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It has been months since Kılıçdaroğlu made a public statement on 13 November announcing his decision to "make amends" with the aim of establishing peace. Following this controversial call to make amends (helalleşme), we have seen this debate losing steam from time to time; nonetheless, the process is still ongoing. On 14 February, CHP posted a video on their social media account with the tag "the journey of making amends has begun". On 9 March, Kılıçdaroğlu went to Diyarbakır province as part of his "making amends" visit and held several meetings. On 11 April, 37 civil society organisations led by DEMOS confirmed their support for the call to make amends by making a statement titled "We are Here for Truth, Justice and Equality"[1], publicly affirming that they "as civil society organisations, professional organisations and initiatives, aspire to work together and promote any process based on truth, justice and equality". In the next six months, several conversations were held with the said groups, and they were asked their opinions on the process of making amends. Opinion columns and blog posts were written, and debate programs were held on the matter. There have been discussions on many topics ranging from the concept of "making amends" to how this process should be carried out and whom to engage in the process.

DEMOS website posted a series of articles titled "Türkiye Helalleşme'yi Tartışırken" and three significant blog posts that have so far provided a major contribution to this field. Güneş (Daşlı) addressed reconciliation and transitional justice in his article titled "How Can We Discuss Helalleşme in the Context of Reconciliation and Transitional Justice?"[2], Nisan Alıcı provided details on transitional justice in her article "What Kind of Transitional Justice Do We Imagine?"[3] and Güley (Bor) covered the role of civil society in her article titled "What Role Can Civil Society Play in Transitional Justice?"[4], all of which provided substantial insight and broadened our perspectives on the debate.

I strongly recommend that you read these articles. I find these discussions very important, and in this blog post, I would like to briefly share my opinions on the actors to engage if this process of "making amends" will continue and the mechanisms will be established.

The question of which actors should be engaged in peace-building processes is a topic of discussion in the conflict resolution literature. Lederach[5] divides the actors in the peace-building process into three levels. The first level is defined as "the top leadership", referring

to decision-makers, political/military/religious leaders, the parliament etc. The second level, described as “Middle-range leadership”, covers actors such as civil society organisations, intellectuals, academicians, religious actors, women and LGBTI+ groups. The third level is the “Grassroots leadership”, which refers to actors such as ordinary people-survivors who have suffered from conflicts, local civil society organisations, local religious leaders and opinion leaders etc.

Engaging all of these actors is necessary to achieve a successful peace-building process. The 2013-2015 solution process showed us that the engagement of only top-level leaders is not enough on its own and that there is a lack of solid bottom-up leadership that would avoid the collapse of the peace talks. Examples worldwide reveal that processes that begin only from the local level to the exclusion of middle and top-level leadership also fail to be sufficient. Let me share with you, insofar as a blog post allows me to do so, why I think all three levels of actors should be engaged in the process of making amends, which I believe to be a part of the peace-building process.

Certain groups have been critical of the concept of making amends as it is based on Islam religion; nevertheless, I think it is important to use local concepts in peace-building processes to reach a broader audience in society. Hence, I am more interested in how to apply this concept rather than the concept itself. In less than two years to the elections, the call by the main opposition party leader to make amends is important, albeit a political move. After all, the segments of society said to be made amends with, relate to many critical events in the history of the Republic of Turkey. It is particularly significant that the perpetrators in some of these events are stated to be government officials and that this, too, will be confronted. Although, at first sight, the term “making amends” may bring to mind exchanging words of forgiveness such as “make a peace offering”, Kılıcdaroglu’s statement shows us that he is well aware that no victim/survivor would be satisfied with only that and that he is referring to a reconciliation that comes after a legal process and compensation of damages. We can foresee that the parliament will play a critical role in the process since the main opposition party leader points to the parliament for the Solution Process, stating that he will recognise the parliament and political parties in the parliament as interlocutors in a possible solution process.

We understand from the examples given that the Kurdish issue will also be included in the

process of making amends. Indeed, the PKK soon sent a message in response to the call to make amends and stated, “if amends are to be made, the existence and the freedom of Kurds shall be recognised; it shall be accepted that Kurds will live freely in Turkey enjoying their identity and culture. Self-government and autonomy of Kurds shall be recognised”. In the event of a possible change of the ruling party after the elections, if the process of making amends with the broader society is to be carried out and the relevant mechanisms are to be put in place, as pledged by Kılıcdaroglu, then the ruling party alone would not be adequate to conduct this process; the engagement of top-level political-military-religious actors should be ensured.

The parliament should establish committees of truth and reconciliation to investigate first and foremost the rights violations in the past and bring the perpetrators to justice; while providing legal guarantees for the process and the actors. This alone would not be enough. Law no 2557, also known as the “solution process law”, offered the right to immunity for those working on the Solution Process, stating that they would not have legal, administrative and criminal liabilities. However, the law published in the Official Gazette and took effect on 16 July 2014 was repealed by a Presidential Decree on 9 July 2018. In other words, it is not enough to have the parliament or the ruling party play an active role in the process; other top-level actors should also be engaged.

If asked whether the engagement of only top-level actors in the yet-to-be-established mechanism would be enough, my reply would be a firm no. Middle-range actors that serve as a bridge between society and the top-level actors would have to step in at this stage. Civil society organisations are the most influential group in the middle range. Despite the continued expansion of civil society in Turkey, the pressure they face is also on the rise due to administrative and legal abuses, and it is getting harder to carry out rights advocacy activities. According to data by YADA Foundation, Turkey has a total of 126.730 civil society organisations, but only 3,3 % are working on rights advocacy. A report by Peace Foundation titled “2013-2015 Çözüm Süreci’nde Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları”[6] provides important data on the role civil society should play in the peace-building process. Both Paffenhoz’s[7] studies on the role of civil society in peace-building efforts and the examples across the world point to the crucial role civil society organisations can play in the peace process. In this regard, the call by 37 civil society organisations to support the process of making amends is an important call from the local level; however, Kılıçdaroğlu’s continued lack of response to this

local call works against him.

Religious leaders are also critical middle-range actors. I recommend that you listen to our recent podcast "DEMOStanSesler "Dini Aktörlerin Barış İnşasındaki Rolü", released together with Dilan Elveren, where we discussed religious actors who can take on important roles in convincing their grassroots to make peace as well as the criticisms levelled against them. These actors, who made major contributions to peace efforts worldwide, including in Guatemala, Northern Uganda, South Africa and the Philippines, would certainly provide positive outcomes to a process that started with a religion-based concept such as making amends. From the perspective of academicians, even the declaration "We Will Not Be Complicit in This Crime" signed by Academicians for Peace calling for an end to conflicts shows that academicians can effectively support peace. In other words, academicians and intellectuals should step in, pull their weight, and be included in the process. Even a mere 2-month experience of the Committee of Wise Persons shows that opinion leaders can positively induce society into supporting the peace process. Engagement of women and LGBTI+ groups in the peace-building process, especially in the case of Liberia and Colombia, prove them to be critical actors in the process. A mechanism for making amends would be lacking without the engagement of these actors.

In the case of making amends, it is essential to make peace primarily at the local level and engage ordinary persons or survivors who have been affected by conflicts, namely the victims. At the outset of the debate on making amends, interviews were held with many people ranging from Roboski Families to the mother of Oğuz Arda Sel, who lost his life in Çorlu Train Derailment. They were asked how they would make amends. Kılıçdaroğlu not only met with a significant number of persons during his visit to Diyarkabır, but he also mentioned several different groups in his meeting with the Victims of 28 February, adding that he would take steps to make amends and make peace with them. Mechanisms of transitional justice should be mobilised to make amends. To apply restorative justice and to heal the wounds of victims/survivors, their voices should be heard, their losses should be recognised, they should be able to see that the perpetrators are brought to trial, their damages should be compensated, and they should receive an apology. Even if all these stages are completed, it may not be enough for them to "make amends/give their blessings" and find "forgiveness", the corresponding term in the literature for making amends. After all, no compensation will ever bring back the losses. In other words, no victim could or should ever be coerced into

making amends with and “forgiving” the perpetrator for the sake of ensuring restorative justice.

To wrap it up briefly, the process of peace-building, whether it be called making amends, confrontation, making peace, reconciliation or transitional justice etc., should be planned well. It is necessary to learn from the key takeaways from similar cases in Turkey and worldwide and find a way forward while engaging all actors from the bottom-up. Those actors who do not want to be involved in the process should at least let others move forward without putting up barriers in their path.

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[1] https://en.demos.org.tr/we-are-here-for-truth-equality-and-justice/

[2] https://en.demos.org.tr/how-can-we-discuss-helallesme-in-the-context-of-reconciliation-and-transitional-justice/

[3] https://en.demos.org.tr/what-kind-of-transitional-justice-do-we-imagine/

[4] https://en.demos.org.tr/what-role-can-civil-society-play-in-transitional-justice/

[5] Lederach, John Paul (1999). Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies. United States Institute of Peace Press, Washington D.C.

[6] Çiçek, Cuma (2017). 2013-2015 Çözüm Süreci’nde Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları. Barış Foundation Publications, Istanbul.

[7] Paffenholz, Thania (2010). Civil Society and Peacebuilding: A Critical Assessment. Lynne Rienner Publishers.