

CESRAN POLICY BRIEF



CESRAN international | Centre for Strategic Research and Analysis | www.cesran.org | 01 April 2013 | No: 1

ANALYSING NEWROZ IN DIYARBAKIR: A MULTI-ANGLE APPROACH

Once the Newroz on 21 March, 2013 in Diyarbakır would be the subject of any sort of conversation, academic discussion, journalistic research and daily bread on the lips of people, it would be absolutely considered as one of the most significant turning points in the history of politics in Turkey. Since, whether it will be successfully accomplished or dramatically failed and cause an internal high-level armed struggle, as a part of peace process initiated by AKP and assisted by BDP, the announcement of Öcalan calling for leaving the armed forces out of Turkey's border and superseded it with ideas and politics will be the inception of new horizons in Turkish politics. The main crux of Öcalan's most recent announcement should not be narrowly seen as part of the Kurdish question alone, but rather in my point of view, its consequences are expected to affect every tiny aspect of Turkey; ranging from the prime sphere of politics to social, cultural, and economic structures. When it comes to specific analysis of these aspects, the implication and strategy of peace process will be much clearer in minds.

By Rahman Dağ
Director of
Turkey Focus Program,
CESRAN International

rahman.dag@cesran.org

Twitter: @rahmandag

CESRAN international

Centre for Strategic
Research and Analysis

www.cesran.org

info@cesran.org

With regard to politics, the most important correlation is that as Turkish politics began to get rid of military tutelage since 2005, Kurdish politics in Turkey will also get rid of shadow armed militants over civil society. To make it clear, despite the fact that they have obvious sympathy, some new attendant MPs of BDP in politics including Selahattin Demirtaş, İdris Baluken, Pervin Buldan, Sırrı Süreyya Önder to mention but a few, who have no direct relations with PKK militants, will be keen to solving the problems within the lines of civil democratic politics. The point is that both sides of the divide; repressed and denied Kurds on one hand, and repressed pro-Islamic identity on the other hand, can do more if there are no military forces which are able to totally control their free-will. Whilst these assertions might seem to be hypothetical and conjectural in nature, I think this announcement can be perceived as a soft-coup against Kandil, which will either lose its efficiency within

MISAK-I MILLI, BROTHERHOOD IN TERMS OF COMMON RELIGION AND HISTORY, ESTABLISHMENT OF THE GRAND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY BY TURKS AND KURDS, AND TURKISH AND KURDISH SOLDIERS DIED IN THE ÇANAKKALE AND IN THE FIRST WORLD WARS ARE ALMOST IDENTICAL ARGUMENTS OF AKP GOVERNMENT SINCE IT CAME TO POWER IN 2002.

the Kurdish movement or regain its strength to become much stronger to be able to discard Öcalan and his leadership at the end of the process.

Secondly, the language which was used in that pronouncement is more or less the same tone of language used by Prime Minister Erdoğan himself and other AKP's prominent figures. It is not hard to find reminiscent between these two languages. Misak-ı Milli, brotherhood in terms of common religion and history, establishment of the Grand National Assembly by Turks and Kurds, and Turkish and Kurdish soldiers died in the Çanakkale and in the First World Wars are almost identical arguments of AKP government since it came to power in 2002. From this perspective, it seems that as if the context of the statement

was written down by AKP and Öcalan together in a very friendship atmosphere. By saying so, my intention is not to accuse AKP of being an accomplice of Öcalan, but I think that within the prevailing context, Öcalan compromised much more than the AKP. Otherwise, before talking about "Helalleşme" (Blessings to each other), he might legitimize his statement by reminding harsh military reactions towards Kurds, assimilationist policies, and absolute denial of Kurdish ethnic identity by the Turkish state since the beginning of the republic. As seen in the statement, there is neither indication of such accusation on Turkish state nor of killings of PKK since the 1980s. This proves that both sides are so eager to solve the problem without going back to dark history but instead focusing on common points of these different ethnic components of Anatolian community. I do not want to discuss which side gained more advantage or which side sent the other side onto their knees.

Regarding reaction of political parties to the announcement and to the event itself,

MHP's was as much classical as before; sincerely, they deserve to be congratulated for their stability and insistence on their approach to the Kurdish question! Yet, it does not contribute to the solution but may rather accelerate the problem. From the CHP side, I think there is nothing they can do to reverse the process as they have chosen to be silent with the argument. Based on that, they do not have much information on the process and perhaps, that is the reason why they do not have much to say. Indeed, both BDP and AKP warmly received the announcement whilst waiting for the swift implementation of the intentions stated by Öcalan, which has obviously led to PKK militants deserting their stations and leaving to positions outside of Turkey's borders.

From a political perspective, AKP's policy of making a clear distinction between the incumbent government and "the state" by referring to the National Intelligence Agency (MIT) as a component of "the State" should be considered as a crucial political strategy. Although that MHP still insists on emphasizing AKP and Öcalan as if they were going to bed together and that CHP complains about not having any information about the process, AKP succeeded in what they planned as they reflect over the process as a secret state policy and claimed that even most AKP significant figures do not know what is going on, in order to refrain from possible provocations and criticism. That is why none of the AKP officials attended the event and behaved as if they were not involved in the situation. By doing so, they were assured of not being accused of any possible unpleasant incident that may occur during the event.

REGARDING REACTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES TO THE ANNOUNCEMENT AND TO THE EVENT ITSELF, MHP'S WAS AS MUCH CLASSICAL AS BEFORE; SINCERELY, THEY DESERVE TO BE CONGRATULATED FOR THEIR STABILITY AND INSISTENCE ON THEIR APPROACH TO THE KURDISH QUESTION!

Actually, reactions of all political parties toward a peace process have been almost clear even before the statement. Yet, interestingly, apart from BDP, all the political parties reached a consensus that there was no Turkish flag where Newroz took place. This tends to be interesting as there has never been someone carrying Turkish flag in Newroz since 1990s because most participants of Newroz celebrations have often been Kurds who have some sympathy towards the PKK's incursion. Yet, it can be thought that focusing on Çanakkale and Independent Wars, Misak-ı Milli borders, and even popular history and religion of Kurds and Turks is significantly complicated without having a Turkish flag in the square. This critic is true but I think the approach is wrong. First of all, the peace process is something that political authorities initiated and try to make acceptable and attractive to the society. Thus, BDP officials should have considered the potential interpretations of the absence of the Turkish flag by hoisting at least, a big Turkish flag behind the stage. In this regard, the critics pertaining to the flag concept should have directed

to BDP not to people over there in the square. And also, BDP replied the critics in a positive ways by stating that “it is our deficit we should have one [the Turkish flag]” by Osman Baydemir; “we must have forgotten it, it is not something intentional” by Esat Canan; and “we do not have any problem with the flag. If the flag is not taken as an identification element associated with a political party, then it can be carried in the next Newroz. Kurdish people are not upset with the state’s flag” by Selehattin Demirtaş. After these goodwill statements, I think there should be no fuss at all when the Turkish flag was not carried in the Newroz festival. Otherwise those who still criticize the event with this point of view will be making the same mistake as those who forgot to put a Turkish flag on the stage and this could hamper the peace process.

I will emphasise the flag crisis because it is almost the only criticism most political parties commonly expressed their sentiments against. There is another aspect, I

“WE DO NOT HAVE ANY PROBLEM WITH THE FLAG. IF THE FLAG IS NOT TAKEN AS AN IDENTIFICATION ELEMENT ASSOCIATED WITH A POLITICAL PARTY, THEN IT CAN BE CARRIED IN THE NEXT NEWROZ. KURDISH PEOPLE ARE NOT UPSET WITH THE STATE’S FLAG”

would like to mention here. When someone talks about the flag, they only use the phrase “Turkish Flag.” literally speaking; this phrase emphasises the ethnic identity of the flag or indicates the state it belongs to. From both a democratic and an Islamic perspective, it is a quiet naturally right to have a flag just representing a given nation or people or society. Then, if the Turkish flag is used in this way, Kurds have the same right to say that they also have their own flag and it is natural to carry that flag in their hands. This stance could be motivated by the fact that Kurds are accepted as having a distinctive ethnic identity.

What I mean here is to initiate a discussion that paves the way for only a section of the populace to hold onto the flag as a symbol of their identity alone. This implies that the embedded perception of ‘Turkishness of the flag’ should be detached from ethnic undertones by reducing the flag to symbolise the identity of all Turks and Kurds such that the flag becomes acceptable in legal terms. While these possible solutions might need time in order to become applicable to society; it is quite meaningful to understand why political parties that have rarely achieved reconciliation in Turkey reacted in this way.

Before moving on to examine the social and cultural approach to the Newroz in Diyarbakir, I would like to give more place in MHP’s argument which is that AKP initiated a process from which an independent Kurdish state would come up. MHP’s argument should be read in reverse to have an analytic analysis. If there was no peace process initiated by AKP and Öcalan, would the possibility of an independent Kurdish state be annihilated? I do not think, even MHP officials would answer this question with in the affirmative!. Taking current political conditions in the Middle

East, especially in Syria and Northern Iraq into consideration, PKK has an advantage of keeping its agenda alive because there seem to be no stable political order in the region; and PKK has quite significant influence over Syrian Kurds and other Kurdish groups. That is why, Murat Karayılan, the commander of PKK militants highlighted that “Everyone should know that PKK is ready for peace and war as well” while immediately before he approves Öcalan’s statement by stating that “On this basis, we will determinately make the process initiated by leader Apo real...” it is an undeniable fact that, on the one hand, PKK itself cannot manage to beat Turkish army and establish an independent Kurdish state in the east of Turkey and on the other hand, Turkish army cannot eliminate the PKK totally while the latter has deep rooted social support, logistics and financial support provided by third parties; unless Turkish state has an intention to kill all Kurds at once which is also simply unthinkable. Relying on this fact, then MHP’s insisting on burning “İmralı” and destroying “Kandil” policy will definitely bring more deaths and economic hardship to Turkey until eventually, a Kurdish state is going to be established with the assistance of third parties such as neighbouring states who may derive certain advantages in case there is any social and political disorder in Turkey. This entire paragraph is to reiterate the fact that there is no solution in the MHP’s argument except deaths as it provides no guarantee to prevent a possible independent Kurdish state in future.

**THE NEWROZ EVENT IN DIYARBAKIR
WITNESSED THE PARTICIPATION OF
DIFFERENT SOCIAL GROUPS FROM
THE EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN
PARTS OF TURKEY**

From social and cultural perspectives, this announcement proves several significant points. First of all, inviting a musician from the Northern part of Turkey, known as Laz origin, Niyazi Koyuncu, brother of Kazım Koyuncu who died in 2005 and collected totally forgotten songs in the Laz language is a crucial point which is totally consistent with the atmosphere in Diyarbakır. Following that, the mayor of Sur municipality, Abdullah Demirbaş stated that “I hope Kurdish songs will be sung in the Black sea area of Turkey. Another significant point which should be mentioned here is that before starting to sing his song, Mr. Koyuncu states on the stage that “we do not have to speak the same language to understand each other.” These are what socially and culturally richness means.

Secondly, the Newroz event in Diyarbakır witnessed the participation of different social groups from the eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey. For instance, the priest of St. Mary Church of Assyrian community, Yusuf Akbulut, pro-Islamic Azadi group led by Muhamed Akar, who is a grandson of Şeyh Said’s brother were all invited to the event and they warmly received the invitation and attended the Newroz. It might be expected that several Turkish originated social community would be invited to attend the event, and I think there will be adequate time to do

this if the process goes well further. At least, social cohesion among regional groups in Kurdish populated areas should not be passed through without mentioning. It is important because the AKP has always criticized BDP and PKK for not representing all Kurdish people in Turkey. That is true, but it has to be admitted that they are the most interactive, dynamic, and very well organized community in the region. Instead of having internal conflict in the region, this sort of cohesion will definitely serve to the peace process.

Last but not least, as you know, reading of the Öcalan's statement in Kurdish was not so enthusiastic among Kurds but in Turkish by Sırrı Süreyya Önder increased the attendants' exacting and enthusiasm. This situation might be linked to the reader's Kurdish language capability. However, I will link it to something else which is not easy to determine if it is good or not. Aysel Tuğluk directed attention towards a long

...THE COERCED OR VOLUNTARILY INTEGRATION OF TURKISH AND KURDISH IN TURKEY, EVEN IN DIYARBAKIR WHERE ALMOST ALL THE PARTICIPANTS AND ENCHANTED IN A POLITICIZED ATMOSPHERE SHOULD BE RECOGNISED AS PART OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE PEACE PROCESS.

-lasting assimilation policy of Turkey as the reason of Pervin Buldan's Kurdish. I partly agree with her. Taking advantage of bad experience in the past, I think this can be an opportunity serving in favour of the peace process. This situation can be regarded as an extreme and almost unbreakable integration of Kurds in Turkey with Turks in terms of language whether it is because of assimilation policy or not. Giving examples from my own experience, in Diyarbakir, most people of younger generations do not know Kurdish properly and would rather speak in Turkish despite the fact that they totally understand what their parents tell them in Kurdish. As a consequence, I totally

agree that it is partly because of the assimilationist policy of governments; but it cannot be explained only with this argument. Whereas the language issue in the Newroz celebration of this year might be seen from this perspective; the coerced or voluntarily integration of Turkish and Kurdish in Turkey, even in Diyarbakir where almost all the participants and enchanted in a politicized atmosphere should be recognised as part of social and cultural contribution towards the peace process. This optimistic approach to the language issue cannot change the reality of significant amount of efforts of the state to eliminate the use of Kurdish language in public even from private spaces in the region and all over Turkey. I hope the peace process will heal previous wounds in terms of freedom of language and other aspects. Where I would like to pay special attention is that the result of past experiences ought to be used as vital instruments for the current peace process.

These invitations also indicate that BDP has gained more importance and ended up as an active actor in the peace process. If these groups were invited directly by the PKK, I am sure they would have declined the invitation. In other words, if the invited

groups had thought that BDP was a direct extension of the PKK as a political branch, it is very likely that they would not have attended the event. Thus, based on this argument, it can be said that BDP is becoming more of a civil-driven political party. Similarly, the perception of BDP in the eyes of none-PKK-Sympathized groups has been changing in the same way. In addition, It is possible that if everything proceed as planned, in the next Newroz celebration in Diyarbakir, several significant ethnically Turkish originated social or economic communities will attend the event, of course by carrying “the flag of Turkey” in their hands. To what extent would the representatives of Kurdish people from different ideologies, and religious groups come and act together, at this level, the peace process will have a chance to reach social reconciliation and come up with permanent social and cultural peace at the end of the process.

In terms of economic contribution of the peace process, it is officially said that more than 300 billion dollars has been spent in previous struggle of the state against PKK, thousands people died, whether they were ethnically Kurds or Turks and thousands of hundreds of people adversely affected by this struggle. In my view, to cite this example that while in all stock markets in the world there was a slight reduction, in Turkey’s stock market, there was a notable increase yesterday just because of the announcement without implementation. Broadly speaking, if these lost capital and human resources were not spent in vain imagine how much economic as well as political progress would have been made by now. Furthermore, any further steps in the peace process will probably boost economic relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq and also with Syrian Kurds after the revolution. In terms of their oil resources, their newly constructed economic market might be turned to be as a catalyst of political, economic, social and cultural good relations. If it is true, macro-economic outlook of Turkey in the global economy will definitely advance, thanks to any further steps towards achieving a lasting peace deal. Eventually, the Newroz celebration in Diyarbakır will be the beginning point of any further political, social and economic development. In what form it would take depends on the implications of Öcalan’s statement and the contribution of AKP, and of course the rest of the political parties and social groups. Apparently, it starts in a good way if it is not perfect and seems to be hopeful for the future of Turkey.

...MORE THAN 300 BILLION DOLLARS HAS BEEN SPENT IN PREVIOUS STRUGGLE OF THE STATE AGAINST PKK, THOUSANDS PEOPLE DIED, WHETHER THEY WERE ETHNICALLY KURDS OR TURKS AND THOUSANDS OF HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE ADVERSELY AFFECTED BY THIS STRUGGLE.

© 2013

Copyright by CESRAN International | www.cesran.org

This material is available for republication as long as reprints include verbatim copy of the article in its entirety, respecting its integrity.

Reprints must cite the author and CESRAN as the original source .

Assessments expressed in this report reflect only the opinions of its authors and do not represent the institutional opinion of CESRAN.

CENTRE

for STRATEGIC RESEARCH

and ANALYSIS

CESRAN is a think-tank specialising on international relations in general, and global peace, conflict and development related issues and challenges.

The main business objective/function is that we provide expertise at an international level to a wide range of policy making actors such as national governments and international organisations. CESRAN with its provisions of academic and semi-academic publications, journals and a fully-functioning website has already become a focal point of expertise on strategic research and analysis with regards to global security and peace. The Centre is particularly unique in being able to bring together wide variety of expertise from different countries and academic disciplines.

The main activities that CESRAN undertakes are providing consultancy services and advice to public and private enterprises, organising international conferences and publishing academic material.

Some of CESRAN's current publications are (www.cesran.org):

- **Journal of Global Analysis** (biannual, peer reviewed)
- **Journal of Conflict Transformation and Security** (biannual, peer reviewed)
- **Journal of Eurasian Politics & Society** (biannual, peer reviewed)
- **Political Reflection Magazine** (quarterly news-magazine)
- **CESRAN Papers**
- **Turkey Focus Policy Brief**
- **CESRAN Policy Brief**
- **China Focus Network**



glopeace.com

 Global-Peace-Workshops
 @GlobalPeaceW

cesran international
AKADAMİK İNŞAAT VE YATIRIM



01-05 Temmuz July 2013
KÜRESEL BARIS ve GENCLİK CALISTAYI
GLOBAL PEACE and YOUTH WORKSHOP



EkoAvrasya
AVRASYA EKONOMİK İLİŞKİLER DERNEĞİ
EURASIA ECONOMIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION
EKONOMİK İLİŞKİLER DERNEĞİ



cesran international
"ADVANCING DIVERSITY"



EkoAvrasya
AVRASYA EKONOMİK İLİŞKİLER DERNEĞİ
EURASIA ECONOMIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION
АССОЦИАЦИЯ ЕВРАЗИЙСКИХ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ



EURASIAN POLITICS & SOCIETY

Annual Conference
25-26 September 2013
at Karadeniz Technical University, Trabzon, Turkey
Registration is now open online:
Please visit www.cesran.org/iepas

