



TURKEY, Bursa, 25th JANUARY 2020

Convener: Muzaffer Mustafa

Part 1. THE SHARING OF PREOCCUPATIONS AND EXPERIENCES.

In this part of the Listening Post participants were invited to identify, contribute, and explore their experience in their various social roles, be those in work, unemployed, or retired; as members of religious, political, neighbourhood or voluntary or leisure organisations, or as members of families and communities. This part was largely concerned with what might be called, ‘the stuff of people’s everyday lives’, that relating to the ‘socio’ or ‘external’ world of participants.

Part 2. IDENTIFICATION OF MAJOR THEMES

In Part 2 the aim was to collectively identify the major themes emerging from Part 1. From several presented these have been drawn together under the following seven interrelated themes:

Theme 1; The war in Libya and Syria and its effects and reflections on Turkey; people who died due to earthquakes, avalanches, wars and turning the deaths into political tools, normalising of deaths, losing the meaning of living

‘We started 2020 with the earthquakes and the losses of our people who were under avalanche. On the one hand, our soldiers who were martyred by the attacks of Syria and Russia, and on the other hand, the soldiers who were martyred after the Hafer supporters attacked the Turkish ship in Libya ... It is bad that death is so ordinary and everyday we face different kind of deaths and this situation is normalised. At the political rally of President Erdoğan, the soldiers who died in Libya, were named anonymus by saying ‘we have a few martyrs’ by the President Erdoğan. Naming “few martyrs” was accepted as instrumentilising and valueless and dehumanizing of the death soldiers. The hiding of the martyrs from the public and the lack of information about how it happens is met with great reaction.’

‘Our soldiers who died in Libya and Syria are not the ones who died by fighting for their homeland, but those who died for no reason. After the coup attempt in 2016, qualified soldiers were cleared from the state cadres. If those soldiers were in charge of their duties, we would not be in Syria and Libya now. 16,000 qualified senior soldiers were dismissed or imprisoned. No qualified people were left to take part in the difficult times, difficult times like war.’

THEME 2; Turkey turned into an open air concentration camp, imprisoned society and society of fear; emptying the state institutions from educated cadres; collective exclusion and ignoring ; recession of economy and fear of getting poor

‘Not only in the military, but all state institutions were evacuated. Due to the educated people who are dismissed from their duties with the Decree Laws, all state institutions are now filled with unqualified and cult members and politicized people. This is a persecution of people. There are no jobs, they are deprived of health insurance, there are prohibitions to go abroad. They are tested by hunger. Turkey officially turned into open-air concentration camp and prison. We live in a times where ignorance is a premium and educated people and education are excluded.’

‘Their families were also affected by this situation. They were also isolated by society. People who previously had friends and colleagues started not talking, because their husbands or wives were in jail. They keep themselves away from them because of the fear that something will happen to them. These families deal with collective exclusion and ignoring. There are judges, teachers, academicians and exc. who try to take care of their families by going to house cleaning, by doing porters in the market because they cannot find a job.’

‘We felt more of our economic prosperity falling down in the last 4-5 years. I cannot go abroad for travelling and for education activities like it was in previous years. 1 euro is 6.6 Turkish lira, 1 dollar is 6.2 Turkish lira. In the last one year, electricity, natural gas, gasoline, benzine hikes are almost more than 50%. We become poor as individual and also as a society.’

THEME 3; Increased suicides for economic reasons, social inequalities, injustices and exclusion from society; silencing of the media; rejection of the truth; undervaluing science and scientists

‘Social media accounts and mail of journalists reporting the deaths of soldiers in Libya were hacked. We officially returned to the BAAS regime, but nobody believes to that. Those who oppose the regime are either arrested or imprisoned for FETÖ or any other reason, and those who do not oppose are in the mode of ‘the snake who do not touch me, can live a thousand lives’.’

‘What about the number of suicides in the past week? The man who burned himself in Mersin due to starvation, the university academician who committed suicide by jumping from the 5th floor of his university, the sergeant who hangs himself in the courtyard of the mosque after praying ... is hard to bear.’

‘Almost every week's earthquakes and frightening Marmara earthquake precautions that are not taken. Despite scientists' warnings, no precautions are taken. It is as if we live by chance in this country.’

THEME 4; Fear from coronavirus; Turkey as a passer-by country and a country without clear boundaries and borders; not shared responsibilities and not taken actions by government and European countries relating refugees; autistic state of minds and society;

‘It is very scary not to take any precautions regarding the corona virus that lies up to our door. People fleeing from the corona virus outbreaks in Iran are trying to come to Turkey . Why do we not do anything when many countries are closing airports, closing their borders? As if we were the passer-by country. As if we have no borders. 1.5 million refugees from Idlib wait at Turkish border

gate. Of course, we need to support people, people fleeing war, but this should be supported by the state policy and also should be taken responsibility from European countries. Who are these people that started to come and to live in Turkey, it is unclear. A Syrian who worked at the organisation where my wife worked, a week ago was caught as one of ISIS's top men. Where do we live, why these people are not investigated. We are not against refugees, we are against the government who do not take needed actions. As if the society is experiencing autistic state of mind, as if the prudence of society disappeared.'

THEME 5; Racist attacks in Hanau, Germany; attacks on ethnic and religious identities; fear from totalitarian regimes; youths that want to leave their countries; hiding ethnic and religious identities from European public sphere;

'What about the racist attack that took place in Hanau, Germany and what about the people that was killed because they were Turkish and Muslim. What about the attacks by racist Nazis. It is not a safe place in Europe anymore. There are young people who want to abandoned Turkey and who want to settle in Europe. In Turkey, they have difficulty in finding a place for themselves, and they want to leave their country. But racist attacks shows that there are no safe place anymore.'

'During the assimilation process of Bulgarian Turks in 1984, before the Iron Curtain collapsed, Turkish and Muslim names are changed and assimilated to Slavic names. For example your name is Aisha or Mohammed, but you need to convert your name to Antoaneta or Michael. This proces of converting identity by converting your Turkish and Muslim names to Slavic names, continue until the Iron Curtain collapses, until 1989. But some of the Bulgarian Turks who have dual citizenship, both EU and BG, and who continue living in Europe, do not change their Slavic names to Turkish names on passports and indenty cards. Their names are Aisha Mustafa and Muhammad Ahmed for example, but they continue to use their names on passports and ID with their Slavic names like Antoaneta Fidanova and Michael Atanasov. They prefer to hide their Turkish and Muslim names, they prefer to hide their Turkish and Muslim identity because of the fear that one day racist attacks also can happen to them, like the cummunist period. It seems as if the ghost of authoritarian history does not chase them.'

THEME 6; Fear of staying out of the global world; a country that closes into itself; lessons from the past can not be retrieved; absence of self-criticizing, self-looking, self-observing politicians

'Turkey is a country incapable of reform without hitting own head against the wall. A country that loses time with using words. A country that cannot draw lessons from what happened to us. It is a country full of people who do not even realize that they come back and come to the same place. While the world is dealing with nanorobots and talking about artificial organs, we talk about Kurdish Turkish distinction, sects, ideologies, and murders of women. I haven't seen a self-criticizing, self-looking, self-observing politician yet, and I don't think these problems will be resolved until I see them.'

THEME 7; Young people lagging behind the education of the modern world; society as black and white, no place for grey shades;

'Turkey is not allowed to lift up education unfortunately. What I mean by education is not to know how to read, write or memorize, or to brag about the successes of the ancestors of the 8th

generation. Education means both positive sciences, chemistry, mathematics, physics, analytical thinking, and social sciences. If you do not give this analytical thinking to youth, to our children they cannot be locomotives of the change. I think our educated workforce is not enough to keep up

with the global world and I do not think that sufficient steps have been taken regarding this. In Turkey, people are black and white, no shades of gray. There is no black and white tone in the world, there is gray tone. I am not sure how to get the gray tone with these cases.'

Part 3. ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS FORMATION

In this part of the Listening Post the members were working with the information resulting from Parts 1 & 2, with a view to collectively identifying the underlying dynamics both conscious and unconscious that may be predominant at the time; and, developing hypotheses as to why they might be occurring at that moment.

Here the members were working more with what might be called their 'psycho' or 'internal' world. Their collective ideas and ways of thinking that both determine how they perceive the external realities and shape their actions towards them. However, the members sought to go beyond this in an attempt to understand what was occurring at a psychological level in society. The resulting analysis has been distilled into the following interrelated hypotheses:

As a LP participants, people realized that they had a hard time seeing themselves with their 'citizen identity'. Being citizens means, being visible in the public sphere, being accepted with different visibilities, being on the streets. The rapid traumatic changes in recent years show that the public sphere has been slowly collapsing in Turkish context, and the "street" as a symbol that brings the differences together has disappeared. Collective activity, collectiveness is replaced by isolation, loneliness and lack of support. Many people feels left and abandoned. As if identities like citizen, NGO participant, working roles no longer exists. It is very difficult to find a space and place for this identities. And to be emotional connected with them is impossible. People can find a space for themselves mainly into family, closed friends and relative contexts. As if they only exists into their roles in the family. Because of economic reasons , war situations, rapid traumatic changes, refugees crises, attacks on ethnic and religious identities, and feeling of insecurities, Turkish citizens have lost their ways of making lives happier and meaningful. People are struggling to find a meaning in their lives and are trying to cope by themselves, which in turn leads to isolation, loneliness, frustration and depression. There is a split between the public and the private domains. The difficulty for educated and young people to find a place and space for themselves in public institutions and private sector, were associated as the revenge of the ignorant and closed mindsets into society. This atmosphere impacts young people and children. As a result they develop a self-centred attitude to others and to life. With citizen roles participants feel like an orphans and homeless people. Orphans and homeless people who are looking for 'good enough parental care' but there is no parental containment. When it comes to dealing with isolation, people tend to believe in technology and social media more than in community. Difficulties in taking up responsibility and bringing the person in the role, citizens struggle to take on responsibility and handle complex issues in the micro level of their everyday life.

Convener: Muzaffer MUSTAFA