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EDITOR'S NOTE

İHSAN DAĞI

ON MARCH 21, almost one million Kurds gathered in Diyarbakir to celebrate the Kurdish New Year, Newroz and listened to the message of Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader of the outlawed PKK. In the midst of the cheers and applause, Ocalan declared that the era of armed struggle for the Kurds ended and the PKK would lay down its arms.

This was a historic public demonstration of a new peace process conducted by the Turkish government on the one side and Abdullah Ocalan on the other to reach a negotiated settlement for the Kurdish insurgency.

After the failure of earlier attempts followed by months of violence and political tension, the new process was a surprise but a most welcome one. Caution is in store but hopes are high. Many regard the prospect for a solution to the Kurdish problem as a historic opportunity for Turkey to build peace among its citizens, consolidate its democracy, and finally remove a significant obstacle to its full strength in the conduct of its regional and global policy.

The government's priority is to secure withdrawal of the PKK militants out of Turkey and their eventual disarmament. This means, first, a ceasefire, and then disarming the PKK. But, there are also the demands and expectations of Ocalan and the PKK to take into consideration. As Ana Vilellas from the Autonomous University of Barcelona reflects in her commentary "any peace negotiation involves some kind of deal where everyone is supposed to gain in some way. It would thus be naïve to expect withdrawal and eventual disarmament without security guarantees or progress with regard to Kurdish demands."

The question is to find a formula that will satisfy the Kurds and be acceptable to the Turks. Not an impossible task, neither an easy one. As Güneş Murat Tezcür of Loyola University warns, "if the government does not act now, Kurdish nationalism would become less containable."

The prevailing mood in the country is that the current process provides a window of opportunity and that Tayyip Erdogan and Abdullah Ocalan can find a solution to the problem.

Will this new process succeed?

In his contribution to this issue of *Insight Turkey* Yılmaz Ensaroğlu, the head of the Southeast subgroup of the 63-member Wise Men Commission reminds us "the peace process is at its earliest and easiest stage."

We still do not know much on how the withdrawal, disarmament, and legal arrangements will be conducted. Methods for conflict resolution and peace building developed in relation to various cases in the world may have provided the Turkish government

with some important insights into the way in which to conduct the negotiations, communicate the process to the public, and implement the agreement. Yet, Turkey seems to be doing it on its own way, namely by making peace with the “leader” of the antagonist.

Thus, in this new initiative, Ocalan emerges as the primary interlocutor for the government. Many believe that he can stop the violence, pull the PKK out of Turkey, and convince militants to lay down their weapons. Whether Ocalan is powerful enough to deliver the terms of a possible agreement remains an open question. He certainly commands the support of the Kurds in the street sympathetic to the PKK and so far seems to maintain the loyalty of the PKK militants too.

A solution to the problem also requires managing the public perception of the process. Johanna Nykänen of the University of Warwick notes in her article that “despite the initial backlashes and unlike with the opening in 2009, the Imralı Process continues to wield an unprecedented amount of initial support from different circles.” The people tired of the conflict are looking for a political settlement.

Still, neither the government nor Ocalan has much time. If they are really determined, they have to move fast to avert provocative assaults of some uncontrolled PKK elements and a possible public opinion backlash among the Turkish voters. A Kurdish peace will certainly be a new beginning for Turkey and the Middle East.

Apart from analyzing the new Kurdish initiative in this issue of *Insight Turkey*, we also commemorate the late president of Turkey, Turgut Ozal, who passed away 20 years ago. He was the person who conducted a process of change between 1983 and 1993 that led to the emergence of the “new Turkey” in 2000s. It was Ozal who introduced the ideas of “scaling down” the state, global competition, market economy, and privatization into the agenda of Turkish politics.

Ozal held “unconventional” views about the Kurdish question that made him enemies as well as new friends. The Kurds of Turkey and Iraq found in him a brave and visionary politician who sincerely yet unsuccessfully tried to solve the problem. In this issue of the journal, the essays of Cengiz Candar, Morton Abramowitz, and Metin Heper shed light on his personality and ideas as a man and a politician.

We would also like to share the news that *Insight Turkey* held its 3rd Annual Conference in Brussels on March 25, 2013. In the last three years, *Insight Turkey* has organized its annual conference in three different continents, starting with America, moving to Asia, and most recently ending up in Europe. In Brussels, under the roof of the European Parliament, a distinguished group of academics, politicians, and journalists discussed the question of whether “Turkey and Europe are drifting apart.” Enjoy this spring issue of *Insight Turkey*! ■