

## Assessment, from Autumn 2015 to Autumn 2016

### The Latest Situation on the Kurdish Front

Ali Bayramoğlu

#### Foreword

This assessment of recent events in Turkey was prepared for the Democratic Progress Institute (DPI) by prominent writer, columnist and Member of Turkey's wise persons commission, Ali Bayramoğlu.<sup>1</sup> It presents the author's view on the current situation on the ground in Turkey, discussing in particular the Kurdish Question over the last year. This paper follows assessments previously provided by other diverse voices in Turkey,<sup>2</sup> and forms part of an ongoing evaluation by DPI of the situation on the ground there, which takes into account different views and perspectives. It contributes to DPI's ongoing evaluation of the 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.

Through its activities and research, DPI aims to contribute to the establishment of structured public dialogue in this area, providing opportunities to all stakeholders in the conflict and its resolution to draw on comparative studies, to take part in inclusive forums, and to contribute to ongoing collaboration between all actors concerned. Further assessments of this kind will continue to be provided by the Institute, with the aim of creating a space for the sharing of different perspectives, thus broadening bases for constructive dialogue in relation to the Kurdish Question in Turkey.

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<sup>2</sup> See previous assessments by Ali Bayramoğlu: Bayramoğlu, Ali, 'The Process of Resolution: From Politics to Arms', October 2015, Democratic Progress Institute: <http://www.democraticprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Ali-Bayramoglu-Assesment-in-3-langauges-Nov-2015.pdf>, Bayramoğlu, Ali, 'The Process of Resolution from the Kobani incidents to the June elections', April 2015, Democratic Progress Institute: <http://www.democraticprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Ali-Bayramoglu-Feb-Assessment-3-languages1.pdf> and Bayramoğlu, Ali, 'New Political Equilibrium and the Kurdish Question', September 2014, Democratic Progress Institute: <http://www.democraticprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/NewPoliticalEquilibriumTheKurdishQuestion-3-languages.pdf>



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September 2016

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### 1. INTRODUCTION: BALANCE SHEET

On 27 June 2016 President Tayyip Erdoğan presented the following balance sheet: “Since July 2015, 700 members of the security forces have been martyred. 8,000 terrorists have been ‘rendered ineffective’ (this phrase in official language expresses killing, wounding and capture).

A tableau that emerges in a report<sup>3</sup> prepared by academics Cuma Çiçek and Vahap Coşkun is one of a civil war:

“According to General Staff figures, as of 10 March a total of 1,076 members of the organisation [PKK] had lost their lives, in Diyarbakır’s Sur district 286 died, in Şırnak province 665 died in Cizre district and 125 in İdil district. Whereas according to a statement issued by the PKK/KCK, in 2015 261 armed militants, 1,250 soldiers, 132 police, 162 special forces police and 13 high-ranking officers lost their lives, a total of 1,818 people (loss of life is increasing every day). According to a Security Directorate report prepared and presented to the Ministry of the Interior in December 2015 a total of 1,300,000 people were affected by curfews and nearly 100,000 people were forced to leave their homes as a result of clashes. By the end of January 2016 the number of people who had been forced to leave their homes as a result of curfews, operations and clashes had reached 200,000, according to sources close to the government. Health Minister Müezzinođlu announced that 355,000 people had been displaced as a result of terror incidents. According to data from the Human Rights

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<sup>3</sup> Cuma, Çiçek & Vahap Coşkun, ‘Dolmabahçe’den günümüze çözüm süreci: Başarısızlığı anlamak ve yeni bir yol bulmak’, published by Barış Vakfı Yayınları, April 2016, Ankara, [https://tr.boell.org/sites/default/files/nisan\\_raporu\\_turkce.pdf](https://tr.boell.org/sites/default/files/nisan_raporu_turkce.pdf)

Foundation of Turkey (TIHV) between 16 August 2015, when curfews began, and 18 March 2016 a total of at least 63 indefinite or daylong curfews were declared in at least 22 districts. These curfews materialised in Diyarbakır (34 times), Şırnak (9), Mardin (11), Hakkâri (5), Batman (twice), Muş (once) and Elazığ (once). During the same period at least 310 civilians lost their lives, including 72 children, 62 women and 29 people over 60....”

Today, in August 2016, this balance sheet has become more serious.

This is not the only item on the balance sheet. The Diyarbakır Chamber of Small Businesspeople and Artisans noted that during the incidents in Diyarbakır more than 5,000 people lost their jobs in small businesses, and that there had been a 20% fall in property values in the region. According to another statistic: “During the period of conflict that began after 7 June [2015] 361 small businesses closed down in Sur, while 56 moved their premises to other parts of Diyarbakır. That is, in 5 months Sur lost over 400 workplaces. (...) Half of the population of Sur left the district. In neighbourhoods where clashes were intense and curfews were introduced up to 80% of the population moved out. Those who abandoned their houses are desperately looking for a roof over their heads. The majority go to other neighbourhoods of Diyarbakır and take refuge with relatives. Sur is a place where the poorest segment of the people, the most economically disadvantaged groups, live. Some of those who remain amidst the bombs and the weapons are families who had to flee the conflict in Syria. Others are too exhausted to go elsewhere...”<sup>4</sup>

The balance sheet and evaluation of this period, which begins with the November elections and includes a further intensification of the clashes which began in July 2015 and a consolidation of the rhetoric of war, also incorporates in parallel with this a regression in the democratic backcloth and a narrowing of the political arena.

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<sup>4</sup> Vahap Çoşkun, Hendeğin Arkası [Behind the ditches], Serbestiyet, 11 Aralık [December] 2015, <http://serbestiyet.com/yazarlar/vahap-coskun/hendegin-arkasi-647874>

## **2. RECENT MEMORY**

### GENERAL

As is known, the borders drawn in the Middle East after the First World War denied the Kurds the right to establish a state, leaving them in four separate countries. From the 1920s onwards every Kurdish political movement that emerged endeavoured to address this omission. In various revolts the Kurds backed their claim to govern themselves. The US invasion of Iraq and the subsequent crises experienced by the nation states of Iraq and Syria constituted a new milestone for the Kurds. In the last 20 years in particular Kurdish communities in these two countries have obtained the opportunity to organise themselves politically on a separate platform. This has resulted in a situation which for the Kurds has exceeded the dimensions of uprisings. The Iraqi Kurds are on the verge of independence, while the Kurds of Syria, despite all the concerns and objections raised by Turkey, initially established cantons and then combined these cantons, making serious progress towards setting up a united Kurdish region on Turkey's southern border. In Turkey, the PKK, which has maintained a revolt for 30 years, is engaged in a struggle for sovereignty. One of the most significant aspects of this situation is the emergence of a new Kurdish imagination, a new hope, that affects a large majority of Kurds living in different countries. This imagination has on the one hand extended the boundaries of the Kurdish question in each country, playing a role in the need for a common space, a shared need for security and even the idea of a state, advancing the integration of Kurdish communities. On the other hand, as in Turkey, for instance, developments in Syria directly affect the social mood and constitute one of the fundamental platforms of Kurdish politics. These developments are an indication of the historic progress stemming from the energy released by the experiences of the Kurdish peoples and organisations in the Middle East and the divided states of Iraq and Syria. With every passing day the Kurdish question in Turkey becomes subject to the conditions of this development.

## TURKEY

In Turkey in the last three years various phases have occurred in the Kurdish issue. The “solution process” which began at Newroz 2013 and continued until July 2015 indicated three significant situations: the changing balance of power in the Middle East and Kurdish regions, changes in political attitudes corresponding to this, and, consequently, the renewed conflict in Turkey.

The civil war in Syria and the fact that this country is sociologically interconnected with the Kurds of Turkey, and politically interwoven with the dominant political movement, the PKK, prepared the ground for the emergence of a Kurdish political area along the Turkish border. Initially, this area achieved a de facto autonomy, and at the second stage, in particular after the Kurdish town of Kobane was besieged by ISIS in October 2014, the PYD-YPG, the Kurdish forces of the region, turned into an important weapon, a means of struggle, for the international alliance against the ISIS threat. In this way the opportunity emerged for the PKK to be a regional player beyond Turkey, to put down roots in Syria and seek international alliances and “legitimacy”.

There were many factors that undermined the process of resolution from the very beginning in 2013. First and foremost were the differences in intention and paradigm between the two sides. These differences led to the process slowing down and going into crisis from time to time between 2013 and 2015. As for the breakdown and the renewal of conflict, the changes occurring in the region, the effect of the ambitions of the Kurdish side on the strategy of the Kurdish movement and the emergence of existential concerns on the Turkish side led to the difference in paradigm becoming unmanageable and the process broke down.

The first result was that the Kurdish movement gradually united the Kurdish regions

in Syria and began to melt down the ethnic and cultural differences in this region. This region, Rojava, constituted a pre-condition for Kandil, although the framework of a final solution was vague. Along with this, the tendency to combine a solution of the Kurdish question in Turkey along with the North of Syria emerged and has taken root.

The second outcome was the Kurdish movement bringing the canton model from Syria into Turkey in the autumn of 2015 by initiating the ditch policy. This step, although it was declared to be a defensive move on the pretext of Turkey-ISIS relations, Turkey's slow pace, and even suspension, in the process of resolution and increasing military operations, was in fact a radical change in strategy. This development presented the government with the opportunity to abandon the process of resolution, in which it had become bogged down, and had led to a fall in its vote. The government's initial response was to take precautions and declare war, steps which opened the way to the balance sheet mentioned above. This was followed by the lifting of parliamentary immunity, criminalisation of freedom of expression, efforts to remove elected mayors and replace them with appointees through changes in legislation, and the narrowing of the political and democratic arena by clamping down on criticism of the state's Kurdish policy and the raising of demands of the Kurdish movement through changes in state security laws and arrests and investigations. Today the Turkish security forces have ensured military equilibrium, while the political sphere has suffered grave damage.

However, the determining factor in this period, not only for the government or the state bureaucracy, but for all political parties represented in parliament and dominant political understanding, is the position of the system and the ruling bloc it has established. Today this is of a determining character, for they indicate that developments in the Middle East and the Kurdish advance are perceived as an existential threat by the Turkish system.

For instance, the tangible hopes of the Kurds and the Kurdish movement regarding the future cause Turkey and the Turkish side to have tangible concerns.

### **3. KANDIL [QANDIL]**

On 27 July 2015 KCK Executive Council member Duran Kalkan made the following appeal: “Let us construct democratic autonomy village by village, town by town, and oppose the AKP. We are not seceding from Turkey, we respect democratic rules. We mustn’t say we are the only administration. I invite everyone to develop democratic autonomy.”

Whereas on 28 September 2015 Karayılan said the following in an interview: “We see the project to turn a democratic autonomous Kurdistan into reality as a historic project and we are advancing it. 80% of the territory in Hakkari province is under definite guerrilla control. The Turkish state cannot enter...”

And in February 2016 the KCK Executive Council President and PKK leader in Kandil, Cemil Bayik, announced in an interview with Le Monde newspaper his strategies and positions with absolute clarity. He said: “In the existing situation there is absolutely no reason to end the armed struggle. On the contrary, in the coming months the civil war will intensify in Turkey. This is taking place in a situation of regional war where everyone is defending their interests and no one can be ignored. The developments in Turkey, Iran and Syria are emerging from the one and same conflict. As a result of this war the Middle East will enter a new age. Kurdistan is in the centre of the Middle East, between Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. We therefore believe that Kurdistan is at the heart of this regional war and that until this war evolves into a new situation it will continue to intensify.”

It is worth recalling briefly the framework indicated by the statements of Duran

Kalkan, Karayılan and Bayık:

The declarations of de facto autonomy in July 2015 were followed by the digging of ditches and trenches, urban resistance and conflict. The security forces intervened in order to thwart the implementation of autonomy by the PKK in areas where it had begun armed resistance. Intense clashes ensued with the state sending in tanks and heavy weaponry, resulting in violations of human rights.

It may be said that Kandil is persisting with its policy of “seeking dominance in chaos” despite it on occasion suffering military setbacks since July 2015. When this policy is examined along with its results it will be seen that civilians have been viewed as shields or targets and that every death and every incidence of damage has been instrumentalised as a gain or a loss, or utilised with the discourse of repression or victimhood. It has also been observed that the struggle for a share of political power has been waged with violence, indicating a framework in which the aim has been to render public and social order unworkable.

Behind this framework is a trilateral preference connected to the balance of power in the region and Kandil’s definition of the sphere of the Kurdish question.

The first preference has involved carrying the de facto model in Rojava to Turkey, rather than concentrating on a Turkey-centric shared model based on democratic integration including opening up to Rojava.

The second preference envisages the Kurdish movement gradually moving its centre of gravity to Rojava to take advantage of the emerging situation there, seeking legitimacy and recognition through relations with countries such as Russia and the USA, becoming an effective regional actor, and eventually moving forward as an “independent political entity” by establishing a Kurdish corridor along the Turkish border.

The third preference, as an inevitable consequence of the first two, has been to reorganise the increasing means and spheres of struggle in the Kurdish movement, sharpen the hierarchy and to limit potential centrifugal tendencies. “Dialogue politics” in the Kurdish movement has pushed back elements such as “parliamentary politics” in the movement’s internal workings and the leadership of armed force has been emphasised. Armed struggle as the vehicle of the Kurdish question has been redefined as the main thrust of the Kurdish movement. The autonomous movement of legal vehicles such as the HDP has been limited and these structures have been redefined as means of support for the new approach. Today for the organisation “politics” is no longer an independent and determining variable, and has become an activity of logistic support for the search for power. If we were to go to the extreme it could be said that Kandil has begun to define political vehicles such as the process of resolution as elements of logistic support to legitimise its new strategy.

The significance attached by the PKK and other elements of the Kurdish movement to negotiation in this latest period has been that of a one-dimensional and declared demand for shared sovereignty, not a politics of democratic interaction.

Hence, all the slogans and propaganda elements of the Kurdish movement, such as “the AKP’s policies of massacre”, “Palace’s hitmen” and “AKP-ISIS equivalence” serve such a purpose and are utilised as a means to normalise this situation, channeling the political and civil energy in this direction.

If it is necessary to summarise, Kandil’s existing strategy emerges as: (1) to combine the North of Syria and the Southeast [of Turkey] around the same model, (2) To declare this united area as the united platform of the Kurdish question and (3) To wage a struggle for de facto sovereignty and zone control in this area. Kandil declared autonomy in certain areas it saw as controllable, inviting the intervention of

the security forces through its ditch policy, leading to these areas being turned into “security zones”.

At the point reached today, following the clashes which broke out after curfews were introduced in the areas where autonomy was declared after July 2015, where the PKK did not receive the participation and support it had desired for its idea of uprising, the organisation has been repulsed by the stern security measures that were implemented. As of today clashes are continuing in the form of attacks by the PKK on the security forces in urban areas and with internal security operations.

At this juncture it is necessary to underline the violent attacks carried out by units affiliated with the PKK on civilian targets in big cities and the political consequences of these attacks.

There have been many attacks involving suicide bombers and bomb-laden vehicles: “10 August 2015 attack in Sultanbeyli in Istanbul, resulting in 1 fatality. 23 December 2015 attack on the Sabiha Gökçen airport in Istanbul, with 1 fatality. 17 February 2016 attack on service vehicles in Ankara, 28 fatalities. 13 March 2016 attack in Kızılay Ankara, 34 fatalities. 27 April 2016 attack in Bursa, 13 wounded. 10 May 2016 attack in Diyarbakır Bağlar, 3 fatalities. 12 May 2016 attack in Sancaktepe in Istanbul, 8 wounded. 12 May 2016 massacre in Dürümlü village, 16 fatalities. 7 June 2016 attack in Vezneciler in Istanbul, 11 dead. 8 June 2016 attack in Midyat, 4 dead.

The attacks on service vehicles, in particular the attacks in Kızılay, which caused a total of 65 civilian deaths, have left their mark on this latest period.

It is necessary to describe these attacks as a strategy of pressurising the government by using suicide bombers in the west of Turkey and in big cities, and consolidating the policy of chaos and issuing a challenge.

However, on this “front” from the viewpoint of the PKK things have gone off the rails. For an organisation pursuing “legitimacy” at the international level, to carry out actions against civilians is a contradiction that appears to have alarmed Kandil. One of the experts on the issue, Mesut Yeğen's evaluation for Deutsche Welle is important: “I don't think the organisation will be able to risk losing both its popularity and its military power at the same time. For it is encountering strong reactions both at home and in terms of international support. Consequently it will think twice when planning such actions in the future...”

At the moment there appears to be no sign of major change in the main strategy of the two parties as regards their positions on the conflict.

So it will be useful to answer again the question “How did we reach this point?”. As we have mentioned above, this change is based on the civil war in Syria, the Kurdish advance and the hopes and aspirations of the Kurdish movement.

The process of resolution was a process that dealt with the issue within national borders using the legitimate and traditional means of the nation state. The emergence of the Kurdish energy in Rojava changed this equilibrium and the presence in the region of the US, Russia, Iran and the ISIS factor have provided a basis for the PKK-PYD's search for international legitimacy.

Kandil's policies are now advancing along this line.

#### **4. Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)**

From the point of view of the HDP the most important development of 2015, the effect of which is continuing to be felt, is the re-formatting that has been carried out by Kandil after the party (HD) received 13% of the vote at the elections of 7 June 2015. Kandil's aim was to prevent legal politics from exerting "a centrifugal force" within the Kurdish movement, and to control this. Following the election success, Kandil reminded the HDP of who it was, what it should do, where the real power lay and that the command room was in the armed centre, not the political centre, by making it abundantly clear, particularly to Kurdish public opinion, with statements, interviews, accusations and criticisms.

In the early days the HDP resisted, saying the "declaration of armed autonomy", which it now defends and to which it attaches profound meaning, was a mistake. However, Kandil, with the developments which followed the outbreak of conflict after 20 July, has step by step destroyed the relative autonomy of politics. As a result, Kandil did not permit the central parliamentary politics of the Kurdish movement to become prominent or attain an autonomous sphere. On the contrary, it saw this as a significant problem to be overcome.

The indicators are clear: Demirtaş began to go beyond Turkish borders in an unaccustomed way for a political party, and advocate the unification of cantons in Northern Syria. He took ownership of the resistance, violence and declarations of self rule. The equation: "ISIS equals the AKP", a discourse that reduced security measures taken against the declarations of autonomy to a government policy of massacre, began to downgrade the HDP to Kandil's "Propaganda Ministry".

And all this made the HDP's election success a matter of debate both in the Kurdish movement and in the court of Turkish public opinion. This stance significantly affected Kurdish politics and Kurdish-Turkish political relations.

The reasons are clear. The organisation preferred not to withdraw, persist with the process of resolution or seek mass support in Turkey, turning its back on searching for a model of resolution that would be different to Syria. On the contrary, it opted to consider the Kurdish regions as a single entity, using arms to declare de facto autonomy and sovereignty, reining in the HDP and making it part of its new strategy.

The HDP, beginning to play the role determined for it by Kandil, found itself confined to a narrower space between June and November 2015, particularly after the general elections of November 2015. Hence the HDP appeared to take on a role where its daily political rhetoric became one of justifying attempts at armed autonomy, and its function was to define measures to counteract these attempts not merely as exceeding limits and reaching the dimensions of violations, but as a planned policy of massacre.

These developments had two results.

1. HDP's claim to be an all-Turkey party regressed and it began to be the voice in parliament of the Kurdish movement's search for armed-unarmed political sovereignty.

2. The Kurdish movement's new strategy once again pushed politics into the shadow of the factor of armed force. Hence, for Kandil the search for political dominance by means of armed actions and imposition appears to be more important than the vote the HDP might receive or its parliamentary activities. This strategy is, contrary to claims to the contrary, independent of Turkey's security policies, at most occurring reciprocally and simultaneously. In this respect it will be particularly useful to underline the following words of Karayılan that appeared in the press. "The declarations of self rule did not reduce the HDP's vote, they increased it. This

demonstrates that democratic autonomy has been adopted by our people. They are insistent on it and are at the stage of revolution...”

During this new phase of violence the only effort to keep the door open to politics was the DTK communique. HDP members played a leading role in the framing of this communique, which is an important document reflecting the paradox of the HDP. It is one of the most comprehensive texts containing proposals for a conclusive solution to the Kurdish question, which both endorses and defends the continuing conflict and also contains proposals for an end to this conflict.

The text has three aspects. Firstly, the communique takes ownership of the declarations of armed self rule, showing the urban warfare engaged in to protect these declarations as just and legitimate and inviting the people, first and foremost the Kurds, to join the resistance. On the other hand, a “demand and draft for autonomy” is presented, and a return to politics and debate of its utilisation as a vehicle is proposed. Finally, autonomy is defined as a pre-condition for the ending of the violence-resistance-revolt.

The aspect of the DTK communique which legitimised violence and contained the pre-condition was given prominence, and the communique was perceived by Turkish public opinion as a text for bargaining.

## **5. STATE AND SYSTEM**

What has been the Turkish state and system’s response to these new conditions, the radical changes in the region, and the move away from the centre in the Kurdish movement’s strategy?

The carrying of the Kurdish question beyond national borders, the intensity of PKK-PYD relations with Iran and Russia, the partnership with the USA and the increasing awareness of the idea of using the Kurdish question as a trump card in international struggles against Turkey, and the commencement in the region of an urban-based uprising, one of the most serious in the history of the republic, have been perceived in Ankara as an existential threat to the state. As a result of these developments and this perception all doors to the idea of politics and its possibilities have been closed.

The meaning of this in the big picture for the state and the system is that the developments in the Middle East and the Kurdish advance and historical opening have triggered a profound fear and anxiety regarding the existence of the state and its territorial integrity. For instance, the concrete hopes of the Kurds and the Kurdish movement regarding the future have led Turkey and the Turkish side into palpable worries. These fears have enveloped the military fabric and opposition parties in addition to the government and have nourished a new power bloc.

The significance of this in the short term is that for the state and government the Kurdish question has evolved into something beyond the boundaries of the policy of resolution.

At the beginning of April I managed in Helsinki to ask Davutoğlu, who was then still Prime Minister, the following question: “You both underline decisively the counter-terrorism struggle and say from time to time that political vehicles may be utilised. If a process of resolution were to re-emerge on the agenda, would there be any other pre-condition for you apart from an end to violence and the securing of law and order? As a government are you in a different position to the past as regards the re-commencement of a political process?”

The answer was as follows: “There is no possibility of progress without a definite disarmament. An absolute disarmament. This is a pre-condition. If the threat to Turkey is lifted then (it can happen). It is also necessary for the threat posed to Turkey by their presence in Iraq and Syria to disappear. First of all an absolute disarmament in Turkey, a line that does not threaten the security or borders of Turkey or of the Kurdish administration in Northern Iraq, we need to see this. If the PKK threatens the administration in Erbil we will accept this threat as one against ourselves. If the PYD constitutes a threat to the Free Syria Army or other groups supported by Turkey in Syria this means a threat is constituted against us....”

For the first time the government was expressing so openly a second pre-condition for the process of resolution and politics to be taken out of the refrigerator - meddling in inter-Kurdish relations and stretching as far as Erbil.

This indicated how distant the Turkish side is both from its fears and from politics.

From the point of view of the system, the question today is defined neither as the Kurdish question nor as a problem of terror. Rather, it confronts us openly as the state's seeking to protect its sphere of sovereignty. And the first outcome of this is for the question of the organisation and the Kurdish issue to once again be separated.

The question has swung to struggle against the organisation, or at least this is now the dominant dimension. In this sense the issue of the organisation connotes three points in the eyes of the Turkish state:

1. Seeing the structure in Northern Syria and the ditch policy as a model for separation/secession.

2. Considering the process of domestic politics based on resolution, dialogue and talks to have been exploited by the organisation along these lines for the purpose of legitimisation.

3. The main point enveloping these is the evaluation that Kandil and the PYD have established alliances that have been used, or are against, Turkey. And most important of all, “the perception of the Kurdish question as an external threat and an external political problem.”

These three considerations indicate “a transition from a phase of a policy of resolution integrating the Kurdish question and the Kurdish movement to one where the question and the movement are separated one from the other as law and order and foreign policy.”

There is no political instrument in the tool box of the Turkish political system that can correct this situation and remove the fear and anxiety.

This means the main path being followed is a three-pronged law and order path:

On the one hand this entails consolidating the area of security and strategies, engaging in a partial but effective cleansing of the organisation in the region, and stepping up the physical violence with new laws and extra protection for the military.

And on the other, to break the legal wing of the Kurdish movement by removing immunity, putting local municipalities into receivership, excluding the Kurdish question and its unwanted representation from politics and closing the political sphere to this question.

And, last of all, to pursue freedom of expression, civil society and the media (such as the legal measures taken against the Academics' communique and volunteer editors at Özgür Gündem) with effective anti-terror laws.

As a result to narrow the political arena at every level, reduce the Kurdish question to one of law and order, and propel demands and views regarding the Kurdish movement into the forbidden zone.

The social perception in Turkish public opinion is moving in this direction.

The gradual departure of the Kurdish question and Kurdish movement from the perception of what are social/political demands and their being addressed in the framework of an international struggle for sovereignty is scuppering the belief in "question-resolution-politics". The Kurdish movement's wave of attacks in the Southeast is perceived as an attempt to seize sovereignty and with its series of alliances against Turkey in the Middle East it is defined as an integral threat.

At this phase of conflict the only political move made by the government is the "Master Plan" it has announced, which is reminiscent of the HDP's DTK communique.

However, this plan, rather than offer hope for the future, expresses a search for a return to the past.

This plan, the details of which will be touched upon below, may be seen as the state's re- definition of its Kurdish policy. The most important aspect of the ten points in this plan is the change in the meaning given to "politics" in the state's

Kurdish policy. In this framework, politics has moved far from a process where it is interactive, involving dialogue and an exchange of views leading to agreement, based on which decisions are taken. On the contrary, in this document the meaning given to politics expresses unilateral steps taken by the government for the benefit of the people and the region in line with appreciated truths, a kind of “political presentation”.

Another important point is the government’s need to repair state/society relations. However responsible the organisation is for the clashes in the Southeast, for the curfews that were introduced, for the damaged cities and public order, the state and government have also been presented with a sizable bill. One of the aims of the plan is to deal with this adverse situation.

Let us now evaluate these ten points under the umbrella of these two aspects.

It is possible to gather the ten points under four main headings.

The first of these is the “law and order” aspect.

The second is the “unilateral democratisation process” aspect.

The third is the “policy of damage redress” aspect.

While the fourth is the aspect of “change in interlocutor, more accurately, the removal of the former interlocutor”.

The text implies that there will be a return to a settled structure with a law and order approach to the Kurdish question. In other words, there is a stress on public order and reference is made to the establishing of a security and intelligence apparatus that will render possible intervention in actions that challenge state authority (such as identity checks, setting up courts or activities such as imposition of taxation).

The text revives the idea of the Kurdish question disappearing as a result of general democratisation, the broadening of the sphere of individual freedoms and privileges, with the implication that by using the concepts of “politics and reform” there will be a return to the unilateral policies of democratisation implemented between 2005 and 2013. Hence, according to the text, with the new definition of citizenship expected in the constitution and the strengthening of local government conditional on strong central control these will be removed as vehicles of Kurdish politics and the elements of the New Turkey project will be defined in this framework.

The redress of damage policies may be addressed both as dealing with the aftermath of disasters through services and as another facet of the policies designed to vaporise the question. This kind of social and economic policy is unavoidable and necessary.

The question of interlocutor is clear. Let us recall once again what the Prime Minister said: “From now on the interlocutor is the people. In all provinces and districts organisations will be formed of universally respected people. We said: ‘you organise amongst yourselves and we will contact you.’ We will address everyone as an interlocutor, but not those who take up arms...” These words are a declaration that the period of contact, dialogue and negotiation with the party holding arms is over.

There is a high risk that this stance means a solution is far away, not close at hand. Time will tell what sort of result this “traditional monofaceted political phase” which “envisages conflict” will yield.

## **6. CONCLUSION: FINDINGS, WISH, PROPOSAL**

There is a thirty-year-old ongoing rebellion. During these years the PKK, the initiator of this rebellion, has acted on a sociological platform powerful enough to attract

50,000 people into the mountains to put their lives on the line. The issue called the Kurdish question is now inseparable from this rebellion. Hence, following the democratic reforms relating to the use of identity rights in Turkey, the Kurdish question is now depicted as the demand for “autonomy and self-government”. This depiction has become intertwined with the PKK's power and base.

Like yesterday, any process of resolution will not involve a general democratisation, but rather, finding a political way of ending the armed struggle carried out by the organisation, and, alongside this, reforming with democratic steps the platform from which the rebellion emerged.

With the latest incidents millions have been displaced, death and violence have become a daily occurrence, and, with the trading of angry and, on occasion, insulting sabre rattling, the Southeast has become a region of grave conflict which nourishes militarism.

It is the responsibility of the state, as in all rational political systems, to increase political participation in regions where predominantly Kurds live, to take measures to ensure pluralism and carry out democratic reform, in addition to seeking ways to end the conflict and disarm the organisation.

The armed organisation is not the only element of the rebellion, the sociological platform and the accumulation of 30 years of conflict. There is also the legal facet of this rebellion, which has a political and social dimension. The last 30 years have given birth to a political party tradition that today has the support of between 10 and 13%, has six million voters, has 59 MPs in parliament and runs 11 municipalities. Many civil society organisations have come into being or found a place within this framework.

This legitimate and legal facet is an indicator of the harsh sociological fabric which may soften through politics, negotiation and rapprochement. This is also an indicator of the fact that the conditions and circumstances that produced both the PKK and the HDP are the same and account for transit between the two. Politics should be able to deal with this unavoidable situation, to transform it and turn it into an opportunity, rather than opting for punishment.

Hence, given the history of the conflict, the point it has reached, the recent going beyond national borders and the organisation's international support, the government's current strategy, depicted as a "policy of eradicating the PKK", is not realistic. This strategy may be posited as a policy of reducing the power and influence of the organisation in addition to taking security measures to counter an existential threat. This is not a policy that can be maintained for years and years. As a result, whatever anyone says, the phase of conflict will end and be replaced by a phase of talks and politics, at this or the other level.