Centre for Just Peace and Democracy

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Kurdish Diaspora Political Activism in Europe with a Particular Focus on Great Britain

Editorial Note

The policy papers were produced in the context of the project Diaspora Dialogues for Development and Peace. We commissioned brief policy and background papers (mainly) from activists to get their views on how they perceive their political activism, as opposed to how outsiders view them. To generate as many policy papers as possible, reflecting diverse viewpoints, the project invited activists and academics via a "Call for Papers". Since the majority of the papers were written by activists or by those who are both activists and academics, the papers cannot be viewed as a neutral account of the present history. Nonetheless, we believe that these are unique perspectives that are hardly recognized in the scholarly writing and should be given space for reflection.

The views expressed are those of the authors and contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of the Berghof Peace Support or any of its constituent agencies. Any comments or feedback should be addressed to the authors directly.

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Abstract

The Kurdish diaspora is the largest stateless diaspora in the world and it is thought to be the most politically active migrant group in Europe. Their activities consequently caused a spill over of the conflict in Turkey to Europe and beyond. The diffusion of conflict outside Turkish borders reveals itself in frequent Kurdish protests and demonstrations, hunger strikes, and occasional violence between Turkish and Kurdish groups in Europe. Besides these activities, the diaspora works alongside numerous civil society organisations throughout Europe to raise awareness of the situation of the Kurds in Turkey. They have succeeded in putting the Kurdish issue on the European agenda and have lobbied European politicians and governments to put pressure on Turkey over a resolution to the Kurdish issue. This article is an attempt to chart the Kurdish diaspora and their political activism with regard to the Kurdish question in Turkey. It focuses on the reasons for the Kurdish influx into Europe and Kurdish diaspora engagements. Moreover, it aims to put special emphasis on the first and second generation Kurds in Europe, as well as the situation of Kurdish women in the diaspora. The paper includes a discussion devoted to the mobilization of the Kurdish diaspora in the UK.

1. Introduction[1]

At present, it is impossible to render a complete picture of the relationship between Turkey and its Kurdish population without taking global and transnational factors into consideration. The conflict is, in itself, transnational in that it is highly sensitive to developments in the region, particularly in countries where Kurds live, such as Syria, Iraq and Iran. Although, as Yildiz has emphasized, there is no single definition of 'Kurd' or 'Kurdishness', within the Middle East the Kurdish identity transcends state borders and the Kurdish question has become a trans-border issue (Yıldız 2005, 118). With regard to the importance of the Kurdish question, Yegen (2011, 67) suggests that perhaps no other issue has "plagued the Turkish state as incessantly". However, the Kurdish question no longer lies solely within the realm of Turkish politics and, due to the Kurdish exodus from Turkey towards Europe, has become a 'European' or even 'transnational' debate.

The Kurdish diaspora, thought to be the largest stateless diaspora in the world and the most politically vocal group within Europe (Grojean 2011, 182), is carrying the Kurdish cause to various European states and beyond. The diffusion of conflict outside Turkish borders reveals itself in frequent Kurdish protests, hunger strikes, and occasional violence between Turkish and Kurdish groups in Europe. However, the *modus operandi* adopted by the Kurdish diaspora today is, in principle, closer to that of a social movement. It works alongside numerous civil society organisations throughout Europe to raise awareness of the situation of the Kurds in Turkey. Moreover, the diaspora has succeeded in putting the Kurdish issue on the European agenda and has lobbied European politicians and governments to put pressure on Turkey over a resolution to the Kurdish issue. As Hassanpour and Mojab (2005, 214) have pointed out, the Kurdish diaspora is "to a large extent, a product of the conflict' and actively participates in its 'reproduction and possible resolution".

Unsurprisingly, the role of diaspora groups in conflict resolution is an increasingly important subject today. In the age of globalisation, diasporas, acting as non-state actors, have the ability to influence policy-making procedure both in the home and host countries. Thanks to their understanding of the politics of each, they have the advantage of playing the role of mediator between their homeland and hostland, or between different homeland groups. Although the literature has, thus far, tended to label the diaspora as contributors to the conflict situation in the homeland, various studies have more recently proven otherwise by investigating the role of the diaspora as peacemakers (Baser/Swain 2008). The Kurdish example offers a wealth of material by which to discuss these issues and to contribute to this strand of the literature.

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1 I would like to thank Omer Tekdemir (Durham University), Ekim Caglar (Uppsala University), Axelle Reiter (European University Institute) and Luxshi Vimalarajah (Berghof Peace Support) for their valuable feedback on this paper. I would also like to express my gratitude to the Graduate School of Social Sciences at Humboldt University, Berlin, for providing me with an excellent working environment in which to conduct my research during my time in Berlin. Lastly, I am indebted to Helen Aitchison for her efforts in polishing up my English.

This article seeks to chart the Kurdish diaspora and their political activism with regard to the Kurdish question. Firstly, a summary of the Kurdish question will be offered as a reminder of the reasons for the Kurdish influx into Europe and the subsequent sections will attempt to describe Kurdish diasporic engagements in Europe. Following this, information will be given about first and second generation Kurds in Europe, as well as the situation of Kurdish women in the diaspora. The paper also includes a discussion devoted to the mobilization of the Kurdish diaspora in the UK. Finally, insights will be offered on the potential role of the Kurdish diaspora in conflict resolution in Turkey.

My arguments are derived largely from my recent fieldwork in Sweden and Germany.[2] I conducted some 50 interviews with first and second generation members of the Kurdish diaspora in Sweden (between January and June 2010), and another 40 or so in Germany, (between October 2010 and March 2011). The diaspora members I spoke to were activists from Kurdish organisations or members of the youth branches of these organisations. My subjects included individuals who personally participated in protests and demonstrations; Kurdish writers and artists; and finally, Kurdish politicians at a local, national, or international level. In addition to my interviews, I have also made use of Kurdish websites, newspapers sources, and, naturally, the existing literature on the Kurdish diaspora.

2. The Kurdish Question in Turkey

After the Turks, the Kurds constitute the second largest ethnic group in Turkey. While there are still no reliable statistics about the total number of people of Kurdish origin worldwide, educated estimates suggest there may be around 20 million Kurds living in Turkey and its neighbouring regions.[3]

Approximately half of the world's Kurdish population lives in Turkey (Gunter 1991, 7; Sirkeci 2000, 149; Tan 2009, 31) and it is generally agreed that they constitute 20% of the population. However, it remains difficult to gauge the precise figure in the Turkish case as there is no available data to confirm the number of Turkish citizens with Kurdish origins.[4]

When it comes to establishing the roots of the conflict, certain scholars argue it began in the late Ottoman era, with the dawning of Turkish nationalism[5] (Sirkeci 2003, 193). However, this discussion focuses on the tendency to perceive the Kurdish question as *'a threat to the national unity of Turkish Republic'*, which begun in the 1920s (Sirkeci 2000, 149), since it was ultimately

2 This fieldwork is a part of the research for my PhD thesis on the Turkish and Kurdish Diaspora in Germany and Sweden.
3 A European Commission Report of October 2004 states that the Kurds in Turkey number between 15 and 20 million (see http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/key_documents/reports_2004_en.htm). Kerim Yıldız claims that it is about 15 million and constitutes 23% of the Turkish population (Yildiz 2005, 6).
4 For example, while to our knowledge the majority of Kurds are Muslim they may belong to different sects of Islam. In terms of language, it is argued that most Kurds in Turkey speak Kurmanji, however in the north west of the Kurdish-dominated areas such as Tunceli and Elazig, Zaza is the predominant Kurdish dialect (Yıldız 2005, 6). Some studies show that the Kurdish population in Turkey is far worse off than the Turkish population in terms of socio-economic situation and they live under conditions of material and non-material insecurity (Icduygu et.al. 1999, 991).
5 For a discussion of the situation of the Kurds during the Ottoman era see Barkey/Fuller (1998).

this that sparked the Kurdish exodus to Europe. When Mustafa Kemal Ataturk founded the Turkish Republic in 1923, the aim was declared to be the creation of 'a civic nation in which all citizens of Turkey could have equal rights'. However, the founders of the new republic, by following the Ottoman policy of perceiving only non-Muslim groups as 'minorities', did not grant any minority rights to the Kurds. Instead, all Muslim groups, regardless of their ethnicity, language or culture, were considered 'Turkish' (Barkey/Fuller 1998, 6; Tocci/Kaliber 2008, 3) This approach entailed the imposition of harsh assimilation policies on the Kurdish population. As a result of the rebellions in Kurdish populated areas, the state started taking extreme measures in order to maintain control of the region.[6]

Gradually the 'Turkishness' discourse would filter into the state system, beginning in 1938 when Turkish was named as the sole official language. Education was made compulsory by law and teaching in languages other than Turkish was forbidden (Gündüz-Hoşgör/Smits 2002, 418) With time, the existence of a Kurdish identity was completely undermined, to the extent that the use of Kurdish place names or personal names was proscribed. Traditional religious schools that had celebrated and promoted Kurdish culture were closed and publications in Kurdish were also banned (Yegen 2010, 2).[7] The use of the Kurdish language in public was proclaimed illegal by Article 26 of the 1982 Constitution. After the 1980 military *coup d'état* and as a result of Kurdish nationalist uprisings, the suppression of the Kurds increased significantly. During the last two decades, Kurdish political parties have been banned and the Turkish Army has launched harsh measures in south-east Turkey (Blatte 2003, 7).

As early as the 1960s, the Kurds began demanding cultural, linguistic and political rights through leftist organisations. According to Gunter, at that time the state's policies even suppressed moderate Kurdish demands, and finally paved the way for the emergence of extremist reactions among the Kurdish population against the Turkish state (Gunter 2000, 849). In 1975 a group of Kurdish activists was formed by Abdullah Öcalan (often referred to as Apo). The group was known as 'Apocular' (followers of Apo) but in 1978 it officially took the name PKK (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan) and announced its intention to follow a Marxist-Leninist approach[8] toward the Kurdish issue with the eventual goal of forming a Marxist Kurdish state in the region (Karlsson 2008, 142).

In 1984 the organisation began an armed struggle against the Turkish state, officially launching an insurgency. The majority of clashes occurred during the 1990s. The 1980 military *coup d'état* also hampered the improvement of Turkish state-Kurdish relations.[9] Instead, the new constitution and regime in the aftermath of the *coup d'état* spelt further suppression and ruthless measures on both the Turkish and Kurdish population. The clashes between the Turkish Army and PKK caused an estimated 35,000-50,000 deaths, accompanied by a number of

6 There had been various Kurdish rebellions led by religious and tribal leaders which were harshly suppressed by the Turkish army. Kurdish villages were closely watched by security forces and the eastern provinces were secured (Ozcan 2009, 4).
7 For more information on the language policy and national unity see Cemiloglu 2009.
8 As Cornell argues: "the PKK defined Kurdish tribal society as the main target of revolutionary struggle. It described Kurdistan as an area under colonial rule, where tribal leaders and a comprador bourgeoisie colluded to help the state exploit the lower classes…it advocated a revolution to clear away the contradictions in the society left over from the Middle Ages, including federalism, tribalism and religious sectarianism" (Cornell 2001, 39).
9 All parties, leftist and rightist, were dissolved within a year. Around half a million people were detained and of these 230,000 were tried, 14,000 stripped off their citizenship and 50 were executed (see http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/domestic/11948502.asp).

‘disappearances’ (Tocci/Kaliber 2008, 4) There were also thousands of internally displaced individuals as a result of the internal deportation of Kurds from nearly 3000 villages. These statistics show clearly the extent of the trauma suffered by the Kurdish population in the region (Tan 2009, 374).

In 1999, Öcalan was captured in Kenya with the help of the US Intelligence and was sentenced to death.[10] After Öcalan’s arrest, the PKK withdrew its demand for a separate state and softened this to demands for a confederation and better democratization for Turkey.[11] However, by 2003, PKK hardliners, frustrated with Turkey’s failure to make any headway on the Kurdish issue resumed the insurgency. A fragment group known as the Kurdish Freedom Falcons carried out a number of bombings in western Turkey (Deutsche Welle 2008).

In the meantime, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) rose to power as a major party receiving 34% of the vote in 2002.[12] The party made clear its willingness to become the front-runner for a resolution on the Kurdish question (Ozcan 2009, 4). A TV channel broadcasting in Kurdish was launched and the JDP also addressed the issue via several domestic reforms. They attempted to transform the security-based approach on the Kurdish question into a cultural-rights based approach, however they oscillated between the two during the reform process. According to many, the JDP’s message about the Kurdish Question had an ambivalent and ambiguous character (Ozcan 2009, 5). Even today, there has been no reconciliation between the two warring parties, the Turkish state and the PKK. Consequently developments regarding this issue in Turkey affect the Turkish and Kurdish populations abroad and they engender the spillover of the conflict to Europe and beyond.

3. The Kurds of Europe: How big is the Kurdish Diaspora

Although the Kurdish presence in Europe dates back to the latter part of the nineteenth century - limited primarily to male members of the aristocracy (Hassanpour/Mojab 2005, 216) - studies have taken the more recent waves of migration as a starting point in order to account for the transnationalization of the Kurdish cause today. When seeking to categorise the Kurdish migration flows to Europe, Ayata’s classification of the three predominant waves becomes useful: a) after the mid 1950s – small numbers of students and intellectuals; b) during the 1960s and 1970s – labour migration; c) during the 1980s and particularly during the 1990s – asylum seekers (especially in Germany, France and Austria) (Ayata 2011, 141).

The first significant mass Kurdish migration to Europe began with the bilateral agreements between Turkey and various European countries. At that time, numerous Kurdish

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10 As a result of the EU accession reforms in Turkey, the Turkish parliament adopted a decision to abolish capital punishment. This development saw Öcalan’s sentence reduced to life imprisonment in October 2002 (Kirisci 2004, 274).
11 However, this ‘new outlook’ was criticized by certain members of the PKK cadre and a number of PKK sympathizers. According to them, the new strategy had no real prospect for the Kurds (Khayati 2008, 72).
12 In the 2007 general elections the AKP gained 46% of the votes. The current estimates for the forthcoming elections in 2011 are around 48-50%.

students also came to Europe for their studies. However, most of the Kurds migrated mainly for economic reasons along with Turkish workers and were typically referred to as ‘Turkish migrants’ in the literature since they held Turkish nationality when they arrived. Several earthquakes in Turkey such as in Mus in 1966 or in Muradiye-Van in 1976 also contributed to the Kurdish journey towards Europe (Author’s interview with Riza Baran[13]). Lastly, but most importantly, Kurdish migration to Europe had political reasons such as state repression of both ethnic and religious identity (especially for the Alevi Kurds), the *coup d’etat* in 1980, and the low-intensity civil war in south-east Turkey.

Today, the Kurdish diaspora is scattered throughout various European countries including Germany, France, Belgium, Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands. No recent reliable census of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe has been carried out, but the most widely accepted estimates suggest there are some 850,000 Kurds in Western Europe, of which 500,000-600,000 live in Germany. According to other sources, the number is approximately 1 million, with 85% hailing from Turkey.[14] The Council of Europe website states the number of Kurds in Europe is over one million.[15] Differing estimates are offered by the Centre for Kurdish Studies and the Kurdish Institute in Paris.[16] The Kurdish associations that I visited in Sweden and Germany argue that the number of Kurds in Europe is much higher (at least 2 million) than generally believed. According to KOMKAR, the number of Kurds in Germany alone is about 900.000.[17] There are two main reasons for the unreliability of these statistics: firstly because the Kurds hold Turkish citizenship they are ‘invisible’ in state statistics and secondly, because there are thousands of undocumented Kurdish migrants in Europe. Moreover, it is even harder to estimate the number of Kurds from Turkey since the figures put forward in several studies or on Kurdish websites cover all Kurds from four different parts of Kurdistan. As Ayata (2011, 143) suggests, the actual size of the Kurdish diaspora “remains an enigma”.

4. Profile of the Kurdish Diaspora

4.1 The First Generation Kurds in Europe

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Kurdish diaspora is not a homogenous entity. The diaspora comprises labour migrants, students, those who came to join their families, asylum seekers, refugees and exiled intellectuals. The labour migrants became politically active and were mobilized in part as a result of the political opportunities in European countries which fostered a process of self-discovery. A large number of Kurds were only to discover their ‘Kurdishness’ in Germany where they could express their culture, language and organise themselves without

13 Riza Baran was the former president of the “Kurdish Community” in Berlin (see https://www.newroz.com/tr/politics/347604/avrupada-k-rt-rg-tlenmes-ve-komkarriza-baran).
14 The data is taken from the Kudish Institute in Paris website.
15 The Cultural Situation of the Kurds, Doc.11006, 7 July 2006 (see http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc06/EDOC11006.htm).
16 The Kurdish Studies Center in Germany (see http://www.navend.de/html/kurden/daten.htm).
17 See http://www.komkar.org/wer_wir_sind.html.

repression. Unable to express their Kurdish heritage in their homeland, the Kurds have found an opportunity to do so in liberal Western states (Curtis 2005, 3; Demmers 2007, 17; van Bruinessen 2000). In addition, it has been argued that the mobilization efforts of the Kurdish elites encouraged many Kurds to embrace their ethnic identity.

Khayati (2008b) enumerates various reasons that may explain how this awakening process came into being:

> "...the substantial growth in the numbers, geographical dispersal, organisation of diaspora communities, greater social and political visibility and influence largely contributed to the awakening of what certain researchers call "previously dormant diasporas" among the Kurds".

However, the core of the diaspora, that is to say the diaspora elite, consists of members who arrived after the 1980s for political reasons. According to Ayata, the asylum seekers who came to Europe in the early 1990s (and later) brought with them the conflict from Turkey. However, the motive for the already-politicized Kurds to mobilize those who had arrived in Europe with earlier waves of Kurdish migration was to create a second base for the Kurdish struggle, this time beyond Turkish borders (Ayata 2011, 145)

It is crucial to appreciate the importance of those already-politicized migrants who arrived after the 1980s because they were predominantly responsible for building the Kurdish movement in Europe and spreading it to the masses.[18] During the interviews I conducted in Sweden and Germany with Kurdish elite members active in various organisations (and who had arrived after the 1980s), I discovered that the majority had, at some point, been detained in Turkish prisons before their arrival in Europe. Many had experienced state oppression and even various forms of torture. As mentioned above, the 1980 military *coup d'état* worsened the relationship between the Turkish state and the Kurds. Furthermore, the new constitution and regime immediately after the *coup d'état* meant more suppression and both the Turkish and the Kurdish population were treated harshly. Among the measures taken, Diyarbakir Prison No.5 is particularly significant. Many Kurdish and Turkish politicians, artists, journalists and academics were put on trial and sent to Diyarbakir - both during and after the *coup*.[19] Kurds were also arrested from the late 70s onwards due to their membership of groups such as Rizgari or Kawa and some were subjected to torture at several other prisons in Turkey. Only recently has the torture inflicted during this time begun to be discussed openly, albeit still in a limited manner.[20]

According to many authors, the Kurds who had been imprisoned at Diyarbakir for reasons such as sympathising with Kurdish nationalist movements, Kurdish leftist movements, or leftist movements in general, became one of the most important recruitment sources for the PKK during the following years. The human rights abuses in this particular prison convinced even those with no prior attachment to the PKK to join the organisation, due to their terrible

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18 Kurdish organisations were formed even earlier than the 1980s, however they did not have a specific homeland agenda. Instead they focused on an adaptation process in Germany while maintaining their Kurdish identity (Interview with Riza Baran). For further information see https://www.newroz.com/tr/politics/347604/avrupada-k-rt-rg-tlenmes-ve-komkarriza-baran.

19 Please see also http://www.diyarbakirzindani.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=215&Itemid=1; For an interesting memoir see Zana 1995.

20 Torture at Diyarbakır prison as narrated by witnesses, see Ziflioğlu 2009.

experience under the junta regime (Barkey/Fuller 1998, 22; Tan 2009, 380-381) Many Kurds who fled or were freed from Diyarbakir prison joined the guerilla group or sought asylum in Europe.[21] Therefore, in order to understand the Kurdish diaspora, it is necessary to understand the psychology of the Kurdish elite who have, for a long time, led the Kurdish movement in Europe. Only then can the Kurdish 'battle'[22] with Turkey be fully understood.

Asylum seekers who arrived from the 1990s onwards also had similar experiences. As well as the Kurds who were arrested and imprisoned, those who managed to leave Turkey also suffered. My fieldwork in Germany and Sweden has revealed that coming to Europe – legally or illegally – was difficult and demanding for the Kurdish migrants; in particular for the undocumented Kurds in Germany, who suffered great hardship for a long period of time before they were granted any rights. Even those with documents would experience adaptation problems in their host country, and racism and discrimination in Europe made matters worse.

The Kurds had to fight to reconstruct their identity in an alien society, although European states were far more liberal in the sense that there they could express themselves freely. Most European countries perceived the Kurds as a sub-group of Turkish immigrants and initially paid little attention to their cause. Since they arrived in Europe as 'Turkish citizens', they were treated as such by the host country. As Ayata points out, with the exception of Sweden, no European country registers the Kurds as Kurds (Ayata 2008, 42) As well as struggling to overcome discrimination and xenophobia in Europe, they had to fight for ethno-cultural recognition as 'Kurds'. In most European countries they were perceived as 'a minority within a minority'.

Although some members of the Kurdish Diaspora became fully integrated into their European host country and followed its politics as closely as they did the political situation in Turkey, I also interviewed Kurdish activists who had lived in Germany for decades and yet showed no interest in its politics. These Kurds clung only to the dream of returning to Kurdistan. It is not, therefore, possible to make any generalizations about the correlation between the integration of the Kurds in European societies and their involvement with homeland politics.

4.2 The Second Generation Kurds

In order to preserve itself, a diaspora undoubtedly needs generational continuity in. Therefore the mobilization of the descendants of Kurdish immigrants is highly important in order to understand better the development and character of the Kurdish diaspora. The importance of the Kurdish cause for second-generation23 Kurds has not yet been sufficiently studied. Some studies suggest that second-generation Kurds are far more interested in Kurdish identity and Kurdish politics than their parents (Curtis 2005, 3; van Bruinessen 1999; van Bruinessen 2000) A recent study focusing on the Kurdish youth in Sweden shows that they are conscious of their 'Kurdishness' even though they had been born, or raised, in Sweden (Eliassi

21 For more information about the human rights abuses in Diyarbakir prison, see Zeydanlıoglu 2009.
22 Demir uses the phrase "battling with Turkey" to describe the Kurdish struggle with the Turkish state. See Demir 2011 (forthcoming).
23 I use the term 'second generation' as an umbrella term to refer to the descendants of the first generation immigrants, therefore it includes Kurds and Turks who moved to Europe while they were younger than 18 and also the ones who are born in Europe as the third or fourth generation.

2010). However, much remains to be discovered about the perceptions of Kurdish origin European citizens of the Kurdish question.

Based upon my fieldwork observations, I would argue that the descendants of the politically-active Kurds show the greatest interest in the Kurdish issue. From a young age they attend seminars, meetings and demonstrations and they are raised in a political atmosphere where issues related to the Kurdish cause are discussed daily. As one of my interviewees from KOMCIWAN Berlin (the youth organisation of KOMKAR) explained:

> "I have been involved in Kurdish politics since I was five years old. I remember coming to KOMKAR after school every day because my father was very active in the organisation. I grew up with Kurdish politics".

I noticed that the level of involvement of Kurds born in Europe was higher if one of their parents had experienced, for example, prison, torture or discrimination as a result of their Kurdish background or Kurdish nationalist activities. During the interviews it transpired that it was much harder for the second-generation Kurds to forgive and forget what their parents had been subjected to in Turkey. For example, a respondent from Sweden, who is a member of the youth organisation UNGKURD, told me his story:

> "I support the PKK with all my heart. I respect the guerrillas without doubt… My father was in Diyarbakir prison in the 80s, later his friends bribed some people and brought him to Sweden. Now he cannot walk because of the torture. He is paralyzed. Every day I go home and I see him… Nobody has the right to tell me that I support a terrorist group."

The descendants of labour migrants tend to be less politically engaged by comparison to the post-1980 migrants. They usually need an incentive before they start showing an interest in the Kurdish movement. Furthermore, certain experiences in Europe or during their visits to Turkey impacted upon their perception of their ethnic identity, for example, a fight with a Turkish student at school, hearing swear words about Kurds in Turkish circles, or watching the news. When I asked the young Kurds in Germany why they became interested in the Kurdish issue, I received the following answers:

A young Kurdish man from KOMKAR told me that he became more conscious about the Kurdish issue after his first encounter with Kurdish music:

> "I listened to a song by Sivan Perwer and my life was never the same. I realised I had to do something for the Kurds."

Another Kurdish respondent mentioned his first experience with the actual conflict in Turkey:

> "I went to my parents' hometown in Kurdistan for the first time in the 90s and all I saw were streets full of Turkish soldiers, tanks, and police beating Kurdish people. When I came back to Germany, I signed up to a Kurdish organisation.'

It was also evident that the organisations played a role on the mobilization of the Kurdish youth:

> "I think that serving the Kurdish cause was the missing link in my life. One day at my university, in Stockholm, some students from a Kurdish organisation came and gave a

seminar about the situation of the Kurds in Kurdistan. After that day, I decided to do something about my people."

Apart from individual experiences, the Kurdish elite also have an impact on the mobilization of the second generation. Kurdish associations throughout Europe are making a particular effort to mobilize the Kurdish youth by organising theatre courses, concerts, folk-dance nights, language courses and movie screenings which work toward strengthening the 'Kurdish identity'. The youth organisation KOMCIWAN is a good example and offers language courses, activities such as weekend camps that bring young Kurds together from all over Europe, as well as Kurdish dance courses and theatre. Another example could be UNGKURD[24], which is a youth association in Sweden known for its support for the PKK. They also run seminars related to Kurdish history. In their website they emphasize that Kurdish youths must 'be as aware of their origins as their rights'.[25] Despite all these efforts, it is of course possible that the Kurds born in Europe may choose to ignore politics. According to various studies, this may indeed be the case, especially for the third generation.

The Kurds and the Kurdish movement have evidently been through a long period of transition. The first generation had difficulties adapting to European society, barely learnt the language of their country of residence, and, in certain cases, barely became fully integrated. The second generation differs from the first in many aspects. Once again, it is worth emphasizing that the level of integration to the host society is not an indication of the level of retention to the homeland. This is the situation for the second generation Kurds as well. During my fieldwork I interviewed young Kurds, both in Sweden and Germany, who were fully integrated and yet still defined themselves as politically active Kurds. I also met young Kurds who felt completely isolated from their host society and found a safe haven in Kurdish associations. The second generation is the vehicle for transformation toward a hybrid identity as Euro-Kurds - those who have few real memories of their parents' homeland but have grown up hearing the stories and experiences of their parents and relatives. This led to the formation of 'imaginary homelands' in the sense that they have built an idea of a homeland in their minds through second hand information. Some diaspora members make frequent visits to Turkey but many diaspora members I interviewed in Germany still cannot return to Turkey and so their children have never been there or experienced living there.

4.3 Invisible Actors: Kurdish Women of the Diaspora

Women are often the invisible actors in conflict studies and are usually excluded from studies about war and peace. In particular, the literature on conflicts and peace processes is likely to overlook the participation of women. This is true in the case of Kurdish women and the Kurdish struggle. Existing studies have a tendency to homogenize the Kurdish population abroad and render the role of women invisible in this context. Furthermore, most of the accounts that deal with exile, torture or displacement usually take into account solely the 'male perspective'. As Lys

[24] UNGKURD, Sweden (see http://www.ungkurd.se/).
[25] UNGKURD, Sweden: "Our Vision" (see http://www.ungkurd.se/Vision.aspx).

Anzia reports from the Women's News Network, the experience of a woman following displacement may well be different from a man's experience. Interviewing a specialist (a humanitarian pediatrician from the Netherlands) she reminds that being both "isolated and a *foreigner* many women cannot confide in anybody what they have been living through" (Anzia 2008).

Recent studies such as Alinia's (2004), focusing on the Kurds in Sweden, take into consideration the 'women perspective' of living in the diaspora. In her book, Alinia describes the experiences of Kurdish women as follows:

> "The Kurdish identity as a project includes many internal subdivisions, among them the Kurdish women's identity. To be a "Kurdish woman" is a project about resistance against women's subordination within the Kurdish community as well as resistance against imposed national identities. At least that is what the women active in the Kurdish women's associations express. The Kurdish movement has always been a priority whereas women's emancipation has been a subordinated issue" (Alinia 2004, 313).

In the same vein, another research paper argued that gender relations are reproduced in the diaspora, as are class relations (Hassanpour/Mojab 2005, 220). A research paper by Mojab and Gorman (2007) also focused on the dispersed nationalism among the Kurdish women in the diaspora. Their study included interviews conducted with women in Sweden, Canada, Britain and Iraqi Kurdistan[26]. Mojab and Gorman, drawing information from their fieldwork notes, came to the conclusion that it was very challenging for mobilized women to battle with predominantly male discourses. According to their study, Kurdish women were not able to compete with male-dominated cultural organisations for funding and recognition - for example, in Sweden (Mojab/Gorman 2007, 66-67). Furthermore, many women who were interviewed by Mojab and Gorman stated that the mechanisms of patriarchy were reproduced within the Kurdish nationalist organisations and that this in turn reproduces unequal gender relations in the Kurdish diaspora. Many of the women interviewed also argued that the discourse about nation-formation is prioritised and that gender inequalities have been postponed to be dealt with only after the Kurdish national demands have been met (Mojab/Gorman 2007, 69).

Despite these issues, Kurdish women are using both international and national means to mobilize their efforts and they are very active in organisations which promote the Kurdish cause, or, particularly, women`s rights in the Kurdish community abroad. Organisations such as the International Kurdish Women's Studies Network are an example of the internationalist aspect of the mobilization of women in the diaspora (Mojab/Gorman 2007, 67). There are also important diaspora organisations which are mobilized 'for the women, by the women'. These include the

26 Mojab and Gorman concluded their study by arguing that first and second generation women in the Kurdish diaspora frame their struggle in relation to three main areas of repression: a) resisting the national oppression of the Kurds, b) freedom from male oppression, c) an end to racism in the diaspora (Mojab/Gorman 2007, 59).

KWRW – Kurdish Women's Rights Watch (founded in 2004)[27] and the Kurdistan Women Union – KWU[28].

During my fieldwork in Sweden and Germany, I also interviewed women among the politically active diaspora members. In Sweden, women were given leading roles in student organisations as presidents of various Kurdish local organisations or as project coordinators. In Germany, although there were women members in diasporic circles, the decision making bodies seemed to be consist mostly of men. In addition I interviewed Kurdish women who complained about the feudal structures both in Kurdish nationalist and Turkish/Kurdish leftist organisations (among the first-generation rather than second-generation women).

One particular event, in Germany, drew my attention to the invisibility of women in conflict research. Amnesty International organised a seminar in which leading Kurdish Intellectuals such as Mehdi Zana and Recep Marasli spoke about their experience of Diyarbakir prison in the 1980s. In addition to these speakers, Nuran Marasli, the wife of Recep Marasli, offered her own account. Her speech affected the audience more than any other because her experiences at Diyarbakir included not only torture and insults but also sexual harassment. Her testimony allowed the audience to see these vicious experiences from a woman's perspective, which again, had been neglected for a long time in the research on the Kurdish question.[29] The activism of Kurdish women in the diaspora is a subject that has been far from adequately studied and needs further fieldwork which would help other researchers and academics understand the insights of the women's perspective.

5. Kurdish Political Activism in Europe

5.1 The Main Activities and the Main Actors of the Diaspora

The establishment of ethnic organisations in Europe naturally followed the waves of Kurdish migration. Early organisations were formed by students and workers and these organisations later added cultural aspects to their agenda. Finally after the 1980s, the establishment of organisations gained a political touch. At this point, it is essential to understand the centrality of the PKK to Kurdish diaspora politics in Europe (Soguk 2008, 183). Although there were other groups which already existed such as Rizgari or Kawa, or those which were organised under different names such as KOMKAR prior to the PKK, during the 1990s the PKK became the most dominant Kurdish movement in Europe. The activities of pro-PKK Kurdish organisations in Europe surpassed that of previous groups which carried out numerous activities related to the

27 KWRW is a network of Kurdish and non-Kurdish women and men, including community activists, academics, lawyers, legal professionals- and journalists, and works with human rights and women's rights organisations inside and outside of Kurdistan (see http://www.kwrw.org/).
28 KWU is located in the northern region of Iraq and has also been closely involved with the advancement of Kurdish women. Through KWU promotion of programs, Kurdish women have become more active in Kurdish parliamentary government. The number of Kurdish female lawyers is also on the rise.
29 See http://www.amnesty-bb.de/Main/Termine?action=download&upname=10_02_11+1547.pdf.

Kurdish identity prior to the PKK's arrival in Europe. The expansion of the Kurdish movement and the experience of exclusion in the host country, especially during the late 1980s and 90s, paved the way for the formation of extremist groups or nourished already existing movements back in Turkey. Many of the asylum seekers then constituted the cadre of PKK organisations in Europe (Kirisci 2004, 289). Among European countries, Germany became the centre for the cultivation of the Kurdish movement (Curtis 2005, 8).

According to the research by Grojean, since 1982 pro-Kurdish demonstrations have occurred almost monthly throughout Europe and the average number of protests annually could be several hundred (Grojean 2011, 182). The Kurdish diaspora employed a variety of methods, firstly to rally their own followers and secondly to make their voice heard - both in their host country and throughout Europe. Although the methods listed were mostly used by the PKK or organisations that sympathised with it, there are also other Kurdish organisations which, from time to time, offered their support to the initiatives or organised their own campaigns. These activities included organising petitions and campaigns, violent and non-violent mass demonstrations and protests, sit-ins, highway blockades, hunger strikes and self-immolation.[30]

The PKK was supported financially by Kurds living in Europe, although they were also engaged in money laundering and the organisation used all these resources to finance its activities (Barkey/Fuller 1998, 30-31; Cornell 2001, 40; Laciner 2008). It is believed that the financial support the PKK received from Europe was between 200 and 500 million US dollars during the mid 1990s, and between 1996 and 1997 PKK funding was some 20 million Marks in Germany alone (Radu 2001, 55). Kurdish second-generation youth were recruited from several European countries (especially Germany) to join the movement.

As Soguk has mentioned, radio and television stations also worked as 'a catalyst' and "mobilized the latent proto-nationalist emotions of the diaspora into a political community" (Soguk 2008, 182). The PKK and several affiliated organisations also published journals and magazines to increase awareness among the Kurdish population in Europe and beyond (Renard 2008). There were also other media agencies promoting Kurdish rights while being critical of the PKK, however, they were not as widespread or strong as the pro-PKK media bodies[31]. Nevertheless, Rigoni, when working on the Kurdish Media in Europe, found around 80 newspapers and magazines that are published by Kurdish associations and private publishers (Rigoni 2001, 5).[32] In terms of visual media, Medya TV and Roj TV produced cultural, educational and political programs that reached Kurds throughout Europe and helped to establish a 'consciousness' about the developments in Kurdistan (Ostergard-Nielsen 2006, 7). As Rigoni emphasized, the role of Medya-TV was:

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30 For more information see Baser/Swain 2010.
31 There is more diversity in terms of Kurdish diasporic media today and it still plays a significant role for the mobilization of the Kurds for the Kurdish cause. There are around 160-170 websites (according to an interviewee from Berlin) based in Europe and followed by many Kurds regularly. Some are pro-PKK and some are highly critical of its actions, others are more academic and neutral. There is also a very recent development in terms of the expansion of Kurdish media in Europe. Since 2009, Le Monde Diplomatique has been released in Kurdish. It is prepared by a professional group based in Berlin that is highly cautious about the use of Kurdish language. At an interview with one of the owners, Kadir Satik, he underlined the fact that their desire had been to pave the way for a standardization of the Kurdish language. The Kurds have also initiated an extensive Kurdish language publication campaign by establishing publishing houses throughout Europe (see http://www.lemonde-kurdi.com/).
32 25 of them were in Germany, 21 in Sweden, 6 in Belgium and 5 in France (Rigoni 2001, 5-6).

> "...as an information channel, insisting on the function of interface between the migrants, the families and political organisations on both sides of the Turkish-Kurdish areas. Some report the existence of a consensus within the team, justified by the « priority of struggle » a mutual enemy, the Turkish State, essential cement of the channel" (Rigoni 2001, 7).

Apart from the Kurdish media organisations that sprung up in Europe, there were serious political attempts by the Kurds in Europe to make their claims more visible to the European audience. For many, the founding of a Kurdish Parliament in Exile in 1995 proved that the centre of Kurdish political activity had shifted to Europe (Blatte 2003, 9; Radu 2001, 55; Van Bruinessen 1998, 46). Although the Parliament in Exile was formed by the PKK and did not receive any support from the other significant Kurdish organisations, it was perceived as a semi-legitimate representation of Kurds from Turkey by the European authorities.[33] Until it disbanded in 1999, the Parliament in Exile had several offices in Europe and connections with several European political parties (Kirisci 2004, 289). The exile government was very active in Europe and managed to organise meetings in Italy, Belgium, Sweden, France and Spain. After its dissolution, the KCN (Kurdistan National Congress) was formed and also organised meetings across Europe. These meetings firstly opened a road to form a strategy among the already active members and secondly helped to encourage other Kurds who were not yet mobilized.

A Kurdish Institute in Paris was formed in 1983 by Kurdish intellectuals with the help of the Socialist government in France[34]. It aimed to cultivate the Kurdish language, run conferences and publish journals. It was a largely neutral organisation.[35] Subsequently, other Kurdish institutes followed this initiative: in Brussels (1989)[36], Berlin (1994), Moscow (1996), and Washington DC (1997). A Kurdish library was opened in Stockholm in 1997. While the Kurdish activists were seeking unity and harmony in various aspects, Europe became the playground for self-exploration of the Kurdish movement (Gunter 1991, 13; Khayati 2008b; van Bruinessen 1999).

Today there are thousands of small Kurdish organisations as well as several Kurdish umbrella institutions in Europe which aim form a united diaspora in order to lobby at European national and supranational levels. These organisations throughout Europe organise activities such as Newroz festivals, memorial days for the Halepce massacre, seminars to discuss the situation of the Kurds in the Middle East, campaigns for the release of Kurdish politicians,

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33 See, for example, Barkey/Fuller 1998, particularly Chapter 2: "The Parliament in exile thus faces a serious representational problem. It has sought, so far unsuccessfully, to enlist other, more serious, Kurdish movements into its ranks. The very important moderate and active (Turkish) Kurdish Socialist party, for example, headquartered in exile in Sweden under the leadership of Kemal Burkay, has declined to join the parliament. Burkay feels that the KPE cannot be taken seriously as a parliament since it is in many ways self-appointed; as a parliamentary body it is also premature in its establishment, as it controls no territory and has no international recognition" (Barkey/Fuller 1998, 37).

34 The Institute has received grants from the EU and from the French, Norwegian and Swedish governments. Its activities include the training of Kurdish language teachers in Sweden, the training of Kurdish cultural elites, some of whom played an important role in Iraq, conferences on 'honor killings' and raising international public awareness for Kurdish issues in general (see http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc06/EDOC11006.htm).

35 Its objectives are: "to maintain in the Kurdish community knowledge of its language, its history and its cultural heritage, to contribute to the integration of Kurdish immigrants to Europe into their host societies and to make the Kurds, their culture, their country and their present situation known to the general public" (see http://www.institutkurde.org/en/institute/).

36 The organisation that later became the Kurdish Institute of Brussels was opened in 1978. Its current activities include language courses, social services, translation services and many cultural activities, for example: Newroz celebrations, cultural excursions, exhibitions, literature, dance, music, folklore and conferences. The Institute has published 41 books and also publishes a bi-monthly magazine. It manages a library and an information centre (see http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc06/EDOC11006.htm).

language and dance courses. Their aims are firstly to mobilize Kurds for their cause and help raise awareness about the Kurdish identity and culture and, secondly, to attract the attention of European politicians, bureaucrats and finally the public. There are organisations like KON-KURD which was founded in Belgium for similar purposes and serves as an umbrella organisation for various Kurdish groups (more than 150) all around the world.[37] It is based in Brussels and is responsible for lobbying activities at the European institutional level. There is also YEKKOM, which is based in Germany and covers around 50 Kurdish organisations. It is known to sympathise with the major goals of the PKK. FEYKA in France, FEDKOM in Holland, and FEYKURD in Denmark are also large Kurdish organisations which support the PKK's line. Finally, there is KOMKAR, (The Association for Kurdish Workers for Kurdistan), a transnational Kurdish organisation which became the first federation of Kurdish worker's associations and is against the use of violence to promote the Kurdish cause. KOMKAR was affiliated with the Özgürlük Yolu movement in Turkey and distanced itself from the PKK line by focusing on improving the Kurdish workers' standards of living in Europe, rather than the struggle for an independent Kurdistan. Only after the 1980s did it become politically active and add Kurdish rights to its agenda (Van Bruinessen 2000). However it is argued by authors such as Jorgensen that the organisations which sympathise with the traditional PKK line managed to reach a broader segment of society (such as women, artists, students and the self-employed) whereas KOMKAR recruited less broadly. He also claims that KOMKAR was better at making itself visible at the official level but was not as strong as the above-mentioned organisations which gathered thousands of people for their demonstrations and protests (Jorgensen 2009).

While discussing KOMKAR, we should also mention Kemal Burkay, the founder of the Kurdish Socialist Party (which was more moderate than the PKK) and has organic links to KOMKAR. Naturally there was often friction between the PKK and KOMKAR which occasionally ended in violence. For example, some PKK members were sentenced for the murder of several KOMKAR members (Lyon/Ucarer 2001, 936). Another sign of tension was at the Newroz of 2003, when Sivan Perver was singing at a concert organised by KOMKAR and that was sabotaged by PKK supporters who used violence to end the concert. Today there is still an evident social and political strain between the two groups, however serious violent encounters have not recently been recorded.

Although the PKK has dominated the debate for a long time, one should note that the Kurdish diaspora has never been a homogenous group. There are several different layers and levels of affiliation. However, it can be argued that the 'most dominant voice' was accepted to be the 'most representative voice' for two decades in the European political arena. Although the PKK dominance over the Kurdish debate often met criticism from various Kurdish groups, mass-protests and marches in the name of the PKK and Öcalan made the PKK appear as the sole front-runner of the Kurdish movement. Yet still many criticized the way the PKK was operating in terms of transparency. Soguk suggests that some Kurds were disturbed by how the PKK ruled in the diaspora but were afraid of possible PKK sanctions, while others formed different organisations

37 Confédération des Associations Kurdes en Europe (see http://konkurd.org/fr/link-1232550498.html).

and followed their own path (Soguk 2008, 189). As a former PKK member, who now resides in Germany, explained to me during the interview:

> "At that time [1990s], the PKK had to be harsh with its policies. I mean, we had no room for opposition, or, if you want to put it that way, we had no room for democracy. All other Kurdish movements, which criticized how the PKK operates, were deviant from the movement in our opinion. We had to get rid of them, in order to stand strong and speak with one voice…we were trying to start a revolution. When there is a revolution, who cares about democracy?"

However, this trend seems to be changing - although it has not completely disappeared. Today, it is possible to see Kurdish intellectuals and political groups who are criticizing the way the PKK handles the Kurdish question. As a result of several factors that caused a shift in the Kurdish movement in Europe there are many different colours in the current Kurdish diaspora. Firstly, the capture of Öcalan had a big impact on the movement. Some argue that the PKK became weaker and that it is now divided into various fragments. Secondly, September 11th 2001 and the 'anti-terrorism' discourse strongly altered the reaction of host countries toward the Kurdish cause and toward the PKK in particular. When the PKK was put on the EU 'terrorism list' in 2002, it was a setback for many Kurdish organisations. Many of them were shut down, or have been persecuted throughout Europe (Ayata 2011, 148).

Many of my interviewees in Germany pointed out that Kurdish activities had been criminalized there as an outcome of the ban on the PKK by Germany in 1993, and later by the EU declaration of the PKK as a terrorist organisation. According to them, it was a major setback not only for the PKK but for all Kurdish organisations. In the literature, we read that the limits of diaspora mobilization are determined by the political opportunity structures that the host country provides, but they are also shaped by the national interests of the host country in the issue that mobilized the diaspora (Hassanpour/Mojab 2005, 219). Therefore, it may be argued that although there is a ban on the PKK and Kurdish activism has been monitored by the host countries, the extent to which the host countries limit the diaspora's activism is very much dependent on the approach of that country to the Kurdish issue. Due to these recent developments, and for many other reasons, many Kurdish organisations and activists today embrace a new strategy and work towards putting their effort into a social movements or human rights context.[38]

38 Today the character of the Kurdish diaspora is multifarious and yet appears to be stronger than ever. After completing my fieldwork, I tried to categorise the main divisions, drawing information from the interviews conducted both in Sweden and Germany. Among the interviewees, there were PKK supporters who are willing to follow Öcalan no matter what (the 'Apocular'); PKK supporters who sympathise with PKK activities but disapprove of the post-Imrali Öcalan statements; former PKK supporters or former PKK cadre who are now suspicious of the PKK in general; and, Kurdish nationalists who are against the PKK and its methods and follow the nonviolent KOMKAR line. There are also smaller groups consisting of Kurdish nationalists who do not belong to any organisation but support the idea of a separate state and therefore find the PKK passive, or at least unable to achieve this goal, as well as Kurdish nationalists who not only want a separate Kurdish state from Turkey but also support a unified Kurdistan which brings the four parts together. Lastly, there are Kurds who detach themselves from the groups above and follow a JDP sympathising line, arguing that the 'Kurdish initiative' has been sabotaged by radical groups like the PKK and if *could* succeed, it would have done so already. These are only the main trends and obviously the list could be extended by numerous nuances.

6. A Special Focus on Kurds in the UK

Substantial Kurdish migration to the UK had started in the late-1980s and continued into the 1990s (Enneli et al. 2005, 5). The majority of these Kurds were asylum seekers. Demir has conducted a recent study of the Kurds from Turkey in London and argues that the majority of the Kurds who reside in the UK are mostly from the central parts of Anatolia, although one would expect them to come from the south-east of Turkey where village evacuations were more frequent. She has confirmed that, in fact, the majority come from Maraş, Sivas and Malatya, and that they tend to be Alevi Kurds. Demir suggests, therefore, that the reason for their migration could be rooted in religious as well as ethnic persecution (Demir 2011). A study by Atay also discovered that most of the Kurds came from the rural areas of the central-eastern and south-eastern Anatolian provinces, and that the majority of them are affiliated with Alevism, a heterodox version of Islam (Atay 2010, 125).

On the situation of the Kurds who migrated to the UK, Enneli et al. point out that many Kurds may have fled their homes with very few possessions and thus not been in a position to seek paid employment for many years. They would also have suffered 'displacement and trauma'. (Enneli et al. 2005, 9) Enneli et al. add that many young Kurds in the UK have early memories and experiences of Turkey and they keep abreast of the developments there – which leads many to conclude that "nothing in Britain could be as bad as Turkey" (Enneli et al. 2005, 46).

In 2008, BBC News reported that Kurdish youths who were born or raised in Britain had become involved in the Kurdish cause. Among them, various young Kurds had joined the PKK in the mountains. According to the report (Dissanayake 2008) "small numbers of young British Kurds, particularly women, are still making the journey out to the mountainous Turkish border to seek battle. Many more travel from Germany". One reason for this could be the fact that Kurdish youths may believe they are "at the bottom of society" (Enneli et al. 2005, 11). As the newest migrant group they certainly have great difficulties to overcome in British society (Enneli et al. 2005, 48). Moreover, they could be mobilized by their ethnopolitically active parents who migrated to Britain for political reasons.

6.1 Main Kurdish Organisations and Diaspora Activism in the UK

As the politicised Kurdish migrants arrived in Britain, they began to form organisations in order to mobilize the Kurds in Britain to work for the Kurdish cause. Furthermore, they formed organisations in order to establish contacts with politicians and policy makers to attract attention to the Kurdish issue. Among these institutions[39] there is FED-BIR which was established (as stated on their website) to 'protect and develop further the social, economic, political and cultural rights

39 A list of other Kurdish organisations can be found at this website:
http://uk.krg.org/pages/page.aspx?lngnr=12&smap=050000&pnr=29

of the Kurdish people'. They describe their aim as follows: to intensify its efforts in representing the Kurdish people in democratic platforms in the UK and accepting responsibility for guiding and coordinating the Kurdish Community Associations in order to unite and develop the Kurdish people.[40] In addition there is the Kurdish Advice Centre[41] (KAC) which offers legal advice to the Kurdish immigrants and provides services such as Kurdish and English language courses or employment guidance. KAC has organic links to KOMKAR, one of the strongest Kurdish movements in Europe. There is also the Kurdish Community Centre (KCC)[42] which is a refugee charity organisation formed in 1992 as a result of the growth and development of the Kurdistan Workers Association (KWA)[43]. Another association, Halkevi, is a community centre for Kurds. Halkevi and the KCC are essentially two branches of one association, and several members of the associations mentioned support the PKK's cause (Demir 2011). KCC and Halkevi also contribute to the cultivation of Kurdish culture by organising language, folklore and music courses. As the fieldwork notes of Pattison and Tavsanoglu reveal, the teaching of Kurdish and courses on folk music and dance are the main activities of such organisations. They discovered that the 'myth of return' to the homeland has been kept on the agenda as a symbol of their fight for an independent Kurdistan. Reviving the Kurdish language and history are important components of their work. Although the members of these associations are aware of the necessity to sustain representation at all levels in the political institutions in Britain, their main aim remains to reconstruct the Kurdish identity (Pattison/Tavsanoglu 2002, 7).

There is also the KHRP (Kurdish Human Rights Project), a well known London-based organisation which works as an NGO to report mostly on human rights abuses. In their website, they define themselves as "a registered charity that was established in 1992 in response to the genocide, war crimes and human rights violations occurring across the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Syria, the Caucasus and elsewhere". [44] The KHRP sent a 13 page report to the Danish EU Presidency and stated that Turkey still did not fulfill the Copenhagen criteria in terms of human rights (the Copenhagen European Council in December 2002) (Blatte 2003, 13). It also filed a lawsuit against Turkey at the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), in pursuit of compensation for repeated Turkish bombings and attacks in northern Iraq (Renard 2008). They also hold seminars and publish reports in order to raise public awareness about the Kurdish issue.

Britain has also witnessed protests and propaganda activities by the Kurds. The methods used vary from hunger strikes to self-immolation as well as mass protests and campaigns. In 2009,

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40 Kurdish Federation, UK (Britanya Kürt Dernekleri Federasyonu)
(http://www.fedbir.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=25&Itemid=31).
41 Kurdish Advice Center, UK (http://www.kurdishadvicecentre.org.uk/about_us.htm).
42 The KCC's Objectives: 1 - To relieve poverty with the provision of advice in areas such as immigration, welfare rights, housing, health and education. 2 - To work towards the preservation and promotion of Kurdish language, art, literature and cultural heritage. 3 - To assist Kurdish children in their mainstream education by running a Supplementary School to develop their core subjects. 4 – To encourage adult education, increase access to employment and enable them to gain confidence by providing language courses and information technology training. 5 – To improve the social and cultural lives of the Kurdish community by organizing entertainment events. 6 – To detract the Kurdish youth from crime by providing social, cultural and educational activities for them
(http://www.kurdishcentre.org/kcc/about_us.html).
43 The KWA was first established in 1987 by a small group of Kurdish friends who recognised a need among the growing Kurdish refugee community arriving in London to meet, support each other, and act as a 'reception' centre for newcomers
(http://www.kurdishcentre.org/kcc/about_us.html).
44 Kurdish Human Rights Project (see www.khrp.org).

members of the Kurdish community went on hunger strike outside Parliament Square in London. They were protesting against the 'inhumane treatment' of Abdullah Öcalan.[45] A decade earlier, in 1999, a 14-year-old girl set herself on fire in London immediately after Öcalan's arrest, to protest against his detainment and the Turkish policies on the Kurds in the eastern part of Turkey. She explained that she had hoped to attract attention from the British public and media about the Kurdish cause in Turkey, and encourage the British public to stop and think about the Kurdish population (Sengupta 1999). British bureaucracy, as with other European countries, has often failed to distinguish the Kurds from other refugees from Iran, Iraq and Turkey and therefore the exact number of Kurds in London is uncertain.[46] In order to challenge this, a campaign called 'Make Kurdish Identity Count!' has been supported by the KSSO (The Kurdish Studies and Student Organisation). The campaign calls upon UK Kurds to participate in the 2011 UK census and make the Kurdish language and identity count in the eyes of the policy makers. 47

Finally, while it is true that Kurds enjoy the multicultural environment in Britain and are able to celebrate their ethnic identity freely, they still encounter problems. For example, the Kurds were one of the groups highly affected by the 'anti-terrorism' atmosphere in the UK after the September 11th and the July 7th attacks in London. After the EU ban on the PKK, the whole Kurdish movement was suddenly threatened by the new measures. As Sentas, from the Campaign Against Criminalising Communities (CAMPACC), points out the ban on the PKK has criminalized the Kurdish movement in general and consequently removed any legal platform for Kurdish political mobilization. She continues with examples from the UK after the ban on the PKK under the terror laws:

> "In the UK since the start of 2009 Kurdish communities have reported a massive rise in the harassment, intimidation and detention without charge of community members who are active in diaspora politics. Examples include people being stopped and searched under terror legislation for distributing legal newspapers, and putting up bill posters for Kurdish events. At demonstrations Kurds are repeatedly told that waving the Kurdish flag is an offence under the terror laws" (Sentas 2010).

Nevertheless, these setbacks do not appear to have discouraged the Kurds. Although, it could prove harder for the diaspora elites to mobilize more people as the dormant members of the diaspora hesitate to engage in political activities, there is still a core who will not give up the struggle.

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45 See http://www.demotix.com/news/hunger-strike-parliament-square.

46 KSSO Census Campaign 2011: Make Kurdish Identity Count! (see http://www.kurdmedia.com/article.aspx?id=16647 or http://www.ikjnews.com/index.php/social/450-make-kurdish-identity-count).

47 The importance of the campaign by the KSSO is stated on their website as follows: 'Census 2011 is paramount important for Kurdish communities to be visible in the UK official data. Researchers of London Metropolitan University, who carried out an ESRC - funded research project on ethnic minorities including Kurdish population in London, state that the Kurds do not appear in much of the UK statistical data. Kurds are registered in the UK to "their" nationality, not their ethnic affiliations and therefore Kurds remain unrecognised as they are classified as 'Turkish', 'Iranian', 'Iraqi' and 'Syrian' within the UK. … Emphasis on official data such as the Census and the Labour Force Survey provide vital information on identity, ethnicity, religion, employment, and economic activities of the population in the UK. However, such data collection in the past have restricted any gathering of information on Kurds living in the UK and leaves Kurds invisible to the public sphere. "Kurds are therefore left with little option other than to define themselves as 'Turkish', 'Iraqi', 'Syrian' or 'Iranian'…. Although Kurds settled into the UK years ago, the British authorities are unable to divulge the number of Kurds living in the UK and are consequently unable to plan service provision accordingly. Excluding Kurds from previous Census data means that Kurds are not integrated into issues such as provision of health care, employment, education and economic activities as they are not recognised under their own ethnic identity as being 'Kurds' (sic)" (see www.ksso.org.uk).

7. Locating the Kurdish Diaspora in the Peace Process: How Far Can the Diaspora Act as the Agent of Peaceful Change?

Diasporas are perceived by many as irresponsible and unaccountable long-distance nationalist groups, whose ideas are more 'marginal' than those of the homeland policy makers, and who are stubborn when it comes to compromising on sensitive issues. However, recent studies have shown that generalizations of this kind cannot be made, as diasporas might also contribute to the conflict resolution process and help to build bridges between the conflicting parties and their host country (Baser/Swain 2008). It is important for researchers to understand that diaspora groups are rarely homogenous and that there are often many different opinions and approaches to issues within the diaspora. In the case of Kurdish diaspora, there are strongly conflicting views about the recent developments in Turkey and the Justice and Development Party's (JDP) approach to the Kurdish issue.

7.1 The JDP and the Kurdish Opening

It is argued that among the Turkish political parties, the JDP can be considered as the turn of the tide for the Kurdish question. Since they came to power, the Kurdish issue became very visible in Turkish politics (Aras et al. 2009, 9). Government officials repeatedly declared that they wanted to bring an end to the insurgencies in south-eastern Turkey.[48] Furthermore, since the JDP came to power, it has passed several laws which could have been considered taboo in Turkish politics until today. However, the democracy initiative launched by the JDP, followed by a 'Kurdish opening' has not yet begun to resolve the conflict.[49] On the one hand, many appreciate the JDP`s effort to make the Turkish population face up to - not just one but many - 'realities' that Turkish politics had long-suppressed. On the other hand, some have argued that the 'Kurdish opening', without a 'road map', had - unsurprisingly - concluded with a 'road accident' (Yörük 2010). As Somer (2004, 236) argues:

> "The Parliament passed a series of laws granting significant cultural-linguistic rights to ethnic Kurds, such as broadcasting in and teaching in Kurdish. These rights, whose implementation has so far been slow, were modest by world standards and fell short of politically conscious ethnic Kurds' expectations for change".

48 For a detailed analysis of AKP policies please see Yavuz/Özcan 2006.

49 JDP 'opening up' process received harsh criticism not only from the opposition parties but also from conservative wings of AKP members. Since the policy changes could not be reversed, the AKP tried to balance the situation by other means. The aim of the AKP is the gradual granting of rights to the Kurds, but to do so in the framework of EU regulations and the Copenhagen criteria. It also aims to strengthen the Islamic bonds between the two groups in order to re-strengthen the common ground between the two cultures. However, it wants to do so by marginalizing the Kurdish movements which already exist in the region. That seems like a problematic strategy in the end (Bezci 2009, 1-2).

In addition, various recent developments in Turkey regarding the Kurdish issue have raised doubts as to the sincerity of the JDP government. For example, as the Kurdish opening was initiated by the government with numerous discourses and speeches about democracy, it is notable that the government blew hot and cold with regard to Kurdish activism. Another example is that a number of Kurdish children faced jail after participating in protests and were arrested under anti-terror laws. Furthermore, 151 high profile Kurdish politicians and Kurdish rights defenders (among them popular politicians) were accused of being the urban wing (KCK) of the PKK and imprisoned (Kurdnet 2010). Recently, Ismail Besikci, a Turkish professor who is also a Kurdish rights defender was sentenced to 15 months imprisonment for using the word 'Kurdistan' in one of his articles and was accused of making propaganda for a terrorist organisation.[50] Many other examples could be added to these, which undermine the sincerity of the JDP's relationship with the Kurds. As the diaspora follows the developments in Turkey very closely, these events also have an impact on how the diaspora shapes its stance towards the JDP.

7.2 The JDP and the Kurdish Diaspora

It could be argued that the JDP discovered the importance of diaspora groups far earlier than other political parties in Turkey, and that it anticipated campaigns in order to move closer to diaspora members - both from Turkish and Kurdish communities - residing in Europe. The formation of a special official body called 'the Directorate of Overseas Turks and Kin Communities' in 2010 is an example which illustrates the JDP`s enthusiasm for pursuing a more active policy towards the diaspora. With regards to the Kurdish question, the JDP also recognized the significance of involving the Kurdish intellectuals such as artists, singers, writers and politicians in the conflict resolution process.

In order to initiate cooperation, the JDP has taken steps such as opening a dialogue with Kemal Burkay to bring about his return to Turkey. As a well-known Kurdish politician who has been living in exile in Sweden for the last 40 years, Burkay's return to Turkey would have enormous symbolic value for conflict resolution between the Turkish state and the Kurds. Furthermore, the JDP MPs made an offer to the most popular Kurdish singer, Sivan Perwer, who is also in exile and is famous for his role in the creation of ethnic-awareness among the Kurdish people through his music. Perwer received a proposal from the Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc to give a concert for TRT 6, the only state-sponsored Kurdish television channel. However, just the fact that he had a meeting with Turkish state officials sparked controversy both in Turkey and Europe. The websites and newspapers close to the PKK-line published articles condemning Perwer as a traitor to his own people (Avci 2011). A hate-campaign was launched against him on the internet and especially in the pro-PKK Kurdish media.[51]

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50 For more information on Besikci see http://www.kurdishinstitute.be/english/1838.html.
51 Only hours after news of the meeting emerged, groups were formed on the social networking website Facebook which decried Perwer as a traitor and he received death threats. Similar reactions also occurred in Turkey toward the Kurdish intellectuals who supported the Kurdish opening initiated by the government. In March, 41 Kurdish intellectuals and activists issued a joint-declaration condemning the death threats made by the PKK against Kurdish writers Muhsin Kızılkaya and Mehmet Metiner, and the Kurdish singer Şivan Perwer. The declaration also detailed the death threaths received by Orhan Miroglu (a Kurdish intellectual who resides in Turkey) and Kemal Burkay

Although the JDP organised meetings with Kurdish diaspora members in Europe, it still aimed to bypass those factions of the diaspora with links to the PKK. This has not gone unnoticed by the diaspora and has been interpreted as a bad omen by those who support the PKK. A member of an organisation following the PKK line in Sweden said:

> "The government is not negotiating with the Kurds. They are negotiating with the 'good' Kurds…They know very well that a solution is only possible with us but they do not come to us. They cannot…".

Another Kurdish activist who used to be active in organisations that are linked to PKK in Germany claimed:

> "They are not trying to resolve anything. They are trying to divide the Kurds. They will sit down and watch while we (the rival Kurdish groups) fight and finally finish each other. That is the JDP resolution".

Recently, there have been interesting developments about the possible return of a number of Kurdish activists in the diaspora. For example, Sukru Gulmus, who served for the PKK for many years and then became an asylum seeker in Germany in 1993, returned to Turkey in January 2011. He has given several interviews to popular newspapers, claiming that if the government can offer certain guarantees, at least 200 people who served the PKK in the past would return to Turkey to take part in the resolution process. He argues that those Kurds in Germany who broke their connection with the PKK are suspicious of both the JDP government's future plans and the PKK's reaction to the return of the former militants.[52] In another interview he claimed:

> "At least 150 people in Germany are looking forward to returning to Turkey. But they hesitate. These are the people who are the core who created PKK, they have given 30 years of their lives to this organisation. If they could go back to their region, if the people can see them, maybe they can start questioning what they have been through. The Kurdish movement might become more democratic with this momentum. The return of popular names like Kemal Burkay or Sivan Perwer certainly carries symbolic importance, but the most important is the return of the PKK cadre who constitute the main body of the PKK".[53]

During my interviews with the Kurds from the PKK cadre who served in the mountains or who were responsible from the recruitment and financial affairs of the PKK in Germany (as well as with other Kurds who served for different Kurdish movements such as Kawa or Rizgari), I heard similar arguments. The main issue that frequently arose were the suspicions about the JDP and its future intentions. The ambiguous nature of the 'Kurdish opening' which, ultimately, failed to solve the Kurdish issue (and instead took a few steps back), caused a lack of trust among the Kurds for the JDP. However, as the conditions are ripe, many of my interviewees announced their intention to return to Turkey. One of the interviewees who used to belong to the PKK cadre said:

> "I will return if they guarantee my well-being in Turkey. By that I mean protection from both the Turkish and the Kurdish side. I will wait until the government shows enough courage to form truth commissions. Kurds need to make their settlements with the Turks. I tell you, the

(who is currently in exile in Sweden) from PKK-supporting groups (see http://todayszaman.com/news-237840-kurdish-intellectuals-condemn-pkk-threats-intimidation.html).

52 See Turkiye Newspaper, 9 January 2011. http://www.turkiyegazetesi.com/haber/475243/40yil.aspx.

53 See Gazete Vatan, 17 January 2011. http://haber.gazetevatan.com/pkk-tarikati-carsamba-ayetleriyle-yonetiliyor/353336/1/Gundem.

> day they form the truth commissions and tell people what the Turkish state did, I will go there and testify and tell them what the PKK did as well. But we need guarantees...".

Another Kurdish activist from a different organisation also voiced suspicions about the current government:

> "Who is the biggest enemy of the Kurds? The Kemalists! Who are now opening space for Kurds to express themselves a little? The Islamists. However... I tell you, I will lean my back against the Kemalists, but never against the Islamists. We (Kurds) should be careful...The Kurdish opening process is like playing with fire for the Kurds".

During my fieldwork, apart from the possibility of return, I asked other questions related to the Kurdish opening, such as the launch of the Kurdish television channel TRT 6. Opinions varied between two extreme views: the respondents who are closer to the PKK line argued that TRT 6 is a tool used by the JDP government to circulate Islamic propaganda in order to make Kurds give less priority to their ethnic identity. Other activists who follow a non-PKK line argued that it was a welcome symbolic step by the government, although it was surely not enough to satisfy the Kurdish demands. Several respondents argued that it is a helpful initiative for the spread and standardization of the Kurdish language. I also asked about the stance of the diaspora members toward the referendum, and, as expected, I received a wide range of different answers. A 'virtual' online battle ensued about the stance that the Kurds in Turkey should take towards the referendum which was held in September 2010. KOMKAR organised a Europe-wide meeting in order to discuss the referendum process. At the end of the conference, it was announced that voting 'yes' for the referendum is the interests of the Kurds, whereas boycotting or voting 'no' would only harm the Kurds in the long run. The PKK, YEKKOM and KONKURD boycotted the KOMKAR Conference and in a press release claimed that the conference only serves the JDP's interests.[54] The circles closer to the PKK produced propaganda before the referendum for the boycott campaign of the Kurdish political party (BDP) in Turkey. Therefore, one of the main conclusions I can draw from the interviews is the fact that to argue that the Kurdish diaspora 'wants this' or 'demands that' is impossible. The interviews I conducted prove that there is no consensus within the diaspora toward current developments. Therefore, *who* represents the diaspora (or indeed the Kurds in general) in a peace process is a controversial issue.

54 See Aknews 28 August 2010, http://www.aknews.com/tr/aknews/4/177728/.

8. Concluding Remarks

The Kurdish diaspora plays a significant role in raising awareness, sometimes in direct support of the party at war and sometimes solely in upholding the Kurdish identity. The diaspora is a result of, and also a part of, the Kurdish movement and it has managed to transform the nation-building efforts into a transnational issue. At times it could be described as a peacewrecker, and at times it is a peacemaker. As I have tried to demonstrate, although we can make a few generalizations about the diaspora, it would be very misleading to interpret the diaspora as a monolithic body in terms of their involvement in conflict resolution in Turkey. When discussing diaspora activism, the political dividing lines within the diaspora must always be taken into account.

Two developments have significant impacts on the diaspora mobilization: the critical junctures in Turkey and significant turning points in European and host country politics. Therefore, understanding the stance of the diaspora toward a certain issue could prove even more complex than understanding the same groups back home. Before we arrive at any conclusions about the Kurdish Diaspora we must consider a number of factors: the experiences and trauma of the Kurdish migrants when they arrived in Europe; the generational differences between the migrants and their descendants; the perspective of women in terms of diasporic experience and the approaches of different host countries and their impact on diaspora mobilization as such. When Soğuk writes about the Kurdish diaspora he asserts that: “the capacity of a displaced people to speak and be heard surprises, even scares, many” (Soguk 2008). As I have attempted to demonstrate here, that capacity continues to surprise many. The impact of the diaspora on Kurdish politics is real, unyielding, and vivid.

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