

# The process of resolution: from politics to arms

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This is an assessment report of recent events in Turkey by Ali Bayramođlu. It contributes to DPI's ongoing evaluation of on-the-ground situation in Turkey with regard to the Kurdish resolution process, and is one of a number of assessments on this topic, undertaken by experts both in the region and internationally

## **Introduction: Continuity and breakdown**

In recent years the main issue shaping politics and democracy in Turkey has been the Kurdish question. The 'process of resolution', or henceforth 'idea for resolution-politics' that began in 2013 and was interrupted in July 2015, still has the determining characteristic as regards the present and future despite all the crises, ups and downs, buffetings and the total breakdown in July 2015.

The story of the search for a resolution is not new. From the point of view of the state, in order to quell the PKK revolt, the first seeking of contact with Öcalan began in the Özal period and continued in the 28 February days through the military. We know that in the second phase, after clashes flared up again between 2005 and 2008, contacts were established with the organisation and informal relations maintained, culminating in the talks held behind closed doors known as the Oslo process between 2008 and 2011. In 2012 a more transparent period of talks began and was proclaimed to public opinion as a process of resolution.

The milestones of this latest phase, the shattering of some taboos, the reduction in fear and public support for the process have been of the utmost significance. The ceasefire declared by the PKK at the end of 2012, linked to the resolution and politics which lasted until July 2015, the first stage of the withdrawal of armed forces, the emergence of a framework law for the resolution in 2014, talks between the parties which were public knowledge: Imrali-state, Imrali-HDP, HDP-government, the 28 February Dolmabahçe meeting and the stressing by Öcalan at Newroz in 2015 that a congress on giving up weapons was nigh are all stages constituting the critical history of the process of resolution.

When all these are placed consecutively three factors will be seen to have emerged:

-In Turkey, there is a continuity in the system and the organisation as regards the

search and wish for a solution and Turkey has attained a certain maturity of experience. Conflict has continued for 30 years, but the last 15 years have seen efforts for a solution and the last ten years the stage of contact-dialogue-talks.

-There has been steady progress. From the initial contacts to the Dolmabahçe accord the search for a resolution has deepened with every passing day. It has progressed irrevocably as regards legitimacy, expectations and even institutionalisation. Within this framework lasting input has been much stronger than the damage caused by periods of crisis.

-The peace process for both the Kurdish movement and the government has been a dynamic, changing process linked to the evolution of the Kurdish question, domestic political developments, tendencies of voters, the balance of forces in the Middle East and new developments. This has also made it difficult for the process to move forward and adapt its dynamics to new circumstances and demands, leading to many crises. If we add the difference in views and expectations between the parties to this structural fragility then we can see the extent of the difficulties. Hence, threats of force are frequently used by the parties as they bring new strategies to the table or re-determine the boundaries of discussion.

In this assessment the phase between the Kobani incidents (6-8 October 2014) and the breakdown of the process of resolution and recommencement of clashes will be addressed, both as regards fundamental developments and around partial analysis. This phase includes a period in which the process of resolution both reached its zenith and in which its dynamics were shattered. This tale of disintegration undoubtedly also indicates what possibilities exist for a return in addition to explaining the reasons for the breakdown, and incorporates this hope. As in our opinion, for the first time in the history of the conflict, the clashes between the state and the organisation are occurring within the parameters of concrete issues. The participation of Kurds in the administration in regions in which they are

predominant, their administering themselves and their integration into local government is a concrete search and is expressed by the Kurdish movement with the concept of 'status'. Similarly, the formation of a Kurdish region in northern Syria is a second area of fundamental problems with links to the Kurdish question in Turkey.

There is an obligation to resolve, or at least neutralise, these two problems besetting the relations between Turkey and the Kurdish movement at this stage.

### **1. The Dolmabahçe Accord**

At the beginning of 2015 the process of resolution had reached a height, while by the end of the year it has sunk to its lowest ebb. Following the Gezi incidents in 2013 which shook Turkey and constituted a breaking point for the policies of the government, and the 17-25 December coup/corruption dossier events, 28 February 2015 was to be a bright day. On that day in the office of the Prime Minister in Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul two members of the government (Deputy PM Yalçın Akdoğan and Interior Minister Efgân Ala), Public Order and Security undersecretary Muammer Dervişoğlu, who had been appointed as coordinator of the process of resolution, and three MPs known as the HDP Imrali delegation (Sırrı Süreyya Önder, İdris Baluken and Pervin Buldan) held a joint press conference. This meeting, which had been awaited for some time in political circles, was a significant signal that the parties were determined to overcome the Kobani crisis and continue the process. A crucial stage had at last been reached. There were three points on which agreement had been reached as regards a road map. (1) Emphasis of the talks stage and a declaration of its general framework, (2) The setting up of a monitoring committee for the talks, and (3) Öcalan's calling on the PKK to convene a congress to discuss laying down weapons. The press conference was held to announce the talks and their framework and to mention the conference on giving up arms. A few days later the deputy PM was to announce that the names of those to be on the monitoring committee were being determined. It was then expected that Öcalan would make a direct call on the organisation, which was to be a crucial step towards negotiations.

However, the path was not that straightforward. Hence, the parties had not been able to reach agreement on a single text for the press conference. There were two texts, each with different emphasis. The intention had been to read out a single text and for the government to approve it, but this desired outcome did not happen. Whereas the intention had been to read out a joint statement detailing what steps needed to be taken and the mutual understanding required to reach a lasting solution, what occurred was that two texts were read out. The text read out by Önder from the HDP was a summary of a 70-page report prepared by Öcalan a few months before, called a road map, representing the Kurdish party's viewpoint. The points the Kurdish side wished to address in order to achieve a lasting solution were summarised in a rather abstract language in ten articles.<sup>1</sup> The text underlined Öcalan's wish regarding the PKK holding a disarmament congress in the spring months. The final paragraph of the text read as follows:

“Öcalan's fundamental point is this: while taking the 30-year period of conflict to a lasting peace, it is our goal to reach a democratic solution. I am inviting the PKK to convene a congress in the spring months in order to make a strategic and historic decision as regards the giving up of the armed struggle on the basis of minimum agreed principles. This invitation is a historic declaration of intent for politics to replace the armed struggle. I send my greetings to all democratic forces that are working and will work for this, knowing that we are closer than we have ever been to peace. May it be auspicious.”

The question as regards whether the expression in this paragraph: “minimum agreed principles” indicated a congress “with or without pre-conditions” would be central in the subsequent impasse.

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<sup>1</sup> These ten articles are as follows: 1. Definition of democratic politics and content 2. Definition of national and local dimensions of democratic resolution 3. Legal and democratic safeguards for free citizenship 4. Headings for relations between democratic politics and the state and society and for its institutionalisation 5. The socio-economic dimensions of the process of resolution 6. The addressing of the relationship between democracy and security in the process of resolution in a manner that will protect public order and freedoms 7. Legal solutions and safeguards for problems of women, and cultural and ecological problems 8. The development of a pluralist democratic understanding recognising the concept of identity and its definition 9. The democratic definition of a democratic republic, joint homeland and people, and the introduction of legal and constitutional safeguards within a pluralist, democratic system 10. A new constitution to aim to internalise all these democratic transformations.

Despite the failure to reach agreement on a joint text, the text to be read out by the Kurdish side was approved by the government side. In other words, agreement was reached between the two parties pertaining to the acceptability of the text. Hence, there were claims that changes had been made to the wording after meetings and bargaining.. Milliyet said: "Changes were made in articles 6, 8 and 9 of the text. Demirtaş (a few days before the press conference) said on TV that agreement had been reached on article 6, including the expression: 'process of resolution to open the way to a new security structure', a wording subsequently altered to read: 'The addressing of the relationship between democracy and security in the process of resolution in a manner that will protect public order and freedoms'. Article 8 in the draft was changed from 'the development of equality mechanisms' to 'the development of a pluralist democratic understanding', while the sentence 'the introduction of legal and constitutional safeguards within a pluralist, democratic system' was added to the wording 'The democratic definition of a democratic republic, joint homeland and people' in article 9. If the assumption and claim subsequently made by the Kurdish side of a joint text and of the state backing out at the last minute is true, then it is highly likely that the text over which bargaining took place was the Kurdish side's text. However, even if this is the case, it has a limited significance, as the state was expecting Öcalan's call for a disarmament congress to be concrete and explicit. The joint text, or the Kurdish side's text, was a concession made to render such an appeal possible. The abstract language used, the existence of points indicating general change, security and the removal of certain crucial matters from the main draft supports this view. Nonetheless, when it is considered that the process of resolution moved ahead through interaction and the mechanism of persuasion, the point reached was symbolically important.

In the text read out on behalf of the government by the Deputy PM at the press conference there was nothing new. The state's insistence on the giving up of weapons was repeated and the state's familiar paradigm of the process was in a way refreshed.

In spite of two texts being read out at the press conference, it was the Kurdish side's text that attracted attention, both from the press and public opinion. Undoubtedly this was because for the first time the subjects Öcalan indicated for negotiation and his demands were made public in the presence of the government and where there was equal representation of the two sides.

So what should we make of this joint press conference in the light of this data?

Despite everything it was important that the parties presented their demands towards an agreement publically side by side. If a realistic appraisal has to be made it may be said that this point only expressed an intention and a beginning. It was also an effort to satisfy the demands that were then current by fulfilling three conditions. It is apparent that when the dynamics of Turkey and the difficulties of the process of resolution are taken into consideration, the symbolic-political value of the point reached was a lot more than surmised. Turkey was establishing a concrete relationship with the structure, organisation representing the Kurdish question during an uprising. Even if uttering the word negotiation was carefully avoided, the negotiation of a giving up of arms and negotiation of the Kurdish question were put in the same pot. At the time I made the following appraisal:

*“This situation indicates a significant and concrete beginning of a great resolution or a march to peace. There is no doubt that there will be ups and downs and difficulties, but what is important is that the process of resolution continues to advance, overcoming obstacles as it has today. This process is undoubtedly the product of historical necessities which will assist in the country and system's progress towards democracy. Hence, the characteristics of the Kurdish question, for instance the text regarding the basis for agreement, makes reference to the administrative and state structure of the country and the reordering of state-society-political relations and the political regime, depicting the resolution of the Kurdish question within this framework. The parties' speeches and meetings have declared publically the framework of what must be done and what topics must be included to secure an agreement. Let us underline that these ten articles have been shaped around the road map prepared*



*by Öcalan. This tableau indicates three issues: 1. It has been officially recorded that there are two parties to the question. 2. Within this framework it has been expressed that the process of resolution will proceed through negotiation. 3. As regards its function, it has been established that there is a parallelism between the giving up of weapons and the steps to be taken in the Kurdish question (from the definition of citizenship to self-government). This is the fundamental difference between the spring of 2013 and the spring of 2015. There is no doubt that there will be ups and downs and difficulties, but what is important is the crossing of a line and the breaking of another taboo ...”*

However, this peak in the process of resolution also heralded the beginning of a downward spiral.

The stage reached, first and foremost the press conference, was subjected to arbitrary interpretation by both sides and was instrumentalised, with the result that the question of the accord soon became an object of conflict. The descent that began at that peak is continuing today with the same force. The first phase of this downward spiral is the period up until the end of July, including the General Elections of 7 June 2015, when the process was frozen on account of tension. The second phase is the ‘renewed armed period’ following the ISIS attack on Suruç on 20 July, when the non-conflict situation ended, and PKK actions and state operations started anew. In Mesut Yeğen’s words, the equation “either negotiations or a revolutionary popular uprising” would soon bring the PKK to declare armed de facto autonomy in certain areas, and the conflict was to turn into open warfare in urban areas.

The question: ‘Why did this downward spiral take place?’ is important.

Before seeking an answer to this question based on analysis, it will be useful to take a look at incidents that occurred, underlining the periodic elements.

## 2. Struggle for sovereignty

The attack by ISIS on the Kurdish city of Kobani in Syria close to the Turkish border in the autumn of 2014 constituted the first major crisis in the process of resolution between Turkey and the Kurdish movement. Differences of paradigm between the parties emerged, or in other words, contradictions exploded<sup>2</sup>. The situation was like this: the civil war in Syria and the lack of central authority gave Kurds resident in that region the opportunity to govern themselves and a new sphere opened for the growth of the Kurdish movement in Turkey, which is closely linked to the Kurdish political organisation in the region. The Kurdish political imagination, with this development, has accelerated socially, politically and even internationally, and the South East of Turkey and the North East of Syria have begun to complement each other directly, both socially and symbolically and a process of indirect supplementation has commenced. Naturally, this has become a determining factor in the strategy of the Kurdish movement and in the definition of the process of resolution become a virtual pre-condition as far as the Kurds are concerned. As for the Turkish state, it has on the contrary endeavoured to 'keep internal and external Kurds separate from each other' and see 'any Kurdish political entity in Syria as a red line', defining the situation as 'national integration within national borders.' Tension between the parties increased and reconciliation became more complicated.

The first effect of this situation on Turkish-Kurdish relations was seen in the incidents of 6-8 October 2014 in Turkey.<sup>3</sup> These incidents were to lead to the emergence of another fundamental contradiction in addition to the question of Rojava. This contradiction was the struggle for political dominance in Kurdistan of Turkey.

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<sup>2</sup> See Ali Bayramoğlu, <http://www.democraticprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Ali-Bayramoglu-Feb-Assessment-3-languages1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> These incidents broke out after the first Rojava crisis, when Kurdish communities protested at Turkish policies following the besieging of Kobani by ISIS in September 2014. The Kurdish political movement called Kurds onto the streets claiming the AKP was supporting ISIS, and protests turned violent in many provinces.

The mistrust created by the street protests and insurgency-type Kobani (6-8 October 2014) actions trying to involve PKK militants, militia and the people, causing the deaths of 50 people, which frightened and challenged the state, led to a significant change in state strategy. Since then the AKP has stressed the need for 'public order', and begun to see crucial holes in it as the result of the flexibility or misuse of the process of resolution, making it a pre-condition for continuing the process. In addition to the disorder of the protests, this also includes the PKK abandoning all efforts to 'state-build', such as setting up clandestine political centres and devolving power. This concept is seen by the government as a question of sovereignty, as an existential question for the state. The first step taken by the government in this regard was to draft the Internal Security Law. The draft bill was sent to parliament on 24 October 2014, immediately after the Kobani incidents, and began to be debated on 19 February 2015, being passed on 27 March 2015. The law was based on the principle of enabling the security forces to intervene more rapidly and effectively in urban incidents. It broadened the powers of the police and limited judicial supervision.<sup>4</sup> These measures were vehemently opposed by democratic public opinion and the Kurdish political movement. In addition to claims that Turkey was facing a military coup, that there would be a fascist order and that the police would have the powers to carry out massacres, serious criticisms were levelled at

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<sup>4</sup> The controversial articles of the Internal Security Law are as follows:

- The police were given the authority to hold people for up to 48 hours as regards offences committed jointly. The police were also granted the power to make 'preventive arrests', even where no offence has been committed, on the grounds that the safety of others may be jeopardised.
- Police will be able to search persons and property solely on the written, or, in emergencies, the verbal order of a superior.
- Police will be able to use firearms against persons attacking with petrol bombs, inflammables, gas and similar objects, in order to render the attack ineffective.
- Police will be able to intercept and listen to communications on the written instructions from the head of the security directorate or intelligence branch.
- Persons wearing emblems belonging to illegal organisations or wearing clothes similar to uniforms, or who carry banners or pictures considered illegal, or who shout such slogans will receive prison sentences of 6 months to 3 years.
- It has been made illegal to cover completely or partially the face with a cloth or similar material, in order to conceal one's identity, when on a demonstration.
- A governor will be able to order police officers to arrest those suspected of committing offences. The governor will also be able to use all public appliances, such as ambulances and fire engines and allot tasks to the personnel concerned.
- Those who oppose the decisions of the governor face a prison sentence of between 3 months and 1 year.

the new law, saying a security mentality was being given prominence over the political rationale. The Kurdish political movement both surfed the crest of this wave of reaction and adopted a political language that nourished this wave of reaction in order to protect its own sphere of influence. The allergy to Tayyip Erdoğan in the country became entwined with this language. It is necessary to admit that as much as a debate on democracy, what took place was a struggle for 'political domination' and 'the protection of areas that were beginning to become autonomous'.

Today the question of sovereignty and control of territory is a new element which constitutes one of two fundamental structural elements, on which we will dwell at length, that are obstructing the process of resolution.

### **3. Preludes to conflict**

The press conference took place at Dolmabahçe in spite of the increasing tension, with Erdoğan urging continuation and an intervention by Öcalan, and agreement being reached with him. However, it needs to be pointed out that the tension and mistrust created by the Kobani incidents on the government side, and the Internal Security Law on the Kurdish side had not been entirely overcome. Another factor affecting this was the general election looming in June 2015. Opinion polls showed that for the first time a Kurdish party, the HDP, might exceed the national threshold of 10%. The HDP exceeding the threshold meant that the ruling party, the AKP, faced the loss of between 50 and 60 deputies in the South East in particular. This would also prevent the AKP achieving a constitutional majority in order to introduce a presidential system of government and perhaps even mean the party would be unable to form a government. The HDP's election rhetoric was based on this element. With the slogan: "We will not allow you (Erdoğan) to be executive president" the HDP followed a path in which throughout the campaign they targeted the AKP, actually lambasting their partner in the process of resolution. The aim was to capture the AKP's Kurdish vote and the vote of Turks worried about the implications of Erdoğan and the executive presidential system he envisages. Another

slogan employed by the HDP was “becoming an all-Turkey party”. The answer as to why the Dolmabahçe meeting rapidly turned into an object of conflict should be sought in these circumstances. It was influenced and overshadowed by the political competition in question. The parties began to accuse each other and make completely different interpretations of the meeting. At the beginning of March President Tayyip Erdoğan went as far as to say he found the “Dolmabahçe meeting and the tableau there to be erroneous”.

The Kurdish side, interestingly, approached the accord frostily, and avoided being seen too close to the AKP. Immediately after the meeting Demirtaş said: “the government doesn’t offer a shred of trust”, and this was followed by statements from Kandil trivialising the meeting. Although the Kurdish movement expressed its lack of faith in the other side, the accord began to bear fruit and they then declared the text they had read out to be a ‘joint text’ or ‘text of the accord’.

The Kurdish side said that talks with the government over the form of the text should be interpreted within this framework. They then went one step further and claimed the pre-condition for Öcalan calling on the PKK to convene a disarmament congress was the acceptance of the ten articles in the text. Negotiations should commence immediately within the framework of these ten articles. As for the government, it said it had approved the Kurdish side reading out its text and that talks had been held on this subject, but that there was no agreement on anything else.<sup>5</sup> The government stressed that the disarmament congress mentioned in the Kurdish text should be convened. Ministers even claimed that Kandil was not listening to Öcalan, and the government stepped up its stance linking the process of resolution to the giving up of weapons. Let alone accepting the Dolmabahçe accord, it even avoided using the word party.

#### **4. The Erdoğan factor and the election campaign**

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, Deputy PM and government spokesperson Bülent Arınç said the press conference had been delayed by two weeks and that 60% of the Kurdish text had been altered.

Tension rose until on 20 March 2015 things finally broke down. Prior to a visit to Ukraine, Erdoğan made a statement to the press where he said the following regarding a monitoring committee:

*"I don't look positively on this. When I was asked what I thought of the group from the Wise Persons going when I was PM I said I didn't consider it to be right. These things are not right. Just as in every country it is the intelligence organisations that direct these matters. They must continue to manage this process..."*

A few hours later Erdoğan made a stronger statement to journalists on the aircraft. I was amongst the reporters accompanying the President and I received the following answers to questions I posed on both the Monitoring Committee and the Dolmabahçe meeting, resulting in a sudden freeze in the atmosphere around the process:

**In Diyarbakır there are Nevruz celebrations and this year a concise call for the giving up of arms is expected. What is your expectation?**

*I've been waiting for years. This is not new. We have to see this in practice. Our government abolished assimilation policies Is it still possible to say there is a Kurdish problem in this country? Kurdish citizens may have problems as may Turkish citizens, but unfortunately, those who are talking about a Kurdish issue are encouraging discrimination and there are those benefiting from this. They are Kurdish nationalists and they are gaining political advantage from this...*

**If there is no Kurdish issue and if most things have been resolved, what is the process of resolution trying to achieve? For instance, on 28 February at Dolmabahçe a text was read out.**

*Not one text, two texts were read out. The text they read out was completely different to the one read out by Yalçın Bey. They were not the same text, if you recall.*

**Doesn't the fact the ten articles were read out mean that at least in one sense the HDP is being talked to regarding the Kurdish issue?**

*I do not think that meeting there was right, as the Deputy Prime Minister was there next to a group from parliament.*

*Previously, a colleague would meet them when necessary and a statement would be issued. But on those occasions there would not be two separate texts read out. I don't consider it right. As for the ten articles, there is no call for democracy there. The Deputy PM made a statement after that, entirely contradictory. So what did they talk about? Can you call that a joint declaration?*<sup>6</sup>

**You said you do not consider the monitoring committee to be right. Now you say you do not find the Dolmabahçe meeting to be right, either. You are the person who initiated the process. If it hadn't been for your decision it would not have got to this point. Prior to becoming President you said you would continue to pursue this. The government consults you constantly on this. On the one hand we look to the government, then you say there has been a mistake.**

*Look. The government is not in constant consultation with the President. They used their own initiative there. But I also have the right to say I am discomfited by this. This is what I said. When I was asked what I thought of the group from the Wise Persons going when I was PM I said I didn't consider it to be right. Now when something like this is done and I am asked about it I have to give the same answer. Hence, I'm saying I do not agree with this.*

**Are you entirely opposed to the existence of a monitoring committee?**

*I'm the person who set up the Wise Persons. But I think it is wrong for such a group to be sent to the island. Someone said 15 should go, then it was 10. This is a disaster, a step intended to increase the legitimacy of the island. Consequently, it is a dangerous step.*

**Well, how should we perceive the Process of Resolution at this point?**

*The Process of resolution has not been constructed solely around the Kurdish issue. The question of the process is based on ending deaths and grieving mothers all over the country. The process is a step towards this. All 78 million are included in this. Therefore all citizens are making a contribution. As you know, the first step in this was the Democratic Opening. Then the Project for National Unity and Fraternity. After that we said Process of Resolution. The process developed like this,*

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<sup>6</sup> On 17 July Erdoğan repeated the following: "I absolutely do not accept the expression Dolmabahçe accord. On the one side there is the government and on the other the political party with a group [in parliament]. What kind of accord are you talking about? If it is a step to be taken for the country then the place for this is parliament. An accord can never be made with those who rely on the protection of a separatist organisation. This is unthinkable."

*separate from the Kurdish question. I constantly say to those who use the term Kurdish issue, so some people think the policies of denial and assimilation are continuing...”*

These comments by President Tayyip Erdoğan were to rapidly produce results. The question of the Monitoring Committee was shelved and the government was to repeat and emphasise “public order” and say that the limit had been reached as regards steps to be taken.

This was followed by an election campaign in which Erdoğan participated actively. During this campaign, as we have mentioned above, the greatest rivalry was between the AKP and HDP over the question of the threshold and its relation to the constitutional majority. The process of resolution also featured prominently in this campaign and rivalry and was instrumentalised to a significant extent. Erdoğan began to go from city to city and target the HDP and Kurdish movement’s stance at rallies. On the one hand he used an old discourse that did not differentiate between the HDP and PKK, calling the Kurdish movement terrorist, and on the other he reduced the process of resolution to one of the organisation giving up arms, entirely rejecting the idea of negotiation, saying things such as: “There is no Kurdish problem”, “there is no table” and “there is no negotiation”. In response to this, the HDP position was that an AKP government would be tantamount to fascism, adding that Erdoğan had abandoned the Dolmabahçe accord for personal reasons in order to establish his own dictatorship.

When looking at the election campaign this appraisal is unavoidable: the two parties closely involved in the running of the process used the difficulties in the process as weapons against each other. The HDP’s direct attacks on the AKP and Erdoğan deepened mistrust and psychologically weakened the government’s belief in the process of resolution, while Erdoğan’s “negationist” language, added to the state’s stern face during the Kobani incidents, led to a loss of hope on the Kurdish side.



How can we explain the change in Erdoğan's approach, which began with the Kobani incidents and sharpened during the election campaign? It will be useful to underline four interwoven elements here.

As we have mentioned above, the Kobani incidents led to the opinion that the PKK was following a double political path, and the perception that the question of political sovereignty in the Kurdish region was a serious risk, becoming established in the state, government and particularly with Erdoğan. The government's more cautious approach to the Kurdish movement's bi-directional policy (both seeking integration and efforts to replace public authority), and its making [an end to] all threats to public order and withdrawal of guerrillas a pre-condition for the process of resolution are a result of this perception. This perception played a consolidating role in the state's paradigm based on the giving up of weapons. The election campaign made the expression of this and its functioning possible.

Another element complementing this were developments in Rojava (The Kurds' setting up an autonomous administration based on cantons, the Kobani crisis, and cooperation between the international coalition and the PYD) and the way this was perceived by the state. The Kurdish movement in Turkey putting down roots in Northern Syria, the possibility and claims of a Kurdish corridor on the border carrying the risk of a Kurdish policial entity under PKK control constitute one of the sensitive points for Erdoğan and the system. This sensitivity over Rojava combined with sensitivity over public order to prepare the ground for a rectification of strategy in Erdoğan's administration. This correction may be defined as grounding the process of resolution in a way that protects the nation state against existing risks and developments, and thereby imposes a limit on Kurdish demands.

A third element is the difference of paradigm between the parties, and the increasing influence of new input and subjective political impulses at the level of decision making. President Tayyip Erdoğan has not changed his main definition of

the process of resolution, despite all the steps that have been taken. Erdoğan assumes that in an environment of democratisation and in the event of weapons being given up this issue will disappear. He has been repeating for years the importance he attaches to the ending of pressure induced by weapons. He thinks that the steps they have taken, for instance, their ending of the denial of the existence of the Kurds, their broadening of freedoms and the recognition of cultural differences have abolished discrimination and is of the opinion, consequently, that he has removed the Kurdish issue. In all likelihood he believes this will be consolidated by steps in the new constitution.

As for the fourth element, it was directly related to the election. A populist and pragmatic election strategy imposed the discourse used by the AKP and Erdoğan. When President Erdoğan was pursuing a constitutional majority that would render the transition to an executive presidential system possible prior to the elections of 7 June, he was aware that his main source of votes was the conservative constituency. Polling conducted before the elections indicated a rise in support for the MHP, due to fears aroused by the process, which, with the risk of it adding to the buffeting the AKP had suffered in the previous two years were subjects of which Tayyip Erdoğan and the AKP were painfully aware. With the HDP adopting a similar discourse against the AKP, this language became even more fomented. Hence, some of Erdoğan's hawkish comments could be seen as responses to the discourse and campaign of the HDP and Demirtaş. Immediately after the elections at an assessment meeting attended by PM Davutoğlu and myself, the PM was asked why he had adapted his language to that of Erdoğan. He replied, saying: "towards the end of the campaign polls showed we were heading for a vote below 40%, so I resorted to this language to consolidate our vote." In conclusion, the sharp language adopted during the campaign was due more to the instrumentalising of the process of resolution than a reflection of the political situation. The clearest indication of this is to be found in the booklet produced by the AKP as part of its election material. "A 100-article convention for a New Turkey" contains the following sentences written by PM Davutoğlu: "From a centralised structure to a decentralised structure and political

representation of social differences...” This proposal, from the point of view of the process, indicated the next possible step (at least as far as the Davutoğlu team was concerned) that the existing political situation would permit.

However, certain developments after the elections made it impossible for a softening and a return to political methods and the process of resolution, and tension continued to rise.

### **5. 7 June 2015 General Elections**

The elections of 7 June resulted in the AKP failing to gain a majority sufficient to form a government for the first time in 13 years. The party lost 9 percentage points compared to the previous elections in 2011, receiving 40.66%. The legal party representing the Kurdish political movement, the HDP, achieved an unexpectedly high proportion of the votes, 13%, and 80 deputies in the 550 member Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM).

There are many reasons for the fall in the AKP’s vote. Corruption dossiers, the increasing authoritarianism of the government and the concentration of power around one person, the end of the wave of reforms and the power struggle with the Gülen movement come to mind immediately. In addition there are important questions such as: ‘Did the process of resolution contribute to the ruling party’s loss of votes, and, if so, to what degree?’ There are two indicators to which we can resort. The first of these is the votes the AKP lost to the anti-process MHP in the conservative-nationalist region of Inner Anatolia, which is most lukewarm as regards the process. In the whole of Turkey around 4% of voters switched from the AKP to the MHP, 40% of the total votes lost by the party. The results in Inner Anatolia are striking: at the 2015 general elections in Kayseri the AKP vote fell by 12.5% while the MHP vote increased by 9.5%. In Sivas the AKP’s vote loss was 6% while the MHP’s vote increased by 8%. In Yozgat the AKP vote fell by 8.28% and the MHP vote rose by 9.19%. In Kırıkkale the difference was 11% and 9% and in Aksaray 8% and 12%.

This tableau demonstrates that the AKP paid the price of taking risks in trying to resolve this issue, as has happened in many countries with similar problems. It is also necessary to point out that, as they emphasised in post-election internal assessments, AKP leaders are of the opinion that the process was one of their main reason for the loss of votes, and are trying to adapt their attitudes accordingly.

The second clear indicator of this matter is the votes the AKP lost to the HDP in the East and South East, where developments around the process of resolution had the opposite effect. The stance of the government over Kobani and the uprising of 6-8 October, debate over the Internal Security Law, the return of Erdoğan and the AKP to a security language reminiscent of the 1990s and comments such as: 'there is no process, table or issue' led for the first time to a collapse in the AKP vote in Kurdish areas. The party's vote fell from 51% to 34-35% in East and South East Anatolia compared to the previous elections. To give a few examples, in Ağrı the AKP's vote fell by 30%, while the HDP's vote exceeded 70% in Ağrı, Hakkâri, Muş and Van, and in Hakkâri was 85%, Diyarbakır 78% and Mardin 72%. In Bitlis and Kars the party achieved a majority for the first time.

Looking at these results it may be said that the increase in the vote received by the MHP, which went up from 13 to 17%, as well as the HDP and AKP vote, offers clues as to the effect the election results may have on the process of resolution policies of the political parties.

As regards the rise of the HDP, its success went beyond a reaction to the AKP by Kurdish voters. The story of the Kurdish political movement's legal parties, which began with the HEP in 1990, with parties being closed down and new ones founded, continued with DEP, HADEP, DEHAP, DTP, BDP and now the HDP. On account of the

10% national threshold these parties usually entered parliament as independent candidates or through alliances with other parties. Their vote from the 1990s onwards varied from 4 to 7%. The elections of 7 June 2015 marked the first time a legal party of the Kurdish political movement succeeded in entering parliament, comfortably eclipsing its previous highest vote of 7%.

There were two visible dimensions of the voter's interest in the HDP. The first dimension was the serious crisis in the opposition and a sense of hopelessness emanating from it. In the previous 13 years parties from the CHP to the MHP were far from producing an alternative to AKP policies, left behind by the democratisation and change, and no one could even imagine their forming a government. With this vacuum and in an environment where there was increasing reaction to the government and ruling party system, the HDP, which had emerged with the claim to be an all-Turkey party (for instance, in the Presidential elections), attracted support on account of its demands around environmental issues, gender issues, secular freedoms and participatory democracy, as much as offering a solution to the Kurdish question. In the Presidential elections a segment of voters who would not vote for the AKP and had given up on the CHP opted for Demirtaş, and the HDP achieved a new bloc of voters of between 1.5 and 2%. The fact that in the 7 June elections in the event of the HDP exceeding the threshold it was the only party that could break the power of the AKP meant it attracted many protest or borrowed votes. This support for the HDP has been calculated to have been around 3%.

The second dimension is the fact that for the first time a large proportion of Kurdish votes in the East and South East in particular went to the HDP.

For years in the Kurdish regions there were two main political traditions: one religious-conservative, the other secular-left. Many right wing parties relied on large blocs of votes in places such as Urfa, Bitlis and Batman. The AKP inherited this legacy. The success of the AKP's economic, social and solidarity policies, increases in

investment in the South East and its approach after 2005 which distanced itself from Turkish nationalism, further increased its support. The 15% swing from the AKP to the HDP in the region at the June elections was due to a number of reasons. In addition to the government's return to the language of denial, the sensitivity over Rojava nourished a sense of identity in Kurdish voters and the historic claim of the Kurdish movement created a mobilisation, even amongst pious segments of the population, that took the HDP over the threshold. In this context it is also necessary to open brackets as regards the process of resolution. One of the crucial points reached in the 2 and a half years of the process was the social legitimacy gained by the search for self-government and its connection to concepts such as honour and democracy and their natural extension from the psychological level to the political level.

These factors and different perceptions amongst voters regarding the process of resolution, in addition to the pre-election crises, were to be reflected in the post-election situation.

This situation meant that despite the possibility existing for the AKP and HDP to form a government they kept their distance from each other. The HDP's insistence during the election campaign that it would not join forces with the AKP, and its claim that the AKP was the same as ISIS, added to the AKP's mistrust of the HDP and voters' reaction, produced negative results as regards interaction and contact between the two actors of the process of resolution.

## **6. Intermediate balance sheet**

What sort of balance sheet is it necessary to draw up immediately after the 7 June elections?

Let us go back in time a little. As we know the latest efforts for peace began with

Erdoğan's declaration of a process of resolution at the beginning of 2013. This was followed by a period of non-conflict and talks between Imrali and the state were made public. Then Öcalan's 2013 Newroz letter was read out in front of the crowds in Diyarbakır and was covered live by all television channels. This was followed immediately by the formation of the Wise Persons delegations, who began to tour Turkey explaining the importance of peace. Bridges were gradually established between the HDP-Imrali-state-government, a framework law to cover possible negotiations was enacted and, finally, the famous Dolmabahçe meeting took place early in 2015. Two years passed like this.

All this took place, despite the intermittent crises, the destructive developments such as the Kobani incidents, for instance. Continuity was ensured and the stages reached were marked. However, from the outset a fundamental structural problem existed, which was complemented in time by two historical-political elements that were to constitute the fragile aspects of this process.

The structural problem was the difference in expectations from the process between the AKP and the Kurdish movement, and their differing paradigms. On the government side the aim was to resolve the Kurdish question through a broadening of individual rights and the political sphere and a strengthening of local administrations. For the AKP the pre-condition for this was for the PKK to give up arms. Following this, the assumption was, and still is, that the issue would disappear after certain reforms, constitutional changes and political and democratic integration took place. Whereas for the Kurdish movement the main aim was for the Kurds to govern themselves, to achieve a status, for a general amnesty, mother tongue education and a powerful autonomy after the release of Öcalan.

This structural difference caused many problems, pauses and difficulties in definition from the very start. The parties based their positions in the process on this difference in demands. All political moves, accusations, coercion and statements

were within this framework as the sides endeavoured to legitimise their own paradigms. As this difference emerged on the one hand, and was hidden under the carpet on the other, progress was made.

This gulf became wider as time went on and there was new historical and political input, such as the YPG, a derivative of the PKK, setting up cantons on the Syrian border with Turkey in Rojava, thereby implementing Öcalan's and the PKK's desired autonomy and self-government formula. As this became increasingly a sine qua non for the Kurds and the Kurdish movement, it became as important as the process of resolution, and even, particularly recently, more important. For the Turkish state this development meant the following: the organisation was waiting for the state to disappear and establishing new spheres of influence. The Kurdish movement in Turkey was beginning to combine politically and socially with Northern Syria. Turkey saw this as a threat for its own Kurdish issue and as the risk of a "PKK state" to the South. This interpretation was the pretext for once again introducing instruments of security.

The second input was the Kobani actions of 6-8 October in Turkey. As a result of these protests the state's fears that the KCK was beginning to replace public authority in Kurdish regions, and that militias were being organised and becoming established were clarified. Control of territory began to be a priority for the state.

As the importance of Rojava and control of territory began to gain importance in the strategy of the parties, they gradually became the main factors influencing strategy.

## **7. The Second Rojava crisis**

Only a week after the elections of 7 June a crucial development took place, which was to sharpen these contradictions further. The town of Tal Abyad, which had been



under siege from the YPG with aerial support from coalition forces, fell and was lost by ISIS. There is no doubt that this development was of great strategic importance from both the point of view of the YPG and the Kurdish movement, and of Turkey.

The Kurds of Syria are organised in three cantons along the 911 kilometre border with Turkey. The easternmost canton, Cizire [Jazireh], borders Iraq, while in the west the canton of Afrin is only 30 kilometres from the Mediterranean. In between is the canton of Kobani. The Tal Abyad corridor between Cizire and Kobani and the Jarablus line between Kobani and Afrin were under ISIS control. Therefore, the three cantons were separated. With the fall of Tal Abyad on 15 June Cizire and Kobani cantons were united. While this unification was appropriate for the Kurdish movement's strategy and made the Kurds happy, it had the opposite effect on the sensitivities of Turkey. It rang alarm bells in Ankara and created irritation. In other words, while the Kurdish movement felt it was making great progress with the support of the international coalition, and statements from Kandil were to this effect, as regards Turkey's official policy, the formation of a PKK state on the other side of its Southern border was becoming a serious problem.

In these circumstances a new page in the Rojava crisis was to begin in July 2015, and this structural issue was once again to emerge in front of the path of Turkish-Kurdish relations and the process of resolution.

As ISIS was being pushed westwards along the Syrian border, the possibility that the YPG might cross the Euphrates and reach Afrin, thereby uniting the three Kurdish cantons, was seen by Turkey as an effort to establish a Kurdish corridor. Turkey was concerned that there were/would be initiatives to Kurdify the area, and that this was a precursor to a state fabric, an unacceptable security risk as far as it was concerned.

In a speech on 26 June the President said: *"We will never permit a state to be*

*established in the north of Syria. We will not ignore changes to the demographic make up of the region. Whatever it takes we will prevent this.”* In state and government circles the dual strategy expressed was to remove ISIS from the Jarablus line and to prevent it falling to the PYD by establishing a 90 km-long security zone. This was followed in the press, particularly in the pro-government press, by the propagating of a war campaign calling for an operation to establish a security zone in Syria. This campaign was scotched by the intervention of the foreign ministry. The operation in question, which was not about to commence, was one that might take place if necessary, and was a warning and a show of strength.<sup>7</sup>

In an article I penned on 1 July 2015 I gave following response to the meaning of the developments in relation to solution process:

*“The new post-election equilibrium and developments in the region are raising tensions. For the first time the process of resolution faces disintegration. The first outcome of these developments from the point of view of the system is that ‘national worries and security concerns’ are beginning to replace the ‘process of resolution and politics’ as the main focus of the Kurdish question. The balance of forces in the region, including the status of the PYD-PKK, combined with the traditional state reflex adopted by the AKP, means this change of emphasis may not only be temporary. It is evident that this situation is putting serious pressure on the process of resolution and that there may be clashes and crises in Turkey, Iraq and Syria. The second result concerns the reactive and closed climate in Turkey as regards political perceptions. This climate has been arrived at as a result of the tendency in conservative politics to attribute the problems in the country, the difficulties and failures and resulting crises, with a*

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<sup>7</sup> This briefing is as follows:

- Turkey is the country that runs the greatest risk as it has a 911 km-long border with Syria and it has adopted a clear stance as regards the Assad regime. The international community is opposed to ISIS. In this framework the Kurds are receiving support (despite Turkey) from the international coalition, first and foremost the USA, and are legitimising and consolidating their status.

- Recent discussions over intervention in Syria and the establishing of a security corridor are not just a search for a way to prevent the uniting of the Kurdish cantons, but are also intended to prevent ISIS seizing control of the western border with Turkey, and of their doing that in concert with Assad. For in such a scenario with the Öncüpınar and Cilvegözü border crossings falling into the hands of ISIS would mean all Turkey’s contact routes into Syria would be closed and there would be a new wave of migration from a region with a population of 4 million that Turkey would not be able to cope with. Diplomatic measures are being taken, as there is no option of a military intervention on our own.

*conspiracy-theory mentality, to Western and Israeli centred external hands and external enemies. In this climate all debate and criticism on internal problems, first and foremost the Kurdish question, is declared off limits and everything is reduced to the level of the state and questions of 'technology', the 'organisation', 'interests' and 'tactics'. International forces are said to be making efforts to establish a Kurdish state in the region, and this is transformed into the main element that defines the Kurdish question. While domestic and democratic needs and principles are ignored, national interests and the needs of politics win the day. This second factor is known to have become closely linked to the first, and it is apparent that these factors have had an adverse effect on the perception of the Kurdish question as well as inciting polarisation."*

The fall of Tal Abyad led to Turkey taking a series of measures against the PYD and ISIS. The most concrete expression of what foreign ministry officials described as 'diplomatic and political precautions are being taken' in response to developments in Rojava were the contacts made between Turkey and the USA regarding cooperation in the region. The opening of the Incirlik air base to the international coalition in May during a visit to the USA by Hakan Fidan, the establishing of a secure zone in Jarablus and Turkey playing a more active role gained importance after the fall of Tal Abyad. On 18 July agreement was reached at a meeting between John Allen and Feridun Sinirlioğlu. The assessment by Hürriyet newspaper's Washington correspondent Tolga Tanış on this issue on 27 July 2015 is illuminating:

*"The developing relationship the PKK extension PYD has established with the USA while fighting ISIS in the north of Syria, and the progress it has consequently made, was the main reason for the decision made regarding Incirlik. It would not be incorrect to state that the possibility of the Kurds reaching the last canton, Afrin, in the north west, giving the Kurds control of 80% of the Turkey/Syria border, and the boost to the PKK given by the US/PYD relationship, forced Turkey into collaboration with the US. Hence, the greatest expectation Ankara has from new cooperation with Washington is that the Americans will be more aware of Turkish sensitivities regarding the Kurds. The second part of Erdoğan's plan is that Turkey does not want the Kurds in the area between Jarablus and Azaz. And it doesn't want ISIS there either...."*

## 8. The third Rojava crisis

The reaction of ISIS to this agreement was the Suruç attack of 20 July.<sup>8</sup> This assault constituted a new milestone in relations between Turkey and the Kurdish movement, or, more accurately, in tensions between the two parties.

On 21 July KCK CO-president Bese Hozat declared that the AKP was responsible for the attack, and HDP MPs made similar statements the same day. On 22 July two police officers were killed in Ceylanpınar. The PKK's armed wing, the HPG, claimed responsibility, saying it was "retaliation for Suruç". On 23 July another police officer was killed. On the same day ISIS attacked a Turkish unit on the border and on 24 July Turkish planes bombed ISIS targets. The Kurdish movement claimed this was an attempt to conceal the truth regarding Suruç. Again, on the same day a conclusion of the Turkey/US talks was announced and bases were opened up for use by the international coalition. Turkey was taking on a more active role, while it was claimed that guarantees had been obtained from the PYD that it would not cross to the western side of the Euphrates.<sup>9</sup> On 25 July Turkish planes hit PKK camps as well as ISIS positions. The most significant result of these 4 days of incidents was the end of the state of non-conflict and the breakdown of the process of resolution.

As the only local force fighting ISIS in Rojava together with the international coalition, the PYD turned to its advantage its being organised on its home ground and also as a means to achieve international legitimacy. Its fundamental policy aimed to prevent Turkey entering this area. Its claim that ISIS was involved in active

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<sup>8</sup> 34 young people died and more than 100 were injured in the bomb attack in the Suruç district of Şanlıurfa province on 20 July.

<sup>9</sup> A statement from the Foreign Ministry on 24 July 2015 was as follows: "The Council of Ministers, based on the authority granted to it by the TBMM on 2 October 2014 has approved the use of bases by the USA and certain countries in the region considered suitable by us to carry out air operations with manned and unmanned aircraft against ISIS. Turkish Air Force planes will also take part in these operations. "

collaboration with Turkey was used energetically, and even in an exaggerated manner. It was evident that the USA-Turkey agreement had upset the Kurdish movement that was following such a strategy. Turkey's involvement as a regional actor in the coalition against ISIS was considered to carry the risk of threatening the PYD's privileged position and restricting its movement. The PKK's attributing the Suruç attack to the Turkish government, its claim that: "ISIS equals Turkey", retaliations and statements saying attacks on PKK camps helped ISIS were all the result of efforts to establish awareness and the support of public opinion.

The Turkish-American agreement rushed through by the Turkish side after the fall of Tal Abyad and the breakdown of the process, in other words, the new balance of forces in Rojava, were a contributory factor to the rivalry between Turkey and the Kurdish movement in the region.

It is evident that the renewed conflict cannot be explained either by the Kurdish movement's claim that it is responding to state operations, or by the government's stressing its reaction to PKK actions. The problem to a large extent stems from new developments, new dynamics in the process and new strategies emerging as a result of this. In its present state the process of resolution is far from meeting the expectations of the parties with their new positions and as a result conflict has once again broken out.

In concrete terms we have constantly underlined throughout this assessment the emerging situation and balance of forces in Rojava, and the point reached in the Southeast where on the one hand there are efforts to declare autonomy and on the other operations to prevent this, resulting in a struggle for control of territory, a situation that the process of resolution has not been able to embrace or answer, leading to both sides once again resorting to violence.

## 9. New strategies: Autonomy and security

It will be useful to take the appraisal one step further. As much as the renewed conflict is related to the limits of the functions of the process of resolution, it also has an aspect that encompasses new strategies.

Let us first look at the situation from the point of view of the Kurdish movement. Prof. Dr. Mesut Yeğen, an important expert on the process, wrote the following piece that was published in *Bashaber* on 21 September 2015. The article was entitled: “Revolutionary Popular War” and defines the PKK’s new strategy with clarity:

*“The PKK’s grand aim is known: Democratic autonomy or self-government. After years of waging an armed struggle for an independent, united, socialist Kurdistan, the PKK has for some time been working towards a ‘free’ Kurdistan by means of democratic autonomy or self-government. It envisages achieving this through one of two ways: either negotiation or Revolutionary Popular War. Since 2011 the PKK has been saying: “negotiation, if it doesn’t work, democratic autonomy through revolutionary popular war”. According to this new doctrine, the alternative to negotiation is no longer guerrilla struggle in rural areas, but revolutionary popular based on urban conflict involving PKK militants and militias amongst the Kurdish masses. And as is also known, just as it did after the collapse of the last round of the process of resolution in July 2011, today, too, the PKK has declared Revolutionary Popular War.”*

Steps taken by the organisation and statements from Kurdish structures confirm Yeğen’s appraisals.

On 15 July 2015 KCK Co-president Bese Hozat wrote in *Özgür Gündem* that “the new period is that of revolutionary popular war”. Whereas on 19 July the KCK Co-

president Cemil Bayık called for fortifications, resistance and arming.

Following a call made by KCK Executive Council member Duran Kalkan on 27 July for the de facto implementation of autonomy, from August onwards the DBP (Party of Democratic Regions) began to make declarations of autonomy in various units of settlement, along with provincial chairs and, if they existed, elected mayors. In August alone autonomy was declared in 12 places, in Şırnak city on 10 August, in Silopi on 12 August, in Cizre on 12 August, Nusaybin on 12 August, Yüksekova on 13 August, Muş/Varto and Muş/Bulanık on 13 August, Hakkâri city on 14 August, Diyarbakır/Sur on 14 August, Diyarbakır/Silvan on 15 August, Van/Edremit on 15 August and Van/Başkale on 16 August.

In places where autonomy was declared it was explicitly explained in all proclamations that KCK authority would replace state authority. As DBP Şırnak Provincial Chair Salih Gülenç explained in a notification:

“As the Şırnak People’s Assembly, all state institutions in the city have lost all legitimacy for us. In this way no one appointed by the state will be able to govern us. From now on as a people we will construct our life on a democratic basis through our own administration. We will develop our own democratic self-defence against attacks. From now on we will govern ourselves in our city. We will not allow others to govern us.”

Following this PKK militias carried out actions such as digging trenches and setting traps to prevent the security forces entering the areas in question and to impede their authority. As for the state, it declared these and adjacent areas to be special security zones and the result was street clashes, curfews and civilians suffering harm.

It is a significant fact that, following the HDP’s success at the 7 June elections, the party was reined in by statements and criticisms emanating from Kandil. Statements defining the HDP’s vote and limiting its all-Turkey image, and criticisms of HDP

politicians' statements distancing themselves from armed declarations of autonomy may be depicted as an attempt to prevent legal politics becoming a "centrifugal force" within the Kurdish movement and to control it. This initiative may be seen as a move to ensure all parts of the Kurdish movement adhere to the strategy of revolutionary popular war and the de facto and armed declarations of autonomy.

On 28 September an interview with Murat Karayılan in Politika newspaper included the following expressions which point to the big picture from the viewpoint of the Kurdish movement:

*"We are not saying: 'tomorrow or the next day this or that will happen.' We see the move to develop our own form of solution in a self-reliant manner, realising a democratic autonomous Kurdistan as a historic step and we are taking it forward. 80% of the rural area of Hakkari is under guerrilla control. The Turkish state cannot go there. The situation in Şırnak and Dersim is similar. A significant part of Amed and Garzan is also like this. The Serhat region, too."*

There is no doubt that the strategy of the government has been reshaped on the basis of extreme sensitivity regarding developments in northern Syria and the tendency to see a Kurdish corridor as the greatest threat. Steps taken, for instance to seek to set up a security zone with US support between Afrin and Kobani cantons, efforts to put a distance between the PYD and international forces and to separate the PYD from the PKK have brought with them a move away from politics to public order, complete mistrust of the organisation and a loss of trust in the process of resolution.

However, in the latest period the really determining issue from the point of view of the government has been the PKK's declaration of de facto autonomy and its efforts to establish sovereignty through resistance, which the government defines as a question of public order. It is possible to say that the state has discovered the



resistance and mobilisation power of the organisation step by step. Hence the legal measures taken after the Kobani incidents, such as the Internal Security Law, in order to counter state-like structures in the region. With the Suruç attack and subsequent actions, this has passed to another phase, with a sharper security strategy. The state's approach in July was: "There is no change in our paradigm, the process will continue, but first we need to rein in the organisation, that is why operations are being carried out". It can be said that the PKK's claim that "the AKP equals ISIS", its blaming the government for the Suruç attack, challenging statements from the HDP and Kandil, retaliation by the organisation, the killing of three police officers and abduction attempts gave the government the opportunity to resort to the security measures it had been considering for some time.

Developments in August also led to another realisation, pertaining to the declarations of autonomy, as regards the depth of the political and military power of the organisation's militants and militia forces in the region. At security summits assessments along the lines that the PKK had opened up the political sphere in order to consolidate its power and that "the HDP is reliant on the PKK's efforts to set up a state and in order for the process to remature these must be thwarted " began to be reflected frequently in newspapers.

Statements by President Erdoğan such as, *"we are going through a troubled period. We wanted a democratic opening project and a process of resolution. We wanted to take this forward. During the process our governors were not carrying out operations as they now are in line with our instructions, perhaps so they would put themselves in order. After that they started preparations for a new phase."* and *"they took advantage of the process of resolution to turn the Southeast into an ammunition dump"*, confirmed the difficulties encountered by the state in the struggle for control and expressed how security had now become the priority.

It would not be incorrect to say that from the point of view of the government the

point reached today is one where the intervention will continue until there is an acceptable level of control in the region. Hence, it is necessary to understand President Erdoğan, PM Davutoğlu and Deputy PM Akdoğan's statements that: *"operations will continue until things are cleaned up"* in this context.

It is evident that the situation and policies have gradually changed form and that there has been a move to a policy of reining in and regaining territory or control. This situation is expressed from the point of view of the AKP as a pre-condition for the continuation of the process, or for the start of another.

### **Conclusion**

The situation is like this: The process of talks, which commenced with the two sides having different expectations, intentions and goals, has today become unworkable on account of these differences. Some progress has been made despite these differences and the stage reached where demands have been aired and reaching agreement has been mentioned. On the other hand, regional dynamics, the coming into being of a common Kurdish region, the revival of the Kurdish dream and particularly developments in Rojava have taken the Kurdish issue in Turkey in a direction outside the country.

So how can further progress be made? We can talk about four areas of congestion that need to be resolved in order for the process to move forward.

The first area is the effect of the "Rojava issue" on the process of resolution. The second area of congestion concerns reducing the gulf between the Kurdish expectation of negotiations and the government's political evaluation. The main responsibility here lies with the government. Instead of unilateral "democracy grafting" it is possible to take the process forward through interaction with the Kurdish side regarding what may be implemented. On topics such as the definition of

citizenship and local government, negotiation, on the condition that it be put to parliament, is a step that can easily be taken. Unless this happens it will be difficult to move forward.

The third point concerns the responsibility of the Kurdish side. The Kurdish political movement has for a long time expressed its wish to be adjoined to the system in an autonomous fashion and in recent times has put this into practice. But the same movement is also pursuing a structure in the Kurdish region that would include a parallel state structure with the functions of justice, public order and property. These are two things that cannot be realised at the same time. The Kurds cannot expect the government to extend talks until a return is made to the line of legitimacy which the government calls "public order". The path to be followed here is not control of territory, but reconstruction. This reconstruction will occur through local government reform after negotiation.

None of these points of congestion is impossible to overcome...

It is necessary to note down these words of Karayılan in *Özgür Politika* newspaper on 28 September: *"We do not want to obstruct the election. That is why we are debating it. In future, we want to fulfil our responsibility so that an environment is created where both in Turkey and in Kürdistan people can go to vote in safety. I hope they do not create problems. We are discussing this and will clarify our position in the coming days. But as I said, we will make no efforts to influence or obstruct the elections. If the other side signals it is open to a solution, if it pushes the door ajar, our door will be open."*

At every opportunity President Erdoğan emphasises that he initiated the process of resolution and that it is possible in suitable circumstances that he would relaunch it. One of the important figures of the process of resolution, Beşir Atalay, said on 8 October in an interview he gave to Al Jazeera the following:

*"These processes are difficult. There are ups and downs and interruptions. It happens like this in every country. It usually takes 9 or 10 years. This is how I look at it. I see the current*

*environment as conjunctural. A lasting solution to these problems will be achieved through work such as this. Sometimes there will be breakdowns, and sometimes things will not go as you wish."*

It may be said that the problem is of redefining the process in a way that encompasses the new issues and needs. The first episode is over. There has been a strong slide downhill, but this does not mean the door is closed to a return.



### **Special Security Zones Created by the State**

- Blue Areas : Special Security Zones created by the State
- Read Areas : Autonomy Declared areas by the KCK and People Assemblies.