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Challenges and prospects

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Introduction

This chapter explores Turkey's ongoing and problematic attempts to develop a process that will bring an end to its ongoing conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*, PKK). It will assess the likelihood that the ongoing democratisation and institutional reform process, which Turkey has undertaken during the past decade, will result in a permanent settlement that will satisfy the demands of the Kurds in Turkey. Questions of pluralism and the constitutional recognition of the Kurdish identity are central to the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Turkey's inability, since the end of one-party rule in 1950, to institute a pluralistic democratic framework, and its failure to constructively engage with the demands of its sizeable Kurdish population, has created an environment characterised by conflict and violence during the past three decades. The legal and political persecution of, and the limitations on, the Kurdish identity has been tested in a persistent manner since the 1960s. Initially, Kurdish dissent in Turkey during the 1960s and 1970s took the form of non-violent protests, and their group-specific demands were articulated as part of demands for equality. However, from the late 1970s onwards, the idea of using violence in their struggle against the state gradually gained ground amongst Kurdish activists and political organisations. The Turkish government's imposition of extensive punitive measures on the articulation of Kurdish political and cultural demands, and its rejection of the right of non-Turkish ethnic groups to claim universal national rights, reinforced the view that the forceful overthrow of the Turkish state rule was indispensable to Kurdish liberation. Such a framing of the Kurdish question in Turkey is best epitomised by the PKK's national liberation discourse and its insurgency throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The conflict and political violence has had deep detrimental effects economically, socially, and politically, and it has been a constant source of tension and political polarisation in Turkey. The response of Turkey's mainstream political parties has centred exclusively on ending the violence through military means, focused mainly on the suppression of the PKK and

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its insurgency. The militarist and security discourse has been dominant in Turkey to such an extent that there has been little room for a public discussion to find any alternative solutions to this complex ethno-political problem. Turkey's inflexible legal order, coupled with an unsympathetic political environment and the unnerving stance of the politically powerful army, has made the expression of an alternative view on the Kurds or the Kurdish question a cause for prosecution (see Bayır, Erdem, and Aksoy in this volume). Within the state's hegemonic discourse, the Kurdish question has been predominantly described as an 'existential threat' to Turkey's security as a state (Taspinar 2006: iv; Bozarslan 2008: 333). Furthermore, the prevalence and continuity of violence during the past three decades, together with the everyday experience of the ongoing conflict and the consequent loss of life, has created fertile ground for the popularisation of nationalist antagonisms, which has led to an alarming rise in anti-Kurdish sentiment in Turkey. This is reflected in the resurgence, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, of support for a more exclusive and militant form of Turkish nationalism, as exemplified by the Nationalist Action Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*, MHP) and the Great Unity Party (*Büyük Birlik Partisi*, BBP), and to a certain extent has been leading to the communalisation of violence. Lynching campaigns against Kurdish individuals, and organised rallies that have an exclusively anti-Kurdish focus in many of the Western cities in Turkey, have become regular events throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Furthermore, the alarming increase in recent years of Kurdish conscripts dying due to unexplained 'accidents' or 'suspicious suicides' during their compulsory national service has enhanced fears that the conflict may be extending into new settings beyond clashes between the PKK guerrillas and the state security forces (Cumhuriyet 2012). Therefore, in the past two decades, the Kurdish question has firmly established itself as a new cleavage in Turkish politics specifically, and in Turkish society generally.

It is also significant to note here that the conflict took a new direction after the capture and imprisonment of the PKK's leader, Abdullah Öcalan, in February 1999. Throughout the 2000s, the Kurdish question entered and remained at a new stage characterised by conflict management, which significantly altered its nature. In comparison to the 1980s and 1990s, the 2000s have witnessed significantly less armed violence, and while we are far from achieving a consensus on a political settlement to end the conflict, this period was a time of reflection and searching. During the past decade, we have witnessed minor shifts and changes in Turkey's Kurdish policy that can be seen as partial and half-hearted responses to Kurdish demands. However, such 'attempts' have been marred by various difficulties and have not necessarily led to a more comprehensive process of conflict resolution. Moreover, a broad-based attempt to construct a much needed national consensus to generate the necessary wide-ranging policy proposals has not become part of the process.

In fact, the absence of an effective conflict resolution process and of a national consensus has been the main barrier to ending the conflict.

The literature on ethnic conflict resolution cites the willingness on the parts of the relevant parties to negotiate and accept mediation as an important factor in successfully resolving ethno-nationalist conflicts (Wolff 2006; Heiberg, O'Leary and Tirman 2007: 416–18). Recently, it has been accepted that Turkish state representatives have held repeated and direct meetings with PKK representatives mediated by Norway. However, talks have not resulted in a productive conclusion, and they broke down following the general election in June 2011. The regular meetings that Abdullah Öcalan has been having with his lawyers and family members were prevented by the state, from 27 July 2011. In line with the state's long established security discourse, the newly elected Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) government has set out to devise a more comprehensive and sophisticated policy to destroy the PKK's presence in the region, which led to a period of escalation in the conflict, with losses on both sides.

The change in the government's attitude of following the entrenched security paradigm, rather than to take a risk by exploring possible political solutions, was perhaps a response to the current political environment in Turkey being highly polarised. Despite the significant decrease in PKK violence in the region in the past decade, the Turkish nationalist framing of the Kurdish question has maintained its strong appeal among the mainstream Turkish society, and support for Turkish nationalist political parties has been consistently high. Such a state of affairs also explains the slow pace of the reforms that Turkey has been undertaking in recent years to improve the political rights of the Kurds. So far, the pace of reform has mainly been driven by Turkey's aspirations to meet the membership criteria of the European Union (EU). While the ongoing difficulties and lack of consensus have been the key limitations impeding the process of political reconciliation and conflict resolution, it is also important to elucidate the possibilities that the reduction in violence created. Initially, the reduction in violence moved the Kurdish question off the public agenda, and this has been falsely interpreted in mainstream Turkish society as the end of the conflict. With the return of pro-Kurdish representation to the Parliament in 2007, the Kurdish question and the debate on finding proposals to solve the conflict started to occupy public discussion once more. However, the ensuing public debate have revealed high levels of polarisation in Turkey, as well as widespread disagreement among the dominant political forces concerning the nature of the conflict and how to respond to it. The ongoing debate has brought to the fore the ideological rigidity of Turkish nationalism and its hesitancy to accept the legitimacy of Kurdish political demands. The recognition of the Kurdish identity and its associated rights requires major changes in Turkey's identity as a state, and these can only come about if there is a willingness and consensus to re-negotiate the dominant conception of citizenship and universal rights.

The prevention of Öcalan from seeing his lawyers, and the continuation of oppressive practices targeting Kurdish political activists, particularly those

targeting members of the Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi*, BDP) as part of the ongoing Union of Kurdistan Communities (*Koma Civakên Kurdistan*, KCK) arrests, has led to an equally robust response from the PKK. This became particularly visible in the increased attacks by the PKK in the summer of 2012. Additionally, a mass hunger strike was begun by some PKK members in Turkish prisons on 12 September 2012, with the restoration of Öcalan's contact with his lawyers and the freedom to use Kurdish in public being the main demands. The hunger strikes came to a halt after Öcalan appealed for an end to it on 17 November 2012, which significantly reduced the growing tension in Turkey. This was followed by an announcement on 3 January 2013 that pro-Kurdish MPs Ayla Akat Ata and Ahmet Türk visited Öcalan, and that there had been a new attempt to revive the dialogue to resolve the conflict (Radikal 2013).

In highlighting the key factors that have so far prevented a conflict resolution process from taking root, and what steps can be taken to overcome the impasse, this chapter will assess the process of change and whether the ongoing democratisation process can be deepened to lead to more widespread reforms and a political resolution of the Kurdish question.[1] It will assess ongoing reforms in the current institutional and constitutional framework, and whether a new democratic framework can be successfully instituted to transcend the growing polarisation in society. It will highlight the position of the major political parties in Turkey to elucidate the difficulties discussed above. The significance of directing our focus at the discourses and political practices of the dominant political parties is that the success of political reconciliation and conflict resolution is strongly connected to building a national consensus. Analysis of the proposals put forward for political reconciliation, and setting out the difficulties that have so far prevented its success, enables us to highlight the full complexity and multifaceted dimensions of the conflict resolution process in Turkey. This chapter also emphasizes the ideological aspects that have been central to sustaining the existing nationalist antagonisms and used as a pretext to dismiss Kurdish demands for recognition of their identity.

In Part One, I offer a brief overview of Kurdish politics in Turkey to look at the nature of the conflict and its trajectory during the past fifty years. In Part Two, I examine the conflict resolution and political reconciliation proposals put forward by the Kurdish national movement in Turkey. I will examine the political proposals developed by the PKK and the pro-Kurdish democratic movement as the main Kurdish political actors in Turkey. While the proposals put forward by the Kurdish national movement have been broad and clear, it has not been able to generate the necessary shift in the public debate in Turkey on the Kurdish question. My evaluation of Turkey's domestic context, in Part Three, will look at the positions of the mainstream Turkish political parties and identify the key ideological difficulties that have so far functioned as barriers to conflict resolution. In the final section, I explore the possibility of transcending the impasse and examine the extent to which the domestic,

regional, and international actors could aid the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Overall, such a focus allows me to offer an overview of the political debate in Turkey around the Kurdish question in order to generate a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding the accommodation of Kurdish demands and highlight the continual influence of the dominant historically and ideologically constituted practices in Turkey.

The Kurds and republican Turkey

In its various guises, Kurdish nationalism and political activism have been a significant aspect of Turkish politics since the proclamation of the Republic in 1923.[2] In the early years of the Republic during the 1920s and 1930s, a considerable number of Kurds took part in a series of uprisings, which were led by a coalition of Kurdish nationalist intellectuals and religious leaders (Bozarslan 2008: 340–41). However, Kurdish nationalist dissent against the state authorities was not continuous over the period, and each rebellion needs to be seen as a separate occurrence and instance of Kurdish nationalist mobilisation. Also, as Bozarslan argues, while these rebellions managed to mobilise a significant section of the Kurdish society, they did not win over the entire rural population, and the urban population did not participate in the revolts (2008: 341). The 1940s and 1950s are often described as the 'quiet years' or 'silence' in organised Kurdish dissent in Turkey (Kendal 1993: 62; Bozarslan 2008: 343). However, notwithstanding the lack of organised Kurdish dissent, given that Kurds were the single largest ethnic minority in Turkey, they were the main targets of the state's extensive assimilation policies, and tensions emanating from possible Kurdish activism remained high.

   Despite the ban on words such as 'Kurd' or 'Kurdistan', and the official policy that Kurds were *essentially* of Turkish origin, widespread discussion related to the Kurdish question was indeed taking place among state officials. In particular, as Aslan (2011) highlights, this was guided by their distrust and fear of the Kurds:

> Kurdish speakers were perceived as a major threat, especially after the first revolts in Kurdish areas in the early 1920s. What the state elite feared most was the rise of a Kurdish nationalism allied with an imperialist Western power with the aim of seceding from Turkey. Almost every report sent to Ankara from the Kurdish areas addressed this fear and contained comments about Kurdish speakers' questionable loyalty to the republic.

> (2011: 81)

Additionally, 'secret' reports compiled by leading Kemalist ideologues such as İsmet İnönü and Celal Bayar during the mid-1930s also reveals the extent of the fear that Kurds' ethno-cultural difference generated among the Kemalist elite (Öztürk 2008; Bayar 2006).

It is important to highlight that, as the reports mentioned above clearly indicate, the Kurds' alterity and the imagined threat that they constituted to Turkish nation building was 'secretly' acknowledged by the leading statesmen of the time, and such reports contained extensive measures that were thought to be necessary to eradicate the putative threat from Kurdish nationalism. Officially, however, the denial of the existence of a separate Kurdish ethnicity or nation in Turkey was the dominant state policy throughout the twentieth century. In practice, this meant that it was impossible to publicly claim that the Kurds were a separate ethnic or national group. Additionally, the state pursued a policy of integration through assimilation into the Turkish nation (Saraçoğlu 2011: 56; Houston 2001: 95–111). The rejection of the group-specific rights of Kurds and other ethnic minorities within Turkey was not in accord with the prevailing discourse at the time of the 'independence war', nor in line with the expectations of the Kurds. Soon after the new Turkish nationalist elite's consolidation of power, a comprehensive socio-political modernisation programme was launched, which for the Kurds meant a process of 'compulsory assimilation' (Yeğen 2007a: 126–27).

The policy adopted by the Kemalist elite and the state in Turkey is neatly summarised by Saraçoğlu (2011: 59):

> The traditional assimilationist perspective perceived the Kurds as an assimilable community or as prospective 'Turks' and did not recognise or exclude them systematically *on a racial or ethnic basis*. The conventional policy of the Turkish state and official Turkish nationalism was rather based on denial of the presence of the Kurdish identity in Turkey.

With a wide-ranging 'turkification' process underway, Turkishness as both a national and an ethnic identity was placed firmly at the centre of citizenship, the category of universal national rights was assigned only to the Turkish nation, and the Kurds' subsequent articulation of their group-specific demands were considered illegitimate and a threat to the unity of the Turkish nation and to Turkey's territorial integrity. However, the denial of the Kurds' existence in Turkey, and the widespread assimilation policies, did not necessarily erase the Kurds' distinct existence, nor was it able to stop the public manifestation of Kurdish political and cultural demands, especially from the 1960s onwards.

The state maintained its rigid attitude throughout the 1960s and more importantly, it failed to engage constructively with the Kurds' demands for equality and the socio-economic development of their regions, which demands were labelled 'regionalist' or 'separatist'. The accusation of regionalism and Kurdish nationalism levelled at Yusuf Azizoğlu – the leader of New Turkey Party (*Yeni Türkiye Partisi*, YTP) and the Minister of Health in 1962 – for prioritising investment in majority Kurdish regions, and his

eventual resignation as a result of it, is a good example of the state's inflex-
ible attitude towards the inclusion of Kurdish demands (Kendal 1993: 66–
67). As reflected in the statement by Cemal Gürsel, the leader of the military
government that ruled Turkey between May 1960 and October 1961, an
unreasonable level of mistrust towards the Kurds seems to have been pre-
valent among the ruling Kemalist elite long after the suppression of the
Kurdish rebellions in the Republic's early years: 'If the mountain Turks do
not keep quiet, the army will not hesitate to bomb their towns and
villages into the ground. There will be such a bloodbath that they and their
country will be washed away' (Gürsel quoted in Kendal 1993: 65). Further-
more, as a reaction to the Kurdish revolt in Iraq, the Turkish state estab-
lished special army units to patrol the Kurdish countryside in 1966, despite
the fact that there were no apparent signs of a Kurdish revolt possibly
occurring in Turkey, and the heavy-handed approach employed by the units
against the rural Kurdish population confirmed to many the high level of
discrimination the Kurds suffered, which made their integration more diffi-
cult (Vanly 1971: 50). Hence, from the 1960s onwards, the Kurds and the
Kurdish question – or the 'Eastern question', as it was called then – came to
occupy a more central place in the public debate in Turkey, leading to an
implicit acknowledgement of their difference and alterity.

It is paradoxical that the implicit acknowledgement of Kurdish difference,
and the *othering* and *ethnicisation* that the Kurds experienced, were by-
products of Turkish nationalist publications.[3] The Kurds' responses to this
process led to the politicisation of the Kurdish identity and the public con-
testation of the denial of that identity in Republican Turkey. In addition to
the discriminatory attitude of the Kemalist elites, the late 1960s witnessed the
Kurds being increasingly portrayed as the 'villains' of Turkey. Numerous
anti-Kurdish articles that appeared in Turkish nationalist magazines, such as
Ötüken, *Yeni İstanbul*, and *Milli Yol*, reflected highly discriminatory views.
For example, an article published in April 1967 in the ultra-nationalist pub-
lication *Ötüken* contained the following sentence: 'Kurds do not have the
faces of human beings' (quoted in McDowall 2000: 407). Another article
published in the same journal in June 1967 directly threatened the Kurds
with physical extermination: 'The Turkish race is very patient, but when it is
really angered it is like a roaring lion and nothing can stop it. Let them ask
the Armenians who we are, and let them draw the appropriate conclusions'
(quoted in Kendal 1993: 77). Hence, while an active debate was taking place
on the Kurd's position in Turkey that tested the existing political boundaries,
the 1960s was also a period in which the limits on the public expression of
Kurdish identity were reinforced.

Another significant development in the 1960s was the increase in Kurdish
political activism. Kurds became active in the Democratic Party (*Demokrat
Parti*, DP) and also in left wing university circles and more formally the
Workers' Party of Turkey (*Türkiye İşçi Partisi*, TİP). Inspired by the Kurdi-
stan Democrat Party (*Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi*, KDP) in Iraqi Kurdistan,

a sister organisation was clandestinely established in Turkey, the Kurdistan Democrat Party of Turkey (*Türkiye Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi*, TKDP) in 1965. Both the TKDP and TİP were important outlets for Kurdish political activism during the second half of the 1960s, and consequently a significant increase was witnessed in Kurdish mobilisation in urban centres.[4] However, as mentioned above, it is important to note here that Turkey was not able to conjure-up a constructive dialogue during the 1960s, and this inability led to the radicalisation of the Kurdish movement in the 1970s and to the emergence of various Kurdish political actors in Turkey, one of which was the PKK. Also, Kurdish activists started to organise separately from Turkey's socialist movement and progressed along an independent trajectory in the 1970s, and the need for political violence and guerrilla insurgency started to be discussed more seriously. The period of intense oppression during the military regime of the early 1980s seems to have strengthened the view that a campaign of armed struggle was needed, and the incarceration or exile of many Kurdish political activists, and the elimination of many of the Kurdish political groups, left the PKK in the leading position to hegemonise Kurdish politics in Turkey.

At the height of its power in the early 1990s, the PKK had a guerrilla army of 15,000, with supporters and sympathizers numbering several million from all parts of Kurdistan and among the Kurdish Diaspora communities in Europe. In addition to gaining widespread Kurdish support, the PKK-led Kurdish rebellion was the most radical and has lasted the longest in the history of the Kurds in Turkey. The PKK managed to evolve into a mass movement challenging the Turkish state's notion of the homogeneity of the nation and its conception of the Kurdish identity within it.

In 1993, the PKK declared its first unilateral ceasefire in an attempt to initiate a process that would eventually lead to a negotiated solution to the conflict. It moderated its aims and suggested that a form of extensive autonomy would be acceptable. In 1995 and in 1998, the PKK again declared unilateral ceasefires to initiate dialogue and discussion. The Turkish state failed to respond. In September 1998, large numbers of Turkish armed forces were moved to the Syrian border, and Turkey threatened to invade if Syria continued to shelter the PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan. On 9th October 1998, Öcalan left Syria for Europe. After his failure to secure sanctuary in any European country, he was kidnapped in February 1999 in Nairobi, Kenya by Turkish security forces. Subsequently, he was tried and sentenced to capital punishment, which sentence, as a result of diplomatic pressure and the fear that the conflict might descend into civil war, was reduced to life imprisonment.

The Kurdish national movement in 21st-century Turkey

Since the emergence of the contemporary Kurdish national movement during the 1960s, numerous political groups and parties have been active.

While violence and insurgency have been the predominant forms of engage-ment during the past three decades, Kurdish political practices have been quite diverse, and peaceful practices through legal channels have not been totally abandoned in favour of insurgency. In its current form, the Kurdish national movement can be described as a network of various organisations that carry out activities predominantly in Turkey, but also in various European countries that house large Kurdish Diaspora communities. The PKK and the pro-Kurdish democratic movement can be singled out as the leading Kurdish political actors. The pro-Kurdish democratic movement has been channelling Kurdish dissent exclusively through political means, and their target group has predominantly been the Kurds in Turkey.[5] In contrast, the PKK continues to use violence to achieve its aims, maintains some aspects of its pan-Kurdist agenda (although to a much lesser extent in comparison with the 1980s and 1990s), and in addition to mobilising Kurds in Turkey, it has been able to attract the support of the Kurds in Syria and Iran. While its initial political programme sought to unite the Kurds in the Middle East within a single state, currently it advocates the realisation of Kurdish political and cultural rights within existing state boundaries. Hence, the political strategy of the Kurdish national movement in Turkey can be briefly summarised as a negotiated settlement to end the conflict, the recog-nition of the Kurds as a distinct national group, and the accommodation of their rights and demands within a democratic Turkey.

Although, as stated above, the period of the PKK's active insurgency was interrupted by three unilateral ceasefires in the 1990s, and by an extensive period following the declaration of a permanent ceasefire in 1999, the use of violence continues to be part of its political practice. In 1999, the PKK started to pull its guerrilla forces inside the borders of Iraq and ceased any military activity within the borders of Turkey. In this period, its guerrilla forces were re-organised into a defence force and took the name of the People's Defence Forces (*Hêzên Parastina Gel*, HPG). In June 2004, the permanent ceasefire was declared to be over, and the HPG has since been carrying out sporadic attacks against Turkish military targets. Also, the early 2000s was a period in which the PKK went through a major ideological and organisational transformation that significantly modified the demands it articulates for the Kurds in Turkey. The initial shock the movement experi-enced after the capture of its leader in 1999 was followed by a period in which it intensified its attempts to construct a more comprehensive demo-cratic discourse. Citing the need for a new political organisation to take the Kurds' democratic struggle into the next phase, the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress (*Kongreya Azadî û Demokrasiya Kurdistanê*, KADEK) was established in 2002, but it changed its name in 2003 to the People's Congress (*Kongra-Gel*). This was followed by the PKK's re-establishment in 2005. The early 2000s witnessed the establishment of various other parties, such as the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (*Partiya Çareseriya Demokratik a Kurdistan*, PÇDK) in 2002 and the Kurdistan Party of Free

Life (*Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistan*, PJAK) in 2004, to represent the Kurds in Iraq and Iran (Gunes 2012: 141).

The PKK's appropriation of democratic discourse was described as a strategic shift. The development of a 'democratic solution' to the Kurdish question through political means, and the 'democratic transformation' of the current state system in the Middle East into federal and con-federal entities, were stated to be its key objectives (PKK 2005: 79; Şafak 2002: 179; Kongra-Gel 2004). The specific steps the PKK took, such as its permanent ceasefire, had the aim of lessening nationalist antagonisms and creating a space for a possible negotiated solution. Another significant development in the 2000s has been the PKK's articulation of a variety of other demands, such as gender equality and environmental protection (PKK 2000: 180). Furthermore, the KCK was also formally established in 2005, and it was designed to be an alternative 'hybrid' institutional framework to provide political representation to the Kurds and allow them to organise as a nation within the existing state boundaries. More formally, the phrase 'democratic autonomy' has been used since August 2010 to describe the specific proposals that the PKK aims to develop as the solution to the Kurdish question (PKK, 2010) (see also Akkaya and Jongerden in this volume).

While there are manifold difficulties involved in the implementation of 'democratic autonomy' in a region characterised by authoritarian state systems, a closer examination of the proposals reveals that the framework is a variant of non-territorial autonomy similar to the 'national cultural autonomy' model developed by Karl Renner at the end of the 19th and discussed in detail in Nimni (2005). From the outset, such a framework seemed suitable, as it would allow the Kurds to develop their identity, culture, and national institutions. Given that many Kurds reside in the cities in Western Turkish, or in areas adjacent to the majority Kurdish regions where they constitute around 30-40 per cent of the population, a solution involving a non-territorial autonomy model is highly suitable. Besides these specific proposals, the right to education in the Kurdish language and the release of political prisoners, including Öcalan, are the key demands raised by the PKK.

In terms of the characterisation of the Kurdish question and steps needed to resolve it, the pro-Kurdish democratic movement has similar views to the PKK. However, as it emerged in a completely different context in Turkey, there are significant differences, too. One of the key demands raised by the pro-Kurdish legal parties has been the discourse of political reconciliation. Since its formation in 1990, the pro-Kurdish democratic movement has been represented by a number of political parties. Due to the nature of the political demands they have been raising – such as the constitutional recognition of the Kurdish identity – and the institutional legal limitations in Turkey, they have been considered political 'outsiders'. Consequently, they have been subjected to numerous suppressive practices, broadly speaking, on the grounds that they promote Kurdish separatism, and the following parties have been banned: the People's Labour Party

(*Halkın Emek Partisi*, HEP) in 1993, the Democracy Party (*Demokrasi Partisi*, DEP) in 1994, the People's Democracy Party (*Halkın Demokrasi Partisi*, HADEP) in 2003, and the Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi*, DTP) in 2009.

The pro-Kurdish political parties have been articulating Kurdish identity and national demands within the discourse of democracy and human rights, and, as a way to end the conflict, they have put forward proposals to reform the existing political framework so to recognise the Kurdish identity and national difference in Turkey. They have consistently emphasized the need to build an open, participatory, and plural democratic society that respects human and cultural rights and accommodates Kurdish rights and demands. Initially, the pro-Kurdish parties campaigned more specifically on political reconciliation and a political solution to the conflict. Highlighting the exclusionary, authoritarian, homogenising, and anti-democratic character of the Republican order in Turkey, the pro-Kurdish democratic discourse proposes peaceful political change and seeks to weaken the antagonisms created by this conflict. The pro-Kurdish political parties have remained committed to forming links with other groups in Turkey who also advocate democratisation, such as trade unions, socialist groups, and other minorities.

Despite the fact that numerous pro-Kurdish political parties were closed down, their activities suppressed, and many of their members imprisoned, the pro-Kurdish democratic discourse has maintained a high degree of stability and a balanced approach to articulating particular Kurdish demands with more universal democratic demands. A central demand of the pro-Kurdish democratic movement has been the recognition of the cultural and linguistic rights of Kurds and other minorities, which is expressed in the following way in the programme of the current pro-Kurdish BDP:

> The right of every citizen, within the unity of the country, to express themselves freely, to develop their culture, to speak and develop their mother tongue, to be educated in it and use it in visual, auditory and written forms of media, are fundamental human rights and consequently they will be protected under the Constitution.

> (BDP 2008)

In addition to the constitutional recognition of Kurdish language rights, the BDP has been demanding Kurdish self-rule. Regional autonomy is seen as a framework and proposal that can be effective in solving the Kurdish question in Turkey, and the BDP has endorsed the 'democratic autonomy' proposals declared by the Democratic Society Congress (*Demokratik Toplum Kongresi*, DTK) on 14 July 2011 (Hürriyet 2011a).

The pro-Kurdish political parties have been steadily building an institutional and support base over the past two decades, and their efforts have resulted in electoral success in the second half of the 2000s. In the 22 July 2007 general election, the DTP managed to find representation in the

Turkish Parliament by choosing to support independent candidates, twenty-one of whom were elected. Subsequently, they joined the DTP to form a political bloc in the Turkish Parliament. Similarly, in the 2011 elections, the BDP built on the DTP's success and increased its parliamentary seats to 35, including three seats in Istanbul and one each in Mersin and Adana (Hürriyet 2011b).[6] In the majority Kurdish regions, the pro-Kurdish parties often gain more than 50 per cent of the votes, and in Hakkari province it gained nearly 80 per cent of the votes in the 2011 parliamentary elections (Hürriyet 2011b). The pro-Kurdish parties have also been successful in municipal elections throughout the past decades, with the BDP currently controlling eight provinces, including the city of Diyarbakır, which is considered to be the regional centre (Hürriyet 2009).

The PKK's ideological re-orientation has brought about a lively debate on the resolution of the Kurdish question and the possible steps that can be taken to accommodate the Kurds' demands. The proposals developed by the Kurdish national movement have so far failed to find an audience in Turkey, and the lack of concrete steps to address Kurdish demands has resulted in the continuation of violence. In line with the state's dominant approach, the current government has resorted to a policy of militarily eliminating the PKK, and part of its wide-ranging 'anti-terror' policy involves suppressing and marginalising the pro-Kurdish democratic movement in Turkey. As part of the 'KCK operations', an estimated 6200 pro-Kurdish political activists have been detained and are awaiting trial.[7] This has resulted in a situation whereby the already narrow and limited political space that the pro-Kurdish political parties have been operating within has been further restricted (Evrensel 2012).

From 'terrorism' to the 'Kurdish question': Turkey's search for beginnings

Throughout the past 30 years, the dominant approach to the Kurdish question has been the attempt to suppress the insurgency and eliminate the PKK's presence in the region. To this end, the state took numerous counter-insurgency measures, carried out large scale military operations in the majority Kurdish regions, and made repeated land and air incursions into neighbouring Iraq where the majority of the PKK's forces have been based since the late 1980s. In the face of such an offensive, the PKK has proved to be resilient and managed to survive and continue its existence despite significant military losses.[8] Also, despite the prevalence of the military approach, the centrality that the Kurdish question has acquired in Turkish politics during the 1980s and 1990s has meant that various mainstream Turkish politicians have also expressed the need to find a political solution to the conflict. In 1991, the veteran politician Süleyman Demirel announced, 'we recognise the Kurdish reality', and, in 1995, the Motherland Party's Mesut Yılmaz linked Turkey's EU prospects to solving the Kurdish question

(Bahcheli and Noel 2011: 101–2). Even if international pressure emanating from Europe and short-term electoral considerations were the main motives behind these statements, the idea of a negotiated settlement was kept alive. However, in comparison to the pro-Kurdish movement, the mainstream political parties in Turkey have not formulated any clear conflict resolution proposals, and they have remained generally uncommitted to dialogue with the Kurdish national movement.

Turgut Özal of the Motherland Party – and Turkey's Prime Minister between 1983 and 1989 and President between 1989 and 1993 – is often seen as the statesmen who was the most serious about ending the insurgency through political negotiation (Gunter 2011; Bahcheli and Noel 2011: 101). He is thought to have been instrumental in easing restrictions on the use of the Kurdish language in Turkey and in getting the PKK to declare its first unilateral ceasefire in March 1993. His untimely death in 1993 followed a period of escalating violence during the mid-1990s. The ascendance in Turkish politics during the 1990s of the Islamist Welfare Party (*Refah Partisi*) also brought about discussion of an Islamic solution to the Kurdish question. However, much like Turkey's mainstream parties, the Welfare Party also failed to develop a consistent policy towards the Kurdish question (Duran 1998: 112). The capture of Öcalan in 1999, and the PKK's subsequent policies, has changed the nature of the conflict, with a sense of normalcy returning to the region in the 2000s. This eased pressure on Turkish politicians to address the Kurdish question, and it is within such a context that the first AKP government was elected in 2002.

The AKP's nucleus is generally traced to the Islamist Welfare Party, but it additionally represents the political space previously occupied by conservative and centrist forces in Turkey. Among its ranks it also includes numerous Kurdish politicians. Hence, while the AKP is often seen as the successor to the Islamist Welfare Party, it is also possible to describe it as the contemporary representative of Turkey's right-wing populist political tradition, which was previously represented by the Democrat Party of Adnan Menderes during the 1950s and Motherland Party of Turgut Özal throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. It is important to note here that right-wing populist parties have been more willing to engage with the Kurds, and they have drawn strong support from Kurdish majority regions in comparison to other mainstream parties.[9] Since 2002, the AKP has been carrying out numerous democratisation reforms, including limited recognition of the Kurdish identity. The establishment of the Kurdish-language TV station, *TRT* 6, as part of the state broadcasting network in January 2009, is often offered as proof of the AKP's tolerance of ethno-cultural diversity in Turkey. However, doubts remain over the extent of the AKP's tolerance because of its consistent refusal to commit to the full recognition of the Kurds' linguistic rights, such as the provision of education in the Kurdish language. Additionally, by emphasising communalities such as Islamic heritage, the aim of the AKP government's political reforms has also been to

lessen the appeal of Kurdish nationalism and to depoliticise the Kurdish identity.

With the declaration of the 'Kurdish initiative' in August 2009, the search for a political solution started to take a more central position in the public debate in Turkey. However, the initial hype generated by the declaration soon gave way to disillusionment as the main opposition parties in Turkey – namely, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*, CHP) and the MHP – strongly opposed the government's proposals and the possibility of public recognition of the Kurdish identity, on the grounds that such a recognition will lead to separatism and undermine the existing notions of nation and citizenship enshrined in the Constitution. Hence, the lack of consensus on the level of public recognition of the Kurdish identity has manifested itself as a major barrier. Subsequently, when the specifics of the government's proposals were made public, the initiative was described as the 'Democratic Initiative Process: The National Oneness and Brotherhood Project' (*Demokratik Açılım Süreci: Milli Birlik ve Kardeşlik Projesi*). It is very difficult to get a clear sense of the level of public recognition that the Kurdish identity is expected to enjoy in Turkey, as the document is rather vague. That vagueness, coupled with a refusal to engage with the Kurdish national movement, is highly reflective of the government's attitude towards the Kurds and the Kurdish movement. While the AKP government has indicated a willingness to go beyond the 'hegemonic' security discourse in its framing of the Kurdish question, its approach also embeds the security discourse, with the elimination of the PKK being a stated objective of the proposal. Also, while it has been keen to express the existence of many ethnic groups in Turkey, this is often expressed as part of the desire to keep the unitary nation-state model. Hence, serious doubts remain concerning whether the AKP's understanding of cultural and political pluralism is sufficiently wide to allow the recognition of the cultural and political rights that the Kurdish national movement has been demanding.

Additionally, during the 2011 election campaign, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan repeatedly stated that the policy of denying the Kurdish identity had been repealed during the AKP's rule. However, such a statement is misleading because the AKP's policy throughout the 2000s has been one of toleration without formal recognition. In the period following the 2011 election, the state's oppressive measures have intensified, and the government has taken measures to implement a comprehensive anti-terror policy, leading to an escalation in military attacks against the PKK and the intensification of efforts to suppress the pro-Kurdish BDP. This change in policy can be seen as reflective of the AKP's authoritarian streak and its insistence to integrate Kurds through depoliticising the Kurdish identity. As well as being influenced by the right-wing populist tradition in Turkish politics, the AKP's policies are also a product of 'statist Islam', as described by Houston (2001), and it is not clear whether its toleration of difference incorporates an acceptance of pluralism: 'In short, statist Islamist discourse, as exemplified in

the enterprise headed by Fethullah Gülen, conceives the Kurdish problem as residing in the Kurdishness of the Kurds. Transform this identification, and there will be no Kurdish question left to ponder' (Houston 2001: 155).

The vagueness of the AKP's proposals, and the refusal to engage with the Kurdish national movement, is also a characteristic shared by the main-stream opposition parties in Turkey. The ideological positioning of the CHP in the Baykal era during the 1990s and 2000s has been characterised by 'authoritarian Kemalism', and it adopted an increasingly exclusionary nationalist line, with the 'security and longevity of the Kemalist state' becoming the party's main aim (Ciddi 2009: 97–99). Consistent with such a view, and without mentioning the rights claims of the Kurds, the CHP's manifesto for the 2007 general elections conceptualised the Kurdish question simply within the security discourse, and listed ending 'terror' and eliminat-ing the PKK's presence in Northern Iraq as Turkey's main priority (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi 2007: 7–13). However, the successive failures of the CHP as an electoral alternative to the AKP has led to a change in the leadership and the election in 2010 of the moderate Kemal Kılıcdaroğlu as the CHP's new leader. Additionally, Kurdish human rights activists Sezgin Tanrıkulu and Hüseyin Aygün have also been elected to the Parliament, with the former being appointed as the deputy chairman of the CHP and elected to the Party's executive board. The change in personnel has resulted in a process of change and a marked decrease in the party's nationalist rhetoric. In stark contrast to the party's position in the 1990s and 2000s, the CHP's 2011 manifesto specifies numerous democratisation proposals, such as poli-tical pluralism, respect for diversity, and the promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi 2011: 4–19). It also reflects the demands for transitional justice and proposes to investigate the 'extra-judicial murders' that took place during the 1990s in Kurdish majority regions. While concepts such as 'equality' and 'societal peace' find frequent mention in the party's discourse, it is not possible to determine the extent of the CHP's willingness to respond to the widespread popular demands for equality made by various groups, including the Kurds. This is because it has traditionally maintained a stagnant attitude to the popular demands of the masses, and as indicated by the heated debate that followed the report on the Kurdish question prepared by Tanrıkulu, wresting power away from the party's 'Kemalist' old guard may not be a straight-forward operation (Radikal 2011). More recently, the CHP has become more active in its search for a national consensus to generate policy proposals for resolving the Kurdish question. On 7th June 2012, its leader Kılıcdaroğlu met with Prime Minister Erdoğan to discuss the CHP's proposed measures for generating a consensus on the Kurdish question, which included establishing a 'Societal Agreement' committee within the Parliament and a 'committee of wise people' comprising of public intellectuals and journalists (Radikal 2012b).

The hard-line attitude that the government's new position reflects is shared by the MHP, which has been the other main opposition party in the 2000s.

The MHP has been the most potent voice of the exclusionary and more militant form of Turkish nationalism since the 1970s, and has been a key opponent of recognizing Kurdish identity and rights in Turkey. Its ideology can best be described as conservative and nationalist, but throughout the post-1980 period it has played a key role in popular anti-Kurdish Turkish nationalist mobilisations. It strongly objects to the modification of the state's unitary structure and the state's fundamental principles, as codified in the first three articles of the Constitution: 'The Nationalist Action Party accepts the republic's foundational characteristics, the Turkish national identity, the democratic regime and the basic human rights as being indispensable values, and rejects their discussion when searching for a compromise' (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi 2011: 14–15). The recognition of different ethnic identities in Turkey is interpreted as a threat to the unitary nature of the state and to the 'single nation–single state' principle (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi 2011: 15). Hence, recognising the collective rights of ethnic groups, such as the provision of education in languages other than Turkish, is firmly rejected. It is highly unlikely that the MHP's position in relation to the Kurdish question will shift in the near future, given that their election strategy throughout the 1990s and 2000s has been exclusively based on the elimination of the PKK and Kurdish nationalism, and that they are the main beneficiaries of the rise in nationalist antagonisms as a result of the conflict.

A new policy framework? Assessing the prospects for change

The political power of Turkish nationalists is the source of the difficulties involved in generating a consensus among the political parties in Turkey concerning the definition of the Kurdish question and the appropriate measures to address the Kurdish demands. Several variants of Turkish nationalism continue to play a significant role in shaping the debate on the public recognition of the Kurdish identity and culture in Turkey. The inflexible legal order, together with the political influence of the staunchly Turkish nationalist army, has also contributed to this barren political environment. Brief reflection on the ideological and political dimensions of the current difficulties reveals the significant role that Turkish nationalism play in the country's hegemonic political practices. It is the Turkish nationalist framing of the Kurdish question as a security issue that continues to enact barriers to addressing the popular Kurdish demands and shapes how democratic dialogue is being pursued. Also, the ongoing debate in Turkey frames Kurdish demands as incommensurable with the acceptable notion of citizens' rights in Turkey. For example, the Kurds' demands for increased autonomy and education in the Kurdish language are rejected because it is seen as a threat to the unity of the nation and Turkey's unitary state structure. However, various decentralisation measures, such as forms of regional autonomy or asymmetric devolution as used in the UK, can be used to satisfy

Kurdish demands while at the same time keeping the unitary state structure. Therefore, it is not that the Kurdish demands are intrinsically a threat to Turkey's unity, but rather that the Turkish nationalist framing of the Kurdish question limits the possibility of democratic dialogue and accommodation. The power of Turkish nationalism has meant that the domestic context has not been strong enough to aid the process of change and the accommodation of Kurdish rights and demands in Turkey. In this part, I evaluate the possibility of change and highlight the factors that may play a role in the adoption of a new policy framework.

As stated above, the prospect of Turkey's membership in the EU has been the main motivation behind Turkey's limited recognition of Kurdish rights to date. Turkey has historically pursued policies of forced assimilation, and the political debate in Turkey concerning the Kurdish question has therefore been shaped by the denial of Kurdish identity and difference. The Kurdish question and the treatment of minorities has been a key aspect of Turkey's EU accession process, and it will be a determining factor in its success since the EU attaches significant importance to a peaceful resolution of the conflict (Casier 2011: 201–2). Moreover, finding a political solution to the Kurdish question will result in improvements to Turkey's human rights record and signify its strong commitment to the internalisation of Europe's democratic values. The EU accession process has brought to fore many issues that Turkey has found very difficult to deal with, and it is widely expected that the prospects of membership would result in the adoption of a new framework to manage cultural and political pluralism in Turkey. Although the accession talks continue, the initial enthusiasm in Turkey for EU membership has come to an end, and the reform process in Turkey has currently stalled.

The existence of significant Kurdish Diaspora communities in many of the European countries has to a certain extent brought the Kurdish question into the EU. From the early 1980s onwards, the PKK establish an organisational network in Europe, which enabled it to forge closer ties with European left-wing political groups, who have remained committed to the democratisation process in Turkey throughout the past 30 years. This enabled the PKK to generate significant diplomatic pressure on Turkey, which proved useful in furthering Kurdish rights claims in Turkey (Casier 2011: 202). Through the activities of the Kurdistan National Congress (*Kongreya Neteweyî ya Kurdistanê*, KNK), the Kurdish national movement continues to exert diplomatic pressure on Turkey and represent the Kurdish view in Europe. The European Union Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC) has organised regular meetings – which are often attended by a cross section of politicians and public figures in Europe and Turkey – in the EU Parliament since 2004, and it has used the Parliament as a space to discuss the Kurdish question in Turkey (Casier 2011). Furthermore, Turkey's poor human rights records, and the availability of European Court of Human Rights as a means to address human rights abuses by the state, have also

brought the Kurdish question into the remits of the EU's dealings with Turkey.

Turkey's relations with her Middle Eastern neighbours, especially Iraq, and the emergence of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as a new regional actor, are also of crucial importance. In recent years, Turkey has increasingly indicated its willingness to be the leading power in the region. However, the extent to which she can fulfil her ambition is closely related to resolving the Kurdish question, which has become a litmus test of the consolidation of democracy in Turkey: 'Three internal factors are preventing Turkey from acting as a model for this multicultural region: the Kurdish conflagration, a quasi-secular system of government and a fragile democracy' (Hakura 2011: 1). The withdrawal of the US military presence in Iraq has added more weight to the importance of good relations between the KRG and Turkey and the impact they have on regional stability and security. Hence, a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish conflict can create significant benefits to Turkey's strategic interests.

The consolidation of Kurdish self-rule is also significant in providing a model for the accommodation of Kurdish rights and demands. So far, Turkey's relationship with the KRG has been shaped by the tensions arising from the PKK's presence in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. Underneath this tension are the increasing and significant economic ties and growing trade between the KRG and Turkey, which play an important role in shaping the dynamics of the relationship (ICG 2008: 12–15; Barkey 2010: 12). However, Turkey's growing economic ties and good relations with the Iraqi Kurds may not mean that a new era of mutual cooperation is dawning:

> Turkey's new Iraq policy contains defensive and expansionist elements. It is defensive insofar as it continues to be constructed on a platform of containment of Kurdish nationalism. This has always been Ankara's first concern, dating almost to 1926 when it consented to Mosul's integration into Iraq. It is also expansionist in that it seeks to maximize Turkish influence throughout the region and Iraq in particular, with an eye to earning a status commensurate with what Turks think they deserve.
>
> (Barkey 2010: 12)

Although the existence of the KRG, and the role it can play in fostering the development of a regional framework in the Middle East, is a significant factor, it is connected to the consolidation of democracy in the Middle East and whether the values of pluralism and liberal democracy can be institutionalised. Hence, the existence of the KRG as a regional actor is of immense importance because it can strengthen the position of the Kurdish national movement in Turkey and create further impetus towards the accommodation of Kurdish demands. The recent upheaval in Syria and the expected change of regime is expected to alter power dynamics in the region, and it can possibly result in the establishment of Kurdish autonomy and self

rule within Syria. The ascendency of the Democratic Union Party (*Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat*, PYD), including their seizing control of towns in majority Kurdish areas of Syria, has been met with alarm in Turkey to such an extent that Turkey has threatened to invade to prevent the establishment of Kurdish self-rule, citing the possibility that the PKK will exploit the situation to launch attacks against Turkey (ICG 2013: 3).

Over the years. we have increasingly seen the emergence of civil society activism in Turkey around the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question. The demands for a peaceful resolution of the Kurdish Question and political reconciliation have been voiced by an increasing number of organisations in Turkey in the past decade. Chief among these are the Mothers of Peace (*Barış Anneleri*) and the Peace Council of Turkey (*Türkiye Barış Meclisi*). Additionally, various trade unions and human rights NGOs are also involved in advocating for the peaceful and political reconciliation of Kurdish demands in Turkey. The existence of independent outlets to disseminate alternative discourse, such as the Independent Communication Network (BIA NET), is also significant and makes an important contribution to the public debate by providing alternative views to those disseminated in the mainstream media in Turkey (see Erdem in this volume). There have also been important developments in the music scene in Turkey, where Turkish and Kurdish musicians and artists have increasingly and collectively raised their voices in support of a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question and the democratisation of Turkey (see Aksoy in this volume). Additionally, Turkey-wide campaigns such as 'Save Hasankeyf', and those against the construction of hydroelectric dams in the Munzur Valley, also present opportunities to mobilise a diverse section of society and inevitably foster the development of democratic practices and forms of identification, which are central to political reconciliation and a peaceful solution to the conflict. Throughout the 2000s, numerous reports by The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) have been published, which can be seen as policy proposals and have generated a notable contribution to the debate on the Kurdish question (TESEV 2008; Kurban and Ensaroglu 2010; Çandar 2011). These mention the need to broaden the legal rights of Kurds, and also the necessity to devise a peaceful method to disarm the PKK.

The level of public recognition of Kurdish identity in Turkey is highly important because it frames the range of rights that are to be accepted, and what is the appropriate means to deal with the demands raised by the Kurdish national movement in Turkey, such as self-rule and education in Kurdish. While the external factors, such as the KRG and the EU accession process can help foster the development of a new policy framework for the Kurdish question in Turkey, whether a political process succeeds or not ultimately depends on Turkey's domestic context and on generating a national consensus to solve the conflict. However, the influence of domestic civil society actors and pressure from the grassroots level has been rather ineffective in transforming the entrenched nationalist antagonisms.

Consequently, the change in the Kurdish national movement's position and domestic actors' activism has not been able to generate a significant shift in Turkey's policy.

Conclusions

The main difficulty that has been blocking the progress of political change and conflict resolution in Turkey is the lack of consensus on the appropriate measures that need to be taken. The level of recognition – and corresponding rights – that the Kurds will enjoy has been the key source of disagreement. This has meant that violence has continued throughout the past 30 years and this has reinforced the association made in the state discourse between the Kurdish question and 'separatism' and 'terror'. The continuation of violence has also been used by the state andthe dominant political interests in Turkey to marginalise and delegitimize Kurdish demands and to not grant rights. The widespread opposition to Kurdish demands and the continuing appeal of Turkish nationalism has meant that the oppression and rejection of Kurdish demands has been carried out without much domestic opposition. It has also meant that nationalist antagonisms have not been overcome, and democratic subjectivities and movements have not been as successful in developing in Turkey, which is central to the peaceful resolution of the conflict and the accommodation of Kurdish rights.

The success of the Kurdish national movement in developing its democratic solution to the Kurdish question depends on constructing a wider pro-peace block in Turkey. The ongoing violence and the state's widespread oppressive measures have created an insecure environment and led to the loss of confidence that a negotiated solution can be arrived at and that Kurdish rights and demands can be accommodated in Turkey. Also, the Kurdish question has a transnational dimension and has been playing a defining role in Turkey's relations with its neighbours and with the USA and the EU. The consolidation of Kurdish self-rule in Iraq offers an example to follow, and the existence of such an entity can aid the process of change and the accommodation of Kurdish rights and demands in Turkey. The prospect of EU membership has offered a more direct incentive to Turkey to change its policy and to create more space for effective conflict resolution. The demands for the establishment of an independent Kurdish state incorporating all the Kurdish territories may be unrealistic given the widespread opposition that is likely to generate in the Middle East region; however, forms of autonomy and cultural rights remain a distinct possibility. Given that the region is experiencing widespread changes, the issue of accommodating Kurdish rights and demands within a democratic Middle East remains a distinct possibility and in accordance with the demands raised by the Kurdish national movement.

Hence, Turkey's recent actions and likely future conduct in relation to the Kurdish question need to be seen within the prism of regional developments.

The prevailing discourse in Turkey seems to support the government's determination not to concede any Kurdish national demands and rights, citing them to be fundamentally against the unity of the state and the indivisible unity of the nation. The Kurds, on the other hand, have moderated their claims and demands and currently seek to realise their rights within a democratic Turkish polity. Whether the proposals that may weaken the centralist structure of the state will be accepted by the politically powerful military and the staunchly nationalist public is difficult to see at present. The accommodation of Kurdish rights in Turkey and the level of public recognition that Kurdish identity is expected to enjoy will be a key area of disagreement, and they will have a significant impact on the process of writing a new constitution that started in 2012 and is expected to continue throughout 2013.

Notes

1 The term 'political reconciliation' is used to refer to a process that will 'transform a relation of enmity into one of civic friendship' (Schaap 2005: 11).
2 For an overview of Kurdish politics in Turkey, see Bozarslan (2008).
3 The Kurds' experience of othering by Turkish nationalists or state officials had a personal dimension. McDowall (2000: 402–3) reflects on the discrimination that the numerous Kurdish political activists experienced during their student days in Western Turkey.
4 For a more thorough discussion of Kurdish politics in Turkey during the 1960s and popular Kurdish mobilisation, see Gündoğan (2011).
5 This is not to say that they are an exclusively Kurdish political movement. The representation of the demands of various other groups in Turkey, such as women, workers, religious and ethnic groups, and students has been a key objective of the pro-Kurdish democratic movement in Turkey.
6 Initially, the number of BDP-supported candidates who won a seat in Parliament was 36, but the High Electoral Commission annulled the candidature of Hatip Dicle, who was elected from Diyarbakir, for previous convictions. The following BDP MPs remain in prison and have not been able to take their seats in Parliament: Kemal Aktaş (Van), İbrahim Ayhan (Şanlıurfa), Selma Irmak (Şırnak), Faysal Sarıyıldız (Şırnak) and Gülseren Yıldırım (Mardin) (BDP, 2011).
7 The figures quoted refer to those that have been stated by BDP representatives in January 2012, and there have been numerous other detentions since then (see Radikal 2012a).
8 The PKK's most significant losses took place in Autumn 1992, when it was attacked by the Turkish troops and the *pêshmerge* forces of Iraqi Kurdish political parties. Also the state's anti-insurgency measures, such as forced evacuation of the rural settlements, managed to cut off the PKK's logistical support during the 1990s (Gunes, 2012, pp. 130–33).
9 See www.belgenet.net for details of the election results since 1954.

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