

TURKEY'S NEW POLITICAL PARADIGM AND THE KURDISH QUESTION

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Foreword

This analysis of the new political paradigm in Turkey was prepared for the Democratic Progress Institute (DPI) by prominent writer, columnist, and Member of Turkey's wise persons' commission, Ali Bayramoğlu. It presents the author's assessment of the shifting political sands and analysis of the current political situation. The measures taken since the attempted coup in July 2016 and developments in both Syria and Iraq are also assessed and the author provides an insightful examination of the crucial question of what all of this means for the political representation of Turkey's Kurds and ultimately the resolution of Turkey's Kurdish conflict. This paper follows assessments previously provided by the author, as well as other diverse voices in Turkey, and forms part of a continuing appraisal by DPI of the situation on the ground, 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 at a time of significant political change, both externally and internally, and not least in the run-up to the presidential referendum in April 2017.

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. DPI strives to provide the broadest possible representation of viewpoints. The views and opinions expressed in the assessment are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of DPI.

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I. The New Paradigm question

The last 15 years of Turkey's political history have been a period of to-ing and fro-ing between two opposite poles. The early years of AKP democratic-liberal reforms have been followed by a dominant insular and authoritarian tendency. The country's critical problems, first and foremost the Kurdish question, and from time to time those of the Middle East, have been enveloped and affected by this to-ing and fro-ing.

1. Turkey: Where is it heading?

As regards the last 15-20 years, it is generally accepted by observers and institutions that a period of democratic opening took place between 2003 and 2010/11. The cornerstones of this period were a "demilitarisation" process accompanied by an overhaul of the state structure that broadened the space for fundamental rights and freedoms, and a "normalisation" of society-state relations in harmony with democratic principles. Despite all the regression, ups and downs and crises, and the current dire situation, the process of resolution, or peace process of 2013/14, that emerged in the "extra time" of this period, broke down certain taboos, raised hopes and made remarkable progress.

Turkey is one of the countries, like those of nearby Europe, which is a great political-economic-cultural centre. Like all nearby countries, when seeking answers and solutions to its problems, while establishing political debate, it first rides on the main political, social, cultural and economic waves in its own centre, and then looks to those of others centres which reverberate around the world.

The period of democratic opening in Turkey began with the liberal winds that blew in world politics despite problems such as Al Qaeda, the Afghan war and the Iraq war. The grave economic crises that Turkey suffered in the 1990s and the early years of this millennium (1999 and 2001), governmental instability (1993-2002) and the existence of armed forces that intervened in politics (1997-1999) demonstrate what a need the country had for such change in order to counter such developments.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP), which emerged with the demands of the Islamic base for rights and democracy and showed a propensity for change in this area, won the 2002 elections and welcomed these developments. A phase where the social enveloped the political and guided it was beginning. It was a period when from right to left, the expectations of people with “democratic” and “liberal” ideas who attached importance to freedoms, liberal urbanites and Islamist segments began to intersect with those of the main conservative current, when the needs began to be shaped in this direction.

The policies of reform pitted the actors of the ancien régime, such as the military, certain secular social groups, Kemalists within the state or modernist judicial and university cadres and the main media against the new actors of the regime clustered around the AKP. Clashes were fierce, but the reform alliance made rapid progress. And it found great Western support and encouragement behind it, from the EU to the US. This period was a time when in most EU countries Social Democratic governments were in power, prior to the shock of the enlargement of 2004. The administration did its utmost to entrench the Copenhagen Criteria. These criteria rapidly became principles and directives underpinning the government programme. Hence, in July 2003 the 7th EU Harmonisation Package launched a serious demilitarisation and in April 2004 the government exerted its influence on the military and the Foreign ministry, approving the Annan Plan and referendum in Cyprus (for the first time in Turkish history). The meeting in Brussels of EU leaders in 2004 confirming that the EU would open accession negotiations with Turkey was reflective of this rapid and effective progress. The years 2005, 2006 and 2007 bore witness to battles around the European negotiations between the reform movement and those opposed to it. Until this point the legitimacy of the reform movement always prevailed, supported by strong economic growth nourished by the global conjuncture and the AKP's success in creating a middle class and broadening its potential.

The wind from the West, carrying liberal policies and universal values was blowing behind Turkey, this is indisputable. However, it is also clear that the same wind was propelling Turkey rapidly towards the West, to a relationship with Western values as regards rights and

freedoms. This thrust not only constitutes one of the most important milestones in the story of Ottoman-Turkish occidentalisation and gravitation towards universal values and opening policies in this direction, but is also evidence of Turkey's greatest pivot towards the West in recent times.

The fact that this occurred during the administration of a powerful government with strong Islamic baggage signified interaction between the Islamic segment and universal values at the social level.

The first crack in this phase took place between 2008 and 2011, when signs of breakdown emerged. The global economic crisis affected Turkey's growth rate. The welfare apparatus that made up a significant part of the AKP reforms and success began to stall. But most important of all, the battles over control of the political arena and the state began to adversely affect the reform process and divert it. In this period Turkey bore witness to acute, no-holds-barred struggles for power. These struggles, between both the actors of the ancien régime and the new regime, and internally between the actors of the new regime, compounded the nastiness. The politicisation of the judiciary and its mediation in the struggle of the government to take full control of the state apparatus, corruption, large scale arbitrary sackings of public servants and personalisation of power were all clues to this change. The way the Ergenekon and Balyoz trials were used, which emerged later, may be taken as the breaking point in this respect.

A 180 degree turn had commenced. The period when society enveloped politics and directed it was over. Now politics, politicians and the government were taking society into the palm of their hand, enveloping and imprisoning it.

This process was undoubtedly gradual and did not remove the positive input of the reforms and sociological change. Even today, when Turkey has reached “zero” as regards democracy, with great disappointment and anger created by Erdoğan amongst the left and liberals who once supported him, the transformation dynamic has not been totally erased, particularly that experienced by the Islamic sections of society. The Peace Process is an example of this, as it occurred right in the middle of this regression and was achieved not only because of political will, but also because of societal expectation and the strength of the wave of legitimacy.

The second and major breakdown was to begin after 2011 and accelerate after 2013.

During the reform period, the AKP demonstrated the skill to meet democratic needs by combining liberal rules with its paternalistic tendency. Within the framework of this understanding it succeeded in levelling out the playing field as regards rights for the pious section of society vis-a-vis the secular section of society. In its subsequent step, instead of opting for a freedom-based political framework that would embrace both sections, it steered a course towards an identity-based paternalistic politics. From 2011 onwards, with the self-confidence

gained from winning the power struggle and with the influence of the winds blowing from the opposite direction in the world and in the region, it gradually abandoned its policies of synthesis.

2. Parochialism on a Global Scale

One question that arises is whether this change can be addressed independently of the world situation.

It is not realistic to abstract the change in direction in question from the waves of the dominant conjunctural crises and the relevant developments. Rather, we must accept that the winds blowing from both the East and the West from 2011 onwards carried with them authoritarian sparks which played a serious role in the political breakdown experienced in Turkey.

The jihadi Salafi mobilisation caused by the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001, expanded in the years since the Arab Spring, reaching the ISIS wave in Syria and Iraq. In the West, influenced by this climate, authoritarian tendencies were strengthened from 2005-2006, leading to de-calibration in the security-freedom balance, and inward-looking approaches from Central Europe to the South and from the North to the Anglo-Saxon world.. This tendency has increased markedly in the last 5 years. The terrorist actions of radical Islamist movements targeting civilians and their lifestyles have led to

destructive consequences with the largest wave of refugees in history that seriously threatens the Western order. Amongst the results of these actions are the rise of security driven policies and Islamophobia that nourishes the inward-looking tendency that has begun to harm the concept of an open society.

When we add the crises suffered by liberal economies post 2008 and the effects they have had on the people in the West the strength of this wave will be clearly evident.

The Brexit decision in Britain, for example, is not independent of these events. An advanced phase of this situation is the rise of nationalist populism. The election in the US of a president like Trump who represents discrimination, churlishness and a narcissistic arbitrariness is by itself a major indication of this. It is well known that Wilders in the Netherlands and Marine Le Pen in France have gained in strength. The commonalities between Orban in Hungary, Modi in India and, Putin in Russia are that they represent a populism that restricts freedoms and yet portray themselves as part of the people, an anti-liberal tendency.

These developments, the crisis in Gaza, the wave of Islamophobia and the reflections of these as caricature crises had begun to partially strain the ties between Turkey and the West and conveyed the combative language of insular parochialness to Turkey.

This process accelerated after 2011 with the Arab Spring and its consequences. Turkey began to distance itself from Western powers , and in an unprecedented way become part of the Middle East and the Muslim world. In this period Erdoğan entered into open conflict with the political position and values of the West , accompanied by an orientation towards arbitrariness, authoritarianism and insularity.

3. Four Sources of the Latest Turkish Authoritarianism

There are four developments that occurred between 2011 and 2015 that may be assessed as provoking Turkey to move from its reformist phase to an authoritarian political climate.

1: Arab Spring.

The Arab Spring played a crucial role as regards Turkey's political orientations. The overthrow of the dictatorships in Arab countries and the release of social energy and the Islamic character of this energy, or the relationships between this energy and Islamic movements constituted the spirit of the Arab Spring. This picture highlighted Turkey as a model of a secular-democratic majority-Muslim country.

However, for the AKP the significance of the Arab Spring did not consist of Turkey being a secular-democratic model. As a government, Turkey needed to provide leadership and patronage for parties and movements such as Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood

that adopt the principle of parliamentarianism, on the basis of “Sunni pluralism” and establish an area within this framework. This implied the possibility of constructing a different and powerful political structure in the Sunni –Arab sphere, an alternative to the West. One facet of this involved democratic institutions, while another reached out to Islamic traditions and solidarity. This proposition and efforts to implement it constitute one of the most important breaking points as regards political developments in Turkey.

It is well known that the initial phase of the Arab Spring did not last long. Morsi, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, who came to power in Egypt after the elections of 2012, had difficulty meeting democratic expectations. He became embroiled in conflict with Western interests and was overthrown by a military coup in July 2013.

And the second phase of the Arab Spring began. Western support, first and foremost that of the US, for the military coup, while Turkey took a strong pro-Morsi stance, influenced by the “policy to build a new civilisation” mentioned above, was to affect the balance of forces. In this period, Erdoğan used confrontational language, representing the clash of values between Islam and the West, rapidly taking on the role of protector of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. In addition to a difference developing between Turkey and the West regarding political positioning, a climate of conflict emerged between Western values and the Turkish government.

Another significant point within this framework is the fact that while in the first phase, “the liberal tendency period”, of the AKP’s rule, Muslim demands and sensitivities were left to one side. With the Arab Spring and East-West polarisation these demands and sensitivities were once again reflected in the government’s discourse and stance. This development constitutes one of the most significant and crucial points in the change of line experienced by Turkey.

This situation impacted the political arena in Turkey in two ways. Erdoğan’s fulminations against the West and its values, a discourse designed for domestic politics, strengthened the view called “national and native” and brought with it tensions. On the other hand, strained relations with the West and criticisms of the AKP by the West began to be perceived by Erdoğan as a threat and the beginning of a plot to overthrow him, or at least began to be proclaimed as such. As the seeds of the phase of anti-Westernism, which was to be a fundamental element in the new period, were scattered, Erdoğan’s feeling of political insecurity and demands for political fidelity increased. Henceforth, every problem in the country, every social or economic crisis was to be described as the intrigue of foreign hands, “masterminded” from without, and this development was to bring about one of the cornerstones of the climate of insularity.

2:Power struggles and Gezi, Patriarchal Administration Crisis

The development that was to leave its mark on the tenth anniversary in 2012-2013 of the AKP's coming to power was the emergence of new social demands, new power struggles and new fields of conflict.

This new page was to shake the tacit alliances between the AKP and the Gülen movement and between left/right liberals and the AKP. Developments were also to affect the balance of power within the ruling party and contribute to the formation of an increasingly Erdoğan-centric order as the result of purges. Patriarchal politics, obedient society, conservative symbols and values and the idea of personal rule based on fidelity and trust were gradually to emerge.

The Gezi incidents in June were the first stop in this regard. In essence, they pointed to the emergence of a new form of conflict and issue. The Gezi incidents may be described as the reaction by young people who had grown up in the AKP period to Erdoğan and his party's restrictive attitude towards the public sphere (law on alcohol, mixed accommodation for young people, public spaces, etc.) and his patriarchal identity-based style and discourse imposing a value system. Phrases such as "demand for participatory democracy", "patriarchal politics crisis", "crisis of majoritarianism " describe these events very well. This period indicated political encounters were to emerge at the micro level, in public spaces, not as previously at the macro level, or state level, such as with regard to the principle of secularism, for example.

It is also necessary to add that the government's use of disproportionate violence against the young people during the Gezi incidents, its peremptory discourse regarding freedom areas, its perception of the developments as an uprising, comparing Taksim Square to Tahrir Square in Egypt, and of the idea of participatory democracy being a challenge intertwined with the intervention of a foreign hand produced a moment of disengagement. The outcome was the end of the solidarity of secular circles with the AKP, the emergence of a harsh polarisation and the government stepping up a gear in its insecurity, authoritarianism and obsession with the West and foreign meddling in internal Turkish affairs.

Another development relating to power struggles and new areas of problems was the power struggle between the AKP and the Gülen movement and its effects. The first indications of this emerged when in February 2012 MIT [National Intelligence Service] undersecretary Hakan Fidan was summoned by Gülenist prosecutors to make a statement regarding the Oslo talks between the PKK and the state. This crisis reached its peak two years later with the tension over the "17-25 December 2013 corruption files and government plot." These incidents pointed to the power of the judiciary being used by an 'Opus Dei' type of structure, but led to the corruption files being covered up. This major and continuing struggle between the partners in power seriously affected the workings of politics and had a very destructive effect. Hence, both the Gülenists' usurpation of state authority and the measures taken against this group by the government that ignored the principles of democracy and law, first and foremost the separation of powers, created a serious "dual authoritarianism" pressurising the

system. This pressure increased with the intensification of the power struggle, continuing until the July coup attempt and the environment that was created by the emergency regime that followed.

3: Civil War in Syria

The civil war in Syria enabled the Kurdish communities living along the Turkish border to gain sovereignty of an area, and over time achieve a political status with cantons administered by the PKK-PYD. Subsequently, this duo, under the name of the PYD, attained the opportunity to become legitimate by participating in the international alliance against ISIS. This historic opportunity for political sovereignty for the Kurdish movement in Syria, led to Turkey perceiving and tackling the Kurdish question beyond national borders. Turkey, which saw this development as a great threat and top priority, began to perceive the internal and external dimensions of the Kurdish 'problem' as a whole, and revised all its policies within this framework. This subject will be dealt with in detail in section two; however, it is clear that the developments in Syria have nurtured Turkey's anxieties and fears, reduced its faith in political means and become a pretext for a return to policies of rejectionism and law and order. This development was to be the reason for the collapse of the peace process that had begun just before this period. Nevertheless, this process that began in 2013 was the only mechanism that protected Turkey's bond with democracy and change. The needs of society brought with it a peace attempt which was contrary to the general political situation.

4: Attempted Coup of 15 July 2016

As Vahap oşkun said: “15 July was an uprising against the democratic order carried out by a group that had infiltrated the state. Those in the seats of power were confronted with the fact that the most critical organs of state functioned beyond their control and that in reality, to a great extent, their power was ‘cosmetic’.”¹

The attempted coup, in which 60% of the armed forces’ generals and admirals were involved, was allegedly orchestrated by Gülenist groups with the strategy of seizing control of the armed forces, and had ruinous consequences for democracy. In state institutions there was a tableau of weakness and a vacuum. If the difficulties associated with getting rid of a structure like Opus Dei are taken into consideration, the resulting purges and restructuring of the state brought with it authoritarianism and the prominence of arbitrary elements. In conclusion, in this tableau in which all political actors were enveloped and rational and institutional functions were difficult, personal and loyalty relations were prominent and doubt and insecurity dominated the government.

Following the 15 July attempted coup there was also an increase in anti-Western rhetoric. Besides the perception that the 15 July attempted coup was ignored by Europe, the government’s discourse alleging that it was encouraged by the US, a claim accepted by a large

¹ Vahap Coşkun, 15 Temmuz Sonrası Türkiye, 7 Ocak 2017, Serbestiyet.com: <http://www.serbestiyet.com/yazarlar/vahap-coskun/15-temmuz-sonrasi-turkiye-1-752134> (last access 10 March 2017)

proportion of the population, led to anti-Westernism reaching a more bitter level. It is necessary to point out that this tendency has become one of the most prominent elements of Erdoğan's personal style of administration and authoritarian populism.

The Result: a new political paradigm?

The insecurity and perception of threat coming from various developments and sources will constitute two founding elements of a new political dynamic for the Turkish political elite, particularly for the conservative layers. While the anxiety caused by “encircling, foreign conspiracy and concrete division” is one side of the coin, on the other is the antidote to this, the discourse “strong state – strong Turkey-existential war”, which has become prominent.

The main results that stem from this political state of mind and reinforce it are the following:

The Executive Presidential system or the authoritarian democracy

model: after the attempted coup of July 15 a perception of a threat to the existence of the state, in particular in right wing circles, has been accompanied by a desire for a strong state and government, opening the way to an executive presidential system. In this regard, the role played by the nationalist MHP and the initiative it took has been determining. The stance taken by the MHP is important as regards representing the state of mind of the right wing political elite. On 16 February 2017 the referendum directive sent by MHP president Devlet

Bahçeli to party organisations has the quality of a political document in this framework. These sentences reflect the essence of the directive:

“For a long time now Turkey has been faced with a dire process full of dangers and threats. Attempts are being made to break the historic and fundamental principles on which our state is based, and then to gradually destroy it. Dark clouds float above our national survival and nightmarish ambitions loiter around our national unity. The state’s indivisible integrity with its people and territory is being targeted both by internal circles and by external circles that encourage them, devising fiendish plots. The imperialist conspiracy that plans to change the borders and maps of neighbours and redraw them, forcefully if necessary, is accelerating its merciless activities. Hence, the coalition of tyrants is busy broadening and advancing the dirty and bloody scenarios it has activated in order to draw Turkey into the ruinous trap. The terror and divisiveness conference in Russia and the decisions announced after it is a precursor of how problematic these developments are going to be, particularly in Syria. Unfortunately our country is surrounded. Russia and the Western alliance which treats the PKK-PYD-YPG like sweet children and pats them on the back is constantly trying to strengthen the enemy camp (... The attempted occupation, called the treacherous coup attempt of 15 July 2016, has absolutely affected the political equilibrium from top to toe, placing very important national and moral responsibilities on our party members. It should be the aim of every patriot to prevent the merciless and bloody intentions of those who are lining up to take revenge from the Turkish nation and shorten its life, and to build a wall from our faith and belief. With this aim in mind, it is therefore essential that a new social contract be introduced in order to prevent the de

facto impositions that originate in the system of governance that have the possibility of deepening crises and chaos, enflaming debate on law and the constitution and disabling the administrative structure. The Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi [Nationalist Action Party] has realised that after the constitutional change in 2007 leading to the President being elected by the people, the Presidential election of 10 August 2014 and the FETÖ betrayal of 15 July that in the event the de facto deadlock continues the future of the people and state is in jeopardy.²

One man regime: The Turkish-style model for an executive presidency proposed by the AKP and approved by the MHP is based on these three main points: 1. A unity of forces symbolised by the President who holds all the power. 2. The President has the power to determine and control the structure of the judiciary. 3. The President may retain his position as leader of a political party, creating a new party-state order with the President exerting dominance over his party's legislative group. Erdoğan's goal after 2013 of a patriarchal political institutionalisation has intersected with the perception of threat and the search to consolidate the state, turning into mutually supporting developments.

A new governing bloc: One of the important points in this framework is the de facto coalition between the AKP and the MHP which has been created by a consensus on the Kurdish question, state of

²Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi Resmi Web Sitesi, Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi Genel Başkanı Sayın Devlet BAHÇELİ'nin 16 Nisan Anayasa Referandumunu kapsamında parti teşkilatlarına gönderdikleri genelge 16 Şubat 2017, https://www.mhp.org.tr/htmldocs/mhp/4210/mhp/Milliyetci_Hareket_Partisi_Genel_Baskani_Sayin_Devlet_BAHCELI_nin_16_Nisan_Anayasa_Referandumu_kapsaminda_parti_teskilatlarina_g.html (last access 10 March 2017)

emergency and a model of authoritarian stability. However, another matter that is at least as important as this is that when the subject in question is that of the internal and external threat posed by the Kurdish issue the main opposition party, the social democratic CHP, joins the other two parties. Although the CHP is opposed to the Turkish-style presidential system and to some of the more extreme measures taken under the state of emergency, as regards the Kurdish issue and the Kurdish movement, or more correctly, the Kurdish advances in the region, it has become part of the “ruling bloc”. The function of this bloc is to affirm the exclusionist, repressive, authoritarian approach towards the Kurdish movement. Apart from exceptional measures, this approach, as far as the political climate and the state’s new Kurdish policy are concerned, define the ruling bloc constituted by the AKP-MHP-CHP. In this sense, as the main opposition party the CHP has failed to provide any effective opposition to the newly formed nationalist, populist, security-based and authoritarian political paradigm, Kurdish political representation finds itself isolated. Hence, the first indication of these policies came with the removal of parliamentary immunity in May 2016, prior to the attempted military coup. The CHP played a crucial role in this, with the new policy being kick-started in this way. One of the HDP’s significant thinkers, Diyarbakır MP İdris Baluken, who is now in custody, underlined this situation in the following way :

“The CHP is one of the structures that bears the most responsibility for this situation. On the subject of the removal of immunity they said: ‘It contravenes the Constitution, but we will say yes’”. Institutionally, that position set forth the CHP’s historical responsibility. Secondly, the CHP, particularly after the attempted coup of 15

July, did not take up a clear position opposing Erdoğan and the AKP's ostracising of the HDP and its stance pushing aside all the diversity represented by the HDP in the reconstruction of the state. It supported the nationalist construction process. It accepted those positions. I believe that at the talks held during that period this kind of process was discussed and that a consensus may have been reached regarding the need for a nationalist viewpoint to be adopted when this kind of process developed against the HDP.”³

- Ideological construction: There is a question of a political-ideological construction which surfaced after Erdoğan became President, but over time became clearly apparent. The first and most significant element of this construction is the transformation of the perception of “threat” into a systematic state policy, receiving support from all political parties except the HDP and DBP, and fixated on by the major media sources. Another cornerstone of the construction is, particularly after the attempted coup of 15 July, the combining of different threats but all having the same target. The Gülen threat, the PKK threat, the ISIS threat and the Western threat will be defined as an inter-related, mutually supportive single threat targeting the territorial integrity of Turkey. Established policies, internal sensitivities and foreign policy priorities will begin to be revised in accordance with this. The emphasis on constant war or existential war, introduced by the AKP and MHP, will lead gradually to the “politics-dialogue-reform idea” being replaced by “security-precaution-paternalism”. The third significant element of the

³ Cumhuriyet.com.tr, İdris Baluken: HDP Seçmeni Boykot Etmez, http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/siyaset/671182/idris_Baluken_HDP_secmeni_boykot_etmez.html (last access 10 March 2017)

construction is the majoritarian tendency reflected in the new constitutional change. The three elements of this tendency - neglecting the constitutional organs, emphasising the national will as the sole and complete legitimate source of political representation, as well as the claim of a leader that indicates a political nation-leader identity and the attendant implications for plebiscitary democracy - reduces to a minimum the layers between the leader and the people.

Viewed as a whole, Turkey's new political paradigm may be defined as an authoritarian-populist stability model based on a climate of "combined threats and dangers", "national-native sensibility", "existential war and nationalism" with a tendency towards security policies.

After 15 July this new paradigm seems to have begun to be shaped in four ways. These are as follows: (1) Military policy in Syria; (2) repression of the opposition under the state of emergency regime; (3) purges in the state and restructuring; and (4) an approach in domestic politics that chokes the arena involving Kurdish politics.

II. KURDISH QUESTION AND POLICY

As previously outlined, developments that have taken place around the Kurdish question and perceptions formed have made a significant contribution to this new climate, Besides, the problem we face is not only the critical political breakdown in the Kurdish question, but also

it is the consequences and effects of this new wave on the quest for a resolution of this question.

1.The Kurdish question in the new political climate

The four excerpts below sufficiently describe the relationship between the Kurdish question and the new political paradigm and how they complement each other.

Fikret Bila: Since the beginning of March 2017 he has been the editor of Hürriyet newspaper, the flagship of the Turkish press, where he was previously a columnist. He has also held the same post at Milliyet newspaper. Bila is a secular journalist bound to republican values, trusted in state circles, particularly in military circles . He is also in contact with Erdoğan and government circles. In recent times he has become one of the journalists who best reflects the convergence of conservative and nationalist circles with the military and government sensitivities, even representing this. In his articles he reflects the state's new perception of politics, Turkey's new political paradigm and, most importantly, in a clear way explains the role of the Kurdish question within it. Bila wrote the following in a column dated 5 January 2017 under the heading: "A century-old game" :

“The process of civil war and fragmentation in Iraq and Syria are the outcome of the imperialist states' second war to divide up the Middle East. Turkey is also one of the countries whose borders are under threat in this war. Since this reality has clearly emerged Turkey has had to intervene and the Turkish Armed Forces launched the Euphrates

Shield operation. Ankara's aim in getting closer to Russia and Iran instead of the US, with whom it has fallen out, is to stave off this threat to its borders and to protect Turkey's territorial integrity. In this second war of sharing out the spoils we see that the Greater Kurdistan project is coming to the fore. The aim of the PKK's trench policy in the southeast and its attempt to occupy the region with urban warfare following the developments in Syria and particularly the Kobani incidents was to implement this project. Deputy Prime Minister Prof. Dr. Numan Kurtulmuş whom we invited to breakfast yesterday in Hürriyet's Ankara office, made a similar analysis, summarising his views thus: 'This is a century-old game. It is a second Sykes-Picot. A matter of dividing up the Middle East. Deputy PM Kurtulmuş referred to this agreement, emphasising that the current process is one of the great states having launched a Sykes-Picot process. Kurtulmuş answering my question said that Turkey was one of the targets of this process. Kurtulmuş's analysis means that Ankara has "looked at the big picture" and has made a correct diagnosis of the process. In order to foil the "century-old game" there is a need for the spirit of Gallipoli and of the War of Liberation.'⁴

President Tayyip Erdoğan: After giving the first indication on 25 June 2015, when he said: "We will never permit a state to be established in northern Syria, to our south. We will continue the struggle, whatever the price,"⁵ he has raised this issue on many occasions in different ways. On 15 December 2016 he went as far as declaring national mobilisation. In a speech broadcast live on all TV channels from the

⁴ Fikret Bila, Asırlık Oyun, Hürriyet Gazetesi, 5 Ocak 2017: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yazarlar/fikret-bila/bir-asirlik-oyun-40326920> (last access 9 March 2017)

⁵ Hürriyet.com.tr, 'Bedeli ne olursa olsun engel olacağız', 27 Haziran 2015: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/bedeli-ne-olursa-olsun-engel-olacagiz-29394009> (last access 9 March 2017)

Presidential palace he said: "... After this, in light of the realities before us, it is time to wage a new War of Liberation, even a new Gallipoli. In accordance with article 104 of our constitution, I declare national mobilisation as the head of state."⁶ At a conference on 22 December 2016 at which he announced a new security strategy, he explained existential war in more detail:

"The subject of Syria and Iraq is not one of energy for Turkey. It is not about broadening the political sphere. This is for us a matter of survival.. Without solving threats originating in Syria and Iraq we cannot achieve the targets of 2023."⁷

Retired Judge Colonel Ahmet Zeki Üçok: He launched the first investigation concerning the Gülen movement and made systematic warnings about it. For this reason he incurred the wrath of this structure and spent 5 years in prison in the Balyoz trial. His is a well known name in Turkey. Üçok, who represents the secular nationalist "Balyoz officers" who are extremely sensitive on the subject of the Kurdish question and Gülen in the press, assessed the declaration of 'national mobilisation' as "a call for unity for the future of the country", adding: "the "President is the only force that can ensure unity".⁸

MHP leader Bahçeli: On 16 February he wrote the following lines::

⁶ Sputniknews.com, Erdoğan: Milli seferberlik ilan ediyorum, 14 Aralık 2016: <https://tr.sputniknews.com/politika/201612141026307168-erdogan-milli-seferberlik/> (last access 11 March 2017)

⁷ Kupuhaber.com, Erdoğan Türkiye'nin Yeni Güvenlik Konseptini Açıkladı, 22 Kasım 2016: <http://www.kupurhaber.com/haber/2141/erdogan-turkiyenin-yeni-guvenlik-konsepti-acikladi.html> (last access 10 March 2017)

⁸ Sputniknews.com, Emekli Albay Üçok: Cumhurbaşkanı ele geçirilseydi, darbenin emir komuta zinciri içinde yapıldığı açıklanır, 16 Aralık 2016: <https://tr.sputniknews.com/bidebunudinle/201612161026352995-ahmet-zeki-ucok-darbe-girisimi/>

“It is apparent that those foreign hands that are using terrorism as a means of foreign policy and a vehicle for blackmail have a grudge against our national unity and fraternity and historical rights and interests. On 8 February 2017 Russia’s proclamation that it did not consider the PKK and YPG to be terror organisations has undoubtedly cast a shadow over both the Astana talks and the upcoming Geneva meeting. While on the one hand Turkey is waging a fearless, selfless, uncompromising struggle against a batch of terror organisations consisting of FETÖ, ISIS, PKK-YPG and DHKP-C, on the other hand countries with whom Turkey is in dialogue are stabbing it in the back. This is a hostile stance. It is an unavoidable and undeniable necessity that Turkey engage in a national coalescence and reconciliation. This is first and foremost the duty of political parties.”⁹

The tableau above describes the tacit alliance of military-civilian nationalists, extreme nationalists and conservatives that exists alongside the ruling bloc in parliament. This alliance defines the developments in Syria as being as serious an issue as the Gülen threat and supports the security-based, anti-political militarist wave.

⁹ Doğan Haber Ajansı, Bahçeli’den teşkilatlara referandum genelgesi, 16 Şubat 2017: http://www.dha.com.tr/bahceliden-teskilatlara-referandum-genelgesi_1458354.html (last access 9 March 2017)

2. Developments in Syria

Conditions created by the civil war in Syria in 2011 led to the Kurdish movements in Syria and Turkey becoming politically and sociologically entwined, without doubt preparing the ground for the question and a resolution becoming extended to include Turkey and Syria.

In the civil war conditions in Syria, the PYD, a close political relative of the PKK, proclaimed canton administrations in three separate regions on the Turkish border from East to West in January 2014. As we have mentioned before, with the increasing threat of ISIS in October 2014 the town of Kobani under PYD administration was surrounded by ISIS and Kurdish local forces began cooperation with an international coalition including the US against ISIS. This enabled the Kurdish movement to establish its political dominance over an area, and gained it legitimacy. These developments seriously affected the definition and policies of both the Kurdish movement and the Turkish state. Rojava began to constitute, both for Kurdish public opinion and for the PKK, one of the fundamental centres of the Kurdish question, affecting imaginations and strategies. The fundamental policy followed by the PKK in the region was the uniting of the cantons and a Kurdish region or corridor under PKK-PYD control stretching to the Mediterranean. Another facet of the policy is to advance south through territory seized from ISIS, so that when there is a resolution of the problems in Syria they will have control of broad areas they can use as leverage at the negotiating table. We

underlined above the anxiety enveloping Turkey as these developments occurred.

The milestones of the moving of the question from Turkey to Syria are as follows:

* 17 June 2015: YPG forces took Tel Abyad from ISIS with the support of the international coalition, under the uneasy gaze of Turkey, uniting the cantons of Cezire and Kobani.

* 25 June 2015: Turkey reacted to this development with Erdoğan uttering the words we underlined above, launching a new political phase for the AKP: “There is absolutely no way we will permit a state to be established on our southern border”. Since that day the Turkish state has declared that the PKK’s policy of setting up a corridor and within this framework crossing to the west of the Euphrates is a *casus belli*, and has engaged in an active political campaign with the US.

* 24 November 2015: Turkey was to condemn itself to 8-10 months of loneliness and be unable to even fly reconnaissance missions over Syria, after it shot down a Russian plane. The period of crisis that followed this incident brought with it two developments that discomfited Ankara. The first of these was the closeness of Russia-PYD relations that resulted in a Kurdish representative office being opened in Moscow.

* 12 June 2016: The second critical development was the PYD forces taking the town of Menbiç on the western side of the Euphrates with US assistance. As the distance between the Afrin canton and the Kurdish area in the east was reduced a little more, Turkey’s perception of threat began to increase.

* 9 August 2016: Following a letter of apology written by Erdoğan at the beginning of the month, the Turkish-Russian crisis ended with a meeting of the two countries' leaders.

* 24 August 2016: Immediately after the Turkish-Russian "peace" which stressed the territorial integrity of Syria, Turkey launched the Euphrates Shield operation against ISIS. More correctly, it was able to do this because there was no longer a Russian threat. FSA forces, supported by the Turkish army, set out towards the town of Al Bab, a 34-kilometre narrow area in the middle of a crucial connection point between Menbiç and Afrin canton. Turkey's aim, in addition to countering the threat posed by ISIS consisted of three elements: 1) to prevent the merging of the Kurdish cantons 2) To form a buffer zone and security zone in areas seized by deploying FSA 3) To strengthen their hand before possible Syria peace talks by overhauling the ethnic, sociological fabric and political control.

* 20 December 2016: A summit was held in Moscow attended by , Russia, Turkey and Iran. Astana meetings on 23-24 January 2017 followed. As a result of these meetings Turkey was to engage in a serious revision of the policies it had pursued in Syria since 2011. It was to abandon its support of the FSA against the Syrian regime , accept the territorial integrity of Syria and indirectly remove its reservations regarding the Assad regime. In return it received support from Russia for its Al Bab operation and its policy regarding the security corridor. Facing the problems produced by the Kurdish question in Syria, Turkey began to withdraw its objections to the Assad regime. This situation is a great change of axis engendered by the anxiety caused to Turkey by the Kurdish question and Kurdish advances.

* 22 November 2016: Turkey announced its new security strategy. This strategy had two meanings. The moment Turkey perceives any threat, it will deal with it at source, if necessary with cross-border operations, and military involvement. At the very least it will pursue an interventionist policy, shaping its domestic and foreign policy relations and priorities accordingly. On the other hand, the government was implying that with this new concept the extraordinary security measures being taken internally would become commonplace, and that things like the removal of immunity and FETÖ operations would become habitual. Hence, President Erdoğan defined this concept in the following way at the “Turkey’s New Security Concept” conference:

“We will not wait for threats to arrive at our door, to cause us pain. Whatever the threat is, internal or external, we will deal with it ourselves at source. The security concept here does not only cover law and order and the safeguarding of our borders. All subjects are within the new security concept, from defence to policing, from justice to health, from the economy to transport, from energy to education, from data processing to urbanisation, (...) We will do whatever is necessary to prevent a threat at source, be it the PKK issue, or ISIS or sectarianism.

... Nobody can prevent our efforts to establish a terror-free safe zone in Syria. Somehow we will ensure our Syria border is secure against all terror organisations. We will also continue to pursue an active policy supported by military force as regards the threat of terror and sectarian conflict in Iraq.

Governments that cannot establish sovereignty over their own territory and cannot prevent terror organisations harming us have no right to criticise

Turkey. Turkey will never shy away from doing whatever is necessary to ensure the security of its citizens.”¹⁰

Erdoğan explained the internal security aspect of the concept by giving examples of the steps taken to suppress the Kurdish movement and representatives of the HDP and DBP :

“Elements of the PKK and other terror organisations within the state are being detected one by one and subjected to the necessary treatment. As you can see, from the members of parliament with their thrones of immunity to the mayors, all those who are material of terror, who support terror, are paying the price and will continue to do so.”¹¹

* 10 March 2017: The Turkish Armed Forces issued a statement outlining the following: “Since the beginning of the Euphrates Shield operation a total of 462 terrorist members of the PYD/YPG/PKK have been rendered ineffective, 425 of them dead ...”¹². This statement, mentioning for the first time clashes between the Turkish military and YPG/PYD forces, indicates a problem that may deepen in the coming period and change once again the balance of forces in the Kurdish question.

¹⁰ Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Resmi Web Sitesi, “Türkiye’nin Yeni Güvenlik Konsepti” Konferansında Yaptıkları Konuşma: <http://www.tcgb.gov.tr/konusmalar/353/61114/turkiyenin-yeni-guvenlik-konsepti-konferansinda-yaptiklari-konusma.html> (Last access 10 March 2017)

¹¹ Ibid

¹²Hurriyet.com.tr, Fırat Kalkanı’nda bir haftada 71 PYD’li etkisiz hale getirildi, 10 Mart 2017: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/firat-kalkaninda-bir-haftada-71-pydli-etkisiz-hale-getirildi-40390593> (last access 12 March 2017)

This schedule undoubtedly indicates changes in structural policy. Hence, the point we have reached by following them illustrates one of the reasons for the formation of Turkey's new political paradigm, and the internal convolutions of this paradigm.

As of today it is necessary to state that Turkey has directed its foreign policy and political energy towards the region to the Kurdish political entity in Syria. The political and military relations it has established with the US and Russia were in order to increase its mobility in the region. Turkey's main goals are to reduce to a minimum the relations the PYD has with the US and Russia, to present its own forces as an alternative to the PYD in the struggle against ISIS, restrict the Kurds' movement and establish security zones in order to prevent the corridor pursued by the PKK-PYD. Turkey has also proclaimed that when it gets the chance it will take military action to restrict the Kurdish territory. Hence, on 28 February 2017 Erdoğan stated:

“Our goal is Jarablus, Rai, Dabik, Al Bab but after that with the coalition forces there are steps to be taken towards both Menbiç (Manbij) and Rakka . We cannot just stand idly by watching all this. We watched before and the price was paid. 'From now on we will be both at the table and on the ground '... We will also go towards Menbiç. Why will we go there...ot because we're very curious. The PYD and YPG are in Menbiç. What is the stage we have reached? As I said before it is Menbiç, which belongs to Arabs. It is not the place of the YPG or PYD”¹³

¹³ Hurriyet.com.tr, Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'dan Rakka çağrısı, 28 Şubat 2017: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/cumhurbaskani-erdogandan-rakka-cagrisi-40380248> (last access 10 March 2017)

A few days later on 5 March Defence Minister Fikri Işık again stressed Turkey's policy, saying:

"Turkey's stance on the merging of the cantons is clear. Turkey will not permit the PYD to unite the cantons, whatever it costs. "¹⁴

3. Internal Political sphere: the destruction of the Kurdish political sphere

There is a serious and significant parallel between the developments in Syria summarised above and the internal political workings regarding the Kurdish question.

In the internal political sphere the Kurdish question in Turkey is undergoing a constriction not seen since the 1990s. In this the anti-Kurdish movement motivation of the new ruling bloc has played as much of a part as the government.

The Kurdish political sphere has, since the spring of 2016, in particular after the attempted coup of 15 July, seen all its elements - parliamentarians, media organs and local representative mechanisms - been declared illegitimate, dangerous, and criminalised. Kurdish representative bodies and civil structures have been linked to terror

¹⁴ Milliyet.com.tr, Son Dakika: Bakan açık açık söyledi! 'Ne pahasına olursa olsun...', 5 Mart 2017: <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/son-dakika-bakan-acik-acik-soyledi-siyaset-2407922/> (last access 7 March 2017)

actions and have become one of the targets of the state of emergency regime, at least as much as the Gülenists.

First, in May 2016, 55 of 59 HDP MPs had their parliamentary immunity lifted by AKP-CHP-MHP collaboration. In the following four months, particularly after 15 July, many of the HDP's 59 deputies, including their co-presidents, were taken into custody. At the moment 14 HDP deputies are in custody, roughly a quarter of the party's total number of MPs. Moreover, 8,930 HDP members have been detained, of whom 2,782 have been remanded in custody. The state of emergency which suspended fundamental rights and freedoms allowed the government to issue decrees with the force of law [KHK], appointing state officials to run municipalities. 74 of the elected mayors in the 102 municipalities run by the DBP have been arrested and sent to prison. 61 of these municipalities have been taken over by state appointees, whose first acts have been to close down art workshops, theatres, creches and social and educational projects for women, which all used the Kurdish language, and to sack those employed there. Additionally, television channels such as IMC and newspapers like Özgür Gündem and associations and civil society organisations have been closed down.

This tableau is one of the removal of representative mechanisms in the Southeast region, the ending of possibilities of entering politics and the state take-over of the Kurdish sphere.

Parallel to this, Kurdish politics and the Kurdish issue have been defined for the whole of society as a suspect and banned question. Public servants and those in the teaching profession who are involved in the Kurdish issue have begun to be sacked and barred from working in public service.

On 11 January 2016 1,128 academics, 953 of them in Turkish universities, signed a petition condemning the AKP government's harsh reaction to the attempted uprising in the Southeastern provinces, saying: "We will not be party to this crime" . President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reacted strongly in a speech he made the next day at the opening of the 8th Ambassadors' Meeting, saying:

"We are face to face with the betrayal of so-called intellectuals, most of whom receive a salary from the state, who carry a state identity card and passport in their pockets, and who enjoy a standard of living well above the average of the country. (...) All those who eat the bread of the state and are hostile to it must as soon as possible receive the sentences they deserve. No public servant, whether in a school, a hospital, a courthouse, a revenue office or in agriculture, in none of our institutions can take a stance against the unity of the people, the integrity of the country. We definitely cannot allow such a situation. This is my personal feeling, and also that of my people. I invite all our relevant institutions to be sensitive in this regard and to fulfil their duties ..."¹⁵

¹⁵ Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanlığı Resmi Web Sitesi, "Türkiye Kadar Teröre Bedel Ödeyen Ülke Yoktur", 12 Ocak 2016: <http://www.tccb.gov.tr/haberler/410/37539/turkiye-kadar-terore-bedel-odeyen-baska-ulke-yoktur.html> (last access 10 March 2017)

This clear instruction, this personal and arbitrary signal of the President found an immediate response. On 15 January 14 academics were detained. Prosecutors' offices launched investigations and many universities opened investigations into those who had signed the petition at the request of YÖK [Higher Education Council]. Following the attempted coup of 15 July, during the state of emergency not only the Gülenists were suspended from universities by KHKs, at the same time those who had signed the petition were especially targeted. 240 of the 953 who signed the petition have been dismissed, that is, about 25%, and barred from being a public servant. Pressure continues to be put on the university authorities that are resisting the dismissal process.

This dire tableau of repression constitutes one of the facets of Turkey's new political paradigm.

5. PKK and its Strategy

The PKK is an organisation that in the recent period has changed considerably as regards its position and definition. For the first time in Rojava it has attained the power to control an area, perhaps areas. It has achieved, or is on the verge of achieving, the appearance of an actor that is drawing itself towards "recognition", making direct or indirect contact and holding overt or covert talks with some states and organisations.

The PKK reached this point through interaction with the changes in the global and regional political climate . It started out in 1973 with the idea of an “independent state”. Following the fall of the Berlin wall and during the timne of its first contacts with the Turkish state it adopted the “Free Kurdistan” approach comprising federative and suchlike aspects in 1993. With the arrest of Öcalan in 1999, the idea of reconstructing Turkey as a “Democratic Republic” was proposed. In 2005 the “Democratic Confederalism” position was reached, a position with a sub-heading on democratic autonomy as regards Turkey, but hinting at a united Kurdistan. Concerning the PKK’s current position and its relationship with political conditions these lines of Mesut Yeğen are important:

“The international situation that both prevented contact between the Kurds of Turkey, Iraq and Syria and put them through the mangle in the nation states in which they lived, began to change from 1991 onwards. The Gulf Wars of 1991 and 2003 radically changed the situation of the Iraqi Kurds, while with Turkey’s membership adventure with the EU becoming serious in 2001, things changed for the Kurds of Turkey and, finally, with the civil war in Syria the position of the Kurds there also changed fundamentally. Connected to all these developments today in all three countries the criminalisation of Kurdishness has retreated in all three countries and ideological, political and economic relations between the Kurds have increased considerably.”¹⁶

¹⁶ Mesut Yeğen, Bağımsız Kürdistan’dan Demokratik Cumhuriyete, Silahlı Mücadeleden Siyasi Müzakereye: PKK ve Kürt Meselesi, yayımlanmamış makale.

Vahap oşkun made a similar evaluation with more concrete aspects:

“In Iraq and Syria it is clear there is a historic opportunity. There is an environment that can be reshaped. This historic opportunity emerged in 1991 and more distinctly in 2003, and with the crisis in Syria has expanded significantly. The KDP made use of the opportunity in Iraq, while the PKK seized on the opportunity in Rojava. In 1991 or at the beginning of the Arab Spring the Kurds could not have even imagined what is happening today.¹⁷

The results of these developments are significant. The PKK’s opportunity to exert political dominance in Rojava has led to a change in the priorities of the Kurdish movement. Syria has become more important than Turkey or, at the very least, two linked centres of political gravity have come into being in Syria and Turkey. The PKK’s headway as regards the idea of a process of resolution, its contribution to the ending of this process, and its attempt to introduce the canton model to Turkey in 2015 is closely related to these developments. The declaration of autonomous administrations in July 2015, in this respect, was based to a certain extent on the belief that the June 2015 elections marked the beginning of the collapse of the AKP, and on a strategy that would accelerate this and benefit from it.

In conclusion, it is apparent that there are parallels between the developments which Turkey defines as a threat and which the PKK sets as a goal.

¹⁷ Aljazeera.com, Krt meselesinde dgm hala Suriye’de, 31 Ekim 2016: <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/dosya/kurt-meselesinde-dugum-hala-suriyede> (last access 9 March 2017)

Hence, as of today, these two statements point clearly to the priorities and direction of the Kurdish movement. KCK Executive Committee member Karayılan states the vital importance Rojava has for them in the following words:

“Turkey’s policy that ‘the Kurds will not obtain status or rights’ has no chance of succeeding. Today Rojava and the forces of the Syria Democratic Assembly intertwined with it control 29 per cent of Syrian territory. Now they are moving on Rakka. If they take Rakka it will reach 40 per cent. Nobody can ignore this.”¹⁸

The HDP Diyarbakır MP Baluken, one of the party’s leading policy makers and ideologues, evaluated the ambitions of the Kurdish movement from a broader perspective about a month ago:

“The existing political situation in Turkey is closely connected to the Middle East and to developments in Iraq and Syria. These developments affect internal politics in Turkey. It is necessary to assess Turkey’s today and tomorrow in these terms. We are living through a phase where the borders drawn a hundred years ago by the Sykes-Picot agreement and the nation-state model is beginning to be transcended. Rather than offer leadership to this process of change and transformation in the Middle East, countries such as Iran and Turkey are resisting it. The developments in Rojava will leave this pro-status quo view behind, and a new period will be established within the framework of a democratic nation based on the peoples of the region. This is

¹⁸ Fıratnews.com, Karayılan: Akan kandan biz değil AKP sorumludur, <http://www.firatnews.com/kurdistan/karayilan-akan-kandan-biz-degil-akp-sorumludur>

our view of politics and the future. This is the HDP's sensitivity. The attacks on the HDP are directly related to this tableau. The pro-status quo view saw the 13 per cent vote we gained at the elections in June 2015 as a great threat and launched attacks on the HDP and DBP. The latest developments in Turkey and those in Rojava are in this respect interconnected. Hostility to the Kurds is the failure of Turkey's foreign policy ."¹⁹

It is evident that the Kurdish movement in Turkey going beyond Turkey's borders constitutes the most critical aspect of the current phase and debate over resolution politics.

Conclusion: Possible developments and the Resolution Process

In these circumstances is a return to the peace process possible, and in more general terms, is a return to politics possible? This is the fundamental question.

The basic framework of the answer is in front of us: it is necessary to look for the key to the door of a solution in the new sphere where it has expanded and in the new dynamics. In other words, without a political equilibrium that both sides will accept being reached in Syria-Rojava, without a bridge being established that both soothes Turkey's fears and offers hope to the Kurdish movement, expecting

¹⁹ Ibid.

the door to a solution to open is, as of today, not realistic.

There is no doubt that the parties must scrutinise their positions and expectations. As Mesut Yeğen accurately emphasised: “Things in Syria and Iraq will not be as the PKK, or, if not quite in the same way, the KDP wants, but it will certainly not be as Turkey wants. That is, perhaps the Kurds will not be able to achieve a federation in Syria from Haseke to Afrin, and in Iraq not be able to gain an independent state, but what Turkey wants will never happen. In Syria will the Kurds will nether return to their pre-2011 situation, nor will the regime have absolute control. And in Iraq the Sunni Arabs will not attain the power to counterpoise Shia Baghdad and the Kurds..”

I expressed another facet of this stark truth in an evaluation I made in December 2016 entitled: “As Tension Mounts in Kurdish Politics”: “For the Turkish state as much as for the organisation, this issue and the balance of forces in the region will have to be taken into account during the next process of resolution or it will be affected by these factors. This situation underlines the growing importance of international actors and the balance of forces. ²⁰” Hence, today Russia, the US, Iran, Turkey, Syria and the Kurdish movement are all present in the field with their intersecting and diverse interests. How will equilibrium be ensured between them. Can it be done? This question awaits an answer.

The most realistic possibility to open the door to a resolution is the balance between the East of the Euphrates and the West of the

Euphrates. It is necessary for the Kurdish side to abandon its idea of a corridor, hand over control of Manbij and withdraw to the East. In return, Turkey must accept the Kurdish entity to the East of the Euphrates.

However, at the moment the parties are distant even from the thought of this. Turkey is indicating that it will not accept any independent area pertaining to the PKK. As for the Kurdish movement, it appears to be persisting with its policy of expansion.

Nevertheless, it is highly likely that when they sit down to discuss a new order for Syria the balance of forces will change.

