

YUSUF ZIYA IRBEC

Member of the Turkish Parliament

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There is a country which sometimes sees itself as a bridge between Europe and Asia, which is Turkey. We had a Turkish voice, from the Government, at the beginning; in this final panel we have a Turkish voice from the opposition, Yusuf Ziya Irbec, who is a member of the Turkish parliament.

Yusuf Ziya Irbec, Member of the Turkish Parliament

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a democratically elected government and a prime minister who defines himself as very democratic. King Abdullah said in an interview in the *Atlantic Review* in March that democracy is a bus ride – if you need it you get in, and if you do not need it you get out. This is not my definition, but that of the Prime Minister. The name of the party, if this is the case, is the Justice and Development Party. There is no problem on the development side for many reasons, but there are many problems on the justice side; if the name of the party includes the word 'justice,' so many journalists should not be allowed to go to prison because of their right of freedom of expression. This is happening in Turkey; unfortunately there is a problem with freedom of the press.

Another problem is freedom of expression. I am in the opposition and was re-elected for a second time, but I was more on the Government side than the opposition side. I have the experience in that case. I saw very clearly that everything is defined in quantities; the Vice-Prime Minister identifies freedom of expression with the fact that there are more than 400 radio stations and an increased number of television stations. This is possible, but there needs to be better understanding and better dialogue between societies and cultures. We have a very multidimensional culture in Turkey, and politicians should be prepared to understand all the dimensions of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and all other religious groups. This is the basis for being an efficient leader in Turkey.

However, I do not see a development in this direction. The reason is that, in order to have a functioning democracy, you should try to have a very efficient opposition, and if you make mistakes, the opposition should have the opportunity to convince you of that, or to defend you against negative impacts on an international and a national level. Nobody is a dictator in the democratic election process; we do not want a dictator. Therefore, we want to be criticised, we want to see ourselves in the mirror. The mirror of the government is the opposition, but in Turkey the Prime Minister says, 'Thanks be to God, I have these two weak oppositional leaders.' This should not be a statement of a democratic leader.

I was also a candidate on the opposition side, and I do not want to go further to that side, but I was registered by his party without my knowledge, my party membership was rescinded, and I was not able to go to my party congress. This is happening in Turkey, and on the other side, the economy is fine, there is no problem. However, where is Turkey going? Radicalisation is another problem. Religion is used for different purposes, in order to gain more votes; this is wrong. The people are radicalised when you use religion for electoral reasons.

Another point is that, at the end of the Second World War, we had fewer than 50 countries, and now we have close to 200. This means more nations and more cooperation. No one expects that the number of countries will decrease; the number of countries will increase, and every 100 years systems and structures are reorganised. The reason for this is not in the scope of our discussion now, but it is happening. Look at the Congress of Vienna of 1815, the First World War 100 years later, and the situation now after 200 years.