Rise and Fall of the AK Party's Kurdish Peace Initiatives

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ABSTRACT *This study analyzes the peace and reconciliation initiatives of the AK Party governments (2002 until 2017) to address the Kurdish Question, with a special focus on the Reconciliation Process. Steps taken throughout the Reconciliation Process and the strengths and weaknesses of these steps are discussed. It is argued that the main challenges and shortcomings were the shifting political priorities of the Kurdish political actors, the changing balance of power within Turkish domestic politics, new opportunities presented to the Kurdish Movement by the Syrian civil war and the uncertainties Turkey faced due to this war. The main conclusion of the paper is that the regional turmoil, especially the ongoing civil wars in Syria and Iraq, is the major determinant that blocked the Reconciliation Process.*

Introduction

The Kurdish Question has been one of the top priority items in domestic politics for the AK Party government. Some serious efforts were made and two major initiatives were conducted by successive AK Party governments to address the Kurdish Question. The most serious effort was the Reconciliation Process (2013-2015). However earlier efforts paved the way for the Reconciliation Process. Erdoğan's Diyarbakır speech in 2005 signaled a change of opinion on the issue. While, along with the Kurdish Opening (2009), some legal amendments and democratization efforts were made to address the problem. The Reconciliation Process (*Çözüm Süreci*) was only possible with the backdrop of these earlier efforts. This study analyzes the peace and reconciliation initiatives of the AK Party governments (2002 until 2017) to address the Kurdish Question. More specific emphasis is on the Reconciliation Process or as it is known in Turkish the "Çözüm Süreci." Steps taken throughout the Reconciliation Process and the strengths and weaknesses of these steps are discussed within the general logic of peace processes.

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Peace Process as a Notion

A peace process is defined as the active attempt for the prevention and management of conflict between and within states.[1] The minimum requirements of a peace process involve the participation of the key protagonists in the process, cessation of violence, practicing political process and taking political steps that would prevent the reescalation of violence.[2] According to John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty, five essential criteria are required for a successful peace accord: 1) The conflicting parties are willing to negotiate in good faith, 2) Key actors are included in the process, 3) The negotiations address the central issues in the dispute, 4) Force is not used to achieve objectives, 5) The negotiators are committed to a sustained process.[3]

A peace process without the above-stated conditions has a very limited chance to be successful. A genuine peace process is different from ending an armed conflict or direct violence. Peace process is a comprehensive procedure that aims to focus on the social, economic, psychological and security-related aspects of the conflict. As Johan Galtung expresses,[4] ending the direct violence cannot be considered the ultimate purpose of the peace process by any means. It can take a long while to overcome and deal with all the aspects of the conflict and such a comprehensive result can never be obtained in most conflicts. However as long as the violence factor continues, convenient grounds to enable progress in other realms cannot be formed. Reaching a result that introduces social justice and consonance while meeting the expectations of all the conflicting parties as a result of negotiations might be the ideal solution. However, many negotiated peace agreements come to an end before achieving this ideal situation.

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The Reconciliation Process analyzed in this study refers to all the constructive efforts to reach a solution that were displayed after the cease-fire with the aim of coming up with a political solution in the long-running Kurdish Question. The Reconciliation Process emerged as a comprehensive process that encompassed legal, social and economic dimensions of the problem. Public diplomacy and communication strategies also comprised major elements of the process. Although a cease-fire was declared at the outset of the process, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) units deployed in Turkish soil did not withdraw despite their promise to do so. During and prior to the Reconciliation Process, a series of comprehensive legal regulations were carried out

towards the recognition of the rights Kurds requested.[5] However, a constitutional amendment regarding the local autonomy demands of the Kurdish National Movement[6] was not brought to the agenda. Despite the drawbacks, the psychological and bureaucratic impediments to permanent peace were minimized during the Reconciliation Process. The atmosphere of peace and stability experienced throughout the process left positive traces in the collective memory of various societal segments in Turkey, particularly of the people living in southeast Turkey. Therefore, this process cannot be regarded as a complete failure. On the other hand, the new phase of conflict that erupted in July 2015 has dramatically changed the resolution model, leading to a new route map.

From Kurdish Opening to Reconciliation Process

With his Diyarbakır speech on August 12, 2005, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan diverged significantly from the official discourses on the Kurdish issue. Erdoğan acknowledged the mistakes of the past governments on the Kurdish issue with the following quote: "there have been faults in the past and we are strong enough to solve these faults and questions."[7] Erdoğan also emphasized his commitment to resolve the "Kurdish Question" through democratization and economic progress. "Kurdish Problem is not just a problem of one part of this nation; it is a problem for all of them. It is also my problem… We will resolve this problem with more democracy, better citizenship rights and more wealth."[8]

Erdoğan's speech in Diyarbakır in 2005 was a bold attempt because it was more difficult to express voices that contradicted with the official position on the issue at that time. In the early 2000's the AK Party was still perceived more skeptically by the military and judicial establishment. It needs to be kept in mind that in 2005 the balance of power was in favor of the bureaucratic establishment and against the democratically elected AK Party government.

The first systematic peace initiative, which was termed the "democratic opening" or "Kurdish Opening" (*Demokratik Açılım / Kürt Açılımı*) later referred to as the "project for national unity and fraternity" (*milli birlik ve kardeşlik projesi*) was launched in early 2009. However, this initiative was weakened after the provocative return of PKK militants to Turkey through the Habur Border Gate and came to an end after the PKK's attack on the city of Tokat/ Reşadiye on December 7, 2009. The second initiative was called "Reconciliation Process/*Çözüm Süreci*." The Reconciliation Process started off with the Newroz declaration of Abdullah Öcalan in Newroz of 2013 (March 21). While the first initiative failed and the country entered a period of turbulence, the second initiative came to a halt due to the reignition of violence in July 2015.

The Kurdish Opening involved some dramatic changes in the Turkish govern-
ments' approach to the Kurdish issue, which was backed by some key legisla-
tion. In return, the PKK was expected to disarm and leave Turkish territories.
The Kurdish Opening was based on deliberative collective decision-making
with the contribution of third parties[9] and special emphasis was given to the
public diplomacy and deliberation dimension of the peace process. While
there was support for the Kurdish Opening at the bureaucratic level, the Turk-
ish public was more skeptical about the process. The Reconciliation Process
was a top-down process, which involved negotiations between Öcalan, on be-
half of the Kurdish Nationalist Movement, and the Turkish State. This study
argues that the Reconciliation Process emerged as a consequence of the Kurd-
ish Opening.

The Kurdish Opening received its official name of "Democratic Opening:
National Unity and Fraternity" in January 2010. The opening broadly con-
sidered the Kurdish problem from the perspectives of economic develop-
ment, democratization, and security. Pushing a security-based approach to
the background for the first time, more equalizing and liberating promises
were made in the political, economic, and social fields. The objectives and
paths to be taken for the resolution of issues such as the establishment of
a state approach respectful of rights and liberties in its attempt to prevent
terrorism, becoming a citizen of the Turkish Republic, Turkish remaining
as the official language but affording opportunities for other languages, dif-
ferences being regarded as cultural richness, preventing the feeling of "oth-
erness," ending the atmosphere which gave legitimacy to terrorism, protect-

ing Turkey's integrity and unitary structure, and becoming a stronger country in the international arena were put forth.[10] The Kurdish Opening process had the presupposition that it would reach its goal of ending terrorism through the path of democratization. By developing fundamental rights and liberties, easing problems of identity, preventing discrimination, and establishing equal political participation, the opening aimed to institute national coalescence.[11]

Throughout the Kurdish Opening process, important steps were taken on a legal basis in the area of democratization and an extensive negotiation platform was created inclusive of large sectors of society in terms of method. Through the medium of this platform, the creation of as big a supporting group as possible was attempted. The AK Party made it a priority to successfully launch the process and worked hard to achieve this.[12]

Although the process was suspended in an unexpected way, it was marked as one of the most serious attempts to introduce peace in the context of the Kurdish issue that has been ongoing for a century

Some of the key legislation of the Kurdish Opening include: establishing an independent human rights institution; creation of a commission for complaints against Turkish security forces; legalization of election campaigns and propaganda in languages other than Turkish; allowing prisoners to speak languages other than Turkish with their visitors; 24-hour private television stations to broadcast in languages other than Turkish; launching of official TRT 6 broadcasts in Kurdish; approval to universities to teach the Kurdish and Zazaki languages; renaming of residential areas in line with demands from locals; and permission of access to social and religious services in languages other than Turkish.

The Context and Dynamics Underlying the Reconciliation Process

On December 16, 2012, Hakan Fidan, the Chief of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MİT), met the PKK's imprisoned leader Abdullah Öcalan on İmralı Island, where Öcalan serves his sentence. Then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared this meeting to the public two weeks later on December 29. On December 28, upon being questioned about the Kurdish issue with the query "Is there any meeting nowadays?" during a broadcasting aired by state-run TV station TRT, Erdoğan said "There are still some ongoing meetings since we have to obtain some results. As long as we can see a light, we will keep on taking steps for this sake. But we would cut off the meetings

if there remains no light." In January 2013, a delegation of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) members headed to İmralı to meet Öcalan. This new peace initiative named the "Reconciliation Process" was coordinated with a focus on negotiating with Öcalan and therefore is also referred as the İmralı Process by some. To end the conflict, a three-phased plan was developed which included:

- Phase One: Gradual withdrawal of PKK forces from Turkish soil
- Phase Two: Democratic reforms from the Government side
- Phase Three: Integration of the PKK into political and civilian life following disarmament.[13]

Within this period, a series of negotiations were conducted with Öcalan through the medium of representatives. For the first time in the Republican history, the Turkish state openly admitted to having a direct contact with Öcalan while declaring an indirect contact with the Kurdish leadership in Qandil as well as Europe-based representatives of the PKK and the Kurdish Communities Union (KCK), an umbrella organization that includes the PKK. The process also helped to legitimize the negotiations between the government and the political agents representing the PKK. During this period, normalization was observed in the region for the first time over the past 30 years. Most of the psychological impediments to peace were overcome during this process and this new atmosphere paved the way for genuine discussions that could really contribute to the permanent peace.

The process came to an end on July 22, 2015, when the PKK shot two police officers in Ceylanpınar, Şanlıurfa. Following the Ceylanpınar attack, the level of violence escalated at a quick pace. Although the process was suspended in an unexpected way, it was marked as one of the most serious attempts to introduce peace in the context of the Kurdish issue that has been ongoing for a century. The mentality of the Reconciliation Process was quite different from that of the Kurdish Initiative.[14] But it can still be argued that the former was a significant forerunner of the latter.

The Design of the Process and Communication Strategies

March 21, 2013 is accepted as the unofficial commencement day of the Reconciliation Process. During the Nevruz celebrations in Diyarbakır province on that day, a letter penned by Öcalan which called for a peaceful and democratic resolution to the Kurdish Question was read by then BDP deputy Sırrı Süreyya Önder. The letter read: "We have come to a point today where guns shall be silenced and thoughts and ideas shall speak. A modernist paradigm that ignores, denies and externalizes has collapsed. Blood is being shed from

the heart of this land, regardless of whether it is from a Turk, Kurd, Laz or Circassian. A new era begins now; politics comes to the fore, not arms. Now it is time for our armed elements to move outside [Turkey's] borders."[15] The letter underscored the brotherhood between Turks and Kurds.

Following Öcalan's letter, a unilateral cease-fire was declared by the PKK on March 23. In May 2013, the PKK started withdrawing its forces within Turkey to Northern Iraq although ultimately only a limited proportion of its forces withdrew from Turkey.[16] The withdrawal process halted in September 2013 as the PKK expressed its disappointment on the pretext that the government failed to take adequate action in terms of promised reforms.[17] So, the first phase of the process was never completed, which then obstructed the following phases.

The process was built upon direct and indirect contacts with the leader of the Kurdish National Movement Öcalan, who was the primary agent of the entire process. All the relevant actors were incorporated into the process by the Kurdish National Movement. Military operations were halted and the authority to use special operation forces and military staff was assigned to civilian authorities and governors. The public was also included in the discussions by means of the Wise People Commission which was an attempt to prepare society for the changes in policies and destination. The Wise People Commission (WPC), known in Turkish as the "*Akil İnsanlar Heyeti*" was formed in order to share the details of the peace process with the public and boost public support to the process. On April 3, 2013, then Prime Minister Erdoğan announced the list of the "wise people," which consisted of 63 members (41 men and 12 women).[18] The WPC dealt with a busy schedule of work for more than two months. The commission comprised seven groups that were active in seven regions of the country.

The Commission was not formed just to expound the government's plans to resolve the Kurdish Question to the public.[19] It was designed as a genuine civilian initiative and included public figures such as artists, writers, academics, civil society leaders, activists, etc. The Commission functioned as a public dialogue and deliberation mechanism endeavoring to grasp people's expectations from the Reconciliation Process and took note of people's reservations and criticisms on the subject. The Commission had a considerable public visibility during the course of its activities. The seven groups

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of the Commission submitted their final reports to the Prime Minister, some of which are open to public access.

Despite the efforts of the Wise People Commission, the process was not sufficiently conveyed to the public and significantly representatives of the opposition parties in the Parliament were not included in the process. For this reason, there have been various criticisms regarding the comprehensiveness and transparency of the process. A number of political prisoners, imprisoned as part of the KCK trial were released during the process. Several critical legal arrangements were made to accomplish a political resolution. While an atmosphere that instilled hope was prevalent in the southeastern and eastern regions of the country, suspicion and reluctance prevailed in the other regions. Within this process, tourism and other economic activities also prospered from the effect of this positive atmosphere.[20]

The NGOs outside of the Kurdish National Movement, other political parties, important leaders from different opinion groups and independent intellectuals in the region were not included in the process. In fact, these groups complained about the pressure that the Kurdish National Movement exerted on them. So, the process only encompassed the main parties of the conflict. These groups also stated that the process led to a consolidation of the Kurdish National Movement while excluding all the other major political agents. The security measures became less visible and there was an impression suggesting that a vacuum emerged in public security throughout the process. Taking advantage of this vacuum, the armed wings of the movement increased their military build-up. They formed urban youth branches including the Patriotic Revolutionist Youth Movement (YDG-H) and trained them to organize uprisings in cities. In addition the municipalities run by the Kurdish National Movement's offshoot Democratic Regions Party (DBP), aided the organization's military build-up activities to a great extent.[21] During this period, public funds were misused to pile up military equipment for terrorists. Police and military officers wavered in intervening in some actions of the organization that went against the logic of the peace process so as not to undermine the continuity of the process.

The AK Party government was accused of not displaying the required sensitivity towards the feelings of Kurds in the context of the Syrian Kurds' fight

against ISIS forces in Kobani (Ayn al-Arab). This claim of insensitivity paved the way for the propaganda alleging that the AK Party government is an ally of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and al-Nusra terrorist groups in Syria. The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and the PKK figures actively manipulated this claim as a propaganda tool and the AK Party failed to convince Kurds about the baselessness of these accusations. Most of the Turkish people were not yet ready for such a grand policy shift. Some debates arguing that the AK Party government did not adequately consider the Kurdish National Movement's expectations and sensitivities during the Syrian civil war came to the agenda. However, during the same period, thousands of Syrian Kurds who fled from the (ISIS) threat in Kobani safely took shelter in Turkish territories.[22] As can be seen, the civil war ongoing in Syria stood out as the biggest obstacle to the Reconciliation Process.

Changes During the Reconciliation Process

There were two main reasons underlying the decline of the Reconciliation Process: The first one is the constant increase of the Kurdish National Movement's expectations throughout the process. It eventually became very difficult for the government to meet their growing demands. The Kurdish National Movement's expectations rose at a quick pace in the face of a series of developments including the Gezi Park protests, the December 17-25 judicial coup attempt plotted by Gülenist terror group (FETÖ) that tried to charge several AK Party ministers with corruption, changing balances of power in the Syrian civil war and the advance of the PKK's Syrian offshoot. The balance of powers turned against the government throughout the process. Some groups even argued that Erdoğan and the AK Party would lose their grip.

Secondly, the electoral period in Turkey undermined the atmosphere required for peace negotiations and polarized the political circles in the country even further. Since controversial political issues are brought to the agenda more intensively during electoral periods, such periods can escalate political tensions. For this reason, political agents from many countries across the world abstain from bringing highly-debated issues such as peace processes to the agenda during electoral periods. Nevertheless, different agents within the Kurdish National Movement issued discordant messages to the public while the government tried to be more consistent. The AK Party electorate approached the process skeptically; in fact the process even sparked nationalistic tendencies within the party. While Erdoğan and the AK Party led and motivated the party base to continue with the process, a part of the AK Party electorate swung to the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) as a response to the Reconciliation Process. The Kurdish National Movement seized the period of loosened security measures as a golden opportunity to store

up weapons and reorganize its militants for urban warfare. Easier access to weapons due to the Syrian civil war and the international legitimacy enjoyed by the PKK's Syrian offshoot Democratic Union Party (PYD), thanks to its fight against ISIS led to the consideration of other alternatives. The Kurdish National Movement at that stage started to aim for a cantonal structure based on establishing self-rule.

The Kurdish National Movement's Dilemma: Being Integrated to Turkey or the Middle East?

Considering the campaigns towards the presidential election that was held in August 2014, the HDP endeavored to build a rhetoric that encompassed all the Turkish electorate by employing a strategic language of resistance against Erdoğan. The party's electoral campaigns put emphasis on Kurdish nationalism in eastern and southeastern regions while opposition to Erdoğan was highlighted in the other regions. The HDP's campaign can be said to have been a success since the party passed the 10 percent election threshold in the general elections held in June 2015 and November 2015. But this achievement does not necessarily mean that they reached their objective to become an integral part of Turkey's political and social dynamics.[23] This policy was a significant move for the Kurdish National Movement since it indicated that the movement would try to achieve their goals through political means and exert efforts to be integrated into Turkish society by addressing the people that are not part

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of the Kurdish political movement. However, one of the most critical mistakes made in peace processes in general is the effort to render the protagonists of the process illegitimate. The Kurdish National Movement and the HDP disregarded the peace process parameters with their efforts to represent President Erdoğan as an illegitimate figure although he was their primary interlocutor in the process. This plunge, which was firstly interpreted as a reflection of political pragmatism, ultimately became one of the main reasons that sharpened the lack of trust between the main actors and put the process to an end. The PKK, meanwhile, changed its strategic priority towards being an influential regional actor in the Middle East in the presence of the authority gap caused by the decline of the Assad regime in Syria. The PKK sought to take advantage of this authority gap caused by the civil wars in Syria and Iraq and the West's climbing concerns over ISIS. Within this perspective, the PKK started to position itself as a regional actor in the Middle East.

Changing Goals and the Kurdish National Movement's Rising Expectations

As the PKK started committing terror attacks as of July 2015 and the party officials failed to maintain a distance to the PKK's assaults, the HDP's claims of efforts to be integrated into Turkey were overshadowed. The HDP co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ supported the demands of "democratic autonomy" and "self-rule" that was declared by the Democratic Society Congress (DTK) on December 27, 2015.[24] The HDP's endeavors to be integrated into Turkey were undermined by the clashes between Turkish security forces and the PKK.

In the general election held in June 2015, the AK Party lost its parliamentary majority as the Kurdish electorate swung to the HDP while the Turkish nationalists predominantly opted for the MHP.[25] The Kurdish support to the AK Party declined not only in eastern and southeastern regions, but also in metropolitan cities including İstanbul, İzmir and Adana. The Reconciliation Process played a central role in this change and was used as a tool to solidify the unofficial networks affiliated with the HDP and the PKK. On the other hand, the nationalist Turks were disturbed by the peace process conducted with the PKK, which led them to swing to the MHP.

Elections and the Deceleration of the Reconciliation Process

Up until July 2015, when the PKK exacerbated its assaults again which led to the suspension of the Reconciliation Process, there were hopes to restructure the political dynamics in Turkey.[26] Peace processes do generally have complex and volatile characteristics, and the parties involved in the process draw a great deal of lessons from past experiences, especially from their mistakes and accomplishments.[27] As a matter of fact, election periods are not convenient times to carry out peace processes since political polarizations always better serve the interests of political leaders seeking to increase their vote share. Despite that, the Reconciliation Process in Turkey did not come to an end, but was decelerated, throughout the electoral campaigns.

Soon after the June 2015 general election, a new wave of insurrections broke out in July, which marked the end of the Reconciliation Process. Three major developments jeopardized the process: the rising expectations of the Kurdish National Movement, the *de facto* autonomy of the PYD in the north Syria, and Demirtaş and the HDP's efforts to defame President Erdoğan. The AK Party, on the other hand, decelerated the Reconciliation Process during the electoral campaign period as a response to the criticisms of the conservative and nationalist Turkish electorate and the concerns of its conventional base.

During the Syrian civil war, the AK Party's foreign policy disappointed a certain proportion of the Kurdish population in Turkey. Although the government expressed that it expected the PYD to act in line with the moderate opponents in the Syrian civil war, the PYD most of the time acted in parallel to the regime's forces. The government's criticisms in this respect were represented as an antagonism against Kurds within the HDP base. This propaganda addressed the base of the Kurdish movement. Meanwhile, the government's reluctance to get directly involved in the clashes ongoing in Kobani between ISIS and the PYD's armed wing, namely the People's Protection Units (YPG), led to rising criticisms towards the AK Party amongst the Kurds in Turkey. Such developments raised the expectations of Kurdish political actors.

Shifting Balances of Power between Protagonists

During the Reconciliation Process, the domestic political context in Turkey and the situation in Syria changed dramatically, which led to the shifting of the balance of power between the main interlocutors of the process. The AK Party was at the peak of its power and legitimacy when the Reconciliation Process was initiated, whereas the PKK was in a very weak position. After this referendum Erdoğan started to take bolder steps along their political reform

agenda. The AK Party won the 2011 parliamentary elections with the support of almost the half of the Turkish electorate and this wide margin (49.5 percent) in its third term boosted its confidence. At the same time in the early stages of the "Arab Spring," the AK Party experience was presented as an ideal

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model for the MENA countries and the party with its leader Erdoğan gained international recognition and popularity. Whereas the PKK was in a very weak position with its plans to initiate uprising and autonomy in Şemdinli failed due to the Turkish security forces' stiff rebuff.

The AK Party started to have some serious challenges in both domestic politics and in its MENA policy starting from mid-2014, while the escalation of the civil war in Syria provided new opportunities for the PKK. Following the Gezi Park protests and the December 17-25 judicial coup attempt plotted by FETÖ, the PKK and the HDP came to regard the government and Erdoğan as the disadvantaged party of the negotiations.[28] It was later seen that this was a faulty evaluation to make in such a volatile process. While Öcalan seemed to conduct a series of large-scale negotiations with the AK Party government on behalf of the Kurdish National Movement, other agents within the Kurdish political movement seized the fluctuations in the AK Party government's power as a new opportunity to strengthen their influence on the table. Their interests during the Reconciliation Process were not completely in line with the position they obtained in the new order of power relations in the Middle East led by the Syrian civil war. The PKK leaders' criticisms and accusations that targeted the AK Party and Erdoğan after the June election demonstrated the PKK's new position and rising self-confidence. For instance, during an interview he gave to the BBC, senior PKK figure Cemil Bayık blamed Erdoğan for backing ISIS atrocities and trying to prevent the acquisitions of territory by Kurds.[29] Duran Kalkan, another senior figure of the PKK, also accused Erdoğan of disrupting the peace process.[30]

The Gezi Park protests posed a major challenge to the AK Party by mobilizing identity-related polarizations in Turkey. During the protests, attempts were made to split Turkish society by agitating some binary opposites such as secular-conservative, AK Party proponent-AK Party dissident, Alevi-Sunni and so on. The protests started two months after the initiation of the Reconciliation Process.[31] Therefore, the Kurdish National Movement was reluctant to join the demonstrations. In particular the left wing of the Kurdish National Movement criticized the PKK and the HDP since they both decided not to get directly involved in the protests. Despite confronting serious challenges such as the Gezi

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Park protests and the December 17-25 incidents, the AK Party government and Erdoğan maintained their robust positions. The leaders of the Kurdish movement wavered between making use of the vulnerability of the government and continuing with the peace process. New data demonstrating collaboration between FETÖ and the PKK can also shed light on the vulnerability of that period. The movement raised its expectations from the Reconciliation Process regardless of their positions. This change encouraged the PKK to exacerbate its violent acts and form an armed militia named the Patriotic Revolutionist Youth Movement (YDG-H)[32] with the aim of stirring urban insurrections in some southeastern cities to declare autonomy.

Shaking of the Regional Order and the Alternative to Negotiations

The second factor that raised the Kurdish National Movement's expectations was the on-going civil war in Syria. The PYD and the YPG obtained some political advantages and domination over the cantons of Afrin, Jazira and Kobani located in northern Syria. Despite the HDP's criticisms towards Turkey due to the Kobani blockade kicked off in September 2014, the PYD was not in a position to defend Kobani without external support, including the support of Turkey. The PYD ended the humanitarian crisis in Kobani with the aid of the Peshmerga forces of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), who went to Kobani by passing through Turkish territory. Significantly, the fighters who were wounded during the blockade were treated in Turkish hospitals while thousands of Kurdish civilians who fled from the siege took shelter in Turkey.[33]

ISIS's siege of Kobani fueled the ethnic-nationalist consciousness among the Kurds in Turkey. Both the PKK and the HDP used the Kobani fight to move towards their internal mobilization goals. The climbing tension due to Kobani and the accusations against Turkey alleging that the Turkish government supported ISIS resulted in the October 6-8 incidents,[34] during which more than 50 Turkish citizens were killed. The PYD's fight against ISIS also contributed to the international legitimacy of the organization. The acquisitions in Syria were valorized as an epic victory especially by the younger generations of Kurds. The regional autonomy in the north of Syria also raised the hopes and expectations of founding an "independent and united Kurdistan."

The PYD obtained wide international support and military aid as it success-fully managed to turn its resistance to ISIS and struggle against a "rogue state" into an international propaganda campaign. Especial attention was focused on the "women warriors" of the movement who were widely portrayed in leading international news sources.[35] In addition to that, the international military aid provided to the PYD enhanced the capacity of the PKK, rendering the or-ganization more powerful against Turkish security forces. The discourse and ideology of the ethnic-nationalist resistance built against ISIS mainly targeted the AK Party. The PKK manipulated the antagonism of younger generations of Kurds and steered their anger towards the AK Party. The government, on the other hand, failed to grasp the sensitivities of Kurdish ethnic-nationalism in Syria.

The De-legitimization of Parties and Problems of Loyalty

The third factor that raised the HDP's political expectations was the party co-chair Demirtaş's[36] electoral campaign for the 2014 Presidential Election. Pull-ing in a considerable amount of support from the young population in met-ropolitan cities with his anti-Erdoğan discourse, Demirtaş received around four million votes, which corresponded to 9.78 percent of the total.[37] As this result instilled Demirtaş with self-confidence, he decided to maintain his an-ti-Erdoğan focus following the election instead of adopting a new political dis-course. Demirtaş's motto was: "We will not make you [Erdoğan] president."[38] The HDP enjoyed a substantial support with the effect of this campaign.

The Syrian civil war and the PYD's success in its fight against ISIS helped the PKK and the PYD become substantial actors in the turbulent atmosphere of the Middle East. While consolidating their legitimacy on the international are-na by defaming the Islamist agents in the region, the PYD and the PKK repre-sented the AK Party as a supporter of these agents.[39] Although their political and parliamentary representative, namely the HDP, exerted efforts to be inte-grated into Turkey, the PKK aspired to become an important component of the Middle East equation. The PKK proved once again that it is the dominant agent in the Kurdish National Movement by giving up the Reconciliation Pro-cess due to its Pan-Kurdist agenda. This choice jeopardized the HDP's political strategy of being integrated into Turkey.

The results obtained in the general elections held in June 2015 and November 2015 showed that the HDP is likely to be an important and consistent agent of Turkish politics in years to come.[40] Despite having a slight decline in its vote share in the November election, the party's vote rate was still regarded as successful. Both domestic and international conjunctures were effective in this result. Demirtaş gained advantage from Gezi Park protests and the ris-

As the "Dolmabahçe Agreement" between the government and the HDP delegations could not be well managed, the trust between the parties was shaken even more while the public started to question the transparency of the process

ing opposition to Erdoğan. On the other hand, the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, and Kurds' resistance to ISIS in these countries consolidated the legitimacy of Kurdish agents in the Middle East. The HDP's efforts to evolve from an ethno-centric party to a "national" one had been successful to a certain extent until the PKK restarted its violent attacks in July 2015.

All in all, the HDP's rhetoric of identity politics increased the party's election performance but the PKK attacks constituted a great impediment to this performance. It is difficult to regard the HDP and the PKK as completely separate entities, but it is apparent that the PKK's objectives and regional ambitions posed a major obstacle to the progress of the HDP as an autonomous political actor. While the HDP tried to improve its position as a legitimate political actor that would be a serious candidate to attract the popular support from all sections of Turkish society "Türkiyeli-leşme," the PKK sought to be a regional actor within the turbulent Middle East (Middle Easternization). Ultimately, the PKK, which was the actor having the final word, hampered the Reconciliation Process. The PKK and the HDP tried to turn the societal support they enjoyed during this period into a civil insurrection. Due to the PKK's presence in Syria, it was possible for the international community to favor such an insurrection. However, these plans did not appeal to the local population of the region and the PKK was completely defeated in its trench and barricade strategies and urban warfare attempts.

Declining Trust and the Lack of Third Parties

The Reconciliation Process generated an excitement particularly amongst the Kurdish population in Turkey. In the eastern and southeastern regions, the hopes to achieve a sustained peace were raised. Since the entities and actors affiliated with the Kurdish National Movement were chosen as the main counterpart, the Kurds that are not affiliated with the movement felt left out. For the Kurdish National Movement, on the other hand, the Reconciliation Process and the developments in Syria, particularly the PYD's acquisitions towards autonomy, caused a distinct eagerness to build a nation.

The majority of Turkish people approached the Reconciliation Process with suspicion but the AK Party governments' devotion to the process had a pos-

The people of Diyarbakır were once more free to sit in front of the Great Mosque after the curfew was lifted in March 2016.

AA PHOTO / OSMAN ÖKSÜZ

itive impact on public support. Despite all concerns, people were happy with the cease-fire between the security forces and the PKK. As the process did not have transparency in general, the leaders of both parties played a major role in convincing their own base, however, the opposition parties and NGOs remained skeptical of the process due to this lack of transparency. They asked to be informed about the process many times yet they were unable to get the expected information. The Wise People Commission played a significant role throughout the process; however, it had a unidirectional communication strategy that did not include explaining the general mindset and details of the Reconciliation Process to citizens.

Many incidents undermined the mutual trust between the AK Party government and the Kurdish National Movement, which rendered the Reconciliation Process even more complex. The October 6-8 incidents created serious suspicions within the government regarding the intentions of the movement. More than 50 people were killed during this tumult while many schools, libraries and other public properties were destroyed. The degree of vandalism and violence witnessed in the incidents shocked the AK Party government and incensed Turkish people. In addition, the withdrawal of PKK militants from Turkish territories had never reached the desired level. In the meantime, the PKK was building and training its youth branches, namely YDG-H and YDG-J, preparing them for an urban insurrection. The armament in some southeastern cities or districts climbed to a critical level. Having access to weapons became easier due to the ongoing civil wars and clashes in Syria and Iraq with Turkey's southern border suffering from serious security lapses allowing infiltration of fighters and armaments. These factors prepared a suitable ground for the PKK's return to violence with some municipalities run by the DBP or the

Unlike the situation in the 1990s, the Kurdish Question evolved into a region wide problem particularly due to the civil wars ongoing in Iraq and Syria

HDP being complicit in facilitating weapon storage.

According to the Kurdish National Movement's point of view, the AK Party's antagonistic approach to the PYD contradicted the objectives of the Reconciliation Process and the general framework of the reconciliation efforts between the Turkish government and the Kurdish National Movement. During this period, constitutional amendments that would meet their expectations of a liberal democratic constitution were not achieved. The government did not openly recommend a road map for legislative regulations regarding the Kurdish National Movement's regional autonomy demands. The Kurdish National Movement representatives accused the government of undermining the process by denying the "Dolmabahçe Agreement." However, President Erdoğan has never recognized such an agreement. Erdoğan expressed that the claimed gathering of two parties at Dolmabahçe Palace was not true. He also expressed his concerns in that the monitoring commission might be abused.[41] Erdoğan also remarked that the Reconciliation Process encompassed 78 million citizens and interested everyone in Turkey.

On February 28, 2015, a delegation of HDP members consisting of Sırrı Süreyya Önder, İdris Baluken and Pervin Buldan met with a delegation of government officials leaded by then Deputy Prime Minister Yalçın Akdoğan. Akdoğan and Önder read their statements in the meeting. According to some news sources, Önder listed 10 articles that summarized Öcalan's priorities.[42] President Erdoğan denied it by saying, "I do not recognize the phrase 'Dolmabahçe Agreement.' There is a government and there is a political party with its grassroots [from the PKK]. If there is a step to take for the future of our country, this should be made in parliament. There cannot be an agreement with a political party that is being supported by a terrorist organization."

Erdoğan said: "There is not a democracy call on this 10 articled text. How could this text be associated with democracy? When examined closely, it can be seen that most of the topics within the text do not have anything to do with democracy. And still, new demands are coming up. A statement was issued by the Deputy Prime Minister, which is the direct opposite of their claims. So, there is no matching data. Then what did they discuss? Can you call it a joint declaration? Is there such a thing?"[43]

As the "Dolmabahçe Agreement" between the government and the HDP delegations could not be well managed, the trust between the parties was shaken even more while the public started to question the transparency of the process.

Eventually, this matter has been a tangible example illustrating some deficiencies of the Reconciliation Process. The lack of transparency, the conflicts in the agendas of the two parties and the fact that the public was not yet ready for the process stood out as several important factors that blocked the process.

The Reasons Underlying the Failure of the Reconciliation Process

There are many interrelated reasons underlying the failure of the Kurdish initiative and the Reconciliation Process. Aside from the fluctuations in Turkey's domestic politics, the uncertainties in the region, the influence of important regional actors, and the competition and disputes among senior figures of the Kurdish National Movement also lead to the failure. The relative success of both processes cannot be denied; however, they failed to reach their ultimate goals of a long-term cease-fire and introducing a permanent solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey. Unlike the situation in the 1990s, the Kurdish Question evolved into a region wide problem particularly due to the civil wars ongoing in Iraq and Syria. This factor also formed an invisible resilience to resolving the problem only through the initiative of Turkey. International actors did not side with Turkey's solving the issue with its unilateral initiative. Ultimately, Turkey preferred to carry out the process through its own initiative but the lack of international support stood out as one of the main deficiencies of the process.

It is hardly possible to evaluate each individual reason separately and determine which factor was more influential in the failure of the process. To sum up, the factors listed below stand out as the main reasons:

1) The public, especially the conservative Turks, were not yet mentally ready for the process.
2) The PKK trained and prepared its youth branches for an urban insurrection by means of its political offshoots.
3) The mobilization capacity, political opportunities and self-confidence of the PKK increased more than expected due to the Syrian civil war and loosened security in the region.
4) The Kurdish National Movement raised its political expectations and objectives during the process with the effect of its rising mobilization capacity.
5) The PKK leaders in Qandil failed to undergo the intellectual transformation required for peace. In addition they were engaged in an intra party competition with the political leaders affiliated with the HDP and the DBP.
6) The balances of power between the government and the Kurdish National Movement showed a change throughout the process.
7) Some problems of mutual trust and safety emerged due to the lack of a mediator, monitoring body or an exercising authority.

Compared to the Kurdish Initiative, the Reconciliation Process was a more comprehensive and assertive process that sought a sustainable solution to the Kurdish Question

The predominant factor in the failure of the Kurdish initiative was the absence of societal readiness. As part of the Kurdish initiative, creating a feasible atmosphere to ensure more substantial steps were attempted. Therefore, public discussions constituted a considerable component of the process. The Kurdish initiative was a process that formed the grounds of direct negotiation efforts. This endeavor could not avert the conflicts but still achieved a number of positive changes. The initiative necessitated a paradigm shift in the official view on the Kurdish Question. For the first time, the official agents recognized that the Kurdish Question is not simply a terrorism or violence problem, and alternative approaches other than security-focused measures must be employed in this regard.

The discussions yielded some results in official and elite segments but failed to achieve a transformation in grassroots. The ceasing of terror attacks and the decline in losses of life and property were the major factors that convinced the public. However, the vulnerabilities in terms of violence lead to a general confusion in society and the expected mutual trust was never fully established. The AK Party also could not sufficiently persuade its own base of the necessity of the process. In particular the AK Party electorate in Central and Western Anatolia kept the alternative solutions to the issue at a distance. Furthermore, the relative legitimization of political agents affiliated with the Kurdish National Movement lead some Kurdish AK Party proponents to swing to the HDP. The swing votes also accentuated the AK Party base's critical approach to the Reconciliation Process.

The legal steps that reformed the individual and group rights of Kurdish citizens were also marked as important moderating steps. They fell short of resolving the Kurdish Question, but a great change has occurred in the stances of official agents. Since the AK Party government publicly abstained from accepting the main representative of the Kurdish National Movement as an interlocutor during the Kurdish initiative, it was seen as a one-sided initiative. It can also be argued that the lack of trust between the parties escalated during this period. The Kurdish Initiative was subjected to heavy criticisms due to the way the PKK militants were greeted when they surrendered at the Habur Border Gate to Iraq and the government could not avert the wave of public criticisms. Considering this drawback of the Kurdish Initiative, the dimension of public diplomacy was taken into account in a more comprehensive way during the Reconciliation Process.

Compared to the Kurdish Initiative, the Reconciliation Process was a more comprehensive and assertive process that sought a sustainable solution to the Kurdish Question. Unlike the Kurdish Initiative, the Process was based on the direct negotiation of key primary parties. The phases of the process had been roughly outlined beforehand and the ultimate goal was designated as disarming the PKK and ending the period of armed conflict. Despite the serious disturbance within its own base, the AK Party government took major risks throughout the process. Although the Wise People Commission played a role in the public diplomacy aspect of the Reconciliation Process, both parties fell short of convincing their own societal bases to support the new situation.

Furthermore, a divergence was observed between the HDP and the PKK. The HDP's political achievements lead to uneasiness within the armed wing of the organization. The PKK leadership wished to take precedence over the HDP, which stood out as the representative of the Kurdish movement through the process. A confusion prevailed in the Kurdish political and societal realms. The armed agents had the final word with regard to the future of the process and they did not want to change this status. A similar confusion was also observed in the base of the ruling party. The ruling party had difficulty in explaining the importance of the process to its own base. The AK Party's popular base has always approached the process skeptically. As a result, a solid social support that would balance the political fluctuations and flaws and contribute to peace was not achieved. If a comprehensive orientation program addressing the public had been conducted and the public had been conditioned to the idea of permanent peace, society might have been more disappointed by the eventual failure of the process. This is one of the paradoxes observed in the socialization of peace processes.

The mobilization capacity of the PKK militants increased with the international political and military support to the PYD and the easy access to sophisticated weapon systems in Syria. Thus the PKK had a chance to reorganize itself in urban areas due to the relaxed security environment. The KCK also intensified its political endeavors in urban centers during the same period. The atmosphere created thanks to the Reconciliation Process enabled a convenient environment for the PKK and the KCK to pile up weaponry and ammunition and run their political propaganda more freely. The appearance of such a convenient environment also encouraged the hawkish wing of the organization. The relaxed security measures during the process were misinterpreted by the organization as a chance to increase their mobilization. The sudden and sharp decline in the visibility and influence of the state's security forces increased the opportunities and mobilization resources of the PKK thus encouraging an urban insurgency.

The availability of the atmosphere and resources required for feasibility and insurrection is considered among the most important factors that can mo-

bilize conflict within the literature of civil wars and ethnic conflicts.[44] Peace processes normally function with the presumption that the parties approach to the process in good faith. Therefore, the conflicting parties are expected to pursue more constructive behaviors and strategies during the process. If the ambiguities in terms of security are abused by parties, the process can easily go wrong and irreparable tensions will arise between the parties. The PKK and the KCK abused the feasible atmosphere caused by the Reconciliation Process and the situation in Syria. During the process, the organization stockpiled weapons and ammunition while accelerating its ideological activities towards the youth. In addition, the Kurdish National Movement figures interpreted the state's constructions of dams and Turkish military stations called "kalekol" in the course of the process as malevolent and threatening steps. The construction sites and companies building the kalekols and dams were subjected to arson attacks by the organization. The state's kalekol constructions and efforts to block the supply points of the organization stirred reactions and criticisms within the PKK.

The HDP's success in the June 2015 general election and the PYD's *de facto* autonomy in the north of Syria affected the PKK. Hoping to expand the autonomous canton system into Turkish territories, on August 12, 2015, the KCK declared self-rule in some 12 districts of Turkey. The KCK's influential propaganda, public diplomacy and mobilization efforts influenced this result and, following this declaration, nationalist tendencies climbed among both Turks and Kurds. The HDP's success in the political realm did not mean that the violent actions of the Kurdish National Movement were condoned but despite this the party took advantage of the new situation created by the Reconciliation Process. Meanwhile, the PKK's acquisitions in northern Syria and the HDP's success in politics rapidly raised the Kurdish National Movement's expectations from the process. It was hard to meet their rising expectations only through the negotiations since they were interpreting their own acquisitions as a weakness in the opposing party, the Turkish government.

The Reconciliation Process was not maintained with a distinct outline and route map, which was one of the significant deficiencies of the process. The government planned to make a series of reforms that would allow democratization and universal standards of group rights in the context of the Kurdish Question and in return expected the absolute cessation of the PKK's armed conflict. The Kurdish National Movement, on the other hand, was in the pursuit of a political status, which would grant them a certain extent of agency. This pursuit was at a point situated between federalism/autonomy and independence. The PYD's *de facto* autonomy in some cantons of northern Syria gave them the confidence to believe they could expand their autonomy inside Turkish territories. The expectations oscillated since the route map and negotiation positions were not explicitly determined. As it became clear that

converging the two parties onto the same point was nearly impossible, the Qandil leaned towards the Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement (BAT-NA). As a result the wave of violence and terror ongoing over the past two years has led to a crisis of trust that is hard to overcome and has rendered such a step almost impossible.

The Gezi Park protests, the December 17-25 judicial coup attempt, the AK Party's loss of its parliamentary majority in the June election, and the AK Party government's much criticized Syria policy due to its consequences were among the important developments that undermined the AK Party. Of international significance is the fact that Erdoğan, the former Prime Minister and current President since 2014, has been subjected to various criticisms due to the above-mentioned accusations and his stance towards the Arab Spring. Erdoğan and the AK Party have been confronting a consistent and widespread defamation campaign in the international arena.

Although the Reconciliation Process came to a *de facto* end, it is yet projected to be in a phase of stalemate but might be re-initiated with a different logic under more favorable conditions

The PYD, meanwhile, represented itself as the only secular agent fighting against ISIS and al-Nusra Front in the Syrian civil war. The legitimization of the PYD particularly by the Western countries also strengthened the PKK's legitimacy and position. Until the reelections held in November 2015, the image and power of the AK Party government declined while the PYD and the PKK enjoyed being represented as an "antidote" to ISIS. The success of the HDP both in June and November elections also boosted the party's self-confidence.

The absence of a monitoring body was another reason underlying the failure of the process. The Reconciliation Process was kicked off with a great excitement displayed by both parties but it did not meet the main expectations of the agents. The parties blamed each other for not sticking to their commitments throughout the process. The PKK did not completely withdraw its militants from Turkish soil while the militants in urban areas were not disarmed. The absence of a third party that would monitor the allegiance to disarmament and other commitments was among the greatest deficiencies of the process.

Instead of withdrawing its militants out of Turkey, the PKK formed an organization named YDG-H/ YDG-J, which drew on young people with an aim to stir an urban insurrection. The AK Party government's denial of the Dolma-

bahçe meetings disappointed the Kurdish National Movement. The presence of a third party as a monitoring organ could have enhanced the transparency of the process. The third party could also have made great contributions to overcoming the commitment problems between the government and the Kurdish National Movement. Besides, a controllable and staged process management might have yielded more productive and permanent results. Such deficiencies in the design of the process resulted in a crisis within the peace talks.

Conclusion

Although the Reconciliation Process came to a *de facto* end, it is yet projected to be in a phase of stalemate but might be re-initiated with a different logic under more favorable conditions. Changes within the regional context will be key to the direction of future steps. Even if there may be new efforts to find political solutions to the Kurdish Question, it seems that Turkish decision makers will no more accept the PKK as their counterpart. Both positive and negative lessons learned from the failed initiatives will be key to future peace processes. After the developments in Iraq and Syria within the last couple of years, the Kurdish Question seems to be a more regional issue than a domestic one. Any new peace initiative needs to take the question within a broader regional framework if its wants to be more effective. ●

Endnotes

1. Jonathan Tonge, *Comparative Peace Processes*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), p. 7; John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty (Eds.), *The Management of Peace Processes*, (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 6-8.

2. Tonge, *Comparative Peace Processes*.

3. John Darby and Roger Mac Ginty (Eds.), *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Peace Processes and Post-war Reconstruction*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 2.

4. Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1969), pp. 167-191.

5. For a detailed compilation of the democratization steps taken during the AK Party period, see: "The Silent Revolution: Turkey's Democratic Change and Transformation Inventory 2002-2014," (Ankara: The Undersecretariat of Public Order and Security, 2014).

6. Kurdish National Movement or Kurdish Ethno-nationalist Movement is characterized in this study as a specific term, which includes all the social, political organizations, armed units, international networks, crime networks and the terrorist organizations (PKK) that are affiliated with Abdullah Öcalan and his idea of revolutionary struggle against the Turkish state. PKK, which is the dominant actor within the Kurdish National Movement is listed as a terrorist organization by scores of states and international organizations. Kurdish National Movement adopts violence as a part of their strategy. The umbrella organization KCK (Kurdistan Communities Union), PKK, legal political parties –HDP (People's Democracy Party) and DBP (Democratic Regions Party)– and the European pillar of the KCK are included under the Kurdish National Movement. There are some other nationalist Kurdish parties, crime networks,

civil society organizations which are not related directly or affiliated to Öcalan and his ideology. These organizations and networks are not considered as part of the Kurdish National Movement. With its pillars in Syria, Iraq, Iran and Europe, the Kurdish National Movement has turned into a transnational organization.

7. Erhan Seven, "Kürt Sorunu Benim Sorunum," *Yeni* Şafak, (August 13, 2005), retrieved May 4, 2017 from http://www.yenisafak.com/arsiv/2005/agustos/13/p01.html.

8. Seven, "Kürt Sorunu Benim Sorunum."

9. Sezen Ceceli Köse, "Müzakereci Demokrasi Kuramı ve Toplumsal ve Politik Dönüşümün İmkanları: Kürt Açılımı Üzerine Bir İnceleme," *Spectrum*, No. 89 (2012), p. 115.

10. Hüseyin Yayman, *Şark Meselesinden Kürt Açılımına Türkiye'nin Kürt Sorunu Hafızası*, (Ankara: SETA Publications, 2011) pp. 375-377.

11. Yalçın Akdoğan, *İnsanı Yaşat ki Devlet Yaşasın: Demokratik Açılım Sürecinde Yaşananlar*, (İstanbul: Meydan Yayınları, 2010), pp. 19-21.

12. Pamphlets like "Sorular ve Cevaplarıyla Demokratik Açılım Süreci: Milli Birlik ve Kardeşlik Projesi" were published by the AK Party in January 2010.

13. "Turkey's Kurdish Conflict: An Assessment of the Current Process," *DPI-Democratic Progress Institute*, (November 2013).

14. On July 29, 2009, the AK Party government initiated the Kurdish Initiative, also called as the Democratic Initiative, which was based on a democratization policy. Then Interior Minister Beşir Atalay was assigned to coordinate the initiative. It was renamed "National Unity and Brotherhood Project" in January 2010 and the AK Party released a booklet entitled *Sorularla ve Cevaplarıyla Demokratik Açılım Süreci: Milli Birlik ve Kardeşlik Projesi* (Questions and Answers on the Democratic Initiative Process: The National Unity and Brotherhood Project) to introduce the project.

15. "Öcalan Calls on Kurdish Militants to Bid Farewell to Arms for a New Turkey," *Hurriyet Daily News*, (March 21, 2013), retrieved March 7, 2016 from http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/pkk-leader-tells-militants-to-leave-turkey-in-nevruz-message.aspx?pageID=238&nID=43373&NewsCatID=338.

16. According to estimations, 10-20 percent of the PKK militants in Turkey have withdrawn. On June 27, 2013, then Prime Minister Erdoğan announced that only 15 percent withdrew from the Turkish soil. "Only 10–15 percent withdrew – Erdogan," *Hurriyet Daily News*, (June 27, 2013), retrieved December 13, 2013 from http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/only-10-to-15-percent-of--pkkmilitants-withdrew-pm-erdogan.aspx?pageID=238&nid=49619.

17. "Kurdish PKK Rebels 'Halt Turkey Pull-out,'" *BBC News*, (September 9, 2013), retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24013837; "Turkey's Kurdish Conflict: An Assessment of the Current Process," p. 34.

18. "63 Kişilik Akil İnsanlar Heyeti Açıklandı," *Memurlar*, retrieved March 7, 2016 from http://www.memurlar.net/haber/356638/.

19. "Turkey's Kurdish Conflict: An Assessment of the Current Process," p. 45.

20. "Çözüm Süreci İhracatı Artırdı," *Milliyet*, (April 8, 2014), retrieved June 24, 2016 from http://www.milliyet.com.tr/cozum-sureci-ihracati-artirdi/ekonomi/detay/1863918/default.htm.

21. "İşte HDP'li Belediyelerin Sabıka Kaydı," *Güneş*, (September 18, 2016), retrieved September 21, 2016 from http://www.gunes.com/gundem/ste-hdpli-belediyelerin-sabika-kaydi-719392.

22. Around 300,000 people from Kobani, most of whom were Kurdish, took shelter in Turkey when ISIS sieged the city in September 2014. Kobani was purged from ISIS in February 2015, upon which the locals began returning to the city. "5 Ay sonra Kobani'ye Dönüş," *Aljazeera*, retrieved September 20, 2016 from http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber/5-ay-sonra-kobaniye-donus.

23. For the HDP, the strategy to be integrated into Turkey meant turning into a left party that can appeal to the entire Turkish electorate by getting rid of the image of an ethno-centric pro-Kurdish party only

effective in one region. The HDP's strategy is said to have been successful until the general elections in June 7, 2015.

24. "DTK Sonuç Bildirgesi Açıklandı", *imctv.com*, (December 27, 2015), retrieved from http://www.imctv.com.tr/dtk-kongresinin-sonuc-bildirgesi-aciklandi-tam-metni/.

25. This prediction is based on an analysis presented by polling company KONDA. "7 Haziran Sandık ve Seçmen Analizi," *KONDA*, (June 18, 2015).

26. The PKK restarted attacking Turkish security forces on July 22, 2015 in Ceylanpınar, Şanlıurfa by killing two police officers. The attack was regarded by the government as the incident that ended the reconciliation process. "Ceylanpınar'da İki Polis Şehit, (July 23, 2015), retrieved from http://www.milliyet.com.tr/ceylanpinar-da-2-polis-sehit-gundem-2091335/.

27. Timothy Sisk suggests that in ethnically, denominationally or religiously divided societies, political elites might play the ethnicity card during the electoral period to create fear in society and receive support from radicals. Timothy Sisk, "Elections in the Wake of War: Turning Points for Peace?," in L*egitimacy and Peace Processes: From Coercion to Consent*, *ACCORD*, No. 25 (2014), pp. 31-34. Also, United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) report shows that elections triggered social, economic and political tensions in Kenya, Haiti and Ivory Coast (p. 9). For more see: "The Role of Elections in Peace Processes: When and How They Advance Stability or Exacerbate Conflicts," *UNSSC*, (2011).

28. Gülen Movement, or FETÖ, is known as a transnational religious network active in education. A number of prosecutors affiliated with FETÖ filed a corruption investigation on Erdoğan and his family in order to topple the AK Party government on December 17 and 25, 2013. FETÖ has infiltrated state apparatuses for decades and ultimately attempted a military coup on July 15, 2016.

29. "PKK Leader: Turkey Is Protecting IS by Attacking Kurds," *BBC*, (August 10, 2015), retrieved from http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33818282.

30. "PKK'lı Duran Kalkan'dan İki Bomba Açıklama," (June 16, 2015), retrieved from http://www.haberler.com/pkk-li-duran-kalkan-yasa-anayasa-degismeden-hdp-7420153-haberi/.

31. March 21, 2013 was accepted as the official beginning of the Reconciliation Process. During the Nevruz celebrations in Diyarbakır on that day, a letter penned by Öcalan, which put an emphasis on peace and the democratic resolution of the Kurdish Question, was read to public.

32. Metin Gürcan, "PKK Looks to the Future with Creation of Youth Militia," *Al Monitor*, (August 31, 2015), retrieved from http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/08/turkey-kurds-pkk-armed-young-militias.html#.

33. "Kobani'den Kaçan Kürtlerin Dostu Türkiye'dir," *Anadolu Agency*, (September 24, 2014), retrieved from http://aa.com.tr/tr/politika/kobaniden-kacan-kurtlerin-dostu-turkiyedir/117059.

34. In September 2014, ISIS sieged Kobani, a city with a predominant Kurdish population located on the north Syria border with Turkey. The HDP co-chair Demirtaş called Kurdish people to take to the streets to protest the AK Party's silence regarding the Kobani siege. More than 50 Kurdish citizens affiliated to HÜDA-PAR (Free Cause Party) were killed in the incidents that broke out upon Demirtaş's call while several public offices were set afire. The October 6-8 incidents did not halt the Reconciliation Process, but leaded to a crisis of trust between the AK Party and the HDP/PKK proponents. See: Vahap Coşkun, "The Kurdish Peace Process: October 6-8 Events and Beyond," *Dicle Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 20, No. 32 (2015), pp.1-12; Ali Dağlar, "6-7 Ekim'in Acı Bilançosu: 50 Ölü," *Hürriyet*, (November 6, 2014), retrieved from http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/6-7-ekim-in-aci-bilancosu-50-olu-27525777.

35. David Ignatius from *Washington Post* and Kate West from *Middle East Eye* were among the journalists and bloggers who sided with supporting the PKK or the PYD against the "Islamists" in the Middle East. Kate West, "The Female Guerilla Fighter of the PKK," *Middle East Eye*, (July 31, 2015), retrieved from http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/female-guerrilla-fighters-pkk-2044198184; David Ignatius, "White House Dithering Paralyzes U.S.'s Best Ally for Fighting the Islamic State," The *Washington Post*, (September 22, 2015), retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/white-house-dithering-paralyzes-uss-best-ally-for-fighting-the-islamic-state/2015/09/22/ba8fe4be-6151-11e5-8e9e-dce8a2a2a679_story.html. The content is presented with a photo of a female YPG fighter.

36. Enjoying particularly the interest of the younger electorate, Demirtaş's popularity grew following the presidential elections. Vahap Coşkun states that Demirtaş also had the support of the Kurdish voters who previously opted for the AK Party. Especially the Kurds living in the western regions of the country supported Demirtaş regardless of the 10 percent election threshold restriction. See: Vahap Coşkun, "What Demirtaş Achieved in the Presidential Election," *Daily Sabah*, (August 20, 2014).

37. At the presidential election, Demirtaş increased the HDP and the BDP votes by one million compared to the vote shares in March 30 local elections. In the metropolitan cities such as Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir, Demirtaş doubled the vote rate of the HDP. Demirtaş received 236,435 votes in Istanbul, 99,302 in İzmir and 67,219 in Ankara. The vote rates climbed from 4.84 to 9.09 percent in Istanbul, from 3.37 to 7.98 percent in İzmir, and from 0.87 to 3.46 percent in Ankara. Hatem Ete, "Demirtaş Kimden Oy Aldı?," *Akşam*, (August 21, 2014).

38. "We will not make you president" was the HDP campaign's slogan for June 7, 2015 general elections. This campaign also pulled votes in western regions aside from the conventional base of the HDP and the BDP.

39. In an interview he gave to *Die Zeit*, Cemil Bayık alleged that President Erdoğan is the khalifa of ISIS. "Bayık: İŞİD'in Halifesi Erdoğan," *Deutsche Welle Türkçe*, (December 17, 2014), retrieved from http://www.dw.com/tr/bayık-işidin-halifesi-erdoğan/a-18136987

40. Talha Köse, "Identity Dynamics of the June and November 2015 Elections of Turkey: Kurds, Alevis and Conservative Nationalists," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (2015), pp. 110-112.

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