

INTERVIEW WITH DANIELLE MITTERRAND

LET US HOPE THAT THE CIVILIANS WILL TAKE POWER IN TURKEY

*Danielle Mitterrand is the president of Fondation France Libertés, the NGO that she established in 1986. The state-approved Fondation France Libertés provides support to all those working in favour of human rights and liberties. Over the past few years, France Libertés has championed the rights of the Kurds, Tibetans, and Armenians. Before 1986, Danielle Mitterrand had already actively sought to protect the rights of oppressed peoples, notably through the creation of the Kurdish Cultural Institute in Paris. She is the author of several books including **La levure du pain** (1992) and **En toutes libertés** (1999).*

This interview was conducted by Jean Catsiapis

Hellenic Studies (HS)

Does Turkey have a place in the European Union? In your opinion, does this country have democratic institutions?

Danielle Mitterrand, *Fondation France Libertés* (FFL)

Opinion is divided on this topic depending on the criteria applied. Some feel that Turkey does not have a place within the EU given the history of the civilisations and the geography of the area. Others think that by taking into account borders drawn according to treaties that sealed bloody European wars, part of Turkey lies in Europe. Turkey could be a member if Turkish leaders showed a real political will to integrate a fundamentally democratic space.

It would be interesting to know the uncensored public opinion in Turkey (if one does indeed exist) on the country's entry into the European Union.

Today the basic principles that inspire a democratic power are systematically violated in Turkey so that debate on the topic

becomes impossible. Monitoring by European powers has to ensure some vigilance so that our ministers do not lose sight of the reasons for which they were elected. If the Turkish civilian government commits to respecting humanist values, in day-to-day management and not only on paper, then the question of joining the EU may be raised.

As long as Turkey continues to try to play along, giving all the appearances of a democracy, e.g., municipal and legislative elections, parliament, political parties, and associations, the country will court anyone willing to listen. Behind this democratic façade, the real power that the military holds will continue to imprison, torture, corrupt and exterminate people, even destroy a region, and entire people to legitimize their power.

Let us hope that the civilians will take power in Turkey so that the existing structures will provide the political framework that the Turkish people deserve.

HS What specific reforms does Turkey have to carry out in order to belong to the European Union?

DM, FFL Recognize and respect individual rights and liberties

- execute constitutional reform in terms of recognizing the rights and cultural identity of the Kurds
- abolish torture and degrading treatment
- abolish the death penalty
- release all political prisoners
- allow political pluralism.

HS What do you think of the current policy of the French authorities *vis-à-vis* Ankara? Should France, president of the EU during the second semester of the year 2000, take any initiatives to facilitate Turkey's membership bid?

DM, FFL Turkey has a special trade partner status with France. That special relationship includes the sale of arms. The French foreign ministry remains quite indulgent toward Turkey. Of course the issue of human rights is raised during meetings between French and Turkish authorities, yet the official answers provided by the Turks seem to satisfy the French. The rather lucrative arms trade with Ankara seems to overshadow such considerations as those based on respect for rights of an individual or a people.

How can France, or any other country presiding over the EU, facilitate Turkey's bid for membership, if Turkey does not demonstrate real progress in terms of the criteria to which it has been asked to conform? The first and unavoidable demand is the establishment of peace in Turkey in the region shaken by the refusal to recognize the Kurds. Without judging the statutory long-term future of the Kurdish people, peace is not foreseeable unless the existence of the the Kurdish civilisation and cultural heritage is recognized. If the European Union wished to leave its commercial interests in order to promote the peace process, it could hear the appeals for a political solution and not take sides. The current situation will remain unresolved until the day that the EU proves just how strongly and clearly it demands a lasting peace between the leaders in the region.

HS The Cypriot Republic, whose northern part has been occupied since 1974 by the Turkish army, began negotiations leading to EU membership in 1998. In your opinion, does Cyprus' membership have to be subordinated to a prior solution to the Cypriot Issue which depends very much on Ankara's good will?

DM, FFL The objective must be to reach an end in the Turkish military occupation of Cyprus. And the Cypriot Republic will write its history in the context of its environment.

HS *France Libertés* has always shown interest in reconciling the Cypriot communities - Greek and Turkish. The Foundation acted as an observer during the Greek Cypriot women's peace march held March 19, 1989. On that day the Greek Cypriot women entered an occupied zone and spoke with Turkish Cypriot women. Can *France Libertés* support or even take the initiative of organizing meetings between Greek Cypriots and Turk Cypriots, either side the victim of a foreign occupation?

DM, FFL The *Fondation France Libertés* works tirelessly to not only encourage different communities that must live together to take their future in their own hands and react as responsible, informed citizens, but also to nurture relations with a certain awareness. *France Libertés* takes part in various events designed to inform and create awareness but does not initiate them.

Our principle is to allow citizens to start the initiative and decide on their own how they wish to take action. Our role consists of putting the various stakeholders into place so that they may meet and be enriched through the contact.