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# The Kurdish Peace Process in Turkey: Genesis, Evolution and Prospects

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# The Kurdish Peace Process in Turkey: Genesis, Evolution and Prospects

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## Abstract

This paper examines the resolution process in Turkey since its inception until today. After an assessment of three distinct phases of the process, it seeks to explain what stimulated the Turkish state and the PKK to launch the resolution process and explains why both sides remained loyal to it despite serious problems and disagreements. It concludes with four possible scenarios for the resolution process in view of the general elections in June 2015.

Since 2009, the AKP (Justice and Development Party) governments in Turkey have been pursuing a political process with the stated aim of resolving the long-lasting Kurdish question of the Turkish Republic. In the last three decades, this had become identified with the guerrilla warfare of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and with the fact that a legal political party in the line with the PKK was backed by the Kurdish masses. Known by the Turkish public as "the resolution process," the political process at stake seems to rely on two main pillars: the negotiations going on between state officials and the PKK and the implementation of reforms ensuring democratisation and recognition of the cultural and political rights of Kurds. As such, the resolution process seems to have been designed to achieve the final disarmament of the PKK in return for more democracy and recognition of the Kurds' cultural and political rights in Turkey.

Not surprisingly, there have been conflicting assessments of the resolution process and its prospects. The AKP governments have boasted that they have taken some unprecedented steps to enhance the unity of the nation.<sup>1</sup> The two opposition parties, the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the Republican People's Party (CHP), however, oppose the process on different grounds. While MHP posits that the resolution process will lead

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<sup>1</sup> A very generic speech to this effect was delivered very recently by President Erdoğan. Addressing such steps as lifting the emergency rule, and launching the state-sponsored Kurdish TV channel TRT 6, Erdoğan claimed once again that the AKP took some historical steps in the field of the Kurdish question. See "Erdoğan'dan çözüm süreci yorumu: Somut adım olmadan daha ileriye gidemeyiz", in *Radikal*, 23 March 2015, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/-1319600>.

to the partition of the country, and has described the reforms introduced in due course as initial steps to that end.<sup>2</sup> CHP has oscillated between a categorical and a veiled opposition to the process and has demanded that the National Assembly be authorised to carry out the process.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, the PKK and the People's Democratic Party (HDP), the AKP's "partners" in the resolution process, portray the aim of the process to be the launching of a radical democracy in Turkey, making Turkey a democratic republic, to use Öcalan's terms, but have described the steps taken by the government as insufficient and the government itself as wavering.<sup>4</sup>

In the following, I will examine the resolution process in Turkey from its inception until today. I will basically try to describe the whole process and discuss the reasons for its inception and also its prospects. Since a fair assessment of the Peace Process may be provided only if it is compared with the ways in which the Kurdish question was tackled beforehand, I will begin with an examination of the policies pursued with regard to the Kurdish question before 2009.

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2 Devlet Bahçeli, the head of MHP, stated recently that the peace process is a process of treason that will culminate with the partition of the country. See "Devlet Bahçeli 'Çözüm Süreci İhanet Sürecidir'", in *Haber Hergün*, 10 December 2014, <http://www.haberhergun.com/politika/h20702.html>.

3 While some hardcore nationalists of the CHP opposed the process on similar grounds with those of the MHP, the top cadres of the party opposed negotiating with the PKK and suggested discussing the issue in parliament. For a fair assessment of the CHP's attitude with regard to the peace process, see Tanju Tosun, "CHP, Kürt Sorunu ve Çözüm Süreci", in *Al-Jazeera Turk*, 29 October 2014, <http://bit.ly/1y0Q3JE>.

4 Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, has long sustained that he is against the resolution of the Kurdish question in Turkey by means of such traditional instruments as "separation" and federalism. Arguing that these ways of resolving the ethno-national questions belong to the classical nation-state paradigm, Öcalan suggests that the Kurdish question needs to be solved by means of a "radical democracy" and "democratic autonomy" in Turkey. Endorsing its leader, the PKK has also suggested resolving the Kurdish question by means of these two new instruments. For an explanation of Öcalan's understanding of radical democracy and democratic autonomy and for a general assessment of the transformation in the views of Öcalan in the last decade, see the following by Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya and Joost Jongerden: "Reassembling the Political: The PKK and the Project of Radical Democracy", in *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, No. 14 (2012), <http://ejts.revues.org/4615>; and "Confederalism and autonomy in Turkey: The Kurdistan Workers' Party and the Reinvention of Democracy", in Cengiz Gunes and Welat Zeydanlioğlu (eds.), *The Kurdish Question in Turkey. New Perspectives on Violence, Representation and Reconciliation*, London and New York, Routledge, 2013, p. 186-204. The HDP also announced in its recent Manifesto for the elections in June 2015 that it endorses launching a radical democracy in Turkey for the resolution of the Kurdish question. See *Büyük İnsanlık Çağrısı*, 18 May 2015, <http://www.hdp.org.tr/guncel/haberler/buyuk-insanlik-cagrisi/6050>.

## The Turkish State and the Kurdish Question

The Turkish state's engagement with the Kurdish question from 1923 until the 1990s stood on three pillars: assimilation, repression and containment. The Turkish state intended to put an end to the Kurdish question, i.e. to the armed or unarmed resistance of Kurds to the Turkish state, by means of assimilation and repression. The Turkish Republic wanted to have an eye on not only its own Kurdish citizens, but the Kurds of Iraq and Syria too. Cooperating with Iran, Iraq and Syria, the Turkish state did whatever it could to ensure that the Kurds of Syria and Iraq were not given any cultural and political rights and did not have any contact with the Kurds of Turkey.

The trio of assimilation, repression, and containment worked until the 1990s. However, the Turkish state was then faced with two important developments that made it difficult to continue with the status quo of the past seventy years. First, the Kurds' resistance to the politics of assimilation and repression reached uncontrollable proportions. While the PKK had turned into a huge military organisation keeping up a low profile war against the Turkish army and a political-complex that operated newspapers and TV channels mobilising thousands of civilians in Turkey and Europe, a pro-Kurdish party in line with the PKK was supported by one third of Kurdish citizens.<sup>5</sup> Second, the protection provided the Kurds in Iraq by the US and NATO after the 1991 Gulf War undermined seven decades of containment.

Under these new conditions, the old elite insisted on continuing with the policies of the past seventy years, then president Turgut Özal wanted to end containment and introduce policies of weak recognition. In contrast to the Turkish army's hostility towards Kurds in Iraq, Özal aimed to establish friendly relations with them and sent his mediators to convince Öcalan to accept a ceasefire. The PKK declared a ceasefire in March 1993 for a month, and while it was preparing to prolong it for another month Özal died on 17 April.

Following the death of Özal, the Turkish state returned to harsher repression than ever. This campaign of brutal repression, which inflicted huge losses and sufferings,<sup>6</sup>

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5 After the Kurdish deputies who had joined the Kurdish conference in Paris in 1989 were expelled from Social Democratic People's Party (SHP), a few deputies resigned from SHP, some leftwing intellectuals and trade-union leaders, and the expelled Kurdish deputies established the People's Labour Party (HEP) in 1990. HEP was closed down by the Constitutional Court in 1993. Since then 7 legal parties established and backed mostly by Kurds arguably in line with the PKK have been banned by the Constitutional Court on the charge of separatism. The elections between 1991 and 2014 indicate that the electoral support given the pro-Kurdish party in Turkish politics has steadily increased from 4 percent in 1990 to 7 percent in 2014.

6 It is estimated that more than 35,000 Turkish citizens were killed during the clashes between the PKK and the security forces

ended in 1999 when Abdullah Öcalan was captured in Kenya, allegedly by a CIA operation, and handed over to Turkey.<sup>7</sup> Upon his capture, Öcalan suggested helping Turkey settle the Kurdish question and asked the PKK militants to cease their armed struggle and withdraw from Turkey. The PKK militants followed Öcalan's orders and withdrew to Iraqi Kurdistan, but the Turkish army did not stop its military operations and killed hundreds of militants during their withdrawal. By the end of the millennium, the Turkish state seemed to have ended the Kurds' opposition to the *status quo*.

But another very important development took place in December 1999. Turkey was elevated to candidate status for full membership in the EU. However, Turkey was asked to introduce many reforms, including some concerning the Kurdish question, before negotiations for full membership could get started. On 8 March 2001, the Council accepted the document concerning the accession partnership, which stipulated the reforms Turkey had to introduce.<sup>8</sup> On 19 March 2001, the Turkish National Assembly accepted a National Program specifying the reforms required to meet the accession requirements. Afterwards, 32 articles of the constitution were amended in accordance with the specifications of the National Program. Of these, the most important amendment was the one introduced in article 26, which regulated freedom of expression. The statement that "no language prohibited by law shall be used in the expression and dissemination of thought" was removed.<sup>9</sup> This practically cancelled the ban on publications and broadcasting in Kurdish. As a result, legal amendments

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in Turkey between 1984 and 2012. Of these citizens, more than 20,000 were PKK militants. For figures see "28 yilin aci bilançosu: 35 bin 300 kişi terör kurbanı oldu", in *Milliyet*, 16 August 2012, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/d/t.aspx?ID=1581690>. A research conducted by the Population Studies Institute in 2006 indicated that more than a million Kurdish citizens were displaced in due course. Likewise, an investigation report prepared by the Turkish Assembly Commission stated that more than three thousand villages or hamlets were evacuated. For these two reports, see Turkish Parliament (TBMM), *Doğu ve Güneydoğu Anadolu'da Boşaltılan Yerleşim Birimleri Nedeniyle Göç Eden Yurttaşlarımızın Sorunlarının Araştırılarak Alınması Gereken Tedbirlerin Tespit Edilmesi Amacıyla Kurulan Meclis Araştırması Komisyonu Raporu*, 14 December 1998, <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/sirasayi/donem20/yil01/ss532.pdf>; Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies (HÜNEE), *Türkiye'de Göç ve Yerinden Olmuş Nüfus Araştırması*, 4 May 2005, <http://www.hips.hacettepe.edu.tr/tgyona/tanitim.shtml>.

7 Murat Yetkin, *Kürt Kapanı. Şam'dan İmralı'ya Öcalan*, İstanbul, Remzi Kitabevi, 2004.

8 For accession partnership, see Council *Decision on the principles, priorities, intermediate objectives and conditions contained in the Accession Partnership with the Republic of Turkey*, 8 March 2001, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=celex:32001D0235>.

9 See the Turkish parliament website: <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/anayasaeng.maddeler?p3=26>. For a comprehensive examination of the constitutional changes made in 2001, see Ergun Özbudun, "2001 Anayasa değişiklikleri ve siyasal reform önerileri", in *Türkiye-Avrupa Birliği ilişkileri serisi*, No. 3, January 2002, <http://www.tesev.org.tr/2001-anayasa-degisiklikleri-ve-siyasal-reform-onerileri/icerik/273>.

enabling learning, teaching, and broadcasting in Kurdish were introduced in August 2002.<sup>10</sup> In 2002, capital punishment was also removed, sparing the life of Öcalan who had been sentenced to death in 1999.<sup>11</sup>

## The AKP and the Kurdish Question

Such was the ground when the AKP came to power in 2002. In other words, the decades-long policies of repression were halted thanks to the withdrawal of the PKK militants, the politics of assimilation were accompanied by policies of slim recognition, and the politics of containment started not to work any more.

The AKP's approach to the Kurdish question was first put in the party program in 2001.<sup>12</sup> The AKP both pursued and departed from the way in which the former mainstream parties had approached the Kurdish question. Discussing the Kurdish question under the ambiguous title of "the Southeast," the program indicated that the AKP would, just like the other former mainstream parties, perceive the Kurdish question in relation to "terror," "foreign incitement," and "underdevelopment." However, the program also admitted that economic development alone would not be sufficient to resolve the question, and suggested recognising the cultural differences of Turkish citizens. Moreover, it suggested seeing citizenship as the main point of reference for national identity. This was of great importance because all mainstream parties and all three constitutions of the republic had until then defined national identity in terms of Turkishness.

However, although the AKP programme had conceded that the "Kurdish question" would not be resolved by the policies of the past, there was no mention of the Kurdish question in the programs of the first two AKP governments.<sup>13</sup> In fact, in some particular instances, the AKP even denied the existence of the Kurdish question. For instance, during a visit to Moscow in December 2002, Tayyip Erdoğan stated that there was no such thing as a Kurdish question.<sup>14</sup>

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10 For the amendments made in August 2002, see *Law 4771 of 3 August 2002*, <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/serial/68377/66629/f1942448432/tur68377.pdf>.

11 The removal of the death penalty was particularly important for the prospect of the Kurdish question in Turkey in 1999. As Öcalan has significant popular support from Kurds in Turkey, executing him would possibly have culminated with a question of public disorder.

12 For the program of the AK Party, see <http://www.akparti.org.tr/english/akparti/parti-programme>.

13 For the programs of the 58th and 59th governments founded by the AK Party in 2002 and 2003, see the Turkish Parliament website: <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/hukümetler/HP58.htm>; <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/hukümetler/HP59.htm>.

14 "Erdoğan ile kürt kökenli işçi arasında ilginç diyalog...", in *Haber Vitriini*, 24 December 2002, <http://www.habervitrini.com/dunya/erdogan-ile-kurt-kokenli-isci-arasinda-ilginc-diyalog-64403/>.

Nonetheless, a few important reforms were introduced in these years. For instance, the twenty year-long emergency rule in the southeast was lifted immediately after the AKP came to power. Subsequently, the AKP introduced legislation removing the barriers on broadcasting and teaching in Kurdish.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, a compensation law was enacted in 2005.<sup>16</sup>

However, the fact that all these reforms had been spelled out by the 57th government – the one preceding the first AKP government – in its famous national program indicated that there was nothing novel in the way in which the AKP engaged with the Kurdish question. As Kerem Öktem argues, while all these reforms were put on the agenda by the former government, the AKP government managed to take the credit for them all.<sup>17</sup>

In the meantime, although the termination of the armed struggle in the southeast lessened the importance of the Kurdish question in Turkish politics, signs indicated that this was a temporary situation. In the 2002 elections, the pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HADEP) received 6.2 percent of national votes, the highest percentage a pro-Kurdish party ever received in a national election. This proved that the politics of "no repression plus slim recognition" of the previous years was not found adequate by the Kurdish masses mobilised by the PKK. The unarmed resistance of Kurds was still fierce even though the armed resistance had halted. As a matter of fact, it was not long before the Kurdish question returned to the Turkish political agenda. In May 2004, the PKK decided to resume the armed struggle and this was followed by armed clashes between the PKK and the army.

In this context, the AKP started to direct more energy at settling the Kurdish question. In a historic speech delivered in Diyarbakır in 2005, Erdoğan used the most liberal discourse a prime minister had ever employed in Turkey. Conceding that the Turkish state had made mistakes in the past, the prime minister used the term "the Kurdish question" and promised to resolve it by means of more democracy, more citizenship law, and more prosperity.<sup>18</sup>

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15 See Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Secretariat General for EU Affairs, *Political reforms in Turkey*, 2007, p. 13-14, <http://www.ab.gov.tr/files/pub/prt.pdf>.

16 The aim of the law was to compensate the losses of those who were displaced during the clashes between the PKK and the security forces. For a work on displacement and the Compensation Law, see Dilek Kurban and Mesut Yeğen, *Adaletin Kıyısında. 'Zorunlu' Göç Sonrasında Devlet ve Kürtler. 5233 sayılı Tazminat Yasası'nın bir Değerlendirmesi: Van Örneği*, İstanbul, TESEV, 2012, <http://www.tesev.org.tr/adaletin-kiyisinda---zorunlu-goc--sonrasinda-devlet-ve-kurtler-%28duzultulmis-2--baski%29/icerik/202.html>.

17 Kerem Öktem, "The Patronising Embrace: Turkey's new Kurdish Strategy", in *RFST Occasional Papers*, February 2008, [http://www.sfst.ch/typo3/fileadmin/user\\_upload/dateien/OP\\_Oktem\\_08-02.pdf](http://www.sfst.ch/typo3/fileadmin/user_upload/dateien/OP_Oktem_08-02.pdf).

18 See "Erdoğan'dan Diyarbakır'da tarihi konuşma: Hataları yok

However, this liberal speech in 2005 was not followed by a firm policy of recognition. In the meantime, it became clear that the Kurdish question was becoming more serious than ever. Not only were the clashes between the PKK and the army increasing but also the tension between civilians and security forces was deepening. On March 2006, 14 PKK militants were killed in a skirmish near Muş. In the funeral in Diyarbakır, heavy clashes took place between the people and the police. They went on for four days and ended with 9 citizens dead, two of whom were aged 6 and 10. The Diyarbakır events indicated that the ties between the PKK and the Kurdish masses were stronger than before and that the Kurdish towns could become ungovernable if other clashes were to occur.<sup>19</sup>

## The Resolution/Peace Process

The 2007 program of the AKP government indicated that there would be no change in the way in which it dealt with the Kurdish question. It announced very boldly that the government relied on the principles of unity of the nation, indivisibility of national territory and a unitary administrative structure. Likewise, it declared that the government would pursue a firm policy against separatist terrorism.<sup>20</sup> However, today it has been revealed that, while the AKP announced in 2007 that it would engage with the Kurdish question as it had engaged until then, it was actually seeking an alternative route.

It has become clear a meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) in 2007 decided to get in touch with the PKK and introduce some reforms concerning the cultural rights of citizens.<sup>21</sup> In other words, the AKP seems to have decided in 2007 to introduce a new policy of negotiation and a firmer policy of recognition. Given that it received almost 50 per cent of the total votes in the 2007 elections, the AKP might have felt strong enough to renew its way of engaging with the Kurdish question, as the old policies had proven unsustainable.

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sayamayız", in *Milliyet*, 12 August 2005, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2005/08/12/son/sonsiy08.html>.

19 Although they tried hard, even the politicians from pro-Kurdish party and Osman Baydemir, the charismatic mayor of Diyarbakır, could not convince the Kurdish masses to get off the streets during the clashes.

20 See the Turkish Parliament website: <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/hukümetler/HP60.htm>.

21 It is understood today that the NSC accepted to launch a new policy involving, among others, the instrument of negotiating with the PKK and putting Emre Taner, the head of the intelligence agency, in charge of conducting these negotiations. See İsmet Berkan, *Asker Bize İktidarı Verir mi*, İstanbul, Everest, 2011, p. 156-157. However, it is also understood from the same book that while Emre Taner would do what we was asked to do by the NSC, he was accused of treason by the Directorate of Military Intelligence.

This new policy yielded its first fruits at the regional level. In 2008, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Erdoğan's chief advisor for foreign affairs, and Murat Özçelik, Turkey's special envoy to Iraq, paid a visit to Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and this visit, as F. Stephen Larrabee and Gönül Tol suggest, "initiated a series of formal contacts with the KRG that has resulted in a significant improvement in relations between Ankara and Erbil, particularly in the economic field."<sup>22</sup> Turkey's decades-long policy of containment of the Kurds (at least the Kurds of Iraq) was now over.

It was not long before this new policy produced significant outcomes in the domestic field too. It has been revealed that state officials contacted the PKK and had consecutive meetings (a.k.a. Oslo talks/meetings) in different places in Europe starting from September 2008.<sup>23</sup> In 2009, possibly due to the advances made in these meetings between the state and the PKK, all the main actors involved in the Kurdish question began to upgrade their positions. First, the chief of staff emphasised that the army would endorse the recognition of cultural rights at the individual level. Likewise, he announced that the army would rather liquidate the PKK than terminate it.<sup>24</sup> In the same speech, he maintained that the term Turkish nation was misunderstood and that the Turkish nation was defined in citizenship terms and comprises everyone who has built the Republic of Turkey. In the same vein, the AKP government started to take the most important steps of recognition. At the beginning of 2009, the public broadcasting agency, TRT, launched a 24-hour Kurdish language channel, TRT 6.<sup>25</sup> Also, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) resolved to establish Kurdish language and literature departments in universities.<sup>26</sup> These ranked among the most radical gestures on the

road to true recognition of Kurdish identity in the history of the Turkish Republic.

It was in this context of renewal that President Abdullah Gül, in an interview on his way to Iran on March 2009, stated that the Kurdish question was the most important question in Turkish politics and that good things would happen soon.<sup>27</sup> This revealed that the Turkish state was ready to change its way of engagement with the Kurdish question and that this new way of engagement was approved by the NSC.

Meanwhile, the local elections held in March 2009 resulted in the absolute victory in the southeast of the Democratic Society Party (DTP), the second predecessor of today's HDP.<sup>28</sup> Immediately after the local elections, the PKK also renewed its position and announced a ceasefire. In an interview given in May 2009, Murat Karayılan, then head of the Kurdistan Communities Association (Kurdish Communities Union, KCK),<sup>29</sup> stated that the PKK was ready to engage in a dialogue with the final aim of disarmament.<sup>30</sup>

These developments in the first half of 2009 were followed by the inception of the now famous "Kurdish opening."<sup>31</sup> The Minister of the Interior, Beşir Atalay, organised subsequent meetings in August 2009 with journalists, intellectuals and NGOs to start a public debate on the resolution of the Kurdish question. The Kurdish opening thus became the number one topic on the political agenda of the Turkish public.

However, as the debate ensued, it became evident that the two opposition parties would not support the Kurdish opening. While the CHP "criticized the Kurdish opening as an irresponsible initiative of the government [...] and expressed its concern that this policy carried the risk of giving way to the ethnic disintegration of the Turkish society," the MHP alleged that the Kurdish opening would "endanger Turkey's identity as a unitary nation-state."<sup>32</sup>

22 F. Stephen Larrabee and Gönül Tol, "Turkey's Kurdish Challenge", in *Survival*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (August/September 2011), p. 145.

23 At least five meetings took place between the PKK and the state officials and a third party (possibly a British NGO) joined as a third eye. See "AKP çözüm geliştirmeli", in *Özgür Gündem*, 25 April 2013, <http://www.ozgur-gundem.com/haber/71299/akp-cozum-gelistirmeli>. Zübeyir Aydar, the head of the PKK affiliated Kongra-Gel (People's Congress), stated in an interview that actually 16 or 17 meetings took place between the PKK and the state officials. See Cengiz Çandar, "Oslo'dan bugüne 'perde arkası' (1)", in *Radikal*, 28 April 2013, [http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/cengiz\\_candar/\\_1-1131383](http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/cengiz_candar/_1-1131383).

24 Commander in Chief of Turkish Armed Forces, General İlker Başbuğ, annual address to the Turkish War Colleges, 14 April 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2r7ZOqgeG4E>.

25 Kerim Balci, "Most Kurds welcome Kurdish channel run by state-owned TRT", in *Today's Zaman*, 27 December 2008, [http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail\\_openPrintPage.action?newsId=162452](http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_openPrintPage.action?newsId=162452).

26 "Kurdish to be offered as elective course at universities", in *Today's Zaman*, 6 January 2009, [http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail\\_openPrintPage.action?newsId=163330](http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_openPrintPage.action?newsId=163330).

27 "Tahran'a; Obama'nın elini havada bırakma", in *Hürriyet*, 11 March 2009, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/11181483.asp>.

28 While DTP had won mayorship in 52 towns in 2004 elections, it won in 99 towns in 2009.

29 KCK is an umbrella organisation involving the PKK and the PKK affiliated organisations.

30 Hasan Cemal, "Karayılan: Barış umudumuz var- Kuzey Irak Notları", in *Milliyet*, 5 May 2009, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/d/t.aspx?ID=1090963>.

31 Later, the government adopted the term "democratic opening" to replace the term "Kurdish opening", which was later replaced by the term "the national unity and fraternity project." See Yılmaz Ensaroğlu, "Turkey's Kurdish Question and the Peace Process", in *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Spring 2013), p. 12-13, <http://www.insightturkey.com/turkeys-kurdish-question-and-the-peace-process/articles/314>.

32 Özlem Kayhan Pusane, "Turkey's Kurdish Opening: Long Awaited Achievements and Failed Expectations", in *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (April 2014), p. 88.

Notwithstanding the disapproval of the opposition parties, the AKP government and the PKK resolutely went ahead with the Kurdish opening. The PKK sent 34 militants and refugees from Kandil headquarters and Maxmur refugee camp in November 2009 to show its willingness to find a solution. However, that the returning militants were dressed in guerrilla clothes and were welcomed with cheers by the Kurdish masses at the Habur border gate enflamed Turkish nationalism and hence increased the opposition of CHP and MHP. Since the discontent of Turkish nationalists with the Habur incident was to some extent shared by the AKP masses, something the AKP could not disregard –the opening process was slowed down. This was followed by the return of clashes between the PKK and security forces. On 7 December 2009, the PKK killed 7 soldiers in an attack in Reşadiye, Tokat.<sup>33</sup> Only a few days later, on 11 December 2009, the Constitutional Court banned the DTP with a unanimous decision.<sup>34</sup> While the DTP deputies took the decision to withdraw completely from the National Assembly, Öcalan asked them, through his lawyers, to return to the Assembly.<sup>35</sup> This intervention by Öcalan and the fact that the PKK did not officially end the ceasefire indicated that the peace process was still on.

Meanwhile, the terms of the Kurdish opening or the peace process remained unclear. From 2009 to 2011 there was no confirmation of the terms of a possible agreement between the PKK and the Turkish state for the resolution of the Kurdish question. However, Öcalan's lawyers stated a few times that he was preparing a road map for the resolution process. It was recently revealed that Öcalan submitted this road map on 15/22 August 2009 to the bureaucrats with whom he negotiated.<sup>36</sup> However, this road map was neither announced nor responded to by the Turkish state. It was only after Öcalan included it as an addendum to his defence in his case before the European Court of Human Rights in 2011 that it became accessible. It is now understood that the road map had proposed resolving the Kurdish question on the basis of the principles of "democratic-nation," "democratic republic," "democratic constitution," and "common motherland," and by means of a three-stage process.<sup>37</sup> The road map envisioned that the PKK would announce a permanent ceasefire in the first stage, that the government would establish a truth and reconciliation commission and the PKK would withdraw its armed forces in the second stage,

33 "PKK Reşadiye Saldırısını Üstlendi", in *Bianet*, 10 December 2009, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/118770>.

34 "DTP kapatıldı", in *Hürriyet*, 11 December 2009, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/13176916.asp>.

35 "Öcalan, 'Meclis'e dönün' demiş", in *Milliyet*, 18 December 2009, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/d/t.aspx?ID=1175416>.

36 "PKK ilk kez açıkladı...Oslo'da neler oldu?", in *Aksam*, 24 April 2013, <http://www.aksam.com.tr/siyaset/pkk-ilk-kez-acikladioslodaneler-oldu/haber-199057>.

37 All these Öcalan principles would actually refer to a non-ethnic and a non-cultural understanding of nationhood.

and that a democratic constitution would be introduced and that the PKK would disarm and become a legal force in the third stage.<sup>38</sup>

The PKK took the slackening of the resolution process, the banning of the DTP, the continuing pressure on Kurdish politicians under the banner of KCK investigations, and the governments' refusal to announce or reply to Öcalan's road map as indications that the government was not willing to advance the resolution process. Accordingly, the PKK decided on 1 June 2010 to end the ceasefire and start a democratic people's war instead. Yet, these developments did not terminate the process. Instead, Öcalan called for another ceasefire in August 2010 and the PKK paused with the democratic people's war and announced another ceasefire for forty days which was then extended until the elections in June 2011.

### *Second Round: 2010-2011*

The PKK's ceasefire in 2010 was followed by a new set of talks between the state and the PKK and Öcalan.<sup>39</sup> During these new meetings, Öcalan prepared and submitted to the state another road map involving three protocols: "The Draft for the Principles for a Democratic Solution of the Main Social Problems in Turkey," "The Draft for a Fair Peace in Relations between the State and Society," and "The Draft for the Action Plan for the Democratic and Fair Solution of the Kurdish Question."<sup>40</sup> Practically, the protocols suggested establishing three commissions composed of individuals from both sides: Commission for the Constitution, Commission for Peace, and Commission for Truth and Justice. It has been revealed that the Öcalan protocols were negotiated during the Oslo Talks and that both the PKK and state officials approved the protocols and promised to take the necessary steps after the 12 June 2011 elections.<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile Öcalan announced that he had done his best and that a new phase could begin after the elections. In the elections, both the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), the predecessor of today's HDP, and the AKP were successful. While the BDP received almost half the votes in the Kurdish provinces, the AKP received half the votes in Turkey. However, it became evident after the elections that the AKP government was not too enthusiastic about

38 "İşte Öcalan'ın yol haritası", in *Hürriyet*, 3 March 2011, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/17170384.asp>.

39 It is now understood that the resumption of talks with Öcalan was accompanied by the resumption of the Oslo talks. See See Cengiz Çandar, "Oslo'dan bugüne 'perde arkası' (1)", cit.

40 "CHP 9 maddelik 'Oslo mutabakatını' açıkladı", in *T24*, 18 September 2012, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/iste-pkk-akp-mutabakat-metni/213334>. It is important that these protocols were not announced but leaked to the newspapers. Today it is widely believed that the protocols were leaked by the police officers who were aligned with the Gülen community with the aim of making things difficult for the AK Party government.

41 Ibid.

continuing the peace process. The PKK leaders argue that the state paused with the Oslo meetings after the elections and refused to sign the protocols approved by the PKK and state officials in the Oslo talks.

The PKK responded to this by terminating the ceasefire and resuming the so-called People's Revolutionary War. Just one month after the elections, on 14 June 2011, the PKK killed 13 soldiers in an attack in Silvan. This marked the end of the second round in the peace process.

While the official narrative is that the first round of the peace process ended with the Reşadiye attack and the second round ended with the Silvan attack, PKK circles argue that while the first round ended when the state did not announce Öcalan's road map, the second round ended when the PKK came to the conclusion that the state was not ready to move ahead along the lines specified in the three protocols prepared by Öcalan.<sup>42</sup>

The clashes between the PKK and the Turkish army intensified in the following months. While the PKK claimed that it would implement a revolutionary people's war with the final aim of defeating the state in the Southeast, the government maintained that it would defeat the PKK just as the Sri Lankan forces had defeated the separatist Tamil guerrillas. Consequently, 2012 turned to be the most violent year in the fighting between the PKK and the Turkish army since 1999.<sup>43</sup> While the clashes in the following 18 months took hundreds of lives, the police and the judiciary pursued a relentless policy of pressure on Kurdish politicians. Thousands of Kurds, including BDP mayors, politicians, journalists, and trade unionists were arrested in almost two years with the charge that they were working for the KCK.

Yet, the months following the severe clashes proved that neither the PKK nor the government could achieve their goals. The government remained cautious enough not to return to the policy of repression of the 1990s with the result that the PKK failed to convince civilians to get involved in the clashes between the PKK and the army. On the other hand, the government did not defeat the PKK either. Despite heavy losses and a massive campaign

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42 In fact, Mustafa Karasu, one of the leaders of the PKK, stated in an interview that the mediators between the PKK and the state told them after the elections that the government would not accept the Öcalan protocols which were approved by the PKK and the bureaucrats in the Oslo talks. See "PKK ilk kez açıkladı...Oslo'da neler oldu?", cit.

43 Güneş Murat Tezcür, "Prospects for Resolution of the Kurdish Question: A Realist Perspective", in *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Spring 2013), p. 69, <http://www.insightturkey.com/prospects-for-resolution-of-the-kurdish-question-a-realist-perspective/articles/1418>; Johanna Nykänen, "Identity, Narrative and Frames: Assessing Turkey's Kurdish Initiatives", in *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (Spring 2013), p. 88, <http://www.insightturkey.com/identity-narrative-and-frames-assessing-turkeys-kurdish-initiatives/articles/321>.

to discredit it, the PKK was able to recruit new militants and uphold its positive image in the eyes of the Kurdish masses.

### *Third Round: 2013-2015*

It was in this context that the negotiation between the PKK and the state resumed at the beginning of 2013. On 28 December 2012, Prime Minister Erdoğan stated in a TV show that the talks between state officials and Öcalan were going on.<sup>44</sup> It was not the fact that the talks were going on, but that the prime minister had wanted to state this on TV indicated that there was something new about the process after the bloodshed of the previous 18 months. Erdoğan would not have announced that talks between the state and Öcalan were going on had they not produced something.

Only a few days later, Ahmet Türk and Ayla Ata Akat, the two deputies from the BDP visited Öcalan at Imralı Prison. Ahmet Türk stated in an interview that Öcalan seemed determined and confident about building peace but wanted to look into the possibility of doing so by communicating with the PKK headquarters in Kandil and the BDP.<sup>45</sup> That the Imralı visit was made public indicated that the new round in the peace process would not be carried out behind the scene. In fact, it soon became evident that the talks with Öcalan would proceed through a complex mechanism: while the state and Öcalan would keep talking, Öcalan would inform the PKK headquarters in Kandil and be informed by them through the BDP deputies visiting Imralı.

While a very serious crisis occurred only a week after the new round commenced – Sakine Cansız, Fidan Doğan and Leyla Şaylemez, three well-known women in PKK circles were murdered by the Turkish citizen Ömer Güney in Paris on 10 January 2013 – the PKK and the BDP considered these murders a provocation committed by a third party and remained loyal to the new process. The following developments proved that both sides were determined to take the steps to open a new round. While Erdoğan announced on 12 February 2013 that he was ready to

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44 "İmralı'yla görüşüyoruz", in *Habertürk*, 28 December 2012, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/807198-imraliyla-gorusuyoruz>. For a very helpful chronology of the third round of the peace process, see SETA Foundation, *Timeline: Reconciliation Process*, <http://setav.org/en/reconciliation-process/timeline/17753>. Later on the minutes of the talks between Öcalan and the BDP deputies, which were leaked to a newspaper, revealed that the talks had started in the autumn of 2012. See "İşte İmralı görüşmesinin tutanaklarının tam metni!", in *T24*, 28 February 2013, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/iste-imralidaki-gorusmenin-tutanaklari/224711>.

45 "Ahmet Türk, Öcalan'la yaptıkları görüşmenin perde arkasını anlattı", in *T24*, 9 January 2013, <http://t24.com.tr/haber/ahmet-turk-ocalanla-yaptiklari-gorusmenin-perde-arkasini-anlattigi/221335>.



take all the political risks to achieve peace,<sup>46</sup> the AKP group in parliament enacted a law enabling defence in one's mother tongue in the courts,<sup>47</sup> which had become a source of crisis in the long-lasting KCK trials of the past few years. This was followed by the release of 8 soldiers and civil servants detained by the PKK in Iraqi Kurdistan. Meanwhile, the BDP deputies visited Öcalan in Imrali and PKK headquarters on Kandil a few times to facilitate communication between the PKK and its leader. It is through these visits that Öcalan conveyed his new proposal for peace and that the PKK leaders expressed their concerns about the new round. Eventually, Öcalan drafted a new proposal for peace and resolution and this new proposal was announced to the public on 21 March 2013 at the Newroz celebration of Diyarbakır, attended by hundreds of thousands of Kurds.

The Newroz message was full of novel insights. Öcalan publicly announced that the era of armed struggle was over and it was now time for political struggle. He also underlined the Islamic brotherhood of Kurds and Turks not only in Turkey but in the Middle East, meaning that he was in some ambiguous way sharing the regional vision of the AKP government.<sup>48</sup> Öcalan also called for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of PKK militants to Iraqi Kurdistan.

The PKK accepted Öcalan's new proposal and announced a unilateral ceasefire on 23 March 2013.<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, the terms of the new agreement between the state and Öcalan/PKK became discernible. Sadullah Ergin, Minister of Justice and a central figure in the third round of the peace process, stated that the process would consist of three phases: ceasefire and withdrawal of the PKK, democratisation, and disarmament and normalisation.<sup>50</sup> This was of course a particular wording of the terms of agreement. It soon became evident that the PKK wanted the government to take some steps testifying to its loyalty to the process before the PKK commenced its withdrawal. The government took these steps and first established a council of wise persons and then set up a commission in parliament to discuss the resolution

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46 SETA Foundation, *Timeline: Reconciliation Process*, cit.

47 Ibid.

48 Nathalie Tocci goes further and argues that "[t]he political visions of two men in Turkey – Öcalan and Erdoğan – are surprisingly converging, in that the former's historic vision of pan-Kurdish unity alongside a growing acceptance of Turkey's territorial integrity is beginning to dovetail with the latter's aspiration for Turkish regional hegemony within a fragmenting southern neighbourhood." See Nathalie Tocci, "Turkey's Kurdish Gamble", in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 48, No. 3 (September 2013), p. 73.

49 "PKK ateşkes ilan etti", in *Deutsche Welle*, 23 March 2013, <http://dw.de/p/183Ac>.

50 "Bakan Ergin'den Öcalan açıklaması", in *Sabah*, 29 March 2013, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2013/03/29/bakan-erginden-ocalan-aciklamasi>. This indicated that a new round would somehow progress as it was contemplated by Öcalan in 2009.

process at the beginning of April 2013.<sup>51</sup>

Even though neither the council of wise persons nor the commission in the parliament met the PKK's expectations, the process went on and the PKK announced the withdrawal of its armed forces on 8 May 2013. During the withdrawal the Turkish army suspended its routine military operations against PKK militants, indicating that the AKP had either convinced or forced the army to abide by the agreement that the PKK's withdrawal had to be achieved in safety. Considering that a few hundred PKK militants had been killed during the withdrawal in 1999, this proved that the Turkish state was somehow determined to go ahead with the process.

On September 2013, however, the PKK made a second announcement and stated that the withdrawal had been halted because the government had not taken the steps it promised and had instead built new military installations in and around the places from which the PKK had withdrawn. Throughout the summer, the Turkish state had built new fortified military stations and dams on the routes the PKK had traditionally used while withdrawing to Iraq in autumn and entering into Turkey in spring of every year. Despite the pause in the withdrawal, the PKK remained loyal to the ceasefire and demanded that the construction of new dams and stations be stopped, that those who were imprisoned under the banner of KCK membership be released, and that a law providing legal grounds for the resolution process be enacted.

The PKK's determination generated its fruits. Immediately after the local elections of 2014, the AKP amended the law of the National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) and granted the MIT the authority to meet and negotiate with "terrorist organisations" and those who are imprisoned.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, KCK convicts began being released at around the same time and almost all were released by the end of 2014. This was followed by a more radical step: the AKP enacted a "framework law" for the resolution process in June 2014. Entitled "Law to End Terror and Strengthen Social Integration," the framework law authorised the government and bureaucracy to determine the necessary steps to be taken and prepare the regulations needed to end terrorism and ensure social integration. Practically, the law was broad enough to specify all military, political, and legal steps needed to ensure disarmament and resolve the Kurdish question. The law also authorised officials to contact "terrorists."<sup>53</sup>

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51 SETA Foundation, *Timeline: Reconciliation Process*, cit.

52 "MİT kanunu Meclis'ten geçti", in *Hürriyet*, 18 April 2014, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/26244381.asp>.

53 "Turkish gov't submits bill to boost Kurdish peace bid, provide legal framework for PKK talks", in *Hürriyet Daily News*, 26 June 2014, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageID=238&nID=68306&NewsCatID=338>.

The process now had a legal basis, as was demanded by Öcalan and the PKK. The AKP took one more step and mentioned the resolution process in the program of the new government, established by Ahmet Davutoğlu, who became the chairperson of the AKP and the new prime minister after Erdoğan became the president in August 2014. The program underlined the government's determination to take the necessary steps for the resolution process.<sup>54</sup> Öcalan announced that the 30 year-long war was about to be ended by means of negotiations.<sup>55</sup>

Once again, the resolution process experienced a serious crisis only a few months later. On 6-8 October, the Kurdish people poured into the streets to protest against the week-long siege of Kobani in Syria by the IS and the government's "apathy" towards or even "contentment" with the siege and the possible fall of Kobani. Almost a civil war, the Kobani events resulted in the death of more than forty civilians, most of whom were HDP supporters.

While shocking, the Kobani crisis had actually come step by step. The Kurdish people in Turkey, at least those who back the HDP and the PKK, were already angered by the government's position with regard to the civil war in Syria. The government remained "unfriendly" towards the Democratic Union Party (PYD), an affiliate of the PKK, while supporting the Islamic groups fighting against the Baath regime in Syria. The events in 2014 further angered the Kurds in Turkey as they witnessed the atrocities committed by the IS in the Yazidi-Kurdish populated Shengal of Iraqi Kurdistan. This motivated hundreds of Kurds in Turkey to join the PYD forces in Kobani to fight against the IS. In only a few months, dozens of Kurdish youth corps came from Kobani to the Kurdish towns in Turkey, making the siege of Kobani and in fact the whole Rojava issue a part of the Turkish Kurdistan issue. At the end of the day, the Kurdish citizens of Turkey witnessed their children, relatives, and fellow nationals being killed in front of the eyes of the world public and the Turkish state. Most angering was the fact that Erdoğan seemed content with the likelihood of Kobani's fall to the IS.

It was against this background that the Kobani crisis exploded. When it became evident that Kobani was about to fall into the hands of the IS after a two-month long siege, the PKK and HDP called upon the Kurdish masses to protest against the Turkish state's attitude. On the very same day, thousands of Kurds, who were already angered by the developments and the rumours that the Turkish state was backing the IS, poured into the streets to protest. The clashes took scores of lives in three days and ended only after Öcalan sent a message from prison asking the protests to stop. The clashes ended but left behind a huge crisis.

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54 SETA Foundation, *Timeline: Reconciliation Process*, cit.

55 Ibid.

Only a few weeks after the break, however, both sides announced that the peace process had to be refreshed. This was possibly because they realised that one of the strongest alternatives to the peace process was no longer a state of governable clashes between the state and the PKK but a civil war. The Turkish state's change of attitude towards the PYD and permission to transfer peshmerga and heavy weapons to Kobani across the Turkish border eased the refreshing of the peace process.<sup>56</sup> In the end, both sides returned to the process a few weeks after the Kobani crisis.

The meeting of the HDP deputies with Öcalan at the beginning of December 2014 showed that the process was on. The deputies returned from Imrali with a draft for negotiations prepared by Öcalan. Even though it was unclear whether this draft was approved by the Turkish state, its release was important as it indicated that some sort of consensus between Öcalan and the state on the framework for negotiation had been reached or was reachable. The draft was taken by the HDP deputies to Kandil to be ratified.

Yet, it soon became evident that the government wanted the PKK to take the decision to disarm before the negotiations between the state and the PKK would commence. In response, the PKK clearly announced that the final decision for disarmament would be taken only after consensus were reached between the parties about the terms of the resolution and that disarmament would be finalised only after the legal and constitutional changes presupposed by this consensus were made.<sup>57</sup> While the problem seemed insurmountable, a middle way was found and Öcalan's call for disarmament and his 10-article draft for negotiations were announced to the public in a meeting attended by members of the government and the HDP on 28 February 2015. While the members of government carefully avoided giving the impression that they approved Öcalan's draft for the negotiations, the very form of the meeting was important as it indicated that there were two formal sides in the process and that there was a ground for negotiations.

Afterwards, the PKK announced once more that they would implement the disarmament once the government took the steps set down in Öcalan's ten-article draft.<sup>58</sup> While the government expected Öcalan to announce a scheduled disarmament in his 2015

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56 Martin Chulov, Constanze Letsch and Fazel Hawramy, "Turkey to allow Kurdish peshmerga across its territory to fight in Kobani", in *The Guardian*, 20 October 2014, <http://gu.com/p/42tk4/stw>.

57 Fatih Polat and Hüseyin Deniz, "AKP'nin süreci seçime feda etmesine izin vermeyiz", in *Evrensel*, 20 December 2014, <http://www.evrensel.net/haber/100197/akpnin-sureci-secime-feda-etmesine-izin-vermeyiz>.

58 "Silah bırakma değil, silahlı mücadeleyi bırakma", in *BirGün*, 31 March 2015, <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/silah-birakma-degil-silahli-mucadeleyi-birakma-77112.html>.

Newroz message, Öcalan did not go any further than what was announced on 28 February. He remained in line with the PKK and reiterated his ten-article draft for negotiation, calling for disarmament but without giving any strict schedule. It now became evident that the PKK would not take a disarmament decision without seeing the official commencement of and some advance in the negotiations – monitored by a “third eye.” The government seemed willing to overcome this obstacle and inserted the long-disputed third-eye into the talks to ensure the decision of disarmament. Such was the picture at the end of March 2015. In other words, albeit with disagreements, the process was moving along steadily.

## Assessment: Reasons for and the Basic Characteristics of the Resolution Process

The current resolution process commenced and has proceeded as portrayed above. I will now try to provide an overall assessment of the process and “speculate” about its prospects. I will try to answer the following questions: What stimulated the Turkish state and the PKK to launch the resolution process and how is it that both sides have remained loyal to the process despite the serious problems and disagreements that have emerged in due course? Is there anything distinctive in the current resolution process making it possible to say that it is the first of its kind in Turkey? What have been the main problems that have prevented the process from reaching a conclusion?

Reasons? Numerous factors seem to have motivated the AKP to launch the resolution process. First, it had long been acknowledged in the core circles of the Turkish establishment that classical policies of assimilation plus repression were no longer viable and that the Kurdish question had to be tackled with a new policy. Second, the elections in 2007 and 2009 and the pro-PKK demonstrations in Kurdish towns in these years proved that the bonds between the Kurdish people and the PKK had not weakened and that the former had not withdrawn their demands despite policies of “no repression plus slim recognition” of the early 2000s. Third, having won an absolute victory in the 2007 and 2011 elections, the AKP felt confident enough to introduce and maintain the current resolution process even though it was evident that the Turkish public would not welcome such a process warmly. Lastly, there were non-domestic reasons too. The AKP governments pursued a “revisionist” regional policy to turn Turkey into “an energy hub and crossroads for pipelines” and make it more effective in the Middle East.<sup>59</sup> The AKP must have believed that ending

<sup>59</sup> Cengiz Çandar, “The Kurdish Question: The Reasons and Fortunes of the ‘Opening’”, in *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (October-December 2009), p. 15, [http://file.insightturkey.com/Files/Pdf/insight\\_turkey\\_vol\\_11\\_no\\_4\\_2009\\_candar.pdf](http://file.insightturkey.com/Files/Pdf/insight_turkey_vol_11_no_4_2009_candar.pdf). For a detailed assessment of the domestic and international reasons behind the

the armed conflict with the PKK would have made it easier to attain this objective.

The AKP remained loyal to the process despite some serious setbacks for a different set of reasons. First of all, the break in the resolution process in 2011 proved that the PKK had the motivation to carry out a more energetic armed struggle, and that it could not be defeated by military means. Secondly, the Kobani crisis of October 2014 made it clear that one of the strongest alternatives to the resolution process was decline into civil war. Thirdly, the crisis in Syria and the one in Iraq between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Iran-supported Maliki regime produced a situation that could possibly complicate and aggravate the Kurdish question in Turkey.<sup>60</sup>

The PKK, on the other hand, had its own rationale to join the resolution process. To begin with, since 1993 the PKK had abandoned the ideal of establishing an independent Kurdistan and had announced that it was ready for a peaceful solution. In other words, the 2009 resolution process was in line with the overall strategy adopted by the PKK in 1993. Second, the PKK had already admitted that the political gains of the armed struggle had reached their limit and that further gains could be attained only through political struggle. Third, the armed struggle and the armed units have long become secondary instruments for the PKK. The PKK had long become a military and political complex with influence on a political party backed by almost half the Kurdish citizens in Turkey, appealing to a huge diaspora in Europe, and boasting a number of newspapers, several TV channels, and numerous NGOs.<sup>61</sup> Hence, the PKK became confident that it could survive as a political party and further Kurds’ cultural and political rights. Fourth, just like the AKP governments, the PKK was also concerned that one of the strongest alternatives to the resolution process was a civil war between Kurds and Turks and wanted to avoid

inception of the peace process, see Johanna Nykänen, “Identity, Narrative and Frames”, cit., p. 86-87.

<sup>60</sup> Defining the situation immediately before the peace process resumed in 2013 as a situation of “non-hurting stalemate,” Güneş Murat Tezcür argues that “[o]ne should seek for alternative dynamics other than the ones in the battlefield to understand the timing of the government’s 2013 initiative.” See Güneş Murat Tezcür, “Prospects for Resolution of the Kurdish Question: A Realist Perspective”, cit., p. 73. Agreeing with Tezcür, I believe that it was mainly due to the regional developments that both sides found the resumption of the peace process reasonable.

<sup>61</sup> As Akkaya and Jongerden suggest, the PKK today “is actually a party complex, a complex of parties and organizations comprising several parties (including the PKK as a party) and sister parties in Iraq, Syria and Iran, the co-party which separately organizes women, the armed organizations and the popular front Kongra-Gel.” See Ahmet Hamdi Akkaya and Joost Jongerden, “The PKK in the 2000s: Continuity through Breaks?”, in Marlies Casier and Joost Jongerden (eds.), *Nationalisms and Politics in Turkey. Political Islam, Kemalism and the Kurdish Issue*, London and New York, Routledge, 2011, p. 147

this alternative. Lastly, recent regional developments have made a resolution process reasonable for the PKK. As the PKK found an opportunity to aggrandize itself in the Rojava in Syria, it became reasonable to maintain the resolution process in Turkey because returning to the armed struggle would have meant fighting on two separate fronts. Also, the PKK did not want to take the risk of infecting the Kurdish question in Turkey with the dynamics molding the Kurdish question in Iraq and Syria as this could have intensified the armed struggle in Turkey and culminated with the PKK's suspension of its loyalty to the principle of the territorial integrity of Turkey. The PKK must have considered that, had this happened, the mass support provided by the Kurds in Turkey would have diminished as a separatist solution has never been popular among Kurds in Turkey.

First of its kind? As stated at the outset, the assessments made by the AKP and the PKK indicate that the resolution process is designed to achieve the final disarmament of the PKK in return for the attainment of a better democracy and recognition of the cultural and political rights of the Kurds in Turkey. The fact that the PKK had already called a few ceasefires before the current process commenced in 2009 and that the Turkish government had already recognised some basic cultural rights for Kurds before the AKP came to power may give the impression that there is nothing distinctive about the current process. However, this is wrong since what has now been done with regard to both disarmament and recognition of rights is both substantially and qualitatively different from what was done beforehand. For instance, the launching of the TRT 6, broadcasting in Kurdish 24 hours a day, the establishment of Kurdish language and literature departments in universities, and allowing instruction in Kurdish in private high schools are substantial steps in the recognition of Kurds' rights. However, the steps taken in the sphere of disarmament are certainly more substantial. Here, the AKP governments have for the first time undertaken direct contacts with the PKK and its leader, resulting in the recognition of Öcalan and the PKK as "legitimate" partners in the resolution process. Likewise, unlike the PKK's withdrawal in 1999, the one in 2013 was achieved in safety, thanks to the pause in military operations against the PKK. This has also made the current process distinctive.

On the other hand, if the resolution process is assessed in terms of what is necessary for the resolution of the Kurdish question as the latter is represented by the PKK/HDP, then it may be posited that what has been done is of little significance as the PKK-HDP argues that the resolution of the Kurdish question requires the adoption of self-rule in Turkish Kurdistan, allowing instruction in Kurdish in public schools, and allowing the PKK to become a legal actor in Turkish politics.

Why not concluded, yet still surviving? To reiterate, the resolution process is designed to attain two objectives: the disarmament of the PKK and recognition of the Kurds' cultural and political rights. While the PKK leaders have constantly and the members of the AKP governments have occasionally acknowledged this dyadic nature of and the simultaneity in the process, in practice there have been two problems. First, while there has been an agreement on the terms of disarmament, there has never been an agreement on the terms of the recognition of rights. Second, the AKP has wanted priority to be given to disarmament so as to break the link between disarmament and the recognition of Kurds' rights. While the PKK announced ceasefires and in the case of 2013 started to withdraw its armed forces and expected the governments to take some steps in the field of the recognition of rights, the AKP has occasionally argued that the issue of recognition of rights should be handled once the disarmament is settled and through a public discussion as this is not an issue to settle merely through the involvement of the PKK and the government. To sum up, the first reason impeding the conclusion of the process is the vital difference between the path proposed by the government and the one proposed by the PKK to carry out the resolution process.<sup>62</sup>

However, it may certainly be argued that the difference between the two sides is actually deeper than this and it is about the content of the process. As Ali Bayramoğlu rightly argues, there seems to be a "paradigmatic difference" between the AKP and the PKK about the very terms of the resolution process.<sup>63</sup> In Bayramoğlu's view, the government's "expectations and targets regarding the solution process include disarming the PKK, it evaporating slowly, and solving the problem by way of democratic integration through the widening of an arena for individual rights and politics; an extraction of discriminatory laws; and new citizenship." Whereas the main aims of the PKK and Öcalan "include self administration to a certain level in a given territory; the establishment of their own institutions; entry into politics for the those in the mountains and the release of Öcalan."<sup>64</sup>

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62 For instance, while Murat Karayılan, the head of the HPG (the PKK's armed wing) stated once that the disarmament would take place once constitutional reforms were implemented, Yalçın Akdoğan, one of the members of AK Party government who is in charge of the peace process, accused him of misunderstanding the process. Akdoğan claimed that the constitutional reforms would begin to be implemented once the disarmament was completed. See, respectively, Namik Durukan, "Silahsızlanma koşulu: Öcalan'a özgürlüktür", in *Milliyet*, 1 May 2013, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/d/t.aspx?ID=1701460>; "Yalçın Akdoğan: Karayılan süreci yanlış anlamış", in *Aksam*, 26 April 2013, <http://www.aksam.com.tr/siyaset/yalcin-akdogan-karayilan-sureci-yanlis-anlamis/haber-199947>.

63 Ali Bayramoğlu, *New Political Equilibrium and the Kurdish Question*, London, Democratic Progress Institute, 2014, p. 6, <http://www.democraticprogress.org/?p=2158>.

64 Ibid.

As a matter of fact, one can show numerous texts or speeches pointing to this gap between the two sides. For instance, Hatem Ete, one of the prime minister's chief advisors and the few state officials handling the resolution process, stated in an interview that the disarmament was the only topic being discussed between the state and Öcalan and that the state would not negotiate anything other than this with him.<sup>65</sup> Instead, the PKK leaders and the HDP deputies have often stated that the resolution process involves three basic stages, withdrawal, democratisation, and disarmament, and that the democratisation stage involves both decentralisation in administration and education in Kurdish.

Moreover, the extent to which Öcalan and the state officials with whom he talked are authorised to finalise the terms of the agreement remained unclear for a long time. Since PKK circles often affirmed that Öcalan was the only person authorised to negotiate, this generated the impression in the Turkish public and the AKP government that the resolution process could be concluded by means of negotiations with Öcalan. However, it appeared that the PKK leaders had their own views and concerns about the terms of the process and that they had convinced Öcalan to acknowledge these concerns. This was sometimes presented by the AKP government and pro-AKP columnists as a schism between Öcalan and the PKK, with the latter unwilling to carry out the resolution process. However, the past two years have proven that the PKK wanted to inform Öcalan and be informed by him and that this was actually presupposed by Öcalan himself at the beginning of the third round.

However, the real problem lies on the other side. It has always remained unclear to what extent the state officials who meet with Öcalan are entitled to reach conclusions about the terms of a possible resolution. It is known that state officials have met with Öcalan countless times and that Öcalan prepared road maps, proposals, and frameworks for negotiations from these meetings. However, it has always remained unclear if and to what extent the state officials and the AKP governments approved Öcalan's texts.

The final reason precluding conclusion is that the AKP has often been squeezed between the requirements of the resolution process and those of success in the elections held during the process, and that it has prioritised the latter. In this sense, the fact that two elections and two referendums have taken place since 2009 has been a factor that has stretched the resolution process.

In spite of all these reasons, the resolution process has survived and this has its own reasons, in addition to those

that motivated the two sides to inaugurate the process. To begin with, neither side wanted to take the risk of being perceived by the public as the one that blocked the process. Second, both sides observed that the resolution process did not result in a weakening in their public support. Third, even though the AKP acted very slowly, it did still take some crucial steps, such as establishing the wise people council or enacting a framework law for the process. This made it very difficult for the PKK to withdraw from the process with the argument that the AKP had not done anything in return. Lastly, the talks between Öcalan and the state seem to have helped narrow the distance between the respective positions. There is an important difference between Öcalan's road map of 2009 and the ten-article draft of 2015, and that the latter is more acceptable to the state. This must have reinforced the state officials' trust in the process.

## Prospects: Success or a Fourth Round?

Despite all these problems prolonging the process, one could easily have maintained around the time of the Newroz in 2015 that the process was on its way and that it would have been concluded after the elections in June. It was evident that some key steps were taken in the last year. By the Newroz of 2015, the government had enacted a framework law for resolution and organised a joint hearing with the HDP deputies of the Öcalan-authored ten-article draft open to the public. The government had also agreed to insert a monitoring eye into the process and, more importantly, was content with the PKK's decision to cease the armed struggle against Turkey only, as the complete disarmament of the PKK in the current conditions in the Middle East had become unrealistic. That the PKK circles had also approved Öcalan's ten-article draft had given the impression that the process was on its way and could be concluded after the elections in June.

Instead, the whole picture is now different. It changed in only a few days following President Erdoğan's speeches about the course of the peace progress. First, Erdoğan stated that there was no longer any such thing as the Kurdish question thanks to the reforms implemented by the AKP government.<sup>66</sup> Later, he challenged the government's path in the resolution process and stated that he was not happy with the 28 February meeting and the idea of inserting a third eye into the process.<sup>67</sup>

Erdoğan's intervention came as a surprise as it indicated that there was a split between the government and the president over the way the resolution process was being carried out. The government's first response was that it

<sup>65</sup> "Hatem Ete: Taslağın muhatabı devlet değil Kandil", in *Star Gazete*, 15 December 2014, <http://haber.star.com.tr/yazar/taslagin-muhatabi-devlet-degil-kandil/yazi-980745>.

<sup>66</sup> "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Kardeşim ne Kürt sorunu ya...", in *Radikal*, 15 March 2015, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/-1314052>.

<sup>67</sup> "Erdoğan: 10 maddeye de karşıyım!", in *Radikal*, 22 March 2015, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/-1318912>.

was determined to carry out the process as planned.<sup>68</sup> After only a few weeks and a few meetings between the president and the members of the government, however, it appeared that the president had somehow persuaded the government that the third eye should not be brought in and that there should be no further advance before the elections in June 2015 or before the PKK took the decision to disarm.

HDP and PKK circles argue, rather convincingly, that the president's intervention into the process was due to the fact that Erdoğan realised and persuaded the AKP administration that, as of March 2015, the resolution process was no longer working to the benefit of the AKP. Instead, it has been helping the HDP in the last few months. Opinion polls show that the HDP might go beyond the 10 percent electoral threshold and gain more than 60 deputies in parliament. This could prevent the AKP from getting the majority needed in parliament to make constitutional changes and so realise Erdoğan's dream of a presidential system.

When the resolution process was put on hold at the end of March 2015, the expectation was that there would be no further move for the moment concerning the process and that the future of the process would be shaped by the results of the June elections. However, while the PKK and HDP side seem content with the picture before the elections and have not pushed for any further steps before the elections, the AKP side does not seem to be willing to reach the elections with the present picture, which is believed to be working in favour of the HDP. Instead, the resumption of military operations against members of the PKK launched in the mountains of Turkish Kurdistan after two years indicates that the government wants to arrive at the elections in June with a picture that is different from the present one. The speeches of AKP members and pieces written by columnists close to the AKP suggest that the government aims to change both its own and the HDP's current images. The image of "the AKP which negotiated with the PKK but failed to disarm it" is to be replaced with "the AKP determined to fight against terrorism." The current image of the HDP is targeted as well. The current image of "the HDP as a new alternative in Turkish politics" and "the HDP as the only antidote to Erdoğan's authoritarianism" is to be replaced with the image of "the HDP messing with terrorists."

It seems that in the few weeks left before the elections there will be a struggle between the AKP and the HDP about their respective images in Turkish politics. While the HDP will try to maintain its image as the only party that is working hard for the settlement of the Kurdish question and that can stop Erdoğan's dream of establishing a presidential system in Turkey, the AKP will try to present

itself as more determined than ever in combatting the PKK and will try to ensure that the HDP is identified with terrorism.

Under these conditions, the prospects for the resolution process will be shaped by the results of the June elections. There are a few possible scenarios.

The first scenario is that the AKP will receive enough seats to enact a new constitution or take it to a referendum. If this happens, the AKP would draft a new constitution introducing a presidential system and become less willing to carry out the resolution process through negotiations with the PKK and Öcalan. Instead, it could embark upon resolving the Kurdish question by handing over less right to Kurds than demanded by the PKK/HDP and with less or no negotiation with the PKK and Öcalan. This could terminate the current resolution process until a fourth round commences.

The second and the most possible scenario is that the AKP may not win enough seats to introduce a new constitution and hence may try to gain the support of the HDP to enact a new constitution. In this case, the resolution process and negotiations could accelerate and be concluded in a few years. However, the Achilles heel of this scenario is the issue of the presidential system. The AKP could place "the presidential system in return for more rights for Kurds" dialectic at the heart of the negotiations. If the HDP remains resolute in its decision not to endorse the presidential system, it may be difficult to reach a consensus between the two sides about the terms of the resolution. In this case, the resolution process would stretch out again.

The third scenario would also arise if the AKP were unable to win enough seats to enact a new constitution. If the AKP and the HDP do not reach a consensus, the AKP could give up the idea of introducing a new constitution or could try to get the support of the MHP for a new constitution. In the first case, the AKP would be less enthusiastic about the resolution process, while in the second, the resolution process would certainly come to an end.

Lastly, there is a fourth scenario, which may arise if the AKP does not win enough seats to build a single-party government. This looks weaker than the first scenario, but if it were to come about, then the prospects for the resolution process would be shaped by the composition of the coalition government or, if a coalition government is not formed, by a new election.

<sup>68</sup> "Hükümetten Erdoğan'a rest!", in *Radikal*, 21 March 2015, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/-1318566>.

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