



Executive Summary Istanbul I Principles

Istanbul, April 2017

EZKS
Europäisches Zentrum für Kurdische Studien
European Center for Kurdish Studies





Disclaimer: The principles in this paper reflect the discussions of the workshop. This does, however, not mean that all participants agree on all points of this document.

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April 2017 | Berlin



Istanbul I Principles

An executive summary of the dialogue workshop in Istanbul, April 28 – 30, 2017

These are the results of the First Dialogue Workshop of the Kurdish National Council in Syria with representatives of other groups within the Syrian opposition, compiled by Prof. Dr. Eva Maria Belser.

The discussions and group work that workshop participants engaged in led to the following consensus:

1. Syria shall be a democratic state.
2. Syria shall respect and safeguard internationally recognised human rights.
3. Syria shall be a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious state that recognises the diversity of its population and all segments thereof, and respects their right to cultural self-determination. International minority rights shall be guaranteed for all of the country's minority populations.
4. Syria shall guarantee women's rights and ensure the reasonable and proportionate representation and participation of women in all institutions of the Syrian state.
5. Syria's territorial integrity shall be guaranteed and secured by ensuring that all segments of the population can participate equally in the state.

Meanwhile, individual working groups also agreed on the following points:

6. Syria shall recognise and protect the rights to self-administration of the following groups: Sunnis, Alawites, Kurds, Assyrians, Turkmen and Druze. They shall exercise their rights and responsibilities by means of their own institutions (parliaments, councils, governments and courts), led by legitimate representatives of the respective groups. The regions shall develop their own constitution, which may not contravene the Syrian constitution. The regions shall have their own budget. Their funds shall be provided by taxes and by financial transfers.
7. The organisation of the Syrian state shall be based on the division of responsibilities and resources between the national, regional and local levels. The goal is to develop an expanded form of administrative decentralisation that breaks with the tradition of the central state, while at the same time addressing concerns that the state could break apart. The boundaries of the regions must be redrawn and must adequately reflect the ethnic, religious and linguistic composition of the population.
8. The national level shall be responsible for Syria's foreign relations, for the country's defence and for citizenship.
9. The constitution shall be created in a two-stage process. Firstly, basic principles of the constitution shall be agreed upon by a general assembly in which all regions of the country and segments of the population are fairly represented. Then, a constitutional committee shall draft a constitution with the support of international experts. This text shall be put to a referendum and shall be adopted upon receiving a simple majority of the votes.
10. The constitution shall be protected by a strong constitutional court which represents all segments of the population and has their trust.
11. Constitutional amendments shall require a two-thirds majority in parliament (in both chambers of parliament, as the case may be). Amendments which particularly affect one region or segment of the population and restrict their rights or powers shall require the consent of said region or segment of the population. The basic principles of the constitution shall be unalterable.



The discussion showed that the following issues require further clarification:

- There is disagreement on the use of terminology. The expression federalism creates room for misunderstandings and must be avoided as far as possible (also due to its association with the failed implementation of federalism in Iraq). A specifically Syrian term is to be preferred.
- It is unclear how the national constitution and the constitutions of the regions will interact with one another.
- The number of regions and the criteria for the drawing of borders remain open.
- The (associated) issue of the distribution of resources and financial equalisation has not yet been settled.
- The details of the division of powers and responsibilities also require further discussion.
- Finally, the procedure for drawing up a constitution (specifically the requirements for approval) has not yet been definitively agreed upon.

