

**AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA**

**THE KURDISH QUESTION IN TURKEY FROM 1999 TO 2006: AN ANALYSIS OF  
THE RESURGENCE OF AN INTRANSIGENT ETHNIC CONFLICT**

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### **List of Abbreviations**

- ARGK - People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan
- DEHAP - Democratic Peoples' Party
- EU - European Union
- ERNK - National Liberation Front of Kurdistan
- FTO - Foreign Terror Organizations
- GOI - Government of Iraq
- HADEP - Peoples' Democracy Party
- KADEK - Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress
- KDP - Kurdistan Democratic Party
- KNA - Kurdistan National Assembly
- KRG - Kurdistan Regional Government
- PKK - Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
- PUK - Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
- TAK - Kurdistan Freedom Falcons
- U.S.A - The United States of America

## **Abstract**

The main purpose of this Master's Essay is to identify and analyze the successive phases of the resurgence of the Turko-Kurdish ethnic conflict. The study puts a particular emphasis on the reemergence of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) after the capture of its leader Abdullah Ocalan in 1999 up to the present days as well as the proposed solutions to the Kurdish Question in Turkey.

The Essay also considers the underlying factors behind their ethnopolitical conflict and the overall stance of the Turkish government towards its Kurdish minority. The other dimensions of the Kurdish Question in Turkey are discussed as well. On the one hand, the Essay examines the Kurdish issue in the broader regional context, on the other, it assesses the role of the Kurdish factor in the relationships between Turkey and the United States. Finally, EU-Turkey relations are discussed since one of the key obstacles for Turkey's EU integration is the Kurdish problem.

## **Introduction**

The Kurdish question in Turkey represents a whole series of issues, including the problem of linguistic and cultural freedom for the Kurds, their demographic prevalence and ensuing political aspirations for independent or autonomous Kurdistan in the south-eastern provinces of Turkey. The Kurdish question is also of vital importance for regional and international actors, including the Arab countries, Iran, the US, the EU, Russia as well as neighboring Armenia.

On the one hand, Turkey's key internal conflict centers on its large Kurdish minority, which is ethnically and linguistically distinct. Thus, the expressions of Kurdish language have been severely repressed by Turkey's policies of assimilation. On the other hand, this issue raises difficult problems of multiculturalism which is again common to much of the world.

Since the Kurdish question is the most serious internal conflict in Turkey, it puts forward obstacles for Turkey's long-term aspiration of joining the European Union. EU is considered to be an essential hallmark for raising the Kurdish issue in Turkey. As one prominent political leader has stated with regard to Turkey's EU integration "the road to the EU passes through Diyarbakyr" which implies that the Kurdish question is so significant in the context of EU-Turkey relations that Turkey's possible EU membership depends on a peaceful solution to this problem.

Having been defined as a candidate country for EU membership in 1999, Turkey initiated several reforms to comply with EU standards. Nevertheless, its relations with the EU are problematic. The Turkish government is constantly under huge pressure by many European institutions in terms of improving its human rights record and protection of minorities. Ankara is still blamed for failing to uphold the rights of its large ethnic Kurdish population.

On February 16, 1999 Kurdish question in Turkey returned to the top of the international agenda with the capture of Abdullah Ocalan, leader of the rebellious Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan-PKK). Many thought that the PKK will once and for all lay down its arms, having lost their head, but the revival of the PKK violence gradually became evident and their struggle still continues with great resurgence. The PKK's guerrilla operations were temporarily halted after Ocalan's capture. However, since 2004 the reemergence of PKK has been felt in the region, including especially in the Northern Iraq. Therefore, the resurgence of the PKK rebellions must still be regarded as a priority issue in the Turko-Kurdish conflict.

The Kurdish question in Turkey cannot be analyzed without considering regional dimensions of the problem. Thus, regional developments in Northern Iraq are essential as Turkey has always been concerned with those developments in its unstable neighbor Iraq which affect their political relations and Kurdish issue in Turkey.

The reality of the Kurdish self-rule in Northern Iraq makes Turkey fear that the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) could serve as a "pole of attraction" for Turkey's Kurds. On the other hand, Ankara is frightened that a sovereign Kurdish state might emerge by design which will threaten not only Turkish territorial integrity but also the disentanglement of the region (Park 2004, 22).

With regard to Northern Iraqi Kurdistan, US-Turkey relations should also be observed. Firstly, Turkey and the US share basic goals in Iraq, secondly the PKK is considered to be a key problem in Turkish-US ties. This is mostly connected with Turkey's misjudgment of the American strategy and intentions in relation to Kurdish separatism and Iraq. "Where Turkey and the United States differ is the extent to which the Iraqi Kurds should be allowed to maintain their hard-won gains of autonomy and quasi-independence during the past decade" (Barkey 2005, 3).



The study of the Turko-Kurdish conflict is not only an international problem but it has also major implications for Armenia. Its relevance lies in the proximity of borders where hostilities can occur. As a result, the deterioration of this conflict can have serious impacts on Armenia's geo-strategic and geopolitical situation, national security, territorial integrity and economic conditions.

The proposed Master's Essay will analyze the Kurdish question in Turkey in the context of EU-Turkey and US-Turkey relations, Northern Iraqi Kurdistan's future status, regional security setting as well as Armenia's security interests. Therefore, these perspectives dictate to this Master's Essay the following research questions:

1. Does the reemergence of the PKK lay a new phase to the Kurdish Question in Turkey?
2. What alternative solutions does the PKK envision?
3. What is the role of the Kurdish question in Turkey's aspirations to integrate with the EU?
4. How do the recent regional developments in the Middle East, particularly the Kurdish self-rule in the neighboring Northern Iraq, affect the related situation in Turkey?
5. Does US-led policy in Iraq influence the Turkish-American relations?
6. What are the implications for Armenia in any possible scenario of the development of Kurdish question that could follow?
7. How successful has been Turkey in its attempts "to solve" the Kurdish question?

The employed research questions have provided to some extent a complete picture of the topic discussed. However, the time was not enough for analyzing the Kurdish political parties' overall role in raising the Kurdish Question on Turkish government's agenda as well as for the US-Kurdish Alliance in Iraq and its effects on Kurdish issue in Turkey.

## **Literature Review and Methodology**

There is a huge amount of literature concerning the Turko-Kurdish conflict, the status of Iraqi Kurds, Turkey-EU and U.S-Turkey relations in terms of Kurdish Question in Turkey. Moreover, the versatile developments after 1999 in this intransigent ethnic conflict have led many scholars to analyze the new phase in the Turko-Kurdish conflict and its possible effects on regional and international security.

In the book “Turkey’s Kurdish Question” Henri Barkey and Graham Fuller (1998) maintain that Turkey is of particular interest since it presents a range of issues that have considerable applicability to conflict situations in the rest of the world. On one hand, Turkey’s key internal conflict centers on the role of its Kurdish minority which is ethnically and linguistically distinct. On the other hand, this issue raises difficult problems of multiculturalism that is again common to most of the ethnic minorities in the world.

Kemal Burkay (2001) in his comprehensive essay “The Kurdish Question: Its History and Present Situation” provides a deep historical analysis of Kurdish nationalistic struggle and movements as well as armed resistance from the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the 1980s. Burkay (2001) also considers the present situation of the Kurdish issue, the external and internal factors influencing the overall effectiveness and unsuccessfulness of the Kurdish resistance movement. A special attention is given to Turkey’s policies of oppression against the Kurds which is the utmost obstacle to democratic consolidation and domestic peace in Turkey. Furthermore, possible solutions to the Kurdish question are proposed by the author himself.

In the book “The Reality of Kurdistan from the XIX Century to Present and the PKK Movement,” Abdullah Ocalan (1998) argues that the PKK is a unique Kurdish revolutionary organization in the history of Kurdistan able to undertake substantive measures for the liberation of Kurdistan. Moreover, PKK differs from other resistant movements in the sense

that it firstly encourages the Kurds in their struggle against the Turkish tyranny, secondly it addresses the Kurdish deep-rooted national concerns in terms of independence, autonomy and freedom. As Ocalan (1998) states, “it is quite evident that, in spite of numerous committed mistakes and faults, the Kurdish nation witnessed a true liberation movement led by the PKK itself, which began a new era in the history of Kurdistan” (365). Therefore, the liberation of the Kurdish nation cannot be perceived without forceful resistance which launched the PKK.

In the article “The Kurdish Question in Turkish Politics” Svante Cornell (2001) analyzes the resurgence of the Turko-Kurdish conflict after Abdullah Ocalan’s, the leader of the rebellious Kurdistan Workers’ party (PKK), seizure in 1999. Cornell views several factors as impediments to the solution of the Kurdish question such as the national conception of the Turkish Republic, the distinctiveness of Kurdish society and the problem of the militant PKK. The author also attaches a considerable amount of importance to Kurdish political parties with regard to the solution of the Kurdish Question.

Hakan Yavuz and Micheal Gunter (2001) in their article “the Kurdish Nation” view the Kurdish problem mainly from the perspective of the history and claim that “the Kurdish question consists of the desire of most Kurds to have the cultural, linguistic, and political rights that will protect their Kurdish identity” (33). Yavuz and Gunter (2001) also put an emphasis on national liberation movements by the PKK and its leader Abdullah Ocalan. The authors (2001) argue that Turkey, Iraq and Iran should take decisive steps in order to help to satisfy the legitimate demands of their Kurdish populations and thus preserve and strengthen their own territorial integrity, “before events begin to spiral out of control” (39). Moreover, the international actors such as US, UN, EU and Arab League should also be involved in this complex process since the Kurdish Question becomes increasingly vital in Middle Eastern and international politics.

A remarkable and versatile outlook for Turkey in historical and geo-strategic context is presented in Conference Report entitled “Turkey’s Role in the Middle East” by Patricia Carley (1995) from the United States Institute of Peace. The wider geo-strategic framework of Turkey’s foreign policy, relations with the Middle East as well as its western foreign policy orientation established by Ataturk are discussed. A special analysis is dedicated to the Kurds of the countries on Turkey’s periphery and the intransigent impasse on the Kurdish issue. This is connected with the fact that the most important Middle Eastern countries from Turkey’s perspective are Iran, Iraq and Syria where religion, boundaries, the PKK and Kurdish question are factors, the latter having a direct impact on Iran, Iraq and Syria. Nevertheless, it is Iraq which will continue to remain Turkey’s trickiest foreign policy problem among its neighbors as any developments there complicate the issue in Turkey and its relations with the United States.

Owen Matthews’s article (2006) “Kurdistan: Dangerous Passage. Turkey Embraces “Hot Pursuit” in Northern Iraq” touches upon the incessant armed insurgents of the PKK and Turkish military operations to prevent the rebellious group’s intrusion into Turkey from their bases in Northern Iraq. Matthews (2006) also addresses the issue of Turkey’s security and domestic stability deriving from the threat of Kurdish insurgency inside Turkey. In such a tense relationship between Turkey and Iraq, the US role is crucial which takes no substantive measures to deal with the PKK problem. As Matthews (2006) stresses “Washington is caught between two allies-NATO member Turkey, its closest friend in the Muslim world, and the Iraqi Kurds, its closest ally within Iraq” (2).

Zeki Sarigil’s report (2005), entitled “EU-Turkey Relations: Opportunities, Challenges, and Unknowns,” draws upon the major developments taking place in the EU-Turkey relations and the Kurdish issue as one of the key obstacles for Turkey’s accession to the EU. Sarigil also argues that the Kurdish Question cannot be studied and it would be quite

limited without considering international and regional dimensions of the problem. Thus, regional developments in the Middle East, EU-Turkey as well as US-Turkey relations are of paramount significance.

In “Turkey - EU Relations within the Context of European Integration. A Black sheep in the Flock?” Cagri Gulsen (2004) analyzes the relations between Turkey and EU from 1980s. Its main goal is to clarify the reasons for Turkey’s repeatedly delayed membership status and to evaluate the appropriateness of Turkish dissatisfaction over the EU’s approach to its membership aspirations. Gulsen (2004) also draws attention to the overall stances of member states towards Turkey’s possible membership.

The article (1999) “Turkey, the Kurds and the European Union: A Vicious Triangle” from the International Institute for Strategic Studies also addresses Turkey’s future EU membership as well as the new phase of the Kurdish political identity in Turkey that is likely to be more dangerous for the state. As to the Europe’s standpoint, “the EU is likely to face a dilemma.... it will have to choose between either supporting movements with links to the PKK or applying pressure directly on the Turkish government and military” (2).

Philip Gordon and Omer Taspinar (2006) in the article “Turkey on the Brink” point out Turkey’s growing frustration with the United States and Europe. On one hand, Turkey has quite a strained relationship with the US because of its support for Iraqi Kurds and the betrayal of its promises to prevent Kurdish dominance in Northern Iraq. On the other hand, such regional developments can present a deteriorating scenario for Turkish foreign policy with the US and Kurdish Question in Turkey. This is connected first and foremost with the rise of the Kurdish separatist pressure and PKK since its “...maintenance of military camps in Northern Iraq further complicates Turkey’s Kurdish predicament” (65).

As to EU-Turkey relations, its accession process is conditional and problematic. Like many scholars, Gordon and Taspinar also consider the Kurdish Question the most critical

challenge and obstacle for Turkey's integration into the EU. Consequently, everything is not successful with Turkey's journey toward Europe because of its domestic political instability and its policies towards the Kurds.

The article "the Kurds of Iraq: Recent History, Future Prospects" (2002) by Carole O'Leary in the Middle East Review of International Affairs recounts the developing situation of Iraqi Kurds over the last decade and discusses their future prospects in a post-Saddam Iraq as well as the future stability of Iraq. The article also looks at how the Kurdish self-rule in a democratic framework influences the debate over Iraq's future.

The report on "Iraq's Kurds and Turkey: Challenges for U.S. Policy" (2004) by Bill Park puts an emphasis on Kurdish political aspirations in Iraq, Ankara's fears and concerns in terms of the establishment of a fully independent and sovereign Kurdish state which would threaten the Turkish territorial integrity. Furthermore, the problems of US-Turkish relations are analyzed.

The study has utilized historical/comparative methodology of analysis. The main resources for analysis are historical literature, books, articles in specialized journals and newspapers as well as Internet sites. Firstly, the relevant literature about the topic has been collected. Secondly, a comprehensive analysis has been done in order to select the information relevant to the research questions. Finally, the research has been employed into the proposed Master's Essay.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Historical Overview of the Kurdish Question in Turkey**

During recent years the Kurdish Question in Turkey has become one of the most fundamental issues on the international agenda. Besides its being a crucial concern for the countries in the region, it constantly leads to internal and external clashes as well as economic, political and social crises. Thus, in order to understand the gist of the Turko-Kurdish ethnic conflict and its present dimensions, it is essential to introduce its historical overview.

The Kurds' struggle and national movements for the autonomy of the Kurdistan embraced a nationalistic character in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century against the two Empires, those of the Ottoman and Persian. Until the mid-nineteenth century Kurdistan was the theatre of violent clashes between these two great states which launched armed attacks against the Kurdish princedoms in order to destroy them. Kurdish princes such as Bedirkhan and Yazdânsheer as well as religious leaders namely Sheik Ubeydullah struggled for the unity and independence of Kurdistan. However, they were defeated (Burkay 2001).

After World War I, the Ottoman Empire was already in the past history but the Kurdish people persistently resisted the brutal oppression of the states in four major parts of Kurdistan both before and after the WWI which still continues with a full-blown activities. The Kurds have struggled to keep their national identity alive, to preserve their culture and language, to claim their national rights as well as to liberally determine their own destiny. As a result, hundreds of thousands of people have died and have been the victims of mass expulsions.

The significance of the Kurdish Question has been touched upon in a number of international treaties. At the end of the WWI, the Ottoman Empire signed the Treaty of Sèvres in France with the allied Powers on August 10, 1920 which was not subsequently

implemented. In reality, the treaty of Sèvres was to solve a range of vital issues covering a wide scope of international politics, especially those concerning the Near-Eastern and European politics. Thus, by not solving those vital issues, namely the Armenian Cause, the Kurdish Question, the Genocide problem<sup>1</sup>, it had detrimental consequences on the new system of international politics formed after the WWI. Moreover, it still has a negative influence on the regional and international situation.

According to the Treaty of Sèvres, the Kurds could have an independent state. It was assumed to create an autonomous Kurdish region, which would further have all the possible chances for full independence. However, the Great powers impeded the solution of the Kurdish Question leading to incessant armed resurgences in the Near-East, particularly in Turkey where Kurdish insurgencies took place in 1925, 1927, 1937, from 1984-1999. In 2004 the PKK guerilla warfare revived which inevitably causes a threat to regional and international actors (Aivazian 2006).

The Turkish Independence War led to replacement of the Treaty of Sèvres with the Treaty of Lausanne signed on July 24, 1923 which enabled to carve up again Turkey's south-eastern borders based on the southern borders of Kurdistan lined up beforehand due to the Treaty of Sèvres. As a result, the largest part of Kurdistan remained within the state borders of the Republic of Turkey which had been founded on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire.

One Turkish representative declared at Lausanne: "The Kurds and the Turks are the essential components of the Republic of Turkey. The Kurds are not a minority but a nation, the government in Ankara is the government of the Turks as well as of the Kurds." Nevertheless, after signing the Treaty of Lausanne, Ankara's policy rapidly changed. The structures of the new state were designed entirely in accordance with the Turkish interests.

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<sup>1</sup> The refusal to solve political issues via the Genocide against the humanity and to punish those who have committed it.



On one hand the Kurds' existence was denied, on the other hand the Kurdish language, culture, even the concepts of "Kurdish" and "Kurdistan" were forbidden.

The Kemalist leadership did not pay the mere attention to the multi-cultural structure of Anatolia which was a mosaic of different ethnic groups. The keystone of their policy was to assimilate other languages and cultures into those of Turkish. Article 39 of the Treaty of Lausanne, having stated that the citizens of Turkey have the right to freely use their respective languages in all areas of life, was overlooked and the Kurdish language was absolutely forbidden in the educational system and the printed media. Moreover, talking about the Kurds and criticizing the Kurds' oppression were considered to be a severe crime and were massively punished (Burkay 2001).

In the Turkish-Kurdish history the reference to the major riots launched by Kurds against the Turkish brutal policy is imperative. From this perspective, the year of 1925 is crucial since at that time the first Kurdish riot blew up led by Sheik Said but this uprising was viciously suppressed. By Ataturk's order the main leaders of the riots were hung, tens of thousands of Kurds were killed and driven into exile. In 1930 the second Kurdish insurgence was launched by the Kurdish organization named "Hoybun" which is known in the history as Ararat riot. This revolt was a key event since it showed that the Kurdish liberation movement was gaining a political dimension.

The young Turkish Republic was challenged by Kurdish uprisings in subsequent years too. One of them was the full-scale riot which took place in Dersim from 1937 to 1938. It was Seit Riza that led the revolt in response to the Turkish attempts to suppress the population in Dersim and abolish the de facto semi-independent status of the region. Kemal's army did not succeed to suppress the riot by means of land attacks. Only by using its air forces, it managed to win the Dersim revolt (Chanlaryan 2005).

After 1938 there was a relatively peaceful halt in the military operations between Turks and Kurds which lasted about 20 years. Nevertheless, under the conditions of constant oppression of the political, cultural and linguistic rights, extreme poverty and ignorance, blocked avenues of political struggle towards them, the Kurds once again took up the arms against the brutal Turkish state. Not only Turkey was the target, but also the region as a whole. Thus, similar developments outspread in other parts of Kurdistan.

The Kurds living within the borders of Iraq, Southern and Northern Kurdistan, have also resisted subjugation towards them since WWI. Since Turkey waged war in Kurdistan, especially in Iraq, on a permanent basis, it eventually led to a number of uprisings there too which ended in defeat. However, in Iraq the Kurdish identity has not been denied. As a result of these revolts, the Kurds have been granted certain cultural rights. Kurdish culture is comparatively developed in this part of Kurdistan. Moreover, they have been enabled to have their own schools, universities, TV and radio broadcasts.

It was in 1961 that the greatest Kurdish revolt in this part of Kurdistan, on behalf of autonomous state, began under the leadership of Mustafa Barzani which lasted till 1970. During these times the government's emphasis on linguistic homogeneity was the prominent stimulus for the Kurdish opposition that included Kurds from Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Although the Kurds reached an agreement with the central government in 1970, the government in Baghdad suppressed the Kurds and overlooked the main provisions of the agreement necessary for the Iraqi Kurds<sup>2</sup>. A number of decrees were issued in 1974 and 1975 which provided for the administration of the autonomous region but they were not accepted by all the Kurdish leaders. Consequently, a major war ensued and the relationships between Barzani and Baath authorities deteriorated<sup>3</sup> (<http://www.globalsecurity.org>).

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<sup>2</sup> See Timeline in Appendix A

<sup>3</sup> See Timeline in Appendix A

In 1975 the Algiers Accord put an end to the revolt led by Mullah Mustafa Barzani. In the early 1970s it appeared that the Kurdish rebels under the generalship of the leader Mullah Mustafa Barzani, could actually carve out an independent Kurdish area in Northern Iraq. However, in 1975, the shah of Iran, the Kurds' main patron, withdrew his support of the Kurds as part of the Algiers Accord between Tehran and Baghdad which led to a sharp decline in the Kurdish movement.

The signing of the Algiers Accord led to emergence of a faction from the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP), chaired by Masud Barzani, the son of Mullah Mustafa Barzani. The faction that left the KDP in opposition to the corresponding Accord formed the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) under the leadership of Jalal Talabani. The PUK engaged in low-level guerrilla movement against the central government in the period from 1975 to 1980. It was the war between Iraq and Iran, broke out in 1980, that gave the PUK and other Iraqi Kurdish groups the opportunity to strengthen their opposition to the government (<http://www.globalsecurity.org>).

Since 1979 Turkey has governed Kurdistan through military law and an ongoing brutal war. But the Kurdish people's struggle has not ceased. On contrary, their armed resistance still continues today and takes a large-scale image. As to the state of Iran, it has also practiced a policy of oppression against the Kurds like that of Turkey's Kemalist regime. During that time the KDP was founded, afterwards the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad was proclaimed<sup>4</sup>. Nonetheless, soon the government in Tehran, with the political assistance of Great Britain and the U.S.A, destroyed Mahabad.

Since the Kurdish community is situated across the borders of three Middle Eastern states, its struggle for independence or secession has been opposed not only by Turkey, Iran but also Iraq. Consequently, the repressive government policies by these states have

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<sup>4</sup> See Timeline in Appendix A

motivated Kurdish rebellion. Neither Iran, nor Iraq, nor Turkey wants to see a truly independent Kurdish entity established. According to Viva Ona Bartkus (1999), “all three states share the same fear: that one Kurdish success will prove an irresistible beacon for the irredentist hopes of the Kurds within their own borders” (56). Overwhelmed with such a fear, each has fiercely opposed a Kurdish secession.

Before 1991 the history of Iraqi Kurdistan was correlated with destruction, killings and displacement. More than 4,000 communities were destroyed including cities of more than 50,000 Iraqi citizens. Thousands of citizens were held in custody, injured and killed or were forced to live in Baghdad-led “collective towns.” Despite Iraqi Kurdistan’s achievements in democratization process and civil society building, its citizens are still threatened by Baghdad and their neighboring regions. All these endanger their overall freedom and the state of self-ruling which lay the basis to consider that the future of Iraqi Kurdistan mainly remains uncertain (O’Leary 2002).

It is in the post-1991 period that the Iraqi Kurds have begun to be engaged in identity formation, have experienced self-rule and democratization. In April 1991 the Iraqi Kurdistan was divided into two parts. From this perspective, the so-called Kurdish safe haven and northern no-fly zone were established. This part is approximately half of the Iraqi Kurdistan. In spite of considerable pressures, strong internal and external opposition, the Kurdish safe haven has been ruled successfully by the Kurds themselves, whereas the rest is governed by Baghdad (O’Leary 2002). However, in Northern Kurdistan the clashes between Iraqi Kurds and Turks are inevitable. Turkey fears that the Kurdish self-rule in the neighboring Northern Iraq might create a sovereign Kurdish state which would threaten not only Turkish territorial integrity but also a disentanglement of the region as a whole.

In the history of the Turko-Kurdish conflict, the role of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) is of crucial significance. The PKK has fought for the Kurdish autonomy against

Turkey since 1984 by military and political means. Its overriding priority is the liberation of the Kurdish nation. The PKK marked a new phase in the Kurdish guerilla movement since it led to a constant armed struggle and revived the concept of the Kurdish identity among the Kurds. No matter whether the party will ever reach its goals, the fact is that it has managed to change both Turkey's foreign and domestic politics (Fuller and Barkey 1998)<sup>5</sup>. As Abdullah Ocalan (1998) mentions "our party will provide the conditions under which our nation can determine its destiny. The struggle will not only make them reckon with the bitter past history, but it will also open ways to the creation of their future ..." (376).

The Kurdish question in Turkey entered a new phase after the capture of the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan on February 1999. Many thought that the PKK will once and for all lay down its arms having remained after its head, but the revival of the PKK violence gradually became evident. It is true that after Ocalan's capture the violence subsided, the PKK even declared a ceasefire on February 9, 2000. However, the Turko-Kurdish conflict began again in 2004 which threatens Turkey's domestic stability till today. Thus, it can be concluded that the devastating wars, with the aim of beating down the stubborn Kurdish partisan movement, which have been going on since 1961 in Southern Kurdistan (Iraq), since 1979 in Eastern Kurdistan (Iran) and since 1984 in Northern Kurdistan, still continues with great resurgence.

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<sup>5</sup> Chapter 3 will state about the PKK in more detail.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Problem of the Kurdish Language and Culture**

Almost all ethnic minorities in the world, while fighting for independence and autonomy, have tried to preserve their identity. In this respect, it is the language and culture that is the most influential tool to suppress a government's policy of assimilation. The Kurds are not an exception in this respect who have struggled against the Turkish Government for a decade to have the right to use their language and preserve their culture and traditions.

“Bearers of a long tradition and culture of their own for perhaps two millennia, the Kurds today are rapidly reformulating their own ethnic identity as a community and seeking its expression in legal terms in the cultural and political realm of Turkish life” (Barkey 1998, 1). Moreover, since the ethnic minority rights are usually denied, the Kurdish minority is striving to achieve legal recognition and establish legal rights in order to retain their own language and culture in their ethnic homeland. However, Turkey does not implement liberalized policies to satisfy the cultural, linguistic aspirations of its ethnic minority. On contrary, the Turkish government's main strategy for assimilating the Kurds has been language and cultural suppression.

Until the 1990s, Turkey regularly attempted to eradicate Kurdish culture. The Turkish government implemented legislation approved in 1924 that outlawed the Kurdish language, names as well as the manifestations of Kurdish culture. Turkey also closed Kurdish schools, banned publications and broadcasts in Kurdish. As the Justice Minister in Ataturk's era publicly announced “... those who are not of pure Turkish stock can have only one right in this country, the right to be servants and slaves.” The Constitution adopted in 1982 included such Chapters which were even directed at eliminating the Kurdish identity (Bartkus 1999). For instance, Article 89 of the Constitution stated that “no political party may concern itself with the defense, development, or diffusion of any non-Turkish language or culture; nor may

they seek to create minorities within our frontiers or to destroy our national unity” (Bartkus 1999, 90).

During those times the authorities considered Kurdish one of the unnamed languages, use of Kurdish was strictly banned in all government institutions, including the courts and schools. Nevertheless, Kurdish intellectuals launched quite an active campaign. They attempted to publish journals and newspapers in Kurdish. Unfortunately, none of these publications survived for more than a few issues because state officials found legal but false pretexts for closing them down (<http://www.globalsecurity.org>). Thus, besides their struggle for political autonomy, the Kurds have also been fighting to preserve their language and culture not to lose their national identity and continue to be considered as a large ethnic minority not only in Turkey but also in the region.

Largely thanks to its aspirations to become a member of the European family, Turkey was engaged in reform process to show some signs of tolerance for the use of the Kurdish language and culture. By amending its Constitution, the Turkish Government went beyond its understanding of the Kurdish Question and provided the Kurds with social, political rights. Turkey also removed the legal provisions forbidding the use of Kurdish language in TV and radio broadcasting. It lifted the restrictions on publishing in languages other than Turkish. However, mother-tongue education is still not allowed.

In July 2003 the Parliament in Turkey amended an article of the Census Law that had been stipulated to prevent the use of Kurdish names. The amendment allowed using the Kurdish names, to spread national culture, customs and traditions in the Kurdish provinces. The revised wording was intended to ease the restrictions. However, advocates of human rights claim that the local authorities fail to adjust those amendments in practice (<http://www.globalsecurity.org>).

In the concluding remarks it can be stated that Turkey has initiated some reforms with regard to its cultural and linguistic rights policy, but they are still on paper. In practice, they are constantly violated. Kurds are not allowed to properly express their political will in Kurdish newspapers and magazines since they are published in few issues. Children are allowed to be engaged only in private courses in Kurdish, whereas the Kurdish is not considered an official language in schools. The Kurdish identity loses its roots since their cultural values are not protected. Besides, the Kurdish culture is still subjected to assimilation of Turkish culture which shows Turkey's menacing stance towards the Kurdish minority.



### Chapter 3

#### The PKK Spearheads in the Turko-Kurdish Conflict

##### *Kurdistan Workers' Party*

The PKK (Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan) or the Kurdistan Workers' Party was formally established as a Marxist-Leninist Kurdish political party in 1978 in Diyarbakir by its leader Abdullah Ocalan. At the beginning, the PKK perceived the Kurdish tribal society as a key objective of the revolutionary struggle (Cornell 2001). "It described Kurdistan as an area under colonial rule, where tribal leaders and comprador bourgeoisie colluded to help the state exploit the lower classes" (Cornell 2001, 7). In order to establish an independent, unified Kurdish state, the Party launched guerilla warfare in 1984 in the mostly Kurdish populated areas of Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran.

The Kurdish sense of identity found expression in Abdullah Öcalan's Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The undertaken policies of the Turkish military as well as regional developments in Iraq and Iran consolidated Kurdish separatism. As a result, the PKK launched an armed rebellion in 1984 to fight the Turkish state. As Barkey and Fuller (1998) state "the emergence of the PKK in 1984 as a revolutionary organization in quest of Kurdish independence marks a major new phase in the evolution of the Kurdish national movement ..." which has been the longest Kurdish insurgency in the modern Turkish history (21). The PKK is in fact "an unusual phenomenon" among Kurdish nationalist movements, especially in its "left-wing origins" since most of the other Kurdish parties, mainly based in Iraq, are from "more traditional Kurdish circles with a definite regional and tribal orientation" (Barkey and Fuller 1998, 21). They were least assimilated of the Kurdish population.

The PKK, on contrary, grew out of the turmoil during the 1970s when a series of violent left-wing Turkish groups emerged. It drastically changed Turkey's both foreign and domestic politics. At first PKK was not so competent in its guerilla movements. Nevertheless,

its recruits gained experience and skills with the time when the PKK reached its peak between 1991 and 1993. Then, Ankara was caught unprepared for such a looming challenge the PKK put forward. It was evident that this Party was not going to be one of the many tiny groups that had appeared and disappeared over the years, but rather the one that had a precise political agenda and could exercise supreme discipline. Its military operations gradually spread violence over the region and increased the armed presence of the Turkish army, special forces and intelligence (Barkey and Fuller 1998).

The security forces in Turkey began to take the initiative in the mid-1990s using aggressive patrols and weaponry as well as attacking the PKK camps and supply storages in Northern Iraq. They also sought to deny the PKK logistical support in Turkey by evacuating and burning more than 2,500 villages and displacing by force an estimated 1.5 mln people. These operations were also carried out with extensive use of torture and executions of those who had pro-PKK stances (IISS 1999). Thus, the popularity and military measures of the PKK are also related to the greater violence of the Turkish army itself which has displaced the major part of the Kurdish population from the state by torturing and abusing their rights. As to the PKK, in search for Kurds' autonomy and independence it became a kind of instrument of pressure and threat for Turkey which keeps the Kurdish question alive on the Turkish government's agenda.

Since the establishment of the PKK, it has gone through a number of tactical transformations. In order to gain an international recognition, PKK political cadres and information agencies were founded in many European capitals. It even assumed a moderate standpoint towards its atheist approach aiming at increasing popular support. In the result, it incorporated Islam which contained a revolutionary message. Given that the Turkish authorities have inevitably looked upon the Kurdish Question closely linked with the PKK, the latter is the leading organization among the Turkish Kurds, who think that their Kurdish

ethnic identity has been strengthened by the armed struggle and the subjugation of the Turkish government. Therefore, the PKK is considered by the majority to be the only Kurdish representative force and initiator, in spite of its brutal policies and methods (Galletti 1999).

Taking into consideration the political agenda of the PKK, the party divided itself into three organs. The party itself, that is to say the PKK, is the principle organ. Afterwards, in 1985 it created the National Liberation Front of Kurdistan (ERNK) to reinforce its recruitment process, provide intelligence services and carry propaganda activities in Turkey and abroad. The third organ in its structure is the People's Liberation Army of Kurdistan (ARGK) which was established in 1986.

As it has already been mentioned above, the key goal of the PKK has been the establishment of a unified, independent Kurdish state which reflects its pan-Kurdish aspirations. However, the political and social revolution in the Kurdish society was also of paramount importance for the PKK in order to change the society's overall feudal structure. On the outset, having a Marxist-Leninist orientation, it adopted the left-wing anti-imperialism oratory to fight particularly against the Turkish imperialism in Turkish Kurdistan. Kurdistan with its four divisions, controlled by Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, was the weakest point in the domain of capitalism and the struggle against imperialism was to preserve Kurdistan's natural resources from exploitation (Barkey and Fuller 1998).

During the 1990s the PKK set aside its Marxist rhetoric and instead prioritized Kurdish nationalism in order to embrace more Turkish Kurds in its ranks since the ideology of Marxism-Leninism was not so influential among the population of the rural southeastern Turkey. Besides, "... the PKK justifies its earlier radical stance as a reflection of the broad, extreme-leftist milieu that dominated Turkish politics at the time" (Barkey and Fuller 1998, 24). Although the PKK is mainly a nationalist party, it has not wholly abandoned the political

Left because of tactical and strategic considerations. The discourse it purports is that of a national-liberation movement committed to the creation of a socialist state.

“It has attempted to demonstrate that it is a “national liberation” organization that can institutionalize itself to survive the long haul” (Barkey and Fuller 1998, 23). It regularly organizes national congresses where decisions are taken democratically and publications are issued regarding them. Such activities therefore indicate that this is a national liberation movement with a specific structure, objectives and the political means to attain them. Though the PKK has been included in the black list of the terrorist organizations by the USA, no nationalist movement has ever achieved as much as the PKK from the period of its emergence without any alternative to political activism and groundwork.

It is the Party’s military skills and competence that have made it easier and more efficient to organize politically. The PKK is primarily a political organization with distinct political goals which in case of necessity are modified employing aggression being derived from its own stance. Different kinds of violence are mainly secondary to its basic character, whereas this does not mean that they are of minor significance for the PKK. Aggression is inevitable when there are cherished goals to accomplish. As to the Turkish government, it has not been able to repress and contain the broader Kurdish nationalist movement led by the PKK which is the sole beneficiary and main contributor of a still continuing growth and expansion of the movement on the political level regardless of military setbacks.

### *The Overall Contribution of the PKK in the Expansion of the Kurdish Question*

The overall contribution of the Kurdish nationalists to the bloody struggle is vital. They have employed a number of strategies which ranged from the PKK-led military campaign and the creation of main Kurdish parties to the struggle for cultural, political and linguistic rights. “The PKK played a critical role in raising Kurdish political consciousness, establishing a web of networks inside and outside Turkey to recruit militants, and undermining the remnants of the religiotribal structure of the region by presenting new opportunities for middle-class and urbanized Kurdish youth” (Yavuz and Gunter 2001, 35). However, one of the most significant unexpected outcomes of the PKK military campaign was the “deepening and the politicization of Turkish nationalism.” Because of the PKK’s military tactics and strategies, which have also included the use of terrorism and violence, “Turkish nationalism has been radicalized and popularized” (Yavuz and Gunter 2001, 35). Consequently, the majority of Kurds has changed their criticism of the political authority in Ankara to that of Turkish nationalism, thus creating and legitimizing their own separatist nationalism.

Since PKK’s key goal is to destabilize Turkey and establish an independent Kurdistan, it is merely impossible to find a piece of land in southeastern Turkey that has not carried the scars of the war. The abatement of the violence in southeastern Turkey has not only undermined the democratic rule of law but also the social structure of the society. In Turkey the PKK attacked educational institutions in the Kurdish regions since the public schools were regarded upon as tools of Ankara’s policy of assimilation. Between 1983 and 1999 the PKK killed 200 teachers and destroyed 150 schools to impede such a policy. As to the Turkish government, it responded to the PKK’s military operations with its own counteroffensive. According to the state statistics, 4,302 civil servants, 5,018 soldiers, 4,400

civilians and 23,279 PKK recruits were killed in the Kurdish region of southeastern Turkey and thousands of people were wounded (Yavuz and Gunter 2001).

The bloody conflict has had its negative impact first and foremost on the entire generation of youth who was socialized at that time. The human cost of the turko-kurdish ethnic conflict also includes a new generation of Kurds whose view of the state is shaped by the emergency rule that authorizes local governors to suspend basic freedoms in the Kurdish provinces. As a result, thousands of Kurds left the country to live in security and peace. Moreover, the political landscape was also in a drastic situation.

Since 1990s the PKK has transformed itself from a military structure to a more political organization. According to Cagaptay and Uslu (2005), such a transformation to a political movement by the PKK has been realized through four stages:

- Ceasefire declaration: On August 1, 1999 Ocalan declared a ceasefire and the PKK moved its insurgents out of Turkey into Northern Iraq since it was primarily concerned with Ocalan's execution.
- KADEK: On April 4, 2002, the organization changed its name into the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK) and shifted its key goal from the establishment of an independent Kurdistan to that of democratic Turkey. This undertaken measure aimed at writing a new Constitution for Turkey which would guarantee the rights of Kurds and recognize them as one of Turkey's two constituent nations together with Turks. During this stage the organization did not resort to violence and armed propaganda tactics such as blocking the traffic or attacking military bases and villages.
- Kongra-Gel: On May 1, 2003, when the U.S. State Department added KADEK in its Foreign Terror Organizations' (FTO) list, the organization changed its name to the Kurdistan Society Congress (Kongra-Gel). However, in June 2004

the Kongra-Gel renounced the already declared ceasefire and undertook violent acts “as a bargaining tool,” putting an emphasis on the timing of attacks and at the same time demanding political opportunities.

- “Democratic Society Movement”: When the Kurdish nationalist Democratic Peoples’ Party (DEHAP) lost the stronghold cities in the March 28, 2004, local elections which was a sign that PKK/Kongra-Gel’s appeal is not so much dominant, Ocalan started the process of founding a political party. On October 23, several former Turkish Parliament members from the Kurdish nationalist Peoples’ Democracy Party (HADEP) declared the formation of the Democratic Society movement. Ocalan’s role is prominent in this movement since he constantly communicates with the members of the movement. There is also an important overlap between the demands of the Kongra-Gel and Democratic Society Movement, including their emphasis on recognition of all ethnic identities by the Constitution together with the Kurds. The relevance of this political party indicates that it is the main body of the PKK with its military wing operating for its sake compared with the formerly Kurdish political parties, such as HADEP and DEHAP which were secondary to the PKK.

*The Reemergence of the PKK after the Abdullah Ocalan's Capture in 1999*

The Turko-Kurdish ethnic conflict is so deeply rooted that the resurgence of it is still evident in Turkey. The reemergence of the PKK itself lays a new phase to the ethnic conflict. Like many scholars Mirella Galletti (1999) is also of the opinion that “the PKK still leads the insurgency and has energetically brought the Kurdish problem to the fore as one of the main domestic issues” (2). Though the PKK declared a ceasefire on February 1999 after its leader Abdullah Ocalan's capture, in June 2004 it renounced its unilateral ceasefire. This was a signal that the PKK, having caused more than 35,000 casualties between 1984 and 1999, was reemerging in the foreground of the Turko-Kurdish conflict posing again a threat to Turkey.

The PKK has approximately 1,850-1,950 rebels in Turkey and another 5,500-5,800 in the regions of Northern Iraq ruled by two Iraqi Kurdish parties, namely the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). It has been already mentioned that the PKK has taken several steps to become a political party, but it gradually becomes apparent that the organization's leadership is resistant to dismantle its military wing.

By taking up its violent operations, the PKK wants to prove that it can still damage Turkey economically, politically and socially. According to Turkish intelligence analysts, the PKK by means of terror also wants to show to the Kurdish community that it is still alive and influential and without its permission no other Kurdish party can have a vital role in the solution of the Kurdish Question. Moreover, they are of the opinion that the PKK tries to show to the Turkish government that it is the sole guarantor of the Kurdish issue in Turkey's democratization process (Cagaptay and Uslu 2005).

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy in one of its 2005 Policy Watches states that there were 584 PKK-led attacks and uprisings in 2000, whereas in 2001 and 2002 there were 729 and 757 clashes correspondingly. In the following years of 2003 and 2004 the resurgence of the intransigent ethnic conflict was quite evident bringing to thousands of



deaths and bloody clashes. For instance, there were 1,500 Kurdish attacks in 2003 and 975 in 2004. Besides, since 2005 the organization has ordered an estimated 1,200 of its combatants to enter Turkey from Northern Iraq. All these facts indicate that the PKK is still capable to threaten Turkey and to influence its domestic stability. It has still the potential to create disorder in Turkey's southeast as well as dangerous environment with which it inevitably manipulates Turkey's EU integration, hinders the Kurds' incorporation into Turkish society as well as creates disagreements in Turkish-Iraqi/Kurdish and Turkish-U.S. relationships.

As Eurasia Insight (2006) writes "an upsurge in attacks against Turkish security forces by militants of the ... PKK and ... outbreak of protests in Turkey's ... southeast are raising concerns that the region could again spiral into the kind of violence experienced during the dark days of the 1980s and 1990s." It draws upon the recent developments in southeastern Turkey resulting in the death of some 40 rebels, 14 soldiers and four police officers. The sequence of bombings in Istanbul as well as in other cities has also been blamed on the PKK. Particular attention is given to late March protests of this year which were expected since they were the outcome of the unresolved political and social problems present in the region. They just shook several southeastern cities and Istanbul and were the worst and most cruel Turkey has been the witness of in more than a decade ([www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org)).

The significant factor of this concern about the bombings and protests is connected with the reality that a new generation of young Kurds is ready to fight against the Turkish government in such a volatile region. Thus, the threat of the PKK is still dominant and the possible revival of the PKK insurgency, aimed at creating an independent Kurdish state, is on the agenda of Turkey's political and military leadership. This is mainly evident in Turkish military's measures towards the reinforcement of its troops in the southeastern Turkey.

The military operations in Northern Iraq are another evidence of the resurgence of the Turkish-Kurdish clashes. Turkey's fight against the PKK results in its cross-border military

infiltrations into the Northern Iraq and its attack on the PKK bases. Such full-scale operations, having a destabilizing effect on the region, inevitably bring to counterattack by the Iraqi Kurds. Consequently, the prominence of the PKK and its operations from Northern Iraq become a major source of conflict. Besides, any Turkish military force crossing the border highly risks confrontation with non-PKK Kurdish forces.

According to Owen Matthews (2006), Kurdistan has become a hazardous passage and “Turkey embraces ‘hot pursuit’ in Northern Iraq.” During May 2006, some 200,000 Turkish troops surrounded the mountainous border with Iraq. They even said to have crossed Iraqi territory in pursuit of PKK rebels. The major reason was to prevent armed insurgents of the Kurdish PKK rebels from intruding Turkey from their bases on Iraq’s Kandil Mountain. However, the PKK and its political affiliates have resorted to violence in Turkey to levels not seen in a decade. More than eight government troops, civilians were killed during clashes in Turkey’s southeast. Such operations can be a momentous of new frictions and tensions to emerge. Massoud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), warned that if Turkey tried to hinder its people from having progress in all spheres of life and profiting, then Turkey would put at stake its domestic stability and security (Matthews 2006).

Jon Gorvett’s (2006) academic article entitled “Turkish-Kurdish clashes continue in an increasingly uncertain regional context” touches upon the violent incidents and combat against Kurdish separatism both by Ankara and Tehran. The Iranian troops invaded across the border into northern Iraq where they began shelling bases belonging to the Iranian-Kurdish Pejak guerrillas and the Turkish-Kurdish PKK. Meanwhile, thousands of PKK fighters are gearing up to assault and have announced that they will take revenge on the Iranians for the attacks on their bases. Turkish troops in their turn are being deployed throughout the region to confront the PKK (Gorvett 2006).

Such actions including infiltrations and bombardment inevitably put forward a precedent of the violability of Northern Iraq's frontiers. Thus, Turkey's southern border is regarded upon as a threat to the Europe's safety since in the southeast lie Syria, Iraq and Iran where incessant bomb attacks, gun battles against the Kurds and riots have lately become a source of concerns. "These incidents are in many ways just the latest chapter in a centuries-old history of Turkish-Kurdish clashes, but they occur in a political and strategic environment that has never existed before" (Gorvett 2006, 2). Moreover, not only Turkey's domestic concerns rise, but also the confrontation between the U.S and Turkey, U.S and Iran, U.S and Syria as well as the long-lasting concern over Northern Iraq.

Recent developments during late August and September 2006 in Turkey with regard to a number of bombings, explosions, killings, attacks and ambushes evidently point out the reemergence of the PKK. There is an overall increase in PKK-sponsored undertakings and attacks which are just directed at Turkey's central places, Turkish towns in south-east and first and foremost Turkey's tourism. It is a well-known fact that the latter is a critical industry in Turkey where millions of foreign tourists become a source of economic development.

In terms of recent PKK led activities, seven bombings occurred in the Turkish cities of Istanbul, Adana, Marmaris and Antalya between August 25<sup>th</sup> and August 28<sup>th</sup> 2006, injuring 60 or more people as well as foreign tourists and killing three Turkish nationals. It is worth mentioning that the Kurdistan Freedom Falcons, also known by the Kurdish acronym TAK, have assumed responsibility for many of the explosions. Nevertheless, the TAK is considered to be an affiliate of the PKK (<http://usinfo.state.gov>).

The Turkish authorities believe that a chain of recent attacks targeted on tourist spots in Turkey can be traced back to Ocalan, although his separatist party PKK renounces killing civilians. This opinion is held according to the Kurdish extremists' statement stressing that as long as Ocalan (Apo) is held in prison by the Turkish government, their attacks and violent

measures will continue. As a Turkish columnist Mehmet Ali Birand has noted, the Kurdish terrorism was entering a new and perilous phase (Grossbongardt 2006).

The Associated Press writes that an extremist Kurdish militant group on August 29 even threatened to turn “Turkey into hell” and warned tourists against traveling to Turkey. The upsurge in violent attacks in Turkey’s southeast has become a critical issue during the past few months. The horrible clashes left dozens of soldiers and guerillas dead, hundreds of people wounded which led to a Turkish crackdown in the region, deployment of Turkish tanks and artillery across the Iraqi border. The threats were also aimed at attacking the PKK guerilla bases in Northern Iraq. All in all, the bombings on the Mediterranean resort of Marmaris and in Istanbul, the menacing warnings by the rebels, the string of attacks against the “soft targets” as well as against Turkish troops and the police most probably appear to be the continuation of the Kurdish guerilla warfare against Turkey (<http://www.iht.com>).

The New York Times is also critical about the latest events in Turkish tourist city, Antalya, where three people were killed and 20 were wounded on August 28 because of the horrible blast, the three consecutive explosions in another tourist place where 21 were injured among them ten Britons. Therefore, the armed conflict between the Kurds and Turks, having claimed more than 30,000 lives since 1980s, still threatens Turkey and innocent civilians which gains a wide popularity among the ethnic conflict analysts (<http://www.iht.com>).

The resurgence of the Turko-Kurdish conflict threatening not only Turkey but also Northern Iraq and the frustration by the enduring assaults in Turkey organized by the PKK led to the U.S appointment of the retired U.S. Air Force General Joseph W. Ralston on August 29, 2006 as a special envoy for countering the PKK and to possibly lessen the terror dominant in the region. It is also said to be an attempt to reduce the threat of Turkish incursions into Northern Iraq.

As U.S Ambassador to Turkey Ross Wilson has stated in the interview given to BBC Radio, Ralston is going to be the U.S. representative to trilateral talks involving Turkey, Iraq and the US. General Ralston is also responsible for coordinating U.S. efforts to deal with Turkey and Iraq as well as to eliminate the threat of the PKK acting in Turkey, Northern Iraq and across the Turkey/Iraq border (<http://usinfo.state.gov>). Besides fighting against the PKK, Joseph Ralston is expected to pursue both short and long-term objectives. The U.S delegate's short-term goals are aimed at closing down the PKK offices in Northern Iraq to prevent them operating in the region and arresting certain leaders of the organization. In the long-term Ralston will undertake substantive measures to eradicate the PKK presence in Northern Iraq (<http://www.zaman.com>).

As to Turkey, on September 2006, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan appointed retired Land Forces commander Edip Baser as a Ralston's counterpart. Turkey's newly appointed special envoy has also assumed the responsibility of countering terrorism putting a particular emphasis on the fight against the PKK (<http://english.people.com>). Following Turkey and U.S, Iraq has also appointed for a short term a special coordinator, General Amir Amet Hassun, to combat terrorism in the country. However, at the beginning of October 2006 Iraq appointed Shirwan al-Waili, minister for national security, as a new envoy to counter the Kurdistan Workers' Party (<http://www.zaman.com>).

### *Alternative Solutions Proposed by the PKK*

In the preceding sections it has been stated that the main goal of the PKK has been the establishment of a unified and independent Kurdistan. In order to attain this paramount objective, the PKK initiated a national liberation movement and has struggled unanimously both for the Kurdish national identity and the state. Apart from its military measures, the PKK seeks a democratic and political solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey. In this respect, the Mezopotamiya newspaper (2005) reports about the Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan's message directed to the solution of the Kurdish Question by the Turkish government which includes the following key points:

- The solution of the Kurdish Question should be accepted as a base of Turkey's democratization.
- The Kurdish identity should be recognized due to their political, cultural, legal and civil rights.
- The language and cultural rights should be protected by laws. The broadcasting of Kurdish radio, TV and other mass media should not be banned and the relevant rights should be equally distributed.
- The Kurdish language should become one of the main teaching languages too in the schools and the higher educational institutions. Besides, departments of Kurdish language, culture and literature should be opened in the universities.
- Different kinds of expressions of Kurdish political will should be protected by laws.
- A proper attention should be given to Ocalan's imprisonment which impedes his right of being informed. Moreover, the required publications should be provided to jailed Ocalan and his writings should be issued.

- The electoral laws should be amended and democratized contributing to the elimination of the obstacles towards the Kurds and their expression of political will.
- The operating laws in the self-government system should also be amended which will deepen the democratization process at the local level as well.
- The “burglars” and the state actors who have illegally come to the office should be dismissed from the political arena.
- It is of great importance to realize the return of the forcibly displaced villagers. To accomplish it, socio-economic and legal measures should be undertaken. Accordingly, first and foremost economic amendments should be initiated which will improve the Kurds’ drastic economic situation.
- “Hasarakakan hachtutjan” and “zhoghovrdakan masnakcutjan” law should be passed. It is essential to enable the warriors, prisoners and the enforced emigrants to be engaged in politics without any preconditions.
- If Turkey does not accept the above-mentioned conditions and the Kurdish Question is not solved democratically, the Kurds’ rights of liberation struggle for legal self-protection and the denial of Kurdish national identity will again be stated as international and natural law. The corresponding laws will be implemented against all the states attacking the Kurds.

The program of the KADEK (Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress) is also of vital significance from this standpoint which proposes a series of points indispensable for the future solution of the Kurdish Question. Before stating those substantial points, it should be mentioned that the reorganized PKK, namely KADEK, is firmly against the nationalism and is the advocate of a democratic solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey. The message of the Kurds in the new phase of the Kurdish history then is to unite the four parts of the

Kurdistan, Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, in the democratic civilization via the democratic solution of the Kurdish issue. Consequently, KADEK proposes the prerequisites for the democratic liberation and the solution of the Kurdish Question in its Congress documents which are as follows:

- The democratic liberation has two main directions. On one hand Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria should be democratized. On the other hand the Kurdish national Question should be democratically solved.
- In order to form a free democratic society in case of a democratic system, the countries comprising Kurdistan should develop democratic institutions.
- Each of these countries should adopt a democratic Constitution which will guarantee everybody's natural rights and freedom.
- Each citizen should be enabled to have a freedom of speech, press and political activity.
- Any pressure against the national minorities and against those worshipping different religions should be banned, their cultural identities should be accepted and corresponding conditions should be created for their free development.
- Turkey's EU integration should be protected and efforts should be exerted that this step becomes an impetus for the unity of people as well as for the near and Middle East.
- Everybody's basic natural rights should be protected. There should be crucial necessity of practical implementation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Paris Charter, the Copenhagen criteria and other international agreements.



- To solve the national Kurdish Question democratically and peacefully, it is necessary to guarantee the Kurds' influential participation in the country as well as to accept and state the status of Kurdish identity in the Constitution.
- It is also important to launch a widespread struggle for the acceptance of the Kurdish language and culture by the Constitution.
- The economy, declined during the years of war, should also be rehabilitated and developed for the sake of people's prosperity.

Thus, the PKK is inclined to find a democratic and political solution to the Kurdish issue and cooperate with Turkey, whereas the latter considers the PKK a "terrorist" organization and refuses to negotiate with them. A vivid case of the PKK's political stance, with regard to the solution of the Kurdish Question, is the PKK's declaration of a unilateral ceasefire on September 30, 2006 which was intended to go into effect on October 1, 2006. However, the Turkish government rejects PKK ceasefire offer. For instance, on October 11, 2006 the Zaman newspaper wrote that four Turkish citizens were kidnapped by the outlawed PKK and the security forces launched operations to rescue the missing citizens and to capture the terrorists (<http://www.zaman.com>). Whereas US coordinator with Ankara stated on October 12 that the Kurdish rebels are still a threat despite ceasefire. Therefore, the PKK must lay down its arms and they need to renounce violence as soon as possible (<http://news.yahoo.com>).

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Kurdish Question in the Context of EU-Turkey Relations**

The analysis of the Kurdish Question in Turkey cannot be provided without considering EU-Turkey relations since one of the crucial obstacles for Turkey's accession to the EU is that of the Kurdish issue. The corresponding issue is even labeled as "a vicious triangle," namely Turkey, the Kurds and the European Union (IISS 1999). Having manifold dimensions such as ethnic, cultural, linguistic, political, social, economic and international including the precedence of security, the Kurdish question is so critical that Turkey's future membership into the EU can only be realized in case of peaceful solution to the issue. As one prominent political leader has stated in relation to Turkey's EU integration "the road to the EU passes through Diyarbakyr," one of the largest provinces in south-eastern Turkey which is mainly populated by Kurds (Sarigil 2005, 2).

Since the ongoing confrontation and armed struggle of the PKK for the Kurdish sovereignty, cultural and political rights still continue and threat Turkey's domestic stability, it is improbable to grant the Kurds either full cultural freedom or political autonomy. There is a widespread opinion that if the PKK really lays down its arms, Turkey is likely to face increased foreign pressure, particularly from the EU, to stop the violence against the Kurds, acknowledge their claims as well as the Kurdish identity. Nevertheless, the Turkish military which holds ultimate power is decisive to resist this. Moreover, it is probable that "foreign pressure is likely to increase the already rapid growth in Turkish nationalism as well as government intransigent. As a result, there will be insurmountable obstacles for Turkey's approximately 41-year-old dream to become a member of the European club (IISS 1999).

Taking into consideration the aspirations of the Turkish Republic to integrate with the EU, it should be mentioned that its road towards the Europe has not been an easy one. Turkey is constantly under huge pressure by many European institutions in terms of improving its

human rights record and protection of minorities. Nevertheless, this pressure and closer scrutiny have limited impact on Turkey's perception and attitude towards different ethnic and religious groups in the country. Therefore, EU is considered to be an essential hallmark for raising the Kurdish issue in Turkey.

It is a well-known fact that a candidate state has to fulfill some distinct criteria, such as stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities as well as the existence of a functioning market economy, in order to become an EU member. As it is obvious, the protection of minorities is one fundamental requirement for EU membership which is one of the sensitive issues between the EU and Turkey (Sarigil 2005). Moreover, the EU, with regard to the Kurdish problem, has persistently emphasized the significance of the legal grounds for protecting minority rights, implying that Turkey should treat all its citizens including the Kurds equally. The EU has also noted that Turkey should have taken measures to make substantive regulations for, for instance, TV and radio broadcasting in Kurdish and toleration of their cultural traditions as well as political rights (Gulsen 2004).

As Sarigil (2005) states "Turkey's EU accession process emerges as the single most important positive factor on Kurdish problem in Turkey" (3). This can be explained first and foremost by Turkey's reform process both in the political and economic spheres. Ankara began implementing these reforms after being recognized as a candidate country for EU membership during the European Council Helsinki Summit in 1999. The accession process which began in Helsinki turned into a powerful inducement for Turkey leading to substantive reform process. One of the momentous changes was the almost 1/3 amendment of the 1982 Constitution which was written under the military regime (Sarigil 2005).

Changes in the political field were mostly remarkable in 2002 when national elections were held. In the result, for the first time in Turkish history a new political party with Islamic

roots named AKP won the elections. The latter owes its political authority partly to its support for “Turkey’s European vocation” and the result of the Helsinki summit which revitalized Turkey’s hopes for EU membership (Gordon and Taspinar 2006, 61).

During these elections the improved EU-Turkey relationships were most apparent since AKP, having a vigorous pro-EU political platform, committed itself to a democratic reform process complied with the EU Copenhagen criteria for membership qualification. Consequently, a series of reforms were implemented directed at balancing Turkey’s judicial system and civil-military relations. Moreover, since Turkey’s EU membership is its top priority, this reformed Islamic movement achieved some vital objectives. On one hand it gained a political legitimacy in Turkey’s secular state tradition. On the other, it got the support of Turkey’s middle class, liberal intellectuals and business community (Gordon and Taspinar 2006).

As to Turkey’s cultural rights policy, it also implemented a series of reforms revealing its new approach to the issue of Kurdish identity. Thanks to positive and biding signals coming from the EU indicating that Turkey might become an EU member if human rights, including minority rights, were ensured for every person regardless of his/her ethnicity, Turkey began to go beyond its conventional understanding of the Kurdish issue and provided the Kurdish population with social as well as political rights (Gulsen 2004). Consequently, Turkey, by amending its Constitution, lifted the restrictions on publishing and broadcasting in languages other than Turkish. However, mother-tongue education is still not allowed.

The growth of Turkish economy was notable too. Turkey launched the economic liberalization program which would facilitate its integration into the European Community as a full member. For instance, by 2003 the Turkish economy had comparatively stabilized leading to reduction in inflation. Because of the lower inflation and interest rates, Turkey’s economy began to benefit from both the domestic and foreign investment which brought to

higher income levels. Besides, its debt to gross national product (GNP) ratio fairly fell being less than the Euro zone average. Afterwards, by December 2004 the EU concluded that Turkey had fulfilled the basic criteria necessary to commence accession talks and “the long-standing Turkish dream of joining the West seemed closer to fruition than ever” (Gordon and Taspinar 2006, 62). However, there are still many vital causes for concern which create impediments for Turkey’s EU integration.

Though EU-Turkey relations improved after the Helsinki summit in 1999, Europe is still skeptical about Turkey’s aspirations to be a European country. On one hand the military still plays a crucial role in the civilian politics. On the other hand, the Kurds do not have equal rights and human rights violations continue. Therefore, the Turkish government fails to convey the image of a democratic country.

Turkey-EU relations entered a new phase after the declaration of the Copenhagen Summit of December 2002 which indicated that Turkey should take measures to be integrated into the EU. It accelerated the pace of Turkey’s reforms which had started in 2001 by fixing a date for accession negotiations and by forcing other member states to take into account the implications of Turkish membership. “...This became a catalyst for further so-called EU harmonization reforms and the ... AKP government gained considerable credibility” (Gulsen 2004, 2). It was also imperative in the sense that the decisions of the Copenhagen European Council made vivid that Turkey’s progress achieved before the summit did not mean that reforms were complete. The EU did not find Turkey’s efforts enough to open accession talks and needed further progress together with practical implementation of all the reforms. In other words, unless Turkey meets the Copenhagen political criteria and implemented the amended regulations, “its membership plans are bound to remain only as a sweet dream” (Gulsen 2004, 40).

All in all, Turkey's EU integration is not an immediate prospect yet since the EU membership entails full compliance with the values of the EU. The accession process begins when a candidate country satisfies Europe's Copenhagen criteria established in 1993. However, Turkey's political criteria are at large stake. It is very difficult to assert whether the reforms have brought Turkey closer to fulfilling the Copenhagen political criteria since their implementation is extremely problematic. As EU Regular Report of 2001 states:

“... Despite a number of constitutional, legislative and administrative changes, the actual human rights situation ... in Turkey needs improvement. ... Turkey does not yet meet the Copenhagen political criteria and is therefore encouraged to intensify and accelerate the process of reform to ensure that human rights and fundamental freedoms are fully protected in law and practice, for all citizens, throughout the country” (32-33).

The Accession Partnership with Turkey, approved by the EU Council in 2001, included the extension of citizenship rights and the elimination of human rights abuses. The objectives ranged from freedom of expression to the abolition of torture. The reforms also covered developments in the performance and efficiency of the judiciary and the removal of legal provisions forbidding the use of Kurdish language in TV and radio broadcasting. After the approval of the Accession Partnership by the EU in March 2001, Turkey submitted its National Program where Turkish authorities' reluctance to implement reforms in human rights and basic freedoms were noticeable. Following the recommendations of the National Program, Turkey initiated a series of reforms. More than 1/5 of the Constitution concerning human rights, the rule of law and democratic institutions was amended.

An important point in Copenhagen was that EU's standpoint towards Turkish membership prospect in future swiftly made the ruling AKP government willing to adopt amendments. The 2002 elections turned out to be a triumph for the ruling Islamic AKP since a series of reforms were initiated by the AKP stewardship. The reforms changed legislation in order to improve the record of human rights, expand freedom of expression, cultural, ethnic

minority rights and consolidate civilian democracy. Abolition of the death penalty and the elimination of the State Security Courts are also of great importance. These reforms lay a ground to consider that Turkey is closer to satisfying the requirements necessary for opening negotiations with the EU. Even in that regard, the EU has stated that in addition to adopting a series of reforms concerning mainly freedom of expression and human rights, the long-cherished membership requires their implementation (Gulsen 2004).

The Turkish ruling party, the AKP, has displayed a strong determination by passing the bills required for the Copenhagen political criteria. Yet, much effort should be exerted in order to implement all those reforms. There are considerable human rights violations in Turkey and doubts about the civilian power of the army have not totally disappeared. As Gulsen (2004) states “there is no discount for Turkey and that the only way that could open Brussels’s doors is to complete compliance with the Copenhagen political criteria which would leave no room for excuses on the part of the EU” (102).

Undoubtedly, the EU’s October 3, 2005 decision to launch accession talks with Turkey was a foremost triumph and gave a paramount boost to Turkey’s EU aspirations. Yet, expectations and outlooks remain low when it comes to a series of issues that are incompatible with European norms and practices.

One of them is the problem of Kurds. Turkey still faces one of its most insurgent issues - the challenge of the Kurdish question which is still considered a major obstacle for Turkey’s EU membership. Though Ankara was engaged in reform process largely thanks to its cherished desire to qualify itself for EU membership “once its candidacy was secured,” its relations with the EU are problematic (Gordon and Taspinar 2006, 59). Ankara is still blamed vigorously for failing to uphold the rights of its large ethnic Kurdish population regardless of pledges and promises given to the European Union. This tangible reality is always a matter of tough discussion among the EU leaders who have to come up with a decision whether Turkey

has taken positive steps towards protecting Kurds' human rights and political freedoms. As Zubeyir Aydar, former head of the PKK, has mentioned in one of his interviews quite arrogantly, Turkey wants to become an EU member without guaranteeing their personal, political, cultural and social rights. Whereas domestic stability is possible only in case of fulfilling Kurds' demands which are norms that comply with European standards. They are primarily directed towards the cessation of Turkish military operations in Kurdish regions, an amnesty for political prisoners, the acknowledgment of Kurdish culture and language.

Washington Times (2006) writes that "the Turkish government has ducked a confrontation with the military over Kurdish unrest ... incurring fresh criticism from the European Union that it is not making needed reforms" (1). The overall situation and the signals from Ankara point out that such a problem is probable to emerge over and over since the EU presses Turkey for changes in its dealing with the Kurdish minority and the role of the military. Washington Times (2006) notes that "the EU raps Ankara for pace of reforms." EU is of the opinion that the undertaken reforms fall short of expectations. Besides, it seems to the EU that Turkey "has lost its appetite for reform" (1) ([www.ebscohost.com](http://www.ebscohost.com)).

Compromise with the Kurds is not an acceptable option for Turkey, thus resulting in military confrontation, political polarization and authoritarianism. To Ankara's great disappointment, the EU regards the Kurdish issue as the rebellion of an ethnic group whose cultural and national rights have been suppressed by an authoritarian state. Turkey is still under domestic political pressures because of the rising Kurdish separatism. Therefore, the Kurdish question has a great impact on Turkey's perception of the EU because Brussels strongly urges Turkey to accept the Kurds as a national minority with distinct political, cultural and linguistic rights (Gordon and Taspinar 2006).

In terms of Turkey's geopolitical stance, the implications of its integration into the Europe are profound and profitable for the EU, but at the same time they are very dangerous



for the Europe. Firstly, the EU, in case of accession, would inevitable acquire neighbors like Iraq, Iran and Syria which will thrust Europe into the tangled politics of the Middle East. Secondly, Turkey's accession would also make the EU an immediate neighbor of the turbulent lands between the Black and Caspian seas. This is another significant factor, since famous for the energy resources of the Caspian basin, the Transcaucasus has always been a sinister region. Thirdly, the uprisings of the ethnic clashes in the region are threatening. In Turkey's case, its Kurdish minority not only in Turkey, but also in Iraq, Syria and Iran, represents a huge problem in the region (Walker 2001). Thus, the EU is wary of its proximity to such an unstable and challenging region as well as very cautious in welcoming Turkey into its union. Such an entangled situation opens a room for reflections whether Turkey really wants to share political sovereignty with the EU taking into account the multifaceted nature of the internal and external threats they are facing in an utmost dangerous geographic neighborhood.

Turkey's EU joining would also be a positive step in the sense that having a Muslim state in the EU would bring all sorts of benefits. However, Turkey's membership is contingent upon its implementing necessary reforms in the area of minority rights as well as aimed at eradicating the dominance of the military in the governing of the state and consolidating democratic procedures into its institutions. EU regularly faces many problems and crises. Some of them get solved, others are ignored hoping that they will go away. Nevertheless, as Thomas Mark states (2006), "there is one EU problem that is resolutely not going away and is going to get worse: that is, Turkey's membership" (2).

The thing is that human rights abuses continue and even escalate, no guarantee of Kurds' political, cultural, linguistic and social rights are provided. On contrary, the Kurdish region of Turkey continually experiences acts of major violence by the military against the civilian population. For instance, large amount of people, among them children, political

activists, members of the Kurdish parties, human-rights defenders are physically attacked, killed as well as imprisoned. The Kurdish villages are also destroyed, burnt and thousands of Kurds are internally displaced. In short, Turkey violates the European norms and breaks its deal with the EU.

The corresponding troubling developments during recent months have impelled European diplomats to question Turkey's determination to comply with EU-related reforms. On one hand, there is a widespread concern that the increased violence in Turkey's largely-Kurdish southeast will urge the military to be involved in domestic affairs. On the other hand, the resurgence of the Kurdish separatist issue could cause the judicial system to regress in terms of human rights. Moreover, there is some anxiety that the growing political tension in Turkey is probable to hamper its reform process. Thus, in spite of Turkey's assurance on implementing the required reforms, EU officials are still skeptical about Turkey's EU integration (Schleifer 2006).

EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn (2005) has also expressed dissatisfaction about Turkey's reform pace and has firmly admonished the Turkish government to undertake urgent measures and to get back on the track of reform implementation. He has also added that "human rights violations continue to occur. The new laws that in principle enhance the rule of law and human rights must be duly implemented on the ground....Hence we expect Turkey to tackle the significant shortcomings without delay..." (www.europa.eu).

As to Turkey's overall standpoint and expectations to join the EU, though revived after Brussels's October 3, 2005 decision to start accession talks with Turkey, they remain distant and uncertain. Such pessimism is justified on many reasons. One of them is the requirement of holding a referendum to approve future EU enlargements which was put forward in 2005 by France after changing its Constitution. This is really awful news for Turkey since other countries may also demand to put Turkish membership to a public vote

which imply that Europeans can oppose to embrace 70 million more Muslims. Besides, even if Turkey continues to consolidate democracy and develop its economy, there are still many obstacles ranging from the issue of Cyprus, Kurdish Question and Armenian Genocide to a national vote from one of the 25 EU countries which can hinder its European integration (Gordon and Taspinar 2006). “Equally troubling for Ankara are French and German proposals for a “privileged partnership” instead of full membership.” Moreover, the fact that the EU has described its accession process “not only open ended but also conditional on the EU’s absorption capacity” still rings in the ears of many Turks who are of the opinion that Brussels will always find pretences to say no to Turkey (Gordon and Taspinar 2006, 58).

As a result, recent polls indicate that only 14% of Turks really think that their country will ever be accepted to the EU causing resentment in Turkey where support for EU integration has lately declined from approximately 85% to 63%. All these bring to conclusion that the reform process has just been a deception, though it has required indispensable sacrifices by the Turkish public for Turkey’s EU accession (Gordon and Taspinar 2006).

Having all these in mind, a big question arises, namely how can Turkey be integrated into the civilized club of European countries? All is not favorable and promising with Turkey’s journey toward Europe, mostly because of its domestic political instability which constantly threatens Turkey on his road to the EU and moves Turkey away from liberalism and democracy.

## Chapter 5

### **The Kurdish Autonomy in Northern Iraq and its Regional Ramifications**

#### *The Status of Kurds in Northern Iraqi Kurdistan*

The history of Iraqi Kurdistan is among the most vibrant one in the world. Before 1991 it had a history of devastation and displacement. Over the past two decades Iraq has been threatened by successive wars, brutal rules and sanctions. As a result, millions of Iraqis have left their homeland and many of them now live as refugees. Moreover, about one million has been displaced in Iraq. With the end of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, the Iraqi people had the opportunity to rebuild their lives.

It is worth mentioning that since the first days of Iraqi independence, Iraq's 4 million Kurds have struggled for autonomy. However, it is since 1991 that Iraqi Kurds have begun to experience self-rule in Northern Iraq Kurdistan, to maintain their ethno-linguistic, cultural identity and at the same time to establish a broad sense of collective identity which is based on three major factors: common geography, the ongoing experiment in self-rule, democratization and cultural tolerance as well as their joint experience as non-Arab Iraqis having to some extent political domination in Iraq (O'Leary 2002).

Just after the Gulf War in early 1991, the Iraqi Kurds rebelled against the central government. During that time there was a massive flee of Kurdish refugees which became a matter of intense international scrutiny. While Iran opened its borders to the fleeing Kurds, Turkey closed its borders because of fear that refugees would destabilize its country. However, Turkey and the United States proposed creating a "safe haven" for the Kurds in Northern Iraq. This resulted in the implementation of the "Operation Provide Comfort" to protect the Kurdish refugees from the Iraqi government as well as to give humanitarian assistance to them in the mountain passes along the Iraqi-Turkish border. In this context northern no-fly zone over a part of Kurdish homelands was established too (Chanaa 2005).

In spite of strong external and internal opposition, the Kurdish “safe haven” has been successfully governed by the Iraqi Kurds themselves which comprises 40.000 square kilometers roughly or about half of Iraqi Kurdistan. The rest is still ruled by Baghdad. Elections were held in May 1992. As a result, the Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) were created. Since the establishment of the northern no-fly zone, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), a twenty-year-old Iraqi Kurdish political party, has been struggling for power with another Kurdish political party, Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

Today, the Kurdish safe haven is ruled in two separate parts, each by one of the two main parties, namely KDP and PUK. However, both are unified to assert firmly the Kurdish right to self-determination in future in Iraq. Besides such more or less achievement of Kurdish political aspirations, this part of Iraqi Kurdistan has become an asylum for all Iraqis seeking freedom, protection and security (O’Leary 2002).

The more than a decade of Kurdish self-rule in Iraq’s three northern provinces have somehow strengthened the Kurdish determination to take advantage of the historic opportunity and reinforce their autonomy. In spite of the violent conflict between the two governing factions during the mid-1990s, Iraq’s self-governing Kurdish provinces have relatively flourished compared with the rest of Iraq and the period before the establishment of KRG.

As to the KRG, it has protected Kurdish freedom from Arab, Turkish or Iranian repressions. Moreover, the autonomous period has been the witness of praiseworthy improvements in the region’s infrastructure. In the region, there has been little of the repression, lawlessness and anarchy which dominate over the rest of Iraq until now. The Kurdish leaders who are elected representatives of their population head not only well-organized political parties but also retain control over their own armed forces – the

peshmerga. The Kurds also maintain their autonomous KRG. In order to strengthen their position and lay the basis for the single Kurdish entity, the KRG's two governing parties are aimed at creating a Kurdish Government in the north as soon as possible (Park 2004).

It can be concluded that Iraq's Kurdish community, particularly unrepresented in and repressed by previous Iraqi governments, is emerging as a key force in post-Saddam Iraq. They are not objects of discrimination and persecution in Iraq as in Turkey, for instance. In Northern Iraq the Kurdish inhabited regions are relatively free of insurgent activities. The Kurds enjoy political autonomy due to the recent national elections which raise concerns that the Kurds might use their political strength to satisfy their interests at the expense of a united Iraq.

Apart from the political autonomy, the Kurds enjoy more national rights, with regard to their culture and language, in Iraq than in other country in the region. On one hand, the Arabic and Kurdish languages have been recognized the two official languages of Iraq. Publications in Kurdish are allowed and there is Kurdish mass media. The Kurdish culture is accepted and it is not distorted. Islamic principles are not considered the primary source of law.

The KRG has been even given the authority to alter the applications, in the Kurdish areas, of those Iraqi laws that are not related to foreign policy, national security, national budgetary matters and control of Iraq's natural resources. The KRG also controls the police forces and internal security, thus allowing the peshmerga to legally operate in the Kurdish regions (Katzman and Prados 2005). All these factors give a vivid picture of the Kurds' status in the Northern Iraqi Kurdistan. However, in the regional setting the future of Iraqi Kurds is still uncertain.

*Regional Developments in Northern Iraq and their Implications for Kurdish Question in Turkey*

The regional developments in Northern Iraqi Kurdistan have undoubtedly a great impact on Kurdish Question in Turkey where the Kurds are constantly subjected to humiliation, persecution and policies of assimilation. Particularly, the Kurdish self-rule in Northern Iraq on one hand threatens Turkey, on the other hand becomes a target for Turkey's Kurds to revolt against the Turkish Government. The other source of concern for Turkey is the PKK bases near the Turkish-Iraqi border which are quite safe spots to raid into Turkey. The status of Kurds in Iraq, as a result, has become a crucial foreign policy issue for Turkey and it is not a contentions one.

From this perspective, the issue of Turkish-Iraqi relations is important which implies whether the issue divides or unites Turkey and Iraq as they both want to contain Kurdish separatism. The solution to this issue lies in granting autonomy to the Kurdish population in each country which has somehow realized in Northern Iraq, whereas in Turkey the situation is the same. Thus, the longer Turkey fails to change its domestic policy towards its Kurdish minority, the greater the risk of negative and worsening developments in Turkey's relations with Iraq (Carley 1995).

In terms of fighting the PKK, it seems as if the issue has united Turkey and Iraq since Iraq has taken measures during September 2006 to shut Kurdish rebel offices there. The Turkish daily newspaper Zaman has published that Iraq, following Turkey and the U.S.A, has even appointed a special coordinator to combat terrorism, the outlawed PKK in the country ([www.zaman.com](http://www.zaman.com)). Such a step no doubt derives from Turkish interests in Iraq and can somehow make Iraqi government seek favorable relations with Turkey.

On November 6, 2006 Kurdish Media informed that Turkey's foreign minister has warned Iraqi Kurds that dividing Iraq across religious or ethnic lines would inevitably create

more chaos and would not ease killings and violence there. Moreover, Abdullah Gul, by expressing its anxiety and fear, told reporters that no one can ignore the fact that “Turkey... has its own large and restive Kurdish population and is wary of any moves toward a separatist Kurdish state in Iraq for fears that would encourage Turkey’s own Kurdish population to join their Iraqi counterparts to fight for an independent state” (www.kurdmedia.com). Thus, the concerns from the part of Turkey with regard to stirring its Kurdish minority in case of any regional developments in the Northern Iraq are still evident in Turkish government and can affect the related situation in Turkey. As Bill Park (2004) states, “Kurdish nationalism is now a genie out of the bottle” (27).

In another respect, Turkey has long feared that the KRG could serve as a pole of attraction for Turkey’s Kurds or an independent and sovereign Kurdish state might emerge by default which will threaten not only Turkish territorial integrity but a disentanglement of the region as a whole.

Overwhelmed with its diplomatic isolation and the possible implications of Iraq’s fragmentation, Ankara has even conducted a diplomatic campaign in Middle Eastern regions which has given rise to suspicions that a shift in Turkey’s foreign policy could be under way. Therefore, in January 2003 Abdullah Gul organized a summit in Istanbul where Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iran attended and which was aimed at finding alternatives to war and at explaining Ankara’s perspectives on the Kurdish problem. In addition, such regional alliance shares Turkey’s restlessness concerning possible Kurdish aspirations for greater autonomy (Park 2004).

Over the years Turkey’s interests in Iraq have been stable since it is mainly concerned with the possible politicization of Turkey’s own Kurds. Such interests can be reduced to two primary factors. Firstly, Turkey is determined to oppose any Turkish-Kurdish rebellious group’s, such as the PKK, a secure haven in Northern Iraq. Secondly, Turkey is to reduce the



contagion effect on Kurds in Turkey that may originate from the political activities of Iraqi Kurds. This factor first and foremost requires the limitation of Iraqi Kurds' political aspirations either in relation to the establishment of an autonomous state in Northern Iraq or just independence.

The most explicit public articulation concerning Turkish fear of the "Iraqi contagion effect" on Turkey's Kurds is that of the former Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit. The latter argued for Turkey's military intervention into Northern Iraq in order to prevent perilous developments from occurring. Consequently, stressing that the Kurds in Iraq are politically quite organized, Ecevit stated:

"They want to create a powerful political party that will incorporate them all. They will succeed in this. They are also thinking of creating a parallel Kurdish party in Turkey. They may succeed in this. After succeeding in this, they will query why should we live in two distinct territories. After a political evolution they will be asking Turkey to give up territory" (Barkey 2005).

The above-mentioned pessimistic statement is a vivid example of Turkey's overall anxious stance towards the regional developments in favor of Iraqi Kurds. Therefore, Turkey's major preference in Iraq is to see the control of the central Government on the entire Iraqi territory. Turkey also wants the GOI to overcome the ethnic, regional divisions that have plagued the country during its history. Finally, it urges Iraq to prohibit PKK activities in Northern Iraq which is the primary source of threat for Turkey. As to Turkey's foreign policy objectives, these regional developments in Iraq have considerably reduced the amount of control it could exercise on the Kurdish factions in Northern Iraq (Barkey 2005).

To sum up, the situation in Northern Iraq has considerable effects on the Kurdish Question in Turkey where the Kurds are highly suppressed. They are not allowed to express their political will, organize their life as they wish and even preserve their national identity.

*US-Turkey Relations as Viewed from the Standpoint of US Policy in Northern Iraq*

The United States of America plays a crucial role in Iraq. American strategy and intentions with regard to Kurdish separatism and Iraq are significant not only for Turkey but also for the U.S itself. On one hand the U.S does not support the fragmentation of Iraq. On the other hand, it is not intended to undertake such measures that might threaten the security of its NATO ally. As Park (2004) notes “in the face of the dilemmas that could be thrown up, US reaction might hinge on the Turkish response, for whom a break up of Iraq might be seen as a first-order strategic threat” (25).

Though Turkey and the U.S have been close allies, during recent years they have experienced bilateral tensions primarily connected with the US-led Iraqi invasion and the ensuing imbroglio. Moreover, today their relationships are strained on the PKK issue as well since Northern Iraq bordering Turkey has become a sanctuary for them who infiltrate into Turkish territories in order to attack military and civilian targets.

“The PKK is a key snag hurting Turkish-US ties.” Therefore, Turkey strongly urges the United States to take active steps against the PKK inside Iraq. In response to Turkey, the U.S officials have stated that their troops are not enough to combat PKK militants ([www.seeurope.net](http://www.seeurope.net)). However, having considered the PKK a terrorist group, US appointed Air Force General Joseph W. Ralston as a coordinator to boost efforts to combat the PKK terrorism. The incumbent is quite experienced and knows a lot about the strategies concerning the antiterrorism. He will try to correct the mistakes committed by the Turkish government and gradually find ways to fight the PKK ([www.turkishdailynews.com](http://www.turkishdailynews.com)).

Despite such undertaken measures, no fruitful results are seen in the Turko-Kurdish conflict, the clashes constantly continue. Continued instability in Iraq not only weakens U.S objectives but, from Turkey’s standpoint, also has the potential to spread in Turkey through PKK raids as well as through huge refugee flows. Regardless of the compatibility of Turkish-

American interests, there is also inconsistency concerning the means to solve the problems of the PKK, the political autonomy of the Iraqi Kurds. Thus, the contingencies there divide the two states the most.

On one hand, Ankara wants to see Kurdish ambitions constrained. On the other hand, it is eager to assume the control of Kirkuk as a safeguard against Kurdish separatist objectives. Whereas the U.S is more ambivalent about Kurdish aspirations, having even promised them a support for a federal arrangement in 1998. Consequently, Turkey is highly worried whether the U.S would support the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq if the situation worsens in Iraq beyond a certain point (Barkey 2005).

Such an uncertain US-led policy in Iraq creates a deep mistrust towards U.S undertaken actions and intentions among the Turks. For instance, public opinion has distinctly turned anti-American in recent years. Recent surveys indicate that Turkish public attitudes toward the U.S are now the most negative. Such deterioration in perceptions of the U.S has great importance for the relations between the Erdogan and Bush administrations since the future of Turkish-US cooperation is crucial for dealing with the chaos in Iraq (Lesser 2005). According to Lesser (2005) “changes in the foreign policy debate on both sides, against the backdrop of turmoil in Iraq, make clear that the bilateral relationship can no longer be left on autopilot” (1).

US-led policy in Iraq no doubt affects its relation with Turkey, leads to a lack of confidence and accord over future contingencies in Iraq, particularly in case of U.S failure in that country. However, their cooperation is inevitable since U.S has its own interests in Iraq, whereas Turkey is primarily concerned with the overall status of the Iraqi Kurds.

Above all, it is improbable that their relations will come to a deadlock. Turkey’s strategic geographical location will guarantee Americans’ continuing interest in Turkish concerns. In this respect, the US should avoid having patronizing position that was evident

during the Iraq war. Particularly, as the chief supporter of Turkey's fight against the PKK, US should be more considerate towards its ally's special concerns and engage in consistent talks with the Turkish government on Iraq while avoiding any "knee-jerk" reactions (Sever 2003).

To conclude, Turkey still faces a foreign policy challenge in order to effectively balance Turkish-American strategic relations. They are favorable not only for Turkey but also the United States. Turkey is mainly concerned with the eradication of the PKK camps in Northern Iraq and the U.S can be an effective tool to fight against the "terrorist" cells in Iraq. On the other hand, the U.S will never deteriorate its relations with its NATO ally because of Turkey's strategic importance in the region.

## Chapter 6

### **The Resurgence of the Turko-Kurdish Conflict and its Implications for Armenia**

The resurgence of the Turko-Kurdish ethnic conflict has great implications for Armenia. Therefore, the Kurdish Question in Turkey needs to be analyzed also in terms of regional security setting, Armenia's geo-strategic and geopolitical situation, Armenia's national security, territorial integrity and finally from the standpoint of its economic conditions.

Firstly, the relevance of this deeply rooted ethnic conflict lies in the proximity of borders where hostilities can occur, thus having a huge impact on Armenia's national security. Secondly, the threat looms because of Turkey itself which always looks for an appropriate pretext to attack Armenia.

Taking into consideration Armenia's security interests and adversarial Turkish-Armenian relationships, particularly Ankara's false propaganda concerning the PKK-Armenia ties should be considered. Since 1993 Ankara has publicly announced as if Armenia supports the PKK and provides it with bases in its territory (Aivazian 2004). For instance, the following title in one of the Turkish newspapers clearly shows the extent of such a propaganda "the report of the intelligence goes into particulars about the PKK-Armenia relationship." More troubling is Metin Gurderen's, a Turkish state official, statement in 1998 which says that "if Armenia supports separatists, then we have made our decision, the button has been pressed. A war might break out any moment" (Aivazian 2004, 120).

Such official and false announcements by the Turkish government create a substantive ground for constantly threatening Armenia or just launching an attack any time. Although, a widespread opinion is held that this false propaganda is intended for mere domestic threat, the situation seems to be much more serious, meaning that the main aim of such a well worked out propaganda is to exert pressure on Armenia (Aivazian 2004).

In case of deterioration of the Turko-Kurdish conflict near the borders not only Armenia's geopolitical and geo-strategic situation will suffer, but also the economy. Because of Kurdish-Armenian close relationship, the Kurds will first and foremost flee to Armenia, thus creating new problems in the field of economy due to our poor economic conditions. However, the Republic of Armenia will have no chance but to assist the Kurds both financially and morally, provide them with shelters, food and with other necessities.

In order to protect the country to some extent from the possible Turkish threats and Turkish incursions into the Armenian territories and in the case of the insurgence of the Turko-Kurdish conflict near the borders, Armenia should take some substantive measures. On one hand it should work out defensive and strategic politics, for instance directed at the reinforcement and organization of Armenian military force, to safeguard its national security and be ready for any emergency situation. On the other hand, Armenia should explore contingencies about the huge influx of Kurds into Armenian territories in case of full-blown military operations in Turkey.

As to raising Turkey's Kurdish Question and the PKK issue in front of the international community, Armenia should conduct counter-propaganda against the Turkish government's false claims about Armenia-PKK connection in the international fora. Moreover, in terms of Turkey's EU integration, Armenia should not only raise the Genocide issue but it must also point out Turkey's failure in upholding fully the rights of its Kurdish ethnic minority as one of the key criteria of the European Union. Such a measure will reveal Armenia's overall stance towards Turkey's false propaganda as well as its democratic approach towards ethnic minorities.

Taking into consideration all these factors and possible threats for Armenia in the region, Armenia should observe carefully all the dimensions and developments in the Turko-Kurdish conflict to be ready for all possible scenarios.

## **Conclusions**

The paper has thoroughly studied all the dimensions of the Turko-Kurdish conflict and its significance for Turkey's foreign policy and its EU integration process. The following final remarks will put forward some recommendations and possible solutions for the Kurdish Question in Turkey.

Since 1984 the PKK, in search for Kurds' autonomy and independence, has become a kind of instrument of threat for Turkish Government, whereas Turkey is determined not to go to compromise with its Kurdish ethnic minority. Such kind of persistent policy against the Kurds in Turkey creates a stable ground for the resurgence of the Turko-Kurdish conflict. Therefore, as Salih (2005) states "the Kurds, as a people divided between four states, pose a ... policy issue of great importance for the future of the region and of these specific countries" (1).

The Kurdish issue in Turkey will long remain a thorn for regional stability. The emergence of a united independent Kurdistan will take decades to be considered a viable option for Turkey. The Kurds in Turkey will reach political autonomy sometimes in the future only after continuing their full-blown military operations in Turkey. At present, it is just an unacceptable and unreal alternative for Turkey. In the result, the Kurdish separatist pressure is constantly rising, whereas Turkey does not take substantive measures both in its domestic and regional policy.

In order to qualify itself for EU membership, Turkey implemented a number of reforms in the political field as well as in its cultural and linguistic policies in order to ease the restrictions on the use of Kurdish language and preservation of the Kurdish culture. Nevertheless, Turkey is far from fully resolving the ensuing problems in terms of fulfilling some distinct criteria, such as stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities.

The problem with the implementation of reforms is connected with the fact that political elite is divided on the necessary course of reforms. Moreover, they lack enthusiasm for deep changes in the country which lessens their commitment to realize those reforms in practice. Therefore, Turkey is under constant pressure by the European Institutions. EU-Turkey relations are still problematic. Turkey is blamed for not changing its brutal behavior towards the Kurds and for slow pace of reforms. Thus, the Kurdish Question as well as the Genocide and Cyprus issues pose a threat that Turkey-EU talks could be heading for breakdown.

In order to somehow mitigate the conflict and to become an EU member, Turkey should first and foremost change its negative perception of the Kurds as an intransigent tribe which will subdue its enmity towards them. From this perspective, it is worth mentioning Salih's proposal concerning Turkey's group recognition, namely the Kurds. Salih (2005) recommends combining democratization and decentralization in different spheres of the state with the recognition of minorities. This is a paramount alternative for Turkey since those living in Turkey might be loyal to the state and the institutions operating in the country. Moreover, the institutions might take into consideration the shared interests, values and necessities not only of the Turks but also those of the ethnic groups (Salih 2005).

Such an option for creating a new policy vis-à-vis the Kurds could be a positive step forward by Turkey since both the state and the institutions would strengthen the links as well as their policies for the benefit of all groups in Turkey. Their national aspirations and conventional demands would be satisfied as well.

In the complex process of democratization Turkey is engaged in, the Turkish problem with the Kurds cannot be overlooked. Thus, Turkey's Kurdish policies and strategies must be reframed within a new political system with appropriate institutional arrangements. If Turkey is really determined to pave a way towards a liberal democratic system, the implemented



reforms should be realized in practice. Besides, almost every reform might contribute to the development and well-being of the Kurds. Consequently, the Kurdish minority should be granted cultural, linguistic rights it has struggled for more than a decade.

As to their political rights, the Kurds should be enabled to control their life themselves, have at least administrative autonomy, freely express their political will and have active participation in the political field. The sooner the governing elite create a shared common perspective among its own citizens and the Kurds, the less pressure and threat any government would be subjected to with regard to Kurdish uprisings in Turkey and Kurdish regional developments in the neighborhood.

Since the reemergence of the PKK lays a new phase to the Turko-Kurdish conflict and Turkey is constantly threatened by the PKK military operations as the recent developments in Turkey's southeastern provinces and its resort centers show, Turkey should find ways to settle the situation. Therefore, Turkey should either conduct negotiations regarding the ensuing tensions and conflicts with the Kurdish leaders or satisfy the minimal demands of the Kurdish minority which is still unacceptable for Turkey.

To sum up, after observing the problems Turkey confronts in its attempts to "solve" the Kurdish Question in future, it can be said that some measures, for example the amendment of the Constitution, have been taken in terms of the Kurds. However, they were initiated in order to be integrated into the European club, whereas the main problems have not been solved yet. The Kurdish issue in Turkey still creates obstacles for Turkey both to become a democratic state and to become an EU member. To depict the Kurds' reality in our days I would like to conclude with Salih's (2005) words typical to Kurds which say "our past is sad. Our present is a catastrophe. Fortunately, we don't have a future" (1).

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*Appendix A: A Timeline of the Origin of the Kurdish Question*

**August 1920:** The Treaty of Sèvres was signed in France.

**July 1923:** The Treaty of Lausanne was signed.

**March 1925:** The first Kurdish riot blew up with the leadership of Sheik Said.

**October 1927:** Rebellion of Shaikh Abdurrahman was launched who attacked the Turkish garrisons in Palu and Malatya. The Kurdish rebels occupied the south of Erzurum and Bayazid. However, they were driven out after Turkish reinforcements entered the area.

**June 1930:** The second Kurdish uprising began led by the Kurdish “Hoybun” organization.

**1937-1938:** The revolt in Dersim broke out with the initiative of Seit Riza.

**1946:** The Soviet Union de facto recognized the autonomy of Iran’s Kurdistan which was ruined by Shah’s authorities.

**1958:** The new Constitution of Iraq recognized two ethnic groups in Iraq, namely Arabs and Kurds.

**1961:** The revolt, under the leadership of Mustafa Barzani, took place.

**March 1970:** An agreement was signed between the authorities of Barzani and Baath parties to be implemented within four years for the creation of autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan.

**1974:** The relationship between them deteriorated again. The Baath authorities launched a bombardment through air attacks on the Kurdish cities.

**1975:** Mustafa Barzani’s revolt ended due to the Algiers Accord.

**1979-80:** The Kurdish separatists in Iran established autonomy in Iran’s Mahabad city which eventually led to a strong opposition of the Iranian authorities.

**1984:** The evolution of the PKK as a key force in promoting the Kurds’ struggle for Kurdish independence.

**1988:** The Kurdish populated Halabja town in Iraq was bombed with chemical weapons. As a result, 5000 residents were killed which contributed to the displacement of more than 180,000 Iraqi Kurds.

**April 1991:** In Northern Iraq a security zone was created which, in fact, lay the basis for the Kurdish autonomy.

**1998:** Based on the agreement between Turkey and Syria, the PKK board of leadership was removed from Syria.

**February 1999:** Abdullah Ocalan was captured in Kenya by Turkish Special Forces and was isolated in Turkey's Imrali Island.

**August 1999:** Ocalan declared a ceasefire and the PKK moved its insurgents out of Turkey into Northern Iraq as it was concerned with Ocalan's execution.

**2000:** 584 PKK-led attacks and uprisings occurred in Southeastern Turkey.

**2001:** There were 729 clashes between Turkey and Kurds.

**2002:** There were 757 clashes between Turkey and Kurds.

**2003:** 1,500 Kurdish attacks took place in Turkish territories.

**2004:** There were 975 clashes.

**2005:** The organization ordered an estimated 1,200 of its combatants to enter Turkey from Northern Iraq.

**2006:** A number of bombings, explosions, terrorist acts, ambushes took place in Turkey's tourist resorts.

**August 2006:** U.S appointed retired U.S. Air Force General Joseph W. Ralston as a special envoy for countering the PKK.

**September 2006:** Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan appointed retired Land Forces commander Edip Baser as a Ralston's counterpart.

**October 2006:** Iraq appointed Shirwan al-Waili, minister for national security, as a new envoy to counter the PKK.