

Martin van Bruinessen,  
'Between guerrilla war and political murder: The Workers' Party of Kurdistan'  
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## **Between Guerrilla War and Political Murder: The Workers' Party of Kurdistan<sup>1</sup>**

Martin van Bruinessen

The most spectacular development of the past several years in Turkey's Kurdish provinces has been the resumption, in the late summer of 1984, of guerrilla activity. The attacks consist mainly of hit-and-run actions against military personnel and against Kurdish civilians considered "traitors" or "collaborators."

The Turkish press has given uncharacteristically extensive coverage of these developments. After a new wave of armed assaults in the spring of 1985, Interior Minister Yıldırım Akbulut spoke of a guerrilla war instead of isolated actions by "bandits," as in the past.<sup>2</sup> Some newspapers even gave what seemed rather inflated estimates of the number of Kurdish partisans.<sup>3</sup> This guerrilla insurgency, unsettling though it must be in itself, has apparently provided the Turkish authorities with a welcome rationale for the violations of human rights that continue to arouse criticism from Europe.

These guerrilla activities were all carried out by members of the Workers' Party of Kurdistan (PKK). Prior to the 1980 *coup d'état*, the PKK had attracted attention because it was the most radical of the Kurdish organisations and the one most prone to violence, even against rival Kurdish organisations. In the name of the "anti-colonial liberation struggle" it carried out actions not only against the Turkish state but also against the various classes of "collaborators," "liquidationists," "social-chauvinists" and other opponents of its own brand of revolution.

It was also the only organisation whose members were drawn almost exclusively from the lowest social classes — the uprooted, half-educated village and small-town youth who knew what it felt like to be oppressed, and who wanted action, not ideological sophistication. In several of the districts where the PKK had previously been active, it had alienated the majority of the local population because of its uncompromising attitudes and its almost religious belief in violence as a means of

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<sup>1</sup> [This article was written in the spring of 1986 but for reasons beyond the author's control was only published two years later.]

<sup>2</sup> All Turkish newspapers, May 24, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> The daily *Hürriyet* (through which the Turkish secret police frequently leaks information and spreads disinformation) reported on May 14, 1985, the number of "separatists" as 1800, of whom so far 56 had been killed and 569 arrested. According to well-informed Kurdish sources, the PKK never had more than 400 armed men inside Turkey at any one time since its 1984 offensive. *Hürriyet* also reported that five officers, 17 non-commissioned officers, 30 soldiers and two policemen had been killed by these "separatists."

salvation. A few areas excepted, the PKK could not count on much support from the local population when the military stepped in and started making mass arrests.

It is impossible to estimate the degree of popular support the PKK enjoys now in its present guerrilla offensive. Many former opponents seem to have become more sympathetic because it is the only organisation that actively resists the Turkish military. But the increased presence of military and police units all over Kurdistan and the severe reprisals taken against suspected supporters of the guerrilla movement make it unlikely that the PKK will get much active popular support or even food and shelter. From the PKK's own publications one gets the clear impression that its fighters are rather isolated, sleeping in caves high in the mountains and eating whatever animals they can trap.

At the same time, they could hardly carry out so many actions deep inside Turkey without at least some measure of voluntary popular support. Long series of reports in the Turkish press on brutalities committed by the PKK against innocent civilians (based on "confessions" of captured activists and a shrewd mixture of fact and fiction) seem partly aimed at undermining popular sympathies for the guerrilla fighters.<sup>4</sup>

The PKK has also been very active in Western Europe. Before 1980 it had been almost non-existent there, and the large community of Kurdish labour migrants (between a quarter and half a million) was under the influence of several other political organisations. Only after the 1980 *coup d'état* did a number of PKK activists go to Sweden and Germany, where they succeeded in drawing many of the younger generation into the party's orbit and into conflicts with rival organisations. In a relatively short time the PKK built a disciplined network of small local branches and front organisations all over Europe and established a highly efficient publishing machine, turning out with surprising regularity various journals, books and bulletins in Turkish, Kurdish and the major European languages.

The resumption of the guerrilla war worked very well from a propaganda standpoint. By the middle of 1985 the PKK and its front organisations in Europe were probably stronger, both in number of active members and of passive supporters, than any other Kurdish or Turkish organisation in exile. One of the most conspicuous activities of the various Kurdish parties and unions abroad is the organisation of *Newroz* (Kurdish New Year) parties, with Kurdish music and dances and nationalistic speeches. (In Turkey, these celebrations are forbidden, along with anything reminiscent of Kurdish culture.) During the past few years, the PKK's *Newroz* parties showed it was capable of mobilising the largest masses. The participants consisted not only of young militant radicals but also of numerous middle-aged, not highly politicised, people and their families. The PKK's fund-raising campaigns to support the party and the guerrilla struggle were spectacularly successful.

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<sup>4</sup> *Milliyet*, October 1 to 7, 1985; *Tercüman*, July 15 to 22, 1985.

But this is not the only achievement of the PKK in its European exile. It gained international notoriety because of several violent clashes with rival organisations and especially because of a number of political assassinations of which it stands accused. Three of the victims were former leading PKK members who had fallen out with party chief Abdullah Öcalan; another was a prominent member of a Turkish left organisation engaged in a propaganda battle against the PKK. The PKK disclaimed responsibility for the killings, but hardly veiled its approval of them.<sup>5</sup> Given the centrality of revenge in recent PKK "theoretical" writings, and the equally self-righteous attitudes of some of its opponents, these killings will probably not be the last, further alienating European public opinion from the PKK and perhaps from the Kurds as well.<sup>6</sup>

### **Followers of Apo**

The PKK has gained committed supporters at a time when other organisations have crumbled. This may be because it is in some ways more "Kurdish," and reflects present-day Kurdish society better than the others. Some of its political activities resemble the ways in which an ambitious tribal chieftain imposes authority over an ever-widening territory: the same manipulation of violent conflicts, the same way of beating people into taking a position.

Not that the PKK represents in any way the Kurdish tribes. On the contrary, tribal elites are represented in various other parties but not in the PKK. Rather, this party represents the most marginal sections of Kurdish society, the ones who feel excluded from the country's social and economic development, victims of the rural transformation with frustrated expectations. The PKK offers them a simple and appropriate theory, and lots of opportunities for action, heroism and martyrdom.

When the PKK was formally founded towards the end of 1978, its core group had already been together for five years. They had met as members of a student union in Ankara that then incorporated many different left tendencies. Impatient with more experienced Kurdish activists who urged moderation and emphasised basic political education, they were looking for direct action. Members of this central group (among whom were several Turks) went to Kurdistan to find a field for revolutionary activities.

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<sup>5</sup> The murderer of the third PKK dissident was arrested and admitted to being a PKK sympathiser but claimed to have acted independently. The PKK called this murder "a deserved punishment" but denied any direct involvement. An article titled "Crime and Punishment in Kurdistan," in the PKK's widely circulated monthly *Serxwebûn* (December 1985), once more denounced the murdered man as a traitor and pointed out other enemies of the PKK's struggle, one of whom became the next victim.

<sup>6</sup> In one recent publication, the PKK even defines itself as a "revolutionary revenge organisation," seeing the punishment of treason, collaboration and opportunism as one of its duties (*Gallows in Kurdistan, Barracks Culture, and Our Duty of Revolutionary Revenge* [in Turkish], July 1985, p.229).

From the beginning, Abdullah Öcalan was the obvious leader of the group. After the short form of his first name, Apo (which also means "uncle"), members of this group came to be called *Apocu*, "follower of Apo." When various Kurdish organisations were established in the following years, the Apocus declined to join any of them. They had already decided that they themselves were going to be the liberators of Kurdistan. They even signed some of their pamphlets as "National Liberation Army "

The Apocus' political ideas were laid down in the party's 1978 program, which remains unchanged. Kurdistan is seen as a "classical colony," divided among four colonising states that keep it in a state of semi-feudal backwardness. Feudal landowners and a sort of comprador bourgeoisie collaborate with the colonisers, betraying their national identity. Parliamentary representation and education are two other processes by which Kurdistan is integrated into the colonising state, its national identity destroyed and its subjugation perpetuated. The revolution will have to be national and democratic, the national aspect predominating. "Feudal" landlords, being exploiters and collaborators, are among the chief enemies: the program says their lands will be expropriated except those belonging to "patriotic" landlords. (The founding congress was allegedly held on the estate of one such "patriotic" landlord. Within a year of its founding, the party was deeply involved in a tribal war between a "collaborating" and a "patriotic" chieftain.) Later books, brochures and periodicals elaborated upon these basic ideas, stressing the importance of violence as the sole road to liberation and adding ever more groups to the list of enemies of the revolution.

### **First Offensive**

In 1979, the Apocus apparently judged that the time for starting their war of liberation had arrived. For their first offensive they singled out Mehmet Celal Bucak, a powerful chieftain and landlord in Siverek district who was also a member of parliament for the liberal-right Justice Party, thus epitomising their idea of a "collaborator." They accused Bucak of terrorising the surrounding districts through a large band of outlaws working for him, and of extorting money and goods from the peasants. A group of Apocus made an attempt at Bucak's life but failed to kill him. The result was an extremely brutal blood feud between Bucak, aided by his allies (including police and military), and the PKK with one or two small tribes.

In the course of the conflict and the resulting social polarisation, the PKK succeeded in drawing many of the youth of the region away from other political organisations. According to a dissident who then belonged to the PKK's central group, they did not shy away from provocations: he claims that the PKK, in order to get the support of a particular tribe, killed one of its members, making it seem as if he had been murdered by

Bucak's outlaws. He accuses the PKK, or more precisely its leader Öcalan, of systematically engaging in similar murderous provocations.<sup>7</sup>

Elsewhere, too, the PKK intensified its propaganda activities, usually trying to exploit local conflicts to the utmost. In Mardin province, the PKK became embroiled in a protracted blood feud with the KUK (National Liberation of Kurdistan), an organisation long entrenched there among almost all social strata.<sup>8</sup> In other districts there were frequent violent clashes with other Kurdish or Turkish left organisations, similar to those taking place throughout Turkey between organisations contesting the control of rural districts or urban slum quarters. In Kurdistan, the ties of tribe or common locality are strong even under normal circumstances. These violent political conflicts had the effect of further strengthening tribal-regional loyalties and oppositions. The PKK ended up fighting with some tribes against other tribes. In fact, it was not unlike a new tribe itself.

There was also a definite aspect of class struggle to these conflicts. Although the PKK was occasionally allied with a "patriotic" chieftain, tribal or landed elites never gained much influence in it, distinguishing the PKK from most other Kurdish organisations, whose leaderships usually included at least a few such persons. Much of the PKK's violence was directed against the haves in the name of the have-nots. In districts it temporarily controlled, "people's courts" dispensed revolutionary justice (or revolutionary terror). In the mass trials against the PKK after the 1980 coup, most of the defendants belonged to the poorest strata of Kurdish society.

### **Strong State**

The PKK directed its activities not only against landlords and other "collaborators" or against rival organisations. It prepared for the armed struggle needed to separate Kurdistan from Turkey. In 1979, Öcalan, who had withdrawn to Syria, established relations with Palestinian groups, as several Turkish organisations had done earlier. The PKK acquired facilities for guerrilla training in southern Lebanon or Syria, and some 300 PKK activists allegedly went briefly to Syria for training.<sup>9</sup> A guerrilla war proper had not yet begun; the state was so weak in the late 1970s that certain districts were virtually controlled by the PKK or other organisations anyway. Only when the army took over in

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<sup>7</sup> Baki Karer, "Let's understand the real nature of the PKK" (in Turkish, pamphlet dated December 1, 1985). Karer was one of the Turkish members of the original group that founded the PKK; he broke with the party in the autumn of 1985, after which he came to Europe and began denouncing Öcalan. He mentions several similar murders and claims that over 20 persons from the PKK's own ranks have also been murdered.

<sup>8</sup> On the KUK and other Kurdish organisations in Turkey, see Martin van Bruinessen, *The Kurds in Turkey*, *MERIP Reports* no. 121 (February 1984), 6-12 [reprinted in this volume].

<sup>9</sup> According to Karer.

1980 and started combing the countryside did the PKK's activists see themselves facing an unexpectedly strong state. A few groups fought themselves to death; thousands of suspected members and sympathisers were arrested. Some groups remained at large, hiding in the mountains and occasionally carrying out a minor raid. In the course of 1981, the last of these groups withdrew to Syria and Iran.

Gradually improved relations with Palestinian groups, especially Na'if Hawatmeh's Democratic Front, secured the PKK excellent training facilities. Following the Israeli invasion into southern Lebanon in 1982 — during which some ten PKK activists were killed and a somewhat larger number taken prisoner — the party's centre of gravity shifted to northern Iraq. Members of the PKK had, especially after 1980, moved from Turkey into Iranian and Iraqi Kurdistan and established contacts with several Kurdish organisations there. The Iraqi KDP was most responsive to their approaches. It wanted a good working relationship with an organisation in Turkish Kurdistan; its traditional partner, the KUK, seemed much weakened after the military coup, and it had moreover started criticising some of the KDP's policies. The KDP gave the PKK facilities in its areas of Iran and northern Iraq, which prompted a major Turkish military invasion into Iraq in May 1983 and an alleged minor operation in western Iran in 1984.

In the summer of 1984, the PKK announced the formation of the "Kurdistan Liberation Brigades" (HRK), which then carried out their first attacks on army units and police posts in Eastern Turkey from bases in northern Iraq. In spite of rapid and massive counter-measures by Turkey's military, the actions continued and spread over ever larger areas. After a winter lull, the guerrilla war resumed on a larger scale during 1985. A new "Front for the National Liberation of Kurdistan" (ERNK; in spite of its name it consists only of the PKK and possibly a few "independent" individuals) assumed control of guerrilla operations, claiming more than 50 separate actions from June through November 1985 in many different parts of Kurdistan, that wiped out four army platoons and killed another 50 soldiers, over 10 policemen and more than 20 "traitors."<sup>10</sup> Its losses, understandably, have been considerable, too, and the consequent repression has worsened in many parts of Turkish Kurdistan. The severity of the reprisals, and the PKK's intolerance of those who do not support it, appear to have led many villagers to show their allegiance to the state and welcome the army. In several areas, paramilitary forces ("village protectors") have been recruited from among the village population, ostensibly to combat guerrilla activity. This gave certain landlords and chieftains the opportunity to legalise their armed retinues and further solidify their local political leverage.

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<sup>10</sup> *Kurdistan Report* (ERNK's German publicity organ), No.15 (March 1985).

## Trump Cards

It is almost impossible to carry out a guerrilla war without having a relatively safe hinterland to withdraw to. For a combination of reasons, the PKK seems to have lost its freedom of movement from and into northern Iraq, the most suitable base area. (The Iraqi-Turkish border is so mountainous that it cannot be completely controlled; the flat Syrian-Turkish border, by contrast has been sealed with barbed wire and minefields.) Not long after its major military incursion of 1983, Turkey threatened to invade Iraq again in order to compel the Iraqi KDP to cease its support of the PKK.<sup>11</sup> The PKK complicated its situation even more by clashing violently with several other political organisations present in the KDP-controlled zones. In the autumn of 1985, the KDP and its partners in the Iraqi Patriotic Democratic Front,<sup>12</sup> who saw their own struggle endangered by the PKK's presence, ordered it to leave the frontier zone base camps and to stop moving back and forth across the border. The KDP claims that since then the PKK fighters have been staying inside Turkish Kurdistan. If this is true, it does not appear to have hampered their activities much; after a few quiet winter months, the guerrillas launched an early spring offensive in the first weeks of March 1986, attacking several army patrols.

The Turkish press has for some time pointed to Syria (and indirectly, the Soviet Union) as the real force behind the PKK. It claims that the recent guerrilla raids were carried out from Syrian territory, across an almost impregnable border. The past year has seen much diplomatic traffic between Turkey and Syria, in which the PKK was undoubtedly one of the major topics of discussion. Like so many other Middle East opposition movements, the PKK has been welcome there, and apparently gets much friendlier treatment than the other organisations from Turkey, which are simply tolerated but have little freedom of movement. President Asad is probably using the PKK as one trump card in negotiations over Turkey's project to dam the Euphrates River, turning a vast dry area of Eastern Turkey into a major granary but thereby also depriving Syria of its chief supply of irrigation water. It seems unlikely that Syria will give up its support of the PKK and deliver Öcalan to Turkey, as demanded, unless Turkey is willing to make major concessions on the Euphrates issue. Until that time, Damascus will likely allow the PKK to be a serious nuisance to Turkey but not to the point of provoking Ankara to take military measures against Syria.

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<sup>11</sup> Press statement of the Iraqi KDP, October 24, 1984, mentioning large troop concentrations on the border and military flights in Iraqi airspace.

<sup>12</sup> See Martin van Bruinessen, "The Kurds Between Iran and Iraq", *MERIP Middle East Report* No. 141 (July-August 1986), p.14 [reprinted in this volume].



## **Dissent, Revenge, Martyrdom**

Much of the brutal violence and the political murders for which the PKK has become notorious stems from a competition for leadership within the party, and from the tendency to put party discipline and unquestioning obedience above all else. According to dissidents, party members are brainwashed in the training camps: all reading is forbidden except the PKK's own publications; friendships are prevented by encouraging everybody to suspect their comrades as possible agents. Criticism of the party's policies is regarded as betrayal. Dissidents have published some 20 names of former members they say have been killed for defecting from the party or disagreeing with its policies.<sup>13</sup>

Policy disagreements and personal rivalries can hardly be distinguished since criticism of the party line amounted to an attack on the party chief. Öcalan had alienated several members of the original central group, but at the party's second congress in 1982 he emerged victorious. One of his most vocal opponents was allegedly imprisoned, tortured into signing a confession of immoral behaviour, and finally killed. Several central committee members have since left the party; two of them went to Europe, where their accusations against the PKK and against Öcalan personally had a great impact in the Kurdish community. Rival organisations echoed the accusations in the European and Turkish press. Neither the dissidents nor the rivals were entirely disinterested critics, of course. But apart from some obvious exaggerations, their charges are credible, and became even more so when one of these dissidents was murdered, promoting more bloodshed.<sup>14</sup> The PKK contented itself with denouncing the dissidents as Turkish agents and traitors and accusing its rival organisations of plotting with the Turkish authorities to destroy the Kurdish revolution.

Paranoia seems quite rampant among the members of the PKK. They see enemies and traitors everywhere, which is one reason for their violent tendencies. Other factors are the social backgrounds of most members and their youth. About half of the approximately 250 "martyrs" the PKK claims were below the age of 22 when they were killed, and almost all were described as of very humble origins.<sup>15</sup> These are precisely the

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<sup>13</sup> The pamphlet by Karer (note 7) and a similar pamphlet by another prisoner dissident, Nedim Talip (June 25, 1985). The PKK claims that several of those mentioned in these lists are still alive and either in Turkish jails or on operations inside Turkish Kurdistan; it points out that numerous former activists have in fact left the party without suffering any reprisals.

<sup>14</sup> Çetin Güngör (better known by his code name, Semir) was murdered in Stockholm on November 2, 1985 by a PKK supporter. A few days later, a member of a rival Kurdish organisation was murdered in Denmark; many assumed the PKK to be behind this murder as well. A strong anti-PKK reaction followed, leading to violent clashes in several European cities and a number of further deaths. The other dissident central committee member, Baki Karer, lives in hiding and continues his denunciations of the PKK.

<sup>15</sup> Biographies of these "martyrs" are in the *Album of the Martyrs of the PKK's Resistance, 1976-1984* [in Turkish], which was published in Germany.

groups most susceptible to rigorous indoctrination and most receptive to the party's romantic doctrine of revenge.<sup>16</sup>

The PKK's Kurdish rival organisations reproach it for taking up arms in the name of, but without, the Kurdish people, and even against their interests. Under the present conditions, they insist, the PKK's armed actions will never be more than an irritant to the Turkish army, but they do bring severe repression over Kurdistan. This not only alienates large segments of the population from the PKK itself but makes them shy away from all oppositional activities.

But the same repression has also contributed much to strengthening the PKK at the expense of more moderate and more "open" organisations. The latter crumbled, while the large PKK trials lent this party the reputation of being the only serious opposition force. Prison conditions in the Kurdish provinces have been even worse than elsewhere in the country, the trials against Kurdish organisations more in contravention of legal rules than others. One of several trials against the PKK, with almost 500 defendants, ended recently after five years with 23 death sentences; another 32 defendants had meanwhile died in jail as a result of torture, hunger strikes or "suicide."<sup>17</sup>

While a certain liberalisation has come to Turkey and newspapers can write more openly than before, it is clear that the Kurdish problem will remain largely excluded from this liberalisation. The authorities will not allow critics to bring up the issue of cultural rights, let alone autonomy. Martial law, lifted in the other parts of Turkey, remains in force in most of the Kurdish provinces. A recent fact-finding mission of the parliamentary opposition party, the Social Democrat-Populist Party, reported that all of Eastern Turkey had become a sort of concentration camp where every citizen is being treated as a suspect and where oppression, torture and insult by the military are the rule rather than the exception.<sup>18</sup> The province of Tunceli, always a hotbed of political dissent, was characterised as "Turkey's largest prison." The PKK could hardly wish a better illustration of its theory of "colonial oppression" than the brutal behaviour of the army, police and some of the paramilitary "village protectors." The PKK's call to revenge these injuries had to fall on many willing ears. And the absence of real economic

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<sup>16</sup> See note 5. The same book continues: "[The PKK] will not permit that those who committed the cowardly crimes of *betrayal* and *surrender* will benefit from them. It will present the bill of *chauvinism* to all those who have *consciously or unconsciously* been tools of the historical betrayal of the *feudal-compradors*" (p. 220, emphasis mine). This defines almost everyone not supporting the PKK as a target for revenge. Action is preferred over political reflection: "Pseudo-socialist sermons will not save us any better than the religious sermons that they have come to replace. Violence ... will in Kurdistan not only be the midwife assisting in the delivery [of a new society] but it will create everything anew. Revolutionary violence has to play this role in Kurdistan, and it will, we say, assume the form of *revolutionary revenge*" (p. 236).

<sup>17</sup> A defendant in a trial against another organisation recently claimed that 60 prisoners had "died" in Diyarbakır's notorious prison during the past five years, and not 32 as admitted officially (*Milliyet*, March 2, 1986).

<sup>18</sup> *Cumhuriyet*, February 12, 1986.

development in the Kurdish provinces insures that the number of marginalised youth who are most receptive to the PKK's radical ideas only goes on increasing.

### **Postscript**

This article was written in the spring of 1986. Most of it still stands, but a few developments deserve some comment.

In spite of, perhaps partly because of, extensive Turkish military operations and severe pressure on the civilian population, the PKK has been able to consolidate itself and to step up its operations deep inside Turkey. Its major targets have been Turkish military patrols and the paramilitary "village protectors," but also include oil installations and radar stations (among them the US radar station in Mardin). Many of its actions have been spectacularly successful and widely reported in the Turkish press. In October 1986, the PKK held its third congress and confidently announced that its struggle would soon enter the next stage with the establishment of "liberated areas" in Turkish Kurdistan. To all appearances, PKK fighters continue to use northern Iraq as a relatively safe haven, but it is unclear whether they still have major bases there. Turkish military operations against alleged PKK bases in Iraq have not had any noticeable effect. In the May 1983 invasion the Turkish army suffered losses and failed to force the Iraqi Kurdish guerrillas to surrender the PKK activists there. In August 1986, the Turkish air force co-ordinated air raids with an Iraqi army attack on areas in northern Iraq that were held by the Iraqi KDP, causing many casualties (165 dead, according to radio Baghdad). Most or all victims were, however, Iraqi Kurds, not PKK fighters. On March 4, 1987, the Turkish air force again bombed alleged PKK camps in northern Iraq. The PKK retaliated almost immediately with a number of attacks on military personnel and government property in districts wide apart and far from the Iraqi border. Its European representatives claimed that their party had suffered no losses at all in the bombing and that its own actions had killed around 30 people.

Apart from these interventions in Iraq, Turkish attempts to break the backbone of Kurdish nationalism and of the PKK in particular have consisted of more forced assimilation, close and brutal police surveillance, and massive resettlement. Many families, sometimes entire villages, have been deported from districts where the PKK had been active. The population of most of the border districts is being resettled in strategic villages, and a strip along the border will be entirely depopulated. These policies are not restricted to the border areas. The mountainous province of Tunceli (previously Dersim), always a hotbed of political opposition and where both the PKK and a radical left group regularly carry out minor actions, will be among the first where a new "forest protection" law will result in more than half of the villages being deported.

In the Kurdish communities in Europe, the PKK continues to wield the greatest influence but fierce rivalries with other organisations have resulted in further bloodshed. In March and April 1987, young gunmen generally believed to be PKK members opened

fire at several *Newroz* parties of the PKK's rivals in Germany and Holland, wounding many people. Unknown persons set fire to several offices of one organisation and attempted to kill one of its leaders. The target organisations perceived in this new wave of violence a well co-ordinated PKK offensive aiming at the "elimination of all enemies" as vowed at its third congress.

Because of the PKK's reputation for violence, it has become common to suspect it of many an unsolved crime. Such was the case with the murder of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme. Immediately after the murder, on February 28, 1986, public speculations about PKK involvement were rife. The motive was believed to be the Swedish police's determination that the PKK was a "terrorist organisation" and the refusal of a visa to PKK chief Öcalan. Hundreds of Kurds were interrogated but no tangible evidence was found. When all other lines of investigation came to dead ends, Stockholm's police chief publicly claimed he had found a PKK connection; the evidence, however, seems extremely weak and the reasoning highly speculative. Nevertheless, it has reinforced in the public eye the association of the PKK, and by extension the Kurds, with blind political violence once again.