

# **33<sup>rd</sup> ABANT PLATFORM DECLARATION:**

## **Turkey's place in the global system**

**22 June 2014**

1. While Turkey used to be a country which had a certain direction in its foreign policy, it has recently begun to give the impression that it does not have any direction. Turkey's current situation could be summarized as the outlook of a Western country which is not Western and an Eastern country which is not Eastern.
2. While Turkey's support for the demand for democracy in the Arab world was a correct choice in principle, the fact that the country failed to keep its impartiality in the realization of its choice has led to its isolation in the region. There is a need for a sound foreign policy which is not focused on religion, sect, ideology, or identity but based on universal values, such as human rights, pluralistic democracy, and the supremacy of law.
3. While the Middle East is undergoing a transformation process, it is time to revisit the parameters of Turkish foreign policy. There is a need for a foreign policy understanding based on new and sound analyses. Turkey's not having ambassadors in three Middle Eastern capitals -- Cairo, Damascus, and Tel Aviv -- is one of the obstacles preventing effective foreign policy management.
4. Turkey's giving meaningful messages to the Middle East and its claim to have a say in the future of the region remains groundless, considering the country's failure to address its domestic matters concerning democratization, human rights, and equal citizenship.
5. Turkey should turn its direction to the EU again and it should make use of new opportunities while the EU is revisiting its institutions.

## **Civil society and political participation**

6. In democracies, politics is not left only to politicians; everyone can participate in politics. Establishing a political party is not the only way to participate in politics. Since politics is an activity aimed at building a common niche for the society, civil society organizations -- along with political parties, media, vocational organizations, and individuals -- are the other fundamental actors of the political sphere. In addition to this, the current 10 percent threshold narrows down the political domain, helps some parties cartelize, and prevents various societal circles as well as new political movements from being represented in Parliament, hence it hinders political participation.
7. When channels of accessing information are not available, and when freedoms are limited through censorship and pressure, voters cannot have complete and accurate information. Under these conditions, elections and votes lose their links to democracy. Demoting political participation to voting alone and not allowing voters to continuously follow political developments and reacting to them by making use of the sources provided by the socio-

economic and technological developments in the world -- hence preventing them from ruling themselves -- is anti-democratic.

8. The civil society, which is needed to protect citizens against the state's possible arbitrary practices in the public sphere, cannot develop and has difficulty in fulfilling this fundamental mission due to the limits the state has imposed on transparency and accountability.

## **Democratic and environmentally-friendly development**

9. Economic growth which disregards humans and environment and is only based on getting wealthy is unacceptable. The strengthening of democracy and the maintenance of a state of law are important opportunities for the improvement of the country's economic wealth as well. Economic welfare is not seen only as an economic growth concept in the 21st century; it is seen as a concept which has social, ecological and economic sustainability at the same time. So, it is necessary to adopt a growth model which respects fundamental human rights, human dignity, and the environment during the economic development process.

10. The main determiner of public investment should be expertise, participation, and transparency. The realization of public investment through objective environment impact assessments and negotiations with all relevant bodies, including local administrations and universities, is of crucial importance for the effective use of public sources.

11. There is a need for an overhaul of working conditions in Turkey with a human-based understanding, the signing of relevant international treaties to this effect, and an implementation of world standards in work life.

12. There is a benefit concerning sustainability in revisiting Turkey's development mentality based on added value, innovation, and research and development.

## **System debates and separation of powers**

13. One of the most important principles in a modern, democratic system is the system's being an effective one. Legislative bodies in Turkey no longer carry the title of fundamental institutions making laws. The importance of the legislative body has increased to holding the executive body to account in order to balance it and supervise it. To this effect, ongoing activities in the organs of the Turkish Parliament should be able to effectively call the executive body to account.

14. In this context, the principle of the separation of powers should be implemented as soon as possible in order to strengthen democracy, and the independence of the judiciary is of the utmost importance to achieve this. In order to maintain the independence of the judiciary, not on paper but in practice, there is a need to establish a legal guaranty for judges. This requires a prevention of the executive body's interference with members of the judiciary. Only under such a guaranty can the judiciary perform its function in accordance with impartial principles of law alone.

15. In a similar vein, there is an obligation for laws to be implemented truthfully and independently, in addition to the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms to establish

a public bureaucracy which is protected from partisanship and favoritism and based on competence.

16. As a matter of fact, amendments that will reinforce the separation of powers should be made by strengthening local administrations and integrating them into the political system in a way to support checks and balances.

## **Problems of democratic representation: pluralism and majoritarianism**

17. It is historically known that majoritarianism has the potential to evolve into tyranny at any time. Concrete examples of majoritarianism include passing omnibus bills without allowing them be discussed at length by the public, refusing to be transparent, reducing accountability to the public to election processes, and provoking polarization.

18. The constitutional amendments of 2010 weakened the tutelary institutions, but a lack of democratic institutions that can limit political power paved the way for the emergence of majoritarian practices. What we need today is to create new legal restrictive mechanisms.

19. At a time when fundamental principles such as the separation of powers and checks and balances -- which are indispensable components of a sound democracy -- are being undermined in favor of the ruling party, the existence of constitutional institutions which support freedoms and abstain from political contention should be appreciated.

20. Building policies on traumas stemming from victimization, grievances, and hostilities leads to new traumas or new "otherizations." It is essential for politics to refrain from "otherization," to instill confidence in society, and to exhibit its sincerity in order to contribute to the healthy development of the society.

21. Social peace can be achieved if a pluralistic mentality is adopted instead of majoritarian discourses and practices, so that everyone can have equal access to civil rights in practice, given the fact that democracy is a system that should protect the rights of all groups.