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Main opposition CHP chair slams Erdoğan's constitution bid



"If you want to be credible, if you really stand for democracy, then first you should abide by the current constitution," main opposition CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu (R) says during an interview on the government's new charted bid. (Photo: YetkinReport)

Turkish main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has responded to the "new constitution" suggestion by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, saying that Turkey really needs a new charter but the new offer raises concerns about "strengthening authoritarianism in the country, not democracy."

"Dictators do not want a democratic constitution based on human rights," Kılıçdaroğlu said in an interview with YetkinReport on Feb. 7.

"On the contrary, they believe that the separation of powers (checks and balances) weakens them and causes weaknesses for their rule. Because dictators think that they can survive as long as they hold the power... The main reason for their understanding is that all dictators are narcissists."

Below are Kılıçdaroğlu's answers to our questions:

"The first four articles must stay"

President Erdoğan said the time has come for a new constitution for Turkey. You haven't responded to that idea. What do you think about this?

All the people in favor of democracy in the country agree that "Turkey needs a new, democratic constitution." Of course, provided that the first four articles(*) of the constitution should remain unchanged. Turkey should carry its democratic standards further with a new constitution, we need that. What we need is an "empowered parliamentary system."

This is a concept widely used by the opposition, but not fully understood. What do you mean when you say "empowered parliamentary system?"

When we say "empowered parliamentary system" we do not mean a return to the Sept. 12 constitution [the 1982 charter that followed the Sept. 12, 1980 military coup]. On the contrary, we should clean the constitution and laws from the coup law. In the system we think of a healthy checks and balances system between the legislative, judicial and executive institutions should be established so that rights will be secured.

"Priority: ensuring separation of powers"

All these sound like general concepts. Can you elaborate?

If we summarize the main principles of this system; the first goal is to ensure the separation of powers.

The second one is to limit the executive power's influence on the legislature and the judiciary. It includes making merit, transparency and accountability unchanging rules in public administration.

The third is to create an auditable execution. In particular, ensuring that the Court of Accounts conducts audits in accordance with international norms.

The fourth is to ensure that parliament has effective legislative and auditing opportunities, also forming it in a way that ensures broad representation and consensus. This includes abolishing the anti-democratic regulations in the Law on Political Parties and the election code (such as election thresholds) and changing the regulations introduced by the coup law that disrupts justice in representation and stability in administration.

The fifth is to ensure that the judiciary gains a completely independent structure that is free from the influence of politics and that can audit the legislation and the executive.

The sixth is to establish a functional checks and balances mechanism. This includes ensuring the participation of professional organizations and non-governmental organizations in the legislative processes.

"The government is not credible, reassuring"

How can these be included in a new constitution?

To do all these, first of all, the executive body that pioneers a new constitution, that is, the government, must be convincing and reassuring. We do not find the government credible or reassuring. How will a government that does not even comply with the current constitution make a democratic constitution? How will it make us believe?

What kind of democracy or what kind of a democratic constitution can we talk about if not only the government but even the judiciary under its control does not implement the Constitutional Court decisions and even if the European Court of Human Rights [ECtHR] decisions are not implemented.

What credibility can we talk about in an environment where even university students who exercise their right to demonstrate in accordance with the current constitution are declared terrorists by the rulers of the country?

If you want to be credible, if you really stand for democracy, then first you should obey the current constitution. You should not reward judges who do not implement the decisions of the Constitutional Court or the ECtHR and promote them to the Court of Cassation. You should not appoint judges to the Constitutional Court by irregular means. You should keep your oath on your honor that you will remain impartial. In short, those acts are the opposite of their discourse should first learn what democracy is.

"Dictators are narcissists, they don't want democracy"

You accuse Erdoğan of not abiding by the Constitution, but the current constitution was already accepted with the support of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and its election ally Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Isn't that a contradiction?

The current constitutional amendment, which envisaged the authoritarian structure we live in today and abolisher the separation of powers, was accepted in the referendum [on April 16, 2017] under the conditions of the state of emergency, which we name the "civilian coup", declared on July 20, 2016, after the coup attempt on July 15, 2016. Just like the constitutional referendum held after the Sept. 12, 1980 coup. During this period, the country has been governed by presidential decree laws.

History has taught us this: Dictators do not want a democratic constitution based on human rights. On the contrary, they believe that the separation of powers

weakens them and causes weaknesses for their rule. Because dictators think that they can survive as long as they hold the power... The main reason for their understanding is that all dictators are narcissists.

What will you tell your election ally İYİ (Good) Party and other opposition parties when you discuss these issues?

I am concerned that the demanded constitutional amendments will strengthen authoritarianism rather than democracy.

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(*) The first four articles of the Constitution of the Republic of Turkey are as follows:

I. Form of the State

ARTICLE 1- The State of Turkey is a Republic.

II. Characteristics of the Republic

ARTICLE 2- The Republic of Turkey is a democratic, secular and social state governed by rule of law, within the notions of public peace, national solidarity and justice, respecting human rights, loyal to the nationalism of Atatürk, and based on the fundamental tenets set forth in the preamble.

III. Integrity, official language, flag, national anthem, and capital of the State

ARTICLE 3- The State of Turkey, with its territory and nation, is an indivisible entity. Its language is Turkish. Its flag, the form of which is prescribed by the relevant law, is composed of a white crescent and star on a red background. Its national anthem is the "Independence March". Its capital is Ankara. IV. Irrevocable provisions

ARTICLE 4- The provision of Article 1 regarding the form of the State being a Republic, the characteristics of the Republic in Article 2, and the provisions of Article 3 shall not be amended, nor shall their amendment be proposed.