

THE IMPACT OF SYRIAN CIVIL WAR
ON THE KURDISH RESOLUTION PROCESS

A Master Thesis

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August 2018

I certify that I have read this thesis and have found that it is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in International Relations.




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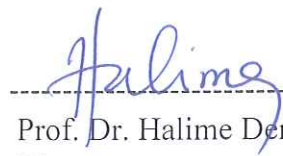
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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF SYRIAN CIVIL WAR ON THE KURDISH RESOLUTION PROCESS

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This study investigates the impact of the Syrian Civil War on the failure of the Kurdish Resolution Process in Turkey within the context of Contagion Process Approach. The main question of the thesis can be formulated as such: what is the role of the civil war taking place in Syria on the failure of the mentioned Resolution Process? In order to handle this question, by using Process Tracing and Elite Interview methods, the process whereby conflict in one country (Syria) spreads to another country (Turkey) has been presented. The first contribution of this study to the literature is, contrary to most studies in the literature focusing primarily on the domestic factors in Turkey and thus neglecting international and transnational factors, that it incorporates the mentioned absence into the study. The second contribution is that this study has included numerous individuals engaged in the process both directly or indirectly in the examination process through elite interviews. The final

contribution is that this study has ruled out other studies in the literature that handle the failure of the Resolution Process in a descriptive way and examined the failure based on a theoretical framework. The result obtained from this study is that the Resolution Process was barred and clash environment was re-established because the Syrian Civil War with its spillover effects started working against the Turkish government and the expectations of the PKK increased when the Turkish government and the PKK, the main actors in the Resolution Process, re-evaluated the cost-benefit analysis.

Key words: Contagion Process Approach, Kurdish Resolution Process, PKK, PYD, Syrian Civil War

ÖZET

SURİYE İÇ SAVAŞI'NIN ÇÖZÜM SÜRECİ'NE ETKİSİ

Akgül, Musa

Yüksek Lisans, Uluslararası İlişkiler

Tez Danışmanı: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Berk Esen

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Bu çalışma, 2011 yılında Suriye'de başlayan ve devam eden iç savaşın, Türkiye'de 2009 yılında başlatılan çözüm sürecinin başarısızlığa uğramasındaki olumsuz etkisini, *Sirayet Süreci Yaklaşımı* (Contagion Process Approach) bağlamında incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmanın temel sorusu, ifade edilen Çözüm Süreci'nin başarısızlığa uğramasında Suriye'de cereyan etmekte olan iç savaşın rolü nedir şeklinde formüle edilebilir. Bu soruyu çözmek amacıyla bu çalışmada, Süreç Takibi (process tracing) ve Elit Mülakatlar (elite interview) yöntemi kullanılarak, bir ülkedeki (Suriye) çatışmanın bir başka ülkeye (Türkiye) sıçrama süreci ortaya konulmuş ve böylece literatürde hakkında çalışmalar yürütülen *Sirayet Süreci Yaklaşımı* doğrulanmıştır. Bu çalışmanın literatüre ilk katkısı, literatürdeki diğer çalışmaların çoğunlukla etkilenen ülkedeki (Türkiye) yerel faktörlere odaklanarak etkilenme sürecinde uluslararası ve ulus ötesi faktörleri yeterince göz önünde bulundurmamış olmalarının aksine, söz konusu eksikliği incelemeye dâhil etmesidir. İkinci katkı, diğer çalışmaların, Türkiye'de yürütülen Çözüm Süreci'nde, süreçte yer

alan aktörleri interaktif bir yöntemle incelemeye dâhil etmemelerine rağmen, bu çalışmanın söz konusu aktörleri, birebir elit mülakat yapmak suretiyle inceleme sürecine dâhil etmesidir. Son katkı, diğer literatür çalışmalarının çözüm sürecindeki başarısızlığı sadece betimsel bir incelemeye tabi tutmalarının ötesine geçerek, çözüm sürecindeki başarısızlığı teorik bir çerçeveyi esas alarak incelemiş olmasıdır. Bu tez çalışmasından elde edilen sonuç, veya çalışmanın doğrulanan ana argümanı, Suriye'de sürdürülen iç savaşın yayılma etkileri ile beraber çözüm sürecinin temel tarafları olan Türk Hükümeti ve PKK'nın süreç içindeki fayda-maliyet analizlerini yeniden değerlendirmeye tabi tutmasına sebep olduğu ve değerlendirme sonucunda sürecin Türk Hükümeti aleyhine işlemesi ve PKK'nın süreçten beklentilerinin artması nedeniyle çözüm sürecinin baltalandığı ve çatışma ortamına yeniden dönüldüğüdür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Çözüm Süreci, PKK, PYD, Suriye İç Savaşı, Sirayet Süreci Yaklaşımı

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Kurdish Question has been among Turkey's most difficult problems to solve since the country's establishment. Kurdish identity had been neglected to the point of non-existence for most of the 20th century. After decades of intense armed conflict between the Turkish military and the PKK (the Kurdistan Workers' Party - Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan, founded in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan), it was made clear that armed struggle was not enough by itself to provide a solution for either side. Subsequently, in 2009, "the Kurdish Resolution Process" was initiated by Turkey's AK Party-majority government and the PKK to approach the decades-long Kurdish Question through a democratization process. This peace process suggested that a solution achieved through political means was possible. The emergence of peace process contributed to the political atmosphere in the country for a while. Thus, in the early phases of the process there was light at the end of the tunnel. However, the peace process ultimately failed and the conflict between the two sides continues today. After the 7 June 2015 general elections, armed struggle continued between the two parties, aggravating the political climate in the country. It became clear that any progress in the peace process was unlikely. The failure of the process and the underlying reasons for it have occupied a notable space in the academic sphere since then.

In this study, I will investigate the impact of the Syrian civil war on the failure of the Kurdish resolution process within a theoretical framework. Accepting that the reasons behind the process's failure are multi-level and multi-causal, this study is primarily concerned with the international dimension. For my research question, I will seek to answer such questions as: What are the historical roots of Kurdish Question in Turkey and Syria? What are the main parameters of AK Party's policy towards the Kurdish Question? Under what circumstances did the Kurdish resolution process start? Why did the AK Party government pursue the process (or, in other words; "take risk" to solve the Kurdish Question)? Why did the Kurdish Resolution Process fail? Which factors contributed to the failure and how has the Syrian Civil War has affected the process? Addressing these questions will show that the Syrian Civil War's spillover effects hastened the end of Kurdish resolution process. Therefore, regional developments and the transnational ties of Kurdish actors need to be considered as decisive factors within the Kurdish Question because "regional conflict complexes" cannot be handled separately.

There have been a number of academic studies into to the Kurdish resolution process and its failure. However, the Syrian conflict had yet to break out when the most of the studies were conducted. It is by no means a simple task to challenge the below-mentioned works as every one of them concentrates upon a distinctive feature of the process or specific actors. Yet, they mainly stress the domestic rather than transnational aspects of the Syrian crisis or regional power politics. It is quite probable that Syrian crisis has been gripped because the two sides involved in this process possess distinct and frequently conflicting strategies towards the current crisis in Syria. Thus, we face a lack of literature related to transnational dimension of the resolution process, and subsequently, to the impact of the Syrian civil war on it.

Firstly, in relation to the Kurdish or Democratic Opening of 2009, Pusane (2014) argues that the 'Kurdish Opening' may not have failed if both parties had maintained central leadership. There were specifically two groups who demonstrated the non-central nature of power on both sides: Qandil, Abdullah Öcalan, the TAK, the KCK, and pro-Kurdish political parties and The Union of Parties, the AK Party government, and Turkish Armed Forces. On the other hand, Paul Roe's security dilemma is used by Kardas and Balcı (2016) as the theoretical framework, and as a result, the theory is adapted to explore the failure of the Kurdish Opening. In accordance with this adaptation, a security trilemma among nationalist Kurds (the BDP, the PKK, the KCK), Islamists (the AK Party governments) and state party (bureaucracy and opposition parties) is put forward. This study explains that perceptions of identity and security were the main causes for the failure of the Kurdish Opening (Kardas and Balcı, 2009: 155-180).

In addition, Çiçek suggests that the lack of institutional democracy and the mindset were engrained in the system, and because of this, the AK Party government could not handle the issue through political or legal means (2011: 15-26). Another theory on the failure of the Kurdish Opening in 2009 was put forward by Aydınli and Özcan (2011), who stress the combined use of both conflict resolution and counterterrorism methods that were relatively successful in handling the Kurdish question. Their main argument is that both of the following methods should be used concurrently: conflict resolution, which approaches the issue as a socio-political issue and propels negotiations for laying down the arms, and counterterrorism measures which would lower the arsenal of the PKK. They conclude that the Kurdish Opening did not succeed due to the fact that these two methods were not working together (Aydınli and Özcan, 2011: 438-457).

A brief review of the literature shows a lack of emphasis on the transnational and international dimension¹ of the resolution process. Exceptions of this are respectively the studies of Gunes and Lowe (2015) and Resch (2017), respectively entitled “The Impact of the Syrian War on Kurdish Politics across the Middle East” and “Syria’s Impact on the Kurdish Peace Process in Turkey”. These studies are very useful for examining the practical impact of the Syrian civil war on the resolution process, but they are descriptive studies deprived of a theoretical background².

At this point, the Contagion Process Approach, which investigates how the contagion works and the mechanisms between the source and targets of contagion, is very helpful theoretically. The impact of Syrian civil war on Turkey and the resolution process can be better understood through this framework because the relationship between domestic events and international context contributes to the spillover effects³ of civil wars across borders. Thus, this study emphasizes the importance of transnational aspect of the Kurdish question and shows how the failure of the Kurdish resolution process is a valuable case to better understand the spillover effect.

With the dearth of relevant research, my research is one of the very rare examples of qualitative research on the resolution process. I conducted elite interviews⁴ with numerous individuals engaged in the process both directly or indirectly. In this manner, I attempted to provide a deeper understanding of what was discussed and put forward by the negotiating actors behind closed doors, while acknowledging their

¹ While international refers to states and practices of international engagement between states in a general sense; transnational refers to non-state and sub-national actors and activities without a direct state influence or support and transnational actions extends or operates across national boundaries (Aydınlı, 2010: 1).

² Very recent study of Dağ (2018), entitled as “The Spillover Effect of the Syrian Crisis on the Peace Process in Turkey,” attempted to fill this gap by analyzing the impact of the Syrian conflict upon the peace process in Turkey benefitting from spillover effects and spreading insurgency theories.

³ “Spillover effect” basically means the spreading of a conflict in one state to an adjacent state.

⁴ See the Appendix to see with whom I made interview. At this point, it should be noted that statements of the interviewees could be subjective, and not objective because of either their official and political positions or their personal beliefs and judgements.

personal and political biases. I used this approach to try and reflect the points of the negotiations that were not released to the public.

1.1. Structure of the Study

To be able to better grasp of the issue, it is of vital importance that the historical background and theoretical framework be firmly established. Therefore, this thesis will first attempt to provide a historical context for the subject and apply a relevant framework. I will firstly use the contagion process approach to elaborate in a more profound manner on how such conflicts spread. The contagion approach explains how a conflict in one state increases the probability of a similar conflict breaking out in a neighboring state. The factors that render contagion effects possible will be explored, type of countries liable to be affected from this phenomenon will be discussed, and the conclusion will be made that a conflict in one state is not merely regional, but rather when the necessary factors come into play and states take advantage of the conflict to gain political leverage, it is very likely to affect countries with shared borders.

This thesis will then explore some crucial questions that will help set the ground for a comprehensive analysis and contextualization of Kurdish question. Special emphasis will be placed on the issue's historical background within Turkey, from the final phases of the Ottoman Empire until recent past when the PKK was founded, the state of Kurds living in Syria, and the Syrian civil war's effect on the Kurdish question in Turkey. Historically, even following the establishment of the borders of nation-states, Kurds living in different countries regularly interacted with and were mutually affected by one another. It was political, rather than literal, borders between neighboring countries that put an end to regional ethnic and commercial ties, which

had historically surpassed these borderlines. Ultimately, this chapter will argue that when examining an issue like the Kurdish question, it is of vital importance to take into consideration the transnational dynamics in addition to the regional dynamics when examining the “spillover effect” that is an inevitable reality of such conflicts.

After providing the necessary context and theoretical background, the first chapter of this thesis will examine how the AK Party tried to handle the Kurdish issue in Turkey and submit a snapshot of the resolution process. It is quite striking that the AK Party admitted the fact that there was in fact a Kurdish issue in Turkey.

However, it employed an instrumentalist method to solve the conflict, which ultimately proved unsuccessful. During the resolution process steps were taken to increase the level of democratization in the country and firmer relations were set with the actors on the Kurdish side of the conflict. Kurds were granted the right to openly practice their culture and speak their language. Yet, following three rounds of negotiations the process collapsed and armed conflict between the PKK and the TSK re-started.

The second chapter in this thesis will take a close look at similar resolution processes throughout the world, among which are those involving the IRA, the ETA, and the FARC. Common themes in these processes that helped the process progress will be discussed, and a list of ‘lessons’ learned from international cases will be presented. Moreover, this chapter will highlight the fact that peace processes require patience and good faith from both sides; they are never resolved overnight. In light of the successful international examples of conflict resolution, this chapter also assesses how the AK Party managed the Kurdish resolution process. This chapter explains the problematical institutional structure with AKP and inner conflicts and inconsistencies that foiled the party’s ability to successfully reach a resolution. Thus, in agreement

with Özpek, this chapter argues that labeling the “peace process” as a strategic peace or merely a truce rather than a true peace (or rather than a complete resolution) would be accurate (2018: 38). Both parties to the process, the AK Party and the PKK, have their fair share of blame in the failure of the process. While the AK Party did not stand firmly behind its policies, the PKK was prone to incite violence since the resolution process was used by both sides in a pragmatic way to protect their interests. Subsequently, failure became inevitable.

The third and the final chapter will explore reasons behind the failure of the resolution process and the underlying causes of the broken-down ceasefire. It will analyze the changing balance of power between the main actors of the resolution process and how the changing of this balance led to a failed process. In addition, this chapter will once again stress that both transnational factors and regional ones play a key role in the process. Accordingly, internal and external factors contributing to the failure of the process will be listed and explained. While former ones increased the fragility of the process, the latter ones had destructive effect.

1.2. Method and Data

1.2.1. Rational Choice Theory and Process Tracing

Rational choice theories assume that political actors are rational and make cost-benefit analysis among various choices and hand down decisions (Özdamar, 2012: 212). This theory suggests that actors possess some targets and make decisions to achieve their targets. Two kinds of rationality exist: “procedural rationality” and “instrumental rationality”, and a clear distinction should be made between the two. Procedural rationality argues actors have extensive information and make decisions

relying on the available information (Quackenbush, 2004). However, what actually happens is that actors are unable to possess procedural rationality because of false perceptions and psychological limitations. Thus, most rational choice scholars admit instrumental rationality is dominant, a theory that puts forward that rational actors pursue more preferable options and absolute and transitive choices (Morrow, 1994: 18).

Attention should be drawn to the fact that normative arguments regarding the behaviors of actors are not presented in rational choice theories, and no judgments are made regarding the consequences of the choices (Özdamar, 2007: 36). Moreover, in this context, rationality should not be confused with the assumption that the actors will not error. Morrow (1994) reckons that there are three fundamental causes leading actors to make a mistake. Hazardous states in which decisions are taken are the first cause. Actors possessing restricted or missing information are the second cause. And, thirdly, actors may simply possess inaccurate information. Each of these reasons combined or acting individually may lead an actor to make mistakes and obtain sub-optimal results.

Academic language and models are utilized a number of researchers with the purpose of acquiring clarity, accuracy and impeccability (Nicholson, 2002), despite the fact that formal language and models are not demanded by rational choice theory (Özdamar: 2012). Through this language they clarify the way an actor acts. To exemplify; “game theory” models situations where consequences originate from strategic interactions of actor among one another (Mesquita, 2010). In these models, actors need to consider the actions of others. Similarly, I attempted to comprehend “strategic perspective” of decision makers (in my case, these actors are the AK Party government and the PKK). Strategic perspective concentrates on actors and on the

local and international constraints on them. According to this perspective, their decisions are more likely to be understood via the assessment of local as well as international factors (Mesquita, 2006).

As indicated above, I will apply these theories to my case study: the failure of the Kurdish resolution process. In this research I utilize rational choice theories, but I do not make use of a formal model or make mathematical and statistical calculations. Rather, I pursued a qualitative analysis via interviews with specific actors and took advantage of the numerous analyses of public statements made by various political leaders and experts in the local and global press at the time of the crisis. Therefore, I employ an “analytical narrative” with the help of process tracing methodology.

Process tracing is: “a procedure for identifying steps in a causal process leading to the outcome of a given dependent variable of a particular case in a particular historical context” (George and Bennett, 2005: 176). Identification of steps in a historical context is very significant, because the same factors produce different results depending on changing circumstances and context. For instance, the Syrian crisis was one of the most important causal factors instigating the negotiation process in the beginning, but it also accelerated the process’s collapse. Thus, process tracing allows scholars to identify the effects of causes put forth by the relevant actors through their actions. Although several varieties of process tracing are close to a detailed narrative, this thesis depends more on a profound, casual explanation.

Through the application of process training, my purpose is to ensure a narrative explanation of the casual factors that causes a particular result (Vennesson, 2008: 235). However, it comes as no secret that I found it relatively challenging both to categorize the factors as domestic or international and to weigh their relative importance, although despite these challenges I did still attempt an in-depth

inspection of the casual mechanism and clarification of the way particular variables interact with one another. These difficulties stemmed from the fact that the Kurdish question is an international and a transnational question and the factors related to it affect each other and are interrelated. For this reason, main actors of the process took both domestic and international factors into account while making cost-benefit analysis and calculations around the negotiation table. Thus, it is not easy to separate causes of the failure as solely domestic or international.

As mentioned above, I conducted interviews with people who were engaged in the process directly or indirectly. During the interview process, I found that the Kurdish question is a more delicate question than I had previously assumed. It is a “loaded” problem with very emotional implications. Frequently, the first question posed by some of my interviewees was whether I was Kurdish. They then assumed that if I was not Kurdish, I had to be Turkish nationalist. Lastly, due to the political turmoil that Turkey has been experiencing in recent years, I observed that some of the interviewees did not want to share their ideas with me in a clear manner.

One fundamental goal of this study is to comprehend the strategic perspective of those who make decisions. The strategic perspective concentrates on decision makers and local and international constraints they are exposed to. Thus, in regards with this perspective, decisions made by them are easier to comprehend via the assessment of local as well as international factors. In this respect, my hypothesis regarding the failure of the resolution process is the following:

The main cause for the failure of the resolution process is that it progressed in the favor of the PKK and to the detriment of the AK Party.

Henceforth, I want to shed light on the intervening causes that are affected by local, international and regional dynamics. For this purpose, I posit four logical factors or explanations that affect this primary reason. The former two are mainly based on Turkey's domestic politics, and the latter two are based on regional factors and international dynamics. The reason for this is that international experiences on conflict resolutions and social agreement propose analyzing dynamics on three levels:

- 1) Actor-based dynamics (Azam, 1995; Mason and Fett, 1996; Zartman, 1985; Harris, 2010; Find-ley, 2012; Çelik, 2010).
- 2) State-level structural dynamics (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Quinn, Mason and Gürses, 2007; Henderson and Singer, 2000; Bates, 1999; Bercovitch, 2005).
- 3) International and Transnational/Regional Dynamics (Gurr, 2000; Hartzell, 1999; Harbom and Wallensteen, 2006; Fortna, 2000; Wallensteen and Sollenberg, 1997; Doyle and Sambanis, 2000; Lake and Rotchild, 1996).

At this point, I acknowledge the role of Erdoğan and Öcalan as the main actors during the resolution process. Whereas State-level or Domestic Factors (or Dynamics) in my research are listed as 1) The HDP-PKK Rivalry, 2) The Existential Crises for the AK Party (the Gezi Protests, the 17-25 December Operations, the Kobane Protests, the 7 June General Election Results); International and Regional Factors (or Dynamics) are 1) The PYD State, and 2) Mobilizational Spillover Effects of the Syrian Civil War.

International and regional factors are particularly important to consider as they significantly affect actors' respective cost-benefit analyses.

All actors' willingness to engage in negotiations relies on a cost-benefit analysis. Upon considering the benefits and concerns, they decide whether to maintain the negotiation process. Thus, the mere act of coming to the negotiation table signifies that actors believe negotiating will be most beneficial for their interests (Çelik, 2017: 4). One can also argue that the main aim of the actors in the negotiation process is to take advantage of the conflict and ultimately gain political power. The negotiation process is merely the means to achieve certain pragmatic purposes; should other platforms provide more convenient alternatives, they will become more appealing to the actors (Çelik, 2017: 7).

After the Gezi Protests, the 17-25 December Operations, the Kobane Protests, and the 7 June elections, the AK Party government, as well as Erdoğan himself, became relatively weaker in the negotiation process. According to the results of the 7 June elections, the AK Party is still the largest party in the parliament despite not holding an absolute majority. The results showed that the AK Party was beaten by the MHP among nationalist voters and by the HDP among Kurdish voters (KONDA, 18.06.2015). Moreover, the HDP-PKK leadership and representation of Kurds were both legitimized by the resolution process (Köse, 2017: 24). However, the AK Party is traditionally a notable rival to Kurdish efforts, but despite the fact that it was indeed able to get more votes than political parties affiliated with the PKK (Aktürk, 2016: 60-61), based on relative gains, it is safe to say that the resolution process worked in favor of the HDP-PKK and to the detriment of the AK Party.

Moreover, the presidential system mapped out by the AK Party was already endangered when the HDP rejected to back it up. This project was initially accepted by the PKK because constitutional autonomy would be easier to attain under the presidential system (Özpek, 2018: 49). However, the presidential system harbored no room for any possible power-sharing between the AK Party and the PKK, which caused the two groups interest to diverge drastically. Consequently, the AK Party started to search for an alternative partner as the resolution process proved insufficient to set up the presidential system (Özpek, 2018: 46-51; Resch, 2017: 11). Following these events, the PKK and the HDP became the target of attacks by the MHP and Erdoğan, who started to build a strong relationship in a push to establish the new system.

The PKK exploited the resolution process and the armistice as an opportunity to make its own rules in the south-eastern Turkey. It started collecting taxes and controlling the area via check-points, and refused to pull back its fighters from Turkey (Akyol, Al-Monitor, 4 Aug. 2015). Moreover, the PKK mimicked the techniques of the PYD in Syria by changing battlegrounds from rural areas to urban areas and utilizing the method of “entrench battles” (International Crisis Group: ICG, 2017: 2). While Öcalan asserted that the PKK had no specific goal of secession, quasi-state activities by the PYD brought back the prospect of an independent Kurdistan among nationalist Kurds (Resch, 2017: 13). During the provisional government period between 7 June and 1 November 2015 elections in Turkey, the PKK seized upon a weakened Turkish government to secure the interests of the PYD in northern Syria. Thus, a preemptive attack against Turkey was started by the PKK (Aktürk, 2016: 61).

Overall, it is argued in this study that domestic dynamics are by themselves not enough to explain the failure of the Kurdish Resolution Process, AK Party policies, or the HDP's success in the 7 June elections. This would be a one-sided perspective. Intrastate armed conflicts are embedded in the regional setting (Forsberg, 2009: 13-17). Similarly, the existing conflict between Turkey and the PKK has also been affected by regional developments. These related matters between actors are of international nature since the PKK, as well as its Syrian branch PYD, follow regional policies and establish distinct relations with the other actors in the region separate from the Turkish government. Moreover, the PKK continues to advocate for secession and irredentist claims. Subsequently, investigating the impact of the Syrian civil war at meso-level is a better analytic practice than concentrating upon the specific deeds of actors separately from the regional developments.

Accordingly, it would be erroneous to think that political events take place in a vacuum in the present world that is getting more and more interdependent. The whole situation took a different direction when the PKK, through relationships with the PYD in northern Syria, became a significantly stronger actor than previously. Kurdish nationalist sentiments to establish a Kurdish nation-state were enhanced due to the quasi-state activities of the PYD in the area. The battle against the ISIS gave a legitimate ground for the deeds of the PYD whilst Turkish government's insufficient pace in responding to the ISIS threat put pressure on it. All in all, I argue that the cost-benefit analysis utilized by actors in deciding whether to sit on the negotiation table was deeply affected by the Syrian civil war and that the war's spillover effects eventually led to the collapse of the peace process.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

People may simply start to believe that if it can happen there, why couldn't it happen here? (Bosker and de Ree, 2014: 207)

2.1. Contagion Process Approach

In this study, rather of the impact of globalization or end of the Cold war, I will focus on ethnic conflicts as the primary international factor, namely on “contagion effects”. These effects can simply be identified as the presence of a conflict which elevates the likelihood of another conflict breaking out in a neighboring country (Dağ, 2018: 6). In other words, it is “a process whereby internal conflict in one state heightens the probability of internal conflict erupting in a neighboring state at a later point in time” (Forsberg, 2009: 14). This approach challenges “closed polity” approach, which exclusively concentrates on domestic and individual characteristics of countries and disregards the potential effect of regional factors and the international context to explain domestic conflicts (Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008: 1). Yet, the academic field generally agrees that any given country’s attributes and/or great power politics affects the likelihood of a conflict (Vorrath and Krebs, 2009: 3; Bosker and de Ree, 2014; Gurses, 2015) because domestic political events do not occur in a vacuum given today’s increasingly interdependent world.

As indicated above, internal conflicts are rarely completely “internal” since they introduce cost factors for neighboring states (Brown, 1996; Collier, 2003) and civil

wars are rarely isolated domestic affairs. Many studies have shown that a continuous internal issue in a single location tends to cluster in space and time, and so countries bordering on conflict zones are increasingly likely to experience violence, including intrastate ethnic conflict (Esty, 1995; Saideman and Ayres, 2000; Ward and Gleditsch, 2002; Gleditsch, 2007: 295; Goldstone, 2003). Conflicts may spread directly or indirectly through spillover effects such as increased refugee migration. Conflict can also spread through the process of diffusion, which contains different types within itself such as contagion, demonstration effects, information flows, and material and ideological support for ethnic diaspora (Salehyan and Gleditsch, 2006; DeMaio, 2010: 27). Whereas refugee flows that change the ethnic balance in the host country can be seen as a more direct contagion effect, contagion processes whereby conflict in a country sets an example and encourages groups in other places to revolt and bear arms by example can be considered indirect (Forsberg, 2009: 28). Consequently, this idea of contagion or “domino effect” is a common way of explaining the spillover of civil wars, where the contagion process approach argues that *context matters in terms of ethnic conflict* (Nguyen, 2010: 7).

The spread of conflict is compared to the spread of a disease. This analogy has explanatory leverage even though it alone cannot offer a full explanation of sub-state conflict. Therefore, we need a more complex framework to fully understand how conflicts spread. The theoretical framework entitled the “Epidemic Triangle”, originally articulated by John E. Gordon (1949: 504-515), is the most promising (Black, 2012: 22).

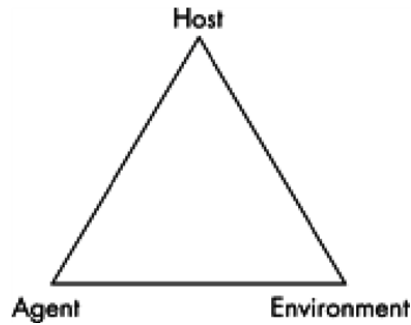


Figure 1. The Epidemic Triangle

As indicated in the **Figure 1**, there are three vertices where each represents a class of causes of the spread of a disease or conflict. The “host” is the potential target of infection, the infecting “agent” is the pathogen, and lastly “environment” is other causes that are neither part of the host nor the agent. Specifically, “host” factors are domestic factors and other structural characteristics of the receiving state that make it more or less susceptible to conflict. A state lacking these factors will be least likely to be affected by outside violence. The factors arising from “agent” may make the conflict more or less likely to spread. Finally, “environment” factors such as the involvement of great powers in the region may actualize the conditions for the spread of conflict or vice versa.

As is understood, (and illustrated in **Figure 1**) “the regional dimensions of internal conflicts assume that things move in one direction: from the place where the conflict started to neighboring states...” (De Maio, 2010: 28). The aim of this approach is to first consider the “source” (conflict country) and the “target” (neighboring country) of a contagious relationship separately, in contrast to previous one-sided studies where the targets of contagion are the point of emphasis and potential sources of contagion are lumped together (Forsberg, 2009: 20). It then suggests explanatory factors having shared borderlines by no means causes contagion effects, but merely

brings about out increased opportunity (Starr and Most, 1976; 1983). In such a manner, we can seek an answer for the question of under what conditions and situations is a country affected by a conflict in another country to the extent that conflict arises within its own territory. Also, we can seek an explanation for why civil wars have contagion effects in certain cases but not others. Moreover, disclosing the mechanisms may help us to understand which countries are the most likely targets of contagion effects, given an ongoing conflict (Forsberg, 2009: 14).

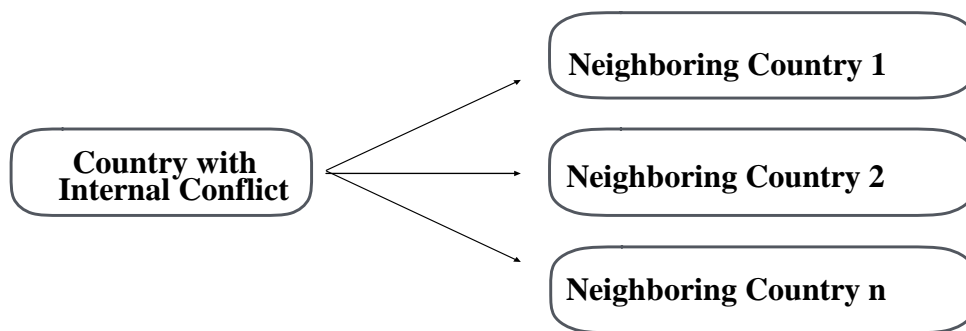


Figure 2. Contagion Approach of the Dissertation

Source: Forsberg, E., 2009, Neighbors at Risk: A Quantitative Study of Civil War Contagion, Report/ Department of Peace and Conflict Research 85, 23.

It is beneficial to look at what factors contribute to the spillover of violence, and under what conditions civil wars might have contagion effects. According to Brown, there are four possible “mechanisms that transmit instability from one place to another”: refugees, economic problems, “rebel activities in neighboring states,” and “when ethnic groups straddle formal international frontiers” (1996: 594-595). Lake and Rothschild also suggest that there are four “diffusion” mechanisms of ethnic conflicts (1998, 25-27). First, we have “events... changing directly the ethnic balance of power at home.” For instance, refugee flows can change ethnic composition in the host country. Second, “ethnic conflict in one country may prompt groups in another to make more extreme demands”, and third, “ethnic conflicts

abroad may lead groups to update their beliefs about the efficacy of the political safeguards contained in their existing contracts”. Finally, ethnic conflict abroad may change the political safety, “costs of protest” and their probability to succeed in the eyes of ethnic minorities in other countries.

Moreover, according Black,

“Potential causes of contagion identified in this literature include: transnational ethnic or religious ties between states, refugee flows, separatist conflicts (as opposed to conflicts over control of the central state), limited ‘state capacity’ of the potential receiving state (measured various ways), the intensity of the original conflict, the absence of international peacekeeper involvement in the original conflict, and, relatedly, ‘the flow of arms across borders’.” (2012: 19).

I will emphasize these factors later, but before that, several points should be briefly highlighted. Firstly, just as support from external actors (either to nation state or in opposition) increases the probability of a conflict spreading, this support can lengthen the lifetime of the conflict (Regan, 2002). Secondly, in addition to change in power balance of ethnic groups, refugees can be detrimental economically to the host country (Murdoch and Sandler, 2002: 91-110). Thirdly, for the fragility of neighboring states, it should be mentioned that domestic conditions in the neighboring state are substantial vis-a-vis characteristics of conflict (Atzili, 2007). Even the type of border and geography (such as one easily crossed, forested areas for hiding, distance from the center...) affect the potential for contagion and the spillover effect (Dyrstad et al., 2011: 369; Fearon and Laitin, 2003: 80). Fourthly, I can confidently say that shared ethnicity is a key variable for conflict spillover. To exemplify; “violence against certain groups in neighboring states may raise awareness at home or raise intrastate expectations of their government in terms of fair treatment or representation” (Lake and Rothchild, 1998: 424). In addition,

internal ethnic divisions at home, especially over long periods of time, may lead to conflict inflow (Forsberg, 2008; RAND, 2014: 11).

Furthermore, when states are uncertain about what potential violence in a neighboring country during a conflict and how it may evolve, they generally behave either more offensively or defensively (Danneman and Ritter, 2013). Defensive action is taken to prevent contagion effects of the ongoing conflict from growing, with internal repression mechanisms being one of the main ways that these actions are taken. Offensive actions are classified as more direct intervention into these conflicts. Potential actions include state actors participating in negotiations or conflicts in order to have a more decisive role in the neighboring conflict, especially when co-ethnic identity matters. In other words, cognates living in the neighbor suffer from the conflict (Trumbore, 2003: 185-190). Timing, ability and effectiveness of international intervention are of capital importance for the conflict spillover, whether said intervention is unilateral, bilateral or multilateral. Maintaining the possibility of intervention is very crucial in establishing credibility, and international actors can use this “threat” to improve security conditions, bring about lasting peace, and escape the cyclical nature of short-term ceasefires and protracted conflicts (Toft, 2010).

Finally, in my opinion, the role of technology for the conflict spillover should be considered, because access to open media can have a significant indirect impact on the contagion. Media coverage contributes to the learning cycle of foreign and domestic populations by improving communication networks and subsequently facilitating the diffusion of ideas and experiences across borders and within a society (Weidman, 2015), as in the case of the Arab Spring (Khondker, 18 November 2011) and in the case of the 6-8 Oct. Kobane Events. Ordinary citizens can build an idea

about the events of a neighboring conflict via social media, and can mobilize to create pressure on both their government and on international bodies to step into action. With the rise of online media, social awareness about the political or humanitarian problems in the conflict can be exposed and brought to the forefront of discussion.

2.2. Which countries are the targets of contagion?

Thanks to the literature on contagion, one can easily see that the security of regional states is inter-linked, with a substantial degree of autonomy from global issues. The concept of “security interdependence” used mainly by the regional complex approach explains this situation effectively because, as Buzan and Waever write, “most threats can travel more easily over short distances than over long ones, security interdependence is normally patterned into regionally based clusters: security complexes” (Vorrath and Krebs, 2009: 4). Yet, the literature at first glance provides us with very general or little information about which countries are the targets of contagion, which variables are the most significant, how they interact, and which conditions are necessary or sufficient for conflict spillover. To fill this deficiency, the studies of Halvard Buhaug and Kristian S. Gleditsch (2008) entitled as *Contagion or Confusion? Why Conflicts Cluster in Space*, and of Erica Forsberg (2009) entitled as *Neighbors at Risk: A Quantitative Study of Civil War Contagion* are, respectively, invaluable.

Buhaug and Gleditsch worked on why civil wars cluster in space as well as time. They separate the effects of neighboring conflict from the domestic factors of civil conflict and evaluate whether the spatial clustering of civil wars is the result of a corresponding spatial clustering of country characteristics or whether conflicts

indeed pose a threat to other proximate states. They benefit from data on intrastate conflicts in independent states over the period 1950-2001, based on the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset. Their results suggest that risk of contagion does not depend on density and severity of the neighboring conflict, and neither proximity nor exposure can explain the trajectory of a conflict. Interestingly, they did not find a significant correlation between the influx of refugees and the risk of civil war, in contrast to much of the literature. Rather, “there is a genuine neighborhood effect of civil war” (2008: 12), thus we must focus on the contextual effects of conflicts among contiguous countries. In other words, it is safe to say that neighborhood conflict still has an impact on the emergence of civil wars.

Considering transnational ethnic and cultural ties, they argue that “countries with ethnic linkages to groups in conflict across a shared border are significantly more at risk of civil war than other conflict neighbors” (Gleditsch, 2007; Buhaug and Gleditsch, 2008: 13). Put differently, it is more probable for countries to experience an onset of domestic conflict when there are ethnic linkages to a group living in a conflict area across borders. Therefore, transnational ethnic linkages constitute a central mechanism for conflict contagion because members of ethnic groups care about the welfare of other group members, and this loyalty does not stop at the border, but rather they continue monitoring the status and behavior of their brethren across borders (Davis and Moore, 1997: 173). Lastly, they assert that conflicts over territorial control (the separatist conflicts) rather than government increases the risk of conflict, mirroring the arguments of Ayres and Saideman (2000) who argue that as long as kin members in a proximate are also separatists, a group united by ethnic features has more chances of going after separatism.

When it comes to the study of Forsberg on civil war contagion, she attempts to examine theoretically when, how, why and where civil wars generate contagion effects using with a series of statistical analysis. In her research, the concept of intrastate armed conflict is introduced as a condition in which the government of a country and a dissident movement which works outside of government channels have openly expressed incompatibility, and the use of violence by both sides becomes inevitable (2009: 13). Civil war literature shows that conflicts that are rooted in internal setting ultimately become part of a regional setting since (1) the issues at stake have international components and rebel groups may pursue secessionist and irredentist claims, (2) both state and non-state actors in conflict may have regional mutual economic, military and political relations and have pursue or ideological relations with groups outside of country residence, and (3) repercussions of civil wars would have regional impact in addition to their domestic impact (Forsberg, 2009: 17).

However, as she mentioned, the literature has not clearly determined an answer to the question of “whether and why certain neighbors are more likely to be targets of contagion effects from an ongoing conflict” (2009: 20). Hence, she works to address this research gap by suggesting *The Contagion Process Approach*, which investigates how the contagion works and the mechanisms between the source and targets of contagion. It presents a more comprehensive perspective regarding contagion among neighbors.

The first thing Forsberg tries to disclose is the risk level of ethnically polarized societies to experience contagion effects. Her hypothesis is that countries that have high level of ethnic polarization adjacent to a country witnessing ethnic conflicts are more susceptible to contagion. Groups in ethnically polarized states could see

themselves likely to become successful in an armed struggle because of the uncertainty the civil war brings about, especially in the context of a weak state (2009: 25). These groups are inspired by regional developments and make a major contribution to the process of contagion. All in all, as Hill and Rothchild said, "...where only a few rivals confront one another within a state and where they have a history of previous protest, they will be most susceptible to intense conflict and to contagion" (1986: 721). Using a global dataset from 1989 to 2004 one can see that ethnically polarized countries are more prone to contagion effects.

Secondly, the impact of transnational ethnic groups or kinship linkages on contagion is analyzed. Although kinship ties as well as ethnic polarization remain important in their own right, further examination is needed to see conditional effect of ethnic polarization and kin-ship ties in case of conflicts in which an ethnic group in one location shares ethnic linkages with groups involved in the neighboring conflict. The presence of transnational ethnic ties between the same ethnic groups in conflict and the neighboring state comes into prominence during times of conflict. Transnational ethnic groups can be identified as a source of conflict because they represent a mismatch between cultural and political boundaries (Brubaker, 1996). Hence, to see spillover effects among members of transnational ethnic groups is not surprising because there is a connection among these groups as well as the sharing of similar features and imitating of one another (Gurr, 2000: 91). If one of the rebel groups is from a particular ethnic group and appears in an ethnic conflict in a state, it is not hard to observe that group members of this ethnic group in a neighboring state are influenced as well. The results, from 1946 to 2006, confirm that *kinship linkages matter for contagion* (Forsberg, 2009: 27). In addition, the effect of kinship is

increased if there is a discrimination against and mobilization among the brethren in the neighboring state.

In regard to the role of refugee flows, it can be said that it has a more “direct” contagion effect in the literature because its results are much more concrete and visible. As a result of armed conflict in a state (source), they may take refuge in a neighboring state (target). Then, they may cause competition over the resources such as food, land and jobs; and / or they may even pave the way for the influx of “warriors, arms and ideologies” due to the manipulation of refugee populations to the host state (Salahyan and Gleditsch, 2006: 335; Mug-gah, 2006; Lischer, 2005; Stedman and Tanner, 2003). In the study, it is suggested that refugees increase the risk of insurgency diffusion (Trumbore: 2003); in other words, neighboring countries accepting refugees are at more risk than neighbors that do not receive refugee flows in terms of civil war contagion. In addition, it is hypothesized that changes in the ethnic geography due to refugee flows make it more likely for hosting states to ultimately have to engage in armed clashes, if there are latent conflicts and ethnic polarization among different groups (Forsberg, 2009: 28-29). Then, the study with an empirical analysis over the period from 1960 to 2006 confirms that host countries become more prone to civil conflict with the arrival of refugees. Yet, it is also found that both the existence of latent conflicts and ethnic polarization in the host state restrain the contagion effect (Forsberg, 2009: 29). This may be because regimes in this type of countries see the risk of instability due to refugee flows and take countermeasures.

Moreover, Forsberg analyzes the impact of letting separatists group become autonomous or independent on the behavior of other ethnic groups in neighboring countries. The assumption is that granting territorial concessions to ethnic groups

that see violence as a way of attaining their objectives could cause “domino effects”. In this way, other ethnic groups may take inspiration to pursue similar goals, and this inspiration could operate both domestically and internationally (2009: 30). She used the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset in the time period from 1989 to 2004 in order to analyze this common notion empirically. The results did not confirm the notion. Other ethnic groups were not inclined to use violence as a way of attaining its objectives neither within countries nor internationally. Yet, Forsberg points out that “concessions do not appear to inspire new separatist movements; however, violent ethnic conflict may be contagious between different subgroup of the same ethnic group” (2009: 31).

Finally, I would like to shed light on something related to policies of threatened regimes in civil wars. As emphasized above, the relationship between domestic situations and international context contributes to the spread of civil wars across borders. During civil conflicts, the policies followed by governments under threat are also among determining factors. These governments can intentionally allow and enable civil tensions to spill across borders (De Maio, 2010: 26). By this way, they can punish and destabilize neighboring states believed to be against the governments and supporting the rebels. Thus, trans-nationalization of a civil war may not be the result of diffusion or contagion, but the result of domestic concerns and foreign policy calculations of threatened regimes. So, these regimes may engage in proxy battles against neighbor states. One good example of this kind of trans-nationalization of conflict is the use of Kurds during the Iran-Iraq war by the governments against each other. Kurds were also used as leverage against each other at regional level at various times e.g. in the competition between the Baath parties in Syria and Iraq, in the water disputes between Turkey and Syria, and during the recent

Syrian crisis (Dağ, 2018: 4). In conclusion, *It is therefore a mistake to think of internal conflict spilling over from one place to another through a process that is beyond human control* (De Maio, 2010: 28)

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

3.1. Historical Context of the Kurdish Questions in Turkey and Syria

In this section I will look into the emergence of the Kurdish question by examining the transnational aspects of the issue through an assessment of the Kurdish historical background in Turkey and Syria. In Turkey, the existence of Kurds was acknowledged during of Independence War. However, when the Turkish state was founded, these phenomena gradually became taboo through the rejection of Kurdish identity and discriminative policies against Kurds, which ultimately gave rise to the foundation of the PKK. In the case of Syrian Kurds prior to the civil war, it the Ba'ath regime's fear that developments that were taking place in the Northern Iraq would set an example for Kurds caused them to deprive them of their most basic rights. However, in the late 1990s, Bashar Assad and the PKK formed a close relationship, despite Turkey's pressure to end the relationship. Rather than succumb to this pressure, Assad, in 2000, legally recognized the Kurdish parties and organizations in Syria. However, by 2004 the Assad regime and Syrian Kurds would once again end up in a tense relationship.

Considering such information is absolutely crucial for the Turkish Kurdish question necessitate highlighting the significance of the regional and transnational dynamics.

Accordingly, the following questions will be addressed: What are the historical roots of the Kurdish Question in the Middle East, especially in Turkey and Syria? After World War I, under what circumstances did the Kurdish entity emerge? How did suppression of Kurdish identity take shape during the national state-building attempts in the region? And, how did Kurds react to this alienation process? Answers to these questions will be useful in showing the historical background of the Kurdish issue and to see the transnational aspects of the Kurdish question (Van Bruinessen, 2000). The causes for the “spillover effect” in the Kurdish case, disseminating from a conflict or insurgency in one state into the neighbor state, can be better comprehended (Dağ, 2018: 2-5).

Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the WWI, the Kurdish population was dispersed primarily among four countries: Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey. These newly-emerged states began the formation of modern secular nation-states and the subsequent exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities from social and political spheres. Within this framework, “The Kurds in Syria and Turkey were the main obstacles to the formation of nationalist and secular states” (Dağ, 2018: 3). Therefore, the existence of Kurdish ethnicity was rejected, and Kurdish language, education, reading, writing, music, broadcasting, names given to babies were all prohibited in public and private life (Mordechai, 2002: 47; Yıldız, 2005). The Kurds responded to this alienation process with a number of riots in each of these countries. The most notable of these riots are the Sheyh Said Riot in 1925, the Ararat Insurgency in 1927-30, and the Dersim Rebellion by Seyid Rıza in 1937-38 (Kirişçi and Winrow, 1997: 103-105). One can include the Mahabad Republic of Kurdistan formed by Qazi Muhammed in Iran in 1945 and the Simko Rebellion on this list as well. Kurdish cultural developments also took place in Syria (Romano and Gurses,

2014: 5). None of these insurrections against these nation states had an impact however, and they were all crushed (Cleveland and Bunton, 2009).

During these insurgencies, the Kurdish rebels benefited from their transnational ties (Van Bruinessen, 2000; Dağ, 2018: 3). In one instance, several leaders of Xoybun (a pro-Kurdish political organization established in 5 Oct. 1927 in Lebanon), including Jaladat Badirkhan and Memduh Selim, escaped Turkey's oppression, installed themselves in the Syrian-Kurdish enclave, and consequently formed Ararat Insurgency (Tejel, 2009: 17-23). With the failure of their revolt, they redirected their focus on the Kurdish cultural movements in Syria. Another example of influential transnational ties is the expulsion of Molla Mustafa Barzani from Iraq during and after the WWII and his success in obtaining a formal status in the Mahabad Republic of Kurdistan. Moreover, the KDP (the Kurdistan Democratic Party) established by Molla Mustafa Barzani and İbrahim Ahmed in Iraq in 1946, managed to branch out into Turkey as well as Syria to raise awareness about the ethnic identity of Kurds (Anderson and Stansfield, 2005: 164). All in all, the Kurdish rebels benefited significantly in their insurgencies from the geographical and demographic traits of the region. They fled across borders and found refuge with their neighbors, which was possible thanks to not-so-strict controls at borders and in the mountainous regions (Dağ, 2018: 3).

However, a united national movement composed of Kurds was impossible to build due to divisions among the Kurdish tribes in different countries, rivalries among tribal leaders, and sectarian divides (Kirişci and Winrow, 1997: 84). In addition to the lack of unification among the Kurds, lack of human and economic resources eased the implementation of the regional governments' oppressive policies towards their demands. Their political activities were treated with suspicion by state

governments, and the Kurds were regarded as “Trojan Horses” by the regional governments (Dağ, 2018: 4). Arab, Persian and Turkish governments, which never allowed the Kurdish movements in their territory, did not hesitate to use Kurds, at the regional level, as a trump card against each other, and as a means to penetrate into other countries when needed (Gunter, 1991; Gambill, 2004; Roth and Sever, 2007: 906; Mincheva and Gurr, 2008: 58-60; Kurubaş, 2009; Yıldız, 2015: 41-59; Dağ, 2018: 4-5; Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Author Interview: 19 Apr. 2018).

3.2. Historical Background of the Kurds in Turkey

In the case of Turkey, as mentioned above, the Kurdish Question can be dated back to the final phase of the Ottoman Empire and modern Turkey’s establishment (Jwaideh, 1999 & Kirişci and Winrow, 1997). During the Independence War between 1919 and 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the leader of this war for the Turks and subsequent founder of Turkey used the Kurds to fight against British and French occupation forces and pledged that “wherever the population of a district [liva] is Kurdish, it will govern itself autonomously. Aside from this, whenever one speaks of the people of Turkey, they (the Kurds) should also be included... Now, the Turkish Grand National Assembly is made up of empowered representatives both of Turks and of Kurds, and the two elements have joined their interests and destinies” (Mango 2002, 15). “The Ottoman country being the homeland of Turks and Kurds” was a point highlighted by Atatürk, and he also emphasized the “inseparability of the Kurds from the Ottoman nation” before and during the Independence War (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008: 5). However, after the establishment of the modern Turkey, the idea of Kurds being a “sibling nation” disappeared. Instead, they were referred to as Turks ignorant of their Turkishness. The treatment they were exposed to assumed that the Kurds

themselves and their languages never existed during the establishment process of the Turkish nation-state.

Following the Lausanne Treaty in 1923, Kurds in Turkey were not considered a minority due to the fact that they were Muslims, and the Turkish state started to reject the existence of Kurdish ethnicity altogether. The Kurds were even referred to as “mountainous Turks” who had yet to discontinue the use of their native language (Gunes and Zeydanlioglu 2014, 9). According to the Turkish Language Institution (Türk Dil Kurumu), the term “Kurds” was defined in 1936 as a “name given to a group or a member of this group of Turkish origin, many who have changed their language, speaking a broken form of Persian and lives in Turkey, Iraq, Iran.” Yet, as Martin van Bruinessen rightly comments, “the embarrassing question why it was necessary to Turkify a people said to be Turks already was never answered” (as cited in Zeydanlioğlu, 2008: 9). Furthermore, the concept of “mountainousness” can actually be seen as a way of humiliating the Kurds and promulgating Turkish superiority.

One reflection of this sense of Turkish superiority is the “Eastern Reform Plan” (Şark Islahat Planı). It was developed by Turkish national elites to put the Kurdish region in order and govern them with the aim of Turkification (Zeydanlioğlu, 2008: 10). For instance, Article 11 of the plan mentions that Kurds would be forced to be dispersed across Turkey, and they would not be allowed to number more than 10% of the population into which they migrated. In addition, social ties between Kurdish families were cut in order to decrease social cohesion among them, and a number of Kurdish children were sent to boarding schools to be forced to speak Turkish and to forget their “Kurdishness”.

Furthermore, according to Nuri Dersimi, a Kurdish nationalist ideologue: “on the one hand when we say we are ‘Turks’ we are told ‘no, you are not Turks, you are Kurds’. Yet, when we, the people of Dersim, say we are Kurds, they hit us hard and say that ‘no you are not Kurds, there are no Kurds” (Kirişci and Winrow, 1997: 105). This shows us how nation-state building efforts of the Kemalist regime ignored and suppressed the Kurdish identity in Turkey. A quotation from Van Bruinessen could better explain the exclusionary Turkish national ideology and show how the founding Kemalist elites believed in a homogeneous and mono-ethnic nation:

“There are strong ideological impediments to the recognition of the Kurds as a distinct ethnic group with its own culture, and further concessions are almost unthinkable. The military and civilian elites (which include “assimilated Kurds”) are deeply committed to the Kemalist dogma that the people of Turkey are one homogeneous nation, and they perceive each denial of unity as a vital threat to the state” (as cited in Heper, 2007: 3).

As a result, one could say that the Kurds were not incorporated within the mindset of the Turkish state founders as a distinct identity with their own cultural and political rights. Demands for the recognition of Kurdish identity were seen as an attempt to undermine state identity and to divide the country. Yet in opposition to these goals, the centralization and secularization process in Turkey during the nation-state building project of the Kemalist elites led to an increase in ethnic awareness among Kurds (Kirişci and Winrow, 1997: 101).

In this way, the “Kurdish taboo” was created via the denial and suppression of Kurdish identity and assimilationist policies in Turkey (Güneş and Zeydanlıoğlu, 2014). This taboo suggested that Kurds were traditional, backward and uncivilized people who needed to be civilized and modernized via modernization methods and Kemalist program of Turkification. The task of “Turkish white men” was carried out by Kemalists during this period. Kurdish language was prohibited in public and

private life (Mordechai, 2002: 47). Kurdish education, reading, writing, music, broadcasting, names given to babies were all criminalized. These restrictions on Kurdish language, literature and culture continued until the EU Accession Requirements were brought into force, which means for most of the Republic.

These discriminatory policies against Kurdish culture and language played a pivotal role in the ethnic mobilization of Kurdish violent groups in Turkey. Yet, to be fair, it should be mentioned that “Kurds have been able to benefit from the basic rights of Turkish citizenship if they disguised their ethnic identity” (Dağ, 2018: 4). For instance, the Turkish Workers Party⁵ (a left-wing party) was closed in 1971 since it openly recognized that “there were Kurdish people living in eastern Turkey” (Kirişci and Winrow, 1997: 108). In reaction to this, all pro-Kurdish organizations, legal or illegal, demanded that the ethnic identity of Kurds be recognized constitutionally (Dağ, 2018: 4).

Turkish state’s policies based on assimilation and the use of violence were the main factors influencing the formation of the relationship between Turkish state and the Kurds. Thus, the Kurdish Question came to be evaluated as a problem between Turkish state and Kurdish society. However, after the continuation of Turkish rejectionist policies towards Kurdish demands, the PKK (the Kurdistan Workers’ Party - Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan founded in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan (Apo)), launched its first armed struggle in 1984. This conflict led to tens of thousands of deaths, destroyed many villages, and forced millions of people to migrate from their hometowns (McDowall, 2000: 418-454).

⁵ With the mid-1970s, the Kurdish groups started to be active among Marxist-Leninist left wing movements (Kirişci and Winrow, 1997; Dağ, 2018).

As a result of the conflicts between the PKK and the TSK, the 1990s saw mass-scale village evacuations that resembled the resettlement programs in the first few years of the republic. Then, as Zeydanlıoğlu emphasizes the “Kurdish question” became “Turkish question” (2008: 12) because problems of Kurdish society took a much clearer shape among Turks. Unfortunately, many Turks began to consider Kurds to be trouble-makers, separatists and betrayers to the Turkish nation. This negative perception widened and deepened the social gap between Turks and Kurds and caused distrust and a “societal security dilemma” between these two societies. This phenomenon is defined by Roe as a situation in which “the actions of one society, in trying to increase its societal security (strengthen its own identity), causes a reaction in a second society, which, in the end, decreases the first society’s own societal security (weakens its identity)” (as cited in Balcı and Kardaş, 2016: 2). In other words, these groups believed their gains to be at the expense of their opponent, in essence, relative gains.

Before concluding this section, it should be noted that the PKK gained leverage over the Kurdish insurgency in Turkey despite the fact that it was unsuccessful in realizing its target of re-placing the state authority in the southeastern region of Turkey (Tezcür, 2010: 775). Turkish authorities subsequently had to deal with PKK terrorism in the context of the Kurdish Question, because until this point, the PKK had tried to justify its actions as protecting the rights of Kurdish people. Furthermore, going back to the primary point of this section, in reality the PKK pursued a Pan-Kurdish agenda from the very beginning because of the transnational nature of the Kurdish people, and so its aspiration for an “independent and united Kurdistan” can be assessed in the same context (Fantappiè, 2016). For instance, when Iraqi Kurds gained relative emancipation from Saddam regime in 1991, the Kurds in Turkey

were inspired by this situation. Following these events, the PKK organized demonstrations and uprisings for a number of years. These demonstrations could be perceived as the continuation of so-called “serhildan”: a popular rebellion declared in March 1990. The PKK used these demonstrations to try and create and enhance a “liberated area” within Turkey (Ökem, 2006: 239).

3.3. Historical Situation of the Syrian Kurds before the Civil War

Before discussing the emergence of the PYD (the Party of Democratic Union, founded by former PKK members) and its role in the failure of the Kurdish Resolution Process, I want to shortly describe the situation of Syrian Kurds under the Ba’ath regime, as well as historical pressures on the Kurds in Syria. With this discussion the logic behind the emergence of the Kurdish nationalism and their present search for the establishment of an independent state in Syria can be understood better.

After WWI, France held control of Syria in accordance with the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement and divided Syria into six “states” (autonomous republics): State of Damascus (1920), State of Aleppo (1920), Jabal Druze (1921), Sanjak of Alexandretta (1921), Greater Lebanon (1920) and Alewife State (1920). However, it did not permit the Kurds to have a state in Syria (Ismael, 2001: 234), thus, an independent state could not be built by Kurds. This occurred firstly due to the fact that they lacked the national consciousness needed to establish an independent state and secondly, because of the international power politics at that time (Kirişci and Winrow, 1997; Jwaideh, 1999; Dağ, 2018: 3). France had good relations with Turkey during the interwar period between WWI and WWII. France was the first Western nation to recognize the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the National Pact.

Additionally, France saw Turkey as an obstacle to Soviet expansionism. Because of this, France wanted Turkey as either an ally or at minimum an impartial nation during WWII (Soysal, 1983). France allowed the Hatay Province to join Turkey in 1939, and as a result, the Turkish-French Declaration stated that, in case of a war in the Mediterranean Sea, France and Turkey would mutually assist each other (Balçı, 2013: 61). In conclusion France sacrificed the Kurds to the benefit of their relations with Turkey (Gambill, 2004).

The pressure over the Kurds increased following the Ba'ath Party's seizure of power through the 1963 coup. The Ba'ath Party was afraid of a domestic Kurdish uprising mirroring the developments in Northern Iraq, where Kurds under the leadership of Mullah Mustafa Barzani revolted against the Iraq regime (McDowall, 2004; Gambill, 2004). In 1962, according to Decree 93, the citizenship rights of practically one fifth of Syrian-Kurds, accounting for more than 120,000 people, were taken from them with an exceptional census in a randomized manner. According to Human Rights Watch "brothers from the same family, born in the same Syrian village, were classified differently. Fathers became foreigners while their sons remained citizens" (CNN, 8 Apr. 2011). It became Kurds' obligation to document that they had been residing in Syria prior to 1945. As a result of this arbitrary treatment, even Kurds who had advanced in the public sector, like former minister and the Chief of the General Staff Abdalbaki Nîzametîn, became stateless (McDowall, 2004: 624). Overnight, the Syrian-Kurds⁶ became aliens (*ajanib*) and unregistered (*maktumin*) (Tejel, 2009: 49-52).

⁶ These Kurds that registered as "foreigners" with the Decree 93 were granted Syrian citizenship in April 2011 after the outbreak of Syrian crisis. With this step, Assad wanted to appease the Syrian Kurds for the unity of state.

In addition to this expatriation, Lieutenant Muhammad Talab al-Hilal, the previous head of Secret Services in Hasaka released a report from Jazira in November 1963 dealing with the “Kurdish Threat”. Within the scope of anti-Kurdish propaganda, he defined Kurds as a “danger” to Arabs and offered a twelve-point manuscript meant to guide the fight against the “Kurdish danger”: 1. Kurds would be moved from their original locale to inner areas; 2. They would be stripped of the right to education ; 3. “Wanted” Kurds would be delivered to Turkey; 4. Any job opportunities would be taken from them ; 6. Kurdish religious ‘ulama’ (clerics) would be sent away with Arabs to substitute them; 7. “Divide-and-rule” policy would be put into effect against the Kurds; 8. Kurdish territories would be colonized by Arabs; 9. Military agencies would be placed in the “northern Arab belt” and Kurds would be moved from this zone; 10. “collective farms” would be established for newcomer Arabs; 11. A comprehensive knowledge of Arabic for would be mandatory for anyone to be able to vote or work as a government officer; and 12. No one wanting to reside in the region except Arabs would be granted citizenship (Vanly, 1992: 156; Tejel, 2008: 61; Gunter, 2013: 4-5). Additionally, the Syrian government later sought to create an “Arab Belt” between its own Kurds and those in Turkey and Iraq (McDowall, 2004; Vanly, 2005: 120). In line with this strategy, Kurdish cities and districts were evacuated and Arabs were placed in the region in a manner similar to the Eastern Reform Plan implemented in the single-party era of Turkey. The names of settlements were translated into Arabic language and Kurdish language was banned (Gunter, 2004). As is clear, assimilationist and oppressive policies against the Kurds were now successfully put into practice in Syria as well.

In the late 1990s, the Assad regime reacted to Turkey’s massive irrigation project known as Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi (Southeastern Anatolia Project, or the

‘GAP’), because the construction of many dams throughout the Tigris and Euphrates watersheds was planned, which would cause water shortages in Syria. In response a strategic alliance between the Assad regime and the PKK emerged; the regime provided the PKK with logistical and military support and provided safe havens to them (Gambill, 2004; Tejel, 2009: 75-79; Fantappiè, 2016: 97-102; Dağ, 2018: 4-5). For instance, Bekaa Valley became home to the first training camps and headquarters of the PKK. Moreover, its leader Öcalan was hosted in Damascus and Lazkiye from time to time. In return for this support, Öcalan directly stated that the struggle of Syrian Kurds for their rights was unnecessary, and, in parallel to the regime, he argued that most of the Syrian Kurds were not native (Gambill, 2004; Tejel, 2009: 78; Kiran, 2014: 95).

However, rapprochement between Turkey and Syria occurred as a result from the threat of war from Turkey (Gambill, 2004; Oran, 2005: 554-557; Özdağ, 2008). Turkey compelled Syria to end its support for and strategic alliance with the PKK. As a result, Öcalan was expelled from Syria in 1998 and later captured by the Turkish government. The Assad regime also reconciled with the Saddam regime. The combination of these two actions strained the regime’s relations with Kurdish groups. In response, the PKK ended its friendship with the regime and in 2003 formed a Syrian branch, the PYD (Schoot, 2017: 13). The PKK’s anti-regime stance continued until the eruption of the Syrian crisis in 2011. On the other hand, Barzani encouraged Syrian Kurds to re-organize politically (Bechev, 2013) and in November 1999 the Yakiti Party, a pro-KDP group, took a step forward by demanding that Kurdish should be an official language and that security and governance in the Kurdish region of Syria should be given up to the Kurds (Gambill, 2004).

After the death of Hafez al-Assad in June 2000, Bashar Assad responded to the inevitable US invasion of Iraq by softening state policies towards the Kurds by legalizing Kurdish parties and their political organizations (Gambill, 2004). He also allowed Kurdish language education in private courses. Following these developments, the Syrian Kurds pushed Assad to take more concrete steps for their rights and Yakiti members called for removing all the the barriers banning Kurdish language and culture and the recognition of the existence of Kurdish ethnicity within the country's unity (Agence France-Presse, 10 Dec. 2002). However, the Syrian government rejected these calls and arrested chief members of the Yakiti Party such as Merwan Osman and Hasan Saleh on charges of "inciting religious and ethnic discord" (Human Rights Watch, 26 Nov. 2009).

Tension between the Assad regime and the Syrian Kurds peaked in March 2004 after a foot-ball match in Qamishli. Kurdish fans and Arab supporters fought after the latter chanted slogans supporting Saddam whereas the former chanted in support of U.S. President George W. Bush. Security forces fired bullets into Kurdish crowd and killed at least seven people and caused many injuries. Following this, the protests spread out to other Kurdish towns including Hasaka, Amuda, Afrin, Aleppo, and Kurdish neighborhoods in Damascus. The protests that lasted for eight days, and 40 people died. Of the dead, 33 were Kurds and 7 were Arabs. 400 people were injured and an additional 2000 Kurds were detained (Gambill, 2004).

The Kurdish question, when examined in the historical context of Turkey and Syria as well as Iraq and Iran, shows the importance of regional dynamics and the fact that the trans-nationalization in the region has long involved the Kurds. Furthermore, it also illustrates that there have always been interactions between Kurdish actors despite the nation-state borders drawn after the WWI. Kurds with nationalistic

sentiments believed that success in one part of Kurdish geography would positively influence the other parts. Thus, the Kurdish actors (including both the KDP and the PKK) have continuously tried to extend their power and impact in ‘the other parts of Kurdistan’. The PKK’s Pan-Kurdish agenda and its aspiration for an “independent and united Kurdistan” can be considered in the same context (Fantappiè, 2016). *This aspect of the Kurdish issue proves that the spillover effect has been in progress for a very long time* (Dağ, 2018: 5). Therefore, developments related to the Kurdish question in one state, like the resolution process in Turkey, cannot be handled separate from the other Kurdish movements in the region.

CHAPTER 4

JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY (AK PARTY⁷) AND THE KURDISH QUESTION & THE KURDISH RESOLUTION PROCESS

The AK Party's biggest move towards the Kurdish question was to recognize the existence of the problem. Before the AK Party came to power, there were ongoing reforms related to Kurdish issue; and, when the AK Party took power, it moved to accelerate these reforms. However, these reforms were not by themselves sufficient. Erdoğan's 2005 Diyarbakır speech brought a completely new dimension to the issue when he explicitly acknowledged that past policies of Turkish state had not been nearly enough to solve the problem. Suddenly, the Kurdish "taboo" was broken.

Following these events, the AK Party proceeded with bolder initiatives on the issue and normalized its relationship with the KRG. This way, it started acting within the parameters of the international dynamics of the issue.

Ultimately, the AK Party concluded in 2007 that armed conflict would not be enough to solve the problem. The PKK also had its own reasons for withdrawing from the battleground, including the necessity of political engagement and regional developments in Syria. As a result, a resolution process composed of three rounds started off, which ultimately failed.

⁷ Short name of the party is "AK PARTY" as expressed in Article 3 of By-Law of the Justice and Development Party (with Amendments Effected in 2012) <http://m.akparti.org.tr/english/akparti/parti-tuzugu>. For this reason, I preferred to use this abbreviation in the study.

Turks, especially Turkish officials, did not perceive a Kurdish problem but rather a general terror problem (Kirişci and Winrow, 1997: 183), so attempts were made to solve it by force. Also, it was only seen as a threat to the independence and national unity of Turkish Republic and related to “foreign incitement” and “underdevelopment,” including the left-wing and Islamist political movements in Turkey (Van Bruinessen, 1998; İçduygu et al, 1999; Tezcür, 2010)⁸. Yet, one must acknowledge that just because an issue has a terror dimension does not necessarily remove the possibility of the Kurdish Question as well, because the PKK justifies its terrorist actions as necessary to draw attention to the problems of Kurds, and necessary even to freeing them from the suppression in the long-run.

Accepting this fact, the first programs of the AK Party⁹ stated that “the ‘Kurdish Question’ would not be resolved by the policies of the past” (Yeğen, 2015: 4), although even in these discussions the problem was discussed under the ambiguous title of “Southeast”, and the Kurdish Question itself was not mentioned. As it is understood, the AK Party accepted the state’s historical mistakes and was aware of the fact that they could not solve the question through solely security measures, yet they hesitated even giving a name to the question (One of the former Foreign Ministers of the AK Party, Author Interview: 29 Mar. 2018; Wise Man, Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018). However, the AK Party would later change the state policies towards the Kurdish Question, step by step, in a pragmatic way.

⁸ The report of the SHP in 1989 known as “South East Report” (Doğu ve Güneydoğu Sorunlarına Bakış ve Çözüm Önerileri) is one of the important exceptions which open the Pandora’s box. Although it offers a democratic solution to the question and went beyond the ordinary state discourse, it is one of the main texts that reflects main characteristics of 1990s because it clearly declared that “national language, flag, symbols, borders of the state and sovereignty rights of the Turkish state is out of the question” (TBMM Official Reports, 05.06.2013). Another report was prepared in December 1991 by Metin Metiner with the instructions of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan when he was the mayor of İstanbul. This report challenged the official ideology seriously and offered unification under İslam (Baskın Oran, Author Interview: 5 Apr. 2018).

⁹ For the programs of the 58th and 59th governments founded by the AK Party in 2002 and 2003, see the Turkish Parliament website: <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/hukümetler/HP58.htm>; <http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/hukümetler/HP59.htm>.

In the beginning, I would also like to point out that because the liberalization process in the public sphere empowered the sub-national identities, Turkey was obliged within the EU membership procedures to bring about political reforms in regard to the solution of the Kurdish issue (Bacik, 2010). Moreover, presence of mobilized Kurdish diaspora in Europe helped increase the pressure by European governments on Ankara (Kirişci, 2003). As indicated in **Table 1**, a series of reforms and regulations, which paved the way for the use of Kurdish language in public sphere, started during the coalition government, which included the left-wing DSP, the right-wing nationalist MHP and the center-right ANAP. This was part of EU harmonization reforms that started before the AK Party coming to power in 2002. The AK Party accelerated these reforms and focused on the social, economic and political dimensions of the problem, trying to gain both international and domestic legitimacy against the military by continuing the EU Reforms (Tezcür, 2014: 160). To stay in power, the AK Party tried to get foreign support from the Western World against their own military by expanding democratic freedoms in the country (Aydın and Emrence, 2016: 6).

With this mentality, the AK Party made three important changes in Turkish politics closely related to the Kurdish Question and within the scope of EU membership process. First, the balance between military and civil institutions in governing the country was arranged in latter's favor. Second, Turkey and Kurdish populated regions financially developed despite the fact that economic policies applied in the region were not successful in ensuring self-sustaining economy and eliminating regional inequalities (Aydın and Emrence, 2016: 8). Third, the realm of minority freedom and rights, especially for the Kurdish identity, was expanded. These changes are explained and evaluated in detail below.

Firstly, the state of emergency in the southeastern part of the country which had been in place for two decades was revoked, and civil governance was reconstituted in the region once the AK Party took over parliament in 2002 (Kirişci, 2011). Civil authority in the National Security Council (MGK) was strengthened with a civilian leader, while the civilian agenda-maker secretary position reserved with the number of Council members was increased to one from five. Moreover, the 2003-2004 reforms deemed the decisions of the MGK as advisory, not obligatory (Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemeleri), and the state security courts, where military judges served, were removed (Heper, 2005: 215-216). The duties and authorities of these courts were delegated to specially-authorized courts who were subsequently abolished in 2014. Additionally, the election of Abdullah Gül in 2007 as president of Turkish Republic was a sign of civil triumph over the military.

One of the chief advisors for the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu during the resolution process interpreted this change and the resolution process as related to each other because the AK Party knew that struggle with the military would not be made by only struggling with the actor itself, but also with the agenda by which the military controlled the political sphere (Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018). This way the AK Party could demonstrate that it was “really” capable of governing the country. According to the advisor, one cannot democratize a political system by merely decreasing the effect of the military on the political system, but one must also fight against the ideology and the grounds which enable the tutelage. Wise Man agreed with him and said that “we know that the question has security dimension, but if you transform it into only a security question, the power and initiative of the security bureaucracy will increase” (Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018). Thus, this tactic

used by the AK Party complied with its struggle against the military tutelage and the EU membership process strengthened its hand.

In the context of the AK Party's policy towards the Kurdish Question, the problem itself was employed as a means through which to overcome the secular nation-state discourse existing in the country, according to which military was the mainstay and guardian of secularism. The party also regarded "secularism as a cause of division between Turks and Kurds" and put forth a formula generated by itself, that of Islam as the metaphorical cement, to beat down the demands made by Kurdish nationalists (Yavuz and Özcan, 2006: 103 & Balcı and Kardaş, 2016: 9-10). Yet, the bonding role of Islam was overestimated in its ability to function as the unifying power that would replace Kurdish nationalism (Yavuz, 2009: 188-190). The AK Party assumed that if the legacy of Kemalist policies of secular nation building could be annihilated by stressing Islamic brotherhood, Kurds would give up their nationalist desires and demands because they would also become nationalist, rightfully, due to assimilationist and secular policies of Kemalists.

However, Kurds are heterogeneous and can be divided into such different groups as integrated Kurds, Islamist Kurds and ethnic/separatist Kurds (Aydınlı and Özcan, 2011: 448). By identifying these target groups, the government should offer a course of action to deal with them one by one even though all classifications are themselves a mere simplification. For the first group, problems can be taken into account as "Turkey's problems" and solved by democratization and economic growth with their further integration into Turkey. For the Islamist Kurds, pro-Islamist discourse of the AK Party government would be sufficient without dismissing the radical Kurdish Islamist groups.

When it comes to the third group, as Sarıgil and Fazlıoğlu mentions, the perception of discrimination among Kurds really matters and plays a crucial role in the rise of Kurdish nationalism, as more people feel alienated, which fosters more ethnic consciousness among them (2014: 437). Noticing the limited number of empirical works in the literature about Kurdish ethno-nationalism, they also claim that the Islamic-brotherhood solution of the AK Party would not be of much use because secular Kurds have a relatively less nationalist mindset than religion-oriented Kurds (2014: 446). In this respect, Wise Man interestingly observes that religious Kurds around him are psycho-logically disengaged from Turkey and it has been more difficult to discuss political issues in Turkey with them in recent years (Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018). The AK Party should have been aware of the huge diversity among the Kurdish population in Turkey, and the fact that these differences are not necessarily exclusionist to one another as there is significant overlap. Therefore, behind the socio-economic problems of the Kurds, the fact that religious Kurds also can be nationalists should not have been forgotten when strategizing how to deal with the Kurdish question.

As indicated above, the manner in which the AK Party tries to handle the Kurdish question is *instrumentalist*, short-sighted and incoherent (Yavuz and Özcan, 2015; Aydın and Emrence, 2016). Inconsistencies within the AK Party towards the Kurdish question may be justified by both the difficulty of the question, and also by “the necessities of the time” (One of the chief advisors of the prime-minister Davutoğlu, Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018). Yet, the problem is that although the AK Party made radical reforms to deal with the Kurdish question, it did not stand behind these reforms (Wise Man, Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018). The party allowed itself to be affected too much by public reaction, especially by nationalists, and the party could

not carry out the policy (Author Interviews with one of the former Foreign Ministers of the AK Party: 29 Mar. 2018; İlnur Çevik: 30 Mar. 2018; Oktay Vural: 3 May 2018).

With this instrumentalist approach, as previously stated, the AK Party attempted to get foreign support needed to stay in power and simultaneously fight against secular state via Kurdish pol-icy reforms. In addition, electoral needs affected the AK Party's policies toward the issue (One of the vice chairmen of the CHP, Author Interview: 20 Mar. 2018). Furthermore, by improving social and economic conditions and providing social services, the AK Party hoped to “contain Kurdish unrest in Turkey” (Yörük, 2012) and to get Kurdish citizens to vote for the party.

For this reason, the party has made many investments since 2002 including roads, schools, hospitals, and airports in the eastern and southeastern part of Turkey where the Kurdish population predominates, matching investment in other regions of Turkey (Akdağ, 2017: 132). To illustrate; according to the TUIK dataset, the persons per doctor ratio decreased from 2,314 in 2001 to 1,349 in 2006, and the student per teacher ratio approached the national average between 2006 and 2008¹⁰. Moreover, the credit per capita supplied by banks went up from 22 dollars in 2001 to 288 dollars in 2006¹¹, and local expenditures by municipalities and government support to the private sector rose significantly between 2001 and 2008 (Aydın and Emrence, 2016: 8). These efforts were seen as a sign of good intentions by the AK Party towards the Kurds, and a considerable number of Kurds repeatedly voted for the AK Party until the 2015 June national elections.

¹⁰ Turkish Institute of Statistics (TUIK), Various Tables, <http://www.tuik.gov.tr/UstMenu.do?metod=kategorist>.

¹¹ The Banks Association of Turkey (TBB). Various Tables. <https://www.tbb.org.tr/tr/bankacilik/banka-ve-sektor-bilgileri/istatistiki-raporlar/59>.

However, the success of the Kurdish HDP (Halkların Demokratik Partisi - People's Democratic Party) in 2011 elections and particularly in the June 7 general elections of 2015 that these gains were not permanent. Based on these results, it can be asserted that socio-economic improvements may not constrain ethno-nationalism among Kurds (Sarıgil and Fazlıoğlu, 2014: 445), and ideological polarization could surpass economic voting behavior. As a result, the AK Party ignored the fact that the addressing of economic problems in eastern and south-eastern Anatolia was necessary, but not sufficient to fully address the Kurdish problem.

When it comes to the realm of minority freedom and rights, the AK Party possessed a loose point of view regarding the Kurdish question compared to previous Turkish governments. During the first few times it came to power, the AK Party emphasized democracy and human rights as part of the EU harmonization process and showed a tendency to grant "reasonable" cultural rights to Kurds (Pusane, 2014: 84-85). These reasonable cultural rights were to be in accordance with the national unity and would not damage the unity of the nation but rather bring only further cultural richness (Dağı, 2006: 97). This way, by emphasizing on democracy, human rights, cultural rights and pluralism, the AK Party was aiming to lay the groundwork to have itself accepted as a statutory political party both by the secular groups in Turkey and the West.

As part of this policy, Prime Minister Erdoğan addressed a crowd in Diyarbakır in 2005 in such a way that would go down in history. In this speech, which one may call quite liberal, he came out against regional and ethnic separatism, but also conceded that past policies of the Turkish state about the Kurdish question were harmful. He also criticized the denial of the Kurdish identity and violation of human rights in the region committed by state officials when the country had been in a state

of emergency. Moreover, he emphasized the cultural pluralism and minority rights, promising to solve “the Kurdish question” by means of more democracy and more citizenship (Milliyet, 12 Aug. 2005; Efeğil, 2011). In this speech, Erdoğan broke one of the biggest taboos of Turkish history by directly naming the question as “the Kurdish question” while serving as the prime minister of Turkish Republic. This is one of the turning points for policy towards the Kurdish question (Wise Man, Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018).

Following this view, the AK Party government later took bold steps in its policy towards the Kurdish question. Torment and maltreatment was done away with, articulating one’s thoughts freely was made possible with the constitutional amendment restricting freedom of expression in “languages prohibited by the law”, use of Kurdish by public and private TV channels and radio stations was permitted, and a prohibition on the giving of Kurdish names to children was abolished (as indicated in the **Table 1**). Also, through a partial amnesty law via “Return to Village and Rehabilitation project”, the AK Party made attempts to integrate some of the PKK militants back into society. Furthermore, old HADEP MPs including Leyla Zana were released with the amendment of the anti-terror law in accordance with the verdict reached by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in 2004 (Akdağ, 2017:132; Pusane, 2014: 85).

Unfortunately, this process had significant ups and downs. For instance, in 2004, the PKK experienced resurgence due to the power vacuum in the region stemming from the 2003 Iraq War. It then decided to end its unilateral ceasefire on June, 2004 and continued to commit acts of violence. The revival of PKK terrorism led to a rise of nationalist feelings and backlash towards the Kurds, and consequently, the public expected the government to respond to this violence more harshly. Moreover, the

next 2007 general elections forced Prime Minister Erdoğan to use nationalist rhetoric and focus on Turkish-nationalist groups during the campaign. Yet, when the results came out, the AK Party received 47 percent of the total vote and half of all Kurdish votes. This proves that despite the AK Party's hardline rhetoric, most of the Kurds appreciated the efforts shown by the party towards developing the socio-economic state of Kurds and its commitment to finding an answer to the Kurdish question (Bahcheli and Noel, 2011: 112).

Although the AK Party government passed a motion in October 2007 in the aftermath of the elections to enable the Turkish Army to carry out trans-frontier military operations in the North of Iraq due to nationalist feelings elevated by the PKK attacks, the AK Party introduced a new policy of negotiation given the results of the 2007 elections (Yeğen, 2015: 5). For instance, it later became known that a possible reform addressing the cultural rights of Kurds was brought to discussion table with the PKK by the National Security Council (NSC) in 2007, and Emre Taner, the head of the intelligence agency was put in charge of conducting these negotiations (Berkan, 2011: 156-157). Furthermore, in February 2008, Prime Minister Erdoğan declared that a public TV channel broad-casting in Kurdish (TRT 6) would soon be introduced. In February 2009, Ahmet Türk, DTP Chair-man, was able to give a talk to his fellow party members in the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM) (Kirişçi, 2011: 344) Later, public use of the letters “q”, “w”, and “x” were authorized for use.

This new policy became useful at regional level as well, especially in relations with the Iraqi Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). In the 2000's, after his arrest, the PKK was urged by Öcalan to “declare armistice and leave Turkey” (Özdağ, 2008: 256-257). The affinity between Turkey and the KRG benefited from the ceasefire.

Afterwards, Barzani announced that despite the fact that he did not approve of Turkey's military crossing the borders towards the KRG areas for military purposes, he intended to maintain the good relationship and support of Turkey in its battle against the PKK (Özdağ, 2008: 325). Then, in 2008, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Prime Minister Erdoğan's chief advisor for foreign affairs, and Murat Özçelik, Turkey's special envoy to Iraq, visited Masoud Barzani, president of the KRG to hold talks regarding its zero-problem neighborhood approach (Özcan, 2011: 71-92).

Afterwards, the financial relationship between these two sides improved as a direct result of a series of meetings (Larrabee and Tol, 2011: 145). Turkey got a big slice of the investment cake in the Kurdish area (Çiçek, 2009) and began to have the right to comment on Kurdish oil via Genel energy. The Kurdish state, in addition, began to provide the Kirkuk-Yumurtalık pipeline with oil in June 2009, and made Turkey the middleman that would now make the oil extracted from the Kurdish area available to world markets (Başaran, 2009). The KRG and Turkey now had a stronger relationship as a result of the interconnectedness in terms of economy and energy, named "mutual economic dependence model" by Aydın Selcen, ex-Consul-General of Turkey in Erbil (2016: 37). Turkey initially connected with the KRG in a highly opportunistic and energy-driven manner while former years were marked with a benighted approach (Ayhan, Barzani and Demir, 2014 & Erkmin, 2014). Thereby, it might be possible for Turkey to gain some profit from the natural resources owned by Kurds, and the KRG would be able to enter the world market thanks to Turkey in reply. It should, nonetheless, be brought up that the literature lacks any sort of analysis regarding the relationship between Turkey and the KRG beyond financial terms; yet, even though the KRG and Barzani were deemed "as part of the problem",

at the moment these two may play a role in a possible progress to be made in Turkey-PKK conflict (Tol, 2014: 5; Vahap Coşkun; Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018).

Improved relations with the KRG helped Turkey to eliminate a negative perception called “Kurdophobia”. Since the Turkish state has historically been unable to maintain good communication with its own Kurds, this phobia sometimes caused its anti-PKK discourse to be transformed into an anti-Kurdish discourse (Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018). One of the former foreign ministers of the AK Party explains this perception by mentioning that when Turkey carries out an operation in Qandil, it is perceived by outside groups to be against Kurds, not the terror itself (Author Interview: 29 Mar. 2018). Considering this reality, the AK Party government took a step to normalize relations with the KRG when Turkey opted for cross-border military operations in the North of Iraq. Thanks to this normalization and intensive economic cooperation with the KRG, Turkey was able to justify more of its combat against terrorism to the international community.

Additionally, the AK Party government thought that if they could finish the fight with the PKK and bring the peace in the region, Turkey could turn into “an energy hub and crossroads for pipelines” (Çandar, 2009: 15). In this way, Turkey would be able to pursue more effective policies in the Middle East and become a much more significant regional power. In the light of these facts, it is safe to say that containment of Kurds in Turkey that had been in place for decades was now over at least for Iraqi Kurds before the resolution process began (Yeğen, 2015: 6). These policies of the AK Party prove that it started actually to see the Kurdish question via international dynamics and wanted to both gain economically and solve the Kurdish question with the help of Barzani. The AK Party, aiming to disarm the PKK and put

an end to the Kurdish question (Pusane, 2014: 86), initiated the “Kurdish opening¹²” in July 2009 with Öcalan (Ensaroğlu, 2013: 12-13), a process that will be analytically narrated and examined in the next chapter.

Table 1: Legal and administrative liberalizing Kurdish identity and language in Turkey in the post-1999 period

<i>Reform</i>	<i>Date</i>
Constitutional amendment restricting freedom of expression in “languages prohibited by the law”	October 2001
Allowing broadcasting in Kurdish	March 2002
Allowing private courses in Kurdish	August 2002
Abolishing prohibition on Kurdish personal names	June 2003
Public TV station broadcasting in Kurdish	January 2009
Allowing electoral campaigning in Kurdish	March 2010 and September 2013
Establishment of Kurdish language and literature programs at university level	January 2011
Allowing elected Kurdish language courses at the fifth grade	September 2012
Allowing limited defense in Kurdish at courts	January 2013
Allowing Kurdish language education in private schools	September 2013
Abolishing “Oath of Allegiance” (to the Turkish Nation) recited by primary school students	September 2013
Allowing q, w, and x in computer keyboards	September 2013
Allowing village names revert back to their originals	September 2013

Source: Tezcür, G. M., 2014, “The Ebb and Flow of Armed Conflict in Turkey: An Elusive Peace”, Conflict, Democratization, and the Kurds in the Middle East: Turkey, Iran (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 179.

¹² The term was later replaced by the term “democratic opening”, which was later replaced by the term of “the national unity and fraternity project” again.

4.1. The Kurdish Resolution Process

Until 2007, Turkish state supported only military solutions for PKK terrorism and ignored the broader Kurdish issue. As shown by Ünal in *Counterterrorism in Turkey: Policy Choices and Policy Effects toward the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)*, after 24 years of combat against the PKK, the AK Party government noticed that even though the military measures against the PKK meant to mitigate the level of violence had been useful in the short-term (first 6 months), they were not beneficial in the long-run (5 years) because the PKK was adept at adapting to changing circumstances and military strategies (2011). Also, the author emphasizes that, as in the case of the PKK, “oppressive” and strategies “oriented to use of power” are not useful for insurgencies with an ethnic background.

Considering these facts, both the government and the PKK understood that bloodshed was not the solution and neither side could win the war (Ünal, 2015: 2). Subsequently, the government attempted to desecuritize the issue and add political and civil approaches. Accordingly, given the results of general elections, it is plausible to claim that the promotion of the new talk-based method and a stricter policy focusing on recognition was adopted as the course of action for the obvious reason that former policies did not work. Following these events, the Kurdish resolution process started in 2009. The peace process is understood to have been “officially” started in 2013, but it actually started in 2009 during the Oslo meetings between members of Turkish National Intelligence Service (MİT) and the PKK representatives. Therefore, “Kurdish opening”; “democratic opening” or “the national unity and fraternity project”, and the resolution process are continuation of existing efforts (Köse, 2017: 18).

At the beginning of 2009, the AK Party was working on the most essential part of recognition, and TRT 6, which broadcasts in Kurdish 24 hours, started broadcasting. In addition, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) let universities open Kurdish language and literature departments. These moves were seen as courageous attempts and significant successes in overcoming the obstacles facing the Kurdish identity. According to Coşkun, with these attempts and the resolution process itself, the AK Party facilitated the disappearance of taboos and very sharp prejudices in Turkish society towards the Kurds. Before the start of this process, there was a commonly held idea that no one could risk negotiating with the PKK. If someone were to do that, they would face a backlash of social indignation which would create a chaotic atmosphere (Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018). Yet following these policies this was not necessarily the case; if explained to the society properly, this method could get public support.

4.1.1. Evolution of the Kurdish Resolution Process¹³

Over the last four decades, there has been a severe conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK. Since it is a prolonged conflict, the state has classical reflexes towards the question and saw it as a threat to the national security and unity. The Turkish state has mostly resorted to military measures to handle the issue. Yet classical security measures were discovered to have limits and were not effective in the solution of the conflicts with an ethnic background (Ünal, 2011; One of the former foreign ministers of the AK Party, Author Interview: 29 Mar. 2018; Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Author Interview: 11 May 2018). The state realized this and faced an

¹³ All of the information and news written in this section could be found by checking this link: (<https://www.cnnturk.com/fotogaleri/turkiye/baslangictan-bugune-gun-gun-cozum-sureci?>) and this link: (<https://www.setav.org/en/reconciliation-process/>).

“unmanageable status” of the question after a long period of unsuccessful actions, As a consequence, the AK Party decided to change and transform its approach towards the question (Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Author Interview: 11 May 2018). Hence, “the essence of the resolution process is to handle the subject with wider perspective and to from different perspectives instead of security-wise solution” (One of the former foreign ministers of the AK Party, Author Interview: 29 Mar. 2018).

On the other hand, according to Mesut Yeğen, there were logical reasons for the PKK to join the resolution process (2015: 11-12), with two of them at the forefront. First, the PKK admitted that there would be no further benefit from armed struggle and political engagement was necessary for any further benefit (Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Author Interview: 11 May 2018); Also, the PKK knew that it had reached a point where it could control and influence the Kurdish people in different parts of the world in addition to Kurdish citizens in Turkey. Second, regional developments, especially in Syria, made the resolution process rational for the PKK because the PKK wanted to focus on the Syrian front and did not want to fight against Turkey simultaneously. In the beginning, gains in northern Syria were seen more concrete and attainable to the PKK due to the chaotic environment of the war, so it did not want to waste resources fighting Turkey (Yeğen, 2015: 12; One of the chief advisors of the Prime-Minister Davutoğlu, Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018).

This nonaggression policy was logical for the Turkish government as well because it aimed “to elude this chaos in the Middle East with minimum damage and protect stability in its territory; it wanted to stop the spread of fire in Syria to Turkey and wanted to have voice in the redesigning of the Middle East. In this manner, the Kurdish question was undoubtedly the most significant question from the viewpoint of Turkey” (Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018). If Turkey could reach

a peaceful solution on democratic grounds after a long conflictual period thanks to the resolution process, it would obtain the right to offer a democratic proposal to the people of the region and have a privilege to guide the democratic forces (Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Author Interview: 11 May 2018). Yet, unfortunately, these calculations of both of these actors went wrong, and the process evolved very differently than planned.

4.1.1.1. First Round¹⁴

The MİT and the PKK held consecutive meetings in Oslo starting from September 2008, which are considered as the beginning of the Kurdish Resolution Process. Probably due to the success in these meetings, President Abdullah Gül announced that “good things will happen very soon” (Hürriyet, 11 March 2009). Furthermore, other Turkish officials including Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan, Minister of the Interior Beşir Atalay and Public Speaker of the AK Party Hüseyin Çelik started declaring that “the Kurdish Question is their first priority and it should be definitely solved”. These developments were regarded as “encouraging” by the *Economist* in an analysis published on 28 August 2009.

Also, after the success of the Democratic Society Party (DTP), the second predecessor to the HDP, in the March 2009 local elections in the southeastern Anatolia, the PKK announced a cease-fire. Moreover, in an interview with Hasan Cemal, Murat Karayılan, who is head of the KCK, (*Group of Communities in Kurdistan* founded by the PKK) declared that the PKK was ready for dialogue and to

¹⁴ When I divided the Kurdish Resolution Process into three sections, I highly benefitted from the study of Mesut Yeğen entitled as “The Kurdish Peace Process in Turkey: Genesis, Evolution and Prospects”.

lay down arms (Milliyet, 5 May 2009), and they extended the ceasefire unilaterally at the end of May 2009.

In August 2009, Interior Minister Beşir Atalay subsequently started organizing meetings with intellectuals, journalists and NGOS to discuss the solution of the Kurdish question. These developments were followed on 15/22 August 2009 by Öcalan's "road map" of, which suggested 1) a declaration of permanent ceasefire by the PKK; 2) establishment of resolution commission (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) by the initiative of government to eliminate legal obstacles and the PKK to withdraw its armed forces; 3) establishment of a Democratic Constitution. If all these conditions were met, the PKK would then lay down arms and become a legal force. Yet, the government stipulated that laying down arms was the first condition for a resolution. Thus, this road map was not responded by the state and was not leaked to the press (Hürriyet, 3 March 2011).

On 19 October 2009, 34 PKK members came to Turkey through the Habur gate and surrendered to the Turkish government. Yet, this event turned into a spectacle, which signaled the PKK's victory against Turkey. This event came to be called the "Habur Incident". It was evaluated as a "road accident" by Interior Minister Beşir Atalay and mentioned many times as a reflection of bad governance of the process. While the CHP "criticized the Kurdish opening as an irresponsible initiative of the government [...] and expressed its concern that this policy carried the risk of giving way to the ethnic disintegration of the Turkish society," the MHP alleged that the Kurdish opening would "endanger Turkey's identity as a unitary nation-state." (Pusane, 2014: 88). Even some circles within the AK Party reacted against this scandal, and the number of supporters for the Kurdish opening decreased from the 45.6 percent when

the process first took off to 27.1 percent after the Habur Incident (Karaveli, 2010: 19-20). This mismanagement is considered the first blow to the process.

On 15 November 2009, Prime Minister Erdoğan declared that “the project of National Unity and Brotherhood is the aim; we will reach it definitely through the democratic opening process” (Milliyet). Also, the jailed PKK leader Öcalan made statements which supported the process via his advocates. However, there was ongoing pressure upon politicians of Kurdish descent through the KCK investigations. Additionally, the government refused to give a response to Öcalan’s road map or plan. These were perceived by the PKK as the AK Party government being insincere and unwilling to advance the process. In this ambiguous environment, the PKK killed 7 soldiers in Reşadiye, Tokat on 7 December 2009, although the PKK did not “officially” end the ceasefire¹⁵. This event signaled an end to the first round.

Just a few days later, on 11 December 2009, a unanimous verdict was taken by the Constitutional Court to put a ban on the DTP (Hürriyet). After the Court decision, the DTP deputies wanted to withdraw completely from the TBMM, yet Öcalan requested that they return to the Assembly (Yeğen, 2015: 7). As a result, one can see that the Habur Incident and Reşadiye Attack negatively affected the opening process, yet the subsequent developments showed that the process continued. On the pretext of the banning of the DTP, KCK investigations, and the government’s refusal to announce Öcalan’s road map, the PKK decided to end the ceasefire and started the “Democratic People’s War” on 1 June 2010. Yet, Öcalan called for a renewed ceasefire on 13 August 2010 and the PKK decided to pursue a course of inaction, not to attack Turkish soldiers and the PKK took this decision positively (Yeğen, 2015:

¹⁵ The PKK declared end the ceasefire on 1 June 2010 and start a democratic people’s war.

7). The ceasefire and the process continued until one month after the June 2011 elections.

Before reviewing the second round, I would like discuss the role and impact of the FETO¹⁶ (Gülenist Terror Organization) on the resolution process, because through my interviews I learned that the KCK investigations were made by this organization outside of the government's control and without the government knowing. On the one hand, a peace process was continuing and the government was trying to disarm the PKK militants. On the other hand, the KCK investigations were initiated against the Kurdish political actors including MPs, mayors, the DTP members and so on, who were arrested in groups. This situation showed that the AK Party was not capable of controlling government bodies, and one group in the state had the ability to sabotage the governments' attempts to resolve the question (Wise Man, Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018). Regarding the position of the FETO during the resolution process, Sırrı Süreyya openly said that "we made an effort to deal with the "cemaat" as much as with the government; they were in the meetings, they objected to the PKK's actions against their schoolrooms, "dershane", and other institutions" and continued that "they stated that they were not against the peace process, but they would not allow a process excluding them". And "they were in search of disconfirming the process since the beginning". Given these realities, according to Süreyya, Öcalan created the concept referred to as the "parallel state" in the literature (Author Interview: 11 May 2018).

¹⁶ Fetullahist Terrorist Organization is a multilayered and complex terrorist group led by US based criminal-cleric Fetullah Gülen under the mask of religious discourse and civilian organization, which carried out 17-25 December Operations in 2013 and attempted to make a military coup d'etat on 15 July 2016 to overthrow the government through its members leaked into the diverse state institutions.

4.1.1.2. Second Round

According to a record leaked on 13 September 2011, after Öcalan's call for a ceasefire, another series of secret talks between the MİT representatives and the leading PKK members was held (Milliyet), most likely by FETO members trying to make things difficult for the government (Yeğen, 2015: 7). Through these records one can see that the AK Party government wanted to continue communicating with Öcalan and the PKK, and Öcalan offered another road map including the establishment of Commissions for the Constitution, for Peace, and for Truth and Justice. Yet, these talks were supposed to be secret and behind closed doors. In these talks, it was approved that the necessary steps were going to be taken to solve the Kurdish question and a new civilian constitution, which would be sensitive to different ethnic and religious groups, was established after the 12 June 2011 elections. However, during the election process, the AK Party used a hardline rhetoric again to appeal the nationalist voters, and also continued military operations and air strikes against the PKK (Pusane, 2014: 86-87). Facing these actions, on 13 May 2011, Öcalan threatened the government and argued that "after June 15th the process will either develop into a historic agreement or war. The Turkish government would not resist for more than three months, should a fierce war break out" (PKK Official Site, pkkonline.com).

In the general elections held in June 2011, both the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), the predecessor of today's HDP, and the AK Party were successful. Around 50 percent of the votes went to the BDP in predominantly Kurdish places, and the AK Party received half of the votes in the whole country. However, after the elections, it appeared that the AK Party was not motivated to continue the peace process. After the election the PKK started the "People's Revolutionary War",

asserting that the AK Party government had not fulfilled its promises and was not ready to implement the protocols prepared by Öcalan. Just one month after the elections, the PKK killed 13 soldiers in an attack in Silvan on 14 July 2011, which marked the end of the second round in the peace process. Later on, 24 soldiers were killed again in Çukurca by the PKK on October 19th, 2011.

In return, military operations against the PKK continued in an increasing fashion. On 28 December 2011, Turkish air forces killed 35 Kurdish citizens who were trying to smuggle goods from Iraq to Turkey. This event, known as the “Uludere Incident”, sparked outrage among some Kurds and opponents of the government including leftists and liberals, since they believed that the AK Party government had intentionally and indiscriminately killed civilian citizens. In this spiral of violence, the PKK and KCK inmates went on a 69-day long hunger strike. These clashes and killings marked another barrier to the peace process and showed that there were still very serious obstacles in front of a resolution to the Kurdish question.

Eighteen months after the Silvan attack, which led to severe clashes between the PKK and the Turkish state, it became clear that none of the parties would be able to achieve their goals. Unfortunately, 2012 had the most intense clashes between the PKK and the Turkish Army since 1999 (Tezcür, 2013: 29). As much as the failure can be attributed to the PKK because civilians could not be persuaded to join the battle against the Turkish army, the Turkish state was unable to defeat the PKK, and the Kurd’s view of PKK became more positive. With this, the PKK managed to recruit new militants (Tezcür, 2013). In addition, the government did not want to return to the violent days of the 1990s in which a lot of suppressive and illegal policies were implemented. Therefore, as a result of this stalemate and the bloodshed, the PKK and Turkish government looked to try some-thing new, and

meetings between state officials and Öcalan subsequently recommenced (Ünal, 2015; One of the former foreign ministers of the AK Party, Author Interview: 29 Mar. 2018; Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Author Interview: 11 May 2018). Presumably, thanks to the success in these meetings, on 28 December 2012, Prime Minister Erdoğan declared that the Turkish state and Öcalan were holding ongoing talks (Habertürk), which indicated that a new process (third round) would soon start.

4.1.1.3. Third Round

According to some information in the political lobbies, on 26 Sept. 2012, Abdullah Öcalan sent a letter to Tayyip Erdoğan via prison administration and national intelligence service. In this letter, he makes some evaluations about the Middle East, Turkey and Fethullah Gülen. Then, he says that Turkey can come across a coup process, and Erdoğan and him (Öcalan) would be liquidated at the end of this process. So, he presented an offer to Erdoğan to cancel this process and argued that he would do his best to democratize Turkey for a solution. It is claimed that the letter is written in this manner. I did not see the letter, yet notable persons in politics including MPs and ministers say that they read this letter, this message. Then, the process started. Why did it start? As long as Turkey does not solve this question, it cannot be at ease domestically and internationally, it is not possible to establish social peace... (Altan Tan, Author Interview: 10 Apr. 2018).

At the beginning of 2013, the AK Party government let the first Kurdish group among the members of the BDP visit İmralı (Ahmet Türk and Ayla Akat), in which Öcalan has been imprisoned since his capture, to restart negotiations. It was understood that the process should be carried out with public consent and more transparently. These visits continued sporadically under the name of “İmralı meetings”. Unfortunately, after several of these meetings, Sakine Cansız, who was a well-known figure in the PKK circles, and her friends were killed in Paris on 10 January 2013. This event was interpreted as a provocation committed by dark forces against the peace. Erdoğan said that he would take all political risks to solve the Kurdish question, and on 12 February 2013 the AK Party’s members in parliament enacted the law which gave permission to use one’s mother tongue to defend oneself

in the courts (SETA Foundation). Defense in mother tongue was a big component of debate during the KCK trials. Three days later, Erdoğan argued that calling the meetings between the MİT and Öcalan as “the resolution process” instead of “İmralı process” would be more accurate. Later, thanks to some progress, the PKK released eight soldiers and civil servants that it had been keeping prisoner.

As result of successive meetings, Öcalan’s Newroz letter including a proposal for peace and the resolution was read by the BDP deputies Sırrı Süreyya Önder and Pervin Buldan in both Turkish and Kurdish respectively on 21 March 2013. At the same time in Diyarbakır hundreds of thousands of Kurds. This was a previously “unimaginable” feat for Turkey, and increased hopes for a peaceful resolution. Thus, 21 March 2013 could be considered the “peak” of the resolution process. In his letter, Öcalan said that the struggle between the Turkish state and the Kurds was over and it was now time for a “cessation of hostilities” and a shift towards political struggle instead (Çandar, Al-Monitor, 24 March 2013). Additionally, he spoke of “the Islamic brotherhood of Turks and Kurds” and their “historical unity and partnership”, showing surprising convergence between Öcalan and the AK Party’s visions about the Kurdish question (Tocci, 2013: 73).

Öcalan demanded that an armistice be put in effect and that PKK militants leave Turkish soil. It was under these circumstances that the PKK began to withdraw its armed forces from Turkish boundaries, while the Turkish army simultaneously held back its forces refrained from any attacks. At this point, before mentioning the convergence between the government and Öcalan on the resolution process and the impact of these regional factors on the process, I would like to touch upon a subject related to the ceasefire discussed by Sırrı Süreyya Önder. In his analysis of Newroz letter and the ceasefire, he frankly expresses that

“Due to our position and responsibility, we can meet both state institutions officials and government officials, and also the PKK and Öcalan. Thus, we can guess the limits and approaches of the parties. In the light of this information, I thought personally we can surpass the armed conflict because the people demanded the peace, the level of support to the process in Turkey was about 70 % and it was 90 % in the region. I thought that these circumstances could build the peace, and the cessation of armed conflicts could be permanent even if not the final peace. However, the biggest factor: ‘regional’ and ‘international’ factors, which we could not foresee from that day and which spoiled our expectations, stepped in...” (Author Interview: 11 May 2018).

Convergence between the government and Öcalan was noticeable, with the statements of Minister of Justice Sadullah Ergin indicating that the process would consist of three phases, similar to the Öcalan’s “road map” of 15/22 August 2009: 1) ceasefire and withdrawal of the PKK; 2) democratization; 3) disarmament and normalization (Sabah, 29 March 2013). This convergence continued with the establishment of the commission of “Wise Men”, created with the aim of reaching out to the public. In addition, to assess the progress of the resolution, a commission was founded in the Turkish Grand National General Assembly. Yet, these commissions did not meet the expectations of PKK. Despite all these advances, there were no legal assurance for the process, and new military installations and dams continued to be built (Yeğen, 2015: 9). This ambivalent situation was criticized by the Kurdish side.

As a consequence of these criticisms, the AK Party enacted the law of the MİT and “Law to End Terror and Strengthen Social Integration”, respectively, after the 2014 local elections. While the former enabled the MİT to contact and negotiate with “terrorists” and “terrorist organizations” (Hürriyet, 18 April 2014), the latter law authorized the government and its officers to pin down the steps needed to put an end to terrorism and ensure social integration (Hürriyet Daily News, 26 June 2014; Al-Monitor, 27 June 2014). The releases of defendants of the KCK case started with 30 people on 1 July 2014.

The Kurdish resolution process now had a legal basis. This progress in the process led to a positive political environment and excited partners' anticipation (SETA Foundation). One example of this was Öcalan's view that the 30-year conflict between the PKK and the Turkish Army was on the verge of ending. Erdoğan announced that he would make the resolution process a primary concern after becoming the president in August 2014. Ahmet Davutoğlu's agenda, upon Erdoğan being elected as the president, articulated that whatever was required for the resolution process would be carried out. Additionally, the success of HDP leader Selahaddin Demirtaş in the presidential elections as a Kurdish candidate was notable because he was able to address a nationwide audience and adopt language of solidarity (Coşkun, Daily Sabah, 20 Aug. 2014). However, this hope gave way to disappointment because of subsequent regional developments.

At the beginning of October 2014, "Kobane", known as Ayn el-Arab in Arabic, a city in northern Syria with a Kurdish majority, was besieged by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Turkey was unwilling to send reinforcements to Kobane and refused to help Kurdish fighters because they were connected to the PKK (Financial Times, 2014). President Erdoğan openly explained that "the PYD and PKK are terrorist organizations and we cannot help them, nor can we allow any-one to help them". It was clear that the AK Party expected that the PKK would be the weaker side at the negotiating table (Ahmed, 2015: 16-17). In line with these expectations, on 5 October 2014, President Erdoğan enunciated: "Kobane is just about to fall!" (CNN Turk).

There were protests all over Turkey on 6-8 October against Turkey's policy that barred any kind of military, medical or humanitarian help from being delivered to Kobane and "Kurdish Brothers" (Letsch and Traynor, The Guardian: 8 October

2014). 51 people died during these protests. The HDP stated that should Kobane fall, the resolution process would end. This event obviously can be taken to signify that the process was nearing its end, as statements from both sides expressed the failure of the process. While Öcalan said “Kobane and the resolution process is indispensable”, Bülent Arınç, who was the spokesman of the government, said that “we are neither compelled nor obliged to the process”. Ironically, HDP leader Demirtaş mentioned that “without the government or Öcalan saying the process ended, it would not end”.

However, KCK leader Cemil Bayık accused the government of being responsible for the events in Turkey and Kobane. Then, the Turkish Assembly passed the resolution for military operations in Iraq and Syria. This resolution was seen as a declaration of war by Bayık, and the PKK sent their withdrawn forces back to Turkey.¹⁷

Considering the statements made by political figures during and after the Kobane process, it can be argued that “after 8 October, the resolution process actually finished, there was no hope for the process anymore; happenings after that were only an effort for resuscitation of the process via artificial respiration” (Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018). Regional developments in Syria sabotaged the process in Turkey and had toxic influence on it, demonstrating the regional interactions. On the one hand, the PKK did not feel the need to hide its activities against the national security establishment of Turkey and its authority in the northern Syria. They tried to mobilize their supporters in Turkey starting with the city of Kobane (One of the chief advisors of the the Prime-Minister Davutoğlu, Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018). On the other hand, Turkey was positioned as a warrior

¹⁷ All of the statements made by political figures in this paragraph could be found by checking this link: (<https://www.cnnturk.com/fotogaleri/turkiye/baslangictan-bugune-gun-gun-cozum-sureci?>) and this link: (<https://www.setav.org/en/reconciliation-process/>).

actor in the chaotic environment of Syria and wanted to show its military power (Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Author Interview: 11 May 2018).

Accusations against the Turkish government for supporting ISIS and the Turkish government's inaction during the Kobane crisis and its unwillingness to help the Kurds eroded the residual trust between the actors, despite the fact that Turkey permitted the Peshmerga and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) forces to cross Turkish soil to help lift the ISIS siege in Kobane two weeks later (Gunes and Lowe, 2015: 10; Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018). This loss of trust had a very negative impact on the process for the next phases of the peace process. As Resch mentioned in her study about the Syria's Impact on the Kurdish Peace Process in Turkey, in the new political context created by Kobane events, neither the AK Party nor the pro-Kurdish HDP wanted to seem as if they had left the negotiation table (2017: 10). Then the HDP demanded concrete concessions from the government for the continuation of the resolution process. As a result, both sides returned to the process a few weeks later through the meeting of HDP deputies with Öcalan, but the process did not advance any further.

On 28 February 2015, a 10-article draft was formulated by Öcalan to reach "a democratic solution" and to end the armed conflict (BBC News). Even though initially there were indications that Turkish government would accept the proposals, the Dolmabahçe Meeting was not vouched for by the President Erdoğan (NTV, 22 March 2015). Two weeks later, President Erdoğan said that "there is no Kurdish problem anymore. What else do you (Kurds) want?" (Anadolu Agency, 23 Mar. 2015). This case signed that end of the process was very close, because, in the past, he made such statements as "the Kurdish issue is my issue" or "I would drink poison hemlock if necessary to the solution" (TCCB, 23 Mar. 2015). At this stage, it was

understood that the Kurdish question was no longer President Erdoğan's priority (Çandar, 2016: 46).

According to Baskın Oran and Sırrı Süreyya, Erdoğan's expectations from the resolution process were to disarm the PKK and to go to the polls with this success, but unfortunately for him he did not get what he wanted in the Dolmabahçe Meeting and Öcalan did not call for disarmament. As a result of this, he put an end to the process (Author Interview: 5 Apr. 2018; 11 May 2018). Then, the concept of the process changed and evolved into a more violent situation. İlnur Çevik, one of the chief advisors of the President Erdoğan, objected to this kind of argument and claimed that

“They (HDP and PKK) were already finishing the process because they trusted in themselves too much because of Syria. We saw this in Dolmabahçe, only thing they did not do was to declare an independent state. They were acting like they got the Treaty of Sevres signed, they demanded extremely nonsense things that couldn't be met by Turkey and Erdoğan” (Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018).

These disputes show that the AK Party and the PKK had a “paradigmatic difference” over the content and terms of the resolution process, which were irreconcilable (Bayramoğlu, 2014: 6).

As indicated above, the government insisted on laying down the arms first and expected Öcalan to give a strict schedule for disarmament in his 2015 Newroz message, but Öcalan and the PKK announced that the disarmament would only take place after the legal and constitutional amendments in accordance with the 10-article draft (Çiçek and Coşkun, 2016: 29). Besides, the PKK stated the negotiations should be monitored by a “third eye”, but President Erdoğan said that he did not see the “Monitoring Committee” as a positive prospect (Hürriyet, 20 March 2015). Prime Minister Davutoğlu had a similar declaration four months ago: “there will be no

foreign eye, or in other words, a third eye. The solution process is a natural outcome of the democratization process. We already have the Wise People Committee. There can be no external eye. We already tried that in Oslo. Oslo was a mediated process and we saw how that was concluded. It did not work” (Aljazeera Turk, 19 October 2014).

This was followed by the heated atmosphere of June 2015 general elections. In his election campaign, HDP leader Demirtaş told Erdoğan “we will not make you the president” referring to his planned constitutional reform (Dogan News Agency, 17 March 2015), and the hashtag “#SeniBaşkanYaptırmayacağız” became a worldwide trend (Hürriyet Daily News, 17 March 2015).

Further, “The Law Amending the Law on Powers and Duties of the Police, Other Laws and Decrees”, known as “Internal Security Package” that gave enhanced powers to police against demonstrators, criminals and terrorists was approved by the President Erdoğan (CNN Turk, 3 April 2015). This package was highly criticized by the HDP leader Demirtaş as it threatened the Kurdish resolution process.

Although the AK Party stated that it would continue the resolution process after the 7 June elections, the President Erdoğan criticized the HDP and said that “without burying weapons they do not have the right to criticize the government” (Aljazeera Turk, 2 May 2015). Also, the Prime Minister Davutoğlu put forth that following the elections they would rethink the interlocutor for the peace process due to the zigzags among the HDP, İmralı and Qandil (Aljazeera Turk, 31 May 2015).

Two days before the elections, a bomb attack occurred at the Diyarbakır rally of the HDP. In the 7 June elections, the HDP showed a historical success by taking 13 percent of the total votes and entered the parliament with 80 deputies. On the other

side, the AK Party got 41 percent of the total votes and lost the absolute majority to form the government for the first time in 13 years (CNN Turk, 7 June 2015). After this success, Demirtaş stated that the PKK would give up arms with the call of Öcalan, yet the KCK announced that the decision of laying down arms was up to them because the HDP was not the legal branch of the PKK, and it did not have right to call for disarmament. Furthermore, because of his circumstances, Öcalan was not able to call for this either (Radikal, 12 June 2015).

At this point, I have to clarify some points about the impact of the 7 June elections on the resolution process. It is claimed that after the 7 June elections, the AK Party lost vast number of votes and its majority in the assembly; and Erdoğan realized that while nationalist conservative Turkish citizens preferred the MHP in the elections, most of the Kurdish citizens voted for the HDP. He also saw that the HDP was against the presidential system. Then, he left the resolution table after understanding that the process turned against his political interests (One of the old Vice-Chairman of the CHP, Author Interview: 20 Mar. 2018; Baskın Oran, Author Interview: 5 Apr. 2018). It is clear that Erdoğan did not find what he expected from the process, but it has to be confessed that the process was already over before the elections. When chronologically analyzed, it is going to be seen that the process collapsed after the Dolmabahçe Meeting.

As Coşkun claims: “Erdoğan’s discourse on the issue had been pretty zigzaggy. While between 2013 and 2015 he used a political language, after 2015 he transited to a military language. Accordingly, I do not reckon that he terminated the process merely due to the results of the 7 June 2015 elections. The process had already been heavily wounded until the elections as in the case of Kobane protests and disagreements in the Dolmabahçe Meeting. Thus, putting the ending of the process down to the elections results only would be a very narrow point of view” (Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018).

Moreover, the statements of Demirtaş indicating they would not make Erdoğan the president came short a while after the meeting. Sırrı Süreyya, at this point, made explicit that “Demirtaş said something before this statement, it was that since you left the table for the presidency, for your authority and hegemony, then we will not make you the president” (Author Interview: 11 May 2018).

On 26 June 2015, considering the developments in the northern Syria namely quasi-state activities of the PYD, Turkish President Erdoğan openly said that “we will never allow the establishment of a state in the northern Syria and we will continue our fight in this regard no matter what it costs” (Hurriyet, 27 June 2015). In return, Karayılan stated that if Turkey intervened in Rojava, they would turn all parts of Turkey turn into a war zone (Sabah, 29 June 2015). Then, the KCK declared the end of ceasefire under the pretext of the construction of dams and stations on 11 July 2015. Further, it was stated by the KCK co-President Bese Hozat that the new process was a “Revolutionary People’s War”, as in July 2011 (Özgür Gündem, 15 July 2015).

In the very end, as the Institute for Security & Development Policy (ISDP) highlighted, “following the Suruç attack on 20 July 2015, growing mutual distrust and diverging political interests put an end to the 2013 cease-fire (2016: 2). Then, Turkish military jets began an operation against both the ISIS in the Northern Syria and the PKK in the Northern Iraq. This was the first air operation against the PKK for 3 years (CNN Turk, 24 July 2015). Consequently, the conflict between the PKK and Turkey restarted in July 2015 after a two-year peace period. According to Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), this conflict caused 1399 deaths in 2015 (which is the highest number since the end of the 1990s) and 1073 in 2016.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE KURDISH RESOLUTION PROCESS IN THE LIGHT OF RESOLUTION PROCESSES AROUND THE WORLD

5.1. International Resolution Processes

All conflicts have unique features, reasons and dynamics, however, these conflicts and their causes often share similarities. Thus, it is reasonable to benefit to draw from international experiences when solving conflicts with similar ethnic, cultural and political roots. The Kurdish Question in Turkey undoubtedly has deep historical roots and an indigenous character. However, although every question has unique features, focusing on international examples of conflict resolution processes is helpful in understanding the question and drawing lessons from it. For these reasons, this chapter analyzes examples of resolution processes from different parts of the world (including the cases of the IRA, the ETA and the FARC, which have attained success in recent years and so on) and attempt to draw out the common factors of success using a comparative analysis. I will then concentrate on the Kurdish Resolution Process in relation to these examples and try to understand the reasons behind the failure and the return of violence.

Especially following the end of Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR, the ethnic conflicts have got attention in world politics and nation-states feel the pressure of

international institutions and international community in their attitude towards different ethnic communities. International community has evaluated the causes of ethnic conflicts and their solutions mainly within the framework of democratization and human rights (Çelik, 2009: 164). Yet, unfortunately ethnic conflicts are still at the top of world political agenda, and the literature shows us that solutions of the internal conflicts, namely *civil wars*, *asymmetrical wars*, *intrastate wars*, are harder to resolve compared to the inter-state wars (Pearson, 2006: 109-128; Mack, 1975: 175-200; Arreguin-Toft, 2001: 93-128; Hartzell, 1999: 3-22; Zartman: 1995), because parties in internal conflicts have to live together within the same borders after the conflict and they dispute over the governance and sociopolitical system in contrast to inter-state wars (Licklider, 1995: 681-690).

Furthermore, according to the researches, solution to internal conflicts through negotiations is very limited. For instance, the study of Stedman demonstrates that the rate of civil wars ended through peace agreements remained limited to 15 % by the year of 1991 (1991: 9). Licklider, who analyzes 57 civil wars that happened between 1945 and 1993, shows that only 14 (25 %) out of them ended in negotiation, and the remaining 43 wars ended up in a military victory (1995). Similarly, the results of M.D. Toft indicate that only 22 (19 %) out of 113 civil wars that happened between 1940 and 2002 ended through negotiations, and 79 (70 %) civil wars ended up in a military victory; the remaining 12 conflicts (11 %) reached an impasse (2010: 7-36).

As indicated above, the success rate in peace negotiations is very low, but there are some successful international examples to solve the conflicts, and some negotiations which cover a considerable amount of distance to overcome the violence and terror. Also, due to the fact that all ethnic conflicts have specific features, it is impossible to apply exactly the same methods of peace processes to the solution of different

conflicts. However, ethnic conflicts have some similarities, so it is indispensable to take appropriate points of the peace processes into account. In this regard, a number of rules / lessons which have vital importance in the success of negotiations have been selected in order to analyze the Kurdish Resolution Process.

5.1.1. Lessons taken from the International Examples

Numerous studies have shown that a mutually hurting stalemate defines the moment as ripe for resolution: both sides are locked in a situation from which they cannot escalate the conflict with their available means and at an acceptable cost. Such a stalemate provides a window of opportunity that is narrow and highly conditional; it depends on perceived rather than objective reality, on a stalemate that affects both sides, and on a discomfort (preferably increasing) felt by both parties (Zartman, 1994: 8).

The first question which must be answered in relation to the peaceful settlement of disputes is “why the resolution by negotiations is promoted?” or “why do parties need to make negotiations to solve conflicts?” The first reason for the beginning of resolution processes is the fact that people are tired of armed conflicts and seek peace and tranquility (Fisas, 2013: 107). Another reason is the Mutually Hurting Stalemate (MHS); in this way, conflicting parties reach an impasse and none of the parties is able to achieve a satisfactory result. According to the “ripe moment” theory, the parties make cost-benefit analysis and notice that continuation of the conflicts is more costly than peaceful alternatives. Then, this situation provides an opportunity for negotiations (Zartman, 2001). Yet, it should not be forgotten that “ripeness is only a condition, necessary but not sufficient, for the initiation of negotiations. It is not self-fulfilling... It must be seized, either directly by the parties or, if not, through the persuasion of a mediator” (Zartman, 2001: 9). The “ripe moment” theory is applicable to the cases of IRA and the FARC.

By the mid-1980s, serious negotiation efforts were made between the British government and the IRA¹⁸. However, it is known that secret meetings were held starting from 1970s to see each other's motivations and capacity (Yıldız and Breau, 2010: 241). As a result of long conflicts, while the IRA understood that it would not possibly be able to kick the British government out of the Northern Ireland with military struggle, the British government saw that they would not be able to defeat the IRA via military measures. Then, the parties started to search for a solution that would satisfy both sides. Also, people yearned for peace and the peace was strictly required economically (Fisas, 2011: 67). Moreover, other peace processes were becoming popular in the world in the 1990s, and the new US government (Bill Clinton) supported the solution of the conflicts in the Northern Ireland with the IRA. Thus, 1990s can be evaluated as ripe moments for Northern Ireland peace process.

When it comes to the case of FARC¹⁹, we see that as a result of intensified military operations by the Colombian government with the backing of the USA during the 2000s, the FARC lost its power substantially and its significant leaders.

Consequently, it was obliged to sit around the table (Pearce, TBBM Official Reports,

¹⁸ By the end of the Cold War, the British government noticed the damage due to the conflicts in the Northern Ireland with the IRA (Ireland Republican Army) and started to look for possible ways of peace. IRA had made struggle for the establishment of United Ireland since 1922 with the division of island into two parts, especially conflicts were very intense during the period between 1970 and 1990 (Aktaş, 2014: 232). After an unsuccessful attempts, parties entered into the process of peace with the **Good Friday Agreement** or Belfast Agreement signed in 1998. According to the agreement, self-determination right was granted to Irish people to decide the future of Northern Ireland; the agreement also contained proposals for Northern Ireland Assembly with power-sharing executive, delegation of authority, social equality, equal and fair representation of different ethnic, sectarian and social groups in the assembly (Sandıklı & Kaya, 2012: 21). The IRA gave up armed struggle in 2005.

¹⁹ FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and other left-wing organizations like ELN (Ejercito de Liberacion Nacional - National Liberation Army) have fought against the state forces for more than 50 years. The state pressure on peasants, poverty, unfair distribution of income and drug trade exacerbated and maintained the conflicts. Both right-wing paramilitary forces supported by the state and the USA and the FARC resorted to violence against the civilians and violated human rights. This situation and terror led to questioning of state legitimacy and its power among people (Lopez, 2011: 6-7). Nearly 220.000 people lost their lives and 6 million people migrated due to these conflicts (*BBC*, 28 Sept. 2016). 1984-1987, 1991-1992 and 1999-2001 peace talks achieved no result, and the conflicts became more violent after every unsuccessful process (Çuhadar, 2017: 89-90).

4 July 2013). Also, the President Santos understood that there was no way to solve the question via military methods and the peace process was very crucial for the economic stability. Further, the FARC and the Colombian government saw that the war was unsustainable because it did not seem possible to win a permanent victory for both parties. Since the conflicts reached an impasse, the armed struggle lost its meaning (Herbolzheimer, 2017: 92-93). In addition, both regional countries and the USA demanded that the Colombian government start peace negotiations because of the political, economic and security concerns derived from the conflicts (BBC, 28 Sept. 2016). These were the reasons behind the beginning of this process.

Another reason for the initiation of peace processes is the change in the decision-making process of the states. For instance, in Spain, the new government was able to start making reforms after the death of Franco. Also, in the case of Guatemala, the turning point was the end of military tutelage with the transition to the democratic life because attempts for the resolution of the conflicts were made after this transition (Fisas, 2013: 108-109). In this direction, it is argued that democratic reforms contribute to the overcoming of the violence and terror.

The most concrete result obtained from the international examples is that “resolution takes time” and negotiation processes in the ethnic conflicts are *fragile*. For instance, The Spanish government had unsuccessful meetings with the ETA²⁰ in 1989, 1997

²⁰ Basque Question acquired a new dimension after the foundation of the ETA in 1959 (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna - Basque Country and Freedom) because it committed many terrorist acts to get world attention to the question (Öztürk, 2004: 222). Its aim had been to establish an independent Basque state in the Basque region including territories under the control of Spain and France. With the foundation of its political wing: Herri Batasuna, after the death of Franco, the ETA gained new members and promulgated its cause. New Spanish government started making reforms to accord with the European Economic Community regulations, and declared general amnesty and softened military measures in the same period. With the new constitution came into force in 1978, state structure was divided into 17 autonomous regions and Basque region regained its autonomy. This structure granted self-determination to the regions and guaranteed to secure their cultural, traditional, language and institutional differences. Yet, the ETA did not give up its demands for an independent state and increased its attacks (Yavuz and Şahin, 2011: 86). As a response, Spain agreed with France to hamper

and 2005. Similarly, peace processes continued for 21 years in the Northern Ireland discontinuously, 10 years in Guatemala, eight years in El Salvador, five years in Indonesia, and four years in Nepal (Fisas, 2013: 107). Therefore, parties should be patient, reveal a powerful will to the solution, and act systematically in good faith.

Moreover, the solution of the conflicts continuing for a long time and building a permanent peace is not easy; it requires patience and a successful planning. Also, it should not be forgotten that there can be actors and falcons on both sides that undermine the process. To illustrate; the agreement was signed by the parties in Havana in August 2016, but it was rejected in the referendum conducted in October 2016. During this referendum, the government and “yes” campaign did not have enough communication strategy to explain the peace process. Local elites were afraid of the forthcoming changes after the peace agreement. Moreover, fulfilling the obligations of the agreement was very difficult for the parties. Also, the violence was rooted and normalized unfortunately after a 50-year conflict period. Forgetting the past and transforming the society would probably be the most time-consuming issues (Herbolzheimer, 2017: 96-97). Yet, contrary to previous processes, the FARC did not break the ceasefire and the negotiations had been continuing with the participation of the ELN. Thus, it was seen that all actors were more eager for the peace and insisted on non-violent methods. With this process, the parties attempted to first prevent the war and later to build the peace (Herbolzheimer, 2017: 95).

actions of the ETA and organized common successful operations against the ETA, and its prominent leaders were captured in Spain and France. Also, PNV: Basque nationalist party, which aims to solve the questions of Basque people within peaceful mechanisms gained strength against the Herri Batasuna in the elections in 2001. Additionally, after the ETA killed a local politician in 1997, it was protested in many regions of Spain including Basque and the ETA started to lose public support day by day (Bieter, 2011; Cala, 2011). In line with these developments, international developments like recognition of the ETA as a terrorist organization by the EU, the UK and Canada (Özdemir, 2012: 64-65) and the international operations against its members weakened the ETA all the more so in 2000s.

For the peace-building, inclusion of more people in the process and its embracement by the society are essential. For instance, the Good Friday Agreement came into force after a referendum held in Northern and Southern Ireland. While 71 % of people voted in favor of the deal in the Northern Ireland, 94 % of people voted for “yes” in the Southern Ireland (Sandıklı and Kaya, 2012). Also, the peace process was not only supported by the government but also by the opposition, important state institutions, and bureaucracy in the UK. Both the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, media and intelligentsia played supportive role in the continuation of this process.

In a similar vein, Zapatero, the prime-minister of Spain, made significant steps to receive public support before starting the negotiations with the ETA in Oslo in 2005. In order to avoid misunderstanding and for transparency, he arranged meetings with the families and kinsmen aggrieved by the attacks of the ETA, and it was explained that the peace process was not a concession; it was rather being conducted for the unity and the national interests of Spain. As a result, the strategies applied during the process and its goals were declared to public in a detailed manner. In addition to these, Zapatero did not make concessions to violent acts and attempted to get the support of political parties against the violence and the ETA in the Basque region (Şimşek, 2010: 339).

Furthermore, confidence building measures are important for the success in the negotiation processes. Accordingly; legal, judicial and executive changes are required as well because negotiation processes in the ethnic conflicts are fragile (Darby and MacGinty, 2003; Byrene and Jessica, 2009; Kerim Yıldız, Democratic Progress Institute: 21 June 2015). Since it is not difficult to bring back the violence, this kind of reformations would test the sincerity of the parties in the eyes of people.

In this direction, the Colombian government established Post-conflict Ministry, which was “responsible for the execution of post-conflict policies in regard to a possible disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the FARC” (Colombia Reports, 9 Dec. 2015; Herbolzheimer, 2017). Similarly, democratic steps such as general amnesty were taken in Spain for the evaluation of the situation of the ETA members, prisoners and for their integration into the society (Bilgiç, 2014: 92; Şimşek, 2010: 339). Reciprocal gestures may also contribute the success. For example, Blair as a prime-minister apologized for British negligence of scarcity that happened 150 years ago in Ireland (The Irish Times, 2 June 1997: 1).

Another important aspect of the resolution processes is the role and the contribution of inter-national actors on the processes. The roles of Colombia, Mexico, Norway, Spain and the USA in the Guatemala process; Sweden in the Indonesia process; the United Nations in the process of El Salvador; and the USA in the Northern Ireland process are all undeniable. Especially, the role of the USA during the negotiation period with the IRA was remarkable. With the initiative of the USA, the IRA declared a ceasefire in 1994 and negotiations continued under the leadership of old US senator George Mitchell. Mitchell stipulated some conditions for the process, e.g. only peaceful and political methods would be used during the negotiation process (Yıldız and Breau, 2010: 248). This approach later came to be called “Mitchell Principles” in negotiation processes.

In this way, it was seen that an objective third party could help the main parties in terms of generating empathy with each other. Thereby, parties could understand each other’s position over the issue in a better way. The role of third parties and international actors is also significant in terms of giving a new perspective to the parties involved, maintaining the continuation of the process in case of disputes and

offering them solution alternatives. Additively, these actors could monitor the process, and check the sincerity of the parties to keep their promises (Çelik, 2009: 173). For instance, during the process of disarmament of the IRA, the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning monitored, reviewed and verified the progress on dismantlement of illegal arms and reported to the governments at regular intervals. Thus, without an objective arbitrator or an observer, it would have been very difficult to reach a solution.

In addition to their mediatory roles, international actors would have an active role in the conflict periods too. For instance, while the IRA received support from the Irish people living in the USA, the Tamil Tigers received support from the Tamil people living in the UK, or the ETA acted freely in France for many years. Yet, when international factors turned against these terror organizations, their mobility was restricted, and they were in a tight corner. Then, they had to sit on the negotiation table and this way peaceful settlement of disputes became possible. Thus, attitude of international actors has a vital impact on the conflict and resolution processes.

Finally, the most controversial issue in the resolution processes is the issue of disarmament of the organizations. This issue may sometimes terminate a process. For example, in spite of the Agreement in 1998, the IRA did not accept to lay down arms and this situation complicated the process. Then, when it was understood that the process would not proceed any further, the issue of disarmament was determined as the goal at the end of the process. However, just four months after the agreement, in August 1998, Omagh bombing happened, which was the most lethal terrorist attack in the history of Northern Ireland, leaving 29 dead. After this attack, people from two sects, Protestants and Catholics, were united against the violence. This event also showed the heavy costs of returning violence, and the disarmament of IRA was

brought to agenda again, which was the biggest obstacle to peace (Archick, 2003: 3). Therewith, Gerry Adams, who was the leader of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, called for disarmament and argued that armed struggle came to an end, and struggle should continue in democratic ways and in political realm to reach the aims of republican movement. Also, with the effective politics of Sinn Fein, the disarmament of the IRA was not depicted as a defeat, but a victory for fair and lasting peace (Aktaş, 2014: 256-258). As a result, the IRA declared that it would lay down arms in 28 July 2005. In return, the British army withdrew from the Northern Ireland in 2007 after 38-year-long military operation, and the British government transferred police forces and justice services into the Northern Ireland based on the Hillsborough Agreement in 2010.

Similarly, as a result of common operations between Spain and France against the ETA, it was stuck in a tight corner. Then, the ETA made a ceasefire declaration in September 2010 and stated that this was a “definitive cease” to end the armed struggle on 20 October 2011 (Reuters; The Telegraph). However, the Spanish government stipulated disarmament as the first condition and did not start negotiations (Govan, 2011). In the light of these developments, the Herri Batasuna indicated that they did not support the separatist violence in the Basque region and would try to reach their goals via political means instead of violence and conflict henceforth, and repealed itself in January 2013 (Tremlett, 2013). Later, the ETA released to public that they would give up the weapons and hand them over in February 2014 (Tremlett, 2014), and dismantled its operational and logistical structures used in the armed struggle in July 2014.

Except for the cases which are the most known and examined in the literature above like the IRA, the ETA and the FARC, there are other processes which succeeded via

the negotiations such as El Salvador, Guatemala, South Africa, Tajikistan, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Brundi, Indonesia and Nepal. They have shown that resolution process has different paths in every country. The United Nations played a mediatory role in the most of these processes (Fisas, 2013: 107). In El Salvador, the desire for peace of the people and the efforts of the United Nations and other mediatory countries were crucial. Also, in the case of Guatemala, the support of third parties was determinative, too (Fisas, 2013: 108-109). Lastly, the Tsunami disaster that hit Indonesia in 2004 led to the restart of the peace negotiations with the mediation of Sweden. The process succeeded as a result of the GAM's (Free Aceh Movement) consent to autonomy by backing down on independence, dis-armament and the general amnesty (Fisas, 2013: 105).

All in all, when different resolution processes around the world analyzed, it is seen that a number of rules/lessons have vital importance. Though every conflict requires unique resolution methods and there is no such a thing as "perfect" resolution process (Herbolzheimer, 2017: 94), some common techniques should be applied in order not to make the same mistakes (Darby and MacGinty, 2003: 2; Byrene and Jessica, 2009: 525-530; Kerim Yıldız, Democratic Progress Institute: 21 June 2015).

They can be ordered as follows;

- Resolution takes time.
- A powerful government and its powerful will to the solution are essential.
- A divided leadership for the warring faction is a weakening factor to the solution.
- Key actors must be incorporated / included in the process.
- Public support and the participation of civil society must be ensured.
- The periods of confidentiality and transparency must be pinned down / decided accurately.
- Negotiation of the basic issues and conditions should not be neglected under any circumstances.
- Time schedule and cornerstones of the road map must be kept in mind, but not in an obsessive way.
- Simplification of the process and rendering it and its goals simple and understandable is vital.
- Focusing on the process in good faith enables both parties to create a diplomatic line to continue communication.
- Trust must be built between two parties via different steps and measures must be taken with patience.
- Political decisions during and after the process should be adapted to the law.
- Use of force must be avoided.
- It is important to keep in mind that there can be falcons and actors that undermine the process on both sides.
- After the agreement, there should be no losing side.
- Putting the agreement into practice is more significant than signing the agreement.
- Democratic reforms and transitional justice must be applied.
- Participation of third parties and international actors eases the progress of the process.
- Developing a theory and adopting a philosophy, compatible with the conflict and its solution is a main component of the process.

5.2. Evaluation of the Kurdish Resolution Process

The Kurdish Resolution Process initiated by the AK Party government is actually defined as botched by many (Aydınlı and Özcan, 2011; Villelas, 2011; International Crisis Group Report, 2014; Ünal, 2015; Balcı and Kardaş, 2016). In other words, “even though the resolution process was one of the greatest steps that the AK Party took during its history, its requirements were not met” (Wise Man, Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018). Many mistakes were made before and during the process. Reservations about the process were not annihilated such as whether the unitary state would be abolished, and Turkey would transform into a federative structure or not (Oktaay Vural Author Interview: 3 May 2018); whether the AK Party would use this process to increase its power and to move into the Presidential system (Baskın Oran, Author Interview: 5 Apr. 2018; Keyman, 2014: 23). Further, the necessary steps for trust building and measures to remove the factors that could undermine the process were not taken. For instance, the AK Party government put up resistance against the participation of a third party and an observer (Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Author Interview: 11 May 2018), acted slowly to constitute a legal framework for the process and waited until the very last moment (Sancar, 2017: 206). Moreover, the government continued to construct dams and military stations in the region while the process was still under way (Aktaş, 2014: 264-265). This situation was mentioned by the PKK as one of the reasons for ending the ceasefire and declaring the Revolutionary People’s War in July 2015 (Aktürk, 2016: 60).

On the one hand, the AK Party exhibited inconsistent policies depending on the electoral needs to keep both Turkish nationalist and Kurdish voters’ loyalty during the process and presented its election victory as a condition to continue the peace process (Özpek, 2018: 47-48). On the other hand, the PKK was eager for returning

the violence (Altan Tan, Author Interview: 10 Apr. 2018) because insurgent organizations need radicalization rather than moderation to survive (Tezcür, 2010: 776). During the process, the PKK never thought of laying down arms, continued recruitment efforts, established self-defense groups and checkpoints, and only 15-20 % of PKK militants with-drew from the Turkish soil (Köse, 2017; Resch, 2017). Further, trenches dug, barricades constructed, and weapons and ammunitions stored up in city centers by the PKK revealed that it used the resolution process to gain time and prepare for a high-intensity war against the Turkish police and army. These were the signs that neither parties acted in good faith and showed a powerful will to the solution. Aydınlı warned in *The Parliamentary Research Commission for the Investigation of Social Peace Roads and the Evaluation of the Resolution Process* that effort of the actors to gain advantage by cheating each other was one of the biggest risks for the process (TBMM Official Reports, 05.06.2013), but unfortunately it seems that the parties acted in that way during the process.

A real peace process is different from the cessation of armed conflicts and the lack of direct violence. It is a comprehensive process involving social, political, economic, psychological and security dimensions of the conflict. As Galtung said, the absence of violence shall never be thought of as the ultimate aim of a reconciliation process (1969: 167-191). The Kurdish Resolution Process was only a truce rather than a peace, and both the AK Party and the PKK preferred peace to war strategically. Thus, we can surely “label the ‘peace process’ as a strategic peace” (Özpek, 2018: 38). Statements from some interviewees prove this claim. For instance, while one of the chief advisors for the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu explained that “it is obvious that the resolution process does not match the description of a healthy process” (Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018). A Wise Man professed that “in my

opinion, it is better to entitle the process as de-conflict process” (Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018). Or, according to Coşkun, the process should terminologically be entitled as a “negative peace” instead of resolution process (Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018). Besides all these, Önder indicated that “Öcalan never called the process as the resolution process until the Declaration of Dolmabahçe was announced. He divided the process into two: 1) Dialogue and Recognition Process; and 2) Resolution Process. It was a dialogue and recognition process” (Author Interview: 11 May 2018). Consequently, considering all of these, it can be asserted that there was no peace process; we had only the name of the peace process, but not the process itself.

This situation stemmed from the fact that both parties believed that ending the conflict was a more useful option for their interests than fighting. According to Özpek, while the AK Party sought to monopolize political power, the PKK wanted to gain legitimacy and political rights such as autonomy. Hence, instrumentalization of the Kurdish question by the AK Party resumed in a different way, and it instrumentalized the resolution process too by using the process as a political immunity shield against the criticisms of domestic political opposition (2018: 33). As it is seen, Özpek mainly focuses on the domestic factors and policies of the elites to explain the start and continuation of resolution process. Yet, *offering Erdoğan’s personal power struggles as the sole explanation for the breakdown (or for the continuation) of the peace process would only show one side of these events* (Resch, 2017: 11) because the Kurdish question is an international and transnational question. So, developments related to it and calculations of political actors cannot be reduced to the Turkey’s own domestic politics, and neither can the regional developments be disregarded.

The AK Party pursued a “revisionist” regional policy to make Turkey more effective in the Middle East and wanted to turn Turkey into “an energy hub and crossroads for pipelines” (Çandar, 2009: 15 as cited in Yeğen, 2015: 11). The AK Party knew that ending the conflict with the PKK and developing relations with the Kurds of region would contribute to attain this aim. This policy had double trivets: northern Iraq and Syria. With this purpose in mind, the AK Party fostered economic and security relations with the Kurdish Regional Government step by step. It could be even argued that the KRG had been regarded, by 2014, to be a most appropriate partner given the Middle Eastern conditions as well as a balancing side against the PKK (Balci, Baykal and Öğür, 2014: 52; Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018). When it comes to the Syrian case, in the beginning, the AK Party thought that fight against the PKK would damage this purpose. Also, the priority of the AK Party in the Syrian civil war was to terminate the Assad regime. For this reason, it adopted a moderate stance towards the PYD in the beginning (Resch, 2017: 7-8; Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Author Interview: 11 May 2018).

On the other side, the regional developments made the resolution process and continuation of truce reasonable for the PKK as well because reinstating the conflict with Turkey meant fighting two separate fronts (Tezcür, 2013: 73; Yeğen, 2015: 11-12; One of the chief advisors of the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu, Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018). The PKK did not want to jeopardize its gains in the northern Syria via the PYD by reviving the Kurdish question in Turkey again. Thus, both sides found the resumption of the resolution process reasonable. All in all, as Mithat Sancar argued, it can be said that the Syrian Civil War was one of the most important reasons for the initiation of the Resolution Process because both sides had their own calculations and wanted to prevent the civil war from causing heavier

results in Turkey. The Kurdish question in different countries is integrated and connected to each other, so the resolution process in Turkey cannot be evaluated properly without considering the questions in Syria (2017: 205-209; Vahap Coşkun, Author Inter-view: 17 Apr. 2018; Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Author Interview: 11 May 2018).

The process started under these circumstances, but the parties did even not agree on what kind of peace they wanted (Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018). At the outset, it was indicated that the resolution process was designed to end the armed conflict and disarm the PKK in the end in return for the improvement of cultural and democratic rights of the Kurds in Turkey in a better democratic environment (Yeğen, 2015: 12). However, it was later seen that there was a “paradigmatic difference” between the AK Party and the PKK over the content and terms of the resolution process (Bayramoğlu, 2014: 6). While expectations and targets of the AK Party government regarding the resolution process were to disarm the PKK, to widen the democratic and political rights of individuals, to terminate discriminatory laws in the context of new citizenship, the PKK and Öcalan hoped to establish a self-administration with their own institutions and ensure entry into politics for its militants and the release of Öcalan (Bayramoğlu, 2014).

Further, the parties failed to agree on what kind of mechanisms were to be established and which actors would participate in these mechanisms for the conflict resolution. As indicated above, the AK Party government was against the inclusion of third parties and an arbitrator, and the monitoring committee (Çiçek, 2017: 163). The government wanted to pursue “national” and “native” resolution process by excluding not only international actors but also international norms that emerged from different conflict and resolution processes around the world (Çiçek, 2017: 171-

172). In this way, the AK Party wanted to restrict the scope of the resolution process with a minimalist approach²¹. Yet, the studies reveal that the lack of a third party or a “third eye” in the process reduces the “audience costs”, the surveillance and the pressure on the negotiating actors, and so decreases the chance of success in the processes (Beriker, 2009; Doyle and Sambanis: 2000; Fortna: 2004; Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Author Interview: 11 May 2018).

Furthermore, the agenda of negotiations and the framework of reforms could not be determined during the process. For instance, after the Dolmabahçe meeting, two different texts were read by the delegation of government and the İmralı Committee, and the only common thing was an ambiguous democratization perspective (Çiçek and Coşkun, 2016). Lastly, a clear plan and common road map were not prepared during the process (Sancar, 2017: 206; İlnur Çevik; Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018). As a result, without a clear plan and road map, there was no chance to monitor the process in order to evaluate whether it was advancing or falling behind. This ambiguity reduced the democratic pressure over the actors to fulfill their commitments (Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018).

Although Öcalan and the PKK offered a solution proposal including ceasefire and withdrawal of the PKK, democratization, and disarmament respectively; the AK Party government insisted on disarmament as the first condition to continue negotiations. On the contrary, the PKK declared that it would not lay down arms without a strict schedule. The issue of withdrawal and disarmament, as well as what

²¹ Via interviews with the some political elites, I have the impression that international actors; especially the U.K. and the U.S., created a pressure over the AK Party government to initiate a solution process for the Kurdish question. For this reason, the government started the process and include some of these actors into the Oslo meetings. In other words, the first round of the process was hosted by international actors; but, it did not work. For this reason, the AK Party approached inclusion of the international actors with suspicion. Also, the government does not believe in the objectivity of international actors in regards to the Kurdish question, and their desire to solve the question.

the government would do in return had always been a question of debate between the parties throughout the process, and it was one of the most important reasons for the failure of the resolution process (Çiçek, 2017: 163).

The lack of transparency in the process and the exclusion of key actors from the process were two other deficits. Oppositional parties and groups, especially the nationalist ones, in Turkey had much of suspicion toward the process (Pusane, 2014: 88; Balcı and Kardaş, 2016: 1-2; Oktay Vural Author Interview: 3 May 2018; İlnur Çevik; Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018). The government should have terminated this concern by implementing much more transparent policies throughout the process to get public support (Keyman, 2014: 22-23). Nobody except for the government members, the PKK and HDP leaders did know what was going on then and was going to happen in the end. Although the wise men council was established to socialize the process, it did not leave room for non-state actors to interact and produce a stable peace (Özpek, 2018: 5; Altan Tan, Author Interview: 10 Apr. 2018). As the AK Party ignored other Kurdish and regional groups and did not open more space for them, the PKK legitimized its leadership among Kurds via negotiations (Yavuz and Özcan, 2015: 76-77; Altan Tan, Author Interview: 10 Apr. 2018). For instance, even Yasin Aktay who was the vice chairman of the AK Party, criticized the process and argued that “Kurdish opening... resulted in the popular feeling that the state authority surrendered the region to the PKK” (Yeni Şafak, 1 Aug. 2015).

When it comes to the nationalist reactions to the resolution process, Oktay Vural criticized the process harshly and argued that it damaged ancient Turkish state tradition. According to him, “terror achieved its goals that could not be achieved by weapon via the process... The PKK terror organization established territorial dominance and was effective on the state institutions... As a consequence, the

process strengthened the terror organization and its representatives” (Author Interview: 3 May 2018).

In addition to the lack of transparency and adequate public support, the process was not institutionalized and not bound by rules (Sancar, 2017: 206). The importance of institutions should be underlined for the peace building because effective institutions can minimize the destabilizing effects of political and economic liberalization (Paris, 2004). In this way, necessary measures for trust building could be taken and the factors that may undermine the process could be removed. Also, it should be emphasized that only institutionalized resolution processes could overcome the “security dilemma” and construct relations based on peace and coordination (Hartzell, 2006). This dilemma was obviously seen during the “Kobane Protests”. The PKK media and supporters equalized the AK Party with the ISIS during the events and asserted that the AK Party supported the ISIS in order to “discipline” the PKK, and so the Kurds. There was a perception that the AK Party wanted Kobane to fall into the hands of the ISIS (One of the former Foreign Ministers of the AK Party, Author Interview: 29 Mar. 2018; Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018; Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Author Interview: 19 Apr. 2018). Because of this security dilemma and non-execution of trust building measures, the language of negotiating actors was far from the peace language and this situation blocked the formation of a solid process and environment of trust.

Furthermore, absence of institutions²² in the process gave a free hand to the negotiating parties, as it happened many times during the process (Özpek, 2018: 49).

²² Actually, at the beginning, the wise men council was planned to be established as a mediator or an arbitrator committee for the resolution process. Yet, later it was turned into a committee which undertook a mission to explain the process to the society, instead of guiding and checking the process. And, all the members participated in the committee accepting this fact because the society (Wise Man, Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018).

For instance, on the one hand, when Erdoğan saw that he was going to lose the support of the Kurdish voters and most of them would not support for the presidential system, he changed his attitude towards the Kurdish question and started to use nationalist rhetoric following the 7 June elections (One of the vice chairmen of the CHP, Author Interview: 20 Mar. 2018; Baskın Oran, Author Interview: 5 Apr. 2018). On the other hand, the PKK acted like a military dictatorship and easily sacrificed the political struggle of Kurds of Turkey in order to save the PYD gains in the northern Syria (Bilici, 2017; One of the chief advisors of the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu; Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018; İlnur Çevik; Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018; Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018). This lack of institutionalization and rules increased the instability throughout the process and provided an environment in which the actors could act incoherently and irresponsibly because it was closed to the democratic control, and this fact decreased the “audience costs” again both domestically and internationally. Due to this problematical institutional structure, time could not be used effectively, the process remained ambiguous permanently, and obligations were not met mutually (Çiçek and Coşkun, 2016).

Lastly, the parties did not come to an agreement on the transboundary and transnational dimension of the Kurdish question. Especially the situation of Rojava (the West Kurdistan) became the biggest matter of dispute since the beginning of the resolution process (Çiçek, 2017: 163-164). Herein, it should be mentioned that all interviewees in my study compromised on this point. In a nutshell, the Kurdish movement headed towards the construction of a de facto autonomous region in the northern Syria under the cover of “third way” between the Assad regime and the Syrian Arab opposition. Conversely, Ankara declared that it would not allow de facto

Kurdish governance in Syria recurrently and saw it as a national threat (Güneş and Lowe, 2015: 10; Beki, *Hürriyet*, 27 Jan. 2015; Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Author Interview: 19 Apr. 2018). In response to this, Öcalan defined the Turkish government's policy towards the northern Syria as war politics against the Kurds and called all Kurds for a preparation for a high-intensity war (Kaplan, *Evrensel*, 23 Sept. 2014). In conclusion, it can be said that regional developments in Syria had toxic impact on the resolution process at the end, in contrast to its beginning.

As Aydınli said;

“the Kurdish question is not an issue between the Kurds and Turks anymore, it has international ties and is a subject of regional geopolitics for many years. This fact complicates the solution by increasing the number of actors, their diversity and enlarging its international dimension. As a result, it is not Turkey's own problem anymore. Even though you think that you controlled every-thing, there are many parts and dimension of the question that you cannot control. Hence, you can-not say that we: the Turks and Kurds, sit together and resolve the problem despite of the international actors. There is no such a Middle East and international system as of today” (TBMM Official Reports, 05.06.2013)²³.

Considering these facts and fragile political structure in the Middle East after the Arabian Spring, Aydınli successfully predicted that “maybe it sounds pessimistic, but it is not possible to solve the Kurdish question in today's Middle East and international system” (TBMM Official Re-ports, 05.06.2013). This analysis, which touches upon the transnational dimension of the resolution process, was made two years before the failure of the resolution process.

Until now, I attempted to explain the international examples of the resolution process and the lessons taken from these examples. Then, I tried to evaluate the Kurdish Resolution Process in the light of this information and explained its problematical institutional structure, inner conflicts and inconsistencies. When compared to the examples of successful international resolution processes, the Kurdish Resolution

²³ Wise Man and Talha Köse agreed with this argument too (Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018; 2017: 32).

Process in Turkey cannot be entitled as a real “resolution process”. In this way, agreeing with Özpek, I put forward that labeling the “peace process” as a strategic peace or just a truce rather than a peace would be appropriate. Also, I showed how the actors calculated both domestic and international factors to start and continue the process. Later, I tried to shed light on the main issue of conflicts between the actors on both domestic and international scale during the process.

At the rest of the study, the reasons behind the failure of the resolution process or ending of the truce and return to the conflict are going to be revealed by focusing on the changing balance of power between the negotiating actors during the process. At this point, it should be acknowledged that the Kurdish question is an international and a transnational question, and so the factors related to the question are interrelated and have affected one another. Thus, it is not easy to separate such factors as domestic or international. For this reason, the main actors of the process took both domestic and international factors that affect the balance of power among them into account while making cost-benefit analysis and calculations around the negotiation table.

Accepting the reasons or factors behind the end of process are multi-level and multi-causal, this study divided the factors affecting the balance of power between the main actors into two: domestic and international factors. Whereas state-level dynamics or “domestic factors” in my research are listed as the HDP-PKK Rivalry and the Existential Crises for the AK Party; international and regional dynamics are listed as the PYD State and Mobilizational Spillover Effects of the Syrian Civil War. Finally, it should be expressed that since the role of Erdoğan as the main actor during the resolution process and Öcalan’s actions were analyzed above (especially by

taking the study of Özpek (2018) entitled as *The Peace between Turkey and the Kurds: Anatomy of Failure into consideration*), the actor-based dynamics will not be repeated below.

CHAPTER 6

REASONS BEHIND THE FAILURE OF THE KURDISH RESOLUTION PROCESS: THE CHANGING BALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN THE MAIN ACTORS

After making cost-benefit analysis on the issue of resolution, the actors decide whether to sit around the negotiation table or not. If they take a positive decision, they continue as long as they think the negotiation remains a better option for their interests and goals than all other alternatives. Thus, they sit around the table when they believe that they could gain more via negotiating rather than conflicting. In other words, the purpose is to turn causes and conditions of the conflict into an advantage and get politically strong with the help of negotiations. Hence, negotiating is only a field for these purposes to be achieved, and if other fields provide better options to realize them, the negotiation table is less attractive to the actors (Çelik, 2017: 4-7).

Erdoğan and the AK Party government started to be perceived as a weak negotiation partner vis-a-vis the PKK and the HDP as a result of the Gezi Protests, the 17-25 December Operations, the Kobane Protests, and the 7 June election results. I will not explain here the aforementioned impact of these protests and operations on the resolution process and how they posed a problem to the AK Party government again. Yet, I want to emphasize that absolute majority could not be attained by the AK Party, although it remained the largest party in the parliament, following the 7 June

elections. It was later understood that the MHP beat the AK Party in terms of the votes of the nationalists and so did the HDP in terms of Kurdish votes. Further, the resolution process legitimized the HDP-PKK leadership and representation of the Kurds (Köse, 2017: 24). However, in the past, the AK Party competed fiercely for the votes of the Kurds and received significantly more Kurdish votes than the political parties associated with the PKK. Therefore, the resolution process went in the HDP-PKK's favor and against the interests of the AK Party.

Furthermore, the presidential system that the AK Party planned for the beginning of the resolution process was imperiled with the HDP's refusal to support it. The PKK had welcomed this initiative earlier as they would be able to get constitutional autonomy within the presidential system (Özpek, 2018: 49). Yet, prospective interests of the AK Party and the PKK sharply diverged when it was understood that there was no place for a power-sharing and autonomy within the presidential system offered. This led the AK Party to look for an alternative and a new partner, because the resolution process was not useful anymore for the establishment of the presidential system (Özpek, 2018; 46-51; Resch, 2017: 11). Then, Erdoğan came closer to the nationalist MHP and started attacking excessively not only the PKK but also the HDP.

On the other side, the PKK used the Resolution Process and the armistice as a chance to establish its autonomy in the south-eastern Turkey: tax collection and territorial control through check-points, and it never withdrew its fighters from Turkey. Also, the PKK imitated the warfare of the PYD in Syria e.g. it shifted battlegrounds from rural areas to the cities and used the method of "entrench battle" because transnational ethnic groups mimic each other. Although Öcalan stated that the PKK did not aim secession, quasi-state activities of the PYD resurrected the dream of an

independent Kurdistan among many nationalist Kurds. In this environment, during the provisional government period between 7 June and 1 November 2015 elections in Turkey, the PKK figured that Turkey got weak and it had seized an opportunity to ensure the gains of the PYD in northern Syria. So, it launched a preemptive attack against Turkey (Aktürk, 2016: 61).

All in all, this study argues that the failure of the Kurdish Resolution Process cannot be explained only through domestic dynamics: policies implemented by the AK Party and Erdoğan or the HDP's achievement in the 7 June elections. This could only show one side of the coin. However, intrastate armed conflicts are embedded in a regional setting (Forsberg, 2009: 13-17). Similarly, the conflict between Turkey and the PKK is not immune to regional developments. The issues at stake between the actors have international components; both Turkey and the PKK along with its Syrian branch, the PYD, implement regional policies and have different type of relations with the other regional actors. Also, the PKK pursues secessionist goals and has irredentist claims. Thus, it is better to analyze the impact of the Syrian civil war at meso-level, and its repercussions in regional setting instead of focusing on actions of actors separately and freely from the regional developments because both actors calculated not only domestic factors but also regional factors before deciding.

In light of this information, I took regional and international dynamics into account because states are not closed boxes, and the domestic political events do not happen in a vacuum in today's world that is increasingly becoming interdependent. The regional setting and the increase in the power of the PKK via the PYD in northern Syria changed the picture. The quasi-state activities of the PYD in the region boosted Kurdish nationalist sentiments to establish a Kurdish nation-state. The fight against the ISIS legitimated the actions of the PYD while the failure of Turkish government

to act against the ISIS threat, or its late response, pressed itself to the wall. As a result, I claim that the Syrian civil war changed all cost-benefit analysis of the actors of the resolution process and put an end to the process with its spillover effects.

6.1. Domestic or State-level Factors

6.1.1. The HDP-PKK Rivalry

Main stream Kurdish movement remained divided, inconsistent and became distanced from the unity during the process because there are at least three power groups in the movement including the imprisoned leader Öcalan, Qandil and its legal political party HDP. Thus, it is argued that lack of unity between the Kurdish side of the Resolution Process, and lack of coordination among them had posed a challenge to construct a healthy and full-fledged mechanism between the negotiating actors, and this situation renders the process fragile (Çiçek, 2017: 172).

Many leftist columnists, opinion leaders and politicians stated that after the spectacular success of the HDP in the 7 June elections, the PKK felt threatened because the HDP could replace its three-decade long leadership among Kurds, and this rivalry motivated the PKK to launch attacks again (Aktürk, 2016: 59). In this way, the PKK terrorized Kurds, constituted a “terror tutelage” over the actors aiming to carry out legal politics and pacified other Kurdish politicians because otherwise presence of the PKK would become meaningless without violence (Altaylı, Habertürk: 28 Feb. 2018). We have some evidence to this claim. To illustrate; the CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu accused the PKK of hurting the HDP and said that “PKK is aiming to keep HDP out of the parliament”, and went on to say that the PKK in this way complicating the solution of the issue and put the HDP into a

difficult position (Hurriyet Daily News, 27 Sept. 2015). Moreover, the claims by Cemil Bayık after the 1 November elections indicated that the electoral support for the HDP was a sign of approval of the PKK and the HDP would not be able to take %5 of the vote under these attacks without the PKK (Aljazeera Turk, 6 Nov. 2015; Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Author Interview: 11 May 2018). Or, the claims of Mustafa Karasu, one of the leaders of the KCK, indicating that “there are no ‘conditional votes’²⁴, they are all ours (the Kurds)” (Rudaw, 9 June 2015) were used as a proof of the rivalry between the HDP and the PKK (Aktürk, 2016: 59).

However, this first explanation is not convincing since there is no public data which indicates the questioning of the PKK’s leadership and its tutelage over the Kurdish question by the HDP (Aktürk, 2016: 60; One of the chief advisors of the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu; Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018), but there is public data which proves the opposite. For instance, Altan Tan likened the hierarchical relationship between the PKK and the HDP to a “dad and son” relation (Author Interview: 10 Apr. 2018), and, considering this situation, one of the former Foreign Ministers of the AK Party governments argued that the HDP could not engage in politics independently from the PKK (Author Interview: 29 Mar. 2018).

On the other side, Bayık himself stated that “the claims that the HDP must detach itself from the PKK and show its stance against its activities are nonsense” (Daily Sabah, 5 Nov. 2015). Önder agreed with the statements of Bayık and said that the PKK and the HDP were inseparable and component parts, not alternatives to each other (Author Interview: 11 May 2018).

²⁴ Those votes that came from the people believing the Turkification project of the HDP, but they were ethnically not Kurdish people. According to this project, the HDP would transform itself into a party of Turkey instead of being party of the Kurds.

Furthermore, not even a single member of the HDP members or MPs resigned from the party or the parliament to protest the PKK attacks. Only Altan Tan, a former political Islamist, criticized the PKK for its actions and asserted that the HDP was only a carrier between İmralı and Qandil during the process (Çiçek, 2017: 172; Author Interview: 10 Apr. 2018). The HDP leader Demirtaş repeated the PKK demands of “democratic autonomy” and “self-governance” during the Democratic Society Congress (DTK) on 27 December 2015 (IMC TV). Hence, in contrast to Garry Adams who called the IRA for disarmament as the leader of Sinn Fein to continue political struggle in democratic ways, Demirtaş was not able to make his presence felt against the PKK. Even though he believed that the PKK should definitely do away with weapons against Turkey, he explained his inability to disarm the PKK and told that if it was up to his call, he would do that all the time (Hürriyet, 15 July 2015).

All in all, the HDP-PKK Rivalry was not a matter of debate, and HDP’s insubordination to the PKK was not the case. This hypothesis was just articulated on a wishful or imaginary split between the PKK and the HDP (Aktürk, Karar, 13 July 2017). The incapability of the HDP to criticize the PKK terror attacks that killed many civilians and to keep itself distant from the PKK damaged itself, and shadowed its arguments of “Turkification - Türkiyelileşmek” and attempts to become a more Turkified, multi-issue party before the 7 June elections (Köse, 2017: 24).

6.1.2. The Existential Crises for the AK Party

The Kurdish Resolution Process was run together with the restructuring process of political and public sphere of Turkey, which rendered the base of process markedly fragile. Additionally, intra-state power struggle and increasing concerns of the AK Party government for remaining in power obstructed to overcome the problems encountered in the process (Çiçek, 2017: 168-169). The AK Party came across three existential crises during the process: 1) Gezi Protests, 2) 17-25 December Operations, 3) Kobane Protests. In addition to these factors, successive elections held in a short span of time starting from the end of March 2014 and to the beginning of June 2015 contributed to the coming of the process to an impasse by poisoning the political atmosphere.

Firstly, Gezi Protests erupted in May 2013 as a dissident movement against the government's controversial plan to demolish the park and continued nearly one month in almost all cities of Turkey as a result of the discontent with the AK Party government's economic, social, cultural and political policies and its rising authoritarian tendency (Arat, 2013). These unusual protests with the participation of 2.5 million people had never been seen in the Turkish history before. Nearly all opponents of the AK Party including the Kemalists, Kurds, Alawite people, leftist groups, liberals, environmentalists, LGBT members, feminists and many more groups took part in the protests. The AK Party government and Erdoğan encountered a big challenge in the protests. As a response to it, the AK Party evaluated the Gezi protests as a total offense against itself, and even saw it as a coup attempt (Çiçek, 2017: 168).

The HDP and the PKK decided not to join the protests directly by taking the resolution process into consideration. In this way, they did not want to come face to face with the AK Party just two months after the Newroz letter of Öcalan was read in Diyarbakır in March 2013, and they were criticized harshly because of this decision by different political camps (Saymadi, Radikal, 27.05.2015). According to Wise Man, Öcalan thought that international factors would topple down anyone who would make an attempt to solve the conflict; and, since Erdoğan wanted to solve this question, these protests were evaluated as an attempt to overthrow him. Thus, Kurds did not join the protests despite the whole efforts to include them, which was a big chance for Turkey for the continuation of the resolution process (Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018). Also, the resolution process was more important for the Kurdish political movement. So, they did not want to stand up to Erdoğan during the protests because there was no actor more powerful to replace him in Turkish politics to solve the Kurdish question (One of the chief advisors of the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu; Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018).

Secondly, the conflict between the AK Party and the FETO came to light after the under-secretary of National Intelligence Service Hakan Fidan was invited to give a statement (Aljazeera Turk, 08.02.2012). Later, this organization performed the 17-25 December Operations in 2013 under the guise of the fight against the corruption. Placing the claims of corruption on one side, next developments including the failed 15 July coup attempt revealed that this “parallel structure” wanted to redesign the political structure of Turkey by weakening it and ultimately overthrow the AK Party government with different methods. These operations and actions of the FETO posed another existential threat against the AK Party government (Çiçek, 2017: 168; Köse, 2017: 26; İlnur Çevik, Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018; Wise Man, Author

Interview: 3 Apr. 2018; Baskın Oran, Author Interview: 5 Apr. 2018; One of the chief advisors of the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu; Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018). New information which will be uncovered in the future about the impact of the FETO on the failure of the resolution process would help us to understand the fragility of the process. Even Demirtaş mentioned this issue in his defending (Hürriyet, 15 Feb. 2018).

At this point, I have to express that via the interviews I made²⁵, I formed an impression that Erdoğan was badly influenced by these first two crises, and this situation damaged the process seriously. Because, as mentioned above, only powerful governments can conduct this kind of negotiations. With these crises, Erdoğan and the AK Party government were now regarded as weak partners for the negotiation with the PKK and the HDP (İlnur Çevik; Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018). Thus, even though the Kurdish opposition against Erdoğan remained at the lowest level during the-se crises, the Kurdish side began to suspect Erdoğan's future and thought that if Erdoğan stepped down the office, it would be pointless to pull all eggs in one basket (Wise Man, Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018). Because of these reasons, it could be argued that these existential threats against the AK Party government increased the fragility of the process, although it did not put an end to it.

Thirdly, I have to mention the Kobane Protests that happened on 6-8 October 2014 and end-ed with the death of more than 50 people. The protests started as a result of the HDP's call for sup-port to rally on the streets to protest the ISIS attacks and the AK Party government foreign policy towards Kobane (Aljazeera Turk, 15 Mar. 2016). Demonstrators occupied the streets in the Kurdish populated cities. The protests took place in a regional scale and finished after Öcalan's call. The ISIS

²⁵ Interviews with Wise Man, 3 Apr. 2018; and, with Baskın Oran, 5 Apr. 2018.

attacks on Kobane paved the way for an elevated level of ethnic consciousness among Kurds living in Turkey, and Kobane struggle became a means for the PKK and the HDP for them to mobilize locally. These protests interrupted the resolution process by disclosing the security dilemma that existed among the followers of the AK Part and the HDP-PKK. (Güneş and Lowe, 2015; Çiçek, 2017:168;: 10; Köse, 2017: 27; Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018).

More to that, the frequency of elections throughout the process including the 30 March local elections in 2014, the 10 August presidential elections in 2014 and the 7 June general elections in 2015 harmed the process by polarizing the political atmosphere and blocking its feasibility for peaceful negotiations (Köse, 2017: 22). During the presidential and general election campaigns, while Erdoğan used a nationalist discourse to receive the support of nationalist constituents; the HDP and the PKK tried to demonize Erdoğan by accusing him of supporting Islamist terrorist organizations such as the ISIS against the Kurds in Syria, and accordingly run an anti-Erdoğan election campaign. The motto of Demirtaş was “Seni Başkan yaptırmayacağız - We Will Not Make You the President” (Resch, 2017: 9-11). The elections by their nature are potentially harmful to the resolution processes because these processes are mostly complex and fragile, and the election periods serve the interests of political leaders aiming at consolidation of their votes through political polarization (Köse, 2017: 24-25). As Timothy Sisk put forward, political elites in ethnically, religiously or sectarian-wise divided societies are motivated to play the “ethnicity card” to create a fear among the public and receive the support of radical and extreme segments of the society (2014: 31-34). Besides, the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) Report in 2011 shows the phenomenon that elections

trigger the social, economic and political tensions, even if not the source of the cleavages.

These were the domestic dynamics in the calculations of the actors that participated in the resolution process. However, the agenda and payoffs of the actors sitting around the negotiation table cannot only be dependent on the domestic developments and interests. As stated previously, the Kurdish question is an international question, and so regional developments are decisive in its geopolitical equation. Also, sociopolitical situation of the Kurdish actors split among Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria has been affecting one another due to the kinship and transnational ties among them. Especially social and economic relations between the Syrian Kurds and the Turkish Kurds are highly developed despite the political boundaries because most of them speak the same Kurmanji Kurdish and the geographical conditions have facilitating effects on these relations. Because of these reasons, both sides, the HDP and the PKK, as well as the AK Party government evaluated this resolution process as part of their regional politics. Hence, the process took shape depending on the regional developments in Syria for both sides (Çiçek, 2017: 165-167). These international and transnational dynamics; namely “the PYD State” and “the Mobilizational Spillover” impact on Turkey brought about by the civil war in Syria, changed the balance of power among the main actor of the resolution process.

6.2. International and Transnational/Regional Factors

6.2.1. The PYD State

The Syrian Civil War grew out of the unrest of the Arab Spring and turned into an armed struggle when protests calling on Assad to be put down were fiercely held down. There are distinct factions taking part in the war: the Syrian government along with its supporters of a wide range; a not-so-strong collaboration by rebel circles of Sunni Arab origin (including the Free Syrian Army—FSA); a predominant portion of Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces; Salafi jihadist groups (including Al-Nusra Front) which frequently work together with Sunni rebels, and the ISIS. Agencies beyond the borderlines helped these factions remarkably, and this paved the way for the conflict to be deemed by many a proxy war fought by regional powers as well as the global ones.

The rebellions against the Assad Regime took in participators from Islamist Kurds and the Kurdish Future movement whose leader was Mash'al Tammo. However, Tammo was killed with a gun on 7 October 2011 by men who suddenly entered into his apartment. The Assad Regime was held responsible for the assassination of Tammo by his supporters. The fact that the PYD may have taken part in this killing is another claim (Hevian, 2013; Tejel, 2012). Then, whereas the Kurdish forces opposing the regime started to lose power in a short span of time, the PYD started to pacify other Kurdish actors (such as Islamic Kurdish group: Erkad-ı İslam and the pro-Barzani KDP: Syrian Kurdish National Council) by clashing with them, and monopolized power in the region, followed by the construction of a federal structure called "Rojava" in 2015 (Bechev, 2013: 56; Kıran, 2014: 112; Dağ, 2018: 12; Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Author Interview: 19 Apr. 2018).

When the effects of Arabian Uprisings reached Syria, and the relations between Turkey and the Syrian government deteriorated, the isolation of Qandil came to an end (Aktürk, Karar, 13 July 2017), and the PKK got a chance to build relations with the Assad regime and its supporter Tehran government in addition to its developed relations with the US. In the chaotic environment of Syrian civil war, a tacit alliance was formed between the Assad regime and the PYD because the Assad regime was not able to fight both against the rebels and Kurds. Head officials of the PYD premeditated this move as well through a strategic sense which anticipated that the ground for combatting the ISIS, Al-Qaida and alike groups was now created through nonaggression with the regime (Hossino and Tanır, 2012; Touloumakos, 2012: 10-11; Rubin, 2014). Following these developments, de facto autonomy was declared in 2012 from the regions that Assad forces withdrew from including Afrin, Kobane and Jazira (Bruneau, 2012; Savelsberg, 2014: 93-102). In other words, power vacuum in the northern Syria was filled by the PYD (Dağ, 2018: 11). Yet, as indicated above, these movements of the PYD to establish an autonomous region were criticized and perceived as a national threat by the AK Party government (Güneş and Lowe, 2015).

However, the relations between Turkey and the PYD were not actually conflictual from the beginning. The AK Party government tolerated actions of not only the PKK but also the PYD for a while for the sake of the resolution process (Dağ, 2018: 11-12; İlnur Çevik; Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018). For this reason, Turkey invited the PYD Salih Muslim to Ankara in July 2013 and conveyed the government's demands to him. 3 conditions for humanitarian aid to Kurdish region in Syria, which had previously been withheld, were laid down: 1- to break up relations with the Assad regime and join rebel forces. 2- to abstain from unilateral declaration of autonomy in the northern Syria. 3- to refrain from taking any step that would threaten Turkish-

Syrian border security (Al Jazeera, 4 Oct. 2014). Yet, the PYD did not change its attitude during the civil war.

Also, it should be emphasized that once Turkish state challenged Assad, he intentionally left the north of Syria for Kurds with the purpose of coming down on Turkey, considering that most damage to Turkey would be done by the PKK (İlnur Çevik; Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018; Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Author Interview: 19 Apr. 2018). As De Maio argued, in the context of contagion process approach, domestic concerns and foreign policy calculations of governments under threat could lead to the diffusion of a civil war and enable civil tensions to spill across the borders because by this way these governments can punish neighboring states supporting the rebels (2010: 26-28).

The criticisms of the AK Party government against the PYD were reflected as “hostility to the Kurds” by the HDP and the PKK (Çiçek, 2017: 164; Köse, 2017: 25). Especially at the time of Kobane process, the AK Party government was subject to a number of accusations among which one was that it took advantage of the ISIS issue to confront Kurds. Erdoğan was demonized and portrayed as being senseless towards human suffering, Kurds being murdered, and at fault for the incidents in Kobane (Köse, 2017; Resch, 2017; Dağ, 2018: 14; One of the former Foreign Ministers of the AK Party, Author Interview: 29 Mar. 2018; İlnur Çevik; Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018; One of the chief advisors of the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu; Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018; Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018). This negative image of Erdoğan did not change, and residual trust between the actors of the resolution process eroded fairly as a result of the Kobane crisis (Gunes and Lowe, 2015: 10; Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018), even though Turkey opened doors for refugees fleeing from the conflicts and allowed

the Peshmerga and Free Syrian Army forces to lift the ISIS siege later. At this point, comments of Sırrı Süreyya Önder on the Kobane events are remarkable:

“There is something called ‘izzet-i nefis’ in the eastern societies; honor does not exactly match its description. This event hurt ‘izzet-i nefis’ of Kurdish people because people there were attacked barbarically, their women were raped, enslaved; i mean all kind of occupation practices were implemented there. Under these circumstances, if you (Erdoğan) say this (Kobane is about to fall!), it means that you are happy with a desperate situation of people that you live together and legally responsible for. People took this saying in this direction and reacted too strongly” (Author Interview: 11 May 2018).

In addition, the PKK gained international backing, especially that of the USA, thanks to the attitude shown in Kobane whilst this incident set the AK Party back (Köse, 2017: 29; Dağ, 2018: 13-15). Even though the PKK was officially deemed a terrorist organization by the USA, the PYD did not go under the same classification (Gunter, 2015). There were two causes of the US support for the PYD: first, the operation by the PYD had proved to be a success and it tightly concentrated upon the struggle against the ISIS instead of the regime of Assad. Thereby, it can be used as “ground force” against the ISIS (Barkey, 2015). Secondly, public opinion of the West was inclined towards seeing the PYD as “freedom fighters” and the most foresighted rebellious circle in the struggle against extremism (Stephens and Stein, 2015). This way, the PYD now gained a more legitimate status to the point of being an ally for the West and a military and political support that it had never received before was granted to them thanks to their decisive campaign against the ISIS (Abdullah, 2016: 92; Touloumakos, 2016: 132). As a result, the Kobane process and the Kobane events in Turkey can be identified as a “game changer”, which suited the interests of the Kurdish actors of the resolution process in the end (Resch, 2017: 7-8; Dağ, 2018: 14-15; İlnur Çevik; Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018). This support and the PYD’s

spiritual, material and territorial gains were perceived by Turkish government as a threat to the balance of power between the PKK and Turkey.

When it comes to the June 2015, just before the end of the resolution process, the Kobane and Jazira cantons were united after the acquisition of Tel Abyad by the PYD with the support of the US air forces. The de facto region extended during the resolution process and reached up to Hatay from the Iranian border, and it would conceivably be able to reach up to the Mediterranean Sea in the near future (Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Author Interview: 19 Apr. 2018; Oktay Vural Author Interview: 3 May 2018). Also, after the autonomy in Syria, the Syrian Kurds was able to unite with the Iraqi Kurds in the long run (Kıran, 2014: 121). Then, Turkey faced a “risk” that could break up its geographical relations with the Arabic and Islamic world and the PKK (Çiçek, 2017: 166; Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Author Interview: 19 Apr. 2018; Oktay Vural Author Interview: 3 May 2018). Thus, this Kurdish corridor, which could change the strategic balance in the Middle East and make Kurds a significant actor in the region, was termed as “terror corridor” by the Turkish government, and Erdoğan declared that “Turkey will block PKK’s Syrian terror corridor no matter what happens” (BBC Türkçe, Euronews, 02.09.2016). Moreover, it was not acceptable for the Turkish government to be neighbor to a state under the control of the PKK (İlnur Çevik; Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018). Otherwise, Turkey would have a significant amount of trouble suppressing the deeds of the PKK in Syria and the PKK-sympathizers inside Turkey.

Consequently, a Syrian-Kurdish state, which was autonomous, changed the power balance for the benefit of the PKK and to the detriment of Turkey. The PYD's existence in Syria turned into a problem of the national security of Turkey and affected Turkish calculation in the region (One of the chief advisors of the former

Prime Minister Davutoğlu; Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018). As İlnur Çevik said, “they (the PKK) used the Syrian civil war opportunistically and thought it’s going well for them in Syria because they were trained and armed by Americans. Thus, Syria decided the timing of insurrection against Turkey” (Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018). Under these circumstances, the cost-benefit analysis of the Turkish government changed, and it abandoned the negotiation table because territorial gains of the PYD and the US support to the PYD were threatening the balance of power among the actors of the resolution process (Resch, 2017: 14).

Lastly, as indicated above, leaving the negotiation table and declaring the “Revolutionary People’s War” seemed more profitable for the PKK (Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018). Through the elevation of “Rojava Revolution” (Western Kurdistan) myth, international military and logistical support, and sympathy earned in the international media by fighting against the ISIS, they grew even more self-confident (Dağ, 2018). Also, the PKK interpreted the AK Party’s loss of reputation in the international arena in the fight against the ISIS and the provisional government in Turkey in the wake of 7 June elections as an opportunity to protect the de facto state in the northern Syria (İlnur Çevik, Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018; One of the chief advisors of the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu; Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018). In the end, the PKK preferred the gains in Syria to the resolution process in Turkey, and sacrificed the latter (Al Jazeera Turk Analysis, 15 March 2016; Bilici, 2017; Köse, 2017; Resch, 2017; Özpek, 2018: 51; Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018).

6.2.2. Mobilizational Spillover

“The PKK/KCK dreamed of the same ‘de facto’ political and military power in Turkey once they had been inspired by the PYG/YPG’s gains in Syria” (Dağ, 2018: 15; İlnur Çevik, Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018)

With the help of the Contagion Process Approach, the impact of Syrian civil war on Turkey and the resolution process can be better understood through a theoretical framework because the relationship between domestic events and international context contributed to the spillover effects of civil wars across borders. The existence of the conflict in Syria, uncertainty and the new conditions created by it made the outbreak of another conflict between Turkey and the PKK more likely. Turkey engaged substantially in the civil war by supporting rebel groups, and this support included not only humanitarian and diplomatic aids but also military aid (Atlas, Bloomberg News, 20 July 2013; Altan Tan, Author Interview: 10 Apr. 2018; Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Author Interview: 19 Apr. 2018) This likely occurred because when the states perceive uncertainty about the situation of the conflict in the neighboring country, they take action (Toft, 2010; Danneman and Ritter, 2013). The headquarters of Free Syrian Army even operated in İstanbul until September 2012 (Anadolu Agency, 22 Sept. 2012). Turkey was also one of the first countries to call for democratic reforms and to declare that Assad should resign from the office to end the civil war (Küçükkoşum, Hürriyet Daily News, 22 Mar. 2011). In addition to the historical problems with Syria and its own Kurds, these policies also made Turkey a potential target for Syrian retaliation (RAND, 2014: 16; Dağ, 2018).

Moreover, Turkey opened its borders to Syrian and Iraqi refugees at the beginning of the war, and their numbers in Turkey reached 3.2 million, according to the AFAD (*The Disaster and Emergency Management Authority*) (2 Oct. 2017). As taken from the Contagion Approach, the arrival of refugees may make host countries more likely

to experience civil conflict due to pressure on local sources and economy. Even though the attitude of Turkish society towards refugees is overall peaceful, we saw that Syrian Refugees were the targets of local anger after the Reyhanli Bombings in May 2013 (Fahim and Arsu, New York Times, 11 May 2013). Yet, the main impact of Syrian civil war on Turkey came from the ethnic and transnational ties: the Kurdish Question. Turkey feared that Kurdish autonomy in Syria would encourage secessionism in Turkey (Larrabee, CNN Global Public Square, 21 Aug. 2013).

As is commonly understood, the beginning of the Kurdish Resolution Process coincided with the civil war. With this step, Turkey intended to benefit from peace and to increase regional influence (Balci, World Politics Review, 29 July 2013). In this direction, series of economic agreements with the KRG were signed and attempts were made to have more advanced relations with other Kurdish groups. In this sense, constructive relations with the Syrian Kurds would prevent any spillover to Turkey because the conflict in Syria and the Kurdish Question in Turkey was much too correlated; however, the opposite happened (Güneş and Lowe, 2015: 3; Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Author Interview: 11 May 2018). After acquiring Tel Abyad with the US support, the PKK united the cantons along the Turkish-Syrian border. Following link-up of Jazira and Kobane, the PKK gained self-confidence, and set new goals and aimed for the sky (Çiçek, 2017: 166; Köse, 2017: 27-28; Dağ, 2018: 15) because “the PKK saw in Syria the realization of many of the objectives they had been fighting for in Turkey” (Akyol, Al-Monitor, 4 August 2015 as cited in Resch, 2017: 11; One of the chief advisors of the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu; Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018; Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018). The new target was to connect Afrin to these cantons, and the KCK co-President Bese Hozat on 21 June 2015 stated that cantons would be united, this was an inevitable end no

matter what Turkey would do; this was the destiny of the Kurds, Turkey would not be able to change this (Rudaw; Al Jazeera Turk).

Moreover, territorial gains in the northern Syria increased the hopes and expectations of the PKK in accordance with its Pan-Kurdish agenda, and its aspiration for an “independent and united Kurdistan” (Köse, 2017: 27-28; Resch, 2017: 13; İlnur Çevik, Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018; One of the chief advisors of the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu; Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018; Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Author Interview: 19 Apr. 2018). Also, as Namo Abdullah clearly stated, “the rise of ISIS has advanced Kurdish nationalism and Kurds are now closer to independence than they have ever been” (2016: 96).

In other words,

“Syria functioned as concretization of a ‘kızıl elma’ (red apple) for Kurds; an organization (the PKK) that has been supported for more than thirty years with an imaginary goal now showed a concrete goal to its supporters. If they could gain a stable status in Syria, this would turn into a movement in northern Iraq and in Iran, and so in Turkey.” (One of the chief advisors of the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu; Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018).

This was seen as a threat by the Turkish government to its national unity because transnational ethnic linkages and the conflicts over territorial control with “domino effects” are potential causes of contagion, so it increases the risk of conflict at home (Davis and Moore, 1997; Ayres and Saideman, 2000; Black, 2012; İlnur Çevik, Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018; Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Author Interview: 19 Apr. 2018; Oktay Vural Author Interview: 3 May 2018). Thus, developments in the northern Syria led to conflict between the ideals of Kurds and fears of Turkey (Kurubaş, 2013) because, as the concept of “security interdependence” implied, Turkish government believed that the security of Turkey was dependent on the regional dynamics. For this reason, Turkey did not disregard the potential effect of

regional factors and international context in Syria on its security. This situation was summarized by Mehmet Akif Ersoy very well: “Turkish state becomes aggressive in the case of separatism”

As indicated above, the ISIS attacks on Kobane triggered the rise of ethnic-nationalist consciousness among Kurds in Turkey. Yet, the AK Party government was not able to comprehend the sensibility of Kurdish ethnic nationalism in Syria, and the importance of transnational ethnic ties between the Kurds in Syria and Turkey in the beginning (Köse, 2017: 28; One of the former Foreign Ministers of the AK Party, Author Interview: 29 Mar. 2018; Wise Man, Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018). It was also anticipated by the AK Party that should the Syrian extension of the PKK fail in Kobane, it would be the weaker side in the negotiation table (Ahmed, 2015: 16-17). Or, so to speak, “with the logic of my enemy’s enemy is my friend, Turkey watched the conflict between the PKK and the ISIS for a length of time because they were both unfavorable actors for Turkey” (Altan Tan, Author Interview: 10 Apr. 2018). However, the struggle of the PYD against the ISIS was an epic battle for the young generations of Kurds, and assistance into Kobane and “Kurdish brothers” were of vital importance for them (Letsch and Traynor, The Guardian: 8 October 2014; Wise Man, Author Interview: 3 Apr. 2018; Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Author Interview: 11 May 2018). Due to these reasons, the perception emerged that the AK Party government was insensitive to the siege of Kobane and possible massacre there, and Erdoğan was reflected as an ISIS supporter (Cemil Bayık, Deutsche Welle Türkçe, 17.12.2014; Altan Tan, Author Interview: 10 Apr. 2018; One of the chief advisors of the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu; Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018; Vahap Coşkun, Author Interview: 17 Apr. 2018).

As Buhaug and Gleditsch proved, “countries with ethnic linkages to groups in conflict across a shared border are significantly more at risk of civil war than other conflict neighbors” (2008: 13), because transnational ethnic groups monitor the status of members of the same ethnic group. Political boundaries do not correspond to their cultural ties, and kinship ties matter in terms of the process of contagion (Brubaker, 1996; Gurr, 2000; Forsberg, 2009). Therefore, to see spillover effects of Syrian civil war among the members of Kurdish society is not surprising because Kurdish groups are connected to one another and share similar ethnic and cultural traits (Güneş and Lowe, 2015: 3; Çiçek, 2017: 165-167). Furthermore, ethnic polarization in Turkey and conflict between the PKK and Turkey for more than thirty years (Yeğen, 1999; Heper, 2007; Konda, 2011; Aktürk, 2012; Keyman, 2014; Güneş and Zeydanlıoğlu, 2014) made Turkey prone to the contagion effects of the Syrian civil war. Lastly, the PKK and its sympathizers in Turkey were inspired by regional developments in Syria and believed in the chance of a success in a violent confrontation due to the uncertainty that the civil war created (Abdullah, 2016; Aktürk, 2016; Touloumakos, 2016; Köse, 2017; Resch, 2017).

The fight against the ISIS, against a “rogue state”, contributed to the international legitimacy of the organization too, and increased the volume of the military support to the PYD (Köse, 2017: 28; Dağ, 2018). Then, the PKK canalized the ethnic-nationalist discourse against the AK Party by manipulating the anger and hostility of young Kurds. Also, as indicated above, the balance of power went in PKK’s favor, and the PKK interpreted the success of the HDP in the 7 June elections as an endorsement of the PKK and extension of its popular base (Aktürk, 2016: 60). Under these circumstances, the PKK mobilized its militants within Turkey in order to start a popular disloyalty/uprising or, as it is called, “serhildan”, because “events...

changing the ethnic balance of power at home” may lead to diffusion of ethnic conflicts (Lake and Rothschild, 1998: 25-27). Since the events in Syria, namely the rise of the PYD and the Kobane resistance with the international support, decreased the “costs of protests” and increased the probability to succeed in the eyes of the PKK, it attempted to create new “Kobane”s in Turkey by inspiring Syria and relying on the support of the international society, and declare “rebel zones” including particularly Diyarbakır, Mardin, Şırnak and Hakkari (TRT Haber, 6 Nov. 2015; İlnur Çevik, Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018). In this sense, the Syrian civil war changed the balance of power among the actors of the resolution process, and so caused the failure of the Kurdish resolution process. In other words, the truce ended, and the parties returned to the conflict.

Finally, during the resolution process, the Turkish state did not grant a legal status for the PKK and refused power sharing as it did for more than 30 years. As Lake and Rothschild suggested, “ethnic conflicts abroad may lead groups to update their beliefs about the efficacy of the political safeguards contained in their existing contracts” (1998: 25-27). When the PKK understood that there was no way of establishing political autonomy in Turkey via negotiations, it decided to resort to the use of force again for its long-term purposes (İlnur Çevik, Author Interview: 30 Mar. 2018; One of the chief advisors of the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu; Author Interview: 16 Apr. 2018). Building roadblocks and digging trenches, storing weapons, and its urban warfare strategy also proved the PKK’s preparation of high-intensity war to claim control and achieve Kurdish autonomy through violent resistance in the end. Then, the PKK used the resolution process to increase its mobilization in line with this purpose and strategy.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

This study first investigated the historical context of the Kurdish issue in Turkey within both the Turkish and Syrian geographical settings. The Kurds have a history of oppression in both Turkey and Syria. In Turkey, Kurdish identity was denied to the extent that it was assumed to be non-existent until the PKK was founded and started its armed struggle, at which point the Turkish state was forced to react to it on the battleground. Similarly, the Kurds were deprived of their basic rights in Syria, although the existence of the PYD in Syria occasionally the Syrian state leverage against Turkey and the Kurds and Syrian government occasionally had a mutually beneficial relationship. Incorporating the Syrian background of Kurds is a crucial component of this thesis, needed to demonstrate the importance of the spillover effect in understanding the dynamics of the issue and provide a more comprehensive explanation.

Since the Kurdish struggles involve almost all aspects of the spillover effect, they function as a fruitful platform to make an in-detail study of high quality. By describing the process in which the spillover effect works, an important contribution is made to understand the problem's evolution and possible solutions. This thesis concentrates merely upon the resolution process, yet it is obvious that further

research with other specific points of focus are necessary to more fully understand the spillover effect of the Kurdish question in the four neighboring countries.

As argued by spillover effect theory, ethnic issues are prone to spread from one country to another, particularly when these countries have an extended border with ethnic minorities on both sides. Assuming the core ideas of the spillover effect, this thesis argues that the Kurdish question in Turkey cannot be assessed separately from the transnational dynamics of the region. Thus, it is of great importance to emphasize once more the fundamental argument of this thesis: the continually changing balance of power between the main actors of the resolution process resulted in the process's failure. Accordingly, internal and external factors contributing to the failure of the process were explained. While the former ones increased the fragility of the process, the latter ones had the final destructive effect. The situation in Syria encouraged the Kurdish agents in Turkey when PYD autonomy was established in Syria in 2012, which set an example for the PKK in Turkey, and led them to believe that they could achieve the same results.

After the PYD's political and military successes in Syria, the PKK established a course of action to establish local authority on short notice. Military and political successes for an ethnic rebellion in one area transmit a huge level of self-confidence to other associated groups. Considering the fact that the PKK has managed to survive in the area for a remarkable period of time, it is possible that the PYD became inclined to see itself as a strong and motivated counterpart in Turkey in terms of engaging in armed struggle instead of negotiating. Therefore, despite not being confident in the fact that the PYD's success was strategic rather than a coincidence, the PKK pursued the same path in Turkey, neglecting to differences between domestic situation in Turkey and Syria. This is precisely where the spillover effect

from the PYD spread to the PKK in Turkey. Yet, structural variations existing between the situations of Turkey and Syria made it difficult for the PKK to mirror the PYD's success in Turkey. The most important of these variations is the nature of relationship between the PKK and the Turkish government led by Erdoğan as compared to the PYD-Syrian government relationship.

To support the resolution problem, the AK Party did something that had never been done before: it acknowledged the fact that a problem existed between Kurds and Turkish state. As a result, the two sides were able to sit at the negotiation table and subsequently started a series of negotiations that would ultimately end in failure.

The resolution process consisted of three rounds. In the first round of the process, the main channel of communication was secret meetings held between the MİT and the PKK in Oslo. During the first round of the resolution process, Turkish state officials, including the Prime-Minister Erdoğan, stated that ending the Kurdish issue was the number one priority on their agenda. In 2009, the electoral success of the DTP was followed by a ceasefire declared by the PKK. Another "road map" was announced by Öcalan in 2009, at the end of which the PKK promised to completely dispose of their arms and emerge as a legal entity. This road map did not get much of a concrete reaction from the AK Party, which promulgated the perception that the Turkish government was not sincere in its willingness to end the conflict. The first round ended when the PKK killed seven soldiers on 7 December 2009.

During the second round, secret meetings between the two sides continued and Kurdish leader Öcalan proposed yet another road map. However, the second round was overshadowed by the AK Party's nationalist rhetoric used for the sake of the Turkish elections, which was not welcomed by Öcalan. The AK Party was successful

in the June 2011 general elections, winning about half of the Kurdish votes. Still, the public perception that the AK Party was not enthusiastic to continue the process continued. In a fashion similar to that of the first round, the second round ended when the PKK took the lives of 13 soldiers in Silvan on 14 July 2011. In response, the TSK intensified their offensive against the PKK.

The third round got under way with the promotion of the idea that the process should be transparent to the public. Accordingly, Öcalan was visited by a number of BDP parliament members in İmralı, which would come to be called “İmralı Meetings.” Erdoğan stated that he would not mind jeopardizing his own political gains in order to resolve the issue. There was a strong prospect for a successful resolution to the process when Öcalan’s Newroz letter was read in Diyarbakır on 21 March 2013. Following these developments, the PKK started to withdraw its forces from Turkish land. However, regional developments would go on to hinder the progress made thus far in the process.

In October 2014, Kobane was besieged by the ISIS and Turkey did not seem enthusiastic to send aid to the area. Erdoğan anticipated that as a result of the situation the PKK would become weaker in its negotiations. The HDP, meanwhile, warned that the process would fail if Kobane fell. After the October 8 protests in Turkey regarding the Kobane incident, the third round practically ended, as did the whole process. The failure in Dolmabahçe Meetings was a clear indicator of this reality.

These three rounds, when evaluated in the light of lessons learned from other international conflicts; show that the resolution process between the Turkish state and the PKK was not really a peace process. It was merely two sides sitting at the

negotiation table because at the time it appeared to be the most pragmatic option.

Resolution processes require both parties involved to be patient and act in good faith.

It is seen that the actors in this resolution process did not meet the criteria.

In conclusion, the PYD's success in Syria inspired the concept of possible 'de facto'

Kurdish political and military strength towards Turkey, which was been an

acceptable option for the Turkish government. Because of the structurally different

situations of Syria and Turkey, pursuing the PYD's strategy did not quite yield the

desired results. Subsequently, this thesis concludes that a unilateral autonomy in

Turkey became more preferable for the PKK as a result of the resolution process.

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APPENDIX

My interviewees are as follows:

- 1) Altan Tan, who is a Kurdish writer and a famous Islamist politician. (10 April 2018).
- 2) A well-known politician, one of the previous foreign ministers of the AK Party governments. (29 March 2018).
- 3) A Wise Man, who has invaluable works on the human rights, democratization, civil military relations, military coups, secularism and the Kurdish question. (3 April 2018).
- 4) Baskın Oran, who is a prominent scholar in the areas of nationalism and minorities, religion-state relations, and Turkish foreign policy. He participated in the commission of “Wise Men” as a member of the Aegean Region committee. (5 April 2018).
- 5) H. İlnur Çevik, chief advisor to the President of Republic of Turkey and a former journalist, who basically wrote about the foreign policy, the Kurdish question and the Turkey-Northern Iraq Relations. Also, he is the officer who signed the 91 armistice with Öcalan in the name of the Re-public of Turkey. (30 March 2018).
- 6) Mehmet Akif Ersoy, who is an experienced journalist on the foreign policy and the Middle East. He worked in the TRT (Turkish Radio Television) for many years and followed closely the developments in the Middle East (and so the Syrian Civil War). (19 April 2018).
- 7) Oktay Vural, who is a famous nationalist politician and former minister of transport and communication. He was also the Vice-Chairman of the MHP and this

party's group deputy chairman in the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) during the resolution process. (3 May 2018)

8) One of the chief advisors of the former Prime Minister Davutoğlu . He took part in the team A of Davutoğlu as a specialist from SETA (Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, that is a think-tank institute associated with the AK Party government). (16 April 2018).

9) One of the former Vice-Chairman of the CHP , who has been closely interested in the Kurdish question for many years as a lawyer. (20 March 2018).

10) Sırrı Süreyya Önder, who is an actor, scenarist, film director, and politician. He read Öcalan's Newroz letter on 21 March 2013 in Diyarbakır as the BDP deputy responsible for the resolution process. He also participated personally in the İmralı Meetings and in the negotiations between the Turkish government and the PKK. (11 May 2018).

11) Vahap Coşkun, who is a prominent scholar in the issues of human rights, democracy, nation-state, and the Kurdish question and its legal dimension. He participated in the commission of "Wise Men" as a member of the Central Anatolian Region committee. (17 April 2018).

Further, I tried to reach other people who were engaged in the resolution process directly or indirectly such as the HDP MP Mithat Sancar, the HDP Deputy Pervin Buldan, and former ministers of AK Party such as Efkan Ala, Beşir Atalay, Yalçın Akdoğan. Yet, they were not able to take part in the interviews because either they did not want to talk about the issue or they had an intense agenda.