“Women Side by Side Discuss the Future” conference in Türkiye: The bankruptcy of identity politics

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The conference held in Ankara on October 31–November 1 under the title “Women Side by Side Discuss the Future” starkly exposed the bankruptcy of middle-class identity politics, including feminism.

The conference was convened at the call of 80 women, among them journalists, academics, activists and representatives of various political parties, and drew more than 500 participants from cities across the country. Its agenda was described as “peace,” a “democratic solution” and “equal citizenship.”

Speakers included Tülay Hatimo?ullar?, co-chair of the Kurdish nationalist Peoples’ Equality and Democracy Party (DEM Party); Pervin Buldan, a member of the party’s ?mral? Delegation; Gültan K??anak, former co-mayor of the Diyarbak?r Metropolitan Municipality; trade union officials such as Ayfer Koçak, co-chair of the Confederation of Public Employees’ Trade Unions (KESK); and academics. The ?mral? Delegation is currently mediating negotiations between the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an and Abdullah Öcalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK). Öcalan has been imprisoned on ?mral? Island in the Sea of Marmara since 1999.

The event’s political direction was set by the Ankara-PKK deal, which the Kurdish movement presents as a “peace and democratization” initiative and the government calls the “Terror-Free Türkiye” process. As part of this orientation, which entails open collaboration with the government, the organizers had invited Özlem Zengin, deputy parliamentary group chair of Erdo?an’s Justice and Development Party (AKP), to speak at a session titled “The political responsibility of peace: democratic solution, parliament and political parties.” Zengin was invited in the spirit of feminist “sisterhood.” Yet in addition to being one of the AKP’s leading figures, she was notorious for denying the allegations of strip searches of women in detention that came to light in 2020.

What further discredited the organizers politically was that they refused to withdraw the invitation despite widespread protests on social media, while Zengin herself chose to stay away, attacking the event from the right.

In a statement to T24, Zengin said she had discussed the matter with her party’s leadership and that the “Terror-Free Türkiye” process was “an important and distinct issue” for them. However, she said, she changed her mind after seeing LGBTQ+ topics on the program. She added: “Our party’s policy is clear; this is something we oppose.” What Zengin politely describes as “opposing” is a sweeping police-state crackdown. Since September, it has included raids on legally registered LGBTQ+ associations and the detention of large numbers of people under the “My Family Is Safe” operations.

Even more revealing was the stance of the event’s organizers. Journalist Gözde ?eker, who announced from the podium that Zengin would not be attending, explained that the purpose of the invitation had been “to put questions to a representative of a government we rarely get the chance to meet face to face.” She added: “None of the women here owes anyone proof of which side she stands on in any rights-based matter.”

The issue is precisely which side one stands on. This event has once again laid bare the contradiction between the side its organizers claim to stand on and reality. As Zengin herself pointed out, the AKP’s hostility to the rights of women and LGBTQ+ people is no secret.

In March 2021, Erdo?an withdrew by presidential decree from the Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, which his government had been the first in the world to sign and ratify in 2011. According to the We Will Stop Femicide Platform, 150 women were murdered in the first six months of 2026 alone, and another 151 died under suspicious circumstances.

In May 2026, the government declared 2026–2035 the “Decade of Family and Population.” This circular reduces women to an instrument of family and population policy and aims to reverse the declining rate of population growth. It is closely bound up with the ruling class’s need for cheap labour and for a population that can be put under arms when required.

It is working-class women who bear the heaviest burden of these policies. The call for “sisterhood” and “women’s solidarity” serves to conceal this class chasm. To place Zengin—an official who implements the AKP’s misogynist policies—in the same category of “women” as the working women who are the victims of those policies is clear proof of how identity politics distorts class reality. Among women, as in the whole of society, there is not “sisterhood” but class struggle. It is the objective class conflict that sets Zengin and other bourgeois politicians, in Türkiye and around the world, against male and female workers.

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The government's attacks in this sphere are an integral part of its broader assault on democratic rights. As the WSWS reported in detail in September, the operations against LGBTQ+ people coincided with the mass arrest of members of left-wing parties, the blocking of access to opposition media outlets and the seizure of opposition television channels through the courts. The "My Family Is Safe" operations were an attempt both to legitimize the assault on democratic rights and to divert attention from growing opposition to the soaring cost of living and social inequality.

Zengin's invitation was a direct extension of the negotiations between the PKK and the Erdo?an government. The political axis of the conference was to bolster this process with the "organized strength" of women. Pervin Buldan said that the last meeting with imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan had taken place on September 13 and that the process had "stalled." Women, she said, could break this deadlock "by appealing to the government and the actors in the process, by applying pressure."

As the WSWS has stressed, this process will bring the Kurdish people neither peace nor democracy. It is a reactionary alliance between the Turkish state and the Kurdish nationalist movement, forged at a time when the United States and Israel are violently reshaping the Middle East. Erdo?an's talk of a "Turkish-Kurdish-Arab alliance" expresses Ankara's calculations aimed at securing a share in the redivision of the region. These calculations, which include the struggle for influence in Syria, are setting Türkiye and Israel, both US allies, on a collision course.

Government officials point out that the Ankara-PKK deal is an alliance against Israel's growing influence. But this is not an anti-imperialist alliance. It is based on collaboration with the United States. The war that the US and Israel launched against Iran on February 28, which has been halted only by a fragile ceasefire, has made these calculations more concrete.

Ankara, which hosted the NATO summit in July, signed the "Mecca Joint Defense Agreement" with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan on August 7. The military pact was approved in parliament overnight from Thursday into Friday by 279 votes to 119, with the support of the AKP, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the Republican People's Party (CHP). It heightens the danger of Türkiye being drawn directly into a war against Iran and its allies.

A regime preparing for war abroad must silence opposition at home. This is what Erdo?an means by the "consolidation of the internal front," the phrase he uses in reference to the negotiations with the PKK. It is precisely at this moment that the Kurdish nationalist leadership and the pseudo-left in its orbit are politically disarming social opposition by spreading the illusion that this regime will bring "peace" and "democracy."

The DEM Party's vote against the Mecca pact does not change this reality. While opposing the war alliance at the level of the parliamentary vote (22 of its deputies voted "no," while 34 did not take part), the party continues to act as a partner in the "consolidation of the internal front" by the regime that is preparing this alliance, and to look to that regime for "peace."

The speech delivered on the panel by DEM Party Co-Chair Hatimo?ullar? exposed the bankruptcy of the middle-class feminist perspective most clearly: "If it is men who started this war, and if many political parties are trying to instrumentalize this process, can we not—as women of the opposition parties, and even of the ruling party—be the founding forces that build peace and articulate the language of peace?"

Wars are not started by "men." As Vladimir Lenin explained 110 years ago in Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, wars in the epoch of imperialism are the product of the division of the world into rival nation-states and of the ruthless struggle waged by the ruling classes for markets, resources and regional influence. In contrast to middle-class identity politics, which serves to divide the working class, the Marxist perspective fights for the unification of the working class on an international scale. That is why it explains that wars are inevitable in this epoch, and that the only road to genuine and lasting global peace lies in mobilizing the working class in the struggle for world socialist revolution to abolish the capitalist system.

As Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution established, in countries of belated capitalist development the bourgeoisie, because of its dependence on imperialism and its fear of the working class, is incapable of carrying out the fundamental democratic tasks. These tasks—including the resolution of the Kurdish question and the securing of the democratic rights of women and LGBTQ+ people—can be accomplished only through the conquest of power by the working class and the extension of the socialist revolution on an international scale. This understanding opens up an unbridgeable political gulf between the Marxist-Trotskyist movement and every variety of bourgeois nationalist movement that seeks "peace and democracy" in collaboration with capitalist or imperialist powers.

The reactionary function of anti-Marxist identity politics—which holds that the decisive division in society is not class, but identities such as gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation—must be understood, and this politics must be rejected. The way forward lies in reviving the traditions of Marxism within the working class and developing the class struggle along the road to socialist revolution. The liberation of all oppressed layers of the population will be possible only through their unification under the leadership of the working class and the carrying of this struggle through to victory.



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