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MARTIN VAN BRUINESSEN

KURDISH ETHNO-NATIONALISM VERSUS NATION-BUILDING STATES

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Collected articles

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He is also an expert on Indonesia, where between 1982 and 1994 he spent altogether nine years, doing research and teaching. He published four books in Indonesian on various aspects of Islam in Indonesia.

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PREFACE

The articles in this volume represent another aspect of my research on Kurdish society than those covered in my *Agha, Shaikh and State* (1978, 1992), which dealt primarily with "traditional" social structure and its interactions with the surrounding states, and the first volume of collected articles, *Mullas, Sufis and Heretics* (2000), which focused on religion.[1] Most of the articles in the present collection deal more explicitly with the Kurdish ethno-national movement or with individual Kurdish uprisings. Whereas during my fieldwork of the mid-1970s I had cautiously avoided any but casual contacts with political activists, not wishing to arouse their or the various intelligence services' suspicions, such contacts developed quite naturally in the following years, primarily through my involvement with political refugees. Once my first writings had been published and noted by Kurdish intellectuals, it became easier to win the confidence of persons actively involved in politics, and during field trips to the various parts of Kurdistan (in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria) in the late 1970s and 1980s I could conduct numerous lengthy interviews with politically active Kurds and observe the relations between political movements and the wider society. The articles in the third and fourth parts of this volume owe much to those field trips.

During the 1980s and 1990s I wrote numerous papers and articles about contemporary developments in the Kurdish movement. Many of them, evidently, lost their usefulness due to later developments and the observations in them were superseded by later writings by myself and others. In this collection I have only reprinted those articles that I believe to be of more than ephemeral value even though they may be dated. Those in sections C and D document developments among the Kurds of Iran and Turkey, respectively, and contain much that may not easily be found elsewhere. These articles do not, of course, add up to an overall history of the Kurdish movement. For the wider view the reader is referred to David MacDowall's book, which is the best general work, and to the study by Henri Barkey and Graham Fuller, which is the best-informed and most judicious study of the Kurdish question in Turkey (which is less adequately covered by MacDowall).[2] I believe, however, that the

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[1] Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan*. London: Zed Books, 1992; Martin van Bruinessen, *Mullas, Sufis and Heretics: The Role of Religion in Kurdish Society. Collected articles*. Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2000.

[2] David MacDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1996; Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey's Kurdish Question*. Lanham etc.: Rowman & Little Field Publishers Inc., 1998.

observations in these articles remain valid and important for understanding present developments. Although I would say certain things differently now, I believe that my analysis in these articles still stands. Occasionally I have added references to later developments or more recent relevant literature in a footnote; such later additions are placed between square brackets.

The articles in the first and second sections do not have the Kurdish movement itself as their primary focus but questions of ethnic and religious identity and the nation-building policies of governments determined to reduce the importance of or to destroy Kurdish ethnicity, respectively. These topics are closely related, in that it commonly is in response to the political situation (which includes government policies) that a person chooses to emphasise (or de-emphasise) one particular identity out of a number of (partially overlapping) possible identities. An awareness that all identities are ultimately socially constructed not only belongs to the received ideas of contemporary sociology but has also in various ways underpinned government policies towards the Kurds throughout the century. Nation-building in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria has often involved the suppression of Kurdish culture and efforts to assimilate the Kurds to the dominant ethnic group. At other moments the particularistic identities of sub-groups among the Kurds (such as Yezidi and Kaka'i in Iraq, Ahl-i Haqq and Shi'i Kurds in Iran, Zaza and Alevi in Turkey) were officially promoted in an effort to weaken the appeal of Kurdish nationalism.

Of the various aspects of Kurdish history and society that I have written on, it is the passages dealing with the Kurds' cultural diversity (in *Agha, Shaikh and State* and a number of later articles, including the ones reprinted here) that have been quoted most frequently — though often out of context. Various circles have believed that insisting on the Kurds' diversity and lack of unity could serve their political interests. In Turkey, the official ban of Kurdish and denial of the existence of the Kurds as a people distinct from Turks, Arabs and Persians was in the 1990s replaced by the propagation of the view that there are so many Kurdish dialects that there is no single Kurdish language. This argument has repeatedly been used to reject the very idea of allowing the use of Kurdish in school education and in the electronic media, as the European Union demands. My work has been referred to in support of such arguments. It is therefore perhaps appropriate to repeat here a less often quoted observation, to be found in the same passages of my work. In spite of the great linguistic and religious diversity, there has for centuries been a strong awareness, among the Kurds as well as their neighbours, of an overarching Kurdish identity — as is well attested in Ottoman sources from the 16th century on.

Two articles carry the term ìgenocideî in their titles. They were written in response to invitations to take part in theoretical and comparative reflections on the subject. When I began my research for these articles, I was convinced that the concept of genocide (which I understood to refer to the deliberate extermination of an entire people) was not applicable in the Kurdish case. I soon had to revise my understanding of genocide, however, and admit that its legal definition (as enshrined in the 1948 United Nations Convention on Genocide) includes massacres of more restricted scale. The essential elements in this definition are that members of an ethnic, religious, etc. group are killed ìas suchî and that the killings are premeditated. This brought the concept closer to my sociological concern with the construction of identities and nation-building. The massacres in Kurdish history that I identified in these articles as the most relevant for comparative purposes remained in my view borderline cases, and I refrained from giving a final verdict (but I have later gradually shifted to the view that these were in fact cases of genocide). Whether constituting genocide or not, the massacres discussed in these articles were deliberate, and they were the ultimate consequence of a particular style of authoritarian modernisation and social engineering adopted by the countries concerned.

Not all aspects of nation-building were that violent and destructive, of course. Mass education, improved communications (roads, radio, television) and economic integration were altogether benign methods and might have been very effective if they had received priority at an earlier stage. As it was, too little was done and too late, resulting in an acute awareness of unequal treatment. It was, however, especially the counterinsurgency measures of the 1980s and 1990s, in both Turkey and Iraq, that caused a massive disaffection with the state and gave the Kurdish nationalist movements the mass support that they had so far lacked. Stages of this process are documented in the various articles in this volume.

Utrecht, August 2000

THE ETHNIC IDENTITY OF THE KURDS IN TURKEY

Most Kurds in Turkey have a strong awareness of belonging to a separate ethnic group, distinct, especially, from the Turks and from the Christian minorities living in their midst. There is, however, by no means unanimity among them as to what constitutes this ethnic identity and what the boundaries of their ethnic group are. This makes it necessary for me to state at the outset precisely whom I mean when in this article I use the ethnic label "Kurds". For pragmatic reasons I use a rather loose and wide definition, including all native speakers of dialects belonging to the Iranic languages Kurmanji or Zaza, as well as those Turkish speaking persons who claim descent from Kurmanji or Zaza speakers and who still (or again) consider themselves as Kurds. Most Kurdish nationalists would agree with this definition (a minority would find it too narrow still); in practice, many Kurds implicitly use much narrower definitions, as will be shown below. Even this simple definition invites some obvious questions: should, for instance, persons who grew up as Kurds, but were in later life voluntarily assimilated to the Turkish majority, be called Kurds or not? Or those members of the Christian minority groups who have formally embraced Islam and have become kurdophone but still retain a memory of their previous identity? My definition would exclude the former and include the latter. Both processes of assimilation will however be considered below.

When asked to specify what constitutes their identity, most Kurds would mention language and religion first. Kurmanji and Zaza are both Iranian languages, grammatically quite different from Turkish, although their vocabularies contain many loan-words from Arabic and Turkish. Few, if any, Kurmanji speakers understand Zaza, but most Zaza speakers know at least some Kurmanji. Virtually all Zaza speakers consider themselves, and are considered by the Kurmanji speakers, as Kurds. They do however constitute a distinct subgroup (or rather a number of distinct sub-groups) that still tends to endogamy and differs from the Kurmanji speakers in several other cultural features. For instance, their agricultural and horticultural techniques are on the average more developed, and where they are tribally organised their tribes tend to be smaller than those of the Kurmanji speakers. These differences are however not perceived as significant. The second criterion, religion, is even less apt than language to set all Kurds (as defined by me) apart from other ethnic groups. Most Kurds, it is true, are Sunni Muslims following the Shafi'i *mezhep*. This neatly distinguishes them from the Shi'i Azeris and Persians as well as from the Hanefi Turkish and Arab Sunnis (and, of course,

from their Christian neighbours). A stranger is frequently asked what his mezhep is, as a cautious way of finding out whether he is a Turk or a Kurd. Many Alevis, however, speak Kurmanji or Zaza dialects and consider themselves as Kurds, and there are still pockets of (Kurmanji speaking) Yezidis, a non-Muslim sect living among the Sunni Kurds. In Iran and Iraq, moreover, a considerable number of Kurds belong to the orthodox Shi'a, and a smaller number to the heterodox Ahl-i Haqq sect. Many Shafi'i Kurds, in fact, refuse to consider the Alevis and Yezidis as Kurds. Intermarriage between these religious groups is extremely rare, much rarer than between Turkish and Kurdish Alevis or even Turkish and Kurdish Sunnis. It might, in fact, be more apt to consider the Kurds not as one, but as a set of ethnic groups (for instance, Sunni, Alevi, Yezidi), although even then the definition of boundaries would not be easy. The Kurdish rebellions of the early years of the Republic showed how little unity there was: Şeyh Sa'id's rebellion (1925) remained largely restricted to the Zaza speaking tribes along the Murad Suyu, and in the Dersim revolt of 1937 only Alevis (both Kurmanji and Zaza speaking) participated. Nationalist leaders tried in vain to exhort others to join in. During the 1970s, the Kurdish nationalist movement became quite influential, even in the villages, and it seemed to create a stronger sense of oneness among the Kurds. The economic and political developments of that decade, however, tended to exacerbate rather than alleviate the long-standing tensions between Sunnis and Alevis, and to revive the importance of religion as a symbol of identity. The difference between Shafi'is and Hanefis is insignificant when compared with that between these Sunnis and the Alevis.

A third criterion, rarely explicitly mentioned but often implicitly used, is that of affiliation with a Kurdish tribe or one of the Kurdish "great families". A person descending from a well-known Kurdish family or tribe is always considered a Kurd, whatever he claims himself to be. This criterion, however, does not define an ethnic boundary: many persons who consider themselves, and are generally considered, as Kurds do not belong to a tribe or great family. Other, secondary symbols are even less apt to define a boundary: "Kurdish" dress, music, folklore, cooking, etc. show great regional variations, while the similarities with those of other ethnic groups in the same region are sometimes striking. These symbols of separateness have since the late 1920s been suppressed by the republican Government, which paradoxically made it possible for the nationalist movement of the 1970s to promote a re-invented, more unified Kurdish tradition, that appeared to be strongly influenced by that of the Kurds of Iraq. This does, however, not seem to have had a lasting impact.

Some other symbols of identity, stressed by Kurds themselves as well as by non-Kurds consist of differences in degree rather than in kind: the (Sunni) Kurds have on the whole maintained more of the traditional Islam than

the other Muslim ethnic groups: the *medrese* did not entirely disappear as elsewhere in Turkey but (clandestinely) survived into the 1960s, and there are still many *şeyhs* (associated with the Nakşibendi or Kadiri tarikat) who wield great influence. The concept of honour (*namus*) and the institution of blood revenge associated with it still play a quite central role in social life. Another traditional institution (although not an Islamic one), the payment of a high bride-price, is still widely adhered to, and the modern one of birth-control is widely disapproved of. The position of women is, on the whole, a more subjected one than among other ethnic groups. None of these cultural features, however, nor a combination of them, defines an ethnic boundary between Kurds and non-Kurds. They are at least to some extent a corollary of the economic backwardness of the region, and each of them may be encountered among different ethnic groups in other backward areas as well. Several of these features sharply distinguish the Sunni from the Alevi Kurds: among the latter, *medreses* and *şeyhs* (apart from a single Bektaşi *şeyh*) are conspicuously absent, as are, in most Alevi villages, mosques. Most of the specific Alevi religious traditions have virtually died out as well, so that it is rather the absence of visible religious symbols that seems to characterize the Alevis. Many, though by no means all, Alevis occasionally drink alcohol, and the relations between the sexes are freer than among most Sunni Kurds — two features that the latter disapprovingly stress and perceive as major differences. There is a lower incidence of blood feuds among Alevis, and if there is a bride-price, it tends to be much lower than among the Sunnis; women have a relatively more important role in social life. While differentiating the Alevi from the Sunni Kurds, these features unite them with the Turkish Alevis. Apart from the language, the Kurdish and Turkish Alevis are culturally very similar, and intermarriage among them is relatively frequent (although there is still a tendency to local and tribal endogamy). They may be considered as one ethnic group, the cultural variations being regional rather than between the linguistic sub-groups. Although many young Kurdish Alevis became active participants in the Kurdish nationalist movement of the 1970s, this did not lead them to stress their differences with the Turkish Alevis; rather, the latter were perceived as a sort of Kurds who happened to speak Turkish but were very different from the dominant Sunni Turkish majority. And, in fact, some Turkish Alevis themselves started claiming that they were really Kurds, who had in the past been turkicised.

There is, then, no unambiguous ethnic boundary separating Kurds from non-Kurds, and in the course of even recent history the boundaries as perceived by various groups have shifted. Large numbers of people have moreover purposively crossed what they perceived as the major ethnic boundary, not only individually, as is wont to happen virtually everywhere, but in many cases collectively. A short historical sketch may be appropriate here to highlight some of the changes in ethnic (self-)definition.

Though some Kurdish intellectuals claim that their people is descended from the Medes, there is not enough evidence to permit such a connection across the considerable gap in time between the political dominance of the Medes, and the first attestation of the Kurds (as Cyrtii).[1] This is not to deny that there may have been some continuity in the population of the area as a whole. Although politically dominant for some time, the Medes may not have constituted a numerical majority in the area at any one time. Cultural variations between the various regions of Kurdistan, as well as the existence of two culturally distinct social strata in several regions, seem to indicate that the present Kurds have incorporated quite heterogeneous ethnic elements. It is not clear when precisely a distinct Kurdish identity emerged. The ethnic label "Kurd" is first encountered in Arabic sources from the first centuries of the Islamic era; it seemed to refer to a specific variety of pastoral nomadism, and possibly to a set of political units, rather than to a linguistic group: once or twice, "Arabic Kurds" are mentioned. By the 10th century, the term appears to denote nomadic and/or transhumant groups speaking an Iranian language and mainly inhabiting the mountainous areas to the South of Lake Van and Lake Urmia, with some offshoots in the Caucasus. If there was a Kurdish speaking subjected peasantry at that time, the term was not yet used to include them. The arrival of sizeable groups of Turkic nomads, from the 11th century on, had a considerable impact on the Kurdish tribes of those days. In the western parts of the Kurdish-inhabited zone, Turkish and Kurdish nomads joined forces to establish huge tribal confederacies, and a new brand of pastoral nomadism emerged, with long-distance seasonal migrations between the Armenian highlands and the Syrian plains.[2] The cultures of the two nomadic peoples mutually influenced each other. Membership of a tribe is, in spite of the genealogical ideology, ultimately a matter of political allegiance. Many Kurdish speakers joined Turkish chieftains and vice versa, and it is highly likely that members of other ethnic groups (Christians as well as subjected Muslim peasants) were occasionally recruited into these tribes. Conversely, tribesmen, because of impoverishment or conflicts, may have settled and gradually merged with the subject peasantry.

A sharp distinction between the Sunni and Alevi varieties of Islam did not yet exist among these tribes. Even if nominally Sunni, their beliefs were strongly coloured by veneration for the Shi'i imams and for Muslim saints, and by messianistic expectations. The popular mysticism brought from Central Asia and Iran by the Turks found acceptance among the Kurds too, and the many Christians who were assimilated and islamicised maintained, and even disseminated, many of their previous beliefs and practices of popular worship. It was only when the Ottoman and Safavid empires were competing

[1]Minorsky (1940) and MacKenzie (1961).
[2]De Planhol (1968).

for control of the area and attempted to impose orthodox Sunni and (initially) heterodox Shi'i Islam respectively, in order to strengthen political loyalties, that distinct Sunni and Alevi groups emerged and gradually came to perceive themselves as ethnically distinct. This process, however, took a long time. During the 16th century, major tribal groups switched their political loyalties and accordingly their religious affiliation -which is reflected in the fact that chieftains gave their sons typically Sunni or Shi'i names according to their political allegiance of the day.[1]

Around 1600 AD, too, we encounter the first written expressions of a Kurdish ethnic awareness. The poet Ahmed-i Khani (Ehmedê Xanî) lamented in the prologue to his famous epic Mem û Zîn (1105/1694) the dividedness of the Kurds, which had caused them to be dominated and ruled by Turks and Persians ('Ajam, which referred to both Persians proper and to the Safavids, and the speakers of Azeri dialects in general). He contrasted the Kurds with Arabs, Turks and 'Ajam, apparently using a combination of linguistic and political criteria. The ruler of the autonomous Kurdish emirate of Bitlis, Sharaf al-Din Khan, composed a history of the Kurds, *Sharafnama* (1005/1596), in which he compiled detailed information on Kurdish dynasties of the past and all tribes of his day. He included Sunnis and Yezidis as well as Alevi Kurds, and the speakers of Zaza as well as of Kurmanji dialects, and even such groups that would not be considered as Kurds today, such as the Lor and Bahtiyari in Iran. Both authors paid little attention to the lower strata of society; where they spoke of Kurds they seemed to mean the ruling families and their tribal followers only. Not all tribesmen, it should be stressed, were pastoral nomads or transhumants. There were also sedentary tribesmen, who were free cultivators or had become townsmen. In many places the tribesmen dominated a subject stratum of peasants and craftsmen, whose position was often not better than that of serfs. Many of these were Christians (Armenians, Jacobites, Nestorians) but there were also many Kurdish speaking Muslims among them. It is not clear whether the two authors mentioned included the latter among the Kurds; half a century later, the great Turkish traveller, Evliya Çelebi, definitely did. For him, everyone who spoke Kurdish was a Kurd, irrespective of class or religion. Evliya explicitly included Zaza among the Kurdish dialects; Kurdish Alevis, however, he often brought together with their Turkish co-religionists and the Safavids under the label of "Kızılbaş". This inclusive, democratic definition of Kurdish ethnicity was, however, an outsider's. Until the beginning of this century, Kurdish leaders themselves seem not to have thought of the subject peasantry as Kurds proper.

[1]This becomes abundantly clear in the history of Kurdish tribes and emirates, Sharafnama, completed in 1597 A. D., by the Kurdish emir of Bitlis, Sharaf al-Din Bidlisi. For a more detailed discussion, see Bruinessen (1981).

From the 17th century on, then, there existed a clear awareness of Kurdish ethnic identity; the political stability brought by Ottoman supremacy tended to consolidate the ethnic boundaries. There continued, however, to be cases of entire tribes crossing these boundaries within a time span of a few generations. This usually coincided with a crossing of political boundaries. The Dumbuli (Dumbeli), for instance, are mentioned in the *Sharafnama* as a Kurmanji-speaking tribe, originally Yezidis but later converted to Sunni Islam. Part of the tribe having moved from the mountains south of Lake Van to the area of Khoy, their chieftains allied themselves with the Safavids, and were rewarded with high positions. In Sharaf al-Din Khan's time, at least a part of the tribe had become (heterodox) Shi'i. During the following centuries, the Dumbuli continued to play a prominent role in regional politics, gradually Turkicising. At present, all Dumbuli are turcophone Twelver (*ithna 'ashari*) Shi'is.

An example of the reverse development is the Karakeçili tribe, semi-nomads living on the slopes of the Karacadağ mountain to the south-west of Diyarbakır. They are kurdophone, but according to local tradition they were originally Türkmen from Western Anatolia, who had been settled in this region by Sultan Selim I after the Ottoman conquest. Sections of the Karakeçili who stayed behind in Western Anatolia retained their Türkmen identity; the ones settled on Karacadağ gradually Kurdicised, as a result of intermarriage and the incorporation of Kurdish allies into the tribe. This process must have been completed before the middle of the 18th century, for the descendants of a section of these Karakeçili who moved to Haymana (South of Ankara) around that time also continue to speak Kurdish.[1]

From the last decades of the 19th century on, increasing numbers of Armenians, whose position was becoming more precarious, adopted Islam (especially in its Alevi variety) and the Kurdish language, and gradually merged with their Kurdish neighbours.[2] After the Armenian deportations and massacres this process was speeded up, and minor groups of the other Christian minorities followed suit. In the provinces Siirt, Van and Hakkari there are small pockets of people who claim to be Kurds and Muslims but retain a clear memory of their previous identity as Armenians or Jacobites. They still tend to marry amongst themselves, and are distinguishable by their superior agricultural techniques and crafts, but are generally recognised as Kurds by their neighbours.

[1] "Notes on Kurdish tribes (on and beyond the borders of the Mosul vilayet and westward to the Euphrates)", Baghdad: Government Press, 1919. Probably compiled by Major Noel. Enclosed in Public Records Office file 1919: 44A/149523/3050. C. Türkay (1979), pp. 32, 99, 476. G. Perrot (1865), pp. 607-631.

[2] Probably the first to mention this process was Molyneux-Seel (1914), who noticed that many of the Kurdish Alevis he met in Dersim had not so long ago been Armenians.

Soon after the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, its government embarked upon a radical programme of nation-building. Ethnic diversity was perceived as a danger to the integrity of the state, and the Kurds, as the largest non-Turkish ethnic group, obviously constituted the most serious threat. They were decreed to be Turks, and their language and culture were to be Turkish. All external symbols of their ethnic identity were suppressed. Use of the Kurdish language was forbidden in cities and towns. Turkish teachers were despatched to Kurdish villages with the teaching of Turkish as their chief objective. Distinctive Kurdish dress was forbidden. Personal and family names had to be Turkish; later, village names, too, were Turkicised. The closing down of *medreses* and the ban on the Sufi orders (*tarikat*), though not exclusively directed against the Kurds, were felt as major blows to Kurdish culture, in which these traditional institutions had a prominent place. In the 1930s, after the first Kurdish rebellions, large numbers of Kurds were deported to Turkey's western provinces, while other ethnic groups (Circassians, Laz, and *muhacir*s from the Balkans) were settled in the Kurdish districts: all attempts to speed up the Turkicisation of the Kurds. These assimilation policies were backed up by a new historical doctrine according to which the Kurds were really Turks originally, but had by historical accident lost their language.

There was no official discrimination against those Kurds who agreed to be assimilated: they could reach the highest positions in the state apparatus. Those who refused, however, often met with severe repression. Publicly proclaiming oneself to be a Kurd has often (though not always) been treated as a major offence, an act of separatism. The assimilation policies were not without effect. Many individuals have for all practical purposes been Turkicised and do not consider themselves as Kurds any more. Most of the Kurds who migrated to the big cities up to the 1960s were rapidly assimilated, and their children do not know Kurdish any more (during the past decades, Kurdish migrants have been too numerous to be assimilated). In several rural areas, too, Turkish has to a considerable extent replaced Kurdish, at least outside the family situation. In much wider areas, Kurds began calling themselves Turks, and it has long been hard to see how serious they were about it. In the relatively liberal atmosphere of the 1970s, when Kurdish nationalism flourished, it became apparent that this Turkicisation was only skin-deep.

From the late 1960s on, Kurdish nationalism, which in Turkey had until then remained restricted to a limited circle of intellectuals only, suddenly found itself a mass base. The military and political successes of the Iraqi Kurds under Barzani constituted one of the major influencing factors; large-scale migration to the cities, the increasing number of Kurdish students, and the weakness and division of the central government combined to make the

emergence and growth of a nationalist movement possible. This is not the place to discuss the history of that movement;[1] the relevant fact is that it revivified or created symbols of Kurdish ethnic identity that affected the way many Kurds saw themselves. Books on Kurdish history were published, and a large number of Kurdish literary, cultural and political magazines appeared. Due to the ban on the Kurdish language, it had long not been able to develop in accordance with the needs of the day. For political discourse, for instance, it was quite inadequate, and most discussions were still held in Turkish. Moreover, the differences between the various dialects were so great that communication was often difficult. Nationalists set out to remedy this situation: there were attempts to create a unified Kurdish (Kurmanji) language, and many neologisms were coined. This modernised Kurdish was disseminated through a variety of journals and many (clandestine) Kurdish literacy courses. A Kurdish national music was re-invented, and became rapidly well-known and popular through the cassette recorder. People started wearing Kurdish clothes again in many cases a fancy dress, based on that worn by the Iraqi Kurds. Kurdish folklore was also re-invented, including the celebration of *Newroz*, Kurdish New Year, which few remembered as ever having existed in Turkey, but which was the Iraqi Kurds' national holiday. The nationalists stressed the ethnic unity of Sunni and Alevi Kurds; and in fact, Sunnis and Alevis worked together in all Kurdish organisations without much friction.

Towards the end of the 1970s, it seemed that this nationalist movement was changing the self-perception of a considerable section of the Kurds. People who had long called themselves Turks started re-defining themselves as Kurds; youngsters in the cities, who knew only Turkish, began to learn Kurdish again.

These developments were cut short by the military take-over of September 1980. The military authorities have taken tough measures against the Kurdish nationalist movement and have reverted to a rigorous policy of forced assimilation. The successes of the Kurdish nationalist movement may well prove to have been ephemeral only. It remains to be seen, however, whether the present government's efforts will be more successful in changing the ethnic map of Eastern Turkey.

[1] Cf. Bruinessen, 1984.

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DIVERSITY AND DIVISION AMONG THE KURDS

There is little apparent unity among the Kurds, and the fact that Kurdistan has been divided between four countries — or even more, if we take the Kurdish enclaves in the Transcaucasian republics into account — is only one of the reasons. Differences in religion, language and other aspects of culture mean that Kurdish society is itself highly diverse. But the effects of the political separation by state borders — and thus in formal education, military service, state radio and television and participation in different political systems — have made the Kurds of Iran, Iraq and Turkey more different from one another than they had been before.

Countless Kurds

Some of the simplest questions about the Kurds are among the most difficult to answer. The question of how many of them there are, for instance. Different sources give estimates varying from less than 10 million to 40 million, apparently reflecting the degree of sympathy for the Kurdish nationalist cause more than anything else. There are no reliable figures based on actual census-taking. Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, which have (in this order) the largest numbers of Kurdish citizens, have attempted to assimilate them, though not all with the same degree of coercion, and they have commonly refrained from counting them.

Turkey has been the most consistent, and long the most successful, in its suppression of Kurdish identity. Until recently, the very existence of the Kurds as a distinct group was officially denied, and the Kurdish language was declared to be a corrupt Turkish dialect — but nevertheless banned as a threat to Turkish unity.

In the late 1980s it became possible publicly to mention the Kurds, and in 1991 the government lifted the ban on publications in Kurdish. The late Prime Minister (and from 1989 until his death in 1993 President) Turgut Özal, to whom this liberalisation is generally attributed, also was the first public person to speak of the demographic importance of the Kurds. His estimate of 12 million (i.e., almost a fifth of the total population) may in fact have been a little on the high side and was probably meant to convince his countrymen of the seriousness of the Kurdish problem. However that may be, since Turkey has recognised that it has a considerable Kurdish population, there have also

been efforts to emphasise and strengthen existing divisions among them. Some members of the Alevi religious minority as well as some speakers of Zaza, a language closely related to Kurdish, have started organising themselves separately from, and in opposition to, the majority of the Kurds.

The Kurds of Iran number at least 5 million or 6 million. Kurdish is related to Persian, and the Kurds have at most times been better integrated in Iran's political and cultural life than has been the case in Turkey or Iraq. Most of the Kurds, in Iran as elsewhere, are Sunni Muslims, which sharply distinguishes them from Iran's Shi'i majority. There are also Shi'i Kurds, however, in the southern parts of Kurdistan.

In Iran, the Kurdish movement has only found significant support among the Sunnis. The Shi'i Kurds appear to identify themselves more strongly with Iran than with the idea of a Kurdish nation; the Islamic government has found it easy to mobilise them against the Kurdish nationalists. Unlike its neighbours, Iran has at most times refrained from systematic oppressive measures against the Kurdish population as a whole. It has allowed some limited room for Kurdish cultural expression but acted decisively whenever demands for autonomy were voiced. It has successfully marginalised the Kurdish movement by systematically assassinating its most effective leaders, in most cases on foreign soil.

Iraq is the only of these states that has always recognised the existence of the Kurds as a distinct component of its population, and its Constitution explicitly mentions them as one of the country's two peoples (although a later paragraph has it that Iraq is at the same time an integral part of the greater Arab nation). Most of the Iraqi Kurds live in the former Ottoman province of Mosul, which after the First World War remained contested. Both Turkey and Iraq laid claims to it, and some British officials briefly toyed with the idea of making it a semi-independent Kurdish buffer state between those two.

Only in 1926 did the province of Mosul definitively became a part of the Kingdom of Iraq. At that time, the Kurds constituted almost a quarter of the country's total population. Iraq's troubled history of expulsions (Jews, Kurdish and Arab Shi'is allegedly of Iranian descent) as well as of genocide has affected many other groups besides the Kurds, and they probably still represent a similar proportion of the population, or in absolute numbers some 4 million.

The absence of census data is not the only reason for the widely divergent estimates of the number of Kurds. Another reason is that it is often not possible to establish unambiguously who is a Kurd and who is not. Sunni Muslims who have Kurdish as their first language are a clear case, but as a

result of assimilation and of intermarriage with other ethnic groups there are, especially in Turkey, numerous people of Kurdish descent who have Turkish (or Persian or Arabic, in the other countries) as their first language. Many young people who in the 1960s considered themselves a Turks have "rediscovered" their Kurdish roots and now define themselves in the first place as Kurds.

On the other hand, there have also been Kurds who, when migrating to another part of the country, made efforts to hide their Kurdish backgrounds in order to be more easily accepted. Finally there are various religious and linguistic minorities in Kurdistan, who in certain situations may define themselves as Kurds but not in others, such as the Zaza speakers and the Alevis in Turkey, the Kaka'i and Yezidi religious minorities in Iraq. Turkey favours the view that the Zaza speakers are not Kurds (both used to be considered as distinct Turkish ethnic subgroups). The Iraqi regime defines the Kaka'is and Yezidis, like all other religious minorities in that country, as Arabs, and the Yezidis' refusal to accept that designation appears to have been the chief reason why part of the community was rounded up and apparently executed in 1988, in the aftermath of the genocidal *Anfal* campaign.

The Diaspora

The vast majority of Kurds used to live in the region traditionally known as Kurdistan, roughly consisting of the mountains and highlands separating Asia Minor and Mesopotamia from the Iranian plateau and including the northern edges of the Mesopotamian plains. This region comprises most of Turkey's east and south-east, parts of north-western and north-eastern Syria, northern Iraq, and the adjacent parts of western Iran. It contains major cities like Diyarbakır and Van (in Turkey), Duhok, Erbil, Kirkuk and Sulaimania (in Iraq), Mahabad, Sanadaj and Kermanshah (in Iran) but its economy used to be primarily based on agriculture and animal husbandry, and most of the Kurds used to live in villages. Since 1970, a considerable proportion of the Kurds have left this region, voluntarily or under coercion. The oil boom and rising employment opportunities in cities outside the region on the one hand, and the mechanisation of agriculture on the other, caused a mass exodus from the villages. The Kurdish communities of Tehran and Baghdad, Istanbul, İzmir and Adana increased rapidly, and the first Kurdish communities in western Europe emerged.

Iraq deported Kurds from the oil-producing districts of Kirkuk and Khanaqin and replaced them with Arab peasants. In a later phase, all villages in a wide "forbidden zone" along the Iranian border were evacuated and destroyed — a measure designed to prevent Kurdish guerrilla fighters crossing

from or into Iran but which largely failed to have the intended effect. In the 1980s, the "forbidden zone" was ever further extended, until 4,000 villages were evacuated and destroyed (out of a total of 5,000). Some of the evacuees were deported to the south of the country but most ended up in closely guarded large resettlement camps in the region. This policy of destruction culminated in the chemical arms-assisted *Anfal* operations of 1988, in which all districts that had been under guerrilla control were systematically razed, their inhabitants driven off to collection points, and some 100,000 of the men despatched to firing squads and mass graves.

In Turkey, systematic village evacuations and destruction began in 1991, with the obvious aim of cutting the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) off from the village population and denying its guerrilla fighters food and other logistical support. Beginning in the regions close to the Iraqi border, where hardly any villages are left but those of pro-state militias ("village guards"), there have been successive waves of village evacuations further inland. At least tens of thousands of families were forcibly evicted; many times that number fled the region because the war conditions made normal life practically impossible. The population of cities in eastern Turkey such as Diyarbakır has tripled or quadrupled in a few years; between 1 million and 2 million have left the region for southern and western Turkey, most of them ending up in the vast slum districts surrounding the big cities.

Different creeds and tongues

Linguistic and religious distinctions among the Kurds also served as divisive factors. In Iraq, which is dominated by Sunni Arabs, Shi'i Kurds have tended to define themselves as Kurds first and have taken part in the Kurdish movement without bothering that the movement was dominated by Sunni Kurds. In Shi'i Iran, however, they identified themselves primarily as Shi'is and, as noted, the Islamic government could recruit many Shi'i Kurds actively to fight the nationalist movement.

In Turkey, the difference between the Sunni Muslims and the heterodox Alevis (among both of which there are Turks as well as Kurds and minor linguistic groups) is perhaps even sharper that that between Turks and Kurds. Alevi Kurds, many of whom moreover speak Zaza, which is quite different from ordinary Kurdish, therefore have ambivalent attitudes towards the Kurdish movement: some play active and even leading roles in it, others prefer to stay aloof or even perceive it as a threat to their distinct identities.

The secular Turkish elite has welcomed the emergence of a strong Alevi self-awareness during the past decade as a potential ally against both Muslim fundamentalism and Kurdish nationalism. Not surprisingly perhaps, the fiercest confrontations between the Turkish army and the Kurdish PKK over the past two years have taken place in the zone inhabited by Alevi Kurds, in and around the province of Tunceli, where both are fighting for the people's loyalties.

Even within Kurdish proper, the differences between the northern ("Kurmanji") and southern ("Sorani") dialects are momentous; these dialects are not mutually intelligible. Within each dialect group there is again considerable variation, and attempts to develop a common standard language have been only partially successful. In Iraq there exists an accepted form of standard Sorani that is generally understood, but the suppression of Kurdish in Turkey has prevented the emergence of a widely accepted Kurmanji standard. Both the Iranian and Iraqi state radio and television broadcast programmes in a variety of Kurdish dialects, in what appears to be a deliberate effort to prevent the emergence of a common standard for Kurds.

It has often been observed that the two Iraqi Kurdish parties that have been at each other's throats during the past years, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), receive the majority of their support from the Kurmanji-speaking northern part of the Kurdish region and the Sorani-speaking southern part, respectively. It would be wrong, however, to reduce the causes of the conflict to this regional-linguistic difference, if only because previously each of the parties also had considerable support in the other region. It is probably more correct to say that the political conflict has had the effect of opening up a gap between the Kurmanji-speaking and Sorani-speaking regions, even though the battle lines never precisely coincided with the linguistic boundary.

Different loyalties

The really divisive factor in Kurdish society is not its cultural and linguistic heterogeneity but the lasting importance of tribal structures. Kurdish tribes, which may consist of thousands to tens of thousands of families, are based on (a belief in) common descent and loyalty to a traditional chieftain. Each tribe is associated with a distinct territory, from a few villages to entire valleys, and its internal cohesion is strengthened by rivalries and conflicts with neighbouring tribes. Not all Kurds belong to tribes, however, and migration to the cities has loosened up tribal loyalties. Urban nationalists have commonly considered detribalisation a necessary condition for the emergence of truly national loyalties.

In times of armed conflict between central governments and the Kurdish movement, however, the tribes have time and again emerged as decisive forces. There had long been conflicts between the family of Barzani, to which the charismatic leader of the Kurdish movement belonged, and some neighbouring tribes. Throughout the 1960s, the Iraqi government paid and armed these tribes as pro-government militias (nicknamed *jash*, "donkey foal" by the nationalists). The Kurdish movement itself in turn also became more dependent on tribal support, especially in the northern part.

As the scope of the conflict enlarged, the number of tribes recruited by one side or the other increased. The great amounts of money and arms thus entering society strengthened the position of the chieftains (who were the recipients, and who could redistribute them as pleased them), shored up tribal coherence and fanned conflicts between neighbouring tribes. The alliances of the tribes with the government or with the Kurdish movement were a matter of expedience and always temporary.

By the late 1980s, a majority of the major tribes had become *jash*. In 1991, following Iraq's defeat in Kuwait, it had been precisely these *jash* tribes that started the large Kurdish uprising against the central government, and later most of them allied themselves with one or the other of the Kurdish parties without, however, cutting all their ties with Baghdad. Several *jash* chieftains have become regional warlords, only nominally subservient to one of the parties. The latter, unwilling to repudiate these militarily powerful allies, have been unable to discipline them. Depredations by these warlords have repeatedly unleashed new rounds of fighting between KDP and PUK guerrilla units.

In Turkey too, the tribes have acquired a renewed prominence due to state intervention. Since 1985, the government has recruited ever more tribesmen as "village guards" to fight against the PKK, some voluntarily, others under threat of eviction from their villages. The total number of these village guards by now appears to exceed 60,000. As in Iraq, these militias remain under the command of their own chieftains, through whom they receive their payment and arms; this has obviously greatly increased the power of these chieftains. As a part of the counter-guerrilla forces, the village guards have been able to kill and steal with impunity. This has sharpened tribal conflict and revived tribal solidarity, with a corresponding decline in security. The PKK, it should be noted, has not come to depend on tribal militias of its own, as the Iraqi parties have to some extent. Many if not most of its guerrilla fighters may be of tribal origins, but they operate under strict party command.

Inter-state Rivalries

Iran, Iraq, Turkey and to some extent Syria have similar problems with their Kurdish populations and therefore, one would assume, a common interest in suppressing Kurdish separatist tendencies and hopes for independence. They have at times assisted one another in countering the threat of Kurdish nationalism the previous pro-western defence alliances, the Saadabad Pact (1937) and the Baghdad Pact (1955), in which the first three took part, enabled them to develop common Kurdish policies, and the Kurds constitute the major topic of discussion in the regular tripartite meetings between Turkey, Syria and Iran.

When there were major clashes of interests between these neighbours, however, they have also repeatedly supported uprisings among each other's Kurds. All Kurdish political parties have, at one time or another, perceived the need for support by a neighbouring state, and most have become highly dependent on it, to the extent that major policy decisions were influenced (or even dictated) by their foreign sponsors. From 1963-75, Iran gave increasing financial and military support to the Iraqi Kurdish movement led by Mulla Mustafa Barzani. Then the Iraqi regime made important concessions in a long-standing border conflict, after which Iran obliged Barzani to give up. Some of the Iranian Kurdish leaders, meanwhile, lived in exile in Iraq biding their time; they returned during the Iranian revolution and reorganised their party.

During the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq supported various Iranian Kurdish parties and groups, and Iran allied itself with the Iraqi KDP then led by Mulla Mustafa Barzani's sons to the extent of carrying out joint military operations against Iraq. These alliances at times also led to armed confrontations between Iraqi and Iranian Kurds: thus in 1968, when Barzani's Peshmerga fighters helped the Iranian government suppress a radical guerrilla movement in Iran, and again in the early 1980s, when the Iraqi KDP fought side by side with Iranian troops against the Iranian sister party.

Both Syria and Iraq depend for their water supply to a large extent on the Euphrates and Tigris, and they feel seriously threatened by Turkey's ambitious Southeast Anatolia Project, which diverts much of the water of these rivers for irrigation purposes. Syria moreover has a territorial claim on Turkey's province of Hatay, which has a large Arab population.

To put pressure on Turkey, Syria has been almost openly supporting the PKK, which since the early 1980s has had training facilities in the Syrian-controlled south of Lebanon and appears to enjoy free movement in northern Syria. (Turkey in turn supports the major Syrian opposition movement, the Muslim Brothers.) The PKK appears to be allowed to enlist the support of

Syrian Kurds, but it has also been accused of acting as an extension of the Syrian state in suppressing other Kurdish movements in Syria as well as northern Iraq.

Since 1991, a large part of Iraqi Kurdistan has been de facto semi-independent under international protection. Besides the various Iraqi Kurdish parties (and those of the Assyrian and Turcoman minorities), the Iranian KDP and the PKK also have their bases here. All four states of the region have been much concerned about the effects this semi-independence could have on the other parts of Kurdistan, and all have made great efforts to extend their influence there.

The Turkish armed forces have repeatedly invaded northern Iraq and maintain a low-key presence in the territory, allegedly to wipe out the PKK bases there but probably as much to impose its will on the Iraqi Kurdish parties and to prevent Iran and Syria from extending their influence. Iran has supported the Iraqi Shi'i opposition and the Kurdish Islamic parties for ideological reasons, and it has had various strategic alliances, first with the KDP and later with the PKK. Last summer it carried out a raid far into the region in an unsuccessful attempt to capture the oppositional Iranian Kurds living there. Syria has been projecting its influence both through the PKK and through a balanced patronage of the Iraqi parties. One important reason the fighting between the Iraqi Kurdish factions has been so persistent is that each of these neighbouring states (as well as the Iraqi regime) has attempted through this conflict to change the balance of power to its own advantage, and has sabotaged peace negotiations that could cost it crucial influence.

KURDS, TURKS AND THE ALEVİ REVIVAL IN TURKEY[1]

Until a few years ago, Kurdish nationalism was the only movement in Turkey that openly defied the official doctrine that Turkey is a homogeneous nation-state. Informally, people would freely apply ethnic labels to their acquaintances; everybody was aware of the rich ethnic variety of the country,[2] but it was thought undesirable to acknowledge this and most people were reluctant or afraid to define themselves as anything but Turks. In the 1970s, Kurdish nationalists had begun challenging this official view, and in 1979 a cabinet minister caused a political scandal by calmly remarking that he too was a Kurd.[3] The military regime of 1980-83 made a last-ditch attempt to silence those Kurds who wished to be different, but its oppressive measures had the opposite effect of what was intended; they strengthened the Kurds' sense of their distinct identity and resulted in massive sympathy for the separatist PKK. By 1990, the Turkish government realised that further efforts to impose uniformity would probably be counterproductive and that they would moreover hamper closer relations with Europe, where the protection of minority cultures had become an important political issue. In a sudden reversal of policy, the government in 1991 repealed the law banning the use of other languages than Turkish in publishing.[4]

This relaxation allowed not only an upsurge in Kurdish cultural activities. Two other ethnic groups, the Laz and especially the Circassians, also began publishing and organising. These activities were stimulated both by the Kurdish example but perhaps even more by developments in the (former) Soviet Union. The Laz live in the region bordering on the republic of Georgia and their language is related to Georgian. The Circassians (called Cherkes in Turkish) originate from the northern Caucasus; the name is in fact

[1] [Written in the spring of 1996 and published, in slightly abbreviated form, in *Middle East Report* 200 (Summer 1996)].

[2] A recent study, Peter A. Andrews' *Ethnic groups in the Republic of Turkey* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1989), enumerates 47 distinct ethnic groups in Turkey, and the choice of another set of criteria for ethnic identity might have yielded an even higher number.

[3] This was Şerafettin Elçi, then minister of public works. After the 1980 military coup he was sentenced to two years imprisonment for this remark.

[4] This law was a product of the 1980-83 military regime. It violated several international agreements on the protection of minorities to which Turkey was a party. See C. Rumpf, "The Turkish law prohibiting languages other than Turkish", in: *Documentation of the International Conference on Human Rights in Kurdistan, 14-16. April 1989* (Hochschule Bremen, 1989), pp. 68-89 and the same author's "Das Sprachenverbot in der Türkei unter besonderer Berücksichtigung ihrer völkerrechtlichen Verpflichtungen", Orient 30 (Hamburg, 1989), 413-27.

a blanket term for various related North Caucasian peoples, primarily Abkhazians, Adighe and Ubigh, and occasionally Chechen and Ingush are also included. There are hundreds of thousands of Circassians in Turkey, most of them the descendants of refugees who left their homelands when these were occupied by Russia in the mid-19th century.[1] The devolution of the Soviet Union caused a reorientation of young Turkish Circassians towards their ancestral homelands, and some actually went back. The recent struggles in Abkhazia (1992) and the war in Chechnya (1995) have not made remigration an attractive option, but they have had a strong mobilising effect on the Circassian (and Chechen) communities in Turkey.

The same period also witnessed a sudden resurgence of the Alevi identity. The Alevis, a heterodox religious minority, began manifesting themselves very much as yet another ethnic group. All over the country, as well as among the migrant communities in Europe, Alevi associations sprang up. Alevi intellectuals and community leaders set out to define the Alevi identity, Alevi tradition, Alevi history. Between 1990 and 1995, more books were published in Turkey about the Alevis than about any ethnic group, the Kurds included. Both the Kurdish movement and the government courted the Alevis, and both did their utmost to prevent the other from making inroads among them. Both, but especially the government, were handicapped in these efforts because they depended on Sunni majorities which had always been hostile to the Alevis. The police, which after 1980 had been purged of left-wing elements, was in many places dominated by conservative Sunnis or right-wing nationalists, and there were a number of major incidents in which the police took part in murderous violence against Alevis, causing renewed alienation between the Alevis and the state.

The most shocking of these incidents were the firebomb attack on a leftist-cum-Alevi cultural festival in Sivas in 1993, in which 37 people were killed, and the riots following a terrorist raid on Alevi teahouses in the Istanbul neighbourhood Gazi (district Gaziosmanpaşa), in which policemen deliberately fired into the crowd of protesters, killing more than a dozen persons. Both are briefly described below. Of a different nature, but not unrelated, was the violence directed at the (Alevi) villages in eastern central Turkey, where the Kurdish war began spilling over into the Alevi-inhabited zone.

[1] See B. Özbek, "Tscherkessen in der Türkei", in: P. Andrews, *Ethnic groups in the Republic of Turkey*, pp. 581-90; M. Bjedug & E. Taymaz, "'Sürgün' halk Çerkesler", Birikim 71-72 (March-April 1995), 118-24.

In the autumn of 1994 and again throughout 1995, the Turkish army carried out large-scale counter-insurgency operations in the mountainous province of Tunceli, resulting in the (partial or complete) destruction and forced evacuation or around a third of the villages there.[1] Tunceli, which is almost exclusively inhabited by Kurdish Alevis,[2] had a long tradition of resistance to government authority, but had not earlier been a stronghold of Kurdish nationalism. The military operations indicated that the Kurdish struggle in Turkey had entered a new phase. The radical Kurdish movement PKK (Workers' Party of Kurdistan) was making inroads among the Kurdish Alevis, who had long been considered as constituting a sort of buffer between the Kurdish provinces proper and Central Anatolia. In early 1996, Turkish public opinion was shocked to discover that similar operations had also taken place in the (largely Turkish) province of Sivas, to the west of Tunceli. Dozens of Alevi villages here, Turkish as well as Kurdish, had been evacuated under strong pressure from the military. Alevi representatives spoke of 'ethnic cleansing' in this religiously mixed province.

Who are the Alevis?

Just as is the case with such ethnic groups as the Kurds and the Arabs, estimates of the number of Alevis in Turkey vary widely, from around 10 percent to as much as 40 percent of the total population. Censuses have never registered Alevis as a distinct category; and even if they had, the outcome would be unreliable, for the Alevis, fearing religious and political discrimination, have often attempted to hide their identity. Mixed (Sunni-Alevi) marriages and the slow but steady process of assimilation of substantial Alevi communities to (secularised) Sunni Islam make all statistics inherently ambiguous.

The name of Alevi is a blanket term for a large number of different heterodox communities, whose actual beliefs and ritual practices differ much. Linguistically four groups may be distinguished. In the eastern province of Kars there are communities speaking Azarbayjani Turkish and whose Alevism differs little from the 'orthodox' Twelver Shi'ism of modern Iran. The Arabic speaking Alevi communities of southern Turkey (especially Hatay and Adana) are the extension of Syria's 'Alawi (Nusayri) community and have no

[1] See the report *Forced evictions and destruction of villages in Dersim (Tunceli) and the western part of Bingöl, Turkish Kurdistan, September-November 1994* (Amsterdam: Netherlands Kurdistan Society, 1995).

[2] I use the term 'Kurdish Alevis' as a shorthand for 'Alevis whose mother tongue is Kurdish or the related Zaza language'. My use of the term does not imply that I consider all these people as essentially Kurdish; in fact, a considerable number of them prefer to identify themselves *not* primarily as Kurds.

historical ties with the other Alevi groups. Like the first group, their numbers are small and their role in Turkey has been negligible. The important Alevi groups are the Turkish and Kurdish speakers (the latter still to be divided into speakers of Kurdish proper and of related Zaza); both appear to be the descendants of rebellious tribal groups that were religiously affiliated with the Safavids.

The religion of these Alevis, though to some extent Islamicised, differs considerably from Sunni Islam. Prayer (*namaz*), the fast in Ramadan, zakat and the hajj are alien practices to most Alevi communities. Instead they have their own religious ceremonies (*cem*), officiated by 'holy men' (*dede*) belonging to a hereditary priestly caste, at which religious poems (*deyiş* or *nefes*) in Turkish are sung and (in some communities at least) men and women carry out ritual dances (*semah*). As among other extremist Shi'i groups, Ali and the Safavid Shah Isma'il are deified, or at least considered as superhuman. Many more elements of pre-Islamic Turkish and Iranian religions have been retained than among Sunni Muslims, and pilgrimages to sacred springs and mountains are especially common. Instead of adherence to the *shari'a*, Alevis profess obedience to a set of simple moral norms; they claim to live according to the inner (*batin*) meaning of religion rather than its external (*zahir*) demands.[1]

The major concentrations of Turkish Alevis used to be found in central Anatolia, but there are important pockets of Alevi villages throughout the Aegean and Mediterranean coastal regions and in the European part of Turkey as well. Kurdish Alevis were concentrated in the north-western part of the Kurdish settlement zone, with Dersim (approximately the present province of Tunceli) as the cultural centre and with important pockets further south, east and west. An arc of ethnically and religiously mixed districts, stretching from Gaziantep and Kahramanmaraş in the south through Adıyaman and Malatya to Sivas in the north, constitutes a zone of transition from Turkish Kurdistan (the Southeast) to the rest of the country. It was in this zone that during the 1970s the most serious clashes between Sunnis and Alevis took place. The Alevis, Turks as well as Kurds, used to live in mountainous and relatively isolated villages, reflecting their history of persecution in the Sunni Ottoman Empire. Only from the 1950s on did they start leaving these villages in large numbers to settle in the towns of the region or migrate to the large cities in the west.

[1]There is no satisfactory description in English of Alevism as a religion. Most useful are: S. van Rensselaer Trowbridge, "The 'Alevis", *The Moslem World* 11 (1921), 253-66 and I. Markoff, "Music, saints, and ritual: sama' and the Alevis of Turkey", in: G. Martin Smith & C. W. Ernst (eds.), *Manifestations of sainthood in Islam* (Istanbul: Isis, 1993), pp. 95-110. The only systematic study presently available is in German: K. Kehl-Bodrogi, Die Kizilbas/Aleviten (Berlin: Schwarz, 1988). [Two recent volumes in English redress this shortcoming: K. Kehl-Bodrogi, B. Kellner-Heinkele, and A. Otter-Beaujean (eds), *Syncretistic religious communities in the Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); T. Olsson, E. Özdalga, and C. Randvere (eds), *Alevi identity: cultural, religious and social perspectives* (Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 1998).]

Emancipation and politicisation

The secularisation of Turkey made the gradual emancipation of the Alevis possible. It is not surprising that during the first great Kurdish rebellion of 1925, which had a strong (Sunni) religious colouring, Kurdish Alevi tribes actually fought against the rebels. It is true that there also were, in 1920 and 1937-38, rebellions of Kurdish Alevis against the Kemalist movement and the Republic,[1] but at no time until the present did Kurdish Alevis in significant numbers join forces with Sunni Kurds against the Kemalist regime. By and large, Kurdish as well as Turkish Alevis were supportive of the secular and populist ideals of Kemalism; many Kurdish Alevis voluntarily assimilated to Turkish culture and came to identify themselves as Turks rather than as Kurds.

Secularisation did not, however, bode the end of the widespread Sunni prejudices against the Alevis (who, like heterodox groups anywhere, are commonly accused of sexual licentiousness and other immoralities). The Alevis' gradual integration into the wider society — migration to the towns, education, careers in public service — brought them into closer contact, and sometimes in direct competition, with strict Sunnis, from whom they had remained socially separated for centuries. This caused growing tension, especially in the towns of the ethnically and religiously mixed zone mentioned above, but also in the large cities further west. Recent immigrants from the villages tended to cluster together with people of the same backgrounds, so that there emerged more or less distinct Alevi and Sunni neighbourhoods.

The political polarisation that began in the 1970s exacerbated the situation. The radical left, perceiving in the Alevi rebellions of the past proto-communist movements, saw the Alevis as its natural allies. The extreme right (the fascist Party of Nationalist Action but also religious right-wing groups), on the other hand, concentrated its recruiting efforts on the conservative Sunni Muslims of the mixed regions, by fanning their fear and hatred of the Alevis and provoking armed incidents. Spreading rumours that Alevis had bombed a mosque or poisoned its water supply was an unfailing method of mobilising Sunni reaction and drawing the Sunnis towards the extreme right. A series of violent Sunni-Alevi clashes culminated by the end of the decade in anti-Alevi pogroms in Malatya, Kahramanmaraş and Çorum. The local police, already infiltrated by the extreme right, did little to protect the Alevis, resulting in a growing alienation of Turkey's Alevis from the state.

[1]On these rebellions see: H.-L. Kieser, *Les Kurdes alévis face au nationalisme turc kémaliste. L'alévité du Dersim et son rôle dans le premier soulévement kurde contre Mustafa Kemal (Koçkiri, 1919-1921)* (Amsterdam: MERA, 1993); M. van Bruinessen, "Genocide in Kurdistan?: The suppression of the Dersim rebellion in Turkey (1937-38) and the chemical war against the Iraqi Kurds (1988)", in: G. J. Andreopoulos (ed.), *Genocide: Conceptual and historical dimensions* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 141-170 [reprinted in this volume].

The years 1950-80 had seen the gradual decline of Kemalism and the return of Islam in public life. The anti-Alevi pogroms appeared to indicate that both secularism and populism had failed to take root. The growth of a strong though divided Kurdish movement and of a radical labour movement also appeared to signal the end of Kemalism. Political polarisation and violence, left and right youth movements bringing entire urban neighbourhoods under their control, threatened to divide all of society. The military took over in 1980 to reverse all these trends and to re-establish Kemalism. A decade and a half later, it is clear that, measured by these objectives, they were at best partially successful — although this is no doubt balanced out by such other achievements as the officers' vastly improved economic conditions, a high military budget that no civilian politician dares to cut, and a lasting influence on government policies.

The military succeeded in decimating the radical left and preventing the emergence of a new generation of left radicals. Their brutal suppression of the Kurdish movement, however, resulted in the emergence of a strong Kurdish cultural and intellectual movement in European exile and in the emergence of the radical and violent Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK) as the strongest political movement of Turkey. The PKK gained a massive degree of popularity among Turkey's Kurds that it would never have achieved without the army's senseless harassment of Kurdish civilians. The fascist right, though its leader Türkeş was briefly jailed, was co-opted and to some extent even integrated into the state apparatus. Young right-wing hoodlums no longer carried out terrorist raids against 'leftist' tea-houses but became policemen and schoolteachers, and the real Rambos among them were recruited into the 'special teams' sent to Kurdistan on counter-insurgency missions.

Apparently expecting thus to steal a march on fundamentalist Islam, the military in fact actively fostered Sunni Islam. Religious education, although of a secularised variety, was reintroduced as an obligatory subject in schools; the Directorate for Religious Affairs, which is answerable to the prime minister's office, was strengthened, and numerous new mosques were built at the state's expense. The Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, a confused doctrine combining fervent Turkish nationalism and Muslim sentiment, that was first formulated by a small group of right-wing intellectuals as an answer to socialism, was virtually elevated to the status of official ideology.[1] The military thus refrained from a return to the classical Kemalist attitude towards religion and deliberately strengthened conservative Islam as an ally against both the left and radical Islam.

[1]See B. Toprak, "Religion as state ideology in a secular setting: The Turkish-Islamic synthesis", in: M. Wagstaff (ed.), *Aspects of religion in secular Turkey* (University of Durham, Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 1990), pp. 10-15; Feroz Ahmad, "Islamic reassertion in Turkey", *Third World Quarterly* 10 (1988), 750-69.

These developments directly affected the Alevis too, and were perhaps in part intended as measures against the Alevis' flirt with left radicalism during the 1970s. The government built mosques in numerous Alevi villages, Alevi schoolchildren were obliged to attend Sunni religion classes, and the police and many other state services in the mixed regions came to be dominated by conservative Sunnis even more than before. There was one important positive change, however: throughout the 1980s there was much less physical violence directed against Alevis than there had been in the 1970s, and no pogroms at all. It did happen from time to time that Alevi villages or urban neighbourhoods were raided by the police and the inhabitants harassed, but this usually was in pursuit of left radicals and did not appear to reflect a specifically negative attitude towards the Alevis.

One effect of the changes in the 1980s was a renewed interest, among the Alevis themselves, in Alevism as a religion. Whereas in the 1970s most of the young Alevis had completely rejected religion as nothing but ideology and had only taken pride in Alevism as a democratic social movement, the failure of the left movement in Turkey made many reflect on Alevism as a cultural and then as a religious identity. On the one hand, some of the radical left movements that in the 1970s had found a measure of support all over the country (although perhaps somewhat more among the Kurdish Alevis than elsewhere) by the late 1980s had lost most of their non-Alevi supporters. Having thus practically become non-religious Alevi movements, they could not help but taking part in the debates on Alevi identity.[1] On the other hand, there was among Alevis of all generations also a strong reaction to the previous flirt with left radicalism, which expressed itself in a desire to know more about their own religious traditions.

The imposition of Sunni Islam by the state no doubt was a major factor contributing to the Alevi revival as a reaction. When in 1989 the ban on organisations (which had been total after 1980) was somewhat relaxed, Alevi associations sprang up all over the country. Under the sponsorship of these associations, Alevi rituals (*cem*), which like the rituals of the Sunni Sufi orders had been practically banned since 1925, were publicly performed and houses of worship (*cemevi*) were opened. There was a sudden tidal wave of publications by Alevi intellectuals, purporting to explain history, doctrine and ritual of Alevism and to define its relation to Sunni Islam. Some of the books engendered heated polemics within the community on such questions as

[1]This is notably the case of the TKP-ML (Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist) and its various splinters.

whether Alevism is a sect within Islam or an essentially different religion (and whether this different religion is of Iranian or Turkish origins).[1]

These developments marked an important change in the nature of Alevism, the transition from a secret, initiatory, locally anchored and orally transmitted religion, which it had been for centuries, to a public religion with formalised, or at least written, doctrine and ritual. Most of these Alevi authors did not belong to the priestly caste that had always held a monopoly of ritual competence and claimed superior knowledge of the tradition (and the few authors who did hail from such a family were not themselves practising as dede). They all have a modern education, and their books reflect their mentalities of educators, all very much in the Kemalist mode. The way they reformulate and (at times even literally) invent Alevi tradition is highly reminiscent of what goes on in nascent nationalist movements.

The Alevi revival received encouragement from secular elements in the political establishment, who had always considered the Alevis as their natural allies against the rise of political Islam.[2] The growing influence of the PKK among Turkey's Kurds, by the late 1980s increasingly also among Alevi Kurds, gave the authorities another incentive to allow and even stimulate the development of Alevism as an alternative 'ethnic' identity. In the early 1990s, the state began to publicly support Alevism, among other things by officially sponsoring the annual festival commemorating the Alevi saint Haji Bektash.[3] Some of the more conservative Alevi leaders were courted and it was attempted to co-opt their associations in the pursuit of strengthening Turkey-based nationalism. At the same time, suspicion of the Alevis with their relatively liberal values and their past tendencies towards leftist politics remained strong among many of the same authorities, and the police and certain government departments were in fact filled with elements that distinctly despised Alevis.

Many Alevis were only too happy with the degree of recognition implied in co-optation by the political establishment. It was attempted to turn Haji Bektash, after whom the major federation of Alevi associations was

[1]An excellent overview of this recent flood of books on Alevism, understood as part of the process of construction an Alevi 'ethnic' identity, is given by Karin Vorhoff, *Zwischen Glaube, Nation und neuer Gemeinschaft: Alevitische Identität in der Türkei der Gegenwart* (Berlin: Schwarz, 1995).

[2]The Alevis vote has always been divided over the whole political spectrum, but the political party closest to the Alevis was the Social Democrat Populist Party (SHP), which had several vocal Alevi deputies. In 1991 the SHP became a junior partner in the government coalition with the True Path Party (DYP), led by Süleyman Demirel and later Mrs. Çiller.

[3]This festival, celebrated for the first time in 1964, had become the country's major left-wing cultural festival during the 1970s, was depoliticised during the 1980s, and received government patronage in the 1990s. Politicians of all parties now put in appearances in order to show how much they like the Alevis.

named, into a symbol for loyalty to the Turkish state.[1] Another group of associations named itself after a different Alevi saint, the poet Pir Sultan Abdal, who was believed to have rebelled against the state and to have been hanged for his religious convictions. Although generalisations about the Alevis are hazardous, it seems safe to say that the religious-minded and the relatively conservative among the Alevis tended to drift towards the former associations, whereas in the latter one finds a higher proportion of former leftists.

New outbursts of violence against Alevis

The first serious outburst of violence against Alevis since 1980, an event that not only disturbed the process of accommodation between the state and the Alevis but that in many quarters created anxieties about the possible dissolution of Turkey, occurred in the town of Sivas in 1993. Sivas is one of the provinces with a considerable Alevi population in the villages (both Kurdish and Turkish speakers), but the towns are dominated by conservative Sunnis. The Alevi rebel saint Pir Sultan Abdal was from Banaz, a village in this province, and he was executed in the city of Sivas.

In July 1993 the Pir Sultan Abdal association organised a cultural festival in Sivas, to which numerous prominent authors and other artists were invited. One of the authors present was the aged Aziz Nesin (not an Alevi, incidentally), who had recently provoked the anger of many Sunni Muslims by announcing his intention to publish a translation of Salman Rushdie's Satanic Verses. The festival was protested by a large group of violent right-wing demonstrators, who were clearly intent upon killing Nesin. They also attacked and destroyed a sculpture representing Pir Sultan Abdal that had been erected on the occasion of the festival. Encouraged rather than calmed down by a speech by the mayor of Sivas (who belonged to the right wing of the Muslim Welfare Party), they laid siege to and attacked the hotel where the participants of the festival were lodged. After throwing stones through all hotel windows, the demonstrators succeeded in setting fire to the hotel. Thirty-seven people in the hotel died in this fire.[2]

[1]Historically, the Bektashi Sufi order had played a role in integrating heterodox and insurgent groups into the Ottoman fold. In the war of independence, the order had given Mustafa Kemal's movement significant support, and in the early years of the republic word was spread among the simple Alevis that Mustafa Kemal was no less than a reincarnation of Haji Bektash. Around 1990, this theme was revived, the journal *Cem* proclaiming Atatürk "a new Haji Bektash." Other Alevi authors presented Haji Bektash as a proto-nationalist, some even calling him an *ülkücü* ('idealist', a term monopolised by the extreme nationalists and fascists of Türkeş' party).

[2]The most accessible reports on the events (all in Turkish) are in: Ali Yıldırım, Ateşte semaha durmak (Ankara: Yurt, 1993); Çetin Yigenoğlu, *Şeriatçı şiddet ve ölü ozanlar kenti Sivas* (Ankara: Ekin, 1994); and, by a prominent Alevi intellectual who narrowly escaped the fire, Lütfü Kaleli, Sivas katliamı (Istanbul: Alev, 1994).

The events in Sivas differed from the pogroms of the late 1970s. There was no massive attack on neighbourhoods inhabited by Alevis this time; the primary target of the demonstrators was Aziz Nesin and the other, mostly Alevi, intellectuals and artists who had come to Sivas for the festival. The Pir Sultan statue was another, highly symbolic target, but Pir Sultan was not so much a symbol for Alevism as one for the rebellious and 'leftist' tradition in Alevism.

The degree of involvement of the police and local authorities was perhaps the most shocking aspect of the Sivas events. The police, although it had advance warning of the demonstrations, had taken insufficient measures to protect the festival (which had been authorised by the provincial governor) and it did not make any serious attempt to disperse the demonstrators or to keep them away from the hotel (apart from a police cordon in front of the hotel). While the hotel was under siege, Aziz Nesin and friends succeeded in reaching vice prime minister Erdal İnönü by telephone and requested him to order measures for their protection. İnönü told them that precautions had been taken, but whatever orders had been sent from Ankara, the police remained passive. In a video film of the events taken by the police and later leaked to the press one can actually hear orders being given over the police radio *not* to intervene when the demonstrators were already attacking the hotel. Most of the police simply looked on as the hotel caught fire.[1]

The clashes between the police and Alevi demonstrators in the Gazi neighbourhood of Istanbul, in March 1995, were if anything more threatening even than the Sivas events. Gazi is a poor new neighbourhood with a high proportion of Alevi inhabitants. In the evening of March 12, unknown gunmen in a stolen taxi drove through this neighbourhood and riddled five tea-houses with bullets, killing one and wounding numerous people. The police was remarkably slow in taking action, and the rumour soon spread that the local police post might have been involved in the terrorist attacks.[2]

Young people of Gazi neighbourhood took to the streets in protest, and they were soon reinforced by groups from elsewhere who had heard the news on local television. The demonstrators directed their anger at the police post, which was believed to be manned by extremely right-wing and anti-Alevi policemen, and where not long ago a young detainee was said to have been

[1]There were, however, individual police officers who did make efforts to save people. One of those saved, ironically, was Aziz Nesin, who was not recognised at first. Once they realised whom he was, some firemen and a policeman started beating him up, but others protected him and rushed him to hospital.

[2]The actors were never caught, but according to the press the raids were claimed by a radical and violent Muslim organisation, IBDA-C, which had carried out numerous terrorist acts before, and by a more shadowy ultra-nationalist organisation, the Turkish Revenge Brigades.

tortured to death. Throughout the neighbourhood police and demonstrators clashed; in the general rioting that ensued a number of shops and workshops owned by alleged 'fascists' were raided and destroyed. That night the police shot one demonstrator. The rioting continued the following days and spread to yet another neighbourhood. Young radicals attempted to seize control of the situation, throwing stones to the police and raising barricades, while moderate Alevi community leaders made great efforts to calm the masses. It was the police, however, who went completely out of control and who instead of using conventional methods of crowd control repeatedly shot into the crowds, killing another 15 persons. Even after the Istanbul police chief, in a meeting with Alevi leaders, had by radio given his men orders not to use firearms any more, several more demonstrators were deliberately shot dead. The insulting language and threats shouted by the police to community leaders who attempted to negotiate with them showed that many of the police acted out of aggressive hatred towards the Alevis. There were, it is true, policemen who attempted to hold their colleagues back, but they were not successful.[1]

The arson in Sivas had shown up that part of the state apparatus — the local police and local government in Sivas — did not stand above communal divisions but sided with the aggressors. Central government authorities apparently did not have control over part of the police force, which through selective recruitment in the 1980s consisted mostly of extremely right-wing Sunni Muslims. The reactions to the events showed that society was deeply divided; the division ran right through the government, whose conservative members without blinking declared Aziz Nesin responsible for the events.[2] The rift between the government and the Alevi communities was opened wide and deep again.

The social democrat members of the government failed to restore confidence in the government, because they were completely ineffective. Their criticism of the police, in connection with the Sivas events and on several later occasions, was only answered with scorn and oblique threats. When the Istanbul police chief — a man who had become notorious for the extra-judicial executions of left radicals carried out by his force, and whose men it were who killed 16 demonstrators in the Gazi riots — publicly insulted the (social democrat) minister of human rights and blamed him for the death of a policeman, they in vain demanded his resignation. Supported by Çiller, the

[1]See the interview with prominent Alevi spokesperson Lütfü Kaleli in the weekly edition of Cumhuriyet, March 24-30, 1995. A description and analysis of the events from the view of young Alevi radicals is given in Zeynep Çabuk, *Gazi direnişi: taş, yürek, barikat...* (The uprising in Gazi: stones, courage, barricades', Istanbul: Öz, 1995).

[2]The public prosecutor of the Ankara State Security Court, Nusret Demiral, even announced his intention to start proceedings against Nesin and request the death penalty.

police chief did not even have to apologise. Nor was he ever held accountable for the shooting in Gazi.[1]

The events in Sivas and Gazi reinforced and radicalised the Alevi revival. Community leaders who go on closely co-operating with the authorities in the hope of recognition as a distinct religious community or in pursuit of personal gains appear to be losing support from below, while left radicalism appears to be gaining influence among the young. The government's efforts to use Alevi awareness as an alternative to Kurdish nationalism have largely failed. Alienation from the state inevitably brought many Alevis closer to the PKK (which within a few weeks took revenge for the arson in Sivas by killing a group of men in a staunchly Sunni village north-east of Sivas). Whereas until the early 1990s most Kurdish Alevis had little sympathy for the PKK, among other things because of its flirt with Sunni Islam, by 1994 it appeared to have gained considerable support among them.

Many if not most of the Kurdish Alevis define themselves as Alevis first and only in the second place, or not at all, as Kurds. State-sponsored publications have hammered on the old theme that Alevism is a specifically Turkish form of Islam and that the Alevis, even those who speak Kurdish or Zaza, descend from Turcoman tribesmen and therefore are essentially Turkish. The PKK and other Kurdish nationalists, on the other hand, have made efforts to persuade them that in the present confrontation their most relevant identity is that of Kurds, and that moreover the Alevi religion has Iranian (Zoroastrian) rather than Turkish origins (so that by implication even the Turkish Alevis are related to the Kurds).[2]

It is hard to determine how much effect both propaganda offensives have had, but it appears that among the radical left Turkish Alevis there is now a tendency to view the PKK as their natural ally because they are up against much the same coalition of extreme right-wing political forces, which have gradually come to control important parts of the state apparatus. This conservative religious and ultra-nationalist block is not interested in cultural and religious pluralism and rejects compromises with Kurds and Alevis alike. In its efforts to create a monolithic state and society, this block constitutes the most divisive force in Turkey today.

[1]Only in the late summer of 1995, when the SHP had merged with the CHP and the enlarged party renegotiated the conditions for its participation in the government, could it force the police chief's resignation.

[2]On these ideological debates, see M. van Bruinessen, "Aslını inkar eden haramzadedir! The debate on the ethnic identity of the Kurdish Alevis", in: Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi, Barbara Kellner-Heinkele and Anke Otter-Beaujean (eds), *Syncretistic religious communities in the Near East* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 1-23.

KURDISH SOCIETY AND THE MODERN STATE: ETHNIC NATIONALISM VERSUS NATION-BUILDING[1]

Two major national problems dominate the political scene of the contemporary Middle East. The first and most conspicuous is the Palestinian problem, the second the Kurdish question. The Palestinian problem has, during the past fifteen years, received much attention because it appeals to strong sentiments and has a strong symbolic value. It appears to exemplify the conflict between Islam and the West, between Arabs and Jews, between the Third World and American Imperialism, between the poor and the usurpers who drive them off their land. The Kurdish question is not so easy to define and understand. The Kurds, even more clearly than the Palestinians, are a distinct people, differing in language and culture from all their neighbours, but there has never been a Kurdish state, although for over a century Kurdish nationalists have attempted to create one.[2] Kurdistan, the traditional habitat of the Kurds, is now divided over four states: Turkey (where an estimated 7 to 12 million Kurds live), Iran (4 to 5 million), Iraq (3 to 4 million) and Syria (0.5 to 1 million).[3] Altogether, the Kurds thus number between 15 and 22 millions, i.e., more than the entire population of Iraq, and almost twice that of Syria. All four countries have their Kurdish problem; and the Kurds in all four countries feel that they have a problem with the state. But opinions differ widely as to what the real nature of the problem is, let alone how it should be solved.

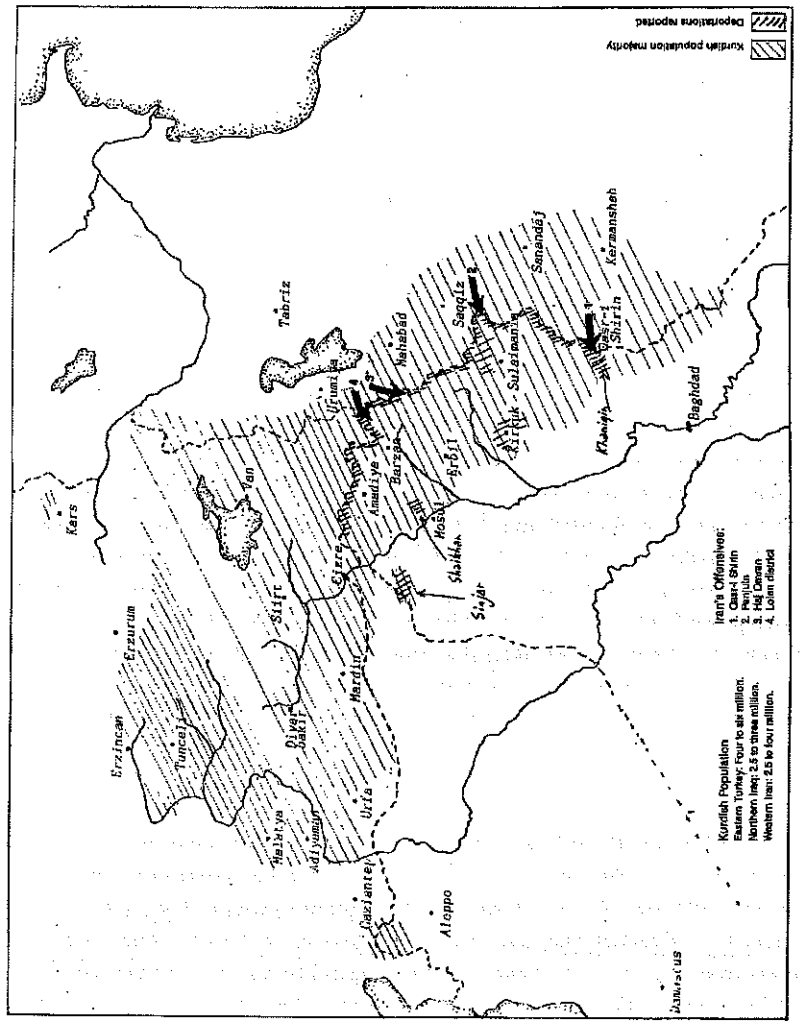
Competing nationalisms appealing to the Kurds

The Kurds are often called a nation without a state; they are perhaps the largest people that has struggled in vain for statehood. To some observers, as well as to many Kurds, this is the essence of the Kurdish problem. Such a view appears to overlook the fact that for many centuries the Kurds have quite

[1]An earlier version of this paper appeared in Indonesian in the journal of the Indonesian Association of Political Scientists, *Jurnal Ilmu Politik* No. 7, 1990. The first part of the paper was also presented, in a slightly different form, at the international conference "The Kurds: Human Rights and Cultural Identity", organised by the Kurdish Institute of Paris with the Fondation France-Liberté's Danielle Mitterand, in Paris, October 14-15, 1989.

[2]The first movement whose leader appeared to have explicit ideas on a separate Kurdish state took place in 1880. For the early history of Kurdish nationalism see Jwaideh 1960; Olson 1989.

[3]The official censuses of these countries do not mention the Kurds separately, and population estimates vary widely. For an account of the estimates given here, see van Bruinessen 1978, 20-22.



THE KURDS IN TURKEY

Travelling from western Turkey to its eastern provinces is like going to an entirely different country — more primitive, poorer, with starker social contradictions. Many peasants there still live in semi-feudal bondage, tribal loyalties are strong, and traditional concepts of honour find expression in violent conflicts. Many people there speak Kurdish rather than Turkish. According to many Turkish politicians or academics, this linguistic peculiarity is yet another indication of the area's backwardness. In the official Turkish view, the Kurds are of Turkish origin, but they have culturally and linguistically degenerated and now speak a gibberish comprised of Persian, Arabic and Turkish and incapable of expressing sophisticated thought. Teaching these "primitive" and "backward" people the Turkish language would be a first step in uplifting them to a more human level. Throughout its existence, the Republic of Turkey has considered this civilizing mission one of its primary duties, all the more pressing as many of the Kurds resisted being "civilized" To the average Turkish patriot, all Kurdish attempts to hold on to their own language and traditions are inherently reactionary. The same is true, a fortiori, of Kurdish rebellions with a nationalist aspect. The fact that such rebellions were often led by "obscurantist" religious or tribal leaders conveniently corroborated this view.

Kurdish nationalists also see a causal connection between the underdevelopment of the eastern provinces and the fact that they are largely inhabited by Kurds. They regard this underdevelopment as the result, at least in part, of purposeful Turkish government policy which expressly impeded the development of the eastern provinces out of fear that economic and educational progress might rekindle the Kurds' nationalist demands. There is some evidence that governments up to 1945 adhered to such a policy, but this was no longer the case after the Menderes period. Beginning in the 1950s, and especially during the 1970s, many roads were built, hydroelectric dams constructed and schools established. There have been noticeable improvements, although the area remains much more underdeveloped than the western part of the country. The eastern provinces also became more integrated in the Turkish economy, but in a way later qualified as "colonial" by most Kurdish intellectuals. Improved educational opportunities, the gradual integration of the region into the Turkish economy and the resulting labour migration from east to west led to the rapid emergence, beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, of a broadly-based Kurdish national movement. The military perceived this movement as a major threat to Turkey's national security, and immediately after the 1980 coup initiated a concerted effort to wipe it out completely.

Turkey's military and bureaucratic elites have always been extremely wary of all forms of expression of Kurdish national sentiment. They have invariably reacted with repressive measures more severe than those directed against any other perceived threat to state security, including communism. The Turkish elite has an obsession with territorial integrity and national unity that seems to be rooted in the trauma of the gradual dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Fears that the Armenians would prove to be a fifth column in an armed conflict with Russia led to their deportation and the massacre of hundreds of thousands of them in 1915. Similarly, the Kurds have been suspected of disloyalty and collusion with foreign powers: with the British and French in the 1920s and 1930s, when these were still considered enemies, and later with the Russians. The present military leadership proclaims to believe that the Kurdish movement in Turkey was masterminded by the Soviet Union, and they have spared no effort to destroy it. The strategic location of Kurdistan, close to the Soviet border and the oil. wells of northern Iraq, and only a few hours' flying time from the Gulf, added to the military's concern with potential separatism.

The strong reaction which Turkey's governing class shows towards even moderate forms of Kurdish ethnic awareness is not born of strategic considerations or fear of foreign subversion alone. The ideology of national unity has come to replace religion as the chief legitimization of state power in Turkey. This national unity was forged by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, and Turkish official historians have provided it with a "scientific" base by "proving," among other things, that the Kurds are really Turks.[1] Challenges of this idea — such as, for instance, the claim that the Kurds constitute a separate nation — provoke a reaction similar to the desecration of the flag or Atatürk's statue.

The Kurds and the First Republic

During the first years of the Republic, there were several serious Kurdish rebellions led by religious and tribal authorities and a few nationalist intellectuals. By the late 1930s, the eastern provinces were pacified. Every

[1]The official Turkish views on history have been expounded in the works of the Turkish Historical Society, established by Atatürk in 1930 with the express aim of writing history according to Turkish nationalist needs. See B. Lewis, "History-writing and national revival in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Affairs* IV (1953), pp. 218-227. The re-emergence of Kurdish nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s was answered by a large number of "scholarly" publications claiming to prove that all Kurdish tribes have Turkish origins. The first academic who openly challenged this official view of history was the (Turkish) sociologist İsmail Beşikçi, in his book *The Turkish thesis on history and the Kurdish problem* (in Turkish, Ankara 1977). For this publication, he was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. Since the 1980 coup, the semi-official Turkish Cultural Research Institute in Ankara has reissued no fewer than six books purporting to demonstrate the Kurds' Turkishness.

Kurdish village of some size was closely controlled by a Turkish police post. The Kurdish language, Kurdish dress, Kurdish folklore, Kurdish names — all had been forbidden. Many Kurds were exiled to other parts of the country, while Turkish immigrants from the Balkans were settled in Kurdistan. The government policy of forced assimilation seemed to bear fruit. In the towns, everyone spoke Turkish, and Kurdish nationalist sentiment seemed to disappear altogether.

The Menderes years (1950-60) brought a certain measure of liberalization and relaxation of the policy of forced assimilation. Most of the village police posts were abolished. The government tried to keep the area under control by co-opting Kurdish tribal and religious leaders and landlords. Through the party system, these local authorities allied themselves with political forces in the capital. They controlled large numbers of local votes, in exchange for which they received spoils to distribute among their followers. Thus the positions of these traditional leaders were reinforced, both vis-à-vis the central government and vis-à-vis the local population. After the military coup of 1960, the now-deposed Prime Minister Adnan Menderes claimed that a number of these Kurdish authorities, not content with their increased powers, had been plotting to achieve full independence for the Kurdish provinces.[1] This charge was probably much exaggerated, but it is certain that among the younger and better educated members of aristocratic Kurdish families there was much resentment of the Kemalist policies, especially assimilation, and an indistinct but powerful nationalist sentiment. This feeling had been strengthened and stimulated by the coup d'état of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim in Iraq in 1958, when Mullah Mustafa Barzani was invited back to Iraq and there was much talk of cultural rights and autonomy for the Kurds there.

Although the military officers who deposed Menderes and took power themselves in 1960 made some efforts to revive the assimilation policies of the pre-1950 period, the constitution they promulgated in 1961 granted much wider civil liberties than had previously existed in Turkey. There was more press freedom, and it became possible to establish less docile trade unions and political associations. A few journals appeared devoted entirely to the history, folklore and economic problems of Kurdistan (still euphemistically called "the

[1]Thus an article in the Kemalist daily *Cumhuriyet* of May 31, 1960 (four days after the coup). The following day 485 influential Kurds were arrested and kept detained in a camp for several months. 55 of the most influential of them — all but one being members of Menderes' Democratic Party — were exiled to western Turkey for two years. This experience seems rather to have kindled their nationalism than stifled it: several of them later played some part in the Kurdistan Democratic Party. (See also (İ. Beşikçi, *Doğu Anadolu'nun düzeni*, 2nd ed., Istanbul 1970, pp. 328-339).

East").[1] These publications were invariably banned upon appearance, but this did not prevent other journals and books from being published, including such great classics of Kurdish literature and history as *Mem û Zîn* and the *Sharafnama*.[2]

The Turkish left, which emerged in those same years and organized itself in the Worker's Party of Turkey (TİP), took some interest in the Kurdish problem. Discussions on the causes of the underdevelopment of eastern Turkey and its remedies filled political and academic journals. At first, these left forces followed the Kemalist tendency to see the problem purely in terms of regional inequalities. Gradually, the Kurdish members of the TİP succeeded in getting the view accepted that the problem also had an aspect of national, or at least ethnic, inequality and cultural oppression. In 1970, the party congress passed a resolution calling the Kurds a separate nation and denouncing the national oppression to which they were subjected.[3]

These discussions remained restricted to a relatively limited circle of students and intellectuals. In the late 1960s, some of these Kurdish intellectuals made a first successful attempt to reach a wider public by organizing mass rallies in the major cities of eastern Turkey. The word "Kurd" was not even uttered at these meetings, but there were very vocal protests against the regional inequalities of which people had, because of better communications, become more aware. Participation in the meetings was very broad: besides the local Kurdish intellectuals and professionals, there were also tribal leaders and landlords, many urban craftsmen, and workers and peasants. Sometimes entire local branches of the Kemalist Republican People's Party actively joined these rallies, until party leader Ismet İnönü forbade them to do so.[4]

[1]The first of these journals, *İleri Yurt*, had already appeared in 1958. It was followed by *Dicle-Fırat* (1962), *Dicle kaynağı* (1962), Deng (1963), *Roj' New'* (1963), *Deng' Taze* (1966), *Yeni Akış* (1966). They were all in Turkish, and expressed themselves in careful terms.

[2]These are a seventeenth-century epic poem, by Ahmedi Khani, and a sixteenth-century chronicle of the Kurdish emirates, respectively. Both were translated into Turkish by Mehmed Emin Bozarslan.

[3]Text of the resolution in I. Ch. Vanly, *Survey of the national question of Turkish Kurdistan*, published by the Kurdish workers' organization in Europe, Hevra, n. p., n. d. (1971), pp. 51-52. After the military intervention of 1971 the TİP was banned because of this resolution.

[4]Metin Toker, *Solda ve sağda vuruşanlar*, Ankara 1971, 71. Report on the meetings and the nature of the speeches in İ. Beşikçi, *Doğu Anadolu'nun düzeni*, pp. 438-450.

Growth of a Kurdish Movement

In 1969, Kurdish intellectuals in Ankara established the first legal Kurdish organization, the Revolutionary Cultural Society of the East (DDKO is its Turkish acronym). Similar societies were soon formed in several other cities. "The East" meant "Kurdistan," as everyone knew, but in order to maintain legality no open reference to Kurdistan or Kurds could be made. In their monthly bulletin, the DDKO wrote mainly about the economic problems of eastern Turkey, the oppression of Kurdish villagers by (Kurdish) landlords and tribal leaders, and the brutal and violent behaviour of Turkish army units in Kurdish villages.[1]

The DDKO and the Kurds active in the TİP (between whom there was some overlap) represented what might be called the left wing of the emerging Kurdish movement. A more exclusively nationalist wing, strongly under Barzani's influence, established in 1964 as a sister to the clandestine Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP) in Iraq. Barzani had fallen out with Qasim in 1961, and in the 1960s his armed rebellion against successive governments steadily expanded his effective control of northern Iraq. Barzani's successes did much to stimulate the aspirations of the Kurds in Turkey. The conservative KDP found its supporters mainly among the traditional Kurdish elite. It saw autonomy or even independence for the Kurds of Turkey as its aim, while the left wing of the Kurdish movement so far only spoke of cultural rights and social and economic equality. Towards the end of the 1960s, the KDP split; the young and ambitious Dr. Şivan (Sait Kırmızıtoprak) established his own, more radical KDP, with a left populist program. He withdrew with some followers to Iraq and began to make plans for an armed insurrection in Turkish Kurdistan. This cannot have pleased Barzani, who did not wish to antagonize the Turkish and Persian governments. After the Turkish military intervention of 1971, the leaders of the rival KDP, Sait Elçi and his friends, also fled to Iraq. Under circumstances that remain obscure, both Elçi and Şivan were killed, which put an end to the activities of both KDPs for some time.[2]

The March 1971 military intervention meant a rupture in the Kurdish movement in several other respects. The Workers' Party of Turkey and the DDKO were banned, and most active members imprisoned. The military raided the Kurdish villages to intimidate the population. Two and a half years later, when parliamentary democracy was restored and a Kurdish movement slowly

[1]The DDKO's bulletins of 1970-71 have been integrally reprinted in *Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları dava dosyası* (Files of the DDKO trial), Ankara 1976, pp. 479-581.

[2]It seems that Elçi was killed by Şivan, and the latter then condemned to death and executed by Barzani. Among the Kurdish organizations, different canonized accounts exist of what really happened, most of them involving provocations by the Turkish intelligence service, MİT.

began to reorganize itself, it was a different movement, more radical in its national demands and at the same time broader in its social base. Like the Turkish left, however, it soon split into many rival groups.

At the risk of being too schematic, we can identify some factors that contributed to the growth and radicalization of the Kurdish movement through the 1970s. The most crucial factor may have been the migration from the Kurdish provinces to the cities of western Turkey. This reached enormous proportions in the 1960s and continued unabated during the 1970s. Such large numbers of migrants could no longer be gradually urbanized and assimilated as earlier generations had been. Rather, they lived together in their own closed communities, to some extent maintaining their traditional lifestyle. They were more aware than they had been before of the great gap in development and ways of life between western and eastern Turkey. Occasional discrimination strengthened their awareness of being different.

The new generation, as university or secondary school students, engaged in the political discussions on imperialism, underdevelopment, class struggle and the national problem, discussions that had rapidly spread outside narrow intellectual circles. This younger generation of migrants was the main motor of the Kurdish movement in the 1970s. Most of the Kurdish organizations were first established in Ankara and Istanbul, and from there spread to Kurdistan. Urban-educated teachers and students returning to their villages brought the new political ideas, in simplified form, to the countryside and attempted to mobilize the peasants.

This was only possible in the relatively liberal political climate of the years 1974–78, a consequence not of the governments' benevolence but of their weakness. In fact, both the Constitution and the Penal Code had been amended in 1971 to make a sharper prosecution of Kurdish activities possible. The state apparatus, including the police and the judiciary, had become politicized and was ridden with partisan rivalries. Each of the coalition governments of the period had such a narrow margin of parliamentary support that it could not afford to antagonize even small sectors of the electorate. There was therefore no consistently strong repression of Kurdish activities until the 1979 proclamation of martial law in the Kurdish provinces.

Another important factor in this politicization was the Kurdish disappointment with Bülent Ecevit. Before the 1973 elections, Ecevit had toured the eastern provinces and promised that he would, as a prime minister, take special care of the problems of the east. Few of his promises, however, materialized, and a few years later Ecevit clashed openly with Kurdish supporters who had dared to raise moderately nationalist slogans. Kurdish suspicions that they could expect little from Turkish politicians if even Ecevit

left them in the lurch drew many people to the Kurdish nationalist organizations proclaiming that Kurds should take what the Turks refused to give. In the 1977 elections, an unprecedented number of independents stood as candidates for the Kurdish provinces. Some had broken loose from Ecevit's Republican People's Party (CHP), while others were known to be close to Kurdish nationalist organizations.

The Kurdish left experienced a similar disappointment with the Turkish left-wing parties and organizations. Most of these did recognize that the Kurds were subjected to cultural oppression, and that the eastern provinces were underprivileged and economically exploited. Their automatic solution, though, was the socialist revolution that would occur under the leadership of the (Turkish) proletariat. Many Turkish leftists considered Kurdish national demands, in the present situation, untimely or even reactionary. The entire left accepted the Leninist doctrine of a nation's right to self-determination. They resolved this inconsistency by refusing to consider the Kurds as a nation, or by adding the rider that this right could only be exercised under the leadership of the proletariat.[1] As a result, many Kurds left the Turkish parties and organizations of which they were members and joined the separate Kurdish organizations that mushroomed after 1975.

The Kurdish movement did not turn away from the left: almost all Kurdish organizations claimed to be Marxist-Leninist, however little the rank and file knew about socialist theory. All considered the Kurds a nation apart and demanded the right of self-determination, although this did not mean for all the establishment of a separate state. One by one, they all also adopted the thesis that Kurdistan is a colony of the Turkish ruling classes. They began to look for inspiration to the liberation movements elsewhere in the world, such as southern Africa and Vietnam. Most of the Kurdish organizations claimed to see the struggle against class oppression inside Kurdistan as equally important, although they frequently accused each other of failing to address this issue. Some made a connection between the national and the class struggle: the chief exploiters — landlords and tribal or religious leaders — were often allied, through the various political parties, with the central state. The left organizations therefore labelled them "collaborators," and proclaimed that breaking their power was one primary aim in the "anti-feudal and anti-colonial

[1] This is my crude summary of a lengthy debate. The various left parties took different positions at different times and rarely stated them so bluntly or simplistically as I do here. The only one among the major left-wing organizations and parties that did recognize the Kurds as a nation and was willing to grant them unconditionally the right to self-determination was Kurtuluş, the most intellectual of the various groups that emerged from the original youth and student movement Dev Genç. Since the 1980 coup, much has changed. In their foreign exile, all the Turkish left movements have made many concessions to the Kurds, and almost all now agree that Kurdistan is a Turkish colony and that the Kurdish movement is an important revolutionary force.

struggle." One organization, thinking that the time was ripe for the armed phase in this struggle, actually opened the offensive in 1979 against some particularly powerful and oppressive chieftains. This precipitated a minor civil war between supporters and opponents of these chieftains, with government forces taking the latter side.

The Major Kurdish Organizations

In 1974-75, the old DDKO were revived under the name of Revolutionary-Democratic Cultural Associations (DDKD), first in Ankara and then in other cities and towns. An attempt to bring all Kurdish progressives together in these DDKD failed: political differences and personal rivalries caused the major branches to split. Some branches continued independently; others came under the control of one or another of the political movements that gradually took shape. Each of these established its own clubs and associations. The first political current to surface is usually known by its monthly journal Özgürlük Yolu (The Road to Freedom) which appeared from mid-1975 until its ban early in 1979. Its leading members had been active in the Workers Party of Turkey in the 1960s, and they continued to represent the same brand of socialism and moderate Kurdish national and cultural demands that had then been characteristic of the TIP. The ÷zg¸rl¸k Yolu group considered an alliance of the Kurdish oppressed classes with the revolutionary Turkish working class the proper strategy to end class and national oppression. It was a typically urban organization of workers and intellectuals, numerically small but with some influence in trade unions and the teachers' union.

Another group grew up around the publishing house Komal and the journal Rizgarî (Liberation). It had less confidence in the Turkish left. Unlike the ÷zg¸rl¸k Yolu group, this group spoke out against supporting the Republican People's Party in the critical 1977 elections. The Kurds, it said, had nothing good to expect from Kemalists; as a colonized people, they should be more concerned with their own liberation than with the political problems of the colonizing nation. This liberation would be achieved through a socialist revolution under the leadership of the Kurdish proletariat. Problems in the identification of a proletariat in Kurdistan, disagreements on the attitude towards the Soviet Union, and other ideological and personal conflicts led to a split in 1979. Ala Rizgarî (Flag of Liberation), which broke away from the Rizgarî organization, adopted a more critical attitude towards the Soviet Union and in other respects too had less rigid political ideas than the group that continued under the old name. The only really anti-Soviet Kurdish organization was the Maoist Kawa, which never gained much following outside some student circles. It was formally established in 1976 and split two years later over disagreements about China's Three Worlds theory.

Large segments of the nationalist wing of the Kurdish movement were also attracted to left ideologies during the 1970s. Şivan's KDP dissipated after his death, but a group of his sympathizers gained control of some of the largest DDKD branches. They went on calling themselves Revolutionary Democrats, and used the name DDKD for the new local associations that they opened. The Revolutionary Democrat movement soon became the largest of the Kurdish organizations; by 1978 it claimed to have no fewer than 40 branches, with some 50,000 members. It called itself Marxist and sought co-operation with the (pro-Soviet) Communist Party of Turkey. In its publications, it directed itself mainly to intellectuals and youth, while its membership included people from all walks of life, even "feudal" elements. On many important issues it never had a clear standpoint.

The remnants of Sait Elçi's KDP continued for some time to exist as little more than an extension of the Iraqi KDP, and it almost dissolved after the collapse of Barzani's movement in 1975. A year or two later, a group of younger and more militant members, calling themselves KUK (National Liberation of Kurdistan), gained a controlling majority in the central committee. They sent the party on a course of active support for the "Provisional Leadership" of the Iraqi KDP (led by Barzani's sons), which from Iran and Turkey had resumed guerrilla warfare in northern Iraq.[1] Both the "Provisional Leadership" and the KUK claimed to have become Marxist-Leninist, and the KUK later broke entirely with the remnants of the old, "feudal" KDP.

The most radical of the Kurdish movements is the PKK (Workers' Party of Kurdistan), better known by the nickname Apocus (after Apo, the short form of their leader Abdullah Öcalan's name). This small group emerged in Ankara in 1974 from a Dev Genc branch[2] and left the capital for revolutionary agitation in Kurdistan. In 1979 it transformed itself into a party (the PKK) and proclaimed the armed struggle against feudalism and colonialism. The party's program was a curious brand of Marxism-Leninism and ultranationalism, with the ultimate aim of establishing an independent, united Kurdistan (i.e., including the parts presently in Iran, Iraq and Syria). Armed struggle, they claimed, was the only way to achieve this. Kurdish "collaborators" were to be attacked as much as the "colonizers," and in practice, rival Kurdish organizations came under attack. In the districts the

[1] [On these developments in Iraqi Kurdistan, see: Martin van Bruinessen, "The Kurds between Iran and Iraq", *MERIP Middle East Report* no. 141 (July-August 1986), 14-27, reprinted in this volume.]

[2] Dev Genç (Revolutionary Youth), also known as Dev Yol (Revolutionary Way), was active in the mid and late 1970s. It grew out of the Turkish People's Liberation Army (TPLA). See Ahmet Samim, "The Tragedy of The Turkish Left," *New Left Review* 126 (March-April 1981).

party claimed as "liberated areas," feudal and tribal lords had lost their power and some of the villagers looked upon the PKK as their liberators. But the party lost much sympathy as a result of its own brutal and violent behaviour. Most of its members and sympathizers were very young, poorly educated and of humble backgrounds. In its composition the PKK was, no doubt, the most proletarian (lumpenproletarian according to its detractors) among the Kurdish organizations.[1]

Most of these organizations were pro-Soviet, or at least embraced brands of socialism they associated with the Soviet Union. Since Turkey was a NATO country and Kurdistan had special strategic value for the West, no Western power seemed likely to help the Kurds in their struggle for more rights, while possibly the Soviet Union might. Özgürlük Yolu, the DDKD and Rizgari competed with each other, and with the Communist Party of Turkey, for recognition by Moscow as the party representing Kurdish communists. None of the groups received such recognition, although there are indications that the PKK received indirectly — through Palestinian connections — some material aid from the Soviet Union. The CPT called on all Kurdish communists to leave the Kurdish organizations which, it said, were all feudal-dominated. As a reaction, three of the pro-Soviet groups established a common action platform, known as the National Union of Forces, early in 1980, but this soon fell apart.

Cultural Rights and Repression

Although all of the Kurdish organizations saw national self-determination as an ultimate goal, their activities were primarily directed towards the achievement of cultural rights. Their journals devoted some attention to the Kurdish language, literature and culture, in addition to the purely political articles. They published Kurdish grammars and dictionaries (and circulated them clandestinely, since they were immediately outlawed). They gave Kurdish literacy courses, since very few Kurds could read and write their own language. The journals began to use more and more Kurdish alongside Turkish. In 1979, there even appeared a journal entirely devoted to Kurdish literature, Tirej. Each group organized its cultural evenings, with

[1]This survey of the Kurdish organizations is based on interviews with members of most organizations and a reading of their journals. Two other such surveys, more detailed at some points, deserve mention: a series of articles in the Turkish daily Aydınlık, June 18 - July 18, 1979, and Chris Kutschera, "La poudrière kurde," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September 1980, pp. 6-8. This survey of the Kurdish organizations is based on interviews with members of most organizations and a reading of their journals. Two other such surveys, more detailed at some points, deserve mention: a series of articles in the Turkish daily Aydınlık, June 18 - July 18, 1979, and Chris Kutschera, "La poudrière kurde," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September 1980, pp. 6-8.

Kurdish music and songs (besides the required political speeches); troupes toured the villages with Kurdish-language political theatre. While all this had to be done clandestinely, there were many attempts to get such activities legalized and to promulgate the use of Kurdish in primary education. Turkey's progressive teachers' union, Töb-Der, in which the Kurdish left was strongly represented, resolved at its 1978 congress that the first years of education should be in the child's native language.[1] These attempts failed to produce any softening of the ban on Kurdish language and culture.

The seeming tolerance of the mid-1970s came to an end with the proclamation of martial law in 1979. Since the military take-over of 1970 the ban on Kurdish language has been implemented more strictly than ever. The present military leaders of Turkey have left no doubts as to their position: the entire Kurdish movement must be eliminated; everything conducive to Kurdish ethnic awareness must be destroyed. In all areas where Kurdish nationalists have been active, military operations were carried out and the villages were raided. The army and police acted with unprecedented brutality in order to intimidate the population. The government arrested tens of thousands of people, and interrogated them, often under severe torture. Persons suspected of contacts with Kurdish organizations were detained practically indefinitely. Most of the leading members of the Kurdish organizations apparently have been arrested, along with the vast majority of the rank and file. Their treatment in prison and in the courtroom is much harsher still than that of Turkish left activists. The members of the violent PKK have been treated with special cruelty, In mass trials directed at this party, the state has demanded over 600 death sentences. About ten of them have died (or been killed) in prison, while many others seem to be close to death.[2]

Together with the suppression of Kurdish activists, the policy of assimilation received new impetus. A general campaign to improve literacy in Turkish, and intensive Turkish-language courses were introduced in primary schools. Provincial commanders had their own programs to stamp out the use of Kurdish, at least in the towns. Traditional Kurdish clothes, which had reappeared in the 1970s, have been banned again.

[1]The military prosecutor gave this as the main reason (or one of the main reasons) why Töb-Der was banned immediately after the September 1980 coup. Earlier, a small left-wing party, the TEP, which had adopted the principle of education in the native language in its program, was banned for that reason. See M. Simon, "The trial of the Türkiye Emekçi Partisi (Turkish Workers' Party) before the Constitutional Court of Turkey," *The Review* (International Commission of Jurists) No. 24, June 1980, 53-64.

[2]The most shocking reports about the treatment of Kurdish prisoners are by two Kurdish lawyers, Şerafettin Kaya and Hüseyin Yıldırım, who themselves spent over half a year each in prison, apparently because they defended PKK members. The two later escaped to Europe. According to both, the authorities are slowly killing the prisoners (Kaya in *Der Spiegel*, July 12,1982, and in his book *Diyarbakır'da işkence* (n. p., 1982); Yıldırım in numerous press interviews early in 1983).

The militarization of eastern and south-eastern Turkey has accelerated since the coup. Additional troops sent to the east seem there to stay. The transfer of Second Army's headquarters from Konya to Malatya will be completed in 1983. Two of Turkey's four armies will then be based in the east, so that the area will remain under close military supervision.[1] The major reason for this militarization is probably the increased strategic importance of eastern Turkey since the changes of regime in Afghanistan and Iran. There have long been several NATO and US military installations in the area, chiefly for electronic surveillance, and the US wants to establish new bases there. Press reports on the establishment of a headquarters for the Rapid Deployment Force at Van, or three new US airfields in eastern Turkey, have been routinely but not convincingly denied in Ankara.[2]

This militarization will make it difficult for the Kurdish movement of the 1970s to reorganize on a significant scale. At the same time, Western strategic interest in the area will safeguard the generals from serious criticism of their treatment of the Kurds. The organized Kurdish movement appears to have been defeated for the time being, but it will take a long time for the increased ethnic and national awareness that it stimulated and represented to die out.

[1]General Evren, in a public speech in Malatya in October 1981, noticed that certain "traitors" claimed that the second army was moved to the east in order to oppress the population there. "Whose land is this," he asked rhetorically, "that we should feel the need to oppress the people of the region? Is this soil here not part of Turkey? Aren't we all real Turkish citizens?" *Orgeneral Kenan Evren'in söylev ve demeçleri (12/9/1981-12/9/1982)*, Ankara 1982, p. 49. Many local people must have felt that this was hardly a denial of the "traitors"' claims.

[2]*New Statesman*, May 14, 1982 (on the Rapid Deployment Force base at Van); *Cumhuriyet*, October 7, 1982 (on the necessity of a base in Eastern Turkey against possible Soviet invasion in Iran); Jack Anderson in the *Washington Post*, October 24, 1982 (on three new US air bases in Eastern Turkey in exchange for more military aid). The airport of Van has recently been modernized, and at some places in Kurdistan roads have been widened to the extent that military aircraft can land on them.

BETWEEN GUERRILLA WAR AND POLITICAL MURDER: THE WORKERS' PARTY OF KURDISTAN[1]

The most spectacular development of the past several years in Turkey's Kurdish provinces has been the resumption, in the late summer of 1984, of guerrilla activity. The attacks consist mainly of hit-and-run actions against military personnel and against Kurdish civilians considered "traitors" or "collaborators."

The Turkish press has given uncharacteristically extensive coverage of these developments. After a new wave of armed assaults in the spring of 1985, Interior Minister Yıldırım Akbulut spoke of a guerrilla war instead of isolated actions by "bandits," as in the past.[2] Some newspapers even gave what seemed rather inflated estimates of the number of Kurdish partisans.[3] This guerrilla insurgency, unsettling though it must be in itself, has apparently provided the Turkish authorities with a welcome rationale for the violations of human rights that continue to arouse criticism from Europe.

These guerrilla activities were all carried out by members of the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK). Prior to the 1980 coup d'état, the PKK had attracted attention because it was the most radical of the Kurdish organisations and the one most prone to violence, even against rival Kurdish organisations. In the name of the "anti-colonial liberation struggle" it carried out actions not only against the Turkish state but also against the various classes of "collaborators," "liquidationists," "social-chauvinists" and other opponents of its own brand of revolution.

It was also the only organisation whose members were drawn almost exclusively from the lowest social classes ó the uprooted, half-educated village and small-town youth who knew what it felt like to be oppressed, and who wanted action, not ideological sophistication. In several of the districts where the PKK had previously been active, it had alienated the majority of the local

[1][This article was written in the spring of 1986 but for reasons beyond the author's control was only published two years later.]

[2]All Turkish newspapers, May 24,1985.

[3]The daily *Hürriyet* (through which the Turkish secret police frequently leaks information and spreads disinformation) reported on May 14, 1985, the number of "separatists" as 1800, of whom so far 56 had been killed and 569 arrested. According to well-informed Kurdish sources, the PKK never had more than 400 armed men inside Turkey at any one time since its 1984 offensive. *Hürriyet* also reported that five officers, 17 non-commissioned officers, 30 soldiers and two policemen had been killed by these "separatists."

population because of its uncompromising attitudes and its almost religious belief in violence as a means of salvation. A few areas excepted, the PKK could not count on much support from the local population when the military stepped in and started making mass arrests.

It is impossible to estimate the degree of popular support the PKK enjoys now in its present guerrilla offensive. Many former opponents seem to have become more sympathetic because it is the only organisation that actively resists the Turkish military. But the increased presence of military and police units all over Kurdistan and the severe reprisals taken against suspected supporters of the guerrilla movement make it unlikely that the PKK will get much active popular support or even food and shelter. From the PKK's own publications one gets the clear impression that its fighters are rather isolated, sleeping in caves high in the mountains and eating whatever animals they can trap.

At the same time, they could hardly carry out so many actions deep inside Turkey without at least some measure of voluntary popular support. Long series of reports in the Turkish press on brutalities committed by the PKK against innocent civilians (based on "confessions" of captured activists and a shrewd mixture of fact and fiction) seem partly aimed at undermining popular sympathies for the guerrilla fighters.[1]

The PKK has also been very active in Western Europe. Before 1980 it had been almost non-existent there, and the large community of Kurdish labour migrants (between a quarter and half a million) was under the influence of several other political organisations. Only after the 1980 coup d'état did a number of PKK activists go to Sweden and Germany, where they succeeded in drawing many of the younger generation into the party's orbit and into conflicts with rival organisations. In a relatively short time the PKK built a disciplined network of small local branches and front organisations all over Europe and established a highly efficient publishing machine, turning out with surprising regularity various journals, books and bulletins in Turkish, Kurdish and the major European languages.

The resumption of the guerrilla war worked very well from a propaganda standpoint. By the middle of 1985 the PKK and its front organisations in Europe were probably stronger, both in number of active members and of passive supporters, than any other Kurdish or Turkish organisation in exile. One of the most conspicuous activities of the various Kurdish parties and unions abroad is the organisation of Newroz (Kurdish New Year) parties, with Kurdish music and dances and nationalistic speeches. (In

[1] *Milliyet*, October 1 to 7,1985; *Tercüman*, July 15 to 22, 1985.

Turkey, these celebrations are forbidden, along with anything reminiscent of Kurdish culture.) During the past few years, the PKK's Newroz parties showed it was capable of mobilising the largest masses. The participants consisted not only of young militant radicals but also of numerous middle-aged, not highly politicised, people and their families. The PKK's fund-raising campaigns to support the party and the guerrilla struggle were spectacularly successful.

But this is not the only achievement of the PKK in its European exile. It gained international notoriety because of several violent clashes with rival organisations and especially because of a number of political assassinations of which it stands accused. Three of the victims were former leading PKK members who had fallen out with party chief Abdullah Öcalan; another was a prominent member of a Turkish left organisation engaged in a propaganda battle against the PKK. The PKK disclaimed responsibility for the killings, but hardly veiled its approval of them.[1] Given the centrality of revenge in recent PKK "theoretical" writings, and the equally self-righteous attitudes of some of its opponents, these killings will probably not be the last, further alienating European public opinion from the PKK and perhaps from the Kurds as well.[2]

Followers of Apo

The PKK has gained committed supporters at a time when other organisations have crumbled. This may be because it is in some ways more "Kurdish," and reflects present-day Kurdish society better than the others. Some of its political activities resemble the ways in which an ambitious tribal chieftain imposes authority over an ever-widening territory: the same manipulation of violent conflicts, the same way of beating people into taking a position.

Not that the PKK represents in any way the Kurdish tribes. On the contrary, tribal elites are represented in various other parties but not in the PKK. Rather, this party represents the most marginal sections of Kurdish society, the ones who feel excluded from the country's social and economic

[1] The murderer of the third PKK dissident was arrested and admitted to being a PKK sympathiser but claimed to have acted independently. The PKK called this murder "a deserved punishment" but denied any direct involvement. An article titled "Crime and Punishment in Kurdistan," in the PKK's widely circulated monthly *Serxwebûn* (December 1985), once more denounced the murdered man as a traitor and pointed out other enemies of the PKK's struggle, one of whom became the next victim.

[2] In one recent publication, the PKK even defines itself as a "revolutionary revenge organisation," seeing the punishment of treason, collaboration and opportunism as one of its duties (*Gallows in Kurdistan, Barracks Culture, and Our Duty of Revolutionary Revenge* [in Turkish], July 1985, p. 229).

development, victims of the rural transformation with frustrated expectations. The PKK offers them a simple and appropriate theory, and lots of opportunities for action, heroism and martyrdom.

When the PKK was formally founded towards the end of 1978, its core group had already been together for five years. They had met as members of a student union in Ankara that then incorporated many different left tendencies. Impatient with more experienced Kurdish activists who urged moderation and emphasised basic political education, they were looking for direct action. Members of this central group (among whom were several Turks) went to Kurdistan to find a field for revolutionary activities.

From the beginning, Abdullah Öcalan was the obvious leader of the group. After the short form of his first name, Apo (which also means "uncle"), members of this group came to be called Apocu, "follower of Apo." When various Kurdish organisations were established in the following years, the Apocus declined to join any of them. They had already decided that they themselves were going to be the liberators of Kurdistan. They even signed some of their pamphlets as "National Liberation Army "

The Apocus' political ideas were laid down in the party's 1978 program, which remains unchanged. Kurdistan is seen as a "classical colony," divided among four colonising states that keep it in a state of semi-feudal backwardness. Feudal landowners and a sort of comprador bourgeoisie collaborate with the colonisers, betraying their national identity Parliamentary representation and education are two other processes by which Kurdistan is integrated into the colonising state, its national identity destroyed and its subjugation perpetuated. The revolution will have to be national and democratic, the national aspect predominating. "Feudal" landlords, being exploiters and collaborators, are among the chief enemies: the program says their lands will be expropriated except those belonging to "patriotic" landlords. (The founding congress was allegedly held on the estate of one such "patriotic" landlord. Within a year of its founding, the party was deeply involved in a tribal war between a "collaborating" and a "patriotic" chieftain.) Later books, brochures and periodicals elaborated upon these basic ideas, stressing the importance of violence as the sole road to liberation and adding ever more groups to the list of enemies of the revolution.

First Offensive

In 1979, the Apocus apparently judged that the time for starting their war of liberation had arrived. For their first offensive they singled out Mehmet Celal Bucak, a powerful chieftain and landlord in Siverek district who was also

a member of parliament for the liberal-right Justice Party, thus epitomising their idea of a "collaborator." They accused Bucak of terrorising the surrounding districts through a large band of outlaws working for him, and of extorting money and goods from the peasants. A group of Apocus made an attempt at Bucak's life but failed to kill him. The result was an extremely brutal blood feud between Bucak, aided by his allies (including police and military), and the PKK with one or two small tribes.

In the course of the conflict and the resulting social polarisation, the PKK succeeded in drawing many of the youth of the region away from other political organisations. According to a dissident who then belonged to the PKK's central group, they did not shy away from provocations: he claims that the PKK, in order to get the support of a particular tribe, killed one of its members, making it seem as if he had been murdered by Bucak's outlaws. He accuses the PKK, or more precisely its leader Öcalan, of systematically engaging in similar murderous provocations.[1]

Elsewhere, too, the PKK intensified its propaganda activities, usually trying to exploit local conflicts to the utmost. In Mardin province, the PKK became embroiled in a protracted blood feud with the KUK (National Liberation of Kurdistan), an organisation long entrenched there among almost all social strata.[2] In other districts there were frequent violent clashes with other Kurdish or Turkish left organisations, similar to those taking place throughout Turkey between organisations contesting the control of rural districts or urban slum quarters. In Kurdistan, the ties of tribe or common locality are strong even under normal circumstances. These violent political conflicts had the effect of further strengthening tribal-regional loyalties and oppositions. The PKK ended up fighting with some tribes against other tribes. In fact, it was not unlike a new tribe itself.

There was also a definite aspect of class struggle to these conflicts. Although the PKK was occasionally allied with a "patriotic" chieftain, tribal or landed elites never gained much influence in it, distinguishing the PKK from most other Kurdish organisations, whose leaderships usually included at least a few such persons. Much of the PKK's violence was directed against the haves in the name of the have-nots. In districts it temporarily controlled, "people's courts" dispensed revolutionary justice (or revolutionary terror). In the mass trials against the PKK after the 1980 coup, most of the defendants belonged to the poorest strata of Kurdish society.

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[1] Baki Karer, "Let's understand the real nature of the PKK" (in Turkish, pamphlet dated December 1, 1985). Karer was one of the Turkish members of the original group that founded the PKK; he broke with the party in the autumn of 1985, after which he came to Europe and began denouncing Öcalan. He mentions several similar murders and claims that over 20 persons from the PKK's own ranks have also been murdered.

[2] On the KUK and other Kurdish organisations in Turkey, see Martin van Bruinessen, The Kurds in Turkey, *MERIP Reports* no. 121 (February 1984), 6-12 [reprinted in this volume].

Strong State

The PKK directed its activities not only against landlords and other "collaborators" or against rival organisations. It prepared for the armed struggle needed to separate Kurdistan from Turkey. In 1979, Öcalan, who had withdrawn to Syria, established relations with Palestinian groups, as several Turkish organisations had done earlier The PKK acquired facilities for guerrilla training in southern Lebanon or Syria, and some 300 PKK activists allegedly went briefly to Syria for training.[1] A guerrilla war proper had not yet begun; the state was so weak in the late 1970s that certain districts were virtually controlled by the PKK or other organisations anyway. Only when the army took over in 1980 and started combing the countryside did the PKK's activists see themselves facing an unexpectedly strong state. A few groups fought themselves to death; thousands of suspected members and sympathisers were arrested. Some groups remained at large, hiding in the mountains and occasionally carrying out a minor raid. In the course of 1981, the last of these groups withdrew to Syria and Iran.

Gradually improved relations with Palestinian groups, especially Na'if Hawatmeh's Democratic Front, secured the PKK excellent training facilities. Following the Israeli invasion into southern Lebanon in 1982 ó during which some ten PKK activists were killed and a somewhat larger number taken prisoner ó the party's centre of gravity shifted to northern Iraq. Members of the PKK had, especially after 1980, moved from Turkey into Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan and established contacts with several Kurdish organisations there. The Iraqi KDP was most responsive to their approaches. It wanted a good working relationship with an organisation in Turkish Kurdistan; its traditional partner, the KUK, seemed much weakened after the military coup, and it had moreover started criticising some of the KDP's policies. The KDP gave the PKK facilities in its areas of Iran and northern Iraq, which prompted a major Turkish military invasion into Iraq in May 1983 and an alleged minor operation in western Iran in 1984.

In the summer of 1984, the PKK announced the formation of the "Kurdistan Liberation Brigades" (HRK), which then carried out their first attacks on army units and police posts in Eastern Turkey from bases in northern Iraq. In spite of rapid and massive counter-measures by Turkey's military, the actions continued and spread over ever larger areas. After a winter lull, the guerrilla war resumed on a larger scale during 1985. A new "Front for the National Liberation of Kurdistan" (ERNK; in spite of its name it consists only of the PKK and possibly a few "independent" individuals) assumed control of guerrilla operations, claiming more than 50 separate actions from

[1]According to Karer.

June through November 1985 in many different parts of Kurdistan, that wiped out four army platoons and killed another 50 soldiers, over 10 policemen and more than 20 "traitors."[1] Its losses, understandably, have been considerable, too, and the consequent repression has worsened in many parts of Turkish Kurdistan. The severity of the reprisals, and the PKK's intolerance of those who do not support it, appear to have led many villagers to show their allegiance to the state and welcome the army. In several areas, paramilitary forces ("village protectors") have been recruited from among the village population, ostensibly to combat guerrilla activity. This gave certain landlords and chieftains the opportunity to legalise their armed retinues and further solidify their local political leverage.

Trump Cards

It is almost impossible to carry out a guerrilla war without having a relatively safe hinterland to withdraw to. For a combination of reasons, the PKK seems to have lost its freedom of movement from and into northern Iraq, the most suitable base area. (The Iraqi-Turkish border is so mountainous that it cannot be completely controlled; the flat Syrian-Turkish border, by contrast has been sealed with barbed wire and minefields.) Not long after its major military incursion of 1983, Turkey threatened to invade Iraq again in order to compel the Iraqi KDP to cease its support of the PKK.[2] The PKK complicated its situation even more by clashing violently with several other political organisations present in the KDP-controlled zones. In the autumn of 1985, the KDP and its partners in the Iraqi Patriotic Democratic Front,[3] who saw their own struggle endangered by the PKK's presence, ordered it to leave the frontier zone base camps and to stop moving back and forth across the border. The KDP claims that since then the PKK fighters have been staying inside Turkish Kurdistan. If this is true, it does not appear to have hampered their activities much; after a few quiet winter months, the guerrillas launched an early spring offensive in the first weeks of March 1986, attacking several army patrols.

The Turkish press has for some time pointed to Syria (and indirectly, the Soviet Union) as the real force behind the PKK. It claims that the recent guerrilla raids were carried out from Syrian territory, across an almost impregnable border. The past year has seen much diplomatic traffic between Turkey and Syria, in which the PKK was undoubtedly one of the major topics of discussion. Like so many other Middle East opposition movements, the

[1]*Kurdistan Report* (ERNK's German publicity organ), No. 15 (March 1985).
[2]Press statement of the Iraqi KDP, October 24, 1984, mentioning large troop concentrations on the border and military flights in Iraqi airspace.
[3]See Martin van Bruinessen, "The Kurds Between Iran and Iraq", *MERIP Middle East Report* No. 141 (July-August 1986), p.14 [reprinted in this volume].

PKK has been welcome there, and apparently gets much friendlier treatment than the other organisations from Turkey, which are simply tolerated but have little freedom of movement. President Asad is probably using the PKK as one trump card in negotiations over Turkey's project to dam the Euphrates River, turning a vast dry area of Eastern Turkey into a major granary but thereby also depriving Syria of its chief supply of irrigation water. It seems unlikely that Syria will give up its support of the PKK and deliver Öcalan to Turkey, as demanded, unless Turkey is willing to make major concessions on the Euphrates issue. Until that time, Damascus will likely allow the PKK to be a serious nuisance to Turkey but not to the point of provoking Ankara to take military measures against Syria.

Dissent, Revenge, Martyrdom

Much of the brutal violence and the political murders for which the PKK has become notorious stems from a competition for leadership within the party, and from the tendency to put party discipline and unquestioning obedience above all else. According to dissidents, party members are brainwashed in the training camps: all reading is forbidden except the PKK's own publications; friendships are prevented by encouraging everybody to suspect their comrades as possible agents. Criticism of the party's policies is regarded as betrayal. Dissidents have published some 20 names of former members they say have been killed for defecting from the party or disagreeing with its policies.[1]

Policy disagreements and personal rivalries can hardly be distinguished since criticism of the party line amounted to an attack on the party chief. Öcalan had alienated several members of the original central group, but at the party's second congress in 1982 he emerged victorious. One of his most vocal opponents was allegedly imprisoned, tortured into signing a confession of immoral behaviour, and finally killed. Several central committee members have since left the party; two of them went to Europe, where their accusations against the PKK and against Öcalan personally had a great impact in the Kurdish community. Rival organisations echoed the accusations in the European and Turkish press. Neither the dissidents nor the rivals were entirely disinterested critics, of course. But apart from some obvious exaggerations, their charges are credible, and became even more so when one of these

[1]The pamphlet by Karer (note 1 p. 241) and a similar pamphlet by another prisoner dissident, Nedim Talip (June 25, 1985). The PKK claims that several of those mentioned in these lists are still alive and either in Turkish jails or on operations inside Turkish Kurdistan; it points out that numerous former activists have in fact left the party without suffering any reprisals.

dissidents was murdered, promoting more bloodshed.[1] The PKK contented itself with denouncing the dissidents as Turkish agents and traitors and accusing its rival organisations of plotting with the Turkish authorities to destroy the Kurdish revolution.

Paranoia seems quite rampant among the members of the PKK. They see enemies and traitors everywhere, which is one reason for their violent tendencies. Other factors are the social backgrounds of most members and their youth. About half of the approximately 250 "martyrs" the PKK claims were below the age of 22 when they were killed, and almost all were described as of very humble origins.[2] These are precisely the groups most susceptible to rigorous indoctrination and most receptive to the party's romantic doctrine of revenge.[3]

The PKK's Kurdish rival organisations reproach it for taking up arms in the name of, but without, the Kurdish people, and even against their interests. Under the present conditions, they insist, the PKK's armed actions will never be more than an irritant to the Turkish army, but they do bring severe repression over Kurdistan. This not only alienates large segments of the population from the PKK itself but makes them shy away from all oppositional activities.

But the same repression has also contributed much to strengthening the PKK at the expense of more moderate and more "open" organisations. The latter crumbled, while the large PKK trials lent this party the reputation of being the only serious opposition force. Prison conditions in the Kurdish provinces have been even worse than elsewhere in the country, the trials against Kurdish organisations more in contravention of legal rules than others. One of several trials against the PKK, with almost 500 defendants, ended

[1]Çetin Güngör (better known by his code name, Semir) was murdered in Stockholm on November 2, 1985 by a PKK supporter. A few days later, a member of a rival Kurdish organisation was murdered in Denmark; many assumed the PKK to be behind this murder as well. A strong anti-PKK reaction followed, leading to violent clashes in several European cities and a number of further deaths. The other dissident central committee member, Baki Karer, lives in hiding and continues his denunciations of the PKK.

[2]Biographies of these "martyrs" are in the *Album of the Martyrs of the PKK's Resistance, 1976-1984* [in Turkish], which was published in Germany.

[3]See note 5. The same book continues: "[The PKK] will not permit that those who committed the cowardly crimes of *betrayal* and *surrender* will benefit from them. It will present the bill of *chauvinism* to all those who have consciously or unconsciously been tools of the historical betrayal of the *feudal-compradors*" (p. 220, emphasis mine). This defines almost everyone not supporting the PKK as a target for revenge. Action is preferred over political reflection: "Pseudo-socialist sermons will not save us any better than the religious sermons that they have come to replace. Violence ... will in Kurdistan not only be the midwife assisting in the delivery [of a new society] but it will create everything anew. Revolutionary violence has to play this role in Kurdistan, and it will, we say, assume the form of *revolutionary revenge*" (p. 236).

recently after five years with 23 death sentences; another 32 defendants had meanwhile died in jail as a result of torture, hunger strikes or "suicide."[1]

While a certain liberalisation has come to Turkey and newspapers can write more openly than before, it is clear that the Kurdish problem will remain largely excluded from this liberalisation. The authorities will not allow critics to bring up the issue of cultural rights, let alone autonomy. Martial law, lifted in the other parts of Turkey, remains in force in most of the Kurdish provinces. A recent fact-finding mission of the parliamentary opposition party, the Social Democrat-Populist Party, reported that all of Eastern Turkey had become a sort of concentration camp where every citizen is being treated as a suspect and where oppression, torture and insult by the military are the rule rather than the exception.[2] The province of Tunceli, always a hotbed of political dissent, was characterised as "Turkey's largest prison." The PKK could hardly wish a better illustration of its theory of "colonial oppression" than the brutal behaviour of the army, police and some of the paramilitary "village protectors." The PKK's call to revenge these injuries had to fall on many willing ears. And the absence of real economic development in the Kurdish provinces insures that the number of marginalised youth who are most receptive to the PKK's radical ideas only goes on increasing.

Postscript

This article was written in the spring of 1986. Most of it still stands, but a few developments deserve some comment.

In spite of, perhaps partly because of, extensive Turkish military operations and severe pressure on the civilian population, the PKK has been able to consolidate itself and to step up its operations deep inside Turkey. Its major targets have been Turkish military patrols and the paramilitary "village protectors," but also include oil installations and radar stations (among them the US radar station in Mardin). Many of its actions have been spectacularly successful and widely reported in the Turkish press. In October 1986, the PKK held its third congress and confidently announced that its struggle would soon enter the next stage with the establishment of "liberated areas" in Turkish Kurdistan. To all appearances, PKK fighters continue to use northern Iraq as a relatively safe haven, but it is unclear whether they still have major bases there. Turkish military operations against alleged PKK bases in Iraq have not

[1] A defendant in a trial against another organisation recently claimed that 60 prisoners had "died" in Diyarbakır's notorious prison during the past five years, and not 32 as admitted officially (*Milliyet*, March 2, 1986).
[2] *Cumhuriyet*, February 12, 1986.

had any noticeable effect. In the May 1983 invasion the Turkish army suffered losses and failed to force the Iraqi Kurdish guerrillas to surrender the PKK activists there. In August 1986, the Turkish air force co-ordinated air raids with an Iraqi army attack on areas in northern Iraq that were held by the Iraqi KDP, causing many casualties (165 dead, according to radio Baghdad). Most or all victims were, however, Iraqi Kurds, not PKK fighters. On March 4, 1987, the Turkish air force again bombed alleged PKK camps in northern Iraq. The PKK retaliated almost immediately with a number of attacks on military personnel and government property in districts wide apart and far from the Iraqi border. Its European representatives claimed that their party had suffered no losses at all in the bombing and that its own actions had killed around 30 people.

Apart from these interventions in Iraq, Turkish attempts to break the backbone of Kurdish nationalism and of the PKK in particular have consisted of more forced assimilation, close and brutal police surveillance, and massive resettlement. Many families, sometimes entire villages, have been deported from districts where the PKK had been active. The population of most of the border districts is being resettled in strategic villages, and a strip along the border will be entirely depopulated. These policies are not restricted to the border areas. The mountainous province of Tunceli (previously Dersim), always a hotbed of political opposition and where both the PKK and a radical left group regularly carry out minor actions, will be among the first where a new "forest protection" law will result in more than half of the villages being deported.

In the Kurdish communities in Europe, the PKK continues to wield the greatest influence but fierce rivalries with other organisations have resulted in further bloodshed. In March and April 1987, young gunmen generally believed to be PKK members opened fire at several Newroz parties of the PKK's rivals in Germany and Holland, wounding many people. Unknown persons set fire to several offices of one organisation and attempted to kill one of its leaders. The target organisations perceived in this new wave of violence a well co-ordinated PKK offensive aiming at the "elimination of all enemies" as vowed at its third congress.

Because of the PKK's reputation for violence, it has become common to suspect it of many an unsolved crime. Such was the case with the murder of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme. Immediately after the murder, on February 28, 1986, public speculations about PKK involvement were rife. The motive was believed to be the Swedish police's determination that the PKK was a "terrorist organisation" and the refusal of a visa to PKK chief Öcalan. Hundreds of Kurds were interrogated but no tangible evidence was found. When all other lines of investigation came to dead ends, Stockholm's police chief publicly claimed he had found a PKK connection; the evidence, however, seems extremely weak and the reasoning highly speculative. Nevertheless, it has reinforced in the public eye the association of the PKK, and by extension the Kurds, with blind political violence once again.

TURKEY AND THE KURDS IN THE 1990's: GUERILLA, COUNTER-INSURGENCY, AND EMERGING CIVIL SOCIETY[1]

Introduction: Newroz

Newroz, the old Iranian new year's day, celebrated on the 21st of March, is a major holiday for all Iranian peoples — Persians, Kurds, Tajiks, Pashtuns — and for many of their neighbours. The Kurds have adopted it as their national holiday. The onset of spring, marking the conquest of light over darkness, has for them become a symbol of liberation from oppression. In Iran and Iraq, Newroz is recognized as a national holiday, but in the Republic of Turkey it was long banned, like all other expressions of Kurdish culture. Under international agreements (notably its participation in the CSCE), however, Turkey is obliged to grant a certain degree of freedom to 'minority cultures' within its borders, and the late President Özal, eager to clear away barriers preventing Turkey's entry into the European Community, forced his administration to carry out a number of reforms. In 1991, the central government finally relaxed the legislation concerning the suppression of Kurdish culture, and in 1992 Newroz could for the first time be publicly celebrated. In the Kurdish-inhabited parts of Turkey, large crowds thronged the streets, singing and dancing around the bonfires that are traditionally part of Newroz celebrations, brandishing flags in the Kurdish colours, and delighting in being able to express their Kurdishness. In several towns the celebrations took on the form of political demonstrations.

The Turkish security forces did not join in the general happiness. Engaged in a bloody counterinsurgency campaign against the guerrilla fighters of the Kurdish separatist PKK, and not always capable of distinguishing between the PKK and the Kurdish population at large, they were not charmed by the liberalisation decreed by the central government. The Newroz celebrations may have appeared to them as pro-PKK demonstrations — there were people carrying PKK banners, and many Kurdish youngsters no doubt shouted pro-PKK slogans. Perhaps also elements in the security forces intended to sabotage the process of liberalisation in matters of Kurdish culture. Be that as it may, in the towns of Cizre, Şırnak and Nusaybin, where Kurdish

[1][The following text, written in early 1997, consists of the historical chapters added to the report of a Newroz mission in carried out March 1993 by a group of observers sent to Turkey by Pax Christi. The full report was published by the Netherlands Kurdistan Society in Amsterdam in 1997]

nationalist sentiment is known to be high, the celebrations ended in blood baths as security troops fired at the merry-making crowds. The toll of this Kurdish New Year's day was, according to Kurdish members of parliament who visited the affected towns to investigate the events, well over hundred dead and hundreds wounded.

As Turkey and the Kurds were preparing for the second officially allowed Newroz celebration in March 1993, Kurdish human rights activists requested the presence of foreign observers, with the dual aim of monitoring what would happen this time and acting as a disincentive to trigger-happy security personnel.

Historical Background

The Kurds, Turkey and the PKK

About half of the total Kurdish population live in Turkey. Estimates of their numbers vary widely, but a figure of 10 to 12 million, or almost 20 per cent of Turkey's population, will not be wide off the mark. Since the first Kurdish rebellions against Turkey's republican regime in the early 1920s, the government has attempted to forestall Kurdish separatism by a policy of forced assimilation. This policy has had some success, to the extent that many people of Kurdish descent started thinking of themselves as Turks rather than Kurds (and that even many committed Kurdish nationalists nowadays speak only a very poor Kurdish). The political and economic liberalisation of the 1950s and 1960s, however, led to the emergence of a new, modest Kurdish movement, formulating demands of cultural rights and economic development for the very backward Kurdish-inhabited east of Turkey. Initially supported by the Turkish left but deserted by it when it met with severe repression, the Kurdish movement radicalised in the 1970s and became more separatist. By 1980, the year of the latest military coup d'état, there were a dozen different clandestine Kurdish organisations, most of which demanded self-determination and made efforts to revivify Kurdish culture through language courses, Kurdish publications or cultural events. Several of these organisations also became involved in the violent clashes between radical left- and right-wing organisations that characterised life in the big cities during the late seventies.

The most radical and violent of these organisations was the PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, Workers' Party of Kurdistan). It was born as a splinter from a left-wing Turkish students' organisation in Ankara in 1974 and transformed itself into a guerrilla organisation recruiting especially among the lower strata in the Kurdish countryside. It declared Kurdistan a colony of the Turkish ruling classes, who were assisted by Kurdish collaborators, and it

called for an armed liberation struggle against the colonisers and their Kurdish cronies. The 'collaborators' it meant were those Kurdish tribal chieftains and other traditional authorities who had accepted positions in the Turkish political system — and especially, of course, those who opposed the Kurdish movement. The PKK in 1979 carried out its first attack on one of the 'collaborators', leading to a protracted armed conflict much like a traditional blood feud between 'collaborator' tribes and 'patriotic' tribes. Elsewhere it became involved in similar conflicts with rival Kurdish organisations.

The military take-over of September 1980 was followed by a well-orchestrated campaign to destroy the Kurdish movement and renewed efforts to assimilate the Kurds. Hundreds of thousands of activists of the left, of the fascist and religious right and of the Kurdish movement were arrested or fled abroad; almost 50,000 were brought to trial. The largest mass trials were those against the PKK, and these ended in the largest number of death sentences (a total of 129). Many PKK activists also were shot dead when resisting arrest. In spite of this, the PKK was the only Kurdish organisation that was not completely destroyed. Regrouping themselves, bands of PKK activists continued roaming the countryside, and for years the Turkish press kept mentioning armed clashes with these groups — which then constituted virtually the only form of armed resistance to military rule. The PKK had so far enjoyed little popularity among the Kurdish population at large, but due to these defiant acts of resistance it began gaining a grudging admiration.

The PKK leadership meanwhile had set up quarters in Lebanon, and due to Palestinian and Syrian support acquired military training facilities in the Beka'a valley. The Syrian regime had obvious reasons for putting some pressure on its northern neighbour, for Turkey's ambitious Southeast Anatolia Project threatened to divert so much water from the Euphrates that Syria could be turned into a desert almost overnight. The degree of Syrian support for the PKK has somewhat fluctuated since, depending on the political and diplomatic relations with Turkey, but it has never stopped. In an apparent attempt to insure itself against dependence on a single sponsor, the PKK also established camps in northern Iraq (where, due to the Iraq-Iran war, central government control of territory was less than complete) and allegedly in north-west Iran as well. In 1983, the Turkish army carried out its first major military operation inside Iraq against these bases. More were to follow, but none of them was to succeed in expelling the PKK from the region, let alone destroying it.

In August 1984, the PKK announced the beginning of a guerrilla war for the 'liberation' of Kurdistan. Guerrilla units attacked police posts and military buildings in the towns of Eruh and Semdinli, not far from the Iraqi border. These attacks caused little real damage, but the psychological impact was great. They had taken the military by surprise, and the PKK was to do

this repeatedly in the following years. The scale of the guerrilla operations also was to show a steady increase, from minor hit-and-run raids by small bands operating from bases across the Iraqi or Syrian border to sustained activities deeper inland by guerrilla units numbering hundreds.

The PKK acted on the assumption that most Kurds would remain aloof from the struggle for national rights unless ordinary life was made intolerable due to repression by the (Turkish) state. Its strategy has been to provoke such repression, in order to force the population of the region to take sides, either with the state or with the movement. It has been dramatically successful, which was due largely to the brutality with which the Turkish security forces have operated in the region. Unable or unwilling to distinguish between PKK partisans and ordinary villagers, the military and special forces, hunting for guerrilla fighters, made life in many Kurdish mountain villages miserable. It was from such villages that the PKK recruited many of its new fighters.

The state, on the other hand, also attempted to mobilise villagers to fight against the PKK. A new law in 1985 saw to the creation of the 'village guard' system. 'Village guards' (*korucu*) received arms and attractive payment, in exchange for which they were expected to hunt down any PKK partisans coming near their villages (and later, to take part in anti-PKK operations further away as well). They received a bounty for each killed guerrilla, and soon there were reports that for the sake of bounty or private revenge many people were killed who had no relation to the PKK but were posthumously declared guerrillas. The village guards system reinforced the old tribal structures that had been gradually loosening during the preceding half century, and brought back some of the worst features of traditional Kurdish society. The authorities preferred tribesmen as *korucu*, and kept them as units under their tribal chieftain or some other local strongman. Moreover amnesty was offered to criminals who joined the village guard system; the effect was that former bandits henceforth could with impunity harass their neighbours in the name of the struggle against the PKK.

This made the village guards almost ideal targets for the PKK: here were 'collaborators' who were generally despised and who exemplified the working of 'colonialism'. The PKK struck at them were it hurt them most: in their families. The prospect of being killed may not deter a tribesman, but his inability to protect his womenfolk causes loss of honour, which is extremely hard to bear. Repeatedly PKK units carried out raids against the houses of village guards and killed women and children — acts of brutal terrorism by international standards but a well-established method in the tradition of tribal warfare. Village guards meted out equal or worse brutality to villages considered as pro-PKK.

The state of emergency, the 'super-governor' and his extraordinary powers

In most of Turkey, martial law (declared after the 1980 coup) had been lifted by 1984. In the four Kurdish-inhabited provinces of Siirt, Mardin, Diyarbakır and Hakkari, however, it continued until mid-1987, when it was replaced by a state of emergency. A state of emergency, furthermore, was in force in four other south-eastern provinces, Elazığ, Tunceli, Bingöl and Van. The state of emergency was described by the Turkish press as a 'civilian' form of martial law; although the highest authority is no longer the provincial military commander but a civilian governor, most of the restrictive measures taken under military rule remain in effect. The military courts were replaced with State Security Courts that have extraordinary judicial powers and that try all political cases.

In order to co-ordinate operations against the PKK and Kurdish-related issues in general, the government created in 1987 the new office of a co-ordinating governor of the region under the state of emergency, whose powers override those of the provincial governors. This 'super-governor', as he is usually called for short, is responsible to the Minister of the Interior, who formulates the general policy, but has wide-ranging powers to give this policy concrete form and implement it as he deems fit. The para-military 'village guards' operate under his authority. In security matters, he works closely together with the commander of the military security forces in the area. While elsewhere in the country a gradual political liberalisation was perceptible, this development did not extend into the Southeast, where every Kurdish citizen continued to be regarded as a potential enemy of the state. The repressive powers of the 'super-governor' were even extended in 1990, further curtailing basic human rights.

On 10 April 1990 the council of ministers enacted decree 413 that gave the 'super-governor' extraordinary powers to:

— censor the press by banning, confiscating and heavily fining publications that 'by misrepresenting the (government's) activities, or by printing incorrect news or analyses, seriously disturb public order in the region, cause anxiety among its inhabitants, or obstruct the security forces in the performance of their jobs';

— shut down printing plants in or outside the region that print such publications;

— exile internally persons whose activities are harmful to public order;

— control or prohibit all trade union activities such as strikes and referendums, and prevent actions such as slowdowns, occupations, and boycotts;

— transfer without prior notice state employees considered as harmful or ineffective;

— evacuate villagers for security reasons.

No legal appeal is possible against these measures.[1] It should be noted that the governor's power of censorship concerns not only the region under the state of emergency but the entire country!

After objections by the parliamentary opposition that the decree was unconstitutional on formal grounds, the government on 10 May 1990 issued the revised decrees 424 and 425, whose contents are substantially the same as those of decree 413, except that they further expand the 'super-governor's powers to exile persons (*Cumhuriyet,* 11-5-1990).

The Turkish government justified these decrees with reference to a 'threat to its national security in Southeast Anatolia'. During 1989, it declared to the Council of Europe, 136 civilians and 153 members of the security forces had been killed by 'terrorists', and in the first seven months of 1990 alone 125 civilians and 96 members of the security forces. The government also complained of a 'campaign of harmful misinformation of the public'. It is true that the guerrilla, in spite of massive military counter-insurgency measures, kept growing in scope and that the number of victims on both sides kept rising. Although most of the press was fiercely hostile to the PKK, press reports on military abuse of civilians have contributed to the disaffection of the people of the Southeast. Moreover, several newspapers had recently published interviews with the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, in his Lebanese headquarters, resulting in an improvement of his public image.

From guerrilla vanguard to mass movement?

The extensive powers given to the 'super governor' by the new decrees probably were in the first place a response to an apparent change in the PKK's strategy. During the first five years that it had carried on a guerrilla struggle it had, in spite of its methods, acquired a considerable goodwill and sympathy among Kurds in the towns. The numbers of active supporters may still have been limited, but many had come to sympathise with it — not least because of the brutal and offensive behaviour of the army, special forces and village

[1]The text of the decree was published in *Cumhuriyet,* 11-4-1990; there is an English summary in Helsinki Watch's *Destroying Ethnic Identity: The Kurds of Turkey. An Update* (September 1990). The eleven provinces affected by the decree are, besides Siirt, Mardin, Diyarbakır, Hakkari, Bingöl, Elazığ, Tunceli and Van, that were mentioned above, the contiguous provinces of Muş, Bitlis and Adıyaman. In mid-1990, two districts where there had been much guerrilla activity were made into separate provinces: Batman (previously part of Diyarbakır) and Şırnak (previously in Siirt), raising the total number to thirteen provinces.

guards. By early 1990, the PKK gave several signals that it intended to follow the example of the Palestinians and move on from guerrilla war and occasional terror to diplomacy on the one hand and urban popular rebellion on the other.

In March 1990, a large popular uprising took place in the towns of Nusaybin and Cizre. It soon was dubbed the 'Kurdish *intifadah*'. The rising was triggered by a relatively minor incident, the funeral of a young PKK activist, who had been killed by the army. He belonged to a prominent family of Nusaybin, and five to thousand people took part in the funeral, while all shops in town were closed, a traditional expression of protest. When special army units tried to disperse the cortege, people resisted and shouted slogans against the army. The troops shot at the crowd, killing one and wounding many more; around five hundred people were arrested. In protest, all shops in Nusaybin remained closed for three days. The uprising then spread to the neighbouring town of Cizre, where the shops were also closed down and there were several large demonstrations, throwing stones and challenging the security forces with Kurdish slogans. Here too, the troops fired into the crowd, killing five. The protest actions spread to several other towns, including Diyarbakır, where the shops were also closed down in solidarity with Nusaybin and Cizre.

Reports on this uprising had a great impact on public opinion in Turkey and to some extent abroad as well. The events convincingly refuted the official view that the army was only up against foreign-supported bandits who terrorised the local population. The mayor of Nusaybin was quoted as saying that in his town everybody sympathised with the PKK. The press coverage of the events represented a major psychological victory for the PKK, which seemed to be shedding its terrorist image. Most likely this was the 'campaign of harmful misinformation' to which the authorities referred.

The Kurdish political party HEP and the Human Rights Association

Around the same time, i.e. in March 1990, the first attempt was made to establish a legal Kurdish party, the HEP (People's Labour Party). Although the initiative appears not to have come from the PKK, it soon threw its weight behind the HEP. The founders of this party were eight former deputies of the Social Democrat Populist Party (SHP), who had been expelled from SHP after they had attended a Kurdish conference in Paris in October 1989. Almost all parties that were represented in Turkey's parliament had some Kurdish deputies, but these usually refrained from expressing themselves as Kurds; at best they attempted to dispense patronage to their local constituencies. The HEP was a radically different party; even though initially it could not openly call itself a Kurdish party or be very outspoken on the Kurdish question, its implicit platform was based on Kurdish nationalism.

The founding members were reinforced by Kurdish lawyers and human rights activists, who enjoyed strong popular support in the Kurdish towns because of their courageous work. That their foray into politics was not without risk was shown by the case of Vedat Aydın, a lawyer and human rights activist in Diyarbakır who became the HEP's provincial chairman. In July 1991 he was taken from his home by police officers but he never returned. The police denied that he was arrested, and a few days later his dead body was found on a garbage heap far out of town. His funeral turned into a mass demonstration of support for the HEP — and then into a blood bath as security forces started firing into the mass of demonstrators.

In October 1991 there were general elections in Turkey. The HEP, which had been established so recently that it had not yet had occasion to convene its first congress, was for this reason not allowed to take part under its own name. The SHP, which only a year before had expelled the deputies who were to found the HEP but was eager to gain Kurdish votes, then proposed the HEP to reunite for the sake of the elections. In this way, 22 candidates of HEP background were voted into parliament on the SHP ticket. When they were sworn in, two of them, Leyla Zana and Hatip Dicle, added brief phrases to the oath — Zana adding in Kurdish that she took this oath in the name of Kurdish-Turkish brotherhood, Dicle that he only took the oath because the Constitution obliged him to. This aroused a storm of protest from Turkish nationalist deputies and caused Zana and Dicle to be expelled from the SHP. Not much later, another 14 members resigned from the SHP, resulting in a 16-strong HEP parliamentary group. The public prosecutor started proceedings to have the HEP banned for separatism.

Several of the elected HEP politicians, as said, had backgrounds as human rights activists. They had been active in the Human Rights Associations (İHD), which mushroomed in Turkey since the first was established in 1986. By 1990, branches of the Human Rights Association existed in 38 of Turkey's 73 provinces. Those in Diyarbakır and Siirt were among the most active, besides the larger Istanbul and Ankara branches. The Associations provided legal aid and monitored human rights violations. Those in the Kurdish provinces soon became victims of repeated human rights violations themselves. Vedat Aydın, mentioned above, was the first among them to actually be murdered; attempts at the life of several others have since been made.

Carrot and stick: Turgut Özal's 1991 liberalisation measures

In February 1991, the government of Prime Minister Turgut Özal made a surprise announcement of liberalisation vis-à-vis Kurdish culture. The law

that had banned the use of Kurdish and other minority languages was lifted, as were the articles of the Penal Code banning communist and anti-secularist propaganda. Many political prisoners were released early as another sign of good will. The abolished laws and articles, however, were replaced by a new, comprehensive anti-terrorism law, that turned all activities that could be constructed as vaguely separatist or supportive of the PKK into crimes to be sentenced by military courts instead of civilian penal courts.

This was part of the balancing act of Prime Minister Özal, who on the one hand was permanently under pressure from the hard-line military but on the other hand knew that liberalisation was a condition for Turkey's acceptance as a full member of the western world. After Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuweit in August 1990 he had at once supported the American-initiated economic blockade of Iraq — at a great cost to Turkey — seeing the opportunity to make Turkey a major player in the wider region. He was the first Turkish politician to recognise that the Kurdish problem could not be reduced to a question of banditry and terrorism that could be solved militarily, but that a political solution was needed. His aim in allowing Kurdish-language publications and further concessions in the cultural sphere probably was to woo the majority of the Kurds away from the PKK and its radical separatist program. Massive investments in the infrastructure of the region (the famous Southeast Anatolia Project) were to bring economic growth to the Kurds, and he hinted that a certain amount of decentralisation was a possible option for the future. For those Kurds not charmed by these concessions, there was the anti-terror law.

The initial effect was dramatic. A spate of new publications appeared, several of them in Kurdish. The mainstream press and television (and especially the new private commercial channels) suddenly opened themselves to a surprisingly free debate on the Kurdish question. But all this happened in the west of the country; in Kurdistan itself the climate was different. Publications freely for sale in Istanbul often were banned by the authorities in Diyarbakır and simply possessing them could be sufficient reason for arrest. Writers and publisher soon discovered that although Kurdish was no longer formally banned, publishing something in it could be construed to be a 'terrorist' act under the anti-terror law.

Early elections in late 1991 resulted in a defeat for Özal, who had to yield his position as the Prime Minister to Süleyman Demirel, an experienced political hack but no match for the military, and entirely lacking in vision. Özal however succeeded in moving on to the presidency and thus retaining some power though not over day-to-day politics.

Large-scale military-civilian clashes: Newroz 1992 and the destruction of Şırnak

As western Turkey experienced an unprecedented liberal atmosphere, the confrontations in Kurdistan became ever grimmer. Together with the Kurdish language, Kurdish New Year also profited from the liberalisation. The government declared that, this year for the first time, Newroz could be celebrated, on condition that it not be turned into a separatist demonstration. (Incidentally, the government never acknowledged that Newroz was a Kurdish holiday; the Ministry of Culture in fact attempted to turn it into a Pan-Turk festival of alleged Central Asian origins.)

In the towns of Cizre, Şırnak and Nusaybin, all near the Syrian and Iraqi borders, the Newroz celebrations were occasions for large street demonstrations in which young people shouted pro-PKK slogans. Military and special forces opened fire on the demonstrators killing at least dozens. Violence and counter-violence continued for several days. The government initially claimed that there had been heavily armed 'terrorists' among the demonstrators and that the PKK had issued numerous arms to the urban population. An investigating delegation of the Social Democrat Populist Party (SHP, the coalition partner of Demirel's True Path Party) that later visited these towns concluded however that the security troops, provoked not by armed violence but by slogans and banners and stone-throwing children, had used excessive violence. The total number of civilians dead was around a hundred.[1]

Less than a half year later the town of Şırnak, where the PKK was known to enjoy much popular support, was largely destroyed in 48 hours of heavy gunfire, leaving 20,000 people homeless. The government claimed that the town had been attacked by PKK guerrillas who had worked all the destruction, but local people pointed out that official buildings were miraculously spared while most civilian houses were destroyed, some of them set alight by soldiers who first poured out gasoline. Later it was admitted that the army had used excessive violence, but a prior PKK raid was given as the excuse. No proof for such a raid could be adduced (no arms found, no guerrillas caught dead or alive), however, and even the Turkish press refused to believe the official account. The security troops had clearly turned from hunting down difficult-to-locate guerrillas to frontal attack on their suspected civilian sympathisers.

[1] *Gözlem, inceleme, makale, rapor ve basın açıklamalarıyla 1992 Newroz olayları* (The events of Newroz 1992: comments, investigations, essays, reports and press statements', Ankara: İHD, 1992)

The people of Şırnak were not the only ones forced to leave their homes. Increasingly the security forces forced villagers out of their villages in order to deny the PKK potential shelter. The super-governor's power to 'evacuate villagers for security reasons', granted to him by the 1991 decrees, was used more and more frequently. Often a village would be given the choice between becoming 'village guards', i.e., being forced to fight the PKK, or leaving their homes. Evacuated villages were commonly burnt down to prevent the people returning. The wave of forced evacuations first and especially hit villages in the Cizre-Şırnak region, and in the province of Hakkari further east. Then it gradually spread to other regions where there was PKK guerrilla activity or through which guerrillas had to pass in order to reach targets further inland. By the end of 1992, the pro-Kurdish weekly Yeni Ülke published a list of 360 names of villages and hamlets which it claimed had been forcibly evacuated since 1990.[1]

Towards Newroz 1993

In this context, many in Kurdistan thought that the next Newroz, to be celebrated on the 21st March 1993, would be a critical occasion where it would become clear whether the announced liberalisation would go on or that the military would confront the civilian population ever more violently. There was a real danger for a serious escalation, but hopes that a road towards a peaceful solution could be found had not yet dissipated.

Beginning in 1991 the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, had made efforts to show Turkish public opinion that he was not the dangerous and uncompromising terrorist as which the pro-government press depicted him. In a series of interviews with Turkish journalists he indicated that he no longer strove for separation from Turkey but was willing to talk about compromise solutions, and he repeatedly made offers of a cease-fire and a negotiated settlement. The government never reacted to these proposals (which would have amounted to an implicit recognition of the PKK). Then, weeks before Newroz 1993, Öcalan declared a unilateral cease-fire, announcing that his guerrillas would refrain from all offensive activities, evade contact with security forces, and only in self-defence and as a last resort would take recourse to their arms. He called upon the urban population to celebrate Newroz quietly and avoid provocations. Öcalan added that, if the government were to respond positively — for instance by making further cultural concessions to the Kurds, such as allowing Kurdish-language radio and television broadcasts — the

[1] *Yeni Ülke*, 20-12-1992. The evacuations were concentrated in the provinces of Hakkari and Şırnak (which includes Cizre), in each of which around a hundred settlements were at least partly evacuated. The other evacuations listed were in Van (26), Siirt (60), Bitlis (28), Mardin (4), Batman (19), and Diyarbakır (17).

cease-fire could be extended indefinitely. He also retracted from his initial demand of direct negotiations between the government and the PKK, suggesting that other individuals could talk to the government on behalf of the Kurds.

This unilateral cease-fire, which soon appeared to actually work, raised great hopes among the vast majority of Turkey's Kurds. Would a transition from guerrilla war to politics be possible?

Developments since Newroz 1993

The almost three years that have passed since Newroz 1993 have not witnessed any hopeful developments. In retrospect it has become clear that the death of president Özal in April 1993 marks an important change in Turkey's political climate, although the decline in human rights standards had already set in under Özal. The Özal years,[1] however, had also been a period of rapid change and significant liberalisation, in politics and culture as well as in economics, steered by Özal's vision of Turkey's future. There had, on the one hand, been severe repression of the Kurds — the village guard system was instituted under Özal, and forced evacuations of Kurdish villages were begun while he still was the prime minister — but Özal had also lifted both the ban on publishing in Kurdish and the taboo on mentioning the Kurds. Under his successors — Süleyman Demirel succeeded him as the president and Mrs. Tansu Çiller, of Demirel's True Path Party, took Demirel's place as the prime minister — the balance between repressive and liberal measures was soon lost. Mrs. Çiller soon ran out of carrots, and she completely surrendered control of the stick to the general staff.

In the first weeks that she was in office, Mrs. Çiller repeatedly spoke of the 'Basque model' in connection with the Kurdish problem, suggesting she contemplated a political solution and was willing to talk about autonomy. This attitude did not last long, however. Mrs. Çiller came under the influence of the hard-liners in the military and developed close ties with the right-wing ultra-nationalist leader Alpaslan Türkeş. She came to vehemently oppose all concessions to the Kurds, insisting that the Kurdish insurrection had to be put down at all cost. Apart from rather a number of insignificant cosmetic changes in legislation, made in 1995 to please the European parliament, there were no

[1]Turgut Özal was made prime minister by the military after the September 1980 coup, but the Özal years proper may be said to begin when his Motherland Party won a landslide victory, against the explicit wishes of the military, in the first elections after the coup, in November 1983. He remained prime minister until after his party's defeat in the March 1989 municipal elections. In November 1989 he had himself elected to the presidency, replacing General Kenan Evren. He remained in office until his death of a heart attack on April 17, 1993.

Özal-type liberal moves to balance the physical oppression in eastern Turkey. Under Mrs. Çiller there has been a steady increase in various types of human rights violations, notably extra-judicial executions, forced evacuations and destruction of villages, and the imprisonment of writers for the expression of their opinions. She personally took the initiative to lift the parliamentary immunity of deputies of the pro-Kurdish party DEP and ordered their arrest.

The cease-fire and its aftermath

To discuss the effects, or lack thereof, of the unilateral cease-fire declared by the PKK, we have to go back in time to March 1993. The cease-fire definitely had an impact on public opinion, and it was widely discussed in the press. There never was a clear response on the part of the government, although there initially were a few hopeful signs. President Özal, prime minister Süleyman Demirel and army chief Doğan Güreş met in late March to discuss ways of bringing the Kurdish guerrillas down from the mountains. The proposals discussed included, according to the Turkish press, a partial amnesty for those who surrendered, lifting the state of emergency in the Kurdish provinces, administrative decentralisation, and heavy capital investment in the region to generate economic growth. None of these, however, were to be implemented as policies, probably because the three men never reached agreement. Each followed his own course.

On April 3, Özal received Iraqi Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani, who did not attempt to hide that he intended to act as a go-between for PKK leader Öcalan. Talabani later publicly urged Öcalan to extend the period of cease-fire, and organised a joint press conference in Damascus with Öcalan, HEP chairman Ahmet Türk and Turkish Kurdistan Socialist Party leader Kemal Burkay (March 15). Burkay, one of the most moderate Kurdish leaders, had been a long-time critic of the PKK, and the joint press conference appeared to signal the de-radicalisation of the PKK. The Kurdish leaders called for an end to the military operations in Kurdistan, broadcasting in Kurdish, and the gradual transformation of Turkey into a federal republic. More modestly, they added that they were waiting for just any positive response to the unilateral cease-fire, and Öcalan added that the government would not have to negotiate directly with him and his party but that others could represent the Kurds.

Inside Turkey, several prominent journalists, reflecting liberal public opinion, called upon the government to use this opportunity and make confidence-building gestures towards the Kurds, such as granting them further cultural rights, taking HEP parliamentarians seriously as a spokespersons for Kurdish interests, abolishing the village guard system, and dissolving the 'special teams' (özel tim), the most oppressive and most hated of the security

forces. Demirel's response, however, was a publicly rejection of the Kurds' least political demand, the right of broadcasting in Kurdish. Apart from repeating his promise to lift the state of emergency (which never happened), he and his ministers made no conciliating gestures that could facilitate the Kurds the transition from guerrilla to political struggle.

The military meanwhile, who had always seen victory just around the corner, perceived the cease-fire as an indication that the PKK was with its back against the wall and were determined to inflict it a decisive final blow. Whereas Newroz had passed relatively quietly, by early April a massive military operation took place in the district of Kulp, north of Diyarbakır. The airforce bombed hamlets and mountain forests where guerrillas were suspected to be hiding; gendarmerie forces raided the villages and so much abused the civilian population that these fled in large numbers to the city of Diyarbakır.[1] Elsewhere too, the army intensified its hunt for Kurdish guerrilla fighters. The latter, where possible, avoided contact.

Nevertheless, the cease-fire held, and when the initial one-month period was over the PKK, still hoping for Özal to respond, extended it by another month. President Özal's death on April 17 dissipated hopes that a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question might be in sight, although Öcalan at once declared that it would not influence the cease-fire. (Later, Öcalan repeatedly stated his conviction that Özal had been killed or, more precisely, that his death following a heart attack was due to deliberate neglect, presumably by military opposed to the peace process). On May 25, the National Security Council[2] declared what it named a partial amnesty, a call for unconditional surrender with a promise of reduced sentences for those guerrilla fighters who surrendered.

The same day, a bloody attack took place that ended the cease-fire. PKK units near Bingöl ambushed buses in which unarmed Turkish soldiers were travelling. They killed 33 soldiers and 2 civilians and kidnapped some twenty other persons. This event gave rise to speculations that there was a split in the ranks of the PKK and that the central committee no longer controlled its fighters in the field, or that it was not PKK guerrillas who had carried out the attack. Even today, the precise circumstances of the event remain unclear.

[1] The Turkish armed forces consist of four sections: airforce, navy, land forces and gendarmerie. The gendarmerie, which is generally considered as the least professional and most brutal of them, is charged with police and internal security functions in the countryside and therefore carries out most of the operations against the PKK.

[2] The National Security Council, instituted in its present form by the generals who carried out the 1980 coup d'état to retain the army's ultimate control over politics, is the most powerful organ of the state, which can supersede government decisions. Its members are the five army chiefs (the chief of the general staff and the land forces, navy, airforce and gendarmerie commanders), the president, the prime minister and the ministers of defence, foreign affairs, and the interior.

PKK spokesmen initially claimed responsibility for the attack, but the PKK's press organs suggest that the central leadership was only informed after the event and was much annoyed by it.[1] In his first reaction, Öcalan called the event an act of 'retaliation', but he also announced his intention to continue the cease-fire. But then, two weeks later, he publicly declared the cease-fire over because there had not been a serious response and after the death of Özal there was nobody left in Ankara to talk to.

Legal Kurdish politics: HEP, DEP and HADEP

It is not surprising that the government has strictly refused to negotiate, directly or indirectly, with the PKK. But it has also refused to take the legal Kurdish parties seriously and has consistently attempted to get rid of them, thereby depriving itself of a channel of communication to an important part of the Kurdish population. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the first legal Kurdish party (which had to refrain from references to Kurds in its name in order to be legal), the HEP, was established in 1990 by former members of the Social Democrat Populist Party. This party, and later its successors DEP and HADEP, suffered much harassment by the authorities as well as a wave of assassinations by officially unidentified actors.

The HEP was not just a PKK front, as government spokespersons often claimed. It represented a broad political spectrum of Turkey's Kurds and it enjoyed a high degree of legitimacy with them. Rather than attempting to better integrate the Kurds into Turkey's political life by tolerating this party, however, the authorities harassed it and its members with court trials for 'separatism'. The public prosecutor of the Ankara State Security Court, Nusret Demiral,[2] who saw it as his chief mission in life to fight against communism and Kurdish nationalism, prepared numerous trials against individual HEP members; legal proceedings against the party itself were instituted at the Constitutional Court. On July 13 the court reached the verdict that the party had to be dissolved.

[1] In an article published in the pro-Kurdish daily *Özgür Ülke* of 24-12-1994, the well-informed Turkish journalist İsmet İmset claims that the army had identified the PKK's 'weak spots', i.e. guerrilla units that had been opposed to declaring a cease-fire. Intensive counterinsurgency operations were carried out in precisely the districts where such PKK units were known to be. A few days prior to the Bingöl incident there had been such an intensive operation in that district, in which more than ten guerrillas were killed.

[2] The State Security Courts replaced the military courts when martial law was lifted. They try offences that are considered as security-related; this includes offences under the anti-terror law. The prosecutor of the Ankara court gained national renown for his extremist views. It was the same Demiral who in 1994 indicted the Kurdish parliamentarians and demanded death sentences for them. In the December 1995 elections he showed his true colours as a candidate for the extremist right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP) of Alpaslan Türkeş.

Having foreseen this, HEP politicians as early as May 7 had established a new party, the DEP (Democracy Party). Briefly before it was banned, HEP convened an extraordinary congress, where it formally evicted its 16 deputies from the party for indisciplinary action, thus reducing their accountability for the party's policies. These deputies then joined the DEP. This (perfectly legal) manoeuvre enabled them to remain in parliament and gave the DEP its parliamentary representation.[1]

These Kurdish deputies remained isolated in parliament; most of their colleagues avoided ordinary contacts. Being a small party, they did not have much speaking time, and whenever one of them took the floor, most of the other deputies ostentatiously left. When the HEP was banned, there were not even signs of disquiet from the other parties, let alone expressions of solidarity. Most shockingly, there were hardly expressions of sympathy when the DEP deputy for Mardin province, Mehmet Sincar, was assassinated on the 4th of September 1993.

> The circumstances of Sincar's assassination and the response of the authorities could hardly have been more symbolic of the decline of democracy and human rights in Turkey and of the unwillingness of most of the political elite to accommodate the Kurds. His murderer's bullets hit him in Batman, while he was leading a DEP fact-finding mission to investigate the wave of unsolved political killings that had until that date taken the lives of 53 members and local leaders of the HEP and DEP (see the following section). Police had escorted him from Diyarbakır to Batman but then for unclear reasons lifted their protection, allowing the assassin to do his work. Together with Sincar, a member of the board of the local DEP branch, Metin Özdemir, was killed, and the deputy for Batman, Nizamettin Toguç, was wounded. It was the first time that a member of Turkey's parliament was assassinated in the streets. Nevertheless there was no state burial or other official ceremony for Sincar, and no serious efforts were made to investigate the murder, which technically remains unsolved.[2]
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> The authorities did not even allow Sincar's political friends to organise a funeral for him in Ankara (where the police had flown his body). Contrary to custom, they refused to release the body; it was kept in a morgue in Ankara and from there taken by officials directly to Sincar's birthplace Kızıltepe (near Mardin), where he was buried in the presence of no more than 8 people. Apart from the DEP deputies, only four other members of parliament, all belonging to the SHP, went to offer their condolences to Sincar's family. Leyla Zana, the DEP's sole woman parliamentarian, became the target of yet another attack when she paid a condolence visit to the Sincar family in Kızıltepe. In spite of a massive show of force by the police that day, a bomb exploded in the house where Zana stayed. (She got away unharmed herself but four other women in the house were wounded.)
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> The lack of sympathy shown the DEP by other parliamentarians reached almost absurd levels. When the DEP asked the presidency of the National Assembly to grant Mehmet Sincar's widow a state pension, this request was turned down on the grounds that Sincar "had not been killed in the course of his normal duties as a member of parliament."

[1]The Constitutional Court abrogated parliamentary membership of only one of the HEP politicians, former chairman Fehmi Işıklar. The decision surprised many, for Işıklar had not defected from the SHP when his colleagues did so and established a HEP group in parliament.

[2]Mehmet Sincar's companions in fact mentioned the name of a person whom they suspected of involvement in the murder, but he was never arrested. No significant witnesses were even heard.

Declaring that in Turkey legal possibilities for them were exhausted, the now 17 DEP deputies sought recourse with the European Conference on Security and Co-operation (ECSC). They accused Turkey of not respecting its obligations in the ECSC framework of safeguarding the rights of minorities, citing especially the systematic destruction of Kurdish villages, the series of assassinations of Kurdish personalities by 'unknown actors', and the government's handling of the Mehmet Sincar case. This complaint caused an immediate and fierce reaction among Turkish politicians and in the nationalist press; the DEP deputies were accused of high treason and seriously harming Turkey's international standing. All subsequent activities in Europe in solidarity with the DEP tended to be proof of the party's betrayal of Turkey's interests. In November, the prosecutor of the Ankara State Security Court, Nusret Demiral, announced that he had started criminal investigations of these deputies' activities abroad, and in December the attorney-general initiated proceedings to have the DEP also banned.

On the 27th of March 1994 local elections were held in Turkey. In the months preceding the elections, attacks on DEP party centres and armed assaults on its candidates further intensified. Various DEP offices were bombed and candidates assassinated. On February 18 a heavy bomb exploded in the party's Ankara headquarters, killing one and wounding 20 people. By the end of February, the party decided not to take part in the elections because of the serious lack of security for both its candidates and its electorate.[1] This meant that once again the real electoral strength of the party was not to be tested.

[1]A long list of violent assaults on party leaders and party buildings between July 1993 and February 1994, which includes dozens of murders and bombings, is given in: A. Osman Ölmez, *Türkiye siyasetinde DEP depremi* ('DEP, an earthquake in Turkey's politics'). Ankara: Doruk, 1995, pp. 358-63. The text of the statement in which the party council announced why it withdrew from the elections is to be found in the same book, pp. 354-7.

The pressure on the DEP did not decrease after it had withdrawn from the race. Prime minister Çiller repeatedly accused the DEP deputies of being in league with, and acting on orders from, the PKK. On March 2, a special session of parliament voted to lift the immunity of 5 DEP deputies and two independents (one of whom was Kurdish, one an Islamist).[1] The initiative for this unprecedented measure came from Mrs. Çiller, and indirectly probably from the military, with which she always appeared to be in complete agreement. It was, however, supported by a vast majority in parliament, which clearly showed that they considered the DEP politicians as traitors. Only a few SHP deputies came to the defence of their colleagues. That same day, State Security Court prosecutor Demiral issued a warrant for these deputies' arrest. Thus it happened that the six Kurdish deputies (and the one Islamist) were taken from parliament and at once detained, to await trial on charges for which the law prescribed the death penalty.

In the elections later that month, the turnout in the Kurdish provinces, especially in such cities as Diyarbakır, was very low. Out of just below 170,000 registered voters in Diyarbakır, only 103,000 actually voted, and 22,500 of them threw invalid votes, presumably deliberately. In other words, there were less than 50 percent valid votes. Thus the Islamic Refah (Welfare) Party became the winner, although it only received 30,000 votes, corresponding with 17.5 percent of the registered voters.[2] The Refah Party made the most impressive showing throughout in these elections — which caused much concern in Europe and lowered the priority of human rights in Turkey, and especially of the Kurdish question, on the agenda of most European politicians. Few appeared to be aware of the fact that the Refah Party, as the only serious outsider taking part in the elections, owed many votes to DEP supporters, who were unwilling to vote for any of the establishment parties.

Meanwhile the trial against the DEP before the Constitutional Court continued, and on June 16, 1994 the party was banned. Party leaders had decided not to leave this party in time (as they had done with the HEP) but to defend it to the very end. This implied that the DEP deputies who still were present in parliament would have to give up their seats, and thereby loose their

[1]These were DEP deputies Hatip Dicle (Diyarbakır deputy and party chairman), Ahmet Türk (Mardin), Leyla Zana (Diyarbakır), Sırrı Sakık (Muş), Orhan Doğan (Şırnak), independent Kurdish deputy Mahmut Alınak (Şırnak) and the independent islamist deputy Hasan Mezarcı (Istanbul). Alınak had been a DEP member but had resigned from the party before procedures against it had started. The case of Mezarcı had no relationship with the Kurdish question; he was accused of insulting Atatürk.

[2]Calculated from the official election results as reprinted in Ölmez, *DEP depremi*, p. 421. It should be noted, moreover, that the registered voters in Diyarbakır did not include all persons of voting age. Many people had recently settled in Diyarbakır to escape from the war raging in the countryside, and they were not generally registered as voters here.

immunities, as soon as the party was banned. Rather than also facing a trial for separatist activities and the risk of the death penalty, a group decided to leave for western Europe before the 16th of June.[1] Two others, Sedat Yurtdaş and Selim Sadak, declared that they preferred to share the fate of their colleagues who already were in prison waiting for their trials. Prosecutor Demiral ordered their arrests too.

Demiral brought charges against the eight detained Kurdish deputies under article 125 of the Turkish Penal Code, for which there is only one sanction, the death penalty. Each of them was accused of contacts with the PKK or of praising the PKK's guerrilla fighters. The trial invited great international attention but this hardly helped the DEP deputies. In December 1994 the court gave its verdict; the choice between death penalty and acquittal was avoided by applying another law than article 125. Five of the deputies were sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, one to seven and a half years, the other two to three and a half years and a high fine each. President Demirel declined using his privilege of pardoning them.

Even before the ban of the DEP, another pro-Kurdish party was established to succeeded it, the HADEP (People's Democracy Party, founded in May 1994). The HADEP appears to represent a somewhat narrower political spectrum than its predecessors, for former HEP politician İbrahim Aksoy (who represented one particular wing within the HEP) soon was to establish another legal pro-Kurdish party, the DDP (Party for Democracy and Change), and there were attempts to establish yet another, moderate, pro-Kurdish party. These other parties remained marginal, however. The HADEP was subjected to the same harassment's as its predecessors. It became the first of the pro-Kurdish parties to actually test its electoral strength, in the December 1995 parliamentary elections. With only 4.8 percent of the total vote, it remained far below the threshold of 10 percent, but in several of the south-eastern provinces it became, in spite of numerous official and unofficial hindrances, the largest party.

[1]The deputies Mahmut Kılınç, Remzi Kartal, Zübeyir Aydar, Ali Yiğit and Nizamettin Toğuç and honorary chairman Yaşar Kaya left for Brussels, where they set up the European representation of the party. Deputy Na'if Güneş, who had earlier gone to Germany, joined them there. Three other deputies had in fact left the party before procedures were started against it or had not formally joined it after their 'expulsion' from the HEP, and could therefore hold on to their seats as independent deputies.

Political assassinations by 'unknown actors'

In the four years that the HEP and DEP existed, no less than 64 of their leaders and members were killed.[1] The police authorities never found their murderers, and in many cases these in fact appear to have acted with connivance or worse of the police or intelligence services. The first of these victims was the Diyarbakır lawyer Vedat Aydın, who in July 1991 had been taken from his home by men whom he recognised as policemen and whose body was found a few days later on a garbage heap. In the case of the assassination of DEP deputy Mehmet Sincar, the police have refused to act on eyewitness accounts that identified the alleged murderer; DEP sources accuse the police of direct involvement and claim that not a single serious witness has been heard by the police.[2]

In many of the other cases too, there are indications that appear to implicate the police in the killings. Many of the killings appear to have been carried out by death squads acting on instructions or in co-operation with the police or the intelligence body of the gendarmerie, JİTEM. The latter service was only established in the late 1980s but soon became notorious for its cloak-and-dagger operations and for its involvement in the heroin trade. Ironically, the first commander of JİTEM, Ahmet Cem Ersever, was himself killed by unknown assailants in November 1993 after he had fallen out with his erstwhile comrades-in-arms and had gone public with criticism of the conduct of the war.[3]

DEP members were only one of the categories of persons targeted by the death squads that have been active in eastern Turkey during the past few years. In 1991, a total of 31 persons were killed by 'unknown actors', in 1992 not less than 360.[4] The peak year was 1993, when according to the Human Rights Association (İHD) of Turkey, 510 persons fell victim to such assassinations. Not all of the victims were Kurds, but a considerable number were.[5] Besides DEP members, other locally influential persons of Kurdish

[1]Their names are listed in Ölmez, *DEP depremi,* pp. 465-6.

[2]The authorities state, however, that 12 arrests were made in connection with this murder. Sincar's widow has accused the police forces of responsibility for the murder and brought the case before the European Human Rights Commission.

[3]Ersever approached journalists when he feared being assassinated, apparently in the hope that public exposure would save his skin. The interviews he gave yield tantalising glimpses of the world of counter-insurgency and its links with ordinary crime. See Soner Yalçın, *Binbaşı Ersever'in itirafları* ('Major Ersever's confessions', Istanbul: Kaynak, 1994) and İsmet İmset's articles in *Turkish Daily News* of November 6, 10 and 18, 1993.

[4]Figures for 1991 and 1992 compiled by the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey.

[5]Cumulative figures on human rights violations in 1993 released by the Human Rights Association (İHD). The figures quoted here do not include victims of assaults by guerrilla units or security forces, and they also exclude disappearances, extra-judicial executions and deaths under torture.

nationalist persuasions and human rights activists were prime targets. And so were journalists and distributors of the pro-Kurdish press. In 1992, 9 journalists and correspondents, and 4 distributors, of the pro-Kurdish press alone were assassinated;[1] in 1993, according to İHD figures, a total of 6 journalists and 8 distributors.[2]

In Diyarbakır and Batman, numerous people were allegedly killed by members of the militant Muslim Hizbullah movement, a section of which became embroiled in a sort of blood feud with the PKK. The Hizbullah ('army of God'), most of whose members are also Kurdish, was originally firmly opposed to the existing political order, though for other reasons than the PKK. The section that came to clashes with the PKK, however, appears to have offered its co-operation to counter-insurgency operatives in the police and/or gendarmerie force. Turbaned, bearded and in baggy trousers (the conservative Muslim outfit), and armed with sticks and butcher's knives, they frequently attacked meetings of young Kurdish nationalists and raided cafes and other gathering places. Many persons in these towns were assassinated with the butcher's knives, which were almost as a signature; nevertheless Hizbullah members were rarely arrested, even those whom witnesses said they had recognised in broad daylight. Public opinion became convinced that these Hizbullah killers acted with connivance or even on instructions from the cloak-and-dagger departments of the counter-insurgency forces, popularly known in Turkey as 'Kontrgerilla'. For this reason the pro-Kurdish and leftist press re-baptised them as 'Hizb-i Kontra', a name that soon became popular. According to reports in the leftist press, at least some Hizbullah members got firearm practice at a police shooting range in Diyarbakır.[3]

The assassinations became a grave national political issue when a number of prominent (non-Kurdish) secularist journalists and politicians were assassinated by 'unknown actors', believed to be Muslim fundamentalists. In response to the assassination of well-known journalist Uğur Mumcu in January 1993, parliament appointed a commission to investigate the entire phenomenon of these unsolved murders. It took the commission 20 months to complete its investigations, but its report was never officially released. Although it cautiously avoids drawing controversial conclusions, the conservative members of the commission believed that the report would be too damaging to the prestige of the state and therefore stopped its publication. Much later, the commission's draft report was published by a small leftist

[1]Serdar Çelik, *Teure Wahrheit: Der Bericht von Özgür Gündem 1993.* Köln: GNN Verlag, 1994, pp. 37-9.

[2]"Human Rights Violations in 1993", summary statistics published by İHD in January 1994; Helsinki Watch, "Turkey: censorship by assassination continues" (New York, February 1994).

[3]See for instance the report in left-wing weekly *Gerçek,* 14 May 1994, pp. 6-10, allegedly based on confessions of a former Hizbullah member.

party.[1] In spite of its cautious formulations, the commission obliquely accused state organs of involvement in many of the 'unknown actor' murders.

In several cases it could be established that the 'unknown actors' of a murder were in fact village guards (korucu), who were confident that they could kill with impunity. In one case where the village guards were apprehended after a killing, they in fact claimed to have acted on instructions from the gendarmerie. In the case of the Hizbullah, the commission also strongly suggested that there was at least connivance, if not more direct involvement, of police forces in their murders. "Whereas the PKK, which has established its urban committees, is not capable of carrying out any actions in the city by day, the so-called Hizbullah activists, on the other hand, freely carry out (violent) actions in broad daylight without being arrested. This causes (the local people) to suspect the state of being involved, and the PKK successfully fans these suspicions."[2]

The commission identified yet another type of assassin allegedly acting on police or gendarmerie instructions, the 'confessant' (itirafçı). The term 'confessant' refers to former Kurdish or leftist activists who have made a full confession and who, in exchange for a reduction of their sentence, co-operate with the police authorities. One of these 'confessants', Alattin Kanat, who is mentioned by name in the commission's report, appears to have carried out several assassinations while he officially was in prison. The report only mentions that this man in fact was a few times allowed to leave prison, but the respected newspaper Cumhuriyet reported actual assassinations carried out by him during such brief 'vacations'. His death sentence was thus commuted to life imprisonment, and hence further reduced to only a few years. The commission, without adding a comment of its own, noted the widespread belief among the population of south-eastern Turkey that many of the unsolved murders were committed by such 'confessants'.[3] After DEP deputy Mehmet Sincar was murdered, his companions reported that they had seen Alattin Kanat with the police that day, and that they were convinced that he was involved in the murder.[4]

Since 1993, the frequency of assassinations by 'unknown actors' gradually declined. Whereas the Human Rights Association gave a total number of 510 for 1993, the comparable figures for 1994 and 1995 were 423 and 99, respectively. This decline does not reflect, however, a general

[1] *T.B.B.M. faili meçhul cinayetler araştırma komisyonu raporu [taslak]* ('Draft report of the parliamentary commission to investigate murders by unknown actors', Istanbul: Birleşik Sosyalist Parti, July 1995.
[2] *T.B.M.M. faili meçhul cinayetler araştırma komisyonu raporu*, p. 79.
[3] *T.B.M.M. faili meçhul cinayetler araştırma komisyonu raporu*, p. 98.
[4] Ölmez, *DEP depremi*, pp. 286-7, 292.

improvement in the human rights situation and in public security in south-eastern Turkey. Much of it is due to a gradual relaxation of the conflict between the Hizbullah and PKK sympathisers. Another reason of the decline no doubt is that there are fewer candidates for assassination left. In this respect the assassinations of 1992 and 1993 have been quite successful: There are fewer human rights activists left in the region, and they operate much more cautiously now. There are practically no journalists reporting from the region — they have been under threat from both sides in the war[1] — and the pro-Kurdish press practically has no distribution in the region anymore. Popular support for the PKK, voiced very openly in towns like Diyarbakır in 1993, has become much muted now.

Village evacuations

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the considerable powers of the 'super-governor' were in April 1990 extended to include, inter alia, the power to 'evacuate villagers for security reasons.' These powers have been used very extensively — although it is not at all clear who makes the real decisions about village evacuations and destructions. It is true that they started in the region under the authority of the 'super-governor', i.e. the provinces in which the state of emergency is in force, but by now hundreds of villages in other provinces have also been evacuated, most recently even as far west as Sivas.

Forced evacuations of villages had been reported before. In the 1920s and 1930s deportations were one of the means by which the government strove to assimilate the Kurds to Turkish culture; many of those deported, incidentally, were later allowed to return to their regions of origin. During the 1980s, several isolated cases of forced evacuations from villages were mentioned in the press, all apparently directly related with counter-insurgency measures. After 1990, however, deportations, often combined with destruction of the deserted villages, became more systematic. A pro-Kurdish source lists the names of 350 settlements that were at least partly evacuated and/or destroyed in the years 1990-92. More than half of these were in the two frontier provinces (bordering on Iraq) of Hakkari and Şırnak, another 85 in the

[1] In October 1993 the PKK informed journalists that, because of their overall pro-state attitudes and their lack of solidarity with the much-harassed pro-Kurdish newspaper *Özgür Gündem*, they were no longer allowed to work in the region and had to close down their newspapers' offices there. They took this warning seriously enough and left. See: Yılmaz Odabaşı, *Güneydoğu'da gazeteci olmak* ("Being a journalist in the south-east"), Istanbul: Kaynak, 1994, pp. 159-77. Odabaşı, who worked in Diyarbakır for several leftist papers, also reports extensively on the pressure on journalists from the side of the authorities, the secret police and the *Hizbullah*.

adjoining provinces of Van and Siirt.[1] In the following years, evacuations spread further inland as well as to the Northeast, reflecting the fact that guerrilla activity took place in an ever larger area.

For obvious reasons there are no really reliable statistics on these evacuations. The pro-Kurdish press has over the years regularly printed lists of affected villages, interviews with evacuees and occasionally with former soldiers; the human rights associations have compiled their own lists on the basis of information from local sources. These lists are the best data readily available but they are not very satisfactory. Villages and hamlets are lumped together; because different hamlets belonging to the same village may have been evacuated on different dates, because in some villages evacuees returned to their village until they were evicted again, and because often the first time only a part of the village is evacuated and the rest on a later occasion, there are double counts. On the other hand, there are undoubtedly other cases that have remained unnoticed. Nevertheless, the government has not contested the numbers of affected villages as given by the Human Rights Associations of Turkey (İHD), it has only given other explanations of the evacuations. Not long after the İHD had published the figure of 874 villages and hamlets partially or completely evacuated in 1983, the Minister of the Interior confirmed to parliament that so far 871 villages and hamlets, i.e. practically the same number, had been evacuated in whole or in part. Unlike the İHD, however, he pointed to PKK violence and the economic situation as the causes.[2]

There are indications, however, that the evacuation of isolated Kurdish mountain villages is carried out as a deliberate and systematic government policy — although its implementation may vary according to the whims of military commanders and even 'village guards'. In the autumn of 1993 a letter that President Özal had written to Prime Minister Demirel two months before his death appeared in the press.[3] In this document he outlined his vision for a solution of the Kurdish question. Massive capital outlays to stimulate the regional economy were one aspect of his project, another the systematic resettlement, in stages, of the entire population of the mountain districts in other parts of the country. It is true that the Çiller government has deviated considerably from Özal's policies — but mostly in following a harder line vis-à-vis the Kurds. The step-by-step evacuation of mountain villages was carried

[1] *Yeni Ülke*, 20-12-1992. The other evacuated villages were in Bitlis (north of Siirt) and the triangle Batman-Diyarbakır-Mardin further west. Some of the settlements listed were proper villages, others probably small hamlets (*mezra*) that have no independent administrative status.

[2] See the report *Forced evictions and destruction of villages in Dersim (Tunceli) and the western part of Bingöl, Turkish Kurdistan, September - November 1994* (Amsterdam: Netherlands Kurdistan Society, 1995), p. 7.

[3] *Hürriyet*, 12-11-1993. The authenticity of this political testament of Özal has not, as far as I am aware, been contested.

through energetically. By the end of 1994, the Minister of the Interior informed parliament that during his period in office, i.e. in 1992-94, a total of 2,215 villages and hamlets had been evacuated. As for the evicted inhabitants, the government had provided alternative housing to 2,424 families.[1] In other words, the government had given some support to one family per evacuated village!

The stories told by evacuees are all very similar.[2] Villages suspected of sympathising with and giving cover to the PKK were the first to be evacuated and destroyed. Soldiers, special teams or 'village guards' came to the village and told the villagers that they had to leave within a certain time or else face reprisals ranging from loss of property to death. Outlying hamlets were destroyed and all food stocks and even crops burned, so that they would not be of use to the guerrillas. Attempts to receive indemnity usually failed. In many cases a village was given the choice between becoming 'village guards' (which meant taking active part in military operations against the PKK) or evacuation. Quite possibly a large number of these paramilitary guards have only signed up in order not to lose their land and property.

Evacuations, followed by destruction of the deserted houses, were carried out more systematically than before during massive operations in the province of Tunceli during the autumn of 1994 and most of 1995.[3] This was a region in which the PKK was relatively late in gaining a popular following, no doubt in part because it was culturally very different from the Kurdish districts properly speaking. The population of Dersim are Alevis, followers of a syncretic religion very different from the Sunni Islam to which most Kurds adhere. The authorities hoped keep the Kurdish Alevis detached from the Kurdish movement by emphasising that they had more in common with Turkish Alevis than with Sunni Kurds. The PKK was doing the reverse and attempted to convince the Alevis that the origins of their religion were Kurdish. The military operations in Tunceli were the ultimate consequence of the struggle between government and PKK for the identity of the (Kurdish) Alevis.

[1] Minister Nahit Menteşe's answers to questions by members of parliament, quoted in daily Özgür Ülke, 10-12-1994.

[2] Interviews with evacuees in Diyarbakır in April 1993, Adana in May 1994 and various places in western Turkey in August 1995; and the following reports: *İHD Şube ve temsilciliklerinin Olağanüstü Hal bölge raporu 1991* ('Report on the region under emergency rule by the İHD branches and representations', Istanbul, 1992), pp. 73-82; Yakılan köylerden bir kesit ('A cross section of the burnt-down villages', Ankara: İnsan Hakları Derneği, 1994); International Association for Human Rights in Kurdistan, *Annual Report 1993* (Bremen, 1994), pp. 53-54; Human Rights Watch - Helsinki "Forced displacement of ethnic Kurds from south-eastern Turkey" (New York, 1994); Amnesty International, "Turkey: a policy of denial" (London, 1995).

[3] This wave of forced evacuations has been better documented than others. See the SNK report *Forced evictions and destruction of villages in Dersim (Tunceli) and the western part of Bingöl.*

It was an almost inevitable consequence that this struggle would spread to other Alevi-inhabited areas. In 1995 a series of similar village evacuations took place in the largely Turkish province of Sivas. The population of this province is mixed Sunni and Alevi, but the Alevis live mostly in mountain villages. It was these mountain villages, some of them Kurdish-speaking, others Turkish, that were subjected to much harassment and ultimately evacuated. At night soldiers dressed as guerrillas would come and force people to give them food, claiming to be PKK militants; they would return the next day and punish the villagers for giving aid to the PKK. Incidents like these, which appear to have been taking place for some time, gave rise to 'spontaneous' migration which was not at once noticed and suddenly came to public attention in early 1996.[1]

Forced evacuations and 'spontaneous' migration because the guerrilla war made normal life impossible in many districts resulted in enormous numbers of internally displaced persons. The US State Department's report on human rights in Turkey in 1995 gives an estimate of 2 million displaced people. Many of them live with relatives in the now highly overcrowded cities of south-east Turkey; numerous others live in squalid neighbourhoods of the large cities of south and west Turkey. Unemployment rates among them are extremely high, housing conditions are abominable, many children do not go to school. The migrants complain of negative discrimination by employers, police and other government services.

On several occasions during the past two years, government officials have spoken of plans to resettle the displaced villagers in new 'centre villages' in their province of origin. The government has in fact made efforts to find European subsidies for such resettlement projects. Like the systematic evacuation and destruction of villages in 'security zones', these projected 'centre villages' are again strongly reminiscent of Iraq's Kurdish policies of the 1980s. The experience of the Iraqi Kurds — where, as it was only discovered years later, this policy culminated in a genuine genocide[2] — should be enough to raise serious doubts about the 'centre villages'. The 'collective villages' where Iraq dumped its displaced Kurds did not allow of any economic activities; the people became completely dependent on the benevolence of the government. Similarly it is not well conceivable how displaced villagers could make their living and maintain their way of life in high-security 'centre villages' far away from their plots of agricultural land.

[1] A number of such cases were reported in the Turkish mainstream press in January and February 1996. Local people claimed that up to eighty villages in Sivas had recently been evacuated under military pressure. A detailed list of the villages is given in the pro-Kurdish daily *Özgür Politika*, 23-1-1996; see also the reports in the weekly edition of respected mainstream newspaper *Cumhuriyet*, 9-2-1996 and 16-2-1996.

[2] In 1988, between 50,000 and 100,000 Kurds were systematically killed. See Human Rights Watch / Middle East, *Iraq's crime of genocide: the Anfal campaign against the Kurds* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

'Thought offences': punishment of writers and journalists

The Çiller years represented a noticeable step back for the freedom of expression. In the field of publishing too, Özal's mix of liberalism and repression was replaced by undiluted repression. Many hundreds of publications were banned, numerous writers and journalists were sentenced to prison terms for writing undesirable — but in hardly any case subversive — things. Mehdi Zana, a former mayor of Diyarbakır and the husband of imprisoned DEP parliamentarian Leyla Zana, was arrested in May 1994 and sentenced to four years imprisonment for a testimony he gave before the Human Rights sub-commission of the European parliament in December 1992. World famous novelist Yaşar Kemal, whom no one can suspect of separatist sympathies, was sentenced to a jail term for an article he published in the German weekly Der Spiegel. Sociologist Ismail Beşikçi, the first Turkish academic to speak openly about the Kurds and a prolific polemical author, was given a whole series of prison sentences adding up to over a hundred years.

Criticism from abroad put some pressure on the government to make at least some semblance of reform in order for Turkey to be admitted to the European Customs Union (which the Çiller government considered as highly desirable). Neither in the government nor in parliament was there, however, a majority to be found that favoured liberalisation. In October 1995 finally a few relatively insignificant legal changes were made, including the modification of article 8 of the anti-terror law, under which most writers had been prosecuted. Cases that had been tried already were reviewed, and as a result dozens of writers were released. This proved to be enough to satisfy the European parliament, which in December 1995 agreed to Turkey's membership of the customs union. It did little to improve the situation, however, for not only can this article 8 still be used to send writers to jail for expressing even non-subversive opinions but there are several other articles under which they can be prosecuted. In March 1996, Yaşar Kemal was again sentenced to 20 months imprisonment, and the appearances are that hundreds of writers and intellectuals will soon follow.

The state of emergency

In spite of repeated promises to the contrary, the state of emergency is still in force in most of the Kurdish provinces. An entire generation has by now grown up there which has not known life under normal conditions. Martial law was declared in the most important Kurdish provinces in 1978 or 1979, and it remained in effect until 1987, when it was replaced by the state of emergency. Ordinary economic life is disrupted but a war economy flourishes

and has given rise to powerful vested interests that wish no change. This lasting abnormal state cannot but have its destructive effects on social life and on the individual personality. It is also likely to further exacerbate the differences existing between the Kurdish provinces and western Turkey and thereby strengthen the population's feeling of being different — thus producing precisely the effect it was intended to prevent.

TURKEY, EUROPE AND THE KURDS AFTER THE CAPTURE OF ABDULLAH ÖCALAN[1]

The capture of a 'baby-killer'

Handcuffed and blindfolded, waking up from what looked like a drug-induced sleep, Abdullah Öcalan told the masked Turkish security men in the little plane that was taking him from Kenya to Turkey that he really loved the Turkish people, that he was willing to co-operate and that he could be very useful to them. The video images of this humiliating scene, hurriedly and very visibly edited so that doubts remained about the context of Öcalan's words, were shown again and again in news programs of the major television stations all over the world. The images created an upsurge of nationalistic fervour in Turkey and caused outrage among Kurds of all political affiliations, including Öcalan's fiercest opponents. These images — of which more were to follow — had the obvious intention of destroying Öcalan's charisma by showing him as a broken and weak man, ready to betray his cause. In an obvious effort to counteract any pity or sympathy that Öcalan's plight might provoke, the Turkish media invariably referred to him as 'baby-killer' and 'terrorist chief' in each news item that mentioned him.

One of the effects of this propaganda offensive was that the Kurds closed ranks; almost every Kurd felt personally humiliated and to some extent identified with the plight of Öcalan. Even supporters of Iraq's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which was at war with Öcalan's PKK, spoke of a black day for all Kurds. They might have applauded if Öcalan had been put on trial somewhere in Europe or had been forced into retirement in some far-away country. When he was captured and surrendered to Turkey, however, they perceived that this was the result of an anti-Kurdish conspiracy involving the USA, Israel and, at least indirectly, western Europe.

The Kurdish response to Öcalan's capture showed clearly to what extent the Kurdish national movement has become a transnational phenomenon. Within hours after the news of Öcalan's arrest had broken, groups of radical PKK activists occupied Greek diplomatic missions all over Europe. The occupiers soon received moral support from hundreds, then thousands of other

[1]This is a revised and updated version of an article that was first published in German as "Die Türkei, Europa und die Kurden nach der Festnahme von Abdullah Öcalan", in the Summer 1999 issue of *INAMO, Informationsprojekt Naher und Mittlerer Osten*, Nummer 18, pp. 9-15.

Kurds gathering in front of the embassies and consulates. In some cities, apparently unorganized Kurdish demonstrators went on rampage, throwing stones at Turkish clubs and shops and generally causing considerable damage to property. Publicly announced demonstrations later the same week were more tightly controlled by the organizers and passed without serious incidents, although the demonstrators' rage and their anger with Europe were palpable. Large demonstrations not only took place in western Europe and Russia, but also in the large Kurdish cities of Iraq and Iran. The Turkish consulate in Urmia (Iran) was under siege for days, and so many people turned out in the streets of Sulaymaniya and Arbil that Kurdish observers wryly commented that by being captured by Turkey Öcalan had become more of a national symbol to the Iraqi Kurds than their own leaders. In Turkey itself, there were protest actions in the Kurdish provinces as well as in the districts of Istanbul with a dense Kurdish population.

Öcalan's detention in the heavily guarded prison island of İmralı in the Sea of Marmara, in mid-February 1999 ended an Odyssey that had begun five months earlier when he was forced to leave Syria, the country that had long been the PKK's major foreign sponsor. After a brief covert stay in Russia — allegedly as the guest of nationalist and communist politicians and to the great dismay of the government when his presence was discovered — he turned up in Italy. His two-month stay there had a high profile, caused a serious diplomatic row between Turkey and Italy, and resulted in unprecedented press coverage of Turkey's Kurdish question, much of it sympathetic to the Kurds. Öcalan himself was too hot a potato for Europe to handle, however; none of the relevant European countries was willing to either offer him asylum or put him on trial.

The PKK, and the Kurds in general, held Europe responsible for Öcalan's ultimate capture in Kenya and surrender to Turkey. Their anger with Europe was a reflection of the high expectations that had been raised by Öcalan's arrival in Europe only a few months earlier. Öcalan had lived in Syria for almost two decades, and his movement had become very dependent on the Asad regime. Whatever the reasons for his departure from Syria, it appeared to strengthen the hand of those Kurds who believed that the Kurdish question in Turkey could only be solved if Europe became more actively involved.

Syria and the PKK

Many Kurds thought that Öcalan's departure from Syria, even though it was not entirely voluntary, was a good thing. Few had any illusions as to the reasons why Syria supported the PKK. Besides being a trump card in Syria's ongoing conflicts with Turkey over the province of Hatay (formerly known to

Europe as Alexandrette) and over control of Euphrates water, the PKK helped Hafiz Asad's regime to keep Syria's own Kurds quiet and to project its influence into northern Iraq. Kurds constitute between 8 and 10 percent of Syria's population, and by successfully mobilising many of them in support of its own struggle, the PKK kept them from expressing their (very justified) grudges against the regime.[1] Significant numbers of Syrian Kurds allegedly became PKK guerrilla fighters, taking part in action inside Turkish Kurdistan. The PKK has been accused of acting inside Syria as an extension of the Syrian intelligence services, cracking down on Kurdish political dissidents. In Iraqi Kurdistan too, some of the PKK's actions — e.g. its attack on the KDP in 1995 — appeared to reflect Syrian interests as much as its own.[2]

Syria had an interest in supporting the PKK to the extent that the latter was actually fighting the Turkish state; it had little reason to persuade the PKK to reach a peaceful settlement with Turkey. If the PKK wished, as it had been saying since 1993, to make a transition from armed resistance to political negotiations, its dependence on Syria probably represented a serious hindrance. Some Kurds perceived yet another danger. In the 1970s, the Iraqi Kurdish movement of Mulla Mustafa Barzani had become so dependent on Iran (and, indirectly, on the USA) that the entire movement collapsed within weeks after the shah had reached a favourable agreement with Saddam Hussein and cut off his support.

The military weakening of the PKK may have been one reason why Syria lost its enthusiasm for the party, increasing international (especially American) pressure and the Turkish threat of armed intervention was another. Syria wished to be removed from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism, which the US made great efforts to isolate politically and economically. It had always denied harbouring Öcalan and the PKK, but when a high-powered Turkish delegation visited Damascus in 1992 it went further and signed a protocol naming the PKK an 'outlawed organization' and pledging co-operation against terrorism.[3] The major PKK training camp in the Syrian-controlled Bekaa valley in eastern Lebanon was dismantled (but smaller camps remained in operation). Syria appears to have ordered Öcalan to keep a low profile and decrease the visibility of his organisation, and it is probably from that time on

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[1] On Syria's treatment of its Kurds (many of whom are not even recognised as citizens), see: David McDowall, *The Kurds of Syria* (London: Kurdish Human Rights Project, 1998).

[2] See: Michiel Leezenberg, "Irakish-Kurdistan seit dem zweiten Golfkrieg", in: Carsten Borck et al. (ed.), *Ethnizität, Nationalismus, Religion und Politik in Kurdistan* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1997), 45-78, at 72-4.

[3] The delegation was led by Interior Minister İsmet Sezgin, accompanied by General Esref Bitlis, who as the head of the gendarmerie co-ordinated the military operations against the PKK. The visit was backed up with the threat of Turkish air operations against the Bekaa valley. See: İsmet G. İmset, *The PKK, a report on separatist violence in Turkey* (Ankara: Turkish Daily News publications, 1992), pp. 175-9.

that it has regularly pressured him to find a permanent residence in another country. According to sources close to the PKK, American pressure on Syria to give up its support for the PKK kept increasing over the past years, and the PKK was told it had long overstayed its welcome. Weapon rattling by Turkey and the threat of a military invasion into Syria, in October 1998, provided the final push.

Turkey's other neighbours and the PKK

The PKK was not exclusively dependent on Syria but had successfully diversified its foreign sponsors. It has had camps in northern Iraq as well as in north-western Iran since the early 1980s. In the 1990s it significantly stepped up its presence there, moving more people from Syria and Lebanon to guerrilla camps in the zones controlled by Mas'ud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) as well as across the Iranian border. Turkey has carried out numerous raids and a number of major invasions (with tens of thousands of troops and heavy material) into northern Iraq but never succeeded in destroying the PKK's presence there.[1] The PKK had gained a measure of popularity among Iraqi Kurds as well, and this kept growing because the Iraqi Kurdish parties gradually alienated much of the civilian population by their bickering, which developed into an open war in 1994.

Turkey's support for American efforts to make peace between the feuding Iraqi Kurdish parties has been conditional upon the latter's preventing PKK activities in the region. In 1995 the PKK declared war on Barzani's KDP, and it has since then intermittently been fighting them, thereby losing much of the goodwill it had gained earlier among the Iraqi Kurds. Presently the largest PKK camps are allegedly in the district of Makhmur, a part of Iraqi Kurdistan south of the 36th parallel that is not controlled by KDP or PUK but by the central government. In spite of combined efforts of the KDP and the Turkish army, a number of smaller camps in very mountainous terrain close to the Turkish and Iranian borders are still operational, however.

In other neighbour countries — Iran, Armenia, Russia, Greece and (southern) Cyprus — the PKK is supported by powerful interest groups though not at the government level. Iran is perhaps the most complicated case,

[1]The first raid was carried out as early as 1983, in the framework of an agreement with Iraq allowing the armed forces of both countries to cross up to 30 kilometres into the other in hot pursuit of guerrilla fighters. Iraq later abrogated this agreement. Since the creation of a safe haven under international protection in northern Iraq, Turkey has established a military intelligence network there and carried out a number of major military operations, most recently in October 1998 (as a part of the threat against Syria), in February 1999 (immediately after Öcalan's arrest), and again in September 1999.

because of the existence of rival authority structures within the state itself. On the one hand, the Iranian government has repeatedly exchanged captured PKK activists for members of Iranian opposition groups arrested in Turkey; on the other it is hardly a secret that the PKK organisation has contacts at high levels (allegedly with the Revolutionary Guards) and has in the past received significant military assistance. In Armenia, there is a natural sympathy with the Kurdish struggle against the Turkish state. The government has an interest in accommodation with Turkey, but important opposition groups appear to lend the PKK concrete support. In Russia as well as Greece, it is powerful nationalist groups with army and intelligence links that supported the PKK in various ways and that have in the past months seriously embarrassed their governments by enabling Öcalan to enter these countries clandestinely.

Between guerrilla war and diplomacy

Öcalan's arrival in Italy was welcomed by many Kurds, both within and outside the PKK. The general perception was that, in spite of Turkey's furious reaction, Öcalan's residing in western Europe would in the long run bring a negotiated settlement nearer. (For those in favour of a peaceful settlement, Italy was certainly a more promising residence for Öcalan than any of Turkey's hostile neighbours.) The balance of forces between the 'military' and the 'political' tendencies in the PKK leadership was likely to be swung in favour of the latter. Being in Europe, the PKK leadership would have to give up the claim of being the sole representative of the Kurdish people, accept other spokespersons for the Kurds and perhaps even become more pluralistic itself. Leaders of rival Kurdish movements, such as Kemal Burkay of the Socialist Party of Kurdistan, publicly welcomed Öcalan and urged the Italian government to grant him asylum.[1] Kurdish personalities of a wide range of political persuasions — including opponents of the PKK — accepted Öcalan's invitation to come and see him in Rome for discussions on possible future strategies. Öcalan and his collaborators announced plans for convening a Kurdish national congress at which all parties and organisations were to be represented. Apart from the Iraqi KDP, almost all Kurdish parties signalled their interest in such a conference.

[1]Burkay's PSK is, after the PKK, the best organised Kurdish party in Europe. It organised the first Kurdish workers' association, KOMKAR, which still has a very large and loyal membership. The PSK rejects armed struggle and was long the severest Kurdish critic of the PKK. Burkay wrote in the early eighties a lengthy critique of the PKK's ideology of violence, which he denounced as terrorism (Kemal Burkay, *Devrimcilik mi terörizm mi? PKK üzerine* (Özgürlük Yayınları, 1983). In 1993 he reconciled himself with Öcalan when the latter announced the PKK's first unilateral cease-fire and even joined Öcalan's press conference, but the relations never became cordial.

It was not exactly as a successful guerrilla leader seeking to shed his terrorist image that Öcalan came to Europe, however, although this was what a significant number of his followers wanted him to do. Turkey's changed counter-insurgency techniques — which under prime minister Çiller and chief of staff Doğan Güreş included the evacuation and destruction of thousands of villages and the use of death squads targeting Kurdish community leaders, lawyers and politicians[1] — had deprived the PKK guerrilla fighters of most of their civilian support. Whereas in the early 1990s the PKK was, through local committees, virtually in control of such towns as Nüsaybin, Cizre and Shirnak, entire wards of Diyarbakır and other large cities, as well as large rural districts, it had by 1995 lost much of its civilian infrastructure and was reduced to a purely military organisation. The physical removal of the village population on which the guerrilla had depended enabled the army to deliver the PKK serious blows. Since 1995 its military presence inside Turkey has been significantly weakened (although there are still armed PKK units permanently present deep inside the country, and the PKK even extended the range of its operations to the Black Sea provinces).

Öcalan's calls for a peaceful settlement were not simply a consequence of the PKK's military defeat, as the Turkish authorities claimed. He had from the early 1990s on, when his movement was at its strongest, made efforts to transform the guerrilla struggle into a primarily political one. He renounced the PKK's earlier pan-Kurdish ambitions and showed himself very eager for negotiations with the Turkish authorities. (He had in fact made the first step in that direction with a charm offensive towards the Turkish public in 1988, in an interview with the large daily *Milliyet*.[2]) In March 1993 Öcalan announced a unilateral cease-fire (a gesture he was to repeat in 1995 and 1998), inviting the government to respond with some form of concession to Kurdish cultural demands and indicating his willingness to let others represent the Kurds in possible talks. Through journalists close to President Özal and Prime Minister Demirel, the first indirect contacts had already taken place the previous year. Öcalan knew that Özal was determined to solve the Kurdish question, though on his own terms, and expected him to take significant initiatives. When Özal died of a heart attack in April 1993, the PKK cried foul, convinced that the

[1] *Forced evictions and destruction of villages in Dersim (Tunceli) and western Bingöl, September-November 1994* (Amsterdam: Stichting Nederland-Koerdistan, 1995); Martin van Bruinessen, "Turkey's death squads", Middle East Report #199 (Spring 1996), 20-23. Many aspects of the 'dirty war' against the Kurds are documented in an official report presented in early 1998 to then Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz, which is also available in German translation: *Bandenrepublik Türkei? Der Susurlukbericht des Ministerialinspektors Kutlu Savaş* (Bonn: Internationaler Verein für Menschenrechte der Kurden, 1999).

[2] The interview, by leading journalist Mehmet Ali Birand, produced a shock in Turkey by showing Öcalan as a man who had in fact much in common with the average Turkish citizens, who had nothing against the Turkish people and who thought of himself as a sort of Atatürk for the Kurds. Birand later published an extended version of this and a later interview together as a book, *Apo ve PKK* (Istanbul: Milliyet, 1992).

'war party' (presumably the same people who in the following years carried through the 'dirty war') had murdered the president.[1]

The PKK also threw its full weight behind the HEP, Turkey's first legal pro-Kurdish party, when this was established in 1990, although it represented a much broader political spectrum than the PKK alone. It is true that the PKK made great efforts to bring the HEP, and later its successors DEP and HADEP, under its control, but these legal parties have always been were more than just fronts for the PKK.[2] When in 1994 the government made moves to have the immunity of the parliamentary delegates of this party lifted, those delegates who had drawn closest to the PKK sought asylum in Europe; their colleagues were taken from parliament to prison. The former group, together with other party officers, spearheaded the establishment in 1995 of the Kurdish Parliament in Exile, a formation that was to function both as a would-be government in exile and as a diplomatic representation that established and maintained contact with numerous parliamentarians in Europe.

The PKK's most significant diplomatic contacts so far have been with the German Federal Republic, ironically one of the states that have banned the PKK following a series of violent actions against (mostly Turkish) targets in Germany. It had soon become clear that the ban did affect the legal activities of pro-PKK groups but had no effect on the PKK's clandestine activities, and that support for the PKK among the Kurds living in Germany kept growing. From 1996 on, a series of highly placed Germans — the head of the internal security service, politicians close to Chancellor Kohl, various government advisors — visited Öcalan in Lebanon or Damascus. They apparently received pledges that the PKK would henceforth refrain from violence on German soil. Germany never lifted the ban in exchange, but it silently allowed PKK activities and the authorities adopted a less hostile attitude towards the PKK. Germany won altogether more in these diplomatic exchanges (and clearly had no desire to jeopardise these gains by requesting Öcalan's extradition when Italy arrested him on the grounds of an old German warrant), but for the PKK they

[1] Two months earlier, the gendarmerie commander Eşref Bitlis, who was known to be opposed to the use of right-wing paramilitary groups in the fight against the PKK, had died in a suspect aeroplane accident widely believed to have been due to sabotage by the same faction in the armed forces. For a review of the evidence in this case, see: Adnan Akfırat, *Eşref Bitlis suikastı - belgelerle* (Istanbul: Kaynak, 1997). Doubts about the circumstances surrounding Özal's death have also repeatedly been voiced in Turkey's mainstream press, and Özal's closest relatives have responded evasively to questions on the subject (one of them answering "You'd better investigate the death of General Bitlis first").

[2] The best, non-partisan, history of these legal pro-Kurdish parties is A. Osman Ölmez, *Türkiye siyasetinde DEP depremi* (The DEP earthquake in Turkey's politics', Ankara: Doruk, 1995). One of the best accounts in English is: Henri J. Barkey, "The People's Democracy Party (HADEP): the travails of a legal Kurdish party in Turkey", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18 no 1 (1998), 129-138.

represented its first successes in this field. The PKK may have seen them as a model for future contacts with Turkey.[1]

'Military' and 'civilian' in the PKK

The group that was to become the PKK first emerged among university students in Ankara in the mid-1970s but then recruited new members with preference among the rural lower classes of Kurdistan. It adopted an anti-intellectual attitude and discouraged formal education, considering schools to be part of the Turkish colonial system. Once the PKK had begun its guerrilla war against the Turkish state, it recruited many young village boys, for whom life with guerrilla units in the mountains was the only form of education they ever received and who grew into a hard core of tough mountain fighters.[2] The PKK's fighters have different social backgrounds, but most of them are of unsophisticated village origins and have low formal education. Guerrilla war is the only work they know well.

An entirely different group of PKK supporters, whom I shall call the 'civilian PKK', consists of those with secondary or higher education, who joined the PKK after it had booked its first military successes. Many of them were previously active in other Kurdish or Turkish left political movements. The PKK came to depend very much on such people for its cultural and diplomatic activities: publishing newspapers and journals in many languages, in Turkey as well as abroad; running the information and solidarity committees in Europe; organising legal associations and parties, the Kurdish Parliament in Exile, satellite television and websites on the Internet.

Behind both groups, and less visible to the outside observer, is the party organisation proper (with parallel structures for the guerrilla army, ARGK, and the political organisation, ERNK).[3] This organisation, most

[1]Some form of diplomatic contact has in fact been established between the PKK and at least a liberal faction of the Turkish military. A small group of respected Kurdish personalities has been meeting with Öcalan and other PKK leaders on the one hand and some of the more liberal generals on the other. Since the replacement of the relatively liberal Karadayı as chief of the general staff by the more severe Kıvrıkoğlu, the impact of these talks on the military's policies is not likely to be great.

[2]Interesting observations on the 'boy guerrillas', and on the attitude of the guerrilla fighters in general, are to be found in the notes of a journalist who was kidnapped by a guerrilla unit and lived with them for a month: Kadri Gürsel, *Dağdakiler* ('Those in the mountains', Istanbul: Metis, 1996), and in the notes of an Italian woman who herself joined a guerrilla unit: Carla Solina, *Der Weg in die Berge, eine Frau bei der kurdischen Befreiungsbewegung* (Hamburg: Nautilus, 1996).

[3]The division of tasks between the party itself, the ERNK ('Front for the National Liberation of Kurdistan') and the ARGK ('Liberation Army of the People of Kurdistan') is not entirely clear. ERNK has in the past also carried out or supervised armed activities. It appears that ERNK is the only party structure active in Europe. There is an official PKK spokesman in Europe, and one or two members of the central committee have lived in Europe in recent years, but the degree of their authority over the European ERNK remains unclear.

members of which have been in the PKK since the 1970s, is highly centralised and only answerable to the central committee — meaning in practice Öcalan, the one person who directly controlled all command structures (and who could maintain his position by balancing the various parallel structures against each other). For most purposes, both the guerrilla units and the 'political' or 'civilian' organisations and support groups had a large measure of autonomy, working only under very general instructions. But any decisions taken there could always be cancelled by a specific order from 'the leadership' (Önderlik, the abstract appellation for Öcalan that had come to replace the more familiar 'Apo' in party parlance).

The 'military' and 'civilian' wings of the PKK obviously had different views of the benefits of negotiations and concessions. Öcalan's attempts of the past years to transform the nature of the PKK's struggle necessitated a balancing act in which he had to keep both sides satisfied. The frequent inconsistencies in his public statements, threats with violence and promises to give up the guerrilla struggle altogether, are at least in part a reflection of the need to keep these wings of the organisation in balance. Progress towards a political solution necessitated the active involvement of the 'civilians' but carried the risk of making the 'military' feel marginalised. It was the latter who presented the only serious potential threat to Öcalan's position and whom he had to find ways to keep in check. Not surprisingly, the 1990s saw a whole series of purges of the military organisation, and Öcalan made efforts to keep it divided by exploiting rivalries between his commanders.

It was significant that Öcalan, when he had to leave Syria, did not join his guerrilla army in Iraq but opted for western Europe, where the strongest 'civilian' structures of his party existed. Never having lived in other political environments than Turkey and Syria, he probably had serious misconceptions of what to expect in Europe, and he did not hide his disappointment with his European organisation for having insufficiently prepared his future position and role there. He did indicate his willingness to stand trial before an international court, which — seeing himself in the role of a Dimitrov accusing his Nazi prosecutors — he planned to use as a platform for his own indictments of Turkey's policies. His presence in Europe galvanised the Kurdish political community, which saw unprecedented opportunities for a new common strategy based on a European mediating role, as well as for more internal democracy in the Kurdish movement.

Öcalan's capture turned the tables within the PKK also. During the first months, the leading role appeared to have reverted to the military wing. The break-up of the PKK into a number of feuding military factions, which was predicted by Turkish counter-insurgency experts, did not occur. An extraordinary party congress held in Kurdistan did not name any successor but confirmed Öcalan as the immortal party leader. The party's European

representatives were severely censured (and apparently punished) for not having prevented the chairman's capture. Publications directed at the rank and file of PKK supporters and sympathisers, attempting to capitalise on the charisma associated with the name of Öcalan, gave much coverage to Abdullah's brother Osman Öcalan, who had since 1990 been the leading party man in Iran. It was initially, however, Cemil Bayık, who had long been the chief military commander, who appeared to hold real authority. Bayik ordered a resumption of the guerrilla struggle almost directly after Öcalan's arrest. In spite of Öcalan's call upon his followers, made through his lawyers, to refrain from violence, Bayik ordered an intensification of the guerrilla struggle.

Under interrogation and in court, Öcalan behaved as the first video images after his capture had given reason to expect he would. He pleaded guilty to most of the charges, admitted that the movement he had led had committed numerous terrorist acts (for which he held others responsible), and praised the Turkish state. Shrewdly he attempted to turn his trial into the beginning of a dialogue between the state and the Kurdish movement and told the court that no one but he himself could bring the guerrillas down from the mountains — in exchange for concessions. Though it must have been hard for PKK sympathisers, as it was for other Kurds, to see their leader acting so submissively and repudiating much of the movement for which thousands had given their lives, there were few open signs of disaffection. Once or twice, PKK spokesmen remarked that the words of a "prisoner of war" under duress cannot be taken at face value. Surprisingly, however, the PKK leadership not only attempted to give its own "spin" to Öcalan's statements, interpreting them in the PKK media as the expression of a policy change that had been decided upon well before his arrest, but they actually kept obeying him. Whatever rivalries and disaffection there were among the party's political and military leaders were kept in check within the "presidential council", the collective decision-making body that carefully maintained a facade of unanimity. When Öcalan declared that he was ready to order the dissolution of the guerrilla forces (on condition that the government made some serious concession to the Kurds), the "presidential council" declared its agreement, without any dissenting voice from Bayik or other commanders. When Öcalan ordered the guerrilla units that were still inside Turkey to withdraw to northern Iraq they did so. In support of Öcalan's offer to disband the guerrilla forces, a small group of high-ranking PKK personnel in fact crossed back into Turkey and in the presence of witnesses surrendered themselves to the authorities, challenging the government to end the armed Kurdish rebellion by proclaiming a wide-ranging amnesty.

The Kurds, Turkey and Europe

The 1999 elections brought Turkey's most nationalist parties to power. The participation of the fascist Nationalist Action Party (MHP) in the government coalition makes serious concessions to Kurdish demands extremely unlikely in the near future. HADEP won the local elections in a number of cities in south-eastern Turkey but is not represented in parliament because it stayed far below the 10% threshold nationally. For this reason the Kurds in Europe are perhaps best placed to have a long-term impact on developments in Turkey, as they had during the 1990s.[1]

The recent events have, however, deeply shaken the Kurds' trust in Europe. NATO's war on Kosovo not only conveniently blotted out all news on developments in Turkey and Kurdistan but also drove home the message that the West applies double standards. Western Europe and the US acted as a virtual ally of the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) but drove Öcalan into the hands of his Turkish captors. Turkey followed up the capture of Öcalan with a successful campaign to ban the Kurdish television station MED-TV from the satellite. Although Britain's Independent Television Commission, which controls access to the satellite, had serious formal grounds for its decision to deny MED-TV further access (in at least one program, a call for violent action was made), its decision was widely perceived to be due to heavy Turkish pressure.

The PKK organisation in Europe no doubt suffered a serious shock with Öcalan's arrest and found it difficult not to lose morale when Öcalan appeared so submissive. It recuperated rather quickly, however. A Kurdish National Congress, preparations for which had been going on for a long time, was convened briefly before Öcalan's trial was to begin, as if to show that the political struggle continued smoothly. The delegates to the Congress, whose name deliberately echoed those of the African National Congress and the Palestinian National Congress, represented a much broader regional and political spectrum than any previous Kurdish body. The election of Öcalan as the Congress' honorary president showed that the PKK was its strongest component, but many of its members were prominent Kurdish personalities who had no previous connections with the PKK. Morale was further boosted by the appearance of a new satellite television station to replace defunct MED-TV. Other Kurdish organisations in Europe also heightened their profile. Kurdish lobbying at European (and American) institutions is becoming increasingly professional and increasingly effective.

[1] See Martin van Bruinessen, "Shifting national and ethnic identities: the Kurds in Turkey and the European diaspora", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 18, no 1 (1998), 39-52.

In Turkey itself and in neighbouring northern Iraq, the PKK has consistently stated its wish to lay down arms and negotiate a settlement. (By analogy with the Oslo process, this is now called the "İmralı process" in PKK circles, after the prison island of İmralı where Öcalan is being held.) It is hard to imagine, however, that the PKK guerrilla forces, which still number several thousand, seriously consider dissolving themselves without tangible gestures from the side of the Turkish government. Similarly, it is hard to see what the Turkish armed forces have to gain with a peaceful solution to the Kurdish conflict, that has provided them, after all, with the legitimisation of their high-handed intervention in politics and with a high budget for arms spending. It will be surprising indeed if low intensity conflict were not to continue, perhaps with a brief interruption for as long as Öcalan's fate remains undecided.

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