Martin van Bruinessen,

'The impact of the dissolution of the Soviet Union on the Kurds'

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THE IMPACT OF THE DISSOLUTION OF THE SOVIET UNION ON THE KURDS

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The Kurds are among the direct neighbours of the Transcaucasian republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azarbaijan, each of which has moreover a Kurdish minority among its population. The Central Asian republics of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, though further removed from Kurdistan, also have significant Kurdish minorities. It is understandable that the recent dramatic events affecting these former Soviet republics, the new wave of nationalism and the reorientation towards Islam, also have their impact on the Kurds. The nature of this impact is mostly indirect and has therefore remained underreported, the more so because it coincides with the impact of other changes in the political and economic world order. This paper sketches the outlines of the various interrelations.

The Kurds and Central Asia in history: Sufi links

The relations between the Kurds and the Muslim peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia have a long history. In the present context it is irrelevant to search for the earliest contacts. The Mongol invasions and the consequent mass upheavals were an obvious period of contact and cultural exchange, but influences in both directions continued for several centuries after. There is, for instance, a strong similarity between Central Asian and Kurdish mysticism of the 13th-15th centuries.

The great Central Asian mystic Najmuddîn Kubrâ (d.1221), who was the originator of the Kubrawiyya *tarîqa* as well as a major influence on the Naqshbandiyya, had as one of his chief

teachers the Kurd `Ammâr b. Yâsir al-Bidlîsî (d. ca.1200).[1] Kubrâ's influence spread west again, at first to Khurâsân, then as far as Kurdistan. By the mid-14th century, the chief shaykh of the Kubrawiyya was a man from the eastern fringes of Kurdistan, Sayyid `Alî Hamadânî (d.1384), who had a major influence on mysticism both in Kurdistan and in Central Asia. The branch of the Kubrawiyya that derived from him, the Hamadâniyya, became especially influential in Khurasan and Central Asia,[2] but it also was the order of the most influential mystics of 15th-century Kurdistan, Shaykh Husâmuddîn Bidlîsî in the north and the Barzinjî family of religious leaders in the south.[3] It was due to Shaykh Husâmuddîn's stature among the Kurds that the major Kurdish emirs allowed themselves to be persuaded by his descendant Idrîs Bidlîsî to join the Ottoman side in the Ottoman-Safavid conflict, resulting in the incorporation of most of Kurdistan into the Ottoman Empire. The Barzinjîs still are the most influential family of religious leaders in southern Kurdistan, although they are no longer affiliated with the Kubrawiyya but with the Qâdiriyya.

`Alî Hamadânî and his direct successors may also point to a link between two heterodox Muslim communities in Kurdistan and Central Asia whose religious music shows a remarkable and so far unexplained resemblance. The Ahl-i Haqq of southern Kurdistan and the Ismâ`îlîs of Bâdakhshân use not only similar types of two-stringed lute, *tanbûr*, but the *maqâms* and the styles of playing are highly reminiscent of one another. W.W. Ivanow has in fact attempted to prove that the Ahl-i Haqq religion was much influenced by Ismâ`îlism, but he has never produced sufficient convincing evidence to corroborate his thesis. Interestingly, however, the written genealogies of Ahl-i Haqq sayyids (the hereditary spiritual leaders of this community) show their common ancestor, the alleged founder of their religion, Sultân Sahâk, to have been a brother of the progenitor of the Barzinjî family and a (spritual) grandson of `Ali Hamadânî.[4] Older texts of the

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[1] Fritz Meier, *Die fawâ'ih al-gamâl wa-fawâtih al-galâl des Nagm ad-Dîn al-Kubrâ* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1957), 17-19.

[2] Devin DeWeese, "The eclipse of the Kubraviyah in Central Asia", *Iranian Studies* 21 (1988), 45-83; on the influence of this Khurasanian-Central Asian branch as far as Mecca and hence southeast Asia see: Martin van Bruinessen, "Najmuddin al-Kubra, Jumadil Kubra and Jamaluddin al-Akbar: Traces of Kubrawiyya influence in early Indonesian Islam", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 150, 305-329.

[3] Brûsâli Mehmed Tâhir, *`Osmânli Mü'ellifleri* I, 58; III, 5-6; Muhammad Ra'ûf Tawakkulî, *Târîkh-i tasawwuf dar Kurdistân* (n.p.[Tehran], n.d.), 133-57.

[4] C.J. Edmonds, *Kurds, Turks and Arabs: politics, travel and research in north-eastern Iraq 1919-1925* (Oxford University Press, 1957), 184-5.

Ahl-i Haqq also contain references to Qalandar dervishes, who appear to have constituted a major component of this religion in its formative stages. It appears worth investigating whether the Ismâ`îlî communities of the Hindu Kush have not similarly absorbed such groups of dervishes. It is even possible that wandering dervishes continued for centuries onward to mediate between these and similar heterodox communities -- as is in fact suggested by some Ahl-i Haqq legends.[5]

There was more of a one-way influence in the case of the Turkic mysticism of the Yesevî-Bektâshî variety. When the Khurâsânî mystic Haji Bektâsh (d.1335) travelled westward, according to the early hagiography, the *Velâyetnâme*, he first spent some time and made disciples in Kurdistan before travelling on to Central Anatolia, the region later specially associated with the Bektâshiyya. He appears to have found a following among Kurdish tribesmen, for even two centuries later the first Ottoman fiscal registers mention nomadic Kurdish Bektâshî tribes.[6]

Dervishes from Central Asia continued passing through Kurdistan during the following centuries, some of them apparently staying on for some time. (Few Kurds are known to have traveled the other way). Especially after the establishment of the Shi`i Safavid state the major pilgrimage route for Central Asians passed through Kurdistan. When Evliyâ Çelebi visited the Kurdish town of Cizre on the Tigris around 1660, he found that the residents of the local Naqshbandî lodge were not Kurds but mostly Central Asians ("*Hindî ve Özbekî ve Çagatayî ve Qumuq qavmi*").[7] The great 18th-century mystic and scholar, Ibrâhîm Haqqî of Erzerûm, mentions in the autobiographical section of his *Ma`rifetnâme* two travelling Özbek Sufis who had been formative influences in his father's spiritual development. One of them had spent an entire winter in the father's house.[8]

Kurdish mysticism was revitalised by the charismatic Mawlânâ Ziyâ'uddîn Khâlid, who

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[5] Examples given in my forthcoming "Satan's psalmists: some heterodox beliefs and practices among the Ahl-i Haqq of the Guran district".

[6] Cevdet Türkay, *Basbakanlik ar,,sivi belgeleri'ne göre Osmanli Imparatorlugu'nda oymak, asiret ve cemaatlar* (Istanbul: Tercüman, 1979), 239.

[7] Evliyâ Çelebi, *Seyâhatnâme* IV, Ms. Topkapi, Bagdat Kö,,skü 305, fol. 386a, 387b. This and the following references to Central Asian dervishes in Kurdistan are discussed in greater detail in my "The Naqshbandi order in 17th-century Kurdistan", in: M. Gaborieau, A. popovic & T. Zarcone (eds.), *Naqshbandis* (Paris-Istanbul: Isis, 1990), 337-60.

[8] Erzurumlu-Hasankaleli Ibrahim Hakki, *Marifetnâme* II (modern Turkish edition, Istanbul 1975), 116-38, summarised in Bruinessen, "The Naqshbandi order", pp. 354-5.

after studies in Delhi under Shâh Ghulâm `Alî (alias `Abdullâh Dihlawî) returned in 1811 to Sulaymaniyya in `Iraqi Kurdistan and between that date and his death in Damascus in 1827 appointed well over sixty *khalîfa*. Within a few generations, the branch of the Naqshbandiyya that derives from him, the Khâlidiyya, spread across the entire Muslim world, overshadowing all other branches. Mawlânâ Khâlid appears to have infused the Khâlidiyya with a militant spirit, for we often find shaykhs of this branch in the forefront of political struggle. The most important early Kurdish nationalist rebellions were led by shaykhs of the Naqshbandiyya-Khâlidiyya.

In the present context, however, the most significant representative of the Khâlidiyya branch of the order is the Dâghistânî Shaykh Shâmil (d.1871), the memory of whose resistance to Russian conquest, as we could recently see, remains a source of pride and inspiration for present-day Muslims of the northern Caucasus.[9] During his struggle against the Russians, Shaykh Shamil in fact was in direct contact with the Kurdish Naqshbandi shaykhs of Nehri (in Hakkari), who appear to have despatched a number of Kurdish warriors to support Shâmil.[10] Admiration for Shaykh Shâmil, incidentally, still is widespread in Turkey, where several books on his life have been published in the past decades and appear to be read not only by persons of Caucasian descent.

The Khâlidiyya also had at least one important representative in Central Asia as well, the jadîdist thinker and theologian Shaykh Ziyâ'uddîn Rasûlî (d.1917), who received his initiation from the prominent Khâlidî Shaykh Ziyâ'üddîn Gümüshkhânavî in Istanbul.[11] Most of the Naqshbandi in Central Asia (including Afghanistan), however, appear to have belonged and still belong to other branches of the order and not to have had recent contacts with the Kurdish Naqshbandiyya.

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[9] Moshe Gammer, *Muslim resistance to the Tsar: Shamil and the conquest of Chechnia and Daghestan* (London: Frank Cass, 1994). Shaykh Shâmil was not the first Naqshbandî of this line to preach *jihâd* in Dâghistân; that was Muhammad Efendi of Yaraglar, the teacher of Shâmil's teacher. All activist Caucasian Naqshbandîs of that period belonged to the line introduced there by Mawlânâ Khâlid's khalîfa, Shaykh Ismâ`îl of Kürdemir. See also Alexandre Bennigsen & S. Enders Wimbush, *Mystics and commissars: sufism in the Soviet Union* (London: Hurst & Co., 1985), 19.

[10] Gammer, *Muslim resistance*, 251.

[11] Bennigsen & Wimbush, *Mystics and commissars*, 38 (where the shaykh's name is distorted to Ziautdin Khemshahnavi). On this shaykh see: Irfan Gündüz, *Gümüshânevî Ahmed Ziyâüddîn KS. Hayati, eserleri, tarikat anlayisi ve Halidiyye tarikati* (Istanbul: Seha Nesriyat, 1984).

The Kurdish communities of Transcaucasia and Central Asia

Wandering sufis and dervishes constitute one interface between Kurdistan and the Caucasian and Central Asian world; another one consists of dispersed Kurdish communities in those regions. The great history of Kurdish tribes and ruling families, the *Sharafnâma*, which was completed in 1597, already mentions several Kurdish tribes living in the Caucasus and in northern Khurâsân. One group of relatively minor tribes in the Caucasus, known together by the Turkish name of Yigirmidört ("Twenty-four"), fled into Iran upon the Ottoman conquest in 1576, but others apparently remained. One Kurdish tribe, the Kîl or Gîl, had long been established in northern Khurâsân, another, the Çeknî, went there in the 16th century and found was used by the Safavids to guard their northeastern frontier against the Sunni Özbeks. Around 1600, another large body of Kurdish tribesmen, allegedly 40,000 families, was brought to this region for the same purposes. They were all Qizilbash Shi`is, and most had come from eastern Anatolia after the Ottoman conquest; they also included the said Yigirmidört from the Caucasus. These are the ancestors of the present Kurdish tribes of northern Khurâsân (in the zone Bojnurd - Shirwân - Qûchân) and southern Turkmenistan.[12] Although still speaking Kurdish, this large Kurdish community has in practice remained completely isolated from the Kurds of Kurdistan proper, and the emergence of Kurdish nationalism there has never had the least impact in Khurâsân-Turkmenistan. They shall not play a part in the remainder of this paper.

The situation of the Kurds of Georgia, Armenia and Azarbayjan, as well as those of Russia and Kazakhstan (who also originate from these three republics) is in that respect different. The Kurds of these Transcaucasian republics in part descend from tribes that have lived here for centuries, in part from people who have for various reasons fled here in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. A significant proportion of the Kurds in Georgia and Armenia are Yezidis, whose ancestors fled here from persecution by Sunni Kurds and the Ottoman army in the 19th century

[12] On this Kurdish population and its origins: M.M. van Bruinessen, *Agha, shaikh and state: on the social and political organization of Kurdistan* (Ph.D. thesis, Utrecht, 1978), 215-20; T.F. Aristova & G.P. Vasil'eva, "Kurds of the Turkmen SSR", *Central Asian Review* XIII/4 (1965), 302-9; Kalîmullâh Tawahhurî 'Ughâzî', *Harakât-i târîkhî-yi Kurd ba Khurâsân* (Mashhad, 1359/1981).

and again in the First World War.[13] The Yezidis have always had a strong awareness of being different from the Muslims, to the extent that many refuse to consider themselves as Kurds. In recent years, the Armenian government has attempted to reinforce the dividing line between both groups, and treated them differently.

In the 1930s and 1940s the Kurds of the Transcaucasian republics also fell victim to Stalin's deportation of minority nationalities. Tens of thousands were deported to Central Asia and Siberia, where there are still sizeable Kurdish communities, especially in Kazakhstan, Kirghizia and Siberia.[14]

There are no widely accepted statistics on the numbers of Kurds in the former Soviet Union; official statistics show wide variation from year to year, and almost certainly seriously under-represent them. The 1897 census of Tsarist Russia counted almost 100,000 Kurds (and this number may not have included those of Turkmenistan). Soviet statistics show declining numbers, allegedly indicating voluntary assimilation. An informed but probably somewhat inflated estimate by a Kurdish nationalist puts the total number of Kurds in the former Soviet Union at 450,000 in 1990, out of which 270,000 lived in the three Transcaucasian Republics.[15]

It was only in Armenia that prior to the recent changes the Kurds enjoyed substantial cultural rights. Yerevan's Kurdish radio programs could be received throughout eastern Turkey and northern Iraq, and they were eagerly listened to, especially when Kurdish language and culture were still subject to a strict ban in Turkey (i.e., until 1991). The Kurdish-language newspaper, *Riya Taze*, that was published (in Cyrillic script) in Yerevan, had a handful of readers among the Kurds in Europe, who occasionally adopted some material from it in their own publications published in (West) Germany and Sweden. After 1980, contacts between Kurdish intellectuals in

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[13] A survey of 19th-century Yezidi migration into Transcaucasia is given in John S. Guest, *The Yezidis: a study in survival* (London: KPI, 1987), 187-96. (The same book was later reissued under the title of *Survival among the Kurds*).

[14] On the deportations: Nadir K. Nadirov, "Population transfer: a scattered people seeks its nationhood", *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Winter 1992, 38-40; Jeri Laber, "Stalin's dumping grounds", *New York Review of Books*, 11 October 1990, 50-53.

[15] Ismet Chériff Vanly, "The Kurds in the Soviet Union", in: Philip G. Kreyenbroek & S. Sperl (eds.), *The Kurds: a contemporary overview* (London: Routledge, 1992), 193-218, at 208. His estimates in detail: Azarbayjan 180,000; Armenia 50,000; Georgia 40,000; Krasnodar 20,000; Kazakhstan 30,000; Kyrgyzstan 20,000; Turkmenistan 50,000; Siberia 35,000.

or from Armenia and Kurdish intellectuals from Turkey living in European exile intensified. Books and articles by such writers as Celîl and Ordîxanê Celîl, Eskirê Boyik, Şukro Mikhoyan and the late Ereb Şemo (Shamilov) were republished in Western Europe and then also in Turkey.

The conflict over Nagorno-Karabagh, and more generally the rise of nationalism in Transcaucasia and Central Asia has negatively affected the Kurds of those regions. In Armenia it was especially the Muslim Kurds who suffered bad treatment and were in many cases literally expelled; Vanly speaks of 18,000 being expelled in 1987-88 alone. In the same years, ethnic conflict in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, though not primarily directed at the Kurds, forced many of them to leave these republics; Vanly claims that most of them settled in Krasnodar, where also many of those from Armenia ended up.[16] Over the past years, large numbers have 'voluntarily' - for economic or security reasons - migrated to Russia or paradoxically to Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan.[17]

In the same period, contacts between these Kurdish communities and the Kurds of Turkey, especially the best organized group among the latter, the PKK, have intensified. The PKK is the only organization that has made serious efforts to gain influence among the Kurds of the former Soviet Union, and it has been remarkably successful -- to the extent that the Turkish press recently carried alarming reports on PKK activities in Kazakhstan, claiming that propagandists were turning the local Kurds against the Turks (viz., the expatriates from Turkey).

The emergence of political Islam among the Kurds - and the Afghan connection

The role of Islam in the Kurdish nationalist movement has been subject to drastic changes. As said above, many of the first Kurdish national leaders were Naqshbandi shaykhs; it was they who led almost all rebellions in the period from 1880 to 1925. The rank and file took part in these

[16] Vanly, "The Kurds in the Soviet Union", 207.

[17] In an interview in the pro-Kurdish daily *Özgür Politika*, 17 and 18 September 1995, the anthropologist Lamara Pashayeva claims that migration from Georgia is purely economically motivated and that only those who have relatives in Kazakhstan and Siberia have gone there, the others going to Russia or attempting to come to Western Europe as refugees.

rebellions out of religious awe for these shaykhs and tribal loyalty to the chieftains who cooperated with the shaykhs, rather than out of national awareness. The Kurdish movement that re-emerged in the 1960s, at first in Iraq, then in Turkey and in Iran, was very different in nature. It was very much a secular movement, and although the majority of the Kurds are pious Muslims, appeals to Islamic sentiment simply did not work politically. The most important leader of the 1960-1975 period, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, belonged to a somewhat eccentric family of Naqshbandi shaykhs but was not a shaykh himself, and none of the other leaders had religious connections. Most leaders were secular intellectuals, and the mullas who were active in the movement at lower levels were so as participants in a *secular* political movement.

The movement in Turkey, roughly speaking, consisted of two wings: one rooted in the tribal power relations of South-eastern Turkey and much influenced by Barzani's movement in Iraq, the other urban-based and left-wing. By the end of the 1970s, there were around a dozen Kurdish political parties in Turkey, all of them adhering to one or another variety of Marxism.[18] Islam and nationalism then almost appeared as mutually exclusive political preferences, the religiously minded remaining aloof from overtly nationalist causes. This changed in the course of the 1980s, as the religious became more nationalist, and the radical nationalists discovered the hold of Islam on the average Kurdish villager.

In Iran, where the Kurdish movement emerged in full strength during and following the Islamic revolution, the Kurdish parties were emphatically secularist. Efforts by the central authorities to put forward religious personalities as more acceptable representatives of the Kurds failed completely. The one charismatic mulla to surface as a political leader, Shaykh `Izzeddîn Husaynî, was a Kurdish nationalist whose entourage consisted of young left radicals. The major Kurdish party, the Democratic Party of Kurdistan, had a Marxist and a social-democrat wing, both secular if not anti-religious, and the other significant party was a Maoist formation that later merged with a non-Kurdish group into the self-proclaimed Communist Party of Iran.

A number of factors in the wider environment contributed to making Islam a factor of greater importance in Kurdish politics. The first was the Islamic revolution in Iran, which sent shock

[18] Martin van Bruinessen, "The Kurds in Turkey", *MERIP Reports* no. 121 (February 1984), 6-12.

waves through all of the Muslim world. A less conspicuous one was the civil war in Afghanistan, which turned that country (and the neighbouring districts of Pakistan) into a training ground for militant Muslims from over the world and propelled the conservative Saudis further into the role of financial sponsors of radical Muslim movements. Muslims of various doctrinal persuasions from Turkey and Kurdistan spent some time in or around Peshawar and gained some direct experience with state-of-the-art guerrilla warfare. It is impossible for outside observers to establish how numerous these people were, nor which organisations they belonged to. One of the groups from Turkey consisted of followers of a Naqshbandi shaykh -- not fundamentalists in the most common sense of the term. They have not been conspicuous since their return to Turkey but in the future the existence of such groups of trained men ready to engage in *jihâd* may prove to be a factor of importance.

Such a group came to the fore in Iraqi Kurdistan in the early 1990s. During the 1980s, in the course of the Iraq-Iran war, a number of Kurdish Islamic formations with strong Iranian or Saudi backing had emerged, but none of them ever became a factor of importance.[19] One of these marginal formations, the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (*Bizûtnewey Îslâmîy Kurdistân*) became a more effective force after 1991, largely due to a number of young radicals led by a man known as Mela Krêkar (or Mela Fateh) and `Alî Bâpîr, who had recently returned from Afghanistan and infused the movement with greater militancy.[20] In Afghanistan they had been with Hikmatyâr's *Hizb-i Islâmî*. When the Islamic Movement became involved in armed conflict with the dominant party of the southern zone, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in 1993 and 1994, it was Mela Krêkar who swept aside more hesitant or moderate leaders and led a successful offensive against the rival party. The movement's gains were not only military: it also acquired a wider following among the village population. Since the two major Kurdish parties (the PUK and the KDP - the Kurdistan Democratic Party, with its major strength in the northernmost zone of Iraq) have been locked in a fratricidal war since the spring season of 1994, they have lost much of the goodwill

[19] Cf. Martin van Bruinessen, "The Kurds between Iran and Iraq", *Middle East Report* no. 141 (July-August 1986), 14-27.

[20] It is said that Mela Krêkar had previously been involved in left-wing politics, hence his nickname: Krêkar means 'worker' (and Mela - mulla - may refer to anyone of traditional background who is considered as well-educated).

they enjoyed, which has made the Islamic Movement look more attractive as a serious alternative.

Demise of socialism?

The demise of the Soviet Union did not provoke a general rejection of socialism as a viable alternative in Turkey and among the Kurds as it did in some other parts of the world. The left-wing parties did not feel the need to revise their political doctrines or even to come to terms with the critique of especially Stalinism within the European left. They had more serious problems: the military takeover in Turkey in 1980 had resulted in the virtual destruction of all left-wing parties (Kurdish as well as Turkish) in that country. Persons reaching adulthood in the 1980s found no political associations in which they could get their first political experience; an almost completely depoliticised generation grew up. There were two exceptions: Islamic radicalism -- as a style rather than as an organised movement -- attracted many of the young who were disaffected with the existing order. And there was the more adventurous alternative of the PKK, which grew into the most successful radical opposition movement in the history of the Turkish Republic.

The PKK had its roots in the left-wing student movement of the early 1970s, and its ideology was based on an unsophisticated version of Marxism-Leninism, in which the oppressed nation was substituted for the oppressed proletariat. Unlike the other Kurdish parties, it succeeded in finding a strong following among the poorest and most oppressed strata of Kurdish society. Highly disciplined and strictly organised, preparing its members to carry out and suffer extreme violence, this was the only organisation that was not easily wiped out by the military. Its sheer ability for survival, and from 1984 on its spectacular propaganda successes in a gradually escalating guerrilla war, gained the PKK the grudging admiration of many Kurds who had initially opposed it for various reasons.[21] The PKK is the best-organised non-government movement of Turkey and Kurdistan, making effective use of the presence of large Kurdish communities in western Europe, but also successfully establishing diplomatic relations with various governments

[21] Martin van Bruinessen, "Between guerrilla war and political murder: The Workers' Party of Kurdistan", *Middle East Report* no. 153 (July-August 1988), 40-46.

that are at odds with Turkey.

Although never formally renouncing on its Marxist-Leninist principles,[22] the PKK became more populist as it became more popular. At its Fourth Congress in 1986 it changed its attitude towards religion. Previously it had, like all left-wing movements in Turkey, been strongly opposed to all religion, but in an important self-criticism the party recognised that this attitude had alienated it from important sections of the village population. Henceforth the PKK has not only refrained from attacks on religion but actively courted (Sunni) religious circles -- to the extent that it alienated many Alevi and Yezidi Kurds. Attempting to be all things to all men (and women!), it then also established its own Alevi and Yezidi unions. Indicative of the extent to which religious identities have come to replace socialism as a leading discourse in Kurdish politics is the fact that in the Kurdish Parliament in Exile, that was established earlier this year and that is transparantly PKK-inspired, we find besides overtly PKK-affiliated members, representatives of various religious constituencies (Sunni Muslims, Alevis, Yezidis, Syrian Christians) but none of labour unions, the 'toiling masses', or socialist associations.

The break-up of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia,... and Turkey's Kurdish problem

Territorial integrity is the number one obsession of Turkish politicians and soldiers -- the country after all was born as a result of the struggle against enemies who were cutting up the last remnants of the Ottoman Empire. The break-up of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia seemed to bring the unthinkable suddenly into the realm of possibilities. These were not dangerous precedents for Turkey, though: both states were federations, and the boundaries between the federated states remained unchanged. The cases of Bosnia and Chechnya are much more relevant to the situation of Turkey, the parallels with the situation of the Kurds in Turkey more obvious. Bosnia never created problems for the Turkish authorities, for the separatists here were the Christian Serbs, for

[22] A publishing house in Turkey that publishes literature sympathetic to the PKK is called MELSA, which allegedly stands for Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin-Apo -- Apo being the sobriquet by which the PKK's leader, Abdullah Öcalan, is widely known.

whom there was little sympathy among Muslims anywhere. No Kurdish leader would like to be compared with Karadzic or Mladic, and Turkish official support for an undivided Bosnia was never criticised.

Chechnia is a different case altogether. Popular opinion in Turkey strongly sympathises with the Chechen in their struggle for independence from Russia. Chechen terrorists are heroes in Turkish eyes, and the Chechen demand for autonomy or more appears only as reasonable. The remarkable parallels between Chechen demands and method of struggle on the one hand and those of the Kurdish PKK on the other appear to escape most people in Turkey (though not, of course, the Kurds). Russian prejudices about the Chechen as a bunch of mafiosi find close parallels in the perception of the Kurds in the eyes of many western Turks. The Chechen's evocation of Shaykh Shâmil's resistance against the Tsarist armies finds its parallel in the positive re-evaluation of Shaykh Sa`îd's rebellion against Kemalist Turkey, towards which the Kurdish movement of the 1970's had had a more ambivalent attitude because of its religious and 'feudal' aspects. Whatever the ultimate solution of Russia's Chechen problem will be, it will have a powerful demonstration effect.

One final parallel should be mentioned: both Chechnya and Kurdistan are transit areas for Caspian oil. The competition between Russia and Turkey, who both desired the new pipeline from Baku to run through their territories, has for the time being ended in the compromise situation where both will get their pipeline. The existing line, soon to be upgraded now, on its way to Novorossiisk on the Black Sea crosses Chechnya, and this is generally seen as the most important reason for Russia to hold on to this region. Turkey intends to transport the oil, which will reach it by a new pipeline through Georgia, to its Mediterranean port of Ceyhan.