

Dilara GÖK: Hello everyone, I'm Dilara Gök.

Dilan KAYA: I'm Dilan Kaya.

Dilara GÖK: We have prepared this podcast series as part of the "Women in Social Peace" Project. The main aim of this series is to benefit and inspire from the experiences and stories of women mediators and activists with examples from Turkey and around the world. Additionally, we will make these stories accessible in different languages. We have Güneş Daşlı from the Research Center for Peace, Democracy and Alternative Politics, aka DEMOS, with us today. Welcome, Güneş.

Güneş DAŞLI: Thank you.

Dilan KAYA: Welcome, Güneş. We'd like to briefly introduce you to our audience. Güneş Daşlı is a Ph.D. candidate in the field of Reconciliation Studies at the Friedrich Schiller University in Germany. Her main focus for her dissertation is transitional justice and critical peace theory in the Kurdish conflict. She has been the research coordinator for several projects of the DEMOS research center since 2015. Her civil society and academic work focus on collective memory, mass graves, gender, and conflict transformation. Indeed, we have been following your work for a while now, Güneş. However, I think it's better to give a brief background for DEMOS to those who are not familiar with the organization. We think DEMOS does significant work in terms of peace and transitional justice in Turkey. We believe it plays a crucial role. Can you describe how DEMOS was founded? What are its purposes?

Güneş DAŞLI: Of course. Thank you, by the way. I'm glad to be here for this podcast and we appreciate your work. First of all, we, as DEMOS, have valued the gender aspect a lot since day one, and I have to say your work is a great contribution in that respect and we appreciate it. DEMOS was founded in 2015; so it's a fairly new research center. We, as a group of social scientists, founded it back in 2015. We mainly work on peace, transitional justice, collective memory, and others. We also carry out research and field studies. We also share information through our podcast and organize seminars and workshops on these topics. We have 3 key principles that I'd like to highlight, and that makes us stand out in terms of the past, truth, and justice. One of them is, of course, the gender perspective. But we don't consider it as an additional perspective; we don't have an order in mind that puts peace, justice, truth, and then gender. We try to integrate the gender perspective in all our studies and projects. We try to include it and analyze any situation from this perspective. I mean, it's not an eclectic perspective. The second principle is being subject-oriented. This is an important and current topic of discussion in peace work, especially critical work. We can roughly describe it as becoming stakeholders with the main subjects who fight for, realize and perform peace and build justice at the local level. It can be defined as a principle, as well. Finally, there is the principle of bottom-up peace... In other words, moving forward by criticizing the overall, liberal peace work.

Dilara GÖK: Thank you Güneş. Your description of DEMOS coincides with our idea of the organization. Happy to hear it from you as well. Your words inspired our next question. Let's move on to your work. We are aware of your very valuable fieldwork. One of them is your research

report on the participation of women and the LGBTQ+ community in the Colombian process. You and Nisan were in the field in 2017 and your report was very useful for us in our discussion of the Colombian peace process. We know that a lot of time has passed since. We don't want to burden you with such a broad question, but we'd appreciate it if you can briefly explain the process and your observations on women's organizing.

Güneş DAŞLI: Yes, indeed, we published that report in 2018. We were 3 researchers; Julia from Spain was also on the team. Our research is available on our website, you can check it out. It was just the thing we wanted to do. We wanted to look into the experiences around the world. This is especially important for a subject-oriented approach. Since conflict transformation and peacebuilding are fairly long-term, rough but sometimes hopeful processes, it's nice to look into what other organizations, activists and survivors are up to, just to develop another perspective. This was our goal; to look into other experiences across the globe. Colombia began its peace process around the same time as Turkey, around 2012. However, our peace process has failed but Colombia succeeded. So, we thought about it and wondered why the Colombia process was successful while ours failed. We compared the processes from a gender perspective. How could women's and LGBT organizations participate in the peace talks in Havana? How were they able to include their concerns in the agenda? Why were they successful and what challenges did they have? If my memory serves me correctly, we actively engaged and have discussions with around 20 organizations from Colombia. We discussed and tried to understand the situation on multiple platforms in Turkey as well as on paper. We had significant findings. We discovered something we've always underlined, which is the civil society's role in peace processes, whether before, during, or after. The lack of civil society is more likely to lead to non-sustainable or fragile processes. This was very clear to us after these discussions. A concrete example is this: there is still a large group of right-wing actors who object to the peace processes. Some elites try to protect their financial interests and the society is quite conservative in general. Despite all of this, women, feminists, and LGBTI people were able to keep their agenda on the table as they were able to act fast and form alliances even though they were from different backgrounds and have different views on many issues. I think this is the most striking example.

Dilan KAYA: Just like you said, utilizing these mechanisms is key for the socialization of peace or establishing social peace in general. Let's discuss the current situation after you touched on Colombia. Peace is a long-term process as you said. Witnessing the process, capturing and recording experiences from different timeframes, and participating in the entire process is also important. I also want to remind everyone that recently, in September 2021, you published a report titled "From Converging Roads to Narrowing Grounds: The Struggle for Peace by LGBTI+ and Women's Organizations in Turkey" where you discussed the situation in Turkey, which is available on the website both in Turkish and English. You also mentioned women's participation in Colombia. What are your thoughts about the process in Turkey? Your report also focuses on the overall approach, situation, and forms of organizing throughout the 8-9-year process since 2013. So, how do you see the women's organization from the perspective of the women's movement?

Güneş DAŞLI: Yes, we were able to complete that study in 2021. We had this idea for a long time because Turkey has a significant women's and LGBTI peace activism. Finally, we were able to do it.

Since you mentioned the website, I'd like to tell you that we renewed our website and it went live today. It's even more accessible and user-friendly now. We worked on it a lot, the team did a great job.

Dilara GÖK: Congratulations! I used it just today.

Güneş DAŞLI: Great! We believe it's more accessible now. It was a bit slow before. So, all three of us, Nisan, me and Güley, have been working on peace; we have been a part of the struggle for peace, especially with the feminist movement. So it was kind of a duty of loyalty for us. But at the same time, we wanted to see what has been said or done about peace. Of course, Turkey's peace process failed but we don't want to be unfair to anyone. When we thought about what has been done, we realized that there were many shortcomings. Even though they have been discussed a lot, these shortcomings still remain. We also must remember that 2 years is a very short period that limits the process a lot. So, we'd like to see what has been done during the peace process, and what women's and LGBT organizations that aimed to participate in the peace talks did. It was about refreshing the memory, documenting the memory. DEMOS values this, too. What is the memory of women and the LGBTI community? What were their goals? We looked into concrete activities as well and we discovered a few things. They weren't that in-depth, of course, but we revealed them nonetheless. We found out that a lot had been done in such a short span of time. One of them is the inclusion of gender and women in the agenda. They aimed to raise these issues in the formal negotiations. They also aimed for the inclusion of women and the LGBTI agenda, which is specific to Turkey's peace process. Feminist women nominated themselves as observers. This was something we discussed a lot in Turkey and Colombia as well, since they had a very conflicted negotiation process, too. Should we include a third actor as the mediator? That was the question. So, the third-party actors were Norway and another South American country in the case of the Colombia process. Turkey had this question as well, but it didn't get anywhere. But we, as women, can be the observers and ensure that the talks make a progress. I find women's nomination encouraging and key to bringing the feminist background and experience into the talks. Besides, women, especially the Kurdish women's movement, follow certain policies that ensured equality and brought peace discussions into the parliament. These are more of the characteristics of Turkey's peace process. A lot had happened, and we lived through very bad times. But I remember having conversations about the process and asking ourselves how we will remember it years later. As it turns out, we did a lot. I mean, the picture wasn't that bad after all. We are glad that we were able to reveal this with our research.

Dilara GÖK: Thank you Güneş. We believe these efforts toward building the memory of peace processes are very important. They are vital. This memory-building process also seems to be related to transitional justice. So, let's go back to the Colombian peace process. Some cases and parties of the process pushed the discussion of transitional justice. The memory and transitional justice processes in Turkey recently became a current topic of discussion after it was brought up by Kılıçdaroğlu's "reconciliation" statement. So, we'd like to ask what transitional justice is for those who are not aware of it. Can you give a few concrete examples from Colombia? Were they able to continue the process? If not, why? We'd like to hear your observations on this. Of course, we'd like to listen if you'd like to discuss the context in Turkey later on.

Güneş DAŞLI: Sure, transitional justice... How should I describe it... First of all, we should distinguish it from peace and reconciliation. Because I see transitional justice as a more stand-alone field that focuses on victims and victimization with specific internal dynamics. Transitional justice is a response to the severe human rights violations that happened during conflicts. Therefore, when there is a transition from conflict to peace, transitional justice is the set of mechanisms that focuses on establishing justice, relief, and reparations for victims. There are four pillars of transitional justice processes: criminal procedures, or trial of the perpetrators of crimes such as forced disappearance or other violations. Truth-seeking commissions, reparations... Both symbolic reparations and material reparations, including material compensation. Finally, institutional reform. So, transitional justice is a stand-alone field with unique internal dynamics. Of course, we, as DEMOS, believe that transitional justice is correlated with peace and reconciliation, however, we think it must be defined on its own. As you said Dilara, this “reconciliation” statement brought along a discussion about this topic. That’s why I felt the need to define this as a separate concept. We discussed this a lot within DEMOS as well. Me, Nisan and Güley participated in this study as transitional justice researchers. But I also study transitional justice for my doctorate and they also study it in other avenues as well. We discussed this a lot and were faced with a disarray of descriptions. Should we consider “reconciliation” as transitional justice? Or should we use the term “settlement” instead? That’s why I believe we must make a distinction. We started working on a series of articles that elaborate on reconciliation. But I, Nisan and Güley wanted to write a separate article on these discussions. What Kılıçdaroğlu meant with “reconciliation” and how it can be sustained was discussed a lot and the answers to those questions were rather cautious, as you expect. Not only we were disappointed by the peace process but also the victims and survivors of JİTEM (Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Group Command) cases were disappointed. All of them got disappointed whenever a truth commission published a report that reiterates the official discourse instead of uncovering the truth. Everyone is more cautious as a result of this disappointment. We had conversations with other organizations in this field and had internal discussions as well. We believe that it can be a positive step towards justice. We think that civil society can actively capture, guide, and support the process as the main actor. Of course, I don’t mean a homogeneous civil society. However, the process is still unclear. We don’t know how it will evolve and move forward. You also mentioned Colombia. Political will is crucial for these topics. The state’s role and the political will manifest themselves in these processes and they are always turbulent. So, it’s not unique to Turkey. As far as we’re concerned, the main issue in the Colombian peace process despite having a peace agreement is the lack of political will to carry the process further. In other words, anti-peace forces are still in power or at least in decision-making positions. They still resist. The president who signed the peace agreement has been replaced by a right-wing, anti-peace president. The current president still does a lot to damage the process. So, political will is crucial. I don’t know if we will have a similar process in Turkey but we believe that the political will must assert itself as an actor in the process despite all the challenges.

Dilara GÖK: Thank you Güneş. Your conceptual definitions and elaborations are very important and helpful for us to think about. By the way, we will link the studies, reports and articles you mentioned below this podcast. We will make it easier for our listeners to access these resources.

Your comments made me think how similar the civil society's struggle against the political will is across the globe. I mean the fluctuations of the political will and their concerns about being at the peace table. Maybe a better expression can be used but the mechanisms utilized by the civil society are both similar and challenging. Thank you for being here. This series is a tool to share the voices of individuals like you, groups and organizations that are active in this field. You already have your own channels of communication but we wanted to support you and reinforce our voice through another channel. Let's discuss these issues in a broader field. Let's create more things to think about as women. Let's create new concepts and mechanisms. That was our goal and what you emphasized was on point. Thank you very much. Glad to have you here.

Güneş DAŞLI: Thank you. It was a nice and broad conversation. Glad to be here.

Dilan KAYA: Thank you very much Güneş. I think discussing transitional justice is very important. While discussing the mechanisms of peace, bringing the language of peace into the practices of daily living and creating the space for perpetuating that language is as important as the civil society, decision-makers and political will. Even from the urban studies perspective, transitional justice creates a space for interdisciplinary analysis, which opens the door for productivity, hope and other studies in the field. You already mentioned it but I have to say that your blog posts have been very eye-opening for me. I believe they can inspire those who listen to this podcast and demonstrate a will in a more peaceful way of daily living even if they don't engage in peace work. I think reading DEMOS' studies will contribute greatly. You don't necessarily need to work in the field of transitional justice. Thank you for being here with us.

Güneş DAŞLI: In that case, let me close with this: You are right, peace and transitional justice are complicated topics. It also depends on the state to a certain extent. Because they require the state to assume its responsibility and demonstrate a political will. That's why it also makes us feel helpless. The lack of civil society presence can make the process go downhill even if the state demonstrates the political will to bring peace. It can lead to a different reform where the state perpetuates and legitimizes its practices. So, we have to wait until the state assumes responsibility while also thinking about what we can do independently without waiting for the state to act. I hope these "reconciliation" discussions will evolve into that. I say that I hope, because we are going through trying times, civil society in Turkey is under a lot of pressure. Just the act of meeting is in itself valuable these days. But everything can change at any moment... That's my somewhat more hopeful closing statement.

Dilara GÖK: Thank you again. I'd like to add one more thing to your hopeful statement. Even the word "reconciliation" has sparked a discussion in such a short time. Of course, civil society played a great part but witnessing this spark, and seeing how ready we are to talk about these issues gave me hope. Thank you again for fostering this hope.

Güneş DAŞLI: Thank you.