

What do the Kurds Want in Turkey ?

The Kurds make up about a quarter of the population of Turkey, numbering between 15 and 20 million, according to the October 2004 Report of the European Commission.

Like all historically constituted human communities, they have the right to live in dignity in the land of their ancestors, and to preserve their identity, culture and language and hand them down freely to their children.

Having been victims of great injustice throughout the 20th century, the Kurds now pin their hopes for a better future on the process Turkey must undergo to become a member of the European Union, which they perceive as being, above all, a multicultural area of peace, democracy and pluralism. To join this family of democracies, Turkey itself must become a true democracy, with respect for its own cultural diversity and political pluralism. In particular, it must guarantee its Kurdish citizens the same rights that the Basques, Catalans, Scots, Lapps, South Tyroleans and Walloons enjoy in the democratic countries of Europe - and which it is itself demanding for the Turkish minority in Cyprus.

Public conscience will not abide a policy of double standards, which would eventually undermine the moral credibility of the European Union and tarnish the image of the Turkish government in European public opinion.

The European process offers both Turks and Kurds new and promising prospects, and gives

them a chance for reconciliation on the basis of a peaceful settlement of the Kurdish question, with due respect for existing borders. This opportunity must be appreciated at its true value.

We the undersigned, representing Kurdish society in all its political and cultural diversity, consider that such a settlement calls for:

- a new and democratic Constitution, recognising the existence of the Kurdish people, and guaranteeing it the right to a public school system and media in its own language and the right to form its own organisations, institutions and parties with the aim of contributing to the free expression of its culture and its political aspirations.

- a general amnesty in order to establish a climate of confidence and reconciliation and, once and for all, to turn the page on violence and armed conflict;

- the implementation, with European support, of a vast programme of economic development of the Kurdish region, particularly including rebuilding the more than 3,400 Kurdish villages destroyed in the 1990s, and incentives for the three million displaced Kurds to return to their homes.

We ask the Turkish authorities and the European leaders to do justice to the Kurds in Turkey by acceding to their legitimate demands in order to ensure regional peace and stability, and to consider the fulfilment of those demands to be an essential criterion by which to measure Turkey's progress along the road to membership of the European Union.

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