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Identity, Narrative and Frames: Assessing Turkey's Kurdish Initiatives

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ABSTRACT *In 2009 the Turkish government launched a novel initiative to tackle the Kurdish question. The initiative soon ran into deadlock, only to be untangled towards the end of 2012 when a new policy was announced. This comparative paper adopts Michael Barnett's trinity of identity, narratives and frames to show how a cultural space within which a peaceful engagement with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) would be deemed legitimate and desirable was carved out. Comparisons between the two policies reveal that the framing of policy narratives can have a formative impact on their outcomes. The paper demonstrates how the governing quality of firmness fluctuated between different connotations and references, finally leading back to a deep-rooted tradition in Turkish governance.*

Since 1984 when the PKK commenced its armed struggle against the Turkish state, Turkish security policies have been framed around the Kurdish question with the PKK presented as the primary security threat to be tackled. Turkey's Kurdish question has its roots in the founding of the republic in 1923, which saw Kurdish ethnicity assimilated with Turkishness. In accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), only three minorities were and continue to be officially recognized in Turkey: Armenians, Jews and Greeks. These three groups were granted minority status on the basis of their religion. Kurdish identity – whether national, racial or ethnic – was not recognized by the republic, resulting in decades of uprisings by the Kurds and oppressive and assimilative politics by the state. For a long time, the Turkish state denied the Kurdish question's ethno-political nature by presenting it as a socio-economic problem. By the early 1990s, the state's perception and methods regarding the Kurdish question began to change as a result of the growing discontent and increased level of armed clashes between the PKK and the military. The ethnic dimension of the question began to be slowly recognized and as the politics of oppression continued throughout the 1990s, the unrest was now viewed as

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In a 2005 rally in the Kurdish-populated city of Diyarbakır, Erdoğan made an audacious declaration that the answer to the Kurds' long-running grievances is not more repression but more democracy

ethnic separatism that required military measures. Therefore, during the 1990s the issue was thoroughly securitized.[1]

Since assuming office in 2003, the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has hinted that his Justice and Development Party (AKP, *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi)* might be willing to address Kurdish political demands for more rights and to hold peace negotiations with the PKK. In a 2005 rally in the Kurdish-populated city of Diyarbakır, Erdoğan made an audacious declaration that the answer to the Kurds' long-running grievances is not more repression but more democracy.[2] The declaration was met with anger and skepticism within the opposition and Kurdish circles, with the former accusing Erdoğan of giving in to terrorists' demands, and the latter arguing that he is delivering mere rhetoric without action. There was more rhetoric three years later in October 2008 when Erdoğan stated that "democratization is considered as the antidote to terrorism, ethnic extremism and all types of discrimination. The main approach here is that no matter where a person lives and from which ethnic origin he/she comes from, they should all feel themselves as equal and liberal citizens of our country".[3]

But it was only in 2009 that the AKP government launched a concrete initiative to tackle the Kurdish question. The launch of the initiative took place exactly ten years after the EU granted candidate status to Turkey. The initiative, initially known as the Kurdish Opening, and later referred to variously as the Democratic Opening, the National Unity Project, and the Democratic Initiative among others, was set to profoundly transform "the basic institutional structure of the post-1980 regime through enlarging the understanding of citizenship, which would lead to re-defining the political community, strengthening association and grassroots participation, and engaging in a relative decentralization of the state with local levels of government carefully integrated into the national centre".[4] Its essential aim was to bring an end to the armed conflict by disarming and disbanding the PKK.

From Hopes to Skepticism

The initiative arguably had its roots in internal politics and external conditions. Five key factors behind the initiative can be distinguished. First, it complemented the Turkish government's "zero problems with neighbors" policy and gave it domestic and international credibility. It also responded to the

prevailing domestic insecurity caused by the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq in 2004. Second, with the Democratic Society Party (DTP, closed down in December 2009 by the Constitutional Court of Turkey) gaining an unprecedented increase in its votes in the southeast in the March 2009 local elections, the government attempted to win back its lost seats by appealing to the Kurdish electorate with a new initiative.

Third, with its unsuccessful attempts to destroy the PKK strongholds in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, and the looming withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, the government was forced to come up with a new solution to the situation in the southeast which was closely intertwined with changes in the balance of power across the border in Iraq. Fourth, the so-called Ergenekon case, which investigated "deep state" activities within Turkey and neutralized the military that used to act as the final decision maker on the Kurdish question, facilitated the prospects for addressing the Kurdish question through non-military means. Finally, there were significant economic factors that favored a non-military solution to the question. In addition to the dire need to reduce overblown military expenditures, Turkey's role as an energy hub and crossroads for pipelines was part of the equation. Indeed "once Turkey resolves its Kurdish question, it would also be able to secure its environs for the realization of new energy transportation projects including Nabucco".[5]

The policy initiative elicited some hopes and optimism within the moderate Kurdish, liberal, academic and leftist political circles as well as among many European commentators. However, the main opposition parties, the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), continued to fiercely oppose the initiative, claiming that Erdoğan was dangerously compromising Turkey's security for political gains. Many in the Kurdish lobby remained skeptical throughout, claiming that the opening was not going far enough in reforming Turkey. However, the initial optimism that the Democratic Opening wielded in some circles soon turned into widespread doubt and skepticism. The window of opportunity began to close with many arguing that "for almost a year, Turkey has been discussing the initiative. However, there is no applicable and concrete suggestion for a solution".[6] Or as Alessandri stated: "The "opening" announced by the AKP last year has lost much of its momentum. With growing polarization, it seems unlikely that a new constructive engagement between Turkish political forces can be attempted on the Kurdish question.".[7]

The European Commission's 2010 Progress Report similarly noted that "concrete measures announced within the framework of the democratic opening fell short of the expectations and were not followed through and implemented". Kurdish critics argued that the Kurdish opening had become a Kurds-less opening with the prime minister failing to include Kurdish voices in the ini-

tiative. In facing these criticisms, Erdoğan insisted that the opening was still in place and that the government stood firmly behind it, arguing that "those who allege that the democratic opening has no content… can fill it themselves. We are ready for this".[8] But violent confrontations between the PKK and the military had already begun to re-intensify, and were followed by massive waves of arrests and detentions.

A New Opportunity

It was not until towards the end of 2012 and the failure of alleged secret talks between the PKK and the Turkish state in 2009–2011 that a new window of opportunity opened, this time termed the Imralı Process. The political landscape looked very different this time around compared to 2009 when the earlier initiative was launched. The outbreak of violence in neighboring Syria in 2011, which has resulted in a prolonged and bloody civil war between the al-Assad loyalists and the opposition forces, brought the possibility of an autonomous Kurdistan region in Syria. The priorities within the Turkish government began to shift from a regime change in Damascus to preventing a Syrian Kurdistan from forming. An autonomous Kurdistan region in Syria together with the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq would mean that two officially recognized Kurdish regions would flank Turkey's Kurdish-inhabited southeast region, providing inspiration, support and resources to Turkey's Kurds to similarly realize their autonomy.

Öcalan's three-stage road map for peace includes an initial ceasefire, the withdrawal of the PKK from Turkey and final disarmament

Furthermore, the year 2012 witnessed the heaviest casualty rates since the late 1990s as well as a massive wave of arrests targeting thousands of Kurdish political actors. The government returned to a security-centered approach with Erdoğan claiming that the escalation of violence resulted largely from Syria's President Bashar al-Assad's resumed support for the PKK. It soon became apparent to both sides of the conflict that the security approach would once again prove fruitless and costly. Finally, the AKP government was now on its third term after securing almost half the popular vote in the June 2011 general elections. There was pressure to use the strong political mandate granted to the AKP in the elections to finally take concrete measures to end the decades-long conflict that was hindering Turkey's political and economic progress. Erdoğan's final term as the leader of the AKP, as decided at the AKP's fourth general congress on September 30, 2012, added an additional sense of urgency to the process.

The Imralı Process involves negotiations between Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT) and the jailed PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, with the ultimate aim of ending the hostilities on both sides and disarming the PKK in return for reforms improving the rights of Turkey's Kurds. The Imralı Process faced immediate challenges with a PKK attack in a military outpost in Çukurca, a district in the province of Hakkâri, and the murder of three Kurdish women affiliated with the PKK, including Sakine Cansız, one of the few PKK founders, at the Kurdish Institute in Paris. But the incidents have not hindered the process. As part of the peace process, the Ministry of Justice was set to approve some long-awaited visits to Öcalan, with the first visit taking place at the beginning of January 2013 when Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) deputy Ayla Akat Ata, and Ahmet Türk, an independent deputy and head of Kurdish umbrella organization the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), were allowed to travel to Imralı. During the same period, Turkey also freed a group of Kurdish former mayors who had served more than three years in a Diyarbakır prison for alleged links to the PKK-affiliated Union of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK). The peace process also coincided with the Turkish parliament's approving of a law that allows a legal defense in a person's mother tongue, a long-standing demand of the Kurdish political lobby.

Following some disputes over the second group of visitors, three BDP deputies, Pervin Buldan, Altan Tan and Sırrı Süreyya Önder, were finally granted access to Imralı toward the end of February 2013. Less than a week later the confidential minutes of the meeting between Öcalan and the deputies were leaked to the press, arguably putting the peace process at risk. The meeting minutes revealed, among other things, that Öcalan fully supported the peace process but threatened war and chaos if the Kurdish question remained unsolved in the future. Öcalan's three-stage road map for peace includes an initial ceasefire, the withdrawal of the PKK from Turkey and final disarmament. Although the government insisted that the leak would not sabotage the process, the disclosure of the meeting minutes nevertheless resulted in unconstructive and at times aggressive finger pointing between the BDP and the governing party. On several occasion Erdoğan stated that the BDP's public comments on the incident were harmful while the BDP shifted the responsibility to the government. The government's narrative of unity was quickly replaced with one portraying the firmly "reliable" government and the "unreliable" Kurdish side. The fundamental lack of trust between the two sides became more apparent with each backlash in the peace process, especially with Erdoğan attacking not only the BDP but the press as well.

Despite the initial backlashes and unlike with the opening in 2009, the Imralı Process continued to wield an unprecedented amount of initial support from different circles, including the main opposition party, the CHP. Referring to the Paris assassinations, its leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, noted that the Imralı Pro-

A supporter of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party waves a flag as she attends the party's congress in Ankara.

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cess "should not be affected by this incident. If the government is determined to move this process forward then it should go ahead".[9] While the nationalist MHP took a predictably negative position on the initiative – vowing to "resist the process like grey wolves"[10] – civil society and many political commentators held a guarded yet mildly optimistic stance. For example, Cengiz Çandar, columnist for the newspaper *Radikal*, maintained "cautious optimism",[11] while Bülent Keneş, the editor in chief of *Today's Zaman*, argued that the "talks with the PKK should continue. But, as noted by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey should continue to conduct operations against those groups that shed blood in the interests of foreign countries. Indeed, when the PKK lays down its arms, operations will automatically stop".[12]

Also Kurdish political actors responded to the process with initial optimism, with, for example, Massoud Barzani, an influential regional Kurdish leader, declaring that he fully supports the process. However, many Kurdish politicians also argued that it should be the state that stopped operations against the PKK, not vice versa, to give the peace process a chance. At the funeral of the three female PKK members killed in Paris, Ahmet Türk said that it is impossible to talk about peace when the Qandil mountains in the Kurdistan region of Iraq where PKK militants are mainly based is being bombarded by the Turkish army.[13] Similarly, upon its visit to Kurdistan in Iraq following the second BDP visit to Imralı Island, another BDP delegation, led by the chairman Selahattin Demirtaş, criticized the ongoing airstrikes and argued that they seriously weaken confidence in the peace process.

Similarly, the initial reactions in Europe were mildly optimistic: "Although European countries evaluate the dialogue process as a positive development, they prefer to adopt a wait-and-see position before issuing strong public support to the process."[14] In an interview with the Dutch daily *Nederlands Dangbla*, European Parliament's rapporteur for Turkey Ria Oomen Ruijten praised the government's efforts in bringing more democratic reforms to Turkey and seeking a solution to the Kurdish question while at the same time strongly criticizing the opposition parties for hindering Turkey's democratization process. In a recent poll, almost half of Turkish citizens believed that the government should begin negotiating with the PKK to lay down arms.[15] It can be argued that there is now overall a more pervasive feeling of optimism toward the initiative than in 2009, largely due to the lack of opposition from the main opposition party and having the National Intelligence Organization involved in the process. The political landscape is now also more conducive for the policy opening.

Despite the initial backlashes and unlike with the opening in 2009, the Imralı Process continued to wield an unprecedented amount of initial support from different circles

In attempting to engage with the PKK, Erdoğan has put himself in considerable political risk as some might view him as weak and acting against national interests. In showing how firmness as a governing quality was re-framed and re-narrated to reach the adequate cultural and political conditions for the initiatives, the article adopts Michael Barnett's trinity of identity, narratives and frames. As Barnett writes in relation to Israel, Yitzhak Rabin and the Oslo accords in 1993, "these sometimes mechanistic and deterministic explanations fail to capture what arguably was a defining feature of Rabin's practices and policies – to create, however temporarily, a cultural space in Israeli politics in which a withdrawal from the territories became desirable and legitimate, that is, a construction of an Israeli national identity and interests that were tied to a peace process that involved compromise with the Palestinians".[16]

In explaining Rabin's action, Barnett employs the trinity of identity, narratives and frames in order to explore the cultural preconditions that were made possible by political elites. The trinity is an effective framework within which to analyze the Turkish case as the three concepts are "critical for understanding the cultural foundations that make possible and desirable certain actions. Yet what is possible and legitimate also is delineated by the institutional context that shapes: the calculations of strategically-minded political elites; which narratives and frames are selected and become politically consequential; and the societal aggregation and interaction processes that are the factory of new cultural configurations and policy making out-

comes".[17] This article shows how Erdoğan "attempted to recreate a national identity that was situated in a new historical narrative and tied to a frame of peace and prosperity".[18]

A Remarkable Trinity: Identity, Narrative and Frame

The trinity of identity, narrative and frames generate "an understanding of the relationship between the contestation over the national identity; how that contestation is tied to an historical narrative that links the past, the present and the future; and how frames that tie together historical narratives and discrete interests are central foe the societal mobilization in favour of a particular project or policy".[19] Identities are continuously performed through discursive practices, with some moments witnessing more rapid identity negotiations than others. As Barnett writes: "although national and state identities are always in negotiation, these negotiations can be expected to be particularly intense during moments of rapid changes in international and domestic politics. At the international level, a change in systemic patterns, caused either by transnational, economic or military politics, can trigger widescale domestic change and debates concerning the national identity and the state's relationship to the wider community".[20]

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However, it can be argued that Barnett does not go far enough in recognizing the constitutive role that identity plays in foreign policy behavior when he suggests that state identity "does not cause action but rather makes some action legitimate and intelligible and others not so".[21] Furthermore, his "thin" Constructivist position as regards *a priori* interests is something that can be challenged. As Barnett argues: "political actors are likely to have competing interpretations of the meanings associated with that identity, and compete to fix a particular national identity because of deeply held convictions and *prior* interests" (emphasis added).[22] There is a sense here that interests can be separated from identity-making, that there are some "fixed" interests that remain immutable amid changes in state identities. However, interests cannot be divorced from identities and separated as an *a priori* category; they are intertwined in such a way that makes it impossible to treat them as two separate or even partly overlapping categories. This "thick" Constructivist position – closer to Post-structuralism – does not make Barnett's trinity model redundant. In contrast, it demonstrates that it is useful even when the trinity of concepts is more fluid and less defined.

The concept of narrative is an important mechanism in collective identity making. As Barnett puts it: "quite simply, a narrative concerns a story that is joined by a plot. As applied to the national identity, the claim is that nations typically construct a storyline concerning their origins, the critical events that define as a people, and some broad agreement over where they should be headed".[23] He argues that participants construct narratives themselves, and the actors can be said to have a collective identity depending on the extent to which they locate themselves within a shared or congruent storyline. He further argues that events play a central role in an historical narrative: "it is virtually impossible for a narrative to exist absent a series of events that are cognitively connected".[24] This could also be turned the other way round: one cannot even talk about events *per se*, but only events under description.[25] In other words, the act of transforming events into narrative endows them with cognitive meaning.

Finally, frames "are specific metaphors, symbolic representations, and cognitive cues used to render or cast behaviour and events in an evaluative mode and to suggest alternative modes of action".[26] The framing process that political elites engage in is *conscious* and *strategic*. This is important to note in relation to the forgone discussion on narratives: even if the narratives that actors choose are products of partly predetermined presuppositions, the way in which a particular frame is used is strategic. As Barnett writes: "actors strategically deploy frames to situate events and to interpret problems, to fashion a shared understanding of the world, to galvanize sentiments as a way to mobilize and guide social action, and to suggest possible resolutions to current plights."[27] Political elites use "cultural symbols that are selectively chosen from a cultural tool chest and creatively converted" into frames of action.[28] At formative moments "political entrepreneurs must construct frames that are able to reconcile these contradictions, to situate these events in ways that mesh with the cultural terrain, or to recast the relationship between the cultural foundations, the costs and benefits of particular policies and the circumstances at hand".[29] In the next section the trinity of identity, narrative and frames is discussed in relation to Turkey's democratic initiative and the Imralı Process.

The Democratic Opening: "A Good Thing to Come"

When President Abdullah Gül famously stated in March 2009 that "good things will happen very soon", he made an important symbolic statement launching the frame for the upcoming policy initiative designed to bring a solution to the decades-long Kurdish question. He drew a line between a "bad" past and a "good" future. Erdoğan, similarly, used a temporal framing and narrated an even more explicit line between the "bad" past and a "good" AKP-led future. In a speech in the parliament in August 2009, he rhetorically asked: "If Turkey had not spent its energy, budget, peace and young people on [fighting] terror-

ism, if Turkey had not spent the last 25 years in conflict, where would it be today?"[30] The narrative model he employed was that of Romance, "fundamentally a drama of self-identification symbolized by the hero's transcendence of the world of experience, his victory over it, and his final liberation from it".[31] The decisive moment is the present, which is dominated by the battle towards the final liberation. It is a classical narrative framing that provides an understanding of the past, present and future, linking them together through a formative moment: the forthcoming Democratic Opening. These statements came at the time when terrorist activities had been on the rise in the past months "with many casualties following a relatively quiet period in the past four years. A number of military positions were attacked and bombs detonated in city centers, reminiscent of the bloody attacks of the 1990s. The events, which began before the July 22, 2007 elections, led to a heated debate on the Kurdish question and all aspects of the counterterrorism measures. These debates indicated a basic consensus that the policies followed to date had proved insufficient and ineffective in stopping the bloodshed, and that the question needs to be divorced from its terror dimension in order to reach a permanent solution".[32]

In framing the initiative in a temporal sense, Erdoğan and Gül were able to frame the issue in such a way as to distant themselves from the conflict and present themselves almost as neutral mediators between the PKK and the Turkish people. What was most significant about the first few months of the democratic initiative and explained the hopes it elicited was the act of recognition of the "bad" things of the past. It gave the opening the needed symbolic power as past administrations had failed to adequately reconcile with the past. This position was arguably designed to place the AKP on a high moral ground vis-à-vis past administration as well as to place it in an indispensable position: it was virtuous and bold enough to face the *realities* of the past, and the only actor that could *solve* the bad things of the past. While framing the policy initiative, Prime Minister Erdoğan used narrative resources traditionally employed by the Kemalist elites in Turkey – references to Turkey's iconic founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. For example, in November 2009 Erdoğan addressed the parliament and introduced the initiative by declaring that they "cannot fall behind Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's Parliament. We cannot sacrifice the basic principles that were based on pluralism, freedom and democracy 89 years ago".[33] He restated Atatürk's famous words "peace at home, peace abroad" but framed it around the principles of democracy and cultural richness. This was in contrast to the principle of Turkishness – a civic identity imposed upon non-Turkish ethnic minorities – as laid down in the founding of the republic. Using the same cultural toolbox as his opponents, Erdoğan was able to frame the question in a reverse way.

The way in which Erdoğan framed the issue was to symbolically alter the cognitive cues related to "firmness". If firmness during the "bad" times meant

military might and hard security, it was now reframed as a question of morality and high virtue, of taking a firm position vis-à-vis the corrupted, the hard-line militarists, the undemocratic elements. In this way, firmness was reframed as an uncompromising insistence on mediation, democracy, equality and fairness. As Erdoğan stated in June 2010: "I will strive for realizing this project [democratic initiative] even at the expense of losing my government".[34] As such, promoting "soft" policies was reframed as a strong position and the promotion of "hard" policies as a weak position. The distinction between the AKP's "soft" and earlier "hard" policies is often put forward in the literature with, for example, Park writing that the pre-AKP era of the 1990s was dominated by reactive and opportunistic policies with "a coercive and heavily securitized approach to foreign policy" while the AKP-governed 2000s can be seen as an era characterized by "dialogue, engagement, confidence-building measures, dispute mediation, trade agreements, the institutionalization of diplomatic relationships, economic aid and reconstruction, and peacekeeping".[35] Much of the scholarly literature reproduced the temporal framing adopted by the AKP and as such strengthened the narrative. Furthermore, the prevailing threat perceptions supported the reframing in that "this new window of opportunity could not have emerged without the explosion of the Ergenekon incident, which has offered a persuasive critique of the closed, dark, intolerant and secret communities friendly with the military bureaucracy and state officials but insidiously devoted to destroying the government".[36] Or as Erdoğan put it: "there are people who benefit from this bloody market. There are people who derive political interests from this bloody sector. When the terrorism ends, the arms are silenced and the mothers shed no more tears, those who exploit this bloody market will go out of business."[37]

If a military solution was indeed an inadequate response to the Kurdish question, a new cultural space needed to be opened for a non-military solution to re-gain wider support base and acceptance

However, the weakness in the temporal framing of the Democratic Opening – which was reinforced with narrative resources tied in with the hegemonic national identity – was to shift the blame on to past administrations, which in party political terms meant the main opposition party, the CHP. It can be argued that this framing partly alienated the CHP from the initiative, making it impossible to gain its vital support for the process. This can partly explain why the narrow cultural space that the initiative had opened began to close with Erdoğan re-framing "firmness" in the context of the Democrat-

Gulten Kisanak, chairman of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party gestures as she attends the party's congress in Ankara.

AFP / Adem Altan

ic Opening. The cultural space in which "firmness" had been re-framed from its more traditional reference to military strength and uncompromising policies to democratic governance, dialogue and reconciliation was now shifting to clandestine networks: firmness was about being tough on these alleged undemocratic actors. This re-framing exercise was taking place while violent confrontations between the PKK and the military re-intensified. Massive waves of arrests and detentions followed, and rapid escalations of violence in 2011 resulted in several casualties on both sides. It was becoming evident that the narrow cultural space that was opened with the democratic initiative for the solution of the Kurdish question was closing.

The Imralı Process: "Brothers against Terrorists"

The situation following the closing down of the cultural space and until the launch of the Imralı Process in late 2012 is best described as an impasse from which it was difficult to escape. If a military solution was indeed an inadequate response to the Kurdish question, a new cultural space needed to be opened for a non-military solution to re-gain wider support base and acceptance. In reference to Israel's peace process, Barnett suggests that "the possibility of breaking out of the current impasse requires the mobilization of individuals along a common cultural space; a cultural space is not given but rather is constructed by leaders who can imaginatively and strategically frame issues in ways that are connected to existing and widely accepted narratives, but these narratives in the age of cultural fragmentation are increasingly elusive".[38] Here the discursive meets the actual: while the cultural space needs to be discursively constructed and framed, it cannot directly contradict with action. Narratives have their limits, which are most obvious in conflict situations. Body counts are more difficult to re-frame than governing qualities and principles.

The temporal framing that was pronounced in the earlier Democratic Opening initiative was no longer present in the framing of the Imralı Process, where the formative line was not drawn temporally but between terrorists and Kurds who are backing the government. In the government's narrative, as shown earlier, Kurds stand in line with the "reliable" government that is *firmly* committed to a peaceful solution. Despite finally embarking on a publicly announced peace process with the PKK and adopting a more inclusive framing of Turkish

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national identity, the government still retained rhetoric that rests on dividing lines and creating unity through internal others. For example, in an address to the AKP's parliamentary group in January 2013, Erdoğan insisted that the army is not bombing Kurds but terrorists: "We have opened our hearts to our Kurdish brothers. We are sending bombs to terrorists. Our fight against the terror will continue today and tomorrow".[39] Similarly, President Gül took a firm position toward terrorists while fully supporting the peace process: "You have to respond to those who use weapons against you with weapons… those who possess arms and those who give orders to these people should do what is necessary".[40] The governing quality of firmness in the Imralı Process continued to be framed as a hard-line attitude towards undemocratic and clandestine elements terrorizing "brothers". The framing between "bad" terrorists and "good" Kurds can be also seen as an attempt to gain further Kurdish support by countering the oft-heard criticism that policies in Ankara "often do not discriminate between armed guerillas and disgruntled civilians".[41]

Although abandoning the temporal framing and re-shifting the emphasis on the fight against terrorism might have secured support within the opposition, Erdoğan is likely to alienate some Kurdish political actors in the process. Indeed, referring to Kurds as "one of us" or "brothers" might be seen as a tacit way to undermine the Kurdish demand for ethnic recognition and as an attempt to enhance a shared Islamic identity. As Casier et al. write: "References from leading government figures to 'our Kurdish brothers' (*Kürt kardeslerimiz*) typifies the AKP refashioning of an old discourse to frame this matter – that is, invoking religious claim to unity, but with the modern slant of a stated ethnicity".[42] In his speech at the AKP general congress in September 2012, Erdoğan made several references to the Seljuk Empire's entry into Anatolia following a victory against the Byzantine Empire in 1071. The chosen narrative "presumes a deeper shared history between the Kurds and Turks", as does his references to Saladin Ayyubi, a historic figure embraced by both Kurds and Turks within a common Islamic heritage.[43]

For Mitchell, Erdoğan's language at the congress both reinforced "an unequal relationship between Kurds and Turks" and "egregiously misevaluated Kurdish interests".[44] For example, Erdoğan credited the AKP "for lifting 'the barriers of

a Kurdish mother to speak to her baby in Kurdish', as if it was a gift".[45] The narrative of national and religious unity together with shifting the main responsibility for a solution to Turkey's Kurds – as manifested in the division between "good" Kurds and "bad" terrorists" – is likely to remind many Kurds of the "bad" past when the quest for national unity denied ethnic heterogeneity within the republic. In the Imralı Process the framing of firmness began to be directed towards the Kurds rather than Erdoğan and his governing party. There was now an implicit suggestion that the government had already delivered so many reforms that the Kurds must in turn *firmly* "rise up to the challenge and distance themselves from the PKK's line"[46] – "reliable" Kurds need to take a firm position against the "cowardly" PKK. Given Erdoğan's current framing of the peace process, which emphasizes national and religious unity, and despite dropping the temporal framing of the democratic initiative that arguably served partly to alienate the opposition, the cultural space that the Imralı Process has opened is still too narrow for a lasting solution. Barnett's cultural foundations that make possible and desirable certain actions cannot be built on the past tendency in Turkish governance to promote brotherhood at the expense of genuine political and societal plurality. At the same time, the window of opportunity that has opened with the Imralı Process is at its widest so far with Öcalan and several other important stakeholders giving the process the green light. If Erdoğan frames the policy initiative in such a way as to include a variety of Kurdish voices rather than "making disparaging remarks about the Kurds" which is "hardly the behaviour of someone seeking to build trust across the communal divide',[47] the cultural space in Turkey could stretch wide enough to accommodate a lasting solution to the Kurdish question.

Given Erdoğan's current framing of the peace process and despite dropping the temporal framing of the democratic initiative the cultural space that the Imralı Process has opened is still too narrow for a lasting solution

Conclusion

This paper has shown how two policies related to the Kurdish question in Turkey, the Democratic Opening and the more recent Imralı Process, were framed by the political elites in such a way as to widen the cultural space for a solution to the decades-long violent conflict between the state and the militant PKK. At the heart of this framing exercise was the governing quality of firmness, which was first re-framed from its more traditional reference of military strength and uncompromising policies that had dominated Turkish politics throughout the 1990s to denote democratic governance, dialogue and reconciliation. It later

shifted back to its traditional reference only to move on to levy responsibility upon the Kurds to stand firmly against the unlawful PKK.

There was also another shift in framing the two policy initiatives. While adopting a temporal framing in the Democratic Opening and making a distinction between a "bad" past and a "good" future, Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Gül attempted to show themselves as neutral mediators in the formative present. This framing, perhaps inadvertently, served to alienate the opposition and contributed toward the failure of the initiative. The Imralı Process that was launched toward the end of 2012 was no longer framed temporally but around the notion of national unity against terrorism. Although the ultimate aim of the government is to do away with terrorism altogether, the dividing line between "good" Kurds that support the firmly "reliable" government and "bad" terrorists that threaten that unity indicates a possible return to the deep-rooted tradition in Turkish governance to emphasize national unity over identity-based heterogeneity.

Although there have been significant boundary crossings between the two sides of the conflict, the inclusion of the PKK in the peace process through Öcalan has not fully materialized in either rhetoric or action with the government that has framed the policy in juxtaposition with the "terrorists" and supporting airstrikes to target PKK bases in the Qandil mountains in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. The narrative now also includes an emphasis on a religious brotherhood tracing back centuries; the past is no longer "bad" but characterized by a long, shared religious lineage that should be embraced. In framing the new policy initiative in such a way, the governing party risks alienating some factions of the Kurdish population, meaning that the support that it had managed to gain within the opposition this time around might not be enough to make the policy initiative legitimate and desirable in the long term. However, if the government's discursive framing more strongly emphasizes a shared responsibility that is explicitly tied in with the recognition of legitimate cultural and political diversity within Turkey and includes genuine border crossings between the government and the PKK, there is a good chance that the cultural space remains open long enough for a peaceful solution to the conflict. ■

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