



TURKMENS SUFFERED THE MOST BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER THE ISIS.

Hasan Turan



Hasan Turan was born in Kirkuk and graduated from the Faculty of Agriculture. He acted as the Turkmen Member of the Kirkuk Provincial Council that was formed by the USA in 2003. He worked as the Vice-President of the Turkmen Justice Party formed in 2004. In May 2011, he became the Member of Board Responsible for Foreign Relations at the reformed Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF). While still undertaking the Vice-Presidency of the ITF, he was elected as the Member of the Iraqi Parliament from Kirkuk in the 2014 Elections. He is also the Vice-President of the Legislation Commission of the Iraqi Parliament. Turan has been working on the Kirkuk issue since 2003 in cooperation with international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union, contributing to the dialogue between different ethnic groups and political parties in Kirkuk.

ORSAM: Let me begin with the political crisis in Baghdad. As far as we are informed you were in Baghdad throughout the crises and even you were in the Green Zone when the protestors stormed the Iraqi Parliament. How do you assess the political crisis in Baghdad? What are the causes of such a crisis and how did the Iraqi Parliament fall under such conditions?

HASAN TURAN: You ask a very important question. That is because we suffer from the lack of peace and political stability in Baghdad. We, the Turkmens, suffer the most from the ongoing developments. What we want is a strong and inclusive political structure in Baghdad. We have had the misfortune to experience firsthand the outcomes of a unilateral style of politics during the previous government and have witnessed the heavy cost that the Iraqi people had to pay because of that. Unilateral politics in Iraq has always been a danger. Therefore, we have always felt the need for stability and peace in Iraq.

We, first of all, need to look at the crises that Iraq suffers from and what the government proposes to solve them. As you are well aware, the struggle against ISIS is our most important agenda. Several Iraqi provinces are under the ISIS rule such as Mosul, the west of Kirkuk, several districts of Selahaddin and a large portion of Ramadi. As the Iraqi government, we are obliged to carry on the struggle. Nevertheless, it is not quite an easy task. Iraq is not strong enough to continue this struggle on its own so it needs to receive support from national allies and regional and international actors. In my opinion, neither regional nor international actors will prove to be effective against ISIS unless we have stability and an inclusive government in Iraq. Both Ban-Ki Moon and the World Bank administration told us very clearly in their speeches in the Iraqi parliament, "We are with you as long as you are able to work closely with each other." They underlined the presence and importance of the government in Iraq. That is because, as I mentioned earlier, cannot achieve success on its own in

this struggle without the help of international organizations. That is the issue that the Iraqi government has to prioritize and take responsibility.

Another problem is the ongoing economic crisis. As you know, the price of crude oil which was almost 100-110 dollars per barrel has fallen to low values. It caused a serious crisis for Iraq. During the former government, the misuse of 550 billion dollars created problems for the Iraqi treasury and budget. The government spends approximately 3.5 billion dollars for salaries and obligatory expenses (public spending such as food stamps, healthcare, etc.). During some months of this year, we were able to acquire only 1 billion; we are short by 2.5 billion dollars. No new projects are developed for three years. The government struggles to finish the ongoing projects. The economic crisis is also linked to domestic peace and stability, since the World Bank and IMF promises support if these two are maintained.

Our third problem is the migrant problem numbering around 3.5 and 4 million people. Most of these people

are internally displaced while others are from other countries. As you know, there are hundred thousands of Iraqi migrants in Turkey. This situation also requires a thorough assessment and support by international organizations as I mentioned earlier. In fact, there is little that government can do about this and furthermore I do not believe that the government has a vision regarding the situation. This is the biggest problem. I have mentioned this problem to the prime minister and other officials numerous times. Either the government does not have a vision therefore is unable to devise a solution or it has the required vision but opts to keep it unknown. Both of these options are negative for the society's well being. Prime Minister's reform packages only include changing names and abolishing ministries. It is as if the concept of reform implies only these. In my opinion, "reform" requires much more beyond these.

Then, what is to be done, in your opinion?

Primarily, Prime Minister needs to form a "common

In democratic countries, parliaments are a venue for discussing opposite views within the framework of the law. If one of the sides tries to force a resolution, we cannot talk about a working democracy.



vision” and transfer it to the others. That is because there is a Parliament in Iraq in which the members are assigned by elections. Naturally, it also entails opposition on either ethnic or sectarian grounds. In the current system, we can witness a multitude of opinions within a single group. Now the Shiite coalition, the Sunni Coalition or Kurds do not share the same views. Thankfully, there is no conflict of opinions among us, the Turkmens in the Parliament. We have maintained our common approach. On this issue, the government needs to define projects and include the political groups in the discussion and exchange of opinions. What has been done up

to now is that the government asks for approval of something without opening it to discussion of members of the Parliament or other groups. Unfortunately, this is not a working method.

So you mean that Abadi seeks reform and change without political negotiations?

That is exactly what I mean to say. Yet, Abadi shares his vision on reform with no one. He waits until the last second for a reform package and gives the names of minister he wants to change and their replacements without an explanation. Maybe, this behavior can be attributed to Abadi’s politi-

cal character as a prime minister, though different political factions must be included in all this process. As a matter of fact, if a balance is struck his own and other political factions it is natural that Abadi adopts such a political character. Lastly, Prime Minister declared that he had a list including members from all ethnic and sectarian groups. He did not uncover the list at that session. Later, the Chair of the Parliament informed us about the list. When we had a look at it, we have seen that there is no Turkmen representative included. We decided to vote against the cabinet since it included no Turkmens while also boasting that the list was all inclusive. As it can be derived from this anecdote, my personal opinion is that a prime minister needs to present a vision for his country. Regardless of the support a Prime Minister receives from international community, he still needs a parliament to approve of his policies. As you know we have five ministers who cannot go to their ministries because the Parliament could not hold a session in which they could swear an oath before starting their assignments.

If we know these, it is certain that Prime Minister and other are also aware. Such parliamentary incidents should be prevented in order to avoid such tensions. As I said earlier, the reason that international organizations support Iraq is that Iraq has a government that was elected unlike the other Middle Eastern countries. Our constitutional institutions make a difference. If these institutions are damaged, Iraq will lose the international support it enjoys. If we lose that support, how will we carry on our struggle against military, economic and humanitarian challenges such as the migration problem? My opinion is that the government needs to prepare a reform package that includes not only reassignments but also solutions to the three problems I mentioned earlier and that encourage exchange of opinions.

You touched upon a very important point. You talked about the presence and necessity of the constitutional institutions. Maybe the greatest problem of Iraq after 2003 that these institutions do not operate as intended. Today, the parliament is the

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only institution that works. Yet we observe fractions within the parliament. As far as we know, there were attempts last week to oust Salim al Juburi, the Parliament chairman. Afterwards, the motion did not get the votes it required and fake attempts were revealed causing an upheaval. How did the Parliament get to this kind of a disagreement? What were the causes for disagreements within the groups?

The beginning of the problems was about that lists. I should underline that it all began with Abadi not presenting a common vision. The actual problem was about the

cabinet not about the parliament. Unfortunately, Prime Minister has spread the cabinet's problem into the parliament. This problem could have been solved in the cabinet in a much more sensible way. Another important problem is the way that the people view the cabinet. Today, all factions in Iraq benefit from the cabinet since they have a member in it. In the future when elections are held, the factions will seek to materialize gains through the cabinet or other ways. When the Prime Minister wanted to jeopardize their advantage through changing the cabinet, naturally they opposed and sought to prevent



his actions by forming a group of 80 in the parliament. There were discussions for a reform within the parliament for the Parliament Chairman remained weak vis-à-vis the Prime Minister. This is naturally within their constitutional rights. We have 328 members in our parliament. The parliament chairman can be changed with %50+1 votes, therefore 165 votes would be naturally enough. Yet, when the video recordings were evaluated, it was observed that the votes in favor were not enough. It remained at 131. The situation was against the constitution and the parliament was engulfed in a struggle. Meanwhile, the President made some moves within his constitutional rights providing us with a roadmap. Yet no further progress was achieved and the process lacked an outcome. That is because it was the second time that a group lacking the required constitutional majority attempted to superimpose their view on the parliament. We believe that any group that reaches 165 votes may naturally change whatever they want. This is a constitutional right. This is a

voting process. Any side that wins the voting process may do whatever it wants. But that group's uncompromising attitude has caused a lockdown and a solution remained out of reach. As you know, after this mess, the Sadr group has arrived with 33 MPs. They tried to force Abadi's reform package, particularly focusing on its contents about ministerial changes. Yet it was not possible. In democratic countries, parliaments are a venue for discussing opposite views within the framework of the law. If one of the sides tries to force a resolution, we cannot talk about a working democracy. That is the reason why we opposed this situation within the parliament. We always advocate the constitutional principle of 165 MPs. Otherwise; the outcome may drag the country towards an undesired situation.

You have enlightened us about the domestic dynamics. Do you think the regional countries seek to prevent the formation of an inclusive government? Or do you think the regional count-

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ries support the formation of such a government yet the internal disagreements within Iraq makes it impossible? That is because all the problems you mentioned are caused by the lack of an inclusive government and a culture of consensus and democracy. Furthermore, what is your general outlook on the policies of the regional countries about this crisis?

It is maybe the first time that the regional countries are on the same page about this issue. They are and should be well aware that Iraq needs to achieve and maintain stability. This is because the Middle East is undergoing a critical period. At this point, it would

take months to remove the government in Iraq and form a new. Moreover, its outcome is indefinite, particularly with regard to the fight against ISIS. A dangerous situation is likely to emerge. If we look at Turkey, we see that it always uttered its support for an inclusive government and stability in Iraq. Iran also shares that perspective. Moreover, the US also has a similar rhetoric in the latest period. Particularly the neighboring countries have connections and interests within Iraq. My personal opinion is that the priority is on the well-being of Iraq not on any country's interests. As I said earlier, a new picture is emerging in Iraq.

Today, neither the Shiites and Sunnis nor the Kurds are able to establish a model the same relations as before. The Kurds were fragmented into five groups, the Shiites experience disagreements. Sadr's opinions are different from those of Ammar al Hakim. The disagreements might positively affect a tendency towards democracy. Maybe a list can be composed of all ethnic and sectarian groups which would promote inclusiveness. Nevertheless, we are experiencing different and difficult conditions as of today. The priority of our struggle should be about how the parliament will be convened. For example, there was a session on Tuesday which couldn't take place. The reason for that is the lists were not able to agree on a common decision to convene. There are two main issues for the sessions. The first is the maintenance of the parliament in a confident manner and the presence of a trustworthy decision-making mechanism. This mechanism has to operate independent of any foreign intervention, threats and pressures. If these conditions

are met and a member of parliament may freely present his own opinions, the parliament may maintain its presence and acquire a working character.

UNAMI has spent a great deal of effort for this problem up to now. They are talking to all sides and initiating exchange of ideas. Yet, no common vision was developed. This is a dangerous situation. That is because even the gathering of the cabinet received reactions and opposition. We have 22 ministers in our parliament and according to the regulations, 11 of them are sufficient for a cabinet meeting. Some others say the number is 9, 10 or 11 and it is all because some ministers have not sworn oaths. That is the reason why the parliament must convene as soon as possible and the government has to provide security for the Parliament and its building and enable all members to express their minds and promote joint decisions. To sum up, this is the main issue about the latest crisis in Baghdad.

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Your emphasis on the role of the regional countries is of vital importance.

Looking back, we see that after the Iraqiyya list won the 2010 elections, Turkey's warnings were not heeded and the US-Iran cooperation prevented the Prime Ministry of Allawi, and all these errors led to the problems between 2011 and 2014 and the current situation. Unfortunately, Americans are late to realize some basic issues. For example, a British political advisor of Ray Odierno who worked in Kirkuk and Baghdad wrote in his memories that their biggest mistake was suppor-

ting the government that was formed after a wrong decision by the Constitutional Court without paying heed to the 2010 election results. In this sense, another problem of ours is that the judicial system and our constitutional institutions are in a bad shape.

You have touched upon a very important issue. You have mentioned the necessity of a trustworthy decision-making mechanism. This is maybe the single most important issue in Iraq as of today. Considering the current deformation of Iraq's insti-

tutional body and the inability to establish state institutions, do you think that an independent and sound technocratic government for Iraq is possible?

In my opinion, no. However, a technocratic government may be accepted. However, the political factions in Iraq must have a say about that. For example, why does the Prime Minister pick someone as the representative of Turkmens? Why does not the Turkmen MPs select pick one of their own? This is also true for other groups. When Mr. Abadi picks the people with whom he will work harmoniously, he should also leave us some space for defining the names and then use his own powers. Despite all the talks that we had, we still have not received any clear information about which group will have which ministry. Like before, they collect the names and put forward those who are from their own list. Afterwards, they ask the parliament to pass the lists. In my opinion, a technocratic government must be led by a technocrat prime minister. Why does the prime minis-

ter have a party affiliation while all other ministers do not? This opinion further fueled the problems. Therefore, I think that the Iraqi government is in a wrong way and has to solve this problem as soon as possible. The Reform package cannot include only a cabinet shift. In addition, a total reform package is needed which will remember Iraq as a country of agriculture and industry as well and include these besides oil production.

How do the fight against ISIS progress under these circumstances of political crisis? In other words, do you think that the fight may progress in a sound way while all these problems plague Iraq?

Definitely not. The political crisis affects the fight against ISIS the most. How can the army or the federal police carry on this struggle under such circumstances? Moreover, some forces have withdrawn from the fight in order to defend Baghdad. Unfortunately, ISIS will benefit the most as long as the political crisis continues. We always stress that Baghdad

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needs stability and peace as well as a government that represents all ethnic and sectarian groups. The scope of the fight against ISIS makes this a necessity. Today, ISIS is not only in Iraq but also in Syria, Libya, Tunisia, and in the Gulf countries. Turkey has to fight against the ISIS in Syria since its borders are being bombed every day. Therefore, it has become an international problem and if we lose the international dimension, we can no longer foresee the future. For example, we are in need of air support. Our air force has been unable to recover after 2003. Therefore, we need to ask for support from the international

community. Then, how will we ensure foreign aid? It is possible only when the domestic political crisis ends. Unfortunately, this political crisis affects the fight against ISIS as well. Meanwhile, the Turkmen village of Beshir has been liberated. We, as Turkmen, contributed a great deal in the liberation of Beshir. However, one must point out that the victory does not belong to only one side. All sides' contributions to the victory must be handled as a whole.

After the liberation, the village of Beshir must be further supported. Approximately 70% or 80% of the local houses are damaged and need immediate resto-

ration. I am sure that Turkey will contribute to these efforts and a quick recovery will be provided.

By the way, ISIS has laid lots of landmines to the region and mine-clearing activities are still going on. Turkmens are taking part in these activities with great numbers and meanwhile 200 of them were martyred even though the village is liberated. In this perspective, Beshir is a model for the rest of Iraq. A settlement can be liberated through the following steps, first local people must participate, then local forces must be deployed and then international forces must provide air support. To stress once again, Beshir was liberated by its own people, by its Turkmens. Ramadi, too, was liberated by its own people, the Iraqi army and air support. Khawija and Mosul must be liberated in the same way as well. Local forces must be supported and organized while including all ethnic and sectarian groups. If Mosul is to be liberated Turkmens, Kurds, Arabs and the local people must participate. That is because the struggle does not end when

the fighting ceases. The people must continue their lives afterwards. Therefore, the struggle must be sustained and then concluded.

As it is well known, Turkmens suffered a great deal in Tal Afar. Hundred thousands of people migrated elsewhere. Under these circumstances, how can Turkmens live there once again? In my opinion, if the Sunni and Shiite Turkmens of Tal Afar fight together against ISIS, there is hope for a peaceful future after ISIS. The foremost task of Turkmens is to organize the people under a joint fighting force, train them and carry on the fight to save Tal Afar.

How do you see the future of the Mosul operation? Is it to be concluded in a short time? What are the obstacles against its realization? What is your opinion?

First, I must say that I agree with you that ISIS is primarily a political problem. Unless democracy is rooted in the Middle East and the people's voices are heard, maybe more radical terrorists will emerge tomorrow once ISIS is destroyed.

The control of Mosul means the control of Iraq-Syria border.



Therefore, the political crisis must be ended be it in Syria or in Iraq. Afterwards, we can tackle the ISIS problem in a short time. Secondly, we have seen both in Iraq and in Syria that the US only supports one side, a situation which is wrong in my opinion. The Americans need to change this policy as soon as possible. Unless they change it, ISIS will benefit from the situation a great deal. They support only one group which commits human rights breaches and demographic alterations and they still go on working with that group. This is an entirely wrong policy, I repeat. For example, what did the international actors or the United Nations

do for Aleppo? Bombardments, civilian deaths and humanitarian tragedy have been seen daily yet nothing was done. Why does no one speak out for Aleppo but yet we hear a loud voices for elsewhere in the world? To compare, America's approach for both Aleppo and Beshir was evident. When Russians came, they adopted a similar attitude. The purpose was not only about saving Syria from ISIS but also about supporting the current regime, and we see its dire consequences. Lastly, we will not get rid of the ISIS problem unless we solve the political crisis.

The Mosul operation will not be carried out through

news on the media. Mosul is the first Iraqi city that ISIS has captured. Two and a half million people live at the city center. Before the ISIS, it was 1.6 million but then people from the outlying villages migrated to Mosul and the population reached 2.5 million. We need careful planning before the operation and we need to besiege the area, opening humanitarian corridors as well. It is crucial that the operational group and character must be determined very well. All these must be carefully assessed. We need to liberate Mosul and actively operate in the surroundings. That is because the control of Mosul means the control of Iraq-Syria border. ISIS receives the greatest support through Syria. Therefore, unless the border is closed the liberation of Mosul will not be easy. Iraq and the international actors have considered that and have made their plans accordingly. When the operations started one and a half month earlier, Iraqi army faced losses due to low readiness level. I hope we do not have the same situation once again and we assess the

situation in a rational manner. But the important thing is that local people must participate in the operation along with the Iraqi army, policy and the Peshmerge; and the international actors must also be involved.

Let's go over the Turkmen issue. Can you tell us clearly the position of Turkmens in the current political crisis and in the fight against ISIS? For example, what is the position of Turkmens in the Mosul operation, in the security measures around Kirkuk, in the political and military balance of power in Kirkuk and the ongoing political crisis?

Unfortunately, Turkmens suffered the most both before and after the ISIS. Our territories in Tal Afar, Mosul and Kirkuk were among the first that ISIS assaulted. Turkmens had to flee their homes and fell into dire conditions. These migrants wait for the time that their settlements will be liberated and they will be able to return home. And there is something else that I cannot decide it is a fortune or a misfortune. Our

In our time, a community needs economic or military power in order to survive. This is true for Iraq as well. Why don't the Turkmens have a militia of their own while others have Peshmerge, Hash al Shaabi or Iraqi Army?

territory has rich energy reserves. Turkmens live on oil and natural gas reserves. This is clear. Both in Tel Afar, Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmato, the energy wealth has caused troubles for Turkmens. This has been the case since 1927. Despite the fact that we live in this region, we couldn't benefit from these resources. Every regime since then has confiscated the wealth and used it against us. We now face a similar situation. As you know, neither the Oil Ministry nor the government informs us about who controls the Kirkuk oil, how much oil is exported, the transit routes, its budget and the contribution of exported oil to Kirkuk. Only the governor told us that he receives 5 million dollars. But again we do not know how this sum takes place within the budget. Oil and natural gas issue is not handled in a transparent manner. In my opinion, regardless of any solution developed, we as Iraqi Turkmens support the unity of Iraq and we have a stake in any solution. Turkmens have a right to the oil and natural gas wealth as much as Arabs and Kurds. Maybe our right

is greater than those of others since the reserves are in our territories. Therefore we need to have our share from the wealth as an inclusive solution is developed for Iraq.

In our time, a community needs economic or military power in order to survive. This is true for Iraq as well. Why don't the Turkmens have a militia of their own while others have Peshmerge, Hash al Shaabi or Iraqi Army? This is against common logic. That is the reason why it is natural for the Turkmens to have a militia force in order to survive among the other groups in Iraq. On the contrary, the Turkmens do not use this force for aggressive aims. It was founded only to fight against ISIS. Unfortunately, we didn't receive Baghdad's support that we needed. Just think that I wrote a petition to the Ministry of Defense asking for a military unit to be dispatched for liberating Beshir. The Ministry then forwards my request to the Joint Operations Center of the Prime Ministry. Their response was that they wanted to send army units there but they are opposed by a

certain ethnic group. This incident shows the illogical situation that we experience. Therefore, the Turkmen have a right to form a militia to protect themselves, which must be constitutionally accepted. Secondly, our community has the same rights to benefit from oil and natural gas wealth as the other groups.

When looking from the perspective of rights, Turkmen's administrative posts were confiscated and not given back.

This is, in my opinion, entirely according to a plan. The current developments in Kirkuk aim to delete our existence from Kirkuk. There is a return to Saddam's policies now. Just as there were no Turkmen appointed even to the post of school director at the end of Saddam's rule, the policies of today are similar. This policy is applied in the police, district councils, departments and assemblies. We, Turkmen, need to develop a policy accordingly. The Turkmen of Kirkuk must take back their rights. It is necessary that they must alert all Iraqis to

the games played and they need to know the unjust practices against the Turkmen in the whole of Iraq. We need to think and act about these issues in a serious manner. And also we need to defend our rights to the energy resources. Unless we intervene in these matters, we will fall into a weak position. That is the reason why solving the two equations is very important to us. We need to study these in a scientific and constitutional framework, reach a solution and take back what is ours.

We know that Turkmen have a lot of expectations from Turkey. Also, Turkish officials are sensitive towards the Turkmen presence in the Middle East as we know from their statements. Turkey also provides support to a certain extent. In your opinion what can Turkey do more in order to contribute to the political solution of the Turkmen's problems? What can you say as a Turkmen MP, as the voice of the Iraqi Turkmen about their problems, demands and expectations from Turkey?

As far as I am able to see, Turkey is the most loved country in this region. Turkey has friends in Iraq among the Arabs and Kurds. The Turkmen are already a part of Turkey.

What do they expect from Turkish officials?

As you know, there is a main “Turkish” branch passing through Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. This is the geography of Turkmens. Therefore it is natural for the Turkmens to be in solidarity and to have cultural, economic and political links with Turks. That is exactly what other nations are doing. While talking about the Arabs, the issue is not only the Arabs of Iraq. Rather it is all Arabs from Marrakesh to the Gulf. Kurds declare that they are present in various countries and ask for their rights. Then it is natural for Turkmens to demand their rights. Turkmens constantly mention this issue to the administration. Moreover, other people are relieved as well. But other people cannot do that.

We, Turkmens, have great expectations from Turkey. Turkey has made substantial humanitarian aid to the Turkmens both in Turkey and in Iraq. Other than that, our expectation from Turkey is that it should play a greater role in the region. We

expect a greater contribution from Turkey particularly in the fight against ISIS in Iraq, in the Mosul operation and in Kirkuk. The international coalition is in the region. Turkey has a role in this coalition. Turkey is also a NATO member. Our main objective is peace, stability, territorial unity and an inclusive government in Iraq. Any rational individual can see the necessity of that. But, foreign actors have sought to limit Turkey’s influence after the Arab Spring. They have tried to ensure that by providing a US-Russia consensus. Turkey needs to develop new policies by overcoming these obstacles.

As far as I am able to see, Turkey is the most loved country in this region. Turkey has friends in Iraq among the Arabs and Kurds. The Turkmens are already a part of Turkey. The views of the Shiites and the Sunnis towards Turkey are the same. They also have expectations from Turkey. They want Turkey to engage them and provide support. But the American-Russian consensus seeks to limit and even neutralize Turkey’s role.

Turkey needs to resist these aims of America and Russia. That is because it is the demand of the regional people. The whole region needs and demands Turkey. Turkey's role is a peaceful, humanitarian and all inclusive role. Therefore, I think there is a dangerous situation which can be resolved by a common approach by Turkey. Moreover, Turkey needs to return to its policy of "Zero Problems with Neighbors." That is because the threat is aimed at not a single country but all regional countries.

Therefore, it is important to meet on common grounds. Turkey needs to open a new page in the Middle East. The bigger role Turkey has in the Middle East, the better conditions there will be for The Turks in Iraq and Syria. The imperialist powers seek to weaken Turkey's role and to make the problems chronic for their own interests.

Thank you for your precious comments and we wish you success in your work and political career.

The whole region needs and demands Turkey. Turkey's role is a peaceful, humanitarian and all inclusive role.

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