is honest when he has a good reputation not wealth, when he leaves power.” In short, people have always been occupied by such problems.

If you run a search on the internet for political scandals, you will find a number of filthy relations involving money and sex. Such scandals in 47 countries are listed below: (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Political_scandals_by_country). The list includes the countries we are most familiar with; in fact, Turkey has recently been included on the list with the Susurluk and December 17/25, 2013 scandals. All the cases are explained in detail. Let us recall some of them: the Watergate scandal in 1972 and President Richard Nixon’s resignation; the Iran gate scandal about illegal arms sales to Iran, in which President Ronald Reagan was implicated in 1985; the case of bribery involving Senator William Jefferson in 2009; the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky scandal; the Silvio Berlusconi, Mark Sanford and Edward Kennedy sex scandals and the relevant lawsuits; the arrest of Taiwanese President Chen Shui Bien right after the end of his term in office ended on May 20, 2008, on corruption charges (his wife was allegedly involved in an illegal transaction of $30 million); after lengthy trials, the president was sentenced to time in prison; the Profumo scandal; Christine Keeler's affair with the defense secretary in 1963, which turned into an espionage scandal and led to Prime Minister Harold Macmillan's resignation.
Scandals are nothing new

Such scandals have always taken place in this world. There are situations considered illegal under the law or unethical under the social code, say, corruption or sex scandals. What and who is at the other end? There are the judiciary and prosecutors and judges who do their job. But in addition to those official forces, there are also other actors as well, particularly in democratic countries where a diverse set of circles stand firmly against these political scandals. These actors are the opposition parties, the journalists or some “dissidents” who oppose such scandals. They do not show mercy against their rivals; they take the opportunity if they are able to use it. These opponents rely on two different references: a) the laws and b) the ethical values of the society.

In this sense, politicians are under a lot of pressure. For instance, the extramarital affair of an ordinary man is considered private life, whereas the actions of politicians are evaluated differently. Politicians are supposed to stay away from anything that is immoral and unethical because their “secrets” can be used against them as a means of blackmail. Of course, I am talking about democratic countries; in other countries, nobody would oppose the rulers.

What has been happening in Turkey is not different from the scandals cited above. The corruption scandals and alleged immoral actions are “normal” situations we are familiar with. But what is not normal is the defense raised against these allegations. Adopting an aggressive stance rather than agreeing to be held accountable under the law is not a usual attitude; this is
unique. A number of allegations after which presidents and prime ministers have had to resign, apologize, leave their political post or agree to judicial action have been made in the past in the world; however, we have never seen those who unearthed the scandalous facts being accused and persecuted. In other words, their right to go after the suspect has never been violated. Being critical was never considered something the critics should be fearful about. What happened in this world was that the accuser had to prove his point and the suspect tried to prove his innocence. Of course, this applies to democratic countries. In other countries, nobody can defy the rulers. This is a news report from last week: Prime Minister Aleqa Hammond had to resign as prime minister and as a member of the Siumut Party until an investigation into allegations that she irregularly spent money from the state budget in Greenland is concluded. Transparency is that simple.

In the “Western” world, which includes our allies and which we want to be part of through membership of the European Union, when they hear references to corruption, they are neither shaken nor surprised. They are aware that a number of people including royal figures and high-level officials have been involved in corruption, and they are fine with this fact. What surprises and disappoints them is the disproportionate response to the allegations. The repressive reaction against the police, the judiciary or the media means not only some sort of acknowledgement of guilt but is also a sign of trying to escape justice. Worse, this also raises questions about the level of democracy in the country. Naturally, they do not claim that there are some complex conspiracies behind the corruption allegations.

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Who discovered America? Well, who didn’t?
By

H. MILLAS

Today’s Zaman, 30 November, 2014

The argument by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan “Not your guys but ours discovered America” attracted a great deal of attention worldwide because it was made by a head of a state; otherwise, this argument is pretty common and could be dated way back to decades ago.

Some said this argument was made to change the agenda or attract attention. Some in the global media view this discourse as Islamist defiance. Others found this argument hilarious or embarrassing. Some remembered other factors and motivations. For instance, the newspaper El Pais recalled that some of his aids believed that the Turkish prime minister would be killed by telekinesis. What I particularly thought about was the role of the advisors. Were they asked to offer an idea? Or do they share this view?

In fact, this “who discovered” debate within scientific circles is being made with reference to the
question “how does a mythos emerge”. There are some interesting works on this subject. I will mention one here: “Invented Knowledge” by Ronald Fritze (2009). Hundreds of myths were invented after America was discovered and were redefined. These myths tell us that many people arguably discovered America: Ancient Egyptians, Ancient Greek travelers, Trojans who left their cities, Romans, Buddhist missionaries, Chinese immigrants, Mongolians, medieval Arabs and many others.

Such myths first emerged while Christopher Columbus was still alive, to make his endeavor worthless. A so-called “unknown guide” provided guidance for the discovery of America. This pilot might have been Andalusian, Basque or Portuguese. In 1558, Nicolo Zeno from Venice “proved” that his ancestors discovered America. The French also made similar arguments. Guillaume de Postel argued that ancient Gauls discovered America. The British attributed the exploration to Prince Madoc of Wales in the 16th century. The argument goes to say that the prince traveled to the continent in 1170. Those British arguments were backed by some “historians” including Humphrey Llywyd, John Dee, George Peckham and David Powel. Some Welsh scholars, including Zella Armstrong, Richard Deacon and Gwyn Williams, still subscribe to this thesis. What I am trying to say is that it has been always easy and convenient to find a “historian” to defend this argument. We should also note that Morgan Jones identified some American Indians who spoke the Welsh language in 1666 (but nobody else was ever able to find them after that). Still, some textbooks in the US in the 20th century referred to “redskins” from Wales.

Without quoting other names (because of space restriction), let me recall some other claims on this matter. Some argued that Scandinavian sailors first discovered America around A.D. 1000. In the 20th century, some African Americans strongly believed that West Africans found the continent. There are two versions of this view: Some argued that the continent was discovered before the Common Era, whereas others argued that Africans discovered it in the 13th century.

Phoenicians, Egyptians or Malians....

This indicates that the first to arrive were Phoenician slaves. Other “researchers” showed that they were Egyptians or from Mali. All these views were proved by so-called scientific methods. However, it is obvious that these views were all about oral tradition or myths.

Archeologist Harold Gladwin (I am giving a name because you may think I made this story up)
argued in 1947 that Alexander the Great brought civilization to the native Americans after crossing the Pacific Ocean. Some others (for instance, a Harvard professor) argued that Ancient Egyptians and Jews explored America before the Common Era. Yet more “researchers” argued that native Americans were people who survived the total destruction of Atlantis. Others noted that the first settlers were Carthaginians; a Portuguese historian also identified a precise date: 590 B.C. There is a vast literature on this matter. Another version of this story placed emphasis upon Phoenicians. Sometimes references are vague; Carthage and Phoenicia appear to be the main actors at the same time. Some Jews also developed their own theses and argued that the ten lost tribes referred to in their sacred book were native Americans. A Spanish researcher even wrote that Odysseus, the mythological character in Homer’s books, was the first to arrive in America. I should note that there are a number of books and publications on the theses I referred to above.

India also joined this campaign in the 19th century. Some argued that the Chinese settled first, before the Indians. The Chinese thesis was strongly defended by new publications in the 2000s. Some others stressed that Siberian Tatars arrived on the continent by crossing the Bering Strait. In other words, a huge market on who discovered the continent emerged. There are a lot of myths and legends on this matter, but it is hard to find a serious approach. The subtitle of the book I referred to above in this piece is “False History, Fake Science and Pseudo-religions.” The book focuses on the myths about America but also Atlantis and pseudo-religions as well. What this book says is that there are countless so-called scientific theses and arguments in our world.

If we look at the Turkish side of the story, I am sensing a shift in the Turkish history thesis from the view that “Turks are the greatest” to one in which “Muslims are the greatest”. I think that there are two dimensions to these views. One is about identity: People tend to glorify the source they built their identity on. The second is about insecurity. If people feel insecure, then they try to present their true or imagined past as superior to others. And it is not hard to create an imagined past. As seen above, many different nations were involved in this game. You could make your point or support your argument by resorting to a book or to a so-called research. The real problem is to make sure that such personal and subjective views are not turned into national dogmas taught at schools. It will be unfair for future generations to create new myths without dealing with the previous ones.
The feeling of déjà vu

By

H. MILLAS

Today’s Zaman, 2 December, 2014

The expression in the title is originally a French term and it is normally used in its original form. It means a sense that a particular present occasion or feeling was experienced before. This has happened to most of us; during a conversation, reading a book or walking on the street, you might have felt that you have experienced that exact moment before. (It is normal if you have not had such a feeling, don't worry!) I have experienced this feeling a few times in my life. The “feeling” was there but I was unable to define what I experienced exactly.
Lately I sensed this feeling. I thought that in the past I had lived this milieu, I had heard this discourse and I had experienced this logic. Not once, but twice. This was an atmosphere and an approach. It was an environment of relations and values; it was like a belief where all of us were entrapped. I had experienced all these in my early adolescence and for a second time in my early youth. Let me call the first “Kemalism” and the second “Marxism.”

'A future where everything is perfect'

My first experience was a common story that goes as follows: a new Turkey is being created; everything will be perfect in the future but at present we have domestic and external enemies including supporters of Shariah, separatists, communists and imperialists. Some stage traps against our state with the pretext of political criticism; for this reason we have to remain united and strong. This is a fight between the evil and the good; it is a war of liberation and independence of this nation. Some make use of the shortcomings of some of the laws to go their way. We should pay attention to the essence and not be stopped due to some details of the laws.

The Marxist paradigm had a similar story in almost every country: a new world is being created; the future will be nice, just like heaven. But right now, the imperialists and their collaborators are our enemies; and all means are allowed in this war. The laws and international justice are sneaky tricks of the bourgeoisie.

I have seen similar analyses the last few months. Two assumptions are apparent: that there is an ongoing war against the enemies, and – this is the déjà vu - a beautiful future is awaiting us in the next years. Not right now; at present we have to deal with the external and domestic enemies. They have to be destroyed first, legal restrictions should not stop us, everything is allowed in this fight of existence.

There are some commonalities in these three stories: an imagined perfect and happy future, domestic and external enemies; their dangerous assaults; a struggle of life or death of the nation; a discourse suggesting that law is being used for evil purposes and that every means are allowed for this bright future.
Throwing out the baby with the bathwater

I have heard statements of this kind a lot lately. A sense of déjà vu … At the end I recalled the novel Küçük Ağa (Young Lord) by Tarık Buğra; that was it! He depicts the bloody days in the war of liberation of Turkey. In the novel, the Armenians and the Greeks are the chief enemies, and they are being killed. The writer refers to the “good others” (i.e., Armenians and Greeks) as well, yet these “good others” need to be sacrificed, too. In other words, the baby has to be thrown out with the bathwater. The writer explains: “I wished there were not innocent people like doctor Minas and textile trader Mr. Eftim (among the massacred people). This would make the thing easier for us. We would say Greeks, Armenians and we would feel relieved; our deeds would have been our ‘right’.”

We have seen this many times in the medieval times; a general massacre had been committed after the uprisings. The same logic was raised in the interviews with the Nazis who committed the Holocaust: some innocent Jewish people were killed, but this should be considered collateral damage. The same view was underlined in all genocides and fascist practices. With such a mindset, everything becomes justified if one is aiming at a Machiavellian victory.

But in our contemporary world an order based on the supremacy of law was created to avoid such problems. Proper measures were taken to consolidate this principle; crime was defined as an individual liability. Punishing the innocent along with the guilty one became a crime. It is preferred now to have suspects acquitted instead of risking sentencing an innocent person. In fact, prosecutors can label suspects and only judges can label criminals. If everybody declared their own criminals and suspects, this would lead to frenzy. The principle of presumption of innocence was also introduced to avoid victimization. This suggests that declaring somebody guilty without a court order is unacceptable. And now, we hear a ‘medieval’ narrative which legitimizes the harming of an innocent in an effort to do away with the problem.

During a war on the battleground it is not usually feasible to distinguish the enemy from the innocent. Of course, we could consider this approach from a reverse angle as well: If one wants to be free to commit a crime he may as well declare that there is a war going on. We may fabricate a war to justify our actions. Creating a sense of war, as is evident by our past experience, has not been so difficult in these lands. We have always had domestic and external enemies. These have been the cornerstones of making politics.
Interestingly, the déjà vu does not have to be about negative and unpleasant developments. It may be associated with some fantastic and enjoyable moments as well. Here, I referred to sad events because I was influenced by the recent developments. I may be a little tired and gloomy too. In principle I try not to be pessimistic. In fact, I am generally optimistic; my death is my great consolation: all my troubles are just temporary.

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What do we see in Greece?

By

H. MILLAS

Today’s Zaman, 5 February, 2015
The parliament building in Athens, Greece. The world has been closely watching the political developments in the country since the far-left Syriza came to power last month.

Watching the political developments in Greece from the Turkish media can actually be quite informative. I learn how everyone finds something that fits in with what he needs or what his perceptions are; like a kind of a Rorschach test. Lest you don't know, the Rorschach test is a kind of psychological test in which people are shown mixed-up shapes that look like ink blots and stains. The people are then asked what shapes they see. An analysis of the particular person's feelings, perceptions, hopes and fears is then done, based on what they say they see. These days, Greece is presenting us with a kind of Rorschach test. Of course, when the test is over, we haven't necessarily learned anything more about Greece. We do see more clearly how people living in Turkey view Greece and why. The picture has long been like this, actually. When politician Andreas Papandreu (who at the time had gotten quite old) betrayed his wife and took up with a younger lover, many Greeks were very embarrassed by the situation in the name of the country. In Turkey, though, the view of what was happening in Greece was very different; some “macho” types opined openly that Papandreu was "quite a man, able to ignore the rules of diplomacy with his mistress on his arm; good for him." Rorschach test is about our own inner worlds.

Many on the right side of the political spectrum find Syriza risky and doomed to failure, on the basis of its leftist orientation. Liberals and supporters of the EU now see that a risky coalition composed of radical left and radical right political elements has been formed in Greece. We see that a 40-person new government cabinet has been formed, with many of its members coming from varying factions of society to join ranks with Syriza. Nine of these people began their political lives in the ranks of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). Most of these people were high-level directors in their former political parties. Five of them are transfers from the center-left Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) party. What's interesting is that five are from the coalition partner, the Independent Greeks (ANEL); persons who broke away from the center right forming an even more right-wing party. Some say they are straightforward racists. In the meantime, the true nature of this unique sort of coalition has not really been analyzed and illuminated in Turkey. But the question needs to be asked: What on earth could the views,
programs, ideologies, interests and social support that drive the radical left and right political elements to join forces really be?

In Turkey, leftists see their dreams coming true in Greece: The left has won a giant victory, with the right defeated at the ballot boxes due to bad leadership. In observing all this, there are some who perceive the likely beginnings of the end of capitalism, the end of imperialism, the end of the neoliberal economy and the end of the enslavement of the people. They see the start of a process set to change Europe and maybe even the world. While some in the Republican People's Party (CHP) clamor to assert “We're next,” some even more “extreme” leftists chime in with “this business will fall on the shoulders of the true Marxists.” It looks like the “hope” slogans have jumped over the borders and into Turkey.

The forgotten recent past

But what lies behind these contradicting views are the different views on the economic crisis in Greece. Until just a year ago, declarations written by Greek academics about the country's economic crisis would fill me with surprise. There was almost nothing left unscathed by these one-and-a-half-page texts, signed off on by some 1,000 or so professors: capitalism, imperialism, neoliberal policies, the EU, the International Monetary Fund (IMF). There was never even one sentence included about actual Greek responsibility in all this. But the truth is, everyone has known for years about the propensity of governments in power in Athens to give thousands of people state jobs - with the intention of basically buying votes - and thus creating a massive cadre of state workers.

Everyone is also aware of the enormous foreign loans taken with the intention of fulfilling the desires of the villagers so vociferous at protests, without any thought as to how they might be paid back. Everyone is also acutely aware of how in Greece, pressure applied by almost corporation-like labor syndicates has been used to reduce competition - the only really positive aspect to capitalism - to almost zero, and how in response, foreign capital flow into Greece has dwindled to nothing, with local Greek capital forced to look outside for opportunities. It is also clear how all the parties in the opposition basically cheered all this on, supporting the general direction things have taken. Yes, with the taking-on of enormous debt, there is no question that living standards in Greece rose in the past decades, but this “abundance” was doomed from the start not to be sustainable.

In the end, though, it was not that those who knew said things that appeared attractive to the voters in the past elections but rather that hope-filled promises were made by some candidates. And so votes went not only to the left but also to the extreme right, to the ANEL and Golden
Dawn parties, with the latter coming third. The truth is, in order to get an accurate reading of the political situation in Greece, one needs to look beyond the left/right split. Most political arguments in this past election season were based on either being for or against the “memorandum,” as the austerity reforms are called. But there was no political party that wanted to talk to Greeks about the real reasons behind the economic crisis. Rather than admitting that “the responsibility lies with us,” we’ve seen a huge preference for talking about “the others,” a phrase that is easier on the ears and helps soothe the damaged national identity. And in the process, it was the EU, the “order of things,” Germany and so on were all turned into scapegoats. Paired with this, the memorandum - the critical austerity measures - was not perceived by anyone as being a way to end the crisis, but rather the reason for the problems everyone faced. The call “Let's put an end to the memorandum” turned into an election slogan. In fact, this was the political vision that wound up uniting all the extreme political leanings in Greece.

The truth is, the normal voter in Greece does not wish for a different political or economic order; what they really want is a return to those old living standards that extreme indebtedness had made possible. They want things to return to the way they used to be. This is why so many voters wound up moving over to the leftist Syriza, with its anti-memorandum slogans, or to ANEL and the Golden Dawn party. Since support for the memorandum is seen so widely as representing a “game played by the West,” the “West as other” sits front and center in the rhetoric heard from the extreme right and left parties in Greece. In fact, anti-West stances and anti-austerity measure stances are the same thing in Greece. And in fact, the message that austerity reforms need to be brought to an end, and that everything will then be fine, found lots of takers. Not only did the idea take root in broad factions of society but even among intellectuals with state jobs.

There is little question that the coming days will bring some interesting developments. The messages from the EU are quite clear. European Parliament (EP) President Martin Schulz, who recently visited Greece, as well as European Commission President Jean Claude Juncker, Eurogroup head Jeroen Dijsselbloem, some of top-rank government officials and Germany - and even certain prime ministers of EU countries - have all expressed the view that Syriza's suggestions are simply not realistic. They all say that treating Greece in a manner that falls outside EU principles is not possible and that for solidarity between Athens and Brussels to continue, certain structural reforms need to be completed. In the meantime, though, it appears that the new Greek government is turning in the opposite direction from all this. A country at the brink of bankruptcy, where unemployment and debt have swollen to all-time highs and where investors simply aren't there, clearly should not further swell the ranks of state clerks as its first piece of business, or put an end to vital reforms. If this new Greek government really does wind up parting ways with the EU - even if only temporarily - the crisis might only get deeper. And if and when this happens, my fear is that rather than accepting responsibility, the Athens leadership will turn to find respite in blaming “the others” and talking of how a “trap was laid for us.”
Greece: revolution or romanticism?

By

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A protester waves a Greek flag during an anti-austerity pro-government demonstration in front of the Parliament in Athens on Monday.
This is yet another faulty question because there is actually no dilemma: A revolution can also be romantic; and romanticism may have a revolutionary outlook. By romanticism, I mean excitement, enthusiasm, risk-taking, a passion to be different and a spiritual state of mind that seeks out adventure.

The romanticism that became influential in Europe in the 19th century gave birth to idealistic movements and nationalist currents that represented proud revolts. For this reason, it is not reasonable to make a distinction between romanticism and social revolutions. The influence of Rousseau and Herder can be seen in the French Revolution as associated movements, but also in Nazism as well.

Greek people are demonstrating a type of strong solidarity that has never been seen before. Surveys reveal that 80 percent of the people of Greece support the new government. At a time when negotiations are being conducted with creditors, people who take to the streets to protest are talking about economic hardship, the injustices done to the country and the undermined image and prestige of the nation. There is general agreement on this. The general wish of the people is for another option, another path for the economy and a different style of politics. "Enough is enough" is the general sentiment. The most optimistic people predict a new political style in Europe and in the country.

This general mood is seen as a just revolt and a political pursuit for a more advanced society in a number of countries, including Turkey. But if certain factors are considered, this also leads to fears and concerns. When some widespread views and sentiments are combined with certain parameters, an interesting web of perceptions emerges. I will summarize these:

1- The far right and the far left have formed a coalition government. 2- Even the Communist Party and the racist Golden Dawn party, which were left out of the coalition, hold a common approach vis-à-vis the “common enemy.” In other words, they indirectly support the anti-Western government. 3- The list of common enemies includes Germany, the West, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) etc. 4- In the distinction between us and them, the Greek side considers itself completely innocent. 5- The West is not considered a creditor; but they are shown as indebted to the Greeks. Specific references are made to debts from the Nazi era 70 years ago. 6- Cartoons in pro-government newspapers depict German politicians as Nazi officers telling their victims that they will make soap out of them. 7- As a nation, the Greeks are considered pioneers in Europe and even in the world. This sense of Greek superiority is frequently underlined. 8- In short, the pride and perception of "others " are based on a sense of victimization. Socialism is experienced together with nationalism. Does any of this remind you of a bad ideology from the recent past?

Looking at Greece from Turkey is a whole different case. Some Turks praise Greece as they
see something they have been missing for a long time. We can understand them. The Greek prime minister says he is an atheist and objects to a religious swearing-in. What he is doing is to implement the most fundamental principle of secularism. But this is a problem that has been resolved in Greece and the West; it is not a big deal and would not cause any serious problems. What matters is that secularism has not taken root in Turkey yet.

Politicians who do not wear ties may also be considered important in Turkey, which still adheres to protocols. But this is seen as a romantic childhood sickness in the world and does not attract attention. Of course, defying the West requires boldness and courage, but whether ties help is a separate matter. This courage may remind us of Cyrano de Bergerac, Edmond Rostand’s protagonist. This hero dies before rejoining his lover, but he preserves his honor. Personally, I prefer initiatives leading to solutions over showy moves. (I care about Syriza starting to make concessions, saying they will pay the debts of the country and saying they will no longer ask for loans.) If you look from Turkey, you may think that it is important if a politician rides a motorbike, has a partner without being married, does not hide that he is a communist or walks on the street by himself. But in the West, all of these are commonplace moves. These are not Greece’s problems.

Over a million unemployed

There are more than one million unemployed and jobless people in Greece. Around 100,000 more businesses are needed to employ these people. Investment is required for additional businesses, and investors and capital are needed for investment. The country needs to produce more.

At the time this was being written, the Chinese Prime Minister made a phone call to Tsipras asking him to support Chinese investments. After pro-statist economy remarks, investors panicked; they now want to leave the country. For instance, the Italian Terna company and foreign oil-extracting companies are leaving the country. Greece, failing to introduce the necessary social reforms, is ranked at the bottom in terms of suitability for investment.

The new government has made some symbolic moves. They have made some symbolic promises, as well. They promised to sell the luxury cars of politicians, reduce taxes for the poor
and supply electricity to the poor free of charge. Undoubtedly, they hold some good intentions in the name of social justice. They will be tolerant toward illegal immigrants and strengthen the social state.

But there is a problematic approach as well: They ask that the austerity plan be ended to promote development. This may sound good, but those who recommended the austerity plan did so to create a solution to joblessness and poor development performance. The real question is different: What measures will contribute to development?

The response to this question in Greece suggests that the Troika should be dissolved and the memorandum should be abolished. They argue that money should be transferred to the markets. What money? Who will supply this money? The EU has supplied billions of euros in recent years. Why did this not lead to development? Can Keynesian measures help in a country that has no production capacity?

Right now, Greece and the EU are asking different questions; and naturally, they are after different goals. One party generates a fairly abstract and nationalistic discourse. And the other is pretty pragmatic. Let us assume that what is being proposed by Greece is right. Can a small country on the edge of collapse impose a different program on 27 European countries? This is not about a simple economic austerity plan; it is the pursuit of multidimensional economic project. The developments in coming weeks will be a lot more illuminating.