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The Influence of the Kurdistan Regional Government-Turkey Relations on the Kurdish Question in Turkey

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Abstract

This thesis studies the influence of the relations between the KRG and the Turkish government on the Kurdish Question and the peace process in Turkey, and it looks into the potential and limits of the KRG to be more effective and involved in the peace process in Turkey. The relations between the KRG and Turkish government have grown fast politically, economically, in energy sector and in terms of security in the past six years parallel to the progress in the Kurdish Question in Turkey. Under the leadership of AK Party, the developments in the Kurdish Question have been quite a rollercoaster full of progress and deadlocks. The thesis employs a qualitative research method; the analysis is based on nine interviews with politicians from different parties in Turkey and KR-I and some official statements of the political parties in Turkey and KR-I.

The thesis argues that the KRG-Turkey relations have contributed to smoothening the public opinion in Turkey toward the Kurdish Question, and the KRG has the potential to contribute to the peace process in case of the disarmament of the PKK. On the other hand, the thesis looks into the power struggle between the Kurdish political parties, which has limited/can further limit the KRG's involvement in the peace process.

Keywords: Kurdish Question; Peace Process in Turkey; KRG-Turkey Relation; Barzani; PKK; Two-Level Game Theory

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Abbreviations

KR-I	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
AK Party/JDP	Justice and Development Party (in Turkish: <i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i>)
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party (in Kurdish: <i>Parti Dimokrati Kurdistan</i>)
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (in Kurdish: <i>Yekêtiy Nîştîmaniy Kurdistan</i>)
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (in Kurdish: <i>Partiya Karkeren Kurdistanî</i>)
HDP	Peoples' Democratic Party (in Turkish: <i>Halkların Demokratik Partisi</i> ; in Kurdish: <i>Partiya Demokratik a Gelan</i>)
BBO	billion barrels of oil
TCM	trillion cubic mete
PYD	Democratic Union Party (in Kurdish: <i>Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat</i>)
KCK	Kurdistan Communities Union (in Kurdish: <i>Komo Civaken Kurdistan</i>)
BDP	Peace and Democracy Party (in Turkish: <i>Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi</i>)
DTP	Democratic Society Party (in Turkish: <i>Demokratik Toplum Partisi</i>)
DEHAP	Democratic People's Party (in Turkish: <i>Demokratik Halk Partisi</i>)
HADEP	People's Democracy Party (in Turkish: <i>Halkın Emek Partisi</i>)
DEP	Democracy Party (in Turkish: <i>Demokrasi Partisi</i>)
ÖZDEP	Freedom and Democracy Party (in Turkish: <i>Özgürlük ve Demokrasi Partisi</i>)
ÖZEP	Freedom and Equality Party (in Turkish: <i>Özgürlük ve Eşitlik Partisi</i>)
HEP	People's Labor Party (in Turkish: <i>Halkın Emek Partisi</i>)

SETA	Foundation for Political, Social and Economic Research (in Turkish: <i>Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Arařtırmaları Vakfı</i>)
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
DTK	Democratic Society Congress
YPG	People's Protection Units (in Kurdish: <i>Yekîneyên Parastina Gel</i>)
PCWK	Peoples' Council of Western Kurdistan
KNC	Kurdish National Council

1. Introduction

In an atmosphere never seen before with Kurdish and Turkish flags flying side by side, the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan (current President) greeted the President of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)¹ Masoud Barzani in his Kurdish clothes in the Kurdish city Diyarbakir, Turkey on November 16, 2013. The event attracted media nationwide in Turkey and Barzani's speech was translated from Kurdish to Turkish, including his concluding statement: "Long live Turk-Kurd brotherhood, long live freedom, long live peace" (Uras 2013). In addition, Erdogan was the first ever Turkish Prime Minister to pronounce the word "Kurdistan" publically. The event and its small components would have been a nightmare ten years ago and probably someone would have been sentenced for telling other about this dream in the 20th century in Turkey.

Even though the celebration seemed like a bright and historical achievement for the Kurds, soon after the meeting different parties expressed controversial perspectives: "Just before the election Mr. Barzani visit Erdogan, and Erdogan received him in Diyarbakir. If you ask people in Bawkr [Kurdistan of Turkey], they will tell you that this was a direct support to AKP[...] This is completely un-expectable attitude" (interview with Gur 2015). In other words, Barzani's visit irked the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)-Peace and Democracy Party (BDP)² camp in the opposite of the Barzani-Erdogan camp. Although all of the sides claim to want peace and thrive for finding a solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey as their immediate agenda, the results, their actions, and their statements have shown otherwise.

The Kurdish Question generally and on country based has been widely discussed by many scholars from historical, ethnic, national, and cultural perspectives. This study focuses on the Kurdish Question in Turkey. However, the nature of my research question dictates to touch

¹ In this study, the term "Kurdistan Region of Iraq" or KR-I as an abbreviation and "Kurdistan Regional Government" or KRG will be used to refer to the "northern Iraq" or the Kurdish government in northern Iraq. Also, some of the interviewees refer to the KR-I as south Kurdistan (Kurdistan Bashur) or northern Iraq. The KR-I and KRG have been widely used by many scholars. To further clarify, the KRG is the official government of the KR-I, which a lot people and scholars get confused and mix both interchangeably.

² On April 22, 2014, the BDP dissolved itself into the Peoples' Democratic Party (in Turkish: Halkların Demokratik Partisi; in Kurdish: Partiya Demokratik Gelan).

upon certain issues and events in KR-I and the Kurdish speaking communities in Syria, *Rojava*³. Simply, KR-I is the departing point of my thesis, and Rojava is the conjunction where all of the different parties and forces meet.

1.1. Significant of the Study

Because the relations between the KRG and Turkish government are new and keep growing, there have been a lot of academic and scholarly attentions on this direct line between Erbil⁴ and Ankara⁵, especially the economic and energy relations. On the other side, the Kurdish Question in Turkey and the PKK have been dissected and investigated by many scholars, which makes writing about them a repetition to the existing literature. This thesis places each one of three (KRG, Turkish Government, PKK/Kurdish political parties in Turkey) on an angle of a triangle and investigates the effect of the sides on each other: more specifically the effect of the KRG-Turkey relation of the Kurdish Question in Turkey; this triangle approach for bringing all of the three variables together is a new contribution to the available knowledge and literature about the Kurdish Question in Turkey.

In addition, I would like to show level of *brotherhood* in Kurdish politics and show to my readers how the politics actually work on the macro level. In other words, how united or/and how much driven by interests are the Kurdish politicians and parties when it comes to the Kurdish cause.

1.2. Historical Background

The Kurdish Question has been one of the most dynamic issues in the Middle East ever since the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, which divided the Kurdish mother land between four countries: Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria. However, this was only the beginning of a long century of Kurdish movements and rebellions in all of the four parts of Kurdistan. Nowadays, the Kurds

³ Rojava literary means “west” in Kurdish. To put it in context, it means the west of Great Kurdistan as it is divided between Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria, and the Syrian part is the Rojava or west part.

⁴ Erbil is the capital of the KR-I. The city has another name, which is Hawler, but in this thesis, I will use the most academically and internationally used name, Erbil, and sorry if this is upsetting for some Kurds, because they would rather stick with Hawler.

⁵ Ankara is the capital of Turkey where all the government and the parliament are based.

are the biggest ethnic group in the world without a state and the fourth largest one in the Middle East with approximately 25-35 million people (BBC 2014).

The Kurds in Turkey have been thriving for an independent Kurdistan since the foundation of the first Turkish Republic by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923. It is no secret that Ataturk used the Kurds during war of independence against Britain, France, and Greece, and he promised “wherever the population of a district [liva] is Kurdish, it will govern itself autonomously. Aside from this, whenever one speaks of the people of Turkey, they (the Kurds) should also be included... Now, the Turkish Grand National Assembly is made up of empowered representatives both of Turks and of Kurds, and the two elements have joined their interests and destinies” (Mango 2002, 15). Quite the contrary, after the foundation of the Republic, he referred to the Kurds as “mountainous Turks” but forgot to speak their mother tongue (Gunes and Zeydanlioglu 2014, 9). The Kurds reacted to Ataturk’s alienation plan with Sheikh Said’s uprising, which had both Islamic and Kurdish elements, but after several months, the uprising was crushed, and Sheikh Said and 46 of his friends were hung publicly on June 29, 1925 in center of Diyarbakir (Cleveland and Bunton 2009, 182).

Fearing the religious nature of the Sheikh Said’s revolution, Ataturk’s government produced a secret plan to re-engineer the demography of the Kurdish populated area: the “Reform Plan for the East” resulted in assimilation of millions of Kurds overtime (Candar 2013, 65). The hostility of the government was unlimited toward the Kurds, which resulted in several Kurdish revolutions that were all crushed by the Turkish military. For example, to suppress the Dersim Rebellion by Seyid Riza in 1937-1938, the Turkish military massacred nearly 13,000 people. Historically known as “Dersim Massacre,” the government had denied the massacre until recently on November 2011, when the Turkish the former Prime Minister publically apologized to the people of Dersim (65).

Starting from the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Kurdish movements in Turkey entered a new phase with the creation of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan/PKK) with the leadership of Abdullah Ocalan (Apo) in 1978; however, the official PKK’s arm struggle began in 1984 with a range of minimal and maximal demands, with the basic idea of pressuring Kurdish political and cultural autonomy in Turkey. The Turkish governments took every measure to eliminate the PKK threat in Turkey, which resulted in declaring the state of

emergency in most of the Kurdish cities in southeast of Turkey and a full militarization of an ethnic issue. By the late 1990s, it was estimated the military destroyed more than 2,300-3,000 Kurdish villages, 37,000 casualties, and about two million Kurds had fled or been forcibly relocated (Cleveland and Bunton, 530). With the arrest of the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, on February 1999 and the coming of the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) in the early 2000s (accompanied by the regional and international changes), the realpolitik of Turkey has leaned toward the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq—which resulted in a decade of less violence, compared to the previous two decades, between the PKK and the Turkish government.

1.3. Topic Background and Definitions

Unlike the previous governments, the AK Party oriented government has succeeded and survived to transform Turkish foreign policy and some domestic policies regarding the Kurdish Question in Turkey since its inauguration in 2002. The Kurdish Question had always been a redline in Turkey, and any President or Prime Minister, who wanted to deal with the issue in nonmilitary way, was removed or threatened to be removed from power. There is no doubt the ideas of current Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, have played a major role in these transformations.

One major change in the Turkish foreign policy has been pursuing a friendly diplomatic foreign policy with the surrounding countries or, as Davutoğlu himself calls it in his *Strategic Depth*, “zero problems with neighbors,” which is one of his five main principles: balance between freedom and security, zero problems with neighbors, multidimensional and multi-track policies, a new diplomatic discourse based on firm flexibility, and rhythmic diplomacy (Sozen 2010, 110). Even though Davutoğlu’s zero problem policy has been the topic of criticism by many scholars for its failure in the Middle East, especially after the developments in Syria and Turkey’s heavy involvement with the anti-Assad groups, these criticisms will be outside the scope of this study, because the KRG enjoys very good relations with Turkey, which is one of the main achievements for Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East.

Turkey as a part of its foreign policy had always wanted to deal with the Iraqi central government in Baghdad and ignore the KRG and its leader to a level where Erdogan called Barzani a “tribe leader” and a supporter of the PKK “terrorist group” on August 2007 (Hurriyet

Daily News 2007). But soon, Ankara realized the road to Baghdad goes through the KRG. The year 2008 turned out to be a historical turning point in the Turkey-KRG relations due to the Turkish official recognition of the KRG after the US Congressional bill (FY2008, HR 1585, September 2007) that recognized Iraq's federal structure and the Kurdish region as legal entities, and the KRG's independent contracting of oil deals with foreign companies. On March 2011, Erdogan became the first Turkish Prime Minister to ever visit Kurdistan Region since Iraq was created. Comparing Erdogan's 2007 speech with his historical speech in 2010, one can clearly see the difference: "That [we] will build a very solid bridge in bilateral relations between Iraq and Turkey and between the Kurdistan Region and Turkey especially. We [Erdogan and Barzani] will be in touch. The two countries also engage in economic cooperation. We will act together on energy and infrastructure" (Charountaki 2012, 199). Nowadays, the KRG and Turkey are strong strategic, diplomatic, political, and economic, and more specifically energy partners in the Middle East, especially with the leadership of the two ruling parties on both sides: the AK Party and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

From the beginning of its foundation in 2001 by the former members of the pro-Islamic Rafah Party, the AK Party tried to distance itself from representing an Islamic agenda and wanted to "change the structure of the state towards more pluralism, human rights, and fuller democracy," which greatly would aim at bringing new perspectives to the long Kurdish issue in Turkey (Pusane 2014, 85). The year following the 2002 election, the AK Party-dominated Turkish Grand National Assembly passed several new laws allowing for TV and radio stations to broadcast in other languages besides Turkish, allowing new born children to have Kurdish names, encouraging people to go back to their evacuated villages, and the amendment of the anti-terror law, which was followed by the release of the Kurdish politician Layla Zana in 2004, who served ten years in prison for her political ideas. On February 2008, Erdogan announced the opening of the first Kurdish satellite TV channel called TRT6⁶ operating within Turkey as a part of the Turkish Radio Television (TRT) network and permitting the use of certain Kurdish letters publically: q, w, and x (85-87).

⁶ It is worth mentioning that TRT6 was referred to as TRT *shesh* in media and among the public; the word *shesh* is the Kurdish word for six. On its fifth anniversary, the name of the channel was officially changed to TRT Kurdi on January 1, 2015.

In 2009, the AK Party-oriented government announced its Kurdish Opening initiative with the aim of fully disarming the PKK members and reintegrating them into the society, but soon after the Habur incident⁷ on June 2009, the initiative ran out of fuel. The second phase of AK Party's attempt to solve the Kurdish Question started on December 27, 2012 when Erdogan stated publically that negotiation with the imprisoned leader of the PKK, Ocalan, would continue until both sides would reach a conclusion, which introduced the term "reconciliation process" to the Turkish mainstream media.

Unlike the previous classified talks between Ocalan and the Turkish Intelligent Agency (MIT), the reconciliation process has allowed for the negotiation with the presence of members of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP, which dissolved itself in HDP) to visit Ocalan in Imrali and act as a messenger between Ocalan, Qandil, and the public. Only in 2013, the delegates of the HDP visited Ocalan fourteen times and eleven times 2014. The reconciliation process has been full of ups and downs, but the visits to Imrali have always continued.

It is important to understand the gravity of the PKK in the Kurdish Question in Turkey, because the negotiation process is directly happening between Ocalan, the PKK, the HDP on one camp and the Turkish government on the other camp. Being the only Kurdish armed power in Turkey for the past three decades, the PKK takes the lion's share in representing the Kurdish Question in Turkey. In addition, the PKK is involved in the KR-I, too, especially after the attacks of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) on the KR-I, which gives the party more ground on a local and regional level, while keeping in mind the periodic tensions between the political parties from the KR-I and the PKK.

The events in Rojava are heavily connected to the Kurdish part of Turkey because not only the PKK has an influence on the Democratic Union Party (PYD), but also because of the massive public's reactions for "Turkey's silence" when the ISIS attacked Kobani, which resulted in massive protests throughout Turkey (Kaur 2014). Overall, the achievements in Rojava will be

⁷ As a part of the Kurdish Opening or Democratic Opening and according to an agreement between the PKK and AK Party, eight members of the PKK organization were to return to Turkey on June 2009 from the Makhmor camp in the Qandil Mountain, but the eight guerillas were greeted by thousands of the PKK followers, which created a backlash and resulted in Turkish and Kurdish nationalist protests all of the country. The government decided to stop the return of the PKK members and the arrest of the already arrived eight members. Jenkins, H. Gareth. "Squaring the Circle: The PKK Return to Violence and Turkey's Intractable Kurdish Problem." In *Turkey Analyst*. Mar. 7, 2011. Vol. 4, no. 5. <http://goo.gl/ASqC0r>.

great gains for the PKK, and it will give the party more leverage on the negotiation table. Understanding the representation of the Kurdish Question in Turkey by the PKK is an important starting point of this thesis.

1.4. Research Question

This study tries to answer one question: To what extent have the relations between the KRG and Turkish government influenced the Kurdish Question and the peace process in Turkey? In order to answer this question, this research addresses the following sub-questions:

1. To what extent have the KRG-Turkey relations contributed to softening the public's perspective toward the Kurds in Turkey?
2. How much has the KRG contributed and can contribute to the disarmament process of the PKK organization?
3. How *strong* have the relations between the KRG and the pro-Kurdish political parties, especially with the Peoples' Democratic Party (in Turkish: Halkların Demokratik Partisi/HDP) and the PKK been? Why?

1.5. Disposition

This study is divided into six chapters. The end of each chapter hints at the one following it, which makes the flow of the thesis.

Chapter one introduces the topic to the readers, grabs their attention and moves their curiosity about the significance of the topic. It also allows the readers to be more familiar with the historical and geographical background of the topic, and the chapter contains definitions of all of possible terms and phrases to help readers engage with the content of the thesis. Finally, it introduces the thesis question, which is followed by three sub-questions to help systematically answer the main research question.

Chapter two carefully examines the existing literature related to the thesis topic and helps the readers understand the scope of the study through four sections: development in relations between KRG and Turkey, a multifaceted Kurdish struggle, the evolution of the peace process,

and Rojava. Furthermore, it guides the readers for more additional readings related to certain issues if they are interested.

Chapter three lays out the methodological approach and tools used in the thesis. The study employs qualitative approach, and the data collection method is interviewees with politicians from different political background in Turkey and KR-I. The chapter also elaborates thoroughly on the ethical consideration and the languages employed during the interviews and their effects on the environments of the interviews. Limitations and security considerations are one section of the chapter, where I talk about how limited my options were during my interviews due to the security changes and how I had to improvise in the best possible way. Finally, the chapter ends with talking about the use of MAXQDA as the main software to do the coding of the interviews and how specifications of the program are used in analyzing the codes.

Chapter four is the theory chapter, where I talk about Putnam's two-level game theory and how it combines intentional and domestic politics together. In addition, I talk about the zero-sum and the variable-sum concepts of power; the former argues the gain of a party happens at the expense of another party somewhere else while the latter argues that mutual gain and loss are actually possible and the total sum of the gains and losses do not add up to zero.

Chapter five is the findings chapter when I go over my themes crafted out of my data and findings. I have three themes in this chapter and they best serve in answering my research sub-questions.

The final chapter is my analysis part of the study. In my analysis I go over the themes mentioned in my findings chapter and elaborate on them in detail and look at each of them from a possible theory angle. The analysis could be divided into two parts: first, where I answer how KRG-Turkey relations contributed and can contribute to the Kurdish Question and peace process in Turkey; second, how limited KRG is getting further involved in the peace process in Turkey.

2. Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of the relations between the KRG and the Turkish government on the Kurdish Question and the peace process in Turkey. Before the start of this journey, it is important to review the existing literature in order to grasp the contemporary debates about different sections of my research topic. Thus, the following chapter introduces some selected literature that are the most related to my thesis with the aim of representing the complexity of my study due to the geographical stretch and not having direct literature discussing the topic. It is important to realize that because of the lack of direct literature, I am reviewing the literature about each part of research question: KRG-Turkey relations, Kurdish Question in Turkey, peace process, and Rojava. The chapter is divided into four sections to help the readers understand the flow and the different angles of the research.

Firstly, I will present the literature about KRG-Turkey relations and the major discussions scholars are revolving around while talking about these relations. Next, I will present the literature about the Kurdish Question and the representation of the Kurdish cause in Turkey by the Kurdish political parties and the PKK. Then, I will present the contemporary debates about the nature and the evolution of the peace process in Turkey. Finally, I will end up with the new academic and media attention on Rojava.

2.1. New Developments between the KR-I and Turkey

The developments of relations between the KRG and the Turkish government since 2008 have attracted a lot regional and international attentions, which resulted in many academic journals, books, reports, and articles. Understanding the nature of these economic, diplomatic, and political relations is very crucial as departure point of this thesis. However, it is important to mention these relations have recently gotten strong while before 2008 Turkey had always wanted to ignore the KRG. Marianna Charountaki divides the Turkey-KRG relations into four phases: from the first Gulf War until the fall of Saddam Hussein, from 2003 until the recognition of the KRG in 2008, from Turkish opening toward the KRG until the withdrawal of the US forces in 2011, and lastly the merge of energy and economic interests between both sides since 2011 (Charountaki 2012). Turkey's attitude has changed toward the KRG, because while in 2007 the former Prime Minister refused to meet the President of the KRG and called him a "tribe leader...

KDP supports PKK” (Charountaki, 191), on March 2011 Erdogan’s first official visit to Erbil resulted in smoothening the relations and was followed by many more official visits from both sides and a complete merge in the economy and energy sectors.

Energy is the dominant factor behind the KRG-Turkey relations, and many scholars have written about this factor. Most of their writings circle around the same points: 1) The KR-I is a new untapped land with an estimated 45 billion barrel of oil and 100-200 trillion cubic feet of resaved gas, which resulted in pouring of many oil companies, especially the Turkish ones, into the KR-I (Ayhan, Barzani and Demir 2014). 2) In order for the KRG to have access to the world’s market, Turkey is the only access for KRG’s natural resources, but at the same time, Turkey’s demand for natural resources is expected to almost double in the next decade given Turkey’s plan to be one of the top biggest economies in the world. 3) The constitutional energy disputes between the KRG and the Iraqi central government have forced the KRG to find Ankara as an alternative, and many incidents forced Turkey to distance itself from Baghdad and side with the KRG (Erkmin 2014).⁸ So far, the more KRG and Turkey have gotten closer, the more both of them have been distanced from Baghdad.

Besides Turkey’s opening, the KRG itself has been opportunistic in using its potential to produce a successful foreign policy in order to cope with regional and international changes; the three major variables that have shaped KRG’s foreign policy are hydrocarbon discovery in the KR-I, diplomatic relations with US and the neighboring countries, and economic development and political relations with Turkey (Zulal 2012, 150). It is worth mentioning that the US government has tried to smooth the relations between Ankara and Erbil, especially after the discovery of natural resources in the KR-I. In a scholarly journal article “Turkey’s Dramatic Shift toward Iraqi Kurdistan: Politics before Peace Pipelines,” Matthew J. Bryza⁹ talks about the relations between Ankara-Erbil from the US perspective and shows how current and updated the Washington DC government has always been with all of the steps. The relations between Washington DC and Ankara have been fragile for a while, especially after the Sulaimani

⁸ For more details see: Park, Bill. *Turkey-Kurdish Regional Government Relations after the U.S. Withdrawal from Iraq: Putting the Kurds on the Map?* United States Army War College Press, 2014.

⁹ Matthew J. Bryza served a US ambassador in Azerbaijan from 2011 to 2012, and he is currently the Director of the International Centre for Defense Studies in Tallinn.

incident¹⁰ until November 2007 when President Bush announced the PKK was “an enemy of Turkey and therefore an enemy of the United States” (Bryza 2012, 58). From his perspective, the betterment in relations between DC and Ankara helped a lot in Turkey’s attitude toward the KRG, especially after Ahmet Davutoglu became the Turkish Foreign Minister in 2009.

No matter how close and how marrying Turkey and KRG’s energy and economic goals are, the Kurdish Question in Turkey, the PKK, and Rojava have always had a level of effect on the Ankara-Erbil relations. Unfortunately, very few scholars look at the KRG-Turkey relations beyond the economic and energy drive, thus overlooking one crucial aspect: while the KRG was only seen “as part of the problem” now it can be part of the solution between the PKK and the Turkish state (Tol 2014, 5). Parallel to Turkey’s maintenance to the opposition groups against the Assad’s regime in Syria, Turkey and the KRG have wanted to influence the politics in Rojava.

2.2. One Aim and a Multifaceted Kurdish Question in Turkey

The Kurds in Turkey have tried different methods to pursue their ethnic identity, especially since the mid1980s. Such methods, which resulted in violent activities by the outlawed PKK organization with the leadership of Abdullah Ocalan (Apo), triggered not only violent responses from the Turkish government, but also the closure of all of the Kurdish political parties by the Turkish Supreme Court of Appeals (Yargıtay Cumhuriyet Başsavcılığı), due to their affiliation with the PKK (Celep 2014). In addition, this gave the Turkish government an absolute excuse to militarize an ethnic issue and to look at the Kurdish Question from a security perspective. On one side, the PKK represented the arm struggle against the Turkish state. On the other hand, there have been many Kurdish political parties to represent the legal face of the Kurdish demands.

¹⁰ The Sulaimani incident or the Hood event happened on July 4, 2003 when the US troops captured and hooded 11 Turkish soldiers in northern Iraq, Sulaimani after they were accused for their attempts to assassinate the governor of Kirkuk. Michael Howard and Suzanne Goldenberg, “US Arrest of Soldiers Infuriates Turkey,” *The Guardian*, July 7, 2003: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jul/08/turkey.michaelhoward>.

2.2.1. PKK

Since its foundation, the PKK has been on the frontline of presenting the Kurdish issue in Turkey and thriving to revitalize a pan-Kurdish identity through advocating Marxist revolutionary ideas, which resulted in three decades of bloody history against the Turkish military and approximately 40,000 lives. Michael M. Gunter is one of the famous writers who has been writing about the Kurdish Question in Iraq and Turkey and the PKK since the mid 1980s. Gunter discusses the dominance of the PKK over the Kurdish Question in Turkey and how the party has appeared under different names since its foundation on November 27, 1978 by Ocalan.¹¹ The PKK has always tried to mobilize the Kurdish diaspora in Europe and to hijack their Kurdish sympathy: “The PKK has created a broadly supportive and legitimized network of legal experts, human rights activists, and environmental specialists, along with connections to scholars, media professionals, and technology skilled members of the Kurdish diaspora” (Gunter 2013, 82).

Though the party was founded in 1978, the PKK organization started its arm struggle in 1984, and its bloody struggle can be divided into two phases: 1984-1999 and 2004-2010. In the period 1984-1999, a total number of 31,000 casualties were recorded (Turkish Security Forces: 5,842; Civilians: 5,390; PKK: 19,786) and in the second period, a total number of 10,051 casualties were recorded (Turkish Security Forces: 742; Civilians: 1,042; PKK: 8,264) (Sarihan 2013, 94-95). Ali Sarihan concludes that the intensity of the conflict was reduced in the second period of the conflict after Ocalan was captured in 1999 and “wanted to free himself from prison, and, to this aim, he abandoned his position to make an agreement with Turkey” (100). Though Sarihan’s writing proves the decline of violence since 1999, the sources for his data are taken from the Turkish Ministry of Defense, Turkish Military and Police Forces, which could be bias in terms of presenting the data because these establishments are undoubtedly represent one side of the conflict.

It is also important to notice that Kurdish nationalism in Turkey has been greatly tightened to the PKK. One of the great books on Kurdish nationalism in Turkey is written by Cengiz Gunes, who discusses PKK’s attempts to mobilize the masses and democratize its discourse from the early 1990s. Also, the aim of the PKK has changed over time from creating

¹¹ For more details see: Gunter, Michael. "Two and Five." In *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997.

an independent Kurdish state to having an autonomous Kurdish region within the boarder of Turkey, where the ethnic rights of Kurdish people are protected (Gunes 2012, 124).

2.2.2. *Kurdish Legal Political Parties*

The PKK indeed takes most of the recent historical and contemporary attentions of the Kurdish Question in Turkey; nevertheless, the Kurdish political parties have always been active and present in representing the *legal* face of the Kurdish national and ethnic demands. The definition of legality in Turkey has been quite elastic for the Kurdish political parties depending on the ruling party in Turkey, because what seems to be legal now would have been absolutely impossible a decade or two decades ago.

It is no secret that all of the Kurdish legal political parties have been legal for a while before they were banned and closed by the Turkish Supreme Court of Appeals for their accusation and “affiliation” with the outlawed PKK organization. Staying out of the shadows of the PKK has always been the main challenge of every Kurdish political party in Turkey. The second major challenge up-to-date has been the 10% constitutional electoral threshold since the 1980 coup, which has prevented Kurdish candidates from the electoral opportunities: “Nomination of a candidate for the Presidency from among the members of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey or from outside of the Assembly shall require a written proposal of twenty deputies. Furthermore, political parties with more than ten percent of the valid votes in sum in the latest parliamentary elections may nominate a joint candidate” (The Executive Power 1982, 48). The current Kurdish political parties, namely HDP, in the Turkish National Assembly have to maneuver the political barriers to increase their parliamentary representations. For instance, the DTP from only 22 parliamentary seats in the 2007 election managed to win 36 seats in the 2011 election with the BDP with having the candidates run on independent list (Celep 2014, 173).

Table 1: The list of the Kurdish political parties from the 1990s that either closed or dissolved themselves in other parties.

Party Names	Date Opened	Date Closed
HEP	June 7, 1990	July 14, 1993
ÖZEP	June 25, 1992	Dissolved itself to merge HEP
ÖZDEP	October 19, 1992	November 23, 1993
DEP	June 21, 1991	June 16, 1994
HADEP	May 11, 1994	March 13, 2003
DEHAP	October 24, 1997	November 19, 2005 (dissolved itself)
DTP	November 9, 2005	December 11, 2009
BDP	May 2, 2008	April 22, 2014 (dissolved to join HDP)

The 10% constitutional barrier coupled with PKK’s shadow have crippled the Kurdish legal face, which has always been dominated by leftist ideas; writers like Celep argue that the Kurdish political parties would contribute to the democratization in Turkey if they were to be treated differently from their already banned ancestors because of their liberal ideology (Celep 2014, 171). For example, the BDP-HDP has been the only political party to have a woman as one of the co-presidents of the party and to have the highest female parliament members (173). For Gunes Cengiz, the pro-Kurdish democratic discourses not only ask for the recognition of their Kurdish identity and cultural rights, but also seek to universalize the Kurdish demands for equality and democracy in Turkey “via an equivalential articulation of the various other particularistic demands that workers, women, religious minorities and other ethnic minorities have for democracy” (Gunes, 154). In addition, their main focus have been to lessen and transform antagonism to “agonism”, but as always in the political arena and popular media the pro-Kurdish discourse have been presented as separatist, against Turkey’s territorial integrity, and pro-terrorist (154-155).

2.3 The Peace Process and its Evolution

Unlike the previous governments, when the AK Party came to power in Turkey a new phase for approaching the Kurdish Question was introduced. Both the government and the PKK understand that bloodshed is not the solution and neither side can win the war. So, the government took brave step in trying to de-securitize the issue and to give it a political and civil

dimension. Though both initiatives in 2005 and 2009 failed and the war with the PKK started again, on December 28, 2012, the Prime Minister at the time Erdogan reintroduced the Kurdish Question to the Turkish mass media and promised serious round of negotiations to peacefully solve the Kurdish issue. The cost of securitizing the Kurdish Question has resulted in the displacement of the millions Kurdish people and destruction of thousands of villages in addition to the 45,000 lives and 150-400 billion US dollars lost in fighting the PKK (Ensaroglu 2013, 9). Despite the attempts of all sides to reach a solution, “the dark shadow of the past experience makes it difficult to overcome reservations” (7).

In order to be familiar with a general overview of the current peace process, the SETA Foundation has created a timeline called “Step by Step of the Reconciliation Process,” which walks the readers through all of the related events to the Kurdish Reconciliation process since Erdogan’s announcement on December 2012 (SETA Foundation n.d.). The timeline allows its readers to zoom in to any period of time to be familiar with the specifics, and it also contains all of the rounds of talks between the imprisoned PKK leader, Ocalan, and the BDP/HDP members in 2013 and 2014, which are 13 meetings 2013 and 12 meetings in 2014.

Another important piece of literature is Ocalan’s “The Road Map to Democratization of Turkey and a Solution to the Kurdish Question.” The document was first addressed to the European Court for Human Rights in August 2009, but the Turkish government considered the document illegal and confiscated it for 18 months. After setting conceptual and theoretical framework for common homeland, democracy, and nation based homeland, Ocalan lays out a number of serious steps for a real solution to the long aged Kurdish Question in Turkey: the withdrawal of the PKK from Turkey, the establishment of “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” approved by the Grand National Assembly to smoothen the process, to remove all legal obstacles, and to be the face of the peace process, and finally, a constitutional and legal democratization reform to guarantee the Kurdish cultural and natural rights (Ocalan 2011, 11). Even though Ocalan’s plan seems to be very bright and optimistic and many Kurdish politicians refer to his *Road Map* while discussing the peace process, it does not include any time frame for each phase to take place, which is a downside of his roadmap.

Many scholars, while talking about the peace process in Turkey, bog down to recounting the events and do not go to the theoretical framework of the Kurdish demands and the peace

process or look at the issue from the understanding of Turkish nationalism. Writers like Umut Ozkirimli argues for different understating of the Turkish nationalism, because “the more Turkish nationalism perceives the claims for recognition as security threats, the more paranoid it becomes, further narrowing down the political space for democratic debate” (Ozkirimli 2014, 1056). How possible is Ozkirimli’s request in a government and in a negotiation process where the two camps of negotiations are not only disagreeing with each other, but they are divided within themselves, which, for some writers, resulted in the failure of the peace process? (Pusane 2014).

2.4. Rojava: a Conjunction of all Powers

With the wave Arab Spring and the emergence of the civil war in Syria, the Syrian government withdrew from the Kurdish populated areas, giving a historical chance to the Kurdish speaking communities to have self-governing Kurdish bodies and introducing the term Rojava to the academic world. But soon, the Kurdish speaking communities was dominated by other Kurdish political powers from the outside of Syria or by groups that are highly linked to the outside forces. Rojava is a curtail part of my research because ultimately it is the land where all of the Kurdish political parties from Iraq and the PKK meet to arm-wrestle. One challenge with this section of my thesis is the lack of literature about Rojava because of the security and the elasticity of the events in the area.

The best piece of literature that touches upon most of the aspects of political life in Rojava is a master’s thesis by Harriet Ida Rump titled “A Kurdish-Speaking Community of Change: How Social and Political Organising takes shape in the PYD-controlled Areas in Syria.” Rump describes the structure of the power, armed forces, and political space for the parties. When it comes to the political participation, many political parties exists, such as KDPS, which is a sister party of Barzani’s party in Iraq, but the most dominated party is PYD, which is a sister party of PKK though the PKK officials deny so. In terms of arm forces, “the YPG needs to be the only armed organisation in the area, but every person who wants to join can do so. The reason why the YPG has to be the only militant organisation is to prevent internal fighting” (Rump 2014, 37). Even though Rump does not go into the details of the internal political

difference between the political parties on the ground, she does a good job in touching upon the surface of most of the difference and internal conflicts.

With ISIS attack on the border town, Kobani, protests broke out in many cities in Turkey against Turkey's block for "any delivery of military, medical or humanitarian assistance into Kobani" and nearly 40 people were killed in the protest¹². For many people this seemed like the end of the peace process in Turkey. Later, Kurdistan Parliament of Iraq agreed to send 200 well trained Peshmerga forces with heavy equipments to Kobani through Turkey. The Peshmerga forces were greeted by hundreds of thousands of Kurdish people in Turkey¹³. All these events have changed the political equations in the area, and because these events were new only news articles were written about them. Last but not least, Barzani has always wanted to have a grip of power in Rojava, which is a zero sum game for PKK. But, it seems the PKK has its grips on Rojava, which gives it more leverage on the negotiation table.

¹² "40 Killed in Turkey in Pro-Kobani Protests." PressTV. October 17, 2014. Accessed March 10, 2015. <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2014/10/17/382576/40-killed-in-turkey-in-kobani-protests/>.

¹³ "Erdoğan Says 200 Peshmerga from Iraq to Enter Kobani." Today's Zaman. October 23, 2014. Accessed March 10, 2015. http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_erdogan-says-200-peshmerga-from-iraq-to-enter-kobani_362457.html.

3. Methodology

It is necessary to explain the choice of methodology and tools employed in this study and how they tackle the research question. To illustrate the effectiveness of the developments between the KRG and Turkey on the Kurdish Question in Turkey, I conduct a qualitative method research with having Alan Bryman's *Social Research Method* as a main source, which has nine chapters about qualitative research method and contains necessary methodological tools by many social researchers. Though it might have been difficult to deal with certain events and findings while doing my research as a Kurd, I have always tried and succeeded in stepping out of my Kurdishness to look at the events as an outside observer and objectively. On the other hand, I had no difficulty in "seeing through the eyes of the people I studied," (Bryman 2012, 399) and to look at the events as a participant observer because of my background. Therefore, I could easily switch between different personalities, languages, and tone of languages when the situations required. Two paradigms are important to notice while talking about participant observation.

3.1. Why Qualitative?

Since the beginning of deciding to have such a new research question, I was fully aware of the two difficulties facing my study 1) what techniques and mechanisms to employ for measuring the influence of the KRG-Turkey relations on the Kurdish Question in Turkey 2) the geographical size of the study, because I am not focusing on one country or one specific event in one country, but I am following a chain of events and developments from KR-I to Turkey, to southeast of Turkey, and to Kurdish populated communities in Syria. In addition to these variables, the Qandil Mountain in northern Iraq, as the base of the PKK, and Imrali prison, where Abdullah Ocalan is detained, are two effective commanding centers to consider in my study, too. So, any changes in any of the variables will have a level of effect on the rest.

The purpose of this study is to challenge and investigate an agreement reality among the Kurds that "brothers side with brothers."¹⁴ By this, I mean to see if KRG's relations with Turkey have had any effects on the reconciliation process in Turkey, which directly impact the Kurds of Turkey. It is important to realize that this study does not aim at illustrating neither the nature of

¹⁴ This is an old Kurdish idiom and is used in political discussion while talking about the importance of the unity for the Kurds.

the relations between KRG-Turkey, the PKK, nor the reconciliation process by the Turkish government, but rather a combination of all of them. I am employing a grounded theory approach to generate a possible theory or theories out of my data and findings. I highly trust my rich data and my coding techniques, which contributed greatly in choosing both theories used in the thesis (Charmaz 1983, 110). In addition to the literature review, I have interviewed politicians and officials from variety of political backgrounds, geographical locations, and ideologies, and I am analyzing certain official statements by the PKK and KDP.

3.2. Data Collection

The data used in this study can be divided into three types. First, I conducted six interviews in Turkey with Members of the Parliament from the AK Party and HDP sides, with the Presidents of two small Kurdish political parties, and the senior advisor of the current Prime Minister of Turkey in Ankara and Diyarbakir. I conducted these interviews from January 8-20, 2015. Second, I have conducted three email interviews with politicians from the KRG to get their opinions on the subject and to cross check certain findings from my interviews in Turkey; these email interviews happened during February and March 2015. Third, in order to thoroughly get the voice of the outlawed PKK organization, I will use the official website of the party, which has been updated up to mid 2014¹⁵, and I will use the official recent statements of the KDP and PKK. There is no doubt about the subjectivity of the website, which poses no barrier for my study, because I am mostly using the official statement section of the website to see the reaction of the PKK toward certain events.

3.2.1. Interviews and Language Employed

Obviously, the bulk of my data is the interviews conducted in Turkey and via email. My interviews in Turkey were semi-structured, because I wanted to give the interviewees the chance to express themselves, but I made sure that all of my interviewees say their opinions on certain issues: the reconciliation process in Turkey, the relations between KRG-Turkey, the PKK role in the reconciliation process, and Rojava. One useful specification of qualitative interview is the

¹⁵ The link of the website is www.pkkonline.com.

flexibility in asking questions, which sometimes leads the interviewees to talk about the topic that is important for them the most and the interviewer might not be aware of. Robin Leidner in her interview with the McDonald's workers discovered that such interview "allowed room to pursue topics of particular interest to the workers" (Bryman 2012, 471).

In addition, while moving on to each section of the interview, I started with more general questions then draw specific questions from their answers or I changed the order of sections depending on the interviewee's background (Bryman, 212). It is important to mention that depending on the time I was given by my interviewees, I had to allow or not allow my interview to depart from the main topic, because, like Bryman says, "there is a greater interest in the interviewees' point of view... 'rambling' or going of the tangents is often encouraged—it gives insight into what the interviewee sees as relevant and important... interviewees can depart significantly from any schedule or guide that is being used" (470).

It is worth mentioning that due to the uniqueness of my interviewees, I could not run a pilot interview before the interviews, but I already knew the time span of the interviews and what questions to prioritize the most. Depending on the schedules of the interviewees, sometimes I had to cross out certain questions, prioritize certain sections, and pack the questions and the interviews to get the most out of the interviewees. The shortest interview was about 38 minutes and the longest one was about 2.5 hours, and my iPhone was used as a recorder during all of the interviews.

The interviews happened in English, Turkish with English translation, Kurdish Kurmanji dialect, and sometimes Arabic. Though my mother tongue is Kurdish Sorani, I was really shocked by how different Kurmanji and Sorani dialects were. Honestly, Kurmanji sounded like a different language for me, because the first Kurmanji person I met in my life was on August 2014, when I was 23 years old. So, I was never exposed to the language, but eventually I started learning about the difference, and conducted one of the interviews in Kurmanji without the help of a translator. Depending on the interviewee, certain phrases or words would vary. For example, the phrase "Kurdistan Region of Iraq" sometimes it was referred to as "South Kurdistan"¹⁶ or

¹⁶ South Kurdistan, because the Kurdish territory is divided between four countries Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey, so the KR-I is located in the south part of the entire Kurdish land, which makes it the south part of Kurdistan.

Northern Iraq. So, I had to be a bit careful with what term to use in order not to give my interviewees any space for prejudices, because most of the time, depending of the ethnicity of the person, the term varies.

3.2.2. Sampling

As I mentioned in my “Acknowledgment” section, if it was not for the help of Dr. Yilmaz Ensaroglu, most of my interviews in Turkey would not have been possible. He was my gatekeeper. In order to be able to have enough tools to measure my research question, I had to interview and have the voices all of the parties relevant to the Kurdish Question in Turkey. So, I came up with three categories for my sampling groups 1) the government perspective, which is represented by the AK Party 2) the HDP, which is the most powerful Kurdish legal political party in the Turkish parliament and representing the Kurdish face in the negotiation process 3) the perspective of the small Kurdish political parties to see their gravity and how much they are considered and treated in the reconciliation process. On the other side, for my email interviews in the KRG, I contacted four officials with different political backgrounds and three of them replied my questions.

With these three categories, I can best present the different voices working on the reconciliation process in Turkey, but one may criticize me for not having any interviews with members of the PKK organization, and I will discuss this in detail in the “Limitation and Security Considerations” section. I contacted 13 politicians, but only six of them agreed to be interviewed and two decided to answer my questions via email, but actually never did.

3.3. Trust and Ethical Consideration

There is no doubt about the level of sensitivity accompanied with protests in Turkey prior to my interviews and the war by the YGP fighters against ISIS and the public accusations for Turkey’s affiliations with the ISIS, which eventually would make building trust with my interviewees harder than usual. Nevertheless, this was my least problem, and my biggest challenge was protecting and keeping the trust that was given to me. In Turkey, I had two elements that helped me a lot in my gaining the trust of my interviewees. First, Dr. Ensaroglu made things easier for

me with his recommendations and telephone calls with the interviewees. Second, my ethnicity as a Kurd made some of my Kurdish interviewees more comfortable with speaking about certain issues, but sometimes I, as a researcher, was portrayed and placed in a position of my Kurdishness rather than an independent researcher. Therefore, two important paradigms to notice about participant observation: “inquiry from the outside” and “inquiry from inside,” whereby the former allows for the researcher’s detachment from his subjects of study and the latter allows for the personal involvement in the investigation process (Iacono, Brown and Holtham 2009, 42).

Indeed one of the major challenges I faced during this research was stepping out of my Kurdishness and being able to situate myself as an objective researcher as much as possible. The guidelines offered by Lund University and CMES are simple in making sure that the research participants will consider my position as a researcher. As Bryman notifies, objectivity can be greatly strengthened with proper guidelines and rules that are clearly specified in advance for the assignment (Bryman, 289). However, even if I were fully successful in doing this: a) most of Kurdish people I know expect me to produce a thesis that support the Kurdish cause due to the fact that Kurdish people have been subject to discriminations and assimilations, especially in Turkey; b) there are certain hard and shocking truths that I was not aware of, and they can be hard to digest; c) shocking and unacceptable conclusions and findings might cause me trouble upon my return to home by my highly politicized government in the KRG. This is when I always had Bryman and his conformability discussion in mind: “Conformability is concerned with ensuring that, while recognizing complete objectivity is impossible in social research, the researcher can be shown to have acted in good faith; in other words, it should be apparent that he or she has not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research and the findings deriving from it” (392-393).

3.4. Limitation and Security Consideration

Some readers may think this thesis lack an important ingredient, which is no interview with PKK officials, and they are correct in the sense that it would have better if I had, but they are wrong if they argue for the lack of the PKK perspectives in the study. First of all, I do not deny that I could have gone to Qnadil Mountain and made some interviews with the PKK commanders

through my good connections in the KR-I, but if I had, I would have had problems with traveling freely in Turkey and interviewing officials from government and pro-Kurdish political parties sides. In addition, the overall security of the area has changed, which makes it very difficult for researchers to travel between the borders.

Though I have not interviewed any first hand PKK members, I have solved this problem in two ways. First, while conducting my interviews and analyzing them, I was surprised by how affiliated the HDP is with the PKK. Most of my interviewees not only made a slight difference between the PKK and HDP, but also saw the HDP as the legal and parliamentary face of the PKK. Second, the official PKK website has interviews and represents the PKK's perspectives on all of the events related to the Kurdish Questions in Turkey and the developments in area. It has both interviews and official statements made by the party. So, overall I do represent the PKK side in this thesis despite the lack of interviews with its members.

3.5. Triangulation and Validity

In order to increase the validity of my study, I am using triangulation method, which allows me to use “more than one source of data in the study of social phenomena... and to cross-check my findings” (392). This technique has been employed by many researchers. For example, Norman K. Denzin refers to the approach as way to use “multiple observers, theoretical perspectives, sources of data, and methodologies” (Densiz, 310).

By using triangulation, I will increase the validity of my findings, because I will cross check my interviewees' answers and their reactions toward certain events to see if they put emphasis on different points and/or give different reasons and interpretations for same events. My interviewees not only come from different geographical areas, but have different political views and most probably will see the events through the lances of their political parties. So, using triangulation as a methodological instrument to verify and check the information and coding of the interview will be highly needed (Blaxter, Hughes and Tigh 2006, 83).

3.6. MAXQDA and Coding

The interviews are all transcribed word by word due to the importance of the wording and language used by my interviewees with the help of Express Scribe Transcription software; the total transcription is about 26,000 words. For the coding, I am using MAXQDA software, which is a magnificent program with a lot of features in coding and helping analysis raw data. In addition, I relied on my observation and language skills in identifying my interviewees' reactions or emphasizes on certain points. After having 217 codes out of my interview with 25 code segments, I categorized them into three themes to present in my finding section. These themes were selected based on their coherent narrative to best explain and address my research question.

4. Theoretical Framework

This chapter lays out the theoretical concepts for better understanding the influence of the KRG-Turkey relations on the Kurdish Question in Turkey. It is important to mention there is a lack of literature on theorizing the Kurdish Question in Turkey and most of the literature is recounting the events and looking at the issue empirically. I build up my theoretical framework based on Robert D. Putnam's two-level game theory (1988) and James H. Read's writings on the zero-sum concept of power.

The two-level game model bridges international and domestic politics together and emphasizes on the entanglement and interdependency of political decisions on both levels. Putnam, unlike the previous foreign policy theorists, focuses on the role of leaders and chief negotiators and their bargaining tactics in carving out international agreements while keeping the domestic pressure as a checkpoint in the back of their heads. Before going into the details of the theory, it is convenient to break down Putnam's vision for any international agreements or negotiations into the following:

- The international stage (Level I): bargaining between the negotiators, leading to a tentative agreement
- The domestic stage (Level II): separate discussions within each group of constituents about whether to ratify the agreement (Putnam 1988, 436)

Level I negotiation can happen between state leaders, ethnic group leaders, party leaders, or all of them. Level II constitutes can be the parliament, the senate, or the public opinion and they have the power to ratify or reject a deal that was made on the first level. Therefore, leaders not only have to negotiate deals on Level I, but they have to fight and negotiate for the same deals on national level (Level II), too. Putnam emphasizes on the role of chief negotiator as the primary engine behind international policy making. However, Level II ratification is the backbone of any Level I negotiations and any expectations or threats "of rejection at Level II may abort the negotiation at Level I without any formal action at Level II" (Putnam, 436). The theory focuses on the mechanism Level I actors can use to assure or to forecast the Level II ratification.

4.1. “Win-Set” and Ratification

The two-level game theory puts a lot of gravity on the concept of win-set and its size. Simply, win-set is the range of possibility for Level I agreements to win Level II constituents’ ratification (Putnam, 437). Thus leaders, when trying to negotiate a deal on the international level, have to keep their domestic win-set in the back of their heads and they have to come up with agreements within the range of their win-sets. In other words, if they bite more than they can chew, their deals will be at the risk of involuntary defection, which will be discussed below.

The size of the Level II win-set is important for two reasons. First, “the larger the win-sets make Level I agreement more likely, *ceteris paribus*¹⁷” (Putnam, 437). Therefore, there is a positive relation between the size of the win-sets and the success of the agreements. It is conditioned that each agreement should fall within the Level II win-sets on both sides otherwise there is the risk of involuntary defection, which is “the behavior of an agent who is unable to deliver on a promise of a failed ratification” (Ibid, 438). The second reason why win-set size is important is that the “relative size of the respective at Level II win-sets will affect the distribution of the joint gain from the international bargain” (440). In other words, the bigger the win-set of a negotiator the more flexible he might be and can be “pushed around,” while the smaller the win-set of a negotiator, the more difficult it is for him and the harder he fights to have an agreement that would be accepted at home (440).

Putnam very effectively summarizes the “sweet and sour” implications of the win-set size in the following chart:

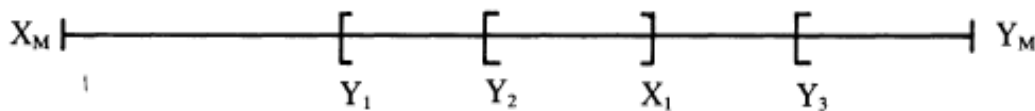


Figure 1. Effects of reducing win-set size

X_M and Y_M represent two different parties, and there is only one of the following three outcomes in their negotiation. First, the best outcome for both parties is when both sides have

¹⁷ *Ceteris paribus* or *caeteris paribus* is a Latin phrase and it means “when other things are same or held constant.” So, when there is a change in one variable, the other variables *ceteris paribus* or stay unchanged.

the greatest overlap, which results in the ultimate gains: when X_1 and Y_1 . Second, the outcome for party X_m is still the greatest (X_1), because it sticks with its negotiation stands and does not lower its demands while party Y_m has lowered its demands to Y_2 . Even though there is a smaller overlap between the interests of both parties, the deal is still ratifiable. The third outcome results in the failure of the deal and “no agreement” point, because there is no overlap between the interests of the two parties: X_1 and Y_3 do not overlap at all.

Clearly, the concept of win-set stands at the core of the two-level game theory, and according to Putnam, there are three factors determining the size of the win-set: distribution of power, preference, and possible coalitions among Level II constituents, type of Level II political institutions, and strategies used by Level I negotiators (Putnam, 442). First, people or groups who have the ratification authority have different interests and costs toward or against an agreement, and in case of no-agreement “some constituents may face low costs from no-agreement, and others high cost, and the former will be more skeptical of Level I agreements than the latter” (Ibid). In order maximize the win-set, coalition and union between the ratifiers are composed. However, there are two types of constituents for Level I leaders to deal with: heterogeneous and homogeneous (444). Second, the type of institutions of Level II greatly affects the autonomy of the negotiator in making international deals meaning “the greater the autonomy of central decision-makers from their Level II constituents, the larger their win-set and thus the greater the likelihood of achieving international agreement” (449). Third, the negotiation techniques used by the negotiators to carve out the deals on Level I are highly important to the win-sets on both sides, because leaders have to be aim at maximizing the overlap of interest as much as possible (450).

4.2. The Role of Chief Negotiator

The two-level game theory elaborates on the importance of actors on both the domestic and international levels. However, at the backbone of the theory stand the people who sit on the negotiation table and make decisions. It is important to mention that throughout his theory for the sake of simplicity Putnam paints his Level I negotiators as honest and sincere ones, which is not the case in reality as he admits in the end of his theory. Two-level bargaining is usually

costly and risky for chief negotiators, and “they often interfere with his other priorities, so it is reasonable to ask what is in it for him” (457).

Regardless of the intention of the national leader in negotiating, public support is always important for the ratification of a deal and its aftermath. So, leaders are extremely careful, or they should be, about the domestic costs in making any international deals, and chief negotiators have their own motives in concluding a deal including:

1. Enhancing his standing in Level II game by increasing his political resources or by minimizing potential losses to either gain more international statues or domestic rewarding or both
2. Pursuing desired domestic policies with the help of international pressure, which Putnam calls “tailwind”
3. Portraying himself as a leader or gaining his cult of personality in the international arenas (455-457).

Now, the philosophical question that Putnam avoids is how much Level I negotiators can balance between their interests and party’s interests on one hand and the nation’s interests on the other hand.

4.3. Elite Model and the Public

Despite the fact that two-level game theory tights international and domestic politics together, the theory puts very little attention to the public voice in influencing the political agreements. Putnam emphasizes on power of elites on both Level I and Level II with authority to negotiate and ratify deals, and this falls under the conceptual framework of elite model: “elite model assumes that power is concentrated within elite groups who are able to dominate politics and society. As such, elite accounts maintain that both media and public opinion are subservient to political elites” (Smith, Hadfield and Dunne 2112, 169).

Regardless of the power of the actors on Level I and Level II, the public voice is always effective and, indeed, is a checkpoint for any new policy. If people are unhappy with a new international policy, they will most probably react against it even if the policy has been ratified

by Level II politicians. Thus, the public is a big filter for any international or domestic decisions, and it should be considered as a part of the win-set.

4.4. Double Two-Level Negotiation

Even though Putnam wrote his theory with the purpose of combining international and domestic politics together, his theory could be extended to other forms of negotiations regardless of whether the issue is international or domestic. Such an assumption stems from Putnam's primary emphasis on the two phases in each negotiation: negotiation: phase one, what happens on the negotiation table in the negotiation room (on table negotiation) and phase two, what happens off the negotiation table when the results of the negotiation is out (off table negotiation). Therefore, it seems the two-level game theory could be used with little adjustment in any kind of negotiations.

This study looks into the relations between KRG and Turkey, which is Level I negotiations and agreements, and it fits into Putnam's two-level game model. A small, but important digression, the KRG is not a fully independent and sovereign state, but it actually acts as an independent international player in crafting out agreements with Turkey. Therefore, when it comes to implementing the theory on the study, I tend to treat KRG as an international player.

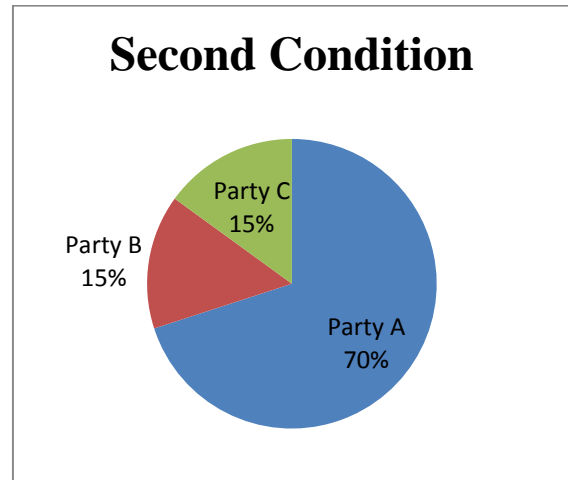
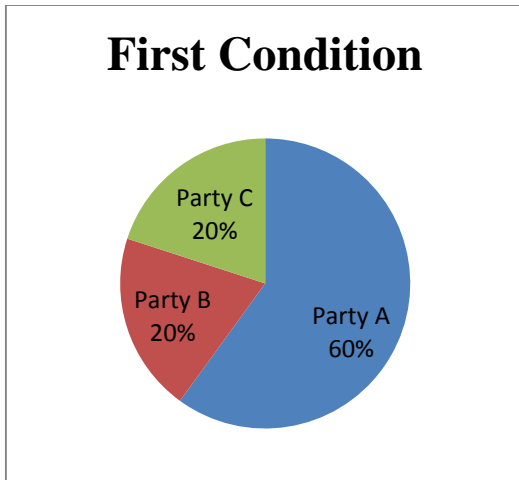
At the core of the peace process stands the negotiation between the leader of the PKK, Ocalan, and the Turkish government. The shortcoming of Putnam's theory for the thesis appears at this stage of my study. First of all, it is a bit difficult to categorize the PKK organization as international or domestic. However, I avoid this shortcoming by focusing on the negotiators and actors on the negotiation table, and I borrow some help from the elite model, which concentrates on leaders' decisions. Because my thesis studies the influence of the KRG-Turkey relations on the Kurdish Question in Turkey, I have to apply the theory two times: first, when looking at the relations themselves and second, when looking at the influence of the relations on another negotiation between Ocalan and Turkish state. For this reason, I call my application of the theory as a double two-level game theory.

4.5. Two Perceptions of Power

One of the oldest concepts theorists have tried to have a static definition of is the concept of power. The definition of power is greatly based on what and how we think it actually works. The simplest definition of power has three components: ability, performers, and receivers. By ability, I mean to have the capacity to change or execute an act upon something or someone (receiver) by someone (performer). However, this thesis focuses mostly on the power practitioners and their perceptions of power, more specifically, the question of power as a zero-sum or variable-sum. The zero-sum concept means the gain of one person, group, or party is equivalent to the loss of another person(s), group(s), or party(s). In contrary, the variable-sum concept argues that it is possible to have mutual gain of power between parties without the loss of other group(s) or party(s) (positive-sum) or it is possible to have mutual loss of power not offset by equivalent gains for another group (negative-sum) (J. H. Read 2012, 6).

One small, but important digression, the terms “zero-sum” and “variable-sum” are borrowed from contemporary economic discussions of zero-sum game and none-zero-sum game. Similarly, in the former case the wins and losses add up to zero, and in the latter case the sum of the winning and losing is greater than zero (Spangler 2003). However, the discussions revolving around these concepts in terms of power are hundreds or thousands years old. For example, great Greek historian and philosopher, Thucydides in his *The History of the Peloponnesian War* in 431 BC elaborated on the zero-sum concept of power between the Spartan and Greek armies, which was more on the international level. Another example is Thomas Hobbes’s *Elements of Law* when he argues that the power of “one man resisteth and hindereth the effects of the power of another: power simply is no more, but the excess of the power of one above that of another. For equal powers opposed, destroy one another; and such opposition is called contention” (J. Read 1991, 505).

The zero-sum theorists assume the total sum of power does not change but rather the share of power increases or decreases depending on the loss of the other actors. The two charts below help in explaining the two conditions. In the second condition, the gain of party A results or has resulted in the loss of Party B and C.



So, when Party A is more powerful, it has more leverage in playing its cards against Party B and C; the core point why A's gain is equivalent to B and C's loss is a conflict of interest and this is how famous IR realist, William Riker, analyzes zero-sum in *Theory of Political Coalitions*: "the direct conflicts among participants" makes them ignore "the common advantage" (Riker 1962, 24). Therefore, each side thrives to maximize its power even if it is at the expense of the other parties or not in line with the common advantage. In a democratic setting, the weak parties do not really need to worry about their loss, because they will have another chance to increase their power in the future. However, in a non-democratic setting, the increase of one party's power is a threat to the rest of the parties.

On the other side, what if what Party B and C are forced or influenced to do by Party A is actually in their advantage, too? This is where theorists start to talk about the variable-sum concept of power. The debate mostly revolves around defining the *real interest* of Party B and C, and though they might have given up some of their shares of the pie, as long as their interests are parallel to the interest of Party A, they still gain what they wished for.

I tend to use the zero-sum concept of power as an explanatory tool in my analysis when explaining the power hunger theme. I make the best use of the conflict of interest part of the concept to see how it can actually set parties apart and move them away from one common goal.

5. Findings

This chapter presents the findings out of my interviews with politicians from Turkey, email interviews with three politicians in the KRG, and official statements of the PKK and KDP. To best approach my research sub-questions, I have narrowed down my findings into three themes: 1) smoothening the public perspective 2) dealing with the PKK 3) power struggle between the Kurdish political parties. The themes are chosen to highlight the gravity of the KRG-Turkey relations on the Kurdish Question and peace process in Turkey and on the other hand to show the reasons behind the KRG's limited involvement in the process.

5.1. Smoothening the Public Perspectives

Looking at an ethnic issue from a military perspective for more than three quarters of a century not only has cost so much lives and capital but has also shaped the mentality of the public that violence is the only solution. The public in Turkey concerning the Kurdish Question was or has roughly been divided between two camps: the Turks who see the Kurds as a threat for the integrality of their country and the Kurds who believe they have been discriminated against by the Turkish state. So, a major step for the Turkish state in the peace process is the reconciliation between Turks and Kurds and breaking the stereotypes to bridge the gaps and allow social engagements and interactions between both sides. The relations between the KRG and Turkey have helped in changing the perspective of the Turkish public toward the Kurds; this point has been emphasized by the Turkish government as the Director General and Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister of Turkey commented:

When we [the Turkish government] accept the existence and the reality of the KRG, it will impossible to negate the Kurds in Turkey. So, it [the relation between the KRG-Turkey] has been an encouraging factor to recognize the reality of the Kurds in Turkey. Second, it has been quite an effective factor on the public perception to the Kurdish Question in Turkey. When the KRG is with Turkey and in favor of Turkey and supporting Turkey on many different levels, it is much easier to tell the public that the peace process is a peaceful one and we should continue doing it, particularly, the economic relations and deepening economic tights and deepening political gains in the region for both sides. For 100 years, it was impossible to quote the word "Kurdistan" publicly, Mr. Taib Erdogan said that four times. It might be something small for the outsider, but it was unimaginable for other people from inside. And he said it refereeing to the KRG in the presence of the President of the KRG, which automatically broke the people's psychological barrier (interview with Hasimi 2015).

What is important to realize is that the same point has been emphasized by Kurdish politicians from different parties in Turkey, and they all agree that there is a positive relation between the KRG-Turkey increase in relations and smoothening the Turkish public in Turkey toward the Kurds and the peace process.

These relations are important for the Kurdish Question in Turkey, because Turkey's softening relations affects the Kurds in Turkey. For many years the Kurdish identity was denied in Turkey. It is not possible for Turkey to recognize the Kurdistan Regional Government, have trade relations with KRG, call Barzani the President of KRG, and recognize five million Kurds in Iraq, while it denies the existence of 20 million Kurds in Turkey. So, Turkey had no other chance than opening to the Kurds in Turkey. Also, these relations were good for Turkey, too, because it helped the public understand that Kurds are not threat to the integrity of Turkey anymore, and it is possible to do business and trade with them without any fear. Also, the public understands now that the existence of Kurdistan of Iraq is not a threat to Turkey. So, these reasons would help in finding a solution for the Kurdish Question in Turkey. For example, if six to seven years ago Kurdish parliament members would have visited Qandil and Ocalan in the Imrali Island, it would have been the doomsday and the end of the world, but now it happens very often; it is like the way to visit the spring... another example is Barzani's visit to Diyarbakir helped in changing the over public opinion in Turkey about the Kurds (interview with Bozyel 2015).

In addition to Bozyel, Altan Tan, who is a Parliament Member from the HDP, has made the same point regarding the possible changes among the Turkish people toward the Kurds in Turkey and KRG, due to the development of relations and continuous visits of officials from both sides as well as the boast in trade relations:

When Turkey decides that they [Kurds] are not our enemy, this decision is very important for solving the Kurdish Question because most of the Turks think that the Kurds will divide their country, and because they decided that Anatolia and Kurdistan all belong to Turks, and Kurdistan is a part of Turkey, so if Kurds take their rights, their country [Turkey] will divide. So, Barzani not only does not fight the Turks, but also say good things about the Turkey and trade with them. All of these make Turkish people normal and silent, and they would say these Kurds are our fiends and they do not want to divide from us, and they will help us. Then, we can live together with them (interview with Tan 2015).

Even though the result might not be visible and obvious at this stage of the reconciliation, the relations between the KRG and Turkey have helped in painting a different and trade friendly picture of the Kurds in the mind set of Turkish public. There is no doubt that KRG's energy boast has greatly contributed to this cause.

The Turkish government has good attitude toward the KRG, which reflects among the public sphere and the mentality of the public. President Barzani was greeted as the president of the KRG in his Kurdish clothes, and for the first time the Prime Minister pronounced the word “Kurdistan.” Also, people were able to go around with a Kurdish flag everywhere; all of these were historical changes and affected the psychology of the Turks toward the Kurds. The perspectives of the Turks have changed toward the Kurd, and it is not just because the Turks started to love the Kurds, but also because of the financial interests and Turks love the money, oil, and energy of the Kurds (interview with Bucak 2015).

5.2 Dealing with the PKK

Even though the Kurdish cause in Turkey is the question of an ethnic group, the PKK organization has presented and/or has been presented as the face of the cause despite the establishment of many political parties. So, dealing with the PKK stands at the core of the peace process in Turkey considering the arm power of the organization. The peace process has encountered many different plans for the fate of the PKK starting from the disarmament of the organization to the reintegration of the PKK members into society and politics. Now, the KRG with its geographical position and diplomatic ties with Turkish government and PKK should be able to have more positive contributions to the PKK chapter of the peace process and make sure that none of the sides would go back to the use of violence. As the Director General of the Prime Minister of Turkey said:

At certain time there were certain statements made by KDP leaders that helped acting as a facilitator. The KRG could give some advices to the PKK that arm struggle is not the solution and this is the age of talk...The majority of the PKK fighters live in the KR-I, and they are in talk with them [KRG politicians]. The peace process and the negotiations are direct talks between PKK and the Turkish government. Turkey has been very critical with having a third party or third eye as a negotiator, because there is direct talk. But obviously, the main issue is trust, so having the support of the Kurdish groups like KDP and PUK will be a positive step for both sides. It is not an issue of mechanism, but it is an issue of encouraging both sides to talk and negotiate more (Hasimi).

Masoud Barzani has asked the PKK to lay down their weapons and come to stay in the KR-I for as many years as they want until a general amnesty is issued by the Turkish government for the PKK member, because having the PKK in the mountain is a bit risky for the KRG, too (Bozyel).

Even though the channels of relations from the KRG side with Turkish state and the PKK are still party based channels, this does not stop the KRG from acting as a facilitator between the PKK and the Turkish state.

The KRG has good relations with the Turkish state through the KDP's political link, trade and energy, and with the PKK through the PUK, PYD and other security aspects. If the KRG makes good use of its combined political capital with all actors involved in the peace process in a timely fashion, it can play a crucial role in making sure that the peace process gains momentum, especially in the first difficult steps in which actors lack trust for each other's intentions. Accordingly, the KRG can facilitate dialogue and make sure that the hard-liners in both sides are isolated (email interview with Ala'Aldeen and Manis 2015).

All political parties in Kurdistan, Kurdistan Parliament, presidency and KRG are supportive of the peace process in turkey. A process that will end the decades long conflict and bloodshed and end with the guarantee of democratic right of the Kurds in turkey. The KRG and its prime minister has contributed a great deal to this process by both convincing the PKK leadership to end its military operations and Ankara to be more forthcoming in opening dialogue with the PKK and its imprisoned leader (email interview with Dizeyee 2015).

The geographical position of the KR-I can contribute to the actual steps of the disarmament of the PKK members and their reintegration into the Turkish society.

The basic idea in the beginning is the PKK fighters would go to northern Iraq with their arms, and they would come back without arms. And the KRG would help them there. And the KRG will mediate. The upper level [high ranking members] of the PKK are living there now. There are 10,000 people living in the mountain. The support of the KRG is very important, because the high level of people are living there and they will stay there for a while. Also, the KRG could help in explaining the situation for the Kurdish people and have them understand the steps of the process (interview with Ensarioğlu 2015).

5.3. Power Hunger

The following theme focuses on the relations between the Kurdish political parties in KR-I toward the PKK, and it emphasizes on the moments of unity and division of interest among them, which caused distractions from one major Kurdish long term goal. The theme looks into the contemporary and slightly historical relations between the Kurdish political parties.

The Kurdish movements in each country must trust each other only, and they should not get direct support from Iraq, Iran, or Turkey against another Kurdish movement. Because they might just want to use Kurds against Kurds. For example, in Turkish there is a very special expression for that “birak yesinler birbirlerini,” which means let the dogs eat each other. This term was used against the Kurds, because the Kurds were used against each other many times. So, the Kurds must only trust in each other and should not have diplomatic and political relations with other states against other states. But, we always support having good relation of the KRG with Turkey, and we openly declared. Also, as a political party, we have very good relations with the KRG... From 1993 up to 1995, the Turkish government organized lots of military operation to the Iraqi land; at that time, we know that PUK and KDP supported the Turks and fought against the PKK. There was also a civil war between the PUK and the KDP, and that is why each of them created a government in Hawler and Sulaimani. So, this is what we don't want and what we are against. So, this is what get the Kurds weaken in the region and that is why we call it *Brakwzhi* [brothers killing brothers]. If we stop this Brakwzhi and get united with one voice, we will be considered a very big player in the political games in the area (Gur).

In the 1990s, before the establishment of the KRG and the US-Iraq war, the political parties like KDP and PUK tried to use PKK against each other when the civil war was happening. So, it was like the PUK with PKK against the KDP and then KDP with PKK against the PKK (Bucak).

Obviously, these hot tensions and wars between the Kurdish political parties are almost two decades old, but one needs to be aware of the history of power struggle between these parties in order to dissect the present diplomatic and power relations between the political parties.

5.3.1. Lack of Trust and Momentary Unity

A lot of time the Kurdish political parties are criticized for not being united and for the lack of trust between them; so, trust becomes an important prerequisite for collaboration on national issues between the powerful parties. Upon certain incidents the Kurdish parties, specifically, the PKK, KDP, and PUK showed their gratitude for collaboration between Kurdish brothers for one national Kurdish cause. One perfect example would be when Kobani and KR-I were attacked by the ISIS though there were holdbacks about how much the parties should interfere while thousands of lives were at risk.

Having Peshmarga in Kobani was great. From Ibrahim Kalil [boarder point between Turkey and KR-I] to Kobani, which is about 400 to 500 klm, people celebrated the passages of only 150 Peshmarge forces. And they were very like a symbol of unity, which was more powerful than their weapon. They united Kurds, and they gave huge moral to Kobani people. Having Peshmarga over there had huge meaning for the Kurds.

On the other hand, in Makhmor, Diyala, Kirkuk, Khanaqin, and in Shangal there are PKK fighters fighting ISIS side by side and shoulder by shoulder with the Peshmargas. This also gives us a hope that we the Kurds must be united, and if we are, we could do everything we want. The idea is all of the forces on the ground the PKK, PYD, the KRG would unite and they fight in the field to defend Kurdistan against those Daish attacks... What we want is real relation between brothers (Gur).

You have the PKK guerrillas in Kirkuk and Shingal fighting together with the Peshmerge forces against ISIS. Nowadays, because of the threat of ISIS, there is more engagement between the KRG and the PKK. Recently a group of PKK-KCK delegates were greeted by the Kurdistan Parliament (Bucak).

There are times in history where calamity of people has not been a uniting factor. With ISIS attack on KR-I and the Kobani later on, moved the conscious of the Kurds wherever they were, [regardless] of their political backgrounds or which parts of Kurdistan they were from. Kobani was such an example and brought people together and paved the way for Peshmerge forces to be sent to defend the besieged population, the same can be said about Shangal and many other places (Dizeyee).

Kobani can be considered a milestone. It brought all Kurdish parties closer together than ever and paved the way for further negotiation (Ala'Aldeen and Manis).

All of the sides agree that the ISIS attacks on Kobani and KR-I have brought the Kurdish parties closer to each other, especially with the passage of Peshmerge troops through Turkey, but two points are very important to keep in mind: 1) how much can these periodic and symbolic unity last? 2) how has Rojava been a land of tension between the Kurdish political parties?

At least from the KR-I side, the fuel of this unity ran out soon after the controversy over PKK's affiliation or, as some argue, PKK's announcement of the Shingal canton on January 14, 2015. The reactions of the KRG, Kurdistan Parliament, Presidency Office, and the parties were obviously rejection and criticism.

We, as the office of the Prime Minister of Kurdistan, thank the YPG guerrillas for their assistance to the Peshmerge forces to rescue the Kurdish Yazidis in the Shangal area when ISIS attacked, but we consider the attempt for establishing an independent body of governing in Shangal by the PKK on January 14, 2015 illegal and against the Kurdistan and Iraq's constitutions. We do not accept the interference of the PKK in the KRG's business and the PKK must move away from such act. There should not be any political or party based bargaining toward the fate of wounded Shangal, because it is illegal and will create political crisis (KRG 2015).

The reaction of the KDP was harsher due to an earlier statement made by Jamil Bayik, the joint head of the KCK, about KDP's Peshmarga forces defeat in the Shangal: the Kurdish Peshmarga

forces escaped the “Yezidi area of Shingal before militants of the Islamic State (IS) entered the area, and they handed over their weapons to IS and fled Shingal area following IS control of Nineveh province in northern Iraq” (ARANews 2014). It is important to mention that the Shingal area was controlled by the KDP forces upon the attack of ISIS.

This declaration is not only an act of disrespect toward the KRG, but also an act of imposing themselves [the PKK] on the people of Shingal and trying to divide south Kurdistan [KR-I]. We, as the KDP, in addition to opposing such idea, ask Kurdistan Parliament, KRG, NGOs and public to have a quick reaction and limit such a wrong policy to divide the country (KDP 2015).

These criticisms were directed to the PKK while PKK guerillas were still fighting with the Peshmaraga forces against ISIS in KR-I, but soon the KCK reacted with the possibility of withdrawing its guerillas from KR-I if those “falsified” propagandas would not stop.

Recently in the south of Kurdistan [KR-I] with the leadership of a specific party, there have been a lot of secret and ugly propagandas toward our party... We managed to send our guerillas to Shingal, Makhmor, Kirkuk, and Shikhan in a very short while during a very sensitive time against the ISIS thugs, and our aim has always been to protect our nation in south Kurdistan [KR-I], their freedom, achievements, and homeland, but there have been some rumors that we had tried to create problems for the KRG and divide their land... When the people of Shingal wanted to create their own independent governing unites in Shingal, waves of fabricated propaganda against us were waged that we aim at dividing the south Kurdistan and we were shown as terrorists and occupiers. We are now talking about the possibility of withdrawing our guerillas from the KR-I (KCK 2015).

Though the Kurdish political parties upon certain incidents show their gratitude for unity and work together, these momentary unities do not last long because they do not fully trust each other, as it is proved by their propaganda machines.

5.3.2. Rojava

After the Assad forces withdraw from the Kurdish speaking communities in Syira, the area was soon poured with Kurdish forces and party representatives from Turkey and Iraq. Rojava is a perfect example of power struggle between the Kurdish political parties. The Erbil Agreement and Duhok agreement called for collaboration between all of the Kurdish parties in three cantons in Rojava: Kobani, Afrien, Jezira. The agreements were violated by the PYD, which is a sister party of the PKK, and prevented the existence of any arm forces except the YPG.

The question of Rojava is heavily linked to the PKK; the PYD wants to be the only power in Rojava, which is not correct and which is a violation of the Duhok [and Erbil] agreements, too. They need to allow for other political parties to participate in the power. The YPG is the armed forces of only PYD. If you want to have a national army, all of the sides should be able to join and have forces in the army, but PYD only allows for its armed forces to exist in Rojava. For example, there are around 3600 well trained fighter in the KR-I, who were not allowed to go to Rojava. They wanted to go, but they were rejected. The main reason why the forces did not want push for going to Rojava is to avoid a civil war with PYD, because a civil war in Rojava now means the end of Rojava (Bucak).

The policies of the PKK are not right in Rojava. They want to be the only arm force in Rojava; this mentality is a totalitarian mentality. Kurds wants democracy, and this is neither democracy nor freedom. They don't allow the Kurdish political parties to practice politics freely. For example, YANKS [a collection of small Kurdish political parties in Syria] members have been beaten up for their disagreements with PKK. To start with, who gave the right to the PYD and PKK to decide who is going to have arm forces and who should not. The political parties should have the right to practice politics feely and to have arm forces if they want to. This unilateral policy of the PKK is really dangerous for the future of Kurds in Syria, because the KDPS¹⁸ wants to have arm forces just like PYD. The mentality of the PKK does not want party getting a bit strong; they don't have the tolerance for the other parties (Bozyel).

These statements will be further analyzed in the analysis chapter. However, the different parties seem to sing different songs for the future and the system of governing in Rojava.

5.3.3. Barzani Vs Ocalan

One topic that kept coming up during my interviews in Turkey was which Kurdish leader more eligible for representing the pan-Kurdish identity and which leader Turkey finds more suitable to deal with. Obviously, Barzani has been in the forefront of the relations with Turkey and Turkey has shown its interest in dealing with Barzani.

Of course the Turkish government prefers to work with Barzani rather than the PKK and Ocalan. The government prefers him over the mentality of the PKK, and this is something that the PKK members do not like and cannot accept. They want to show to the world that Ocalan as the leader of the Kurds and thrive not to have Barzani take this opportunity (Mitchell 2015).¹⁹

Turkish government decided if the issue forced us for the giving the rights of the Kurds, we don't want to work with a party or people like PKK; Barzani's mind is better than

¹⁸ The Syrian branch of KDP is called KDPS, which stands for Kurdistan Democratic Party Syria.

¹⁹ Mehmet Mitchell is a fake given name to protect the anonymity of my source.

PKK, because he is near to the European side, he is near to the US, and his mentality is near to the Islamic mentality. So, we [the Turkish government] prefer Barzani in comparison to the PKK (Tan).

It might actually be hard to know what the politicians and leaders themselves think, but the propaganda machines of both sides keeps generating negative thoughts to tarnish each other.

I don't care what they say, but the Kurdistan will be united by the hand of President Masud Barzani. They [PKK member and followers] might think or illusion that Apo or whatever they call him to be the leader of the Kurds, but this will happen on the hands of President Barzani (Khaliq).²⁰

KRG is only the representative of the bashwri Kurds [Kurds in Iraq]. If they feel like they are the only representative of all of the Kurds in the whole world, this is not true... If president Barzani wants to be the representative of all Kurds, we must have the Kurdish National Congress as soon as possible. Otherwise, he will only represent himself, his party, and his region. We are (the Kurds in Turkey) 25 million and we are the biggest geographical portion of Kurdistan with the biggest population, how KRG is going to represent us in the world. That is not possible, because we are here (Gur).

The PKK propaganda machines were calling Barzani *Khadaqchi*²¹ while he was foreseeing the politics of the region. They made a lot of propaganda about this, but later they knew how smart Barzani's plan was. But, they did all of these in opposition to Barzani (Bucak).

With the implicit approval of the KDP administration, ditches are being dug on the South Kurdistan's (KRG) border with Rojava. The people of Rojava have been reacting against this for days. The border ditches and the resulting tension have caused anger and disturbance in the Kurdish public opinion. The ditch digging was quite an unexpected development for the Kurdish public opinion. Just like everybody else, we were astonished by this. Such a tension is a misfortune, especially at a time when the importance of national unity is increasing and there are so many discussions about the national congress (KCK 2014).

Despite the need for the different parties to seek one common future goal, personalization of national interest is obvious by these party members, and the difference shine crystal clearly when the hardliners from all sides speak.

²⁰ Abdul Wahab Khaliq, the spokesperson of the KDP in Sulaimani.

²¹ This word means, trench digger. In this context it refers to the time when the KDP or KRG decided to dig trenches from the borders of Erbil to Syrian borders, and this triggered a lot media attentions.

6. Analysis

Suppression and violence have always been the forefront mechanisms in dealing with the Kurds by the regimes in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and especially Turkey. With the inauguration of AK Party in Turkey in 2002, hope started to slowly grow for a better, i.e. less worse, future for the minorities, including the Kurds, and for dealing with the Kurdish Question differently and peacefully. Obviously, with the dominance of Davutoglu's "zero problem with neighbors" principle on Turkish foreign policy, Turkey not only started to open up with the Kurds in Iraq, but the relations between Turkey and KRG have boasted sharply. So, while Turkey's relation is boasting with a group of Kurds outside of Turkey, the Kurds in Turkey are still awaiting for a final solution for identity.

This chapter aims at analyzing the three themes mentioned in my finding chapter through the lenses of Putnam's two level-game theory and the zero-sum concept of power. The analysis focuses on the influence the KRG-Turkey relations have had on the Kurdish Question in Turkey, and it discusses the potential and limits of the KRG for further involvement in the process.

6.1. Public Opinion as a Part of Win-set

Without a doubt it had not been an easy path to introduce new methods for dealing with the Kurdish Question in Turkey, and the AK Party's road for a peaceful solution has been full of ups and downs. The decades long of arm conflict have had a major effect on ethnic groups' perspectives toward each other and this has shaped the psychology of the public. According to the survey in 2010, 10% Turkish participants and 18% Kurdish participants confirmed that "a close member of my family has died or wounded during the 30 years of ongoing conflict" meaning 3.7 million Turkish people and 1.3 million Kurdish people have been directly affected by the conflict in Turkey (KONDA 2010). Even though the arm conflict was between the PKK guerillas and the Turkish armed forces, the effect of the clash has greatly been distributed into the Turkish and Kurdish societies, which has strictly polarized the country. As I mentioned in the historical context, most of the Kurds believe they have been discriminated against and have been deprived from their basic rights while many Turks see the Kurdish Question as an issue of demand for an independent state and separatism.

It is not surprising that the society had been divided in such a way, because since the foundation of the Turkish Republic, the Kurdish Question had always been militarized and the Kurds have been portrayed as a threat for the unity of Turkey. However, the AK Party's introduction of non-militarizing the Kurdish Question and opening toward the KRG introduced new perspectives to the psychology of the Turkish public about the mechanism in dealing Kurdish Question. Looking at it from the two-level game theory perspective, the public opinion is important as a support for the international opening toward the KRG and for domestic issues and vice versa.

What does the KRG represent or how does the Turkish public see the KRG? The KRG represents a new version or face of the Kurds that is peaceful to deal, do business, and trade with as Hasimi, Bozyle, Tan, and Bucak pointed out. This is absolutely a new way for looking at the Kurds, because the PKK outlawed organization has always been portrayed as the main face of the Kurds and Kurdish Question in Turkey. As I mentioned in my introduction, the PKK is considered as a terrorist organization in Turkey, which automatically helps in shaping and frightening people's ideas about the Kurds. In addition, as I clearly state in my literature review, all of the Kurdish political parties since 1990s have been closed for their affiliations with the PKK organization, which really has left no space for any other room for representation of the Kurdish Question in Turkey except for the PKK. So, when the Prime Minister of Turkey greets the President of the KRG in his Kurdish outfit in Diyarbakir Turkey, this sends out a positive picture of the Kurds throughout Turkey, which some Turkish people buy the positiveness and some still stick with their old ideas. Most of my interviewees emphasized on the positive influence of the KRG on the Turkish public opinion and the new image building of the Kurdish Question in Turkey. In fact, the code "Psychology Change" was repeated nine times in total by three of my interviewees (interviews with Hasimi, Bozyle, and Bucak, 2015), and they put emphasis on the positive effects of the KRG's new image on the Turkish public opinion.

All of these concludes that when the Turkish public thinks of the Kurdish Question, it also thinks of the positive relations between the KRG and Turkey and the HDP in addition to thinking of the PKK, too. So, it is not only the PKK, but there are new players in game, which reduce people's fear and smoothen their ideas toward the Kurdish Question. Furthermore, from Putnam's two-level game model, this positiveness in the public's perspective has two

implications. First, on the international level when the Turkish government makes agreement with the KRG, it is certain that the public would not be furious and react positively to it. This already increases the size of the win-set on Level II and gives Level I leaders more space and flexibility in making deals. In addition, as Putnam points out, sometimes the Level II constituencies and the public are more eager than the national leader to accept a deal (Putnam, 458). Second, because the public opinion is actually a part of the win-set, the AK Party orientated government is really careful in dealing with all of the sides, including the Turkish nationalists, who still do not agree with KRG-Turkey relations and see the KRG as a threat to the integrity of Turkey (Rudaw, 2013). The AK Party is aware of how much the hardliners could actually be utilized, which can greatly mobilize the public and affect the results of the presidential election, parliamentary election, and municipality election. In the end of the day, people's vote determines the result of the elections, so the AK Party needs to guarantee its long term public win-set.

6.2. PKK Fate and Level I Negotiations

The peace process negotiation is direct talk between the imprisoned PKK leader, Ocalan, and the HDP representatives on one camp, and the Turkish government on the other camp. Though he has been in prison since 1999, Ocalan is still the president of the PKK, and the PKK organization is still under his commands. The PKK chapter dominates the past three decades of the history of the Kurdish Question in Turkey. Therefore, dealing with the PKK organization is absolute backbone for finding a solution to the Kurdish Question. The question or the concern a large majority of people has is whether Ocalan is the one to decide the fate of the PKK or the fate of the Kurds in Turkey or both. Evidence suggests the answer is partially both, to be partially both, because the PKK and the Kurdish cause in Turkey are highly intertwined, and the changes in one variable greatly affect the other. For example, if the Turkish government meets the demands of the Kurdish people, then there will be no point for having a Kurdish armed force in Turkey fighting for the Kurdish demands. The opposite is true, too; if the PKK disarmed itself, this will pave the way and speed up the process of meeting the Kurdish people's demands. Therefore, the Level I negotiation is actually a big part of the peace process.

Ocalan in his *Road Map* lays out the mechanism for the disarmament of the PKK step by step while he, the Kurds in Turkey, and the PKK expect a guarantee that their demands will be constitutionally recognized. One deadlock the both sides are facing is the mismatch of the interpretation of the Kurdish demands. All of the Kurdish politicians I interviewed asked for having a political status for the Kurds in Turkey, whether autonomous or federation, while the Turkish interviewees rejected the idea and denied the possibility of such a demand. In fact, the code “With Autonomy”²² was repeated seven times, obviously by the Kurdish politicians, and in contrary the code “Without Autonomy” was repeated two times.

Regardless of this mismatch, the negotiation between the Level I leaders continues, and all of them want an outcome that would satisfy their Level II constituencies, especially the public. The initial plan for dealing with the PKK has two stages. First, the PKK fighters lay down their arms and they withdraw from the Turkish territories. Second, the Turkish government will issue a general amnesty, which allows the PKK members to come back to Turkey and reintegrate with the society and politics (interview with, Ensargolu 2015).

The KRG has the potential to contribute in this process in two ways. Through its different party based channels of communication it can keep track of both the PKK and the Turkish government sides. In other words, the KDP channel has more close relations with the Anakara government and the PUK said has good security relations with the PKK and PYD camp (Ala'Aldeen and Manis, 2015). Through these different channels, the KRG can help in making sure the war between the PKK and the Turkish government would not start again. In fact, Barzani and other leaders from the KRG have told the PKK and the Turkish government that weapon cannot bring a solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey, and they need to find a solution peacefully. All of my interviewees from Turkey and KR-I have agreed with the potential of the KRG leaders in helping talk to the PKK.

Clearly, the geographical potential of the KR-I should not be underestimated while considering the disarmament of the PKK. The headquarters of the PKK is located in the Qandil mountain, which is north of KR-I. In case the disarmament process happens, the KR-I could be a

²² With autonomy is a code meaning the interviewees demanded a political status for the Kurds in Turkey as an autonomous region or federation. In contrary, the “Without autonomy” is another code representing the voice of the Turkish interviewees disregarding this demand.

good location to host the PKK members until they can go back to Turkey (Bozyel) and the KRG could help in explaining and convincing the people with the step by step of the peace process (Ensarioğlu).

Despite the fact the peace process has had many obstacles and shortcoming, the talks with the imprisoned leader of the PKK has not stopped since the end of 2012. Regardless of the technicality and the details of the process, the determination of the PKK's fate is an absolute prerequisite for the peace process, and the Ankara government believes in the potential of Ocalan in controlling the PKK front (Hasimi). The Level I negotiators from both sides understand the importance of continuing the negotiation, but at the same time they are aware of how much they can give in order for their gains to be accepted by their constituencies and the public. So far, continuing the cease fire is the brightest overlap in the win-set of Ankara and PKK/Kurds in Turkey.

The Level I leaders on the negotiation table are the ones who decide the direction of the peace process, and Ocalan seems to have the power to contain the PKK members. The power of crafting agreements on this case is in the hands of Level I leaders, and the elite model argues that power is concentrated within elite groups who are able to dominate politics and society. The elites have the ability to lead and utilize the majority of the public opinion, which maximizes their win-sets and overlap, to promote their Level I agreements (Smith, Hadfield and Dunne, 171). It is no secret that in two-level game model Level I negotiators have personal and party based interests, which sometimes make the bargaining costly and risky in case their interests do not match the overall national interest (Putnam, 457). Both the AK Party and HDP are criticized for their use of the Kurdish Question to gain more popularity prior to elections, and their loaded contrary statements to utilize the public for more support during election campaigns (Rudaw, 2015). When the leaders on Level I bargain on the peace process, this is already an application of the two-level game theory though the Level I negotiators are within Turkey talking about a domestic issue. In addition, the KRG as an outsider to the peace process has the potential to contribute to the disarmament of the PKK.

6.3. Power Struggle: to Unit or Not to Unite

Even though it is common among Kurds that “if brothers back each other, only God may have the power to defeat them,”²³ the struggle for power dominance and securing party legacy have set the Kurdish parties apart and driven them away from focusing on one national Kurdish goal. This notion of power hunger has been translated into bloody civil wars between the KDP and PUK themselves in the KRG and against the PKK in the 1990s. Therefore, the KRG does not have a clear background toward the PKK, which is something to keep in mind while considering KRG’s objective status in the peace process as a facilitator. As Putnam argues the parties in the KRG want to know “what is in it” from them. This section of the chapter goes over the “power hunger” theme mentioned in my findings through the lenses of the zero-sum concept, and it shows why/how limited the KRG is in involving in the Kurdish Question and peace process in Turkey.

Before I go into the details of how the Kurdish political parties are divided, it is important to note that upon certain crisis, the PUK, KDP, and PKK have shown their gratitude for collaboration and unity. Recently, when ISIS attacked and Peshmarga forces were defeated in Shngal on August 2014, the PKK fighters were the first, due to their strategic location in Qandil Mountain, to arrive the area and fight ISIS back. Nowadays, the PKK fighters are fighting side by side with the Peshmarga forces in Shangal, Kirkuk, and Khanaqin areas in the KR-I against ISIS: “you have the PKK guerrillas in Kirkuk and Shingal fighting together with the Peshmerge forces against ISIS. Nowadays, because of the threat of ISIS, there is more engagement between the KRG and the PKK” (Bucak). Also, when the border town Kobani in Syrian Kurdish part was under attack by ISIS in September and October 2014, the Kurdistan Parliament agreed to send 200 well trained Peshmarga forces with heavy equipments through Turkey to help defend the city against ISIS.

With ISIS attack on KR-I and the Kobani later on, moved the conscious of the Kurds wherever they were, [regardless]of their political backgrounds or which parts of Kurdistan they were from. Kobani was such an example and brought people together and paved the way for Peshmerge forces to be sent to defend the besieged population, the same can be said about Shangal and many other places (Dizeyee).

²³ This is a common Kurdish proverb in the KR-I to show to power and the necessity of unity. It is widely used in normal life and political discussions.

Having Peshmarga in Kobani was great. From Ibrahim Kalil [boarder point between Turkey and KR-I] to Kobani, which is about 400 to 500 klm people celebrated the passages of only 150 [200] Peshmarge forces. And they were very like a symbol of unity, which was more powerful than their weapon... On the other hand, in Makhmor, Diyala, Kirkuk, Khanaqin, and in Shangal there are PKK fighters fighting ISIS side by side and shoulder by shoulder with the Peshmargas. This also gives us a hope that we the Kurds must be united (Gur).

These two examples signify the importance of unity among Kurds regardless of their backgrounds and political affiliations. When I was conducting my interviews, I could see the hope, inspiration, and delight in the eyes of the Kurdish interviewees while talking about the significant of this historical momentum unity; because the main prerequisites, namely trust for unity and collaboration, do not fully exist among the Kurdish political parties, their temporarily unity runs out of fuel fast. Despite the fact ISIS's attacks on KRG and Kobani were terrible, it gave some hope for the Kurds to unite once for all. Nevertheless, this momentary unity ran out of energy faster than anyone ever expected, especially from the KRG's side over the PKK's affiliation or announcement of the Shangal canton on January 14, 2015.

The announcement of Shangal canton, which was unsuccessful, upset all of the sides from the KRG and PKK was accused as the main brain behind the announcement. The President office, the Prime Minster office, Kurdistan Parliament office stood against such a action and looked at it as a violation of Iraqi and Kurdistan constitutions and interference in the politics of the KRG. The PKK was accused for acting "illegally," "interfering" in the politics of the KRG, and for trying to "divide" the KR-I (KRG 2015) (KDP 2015).

These back and forth statements provoked the propaganda machines from all of the sides, and it almost set the unity clock backward to time worse than before ISIS attack. The PKK denied its status as the main engine behind Shangal canton and explained that its main purpose was to help the Shangal people to have their own governing body (KCK. 2015). Parallel to these statements from all of the sides, the PKK fighters were still fighting with Peshmarga forces against ISIS in KR-I and Peshmaraga forces were still fighting against ISIS in Kobani. The PKK accused those propaganda machines for giving the public "falsified" information and threatened with the possibility of withdrawing its guerillas from KR-I (KCK 2015).

While the most dangerous terrorist group was at the shore of their homelands and Peshmarga units were fighting, bleeding, dying, and sharing their daily victory and loss with the

PKK guerillas, the elites with the authority could not go over their differences. Thus far, the elites have not earned each other's trust, and no matter how necessary a unity is, it cannot come to being without trust.

It is not surprising none of the Kurdish political parties fully trust each other. Each party wants to maximize its own piece of the pie even if it is at the expense of another party, and they are more concerned with glorifying their party and family legacy than one Kurdish national cause. The concept of synergy has not arrived the Kurdish territory yet, and the idea of competition dominates most of the act of the parties. Among the Kurdish parties, most of the time power is conceptualized as zero-sum on both elites and party level. To look at the power struggle from an elite perspective, two Kurdish leaders are portrayed as rival competitors in terms of presenting a pan-Kurdish identity.

I don't care what they say, but the Kurdistan will be united by the hand of President Masud Barzani. They [PKK member and followers] might think or illusion that Apo or whatever they call him to be the leader of the Kurds, but this will happen on the hands of President Barzani (Khaliq).

Accordingly, the victory of one leader comes at the expense of the other leader's loss. It might be a little bit less clear when we compare the rival between Barzani and Ocalan, but when we compare the competition on the party level, one can obviously see the challenge and race to dominate as much of the pie as possible.

After the Assad regime withdrew its forces from Rojava, the Kurdish party of Syria was poured with party representatives from KR-I and Turkey. Having armed forces in the Syrian Kurdish speaking communities was a must for the Kurds to protect themselves from an inevitable bloody civil war in Syria. But at the same time, having multiple Kurdish arm forces in the Syrian Kurdish part could possibly trigger a civil war between themselves, which would mean the end of Rojava. Therefore, the Kurdish National Council (KNC) and the Peoples' Council of Western Kurdistan (PCWK) signed Hawler Declaration (Erbil agreement) on November 7, 2012. The agreement was facilitated by Barzani himself and the main purpose of the agreement was to organize the Kurdish armed powers in Rojava and to prevent any internal fighting in the area (Kurd Watch 2012). As a result, the Supreme Kurdish Committee (SKC) was established, a structural organ with the purpose of democratising the power division in the area, giving the KNC five seats and the PCWK five seats.

Short after the agreement, the Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (YPG)²⁴, the official armed power of the PYD, a sister party of the PKK wing in Rojava, declared that they would not accept other armed forces except for ones that operate under its rule (Kurd Watch 2012), which almost triggered an arm conflict between the arm powers from the KR-I and YPG. The KDP trained and armed around 4,000 fighters and was about to send them to Rojava, but the PYD threatened to “fight back if one single fighter steps in” (Crisis Group 2014, 2). Obviously, the struggle for power between the Kurdish political parties has almost triggered another civil war over having greater piece of Rojava’s pie. In other words, each party thrived to maximize its power in Rojava at the expense of the other parties, or each party perceived the strength of another party at the expense of its strength.

Rojava is the best example of power struggle between the Kurdish political parties, and it is the conjunction, where all the political powers meet and arm wrestle. Despite the constant threat of ISIS, a full unity seems to be costly for the party. The “power hunger” theme elaborated on the division between the Kurdish political parties by looking at the elites’ revivalism and Rojava’s as a land of opportunities and power struggle. Even though upon certain incidents the political powers have united, these collaborations were momentary and expired soon. The current power struggle is one of the reasons for KRG’s limitedness in getting more and more involved in the Kurdish peace process in Turkey.

By no means just because I am ending my analysis with explanation of this theme, it does conclude that KRG cannot and has not influenced the peace process. On the contrary, it has influenced the peaces process and has the potential for further contribution to the peaces process in the future, but the power struggle between the Kurdish policies parties could be quite a holdback in the process.

²⁴Yekîneyên Parastina Gel is Kurdish for the “People’s Protection Unit”, and conduct the armed wing of the PYD party.

7. Conclusion

The 20th century was a quite tough one for the Kurds in Turkey, especially with the start of the PKK's arm struggle against the Turkish state, which cost thousands of lives. The Kurdish issue in Turkey appeared under different names such as the southeaster problem or terrorist issue without addressing the origin of the problem. Since the beginning of the 1980, the Kurdish Question in Turkey has been thoroughly militarized, and the Turkish government has used every military measure to put an end to the PKK activities. This has created a norm among politicians and the public that military action is the only way to deal with Kurdish cause in Turkey. Aside from the destruction and violence, the PKK organization has been the main face of an ethnic issue, which has left no room except for military measurement for finding a solution to the Kurdish Question. Nowadays, after more than three decades of bloodshed and 45,000 lives, both the PKK and the Turkish state understand that the Kurdish cause cannot be solved with arm power and blood.

Even though the achievements out of the peace process might not have been satisfactory for all of the sides, the Turkish government has taken some major steps in finding a solution and in looking at the Kurdish Question from a non-military perspective. Overall, the notion that Kurds are danger for the integrity of Turkey has greatly reduced. Currently, the KRG is one of the strongest allies of the Turkish government. The KRG-Turkey relations have escalated since 2008 politically, economically, diplomatically, in energy and security sectors. Therefore, while the Turkish state enjoys good relations with the Kurdish government in Iraq, it cannot ignore its Kurdish problem at home, because in the worst case scenario, if the war between the PKK and the Turkish government starts again, this will effectively endanger Turkey's investment in the KR-I and the KRG-Turkey relations.

This thesis investigated the influence of the KRG-Turkey relations on the peace process for the Kurdish Question in Turkey. Through the interviews conducted in Turkey and via email, enough data were gathered to tackle this question. In my analysis, I looked at new image building among the Turkish public and the contribution of the KRG in dealing with the PKK as a part of the peace process. The KRG-Turkey relations have shown the Turkish public a non-military and business friendly face of the Kurds, because the PKK has always been presented as the face of the Kurdish cause in Turkey. One may argue that the Kurdish legal political parties

have also represented the Kurdish cause in Turkey in addition to the PKK; this argument is correct, but evidence suggests all of these Kurdish legal parties were shutdown for their affiliation with the PKK.

This thesis shows that dealing with the PKK is one of the major steps in finding a solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey, and KRG can contribute to this through maintaining talks with the PKK and the Turkish government, *thanks* to its different party based channel of communication. In addition, the KR-I could help in dealing with the PKK members during the disarmament until they are reintegrated into the society and politics in Turkey. In the last section of my analysis, I have looked at another angle of influence the KRG-Turkey relations, and I focused on the struggle for power between the Kurdish political parties. I explained this point through using the zero-sum concept of power as an analytical tool and I have also given Rojava and the aftermath of the Shangal canton as examples. Therefore, I argued that because of the power conflict between Kurdish political parties, it is hard for the KRG to be further involved or to have more positive effect on the peace process.

Overall, the KRG-Turkey relations have contributed in smoothening the public opinion about the Kurdish Question in Turkey, and the KRG can offer its geographical potential in the disarmament process of the PKK. On the contrary, each Kurdish political party strives to maximize its power, which can be a potential barrier for collaboration between the PKK and the KRG and it can actually limit the KRG from involving further in the peace process.

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9. Appendix

9.1. Interviews in Turkey

Interview with Altan Tan, the member of the Turkish National Assembly from the HDP (former BDP) on January 20, 2015. Duration 36 minutes. Location: Turkish National Assembly.

Language: Mostly English; sometime Arabic and Kurdish Kwrmanji.

Arez Hussen (AH): In your opinion, how satisfactory are the changes that came out of the peace process in Turkey?

Altan Tan (AT): The Turkish government should solve this problem; The Turkish government can't delay the Kurdish problem. What are the reasons? First, now there is a Kurdish government in north Iraq; not independent, but it is a government, so Kurds took all their rights in north of Iraq, in the south part of Kurdistan. What are these rights? The education in mother tongue, regional government, of course, writing and reading in the government (changing to Arabic) "legal language". The second reason is the Syrian part of Kurdistan, we call it Rojava; there is now three cantons. Cantons means as small government; it is not important the inside of the rule, but the Kurds have a name in the north part of Syria and all of the world now knows them as the Kurd. But before there was no such a chance. So, whoever will come to the power in Syria: Islamic, Baath, I mean Bashar Assad, or another power, they should give the rights of the Kurds in Syria.

So, these changes in Iraqi part and Syrian part forced Turkey and inside Turkey, there is a struggle that is 100 year old and in the last 30 years, there is a war. 50, 000 people are killed during these 30 years. Outside of Turkey, in the Syrian part of Kurdistan and Iraqi part of Kurdistan forced the Turkish government to solve the Kurdish problem. But, they don't want to solve these problem by giving the Kurds the equal rights; they want to assimilate Kurds and they want to take time: five years, 10 years, 20 years, 15 years. Why? They want to take time because nearly 30% of Turkey is Kurd. So, it is nearly 16-17 million; These 16-17 million Kurds half of them are living in the west part of Turkey; more than half of the Kurds do not know their mother language, Kurdish. Every year the new born boys and girls will not know Kurdish. So, if 50% of them do not know their mother language, each year this 50% will increase and will be 55, 60, 65%. Maybe after 20 years, this ratio will be 75%. For this reason, Turkish government wants to take time. They are imagining, we will give the right of the Kurds, when the Kurds will finish. If nobody or if 10, 20 or 30% can speak Kurdish, and 80% is assimilated, then there is no danger. Now, the talking with the PKK and Abdulla Ocalan is this you (Ocalan) serve me and I will serve you. What is the meaning of serving? There were three elections in Turkey: the local

election, the national presidential election, and the last one will happen in June. These three elections are very important for Taib Erdogan; he gained two of them, and in this time, he will maybe gain the third one. So, he says, you serve me, and then if I pass these three examination, so maybe I will think for you.

AH: Is this an agreement between Ocalan and President Erdogan.

AT: I think. I think so. My believe is this. So, they don't have any program.

AH: Who exactly does not have any program? Do the Kurds have any program?

AT: the Turkish government, and they do not agree with any program. What are these? One, mother language education.

AH: But does not that already exist?

AT: NO, NO, NO. Only Kurdish course. And the second one is the official language. The third one is regional government. They did not agree with any of them.

AH: What do you think of the relations between the KRG and Turkish government? In your opinion, what is the nature of the relations between them?

AT: Well, there are main two reasons, there are many reasons, but the main ones for their relations are two. First, Turkish government decided if the issue forced us for the giving the rights of the Kurds, we don't want to work with a party or people like PKK; Barzani's mind is better than PKK, because he is near to the European side, he is near to the US, and his mentally is near to the Islamic mentality. So, we [the Turkish government] prefer Barzani in comparison to the PKK. Or a person or a group like Barzani. But, the main reason, the second one is that they [Turkish government] seeing that because of the Kurds, it is impossible to build a new Middle East without Kurds. And, the relations between Kurds and Turks are older than between Kurds and Arabs or Persians. So, they say first of all, if don't take the support of the Kurds, we cannot do much in the Middle East. So, building a new Ottoman Empire is not possible without the Kurds.

AH: Let me ask you a more specific question, what do the Kurds have that make them so important for the Turks?

AT: One, is the strategic area, geopolitics. Kurds are in the heart of the Middle East, between the Turks, Arabs and Persians. Second one is the petrol of the Kurds. In the Saddam time, there was not one dollar petrol of the Kurds; Now, the KR-I, excluding Kirkuk and Mosul, I am talking about Erbil, Sulaimani, and Duhok, but now they decided that in ten years, there will be one million barrels of petrol; Turkey has 600,000 barrels of, but Kurds have one million, which is more than the Turkish need. They say if we connect with the Kurds like Barzani, we will take all of our energy from the Kurds. Now, Turkey is taking its energy from Iran and Russia, mostly natural gas. The third reason is the Dicle and Furat (Tigris and Euphrates). Because the sources of these rivers are mostly located in the Kurdish lands. So, in the next century in the Middle East and the whole world, the most important thing will be water and food, more important than petrol.

AH: But, the Great Anatolian Project is build by the Turkish government and it is a Turkish project?

AT: yes, that is why they want to dominate the areas where the future food production will be. And more importantly, we are talking about drinking water, not only the water for agriculture. Now Israel, Jordan, and Palestine don't have drinking water. So, these dams, and the rivers will be more important than the petroleum. So, Kurds have area, energy, water, and food. And also, force.

AH: What do you mean by force?

AT: For one thousand year, the Turks could not do much in the Middle East without the Kurds: soldiers. i.e., brothers; brothers who work without money without salary.

AH: What tools or mechanisms do the Kurds in Iraq and KRG have that could help in finding a solution for the Kurdish question in Turkey?

AT: First of all, they don't fight with the Turkey. So, Turkey decides that they are not our enemy, and this decision is very important for solving the Kurdish Question because most of the Turks think that the Kurds will derived our country, and because they [some Turkish people] decided that Anatolia and Kurdistan all belong to Turks, and Kurdistan is a part of Turkey. So, if Kurds take their rights, their country [Turkey] will divide. So, Barzani not only does not fight the

Turks, but also say good things about the Turkey and trading. All of these make Turkish people normal and silent, and they would say these Kurds are our fiends and they do not want to divide from us, and they will help us. Then, we can live together with them. Second, the ratio of trade, because Turks go to Kurdistan [KR-I] and Kurds come to Turkey.

AH: But, how helpful is this trading for solving the Kurdish question?

AT: The third one is balancing the PKK. Barzani says to PKK, you are very strong, and you should be near traditional Kurds, Islam, tradition, European Union, and United States. So, these policies balance the Turkish and Kurdish relation.

AH: Do you think Barzani has any influence on the PKK? Or has Barzani/KRG pushed the Turkish government in any way in finding a solution for the Kurdish Question.

AT: Not much, because now Barzani/they are thinking of themselves, but they can force Turkish government more than this.

AH: In what way? How?

AT: By talking, by going, by selling petrol; they should give some.

AH: In your own words, the KRG could have done more!

AT: Yes, they can.

AH: I will mention two incidents and I would like to know your opinion on them: First, Barzani's visit to Diyarbakir prior to the election. Some people see this a great opening for the Kurds, because Barzani was greeted by Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Erdogan mentioned the word Kurdistan and quoted Ahmed Kaya in his speech. On the other hand, some people think of it as a betrayal against the Kurds. The second incident is the Nechirvan Barzani's visit to Van and his request for the support for AKP party.

AT: These things according to past are very important, but according to now, these are nothing. They should make more effort now, because we cannot wait another 100 years. Their visit to

Van and Diyarbakir are important, but only supporting AK Party policies is wrong. They should forced the Turkish government for giving the democratic rights to the Kurds.

AH: But you have no comment on the timing of the visit, before the election!

AT: It was wrong. But maybe he [Barzani] says that he [Erdogan] forced or it was a chance for him to come to Diyarbakir. So, he gave me this chance and I will give me my support.

AH: (this question was asked in English and Arabic for the sake of clarity to the interviewee) To what extent the Turkish government *used* the KRG in both finding a solution for the Kurdish Question in Turkey and in the internal problems in Turkey?

AT: He [Erdogan] was to show to the Kurds that he is clear to the Kurds but PKK is the opposite of us, and he will serve the people with Barzani. This policy half of it wrong, because the Turkish government does not solve the Kurdish problem; the three points the Kurds want have not been met yet: education in mother tongue, regional autonomy, and official language.

AH: So, Barzani has not done anything in these three areas?

AT: No, he does not force the Turkish government. Now they are thinking of themselves first.

AH: But, don't you think it might be a smart thing that they are thinking of themselves first and then in the afterward, they will have bigger plans?

AT: But when. After how long: 50, 60, 100 years. If it is small time, it does not matter, we will wait. But now 13 years passed from the rule of the AKP.

AH: How important is the PKK for the Kurdish question in Turkey? How important the PKK and Ocalan are in the equation?

AT: According to me, PKK wants to rule an area and then take the rights of the Kurds. Ruling the area is their first principle.

AH: What area we are talking about?

AT: Kurdistan.

AH: What Kurdistan, there are four parts of Kurdistan?

AT: The Kurdistan of Turkey, of course. So, they want to force Turkey Kurdistan as socialist Marxist party. The plural politics of the system is not their issue. First of all, they want to rule the area as socialist and Marxist.

They say we want to live with Turkey, and we don't want to separate, but these mentality is separating.

AH: How?

AT: In the west part of Turkey is democracy, and in the east part of Turkey having dictatorship is impossible.

AH: When you say dictatorship, you mean they want to be the only party in the area?

AT: Yes, they don't say it like that. But they are acting like that.

AH: What have they done that support that statement?

AT: They are taking money and using force.

AH: But they are the only force, so, don't you think this will automatically make them the only source of use of force?

AT: Force on the Kurds, too, not only on the Turks. There are many Kurds don't believe like PKK. There are Islamic, liberalist, etc.

AH: What about Ocalan, how much decision making power he has? Is he the final person to decide on issues?

AT: Yes.

AH: What do you think of this, that there is one person deciding?

AT: It is wrong. In the modern democracy, there is no one man democracy.

AH: What is your comment on this statement, “AK Party prefers Barzani to be the leader of Kurdistan, not Abdulla Ocalan. That is why the Party is so keying on Barzani.”

AT: They don't want Abdulla Ocalan and neither Barzani, but they say we better work with people like Barzani than people like PKK. It is not like they support Barzani or like him very much.

AH: AK Party wins more than 50% of the votes in the Kurdish areas, what are your thoughts on this?

AT: The problem is religion. Turkey's Kurds are more religious than the Iraqi and the Syrian Kurds. Second, they do not want to separate from Turkey, because their relation is not like the one with Syria and Iraq (he means with Iranian and Syrian governments). Here, there are more than 1 million wedding between Kurds and Turks. Also, half of the Kurds living in the west part of Turkey.

AH: How much religion has to do with this?

AT: Maybe half of the cause is religion.

AH: If there was a Kurdish religious party, do you think the voting ratio would have change?

AT: If Taib Erdogan does not solve the problems, there will be.

AH: How is the between the Kurdish political parties in Kurdistan of Turkey? Like the relations between HDP, BDP, HAK party, KDPT...?

AT: They don't have any power. All of them are not even one percentage.

AH: Why do you think there is not so much corporation between these Kurdish political parties?

AT: I don't know.

In the Kurdistan part of Turkey, there are three powers: one, government, soldiers, police, feudal, lords; the second, Islam and the mentality of Islam; and the third one is PKK.

The balance of PKK is Islam; the challenger of PKK is Islam, which is be taken by AK Party.

Also, in our party, HDP more than half of our voters are Islamic and they are praying and covering their hair.

AH: How is the relation between the Kurdish political parties in Turkey and KRG?

AT: Not good; The Kurdish parties go and talk with the KRG, but they don't have good support or relationship. Only we say diplomatic and protocol talks.

AH: Why is that?

AT: I don't know. KRG prefers make the relation with Taib Erdogan. KRG think that they [Pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey] don't have any power, so why should I [KRG] support them.

AH: There is an election coming, are we expecting any big change considering the statement Ocalan made about concrete changes before Nawroz 2015?

AT: I don't know; I don't know.

AH: According to what Ocalan said, it there won't be any big changes, arm struggle is another option.

AT: I don't think so, because between Taib Erdogan and Ocalan there is a good relation.

AH: In less than one minute, Rojava, the land where everyone meets and all of the political parties, PKK, KDP, PUK, meet, so, is Rojava the land of conflict or the land that could united all of the differences?

AT: I don't think PKK will accept the other groups. In Shengal, they announced the canton of Shengal against Barzani. So, when the PKK see himself strong, he does not accept anyone.

AH: Has Kobani anything? Peshmargas from KRG going to Kobani!

AT: Kobani will be the area of everyone: US, Syrian Free Army, Turkey, PKK, and Barzani.

AH: What are your thought on the Kurdish National Congress? What are the barriers?

AT: Until the United States, Turkish government, PKK, and Barzani agree to each other, it is impossible to have such a congress. But, Turkey, PKK, and Barzani should agree, then this is a possible.

Interview with Bayram Bozyel, the President of the HAK Party on January 10, 2015.

Duration: Approximately 85 minutes. Location: Headquarter of the HAK Party in Diyarbakir.

Language: Kurdish Kwrmanji.

Arez Hussen (AH): To what extend the outcomes out of the peace process and the resolution process have met the expectations of all of the sides in Turkey?

Bayram Bozyel (BB): The demands of the Kurdish people are obvious; we ask for our democratic, cultural, and national rights. Their rights have been persecuted and denied for the last 100 years. The Kurds demand to have their identity officially and constitutionally recognized, have education from elementary school to university in Kurdish, have Kurdish language as an official language of the state besides Turkish, and finally to have a political statues for the Kurds whether it is an autonomy or federation like the Iraqi Kurdistan. Also, we ask to put an end to the fight and the use of violence through peace. The government wants to solve the Kurdish Question only when the arms are lay down, but the Kurdish case and the arm struggle are two different things, and they should not be mixed together. The Kurdish Question is

a issue of a nation that has existed for hundreds of year and their basic rights have been denied for 100 years, but the issue of the use of weapon is new and an outcome of not resolving the Kurdish Question from the revolt of Shaick Abaidulla to the rise of PKK. So, the Kurdish Question should come first and then the arm struggle, because if PKK lays down its arms today, the Kurdish Question would not be solved tomorrow. There should be a distinction between the PKK and the Kurdish Question. Also, the government's evaluation of the war is incorrect; they have to know why the PKK fighters went to the mountains in the first place. To put an end of the fight once for all, they should have a plan for the PKK to come down from the mountain and get engaged in the politics and life of the people without putting them in prison.

The government also needs to make some constitutional changes such as getting rid of the 10% threshold so that small parties could engage with the politics. So, the government needs to have a broader vision while looking at the Kurdish Question and needs to have plans.

AH: After the AK Party came to power and the start of the solution process, have the changes been satisfactory in the Kurdish Question, or not? Why?

BB: first of all, the coming of AKP to power was a good thing for the Kurdish Question in Turkey, and the international changes also put some pressure on the AKP to make changes. Also, the AKP itself went through so many difficulties before it got to power with the arrest of Erdogan and the attempt to remove Necmettin Erbakan from power. AKP already knew the hardship. Also, Turkey's attempt to join the EU was another factor for AKP to soften its rules and laws, because they know they cannot join the EU without making certain changes. The AKP itself knew that in order to stay in power it had to make doing politics easy, so they made those changes. All of these reasons accompanied with the Ergankon case and Turkey's relations with the KRG led to changes in the Kurdish Question in Turkey such as the opening of TRT 6 [the name of this TV channel was changed to TRT Kurdi five days after this interview].

In the 1990s, the relations with the KRG were not good. Turkish state would refer to Barzani and Talabani as the head of two tribe leaders, but after the Iraqi constitution was passed in 2005 and recognized the KRG, Turkey started opening its relations with the KRG; there are political, trade, and diplomatic relations between both sides now. Back to your question, it has been 13 years since the AKP came to power, and we can ignore the first years of its rule because they were new and there were so many things happening, but after that until now the vision of AKP has been very narrow in dealing with the Kurdish Question. Since the peace process there have been many casualties and only in the recent event about Kobani about 50 people were killed. So, the government needs to change its mentality and its attitude in dealing with the Kurdish Question. Yes, they have made changes but they need to work on that more.

AH: In your perspective what is nature of relations between KRG and Turkey?

BB: The relations are based on two purposes; Turkey is on the transit line for energy, and it can be a good way for Kurdish energy to the market. So, in this case Kurdish energy would sell in a cheaper price to Turkey. So, this is good for the KRG, because KRG does not enjoy good relations with Baghdad and Iran, too. What is important is that these relations between Turkey and KRG have a positive impact on the Kurdish Question in Turkey.

Obviously, Turkey is an independent state, and KRG is a federal region, but KRG enjoy it is political and diplomatic freedom; it has good relations with Europe and US, and there are representatives of many governments in the KRG. Also, these relations are not illegal, because they are allowed according to the Iraqi constitution.

AH: In south Kurdistan (KR-I), some critics argue that the relation between KRG and Turkey are mostly relations between KDP and AK Party and other parties in the KRG are not aware of most of the ins and outs of the relations; what is your comment on these criticism?

BB: I think it is something normal, because nowadays AKP is in power and runs the government, so they control these relations from the Turkish side. It is like if the Republican Party comes to power in the US, they would control the foreign policy of America. So, if tomorrow AKP is not in power, another party would control these relations. For the KRG, you need to know that Barzani is an elected legitimate leader for the KRG and it should be normal if he is in charge of the relations. If it was a government run by Barham Saleh or Nechirvan Barzani, they would have been in charge of the relations, too. If it was Goran in charge of the government, they would have controlled these relations.

I have one criticism for these relations. The KRG should not fully tight itself with Turkey and should have other alternative so that they do not fully tight their future plans and future of Kurdistan with Turkey. For example, if tomorrow CHP comes to power and these relations go back, what would be the future of Kurdistan? Yes, the KRG should continue its economic, political, and diplomatic relations with Turkey, but at same time should have other plans. Over all, the KRG should not put all of their eggs in one basket.

AH: How important are these relations between the KRG and Turkey important for the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

BB: As I said, these relations are important for the Kurdish Question in Turkey, because Turkey's softening relations affects the Kurds in Turkey. For many years the Kurdish identity was denied in Turkey. It is not possible for Turkey to recognize the Kurdistan Regional

Government, have trade relations with KRG, call Barzani the President of KRG, and recognize five million Kurds in Iraq, while it denies the existence of 20 million Kurds in Turkey. So, Turkey had no other chance than opening to the Kurds. Also, these relations were good for Turkey, too, because it helped the public understand that Kurds are threat anymore and it is possible to do business and trade with them without any fear. The public understands now that the existence of Kurdistan of Iraq is not a threat to Turkey. So, these reasons would help in finding a solution for the Kurdish Question in Turkey. For example, if six to seven years ago Kurdish parliament members would visit Ocalan in the Imrali Island, that would have been the dooms day and the end of the world, but now it happens very often; it is like the *way to visit the spring*²⁵. Also, they visit Qandil Mountain easily, which was impossible before.

AH: Visiting Imrali easily and Kurds are not danger anymore, are these happening mostly because of the developments in relations between the KRG and Turkey, or there are other reasons?

BB: As I said, this is one of the main factors, because this matches Turkey's overall interest, but also you have to know that Kurdish people in Turkey have been thriving for their rights for the last 100 years. So, this also a major reason accompanied with EU's pressure on Turkey to make domestic changes.

AH: From your observation, have you seen any concrete attempts by the KRG to push or maybe ask the Turkish government for a quick solution for the Kurdish Question in Turkey? Can you provide any examples?

BB: The KRG has had an effect on the Kurdish Question in Turkey from the 1990s. Mam Jalal visited Ocalan in 1993 and asked him for a cease fire between the PKK and Turkey. Both sides agreed with the cease fire. Also, Masoud Barzani and Nechirvan Barzani have always tried to find settlement between both sides. So, both the PUK and KDP have bravely ask Turkish state for more opening with Kurds in Turkey.

AH: Besides 1993, do we have any other examples?

²⁵ A Kurdish idiom that is used when something is really easy to do or when someone goes somewhere and comes back easily. It has the connotation of "a piece of cake."

BB: Barzani upon many occasions asked the Turkish state to give the rights of the Kurdish people in Turkey and stop the war with the PKK, and he also spoke with the PKK to stop the violence.

AH: In what ways Turkey has used KRG in dealing with some domestic political crisis?

BB: Turkey would like to use the KRG in dealing with the Kurdish issue, but this should not be a negative thing. For example, Taib Erdogan invites Barzani to Diyarbakir; on one hand, AKP might get more Kurdish votes out of this, but on the other hand, Barzani is received as the President of KRG, not a tribe leader like before. So, if Turkish state uses KRG in dealing with the Kurdish Question in Turkey, this will be in the advantage of the KRG, too. So, Barzani's visit helped in changing the over public opinion in Turkey about the Kurds, and I don't think his visit was a negative thing at all.

AH: But, won't these visits harm the pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey?

BB: This is a phase; what we need now is to have progress in the Kurdish Question in Turkey in anyway. So, if AKP finds an absolute solution to the Kurdish Question, people would vote of it then. Obviously, both PKK and BDP were upset with Barzani's visit to Diyarbakir, but later Barzani visited the Diyarbakir Municipality that was governed by BDP; eventually, people from BDP and other side were happy with the visit.

AH: A lot of people see Imrali and Qandil as the focal point for the Kurdish Question in Turkey; how correct this statement is?

BB: This is half correct; it is not correct because the PKK is not fully equal to the whole Kurdish nation, and PKK is just an important and curtail actor of the Kurdish Question in Turkey. On the other hand, it is correct because PKK has the arm power, and both Imrali and Qandil are the decision making center for putting an end to the fight. So, there must be a distinction between the PKK issue and the Kurdish issue.

AH: Does Ocalan have the final word?

BB: What Ocalan demands is almost what the Kurds in Turkey demand, too, but Ocalan asks for finding a solution for the boarder of Kurdistan and water while the basic demand of the Kurdish

people is having a federation. You have to know Ocalan is in prison and has this special condition, which have an effect on his decision. Over all, the PKK and Ocalan are big actors in the political equation.

AH: How important is the disarmament of the PKK for the resolution process in Turkey?

BH: Of course it is important; Ocalan himself declared in Nawroz 2013 that the “age of weapons is over, and this is the age of pencil.” So, the PKK and Ocalan know that arm struggle is not a solution for the Kurdish Question in Turkey, but in fact, a barrier in front of it. We also have HDP parliament member, who were elected by the people, but there are actually not free in their political decisions; they mostly go by what they are told from Qandil and Imrali. When there is arm force, the political Kurdish parities are not free, too. The HDP is not free.

AH: How “un-free” HDP is?

BB: [tried not to give specific details about this and laughed out of the question]

Another important thing is that when there is no fight and war, it is easier to do politics.

AH: But, some politicians argue that Kurds in Turkey need to have their own arm forces to protect themselves. For example, the Kurds in south (KR-I) have Peshmarge forces, so the Kurds in north need to have a force to protect them. What is your comment on this?

BB: We need to look at the practical politics on the ground. The PKK does not want to have a separate country from Turkey now. They just demand the Kurds to have cultural and national rights, and eventually, the PKK would be the local forces like police forces of the cities in Kurdistan of Turkey. I would like to emphasize on the point that having arms is a barrier in front of the Kurdish political movement and dialogue.

AH: The PKK is an important part of the Kurdish equation in Turkey, and it has power over the Kurdish political parties in Turkey, but how can the KRG and Barzani help in finding a solution for the Kurdish Question while there has been a historical conflict or tension between the PKK and KDP?

BB: Unfortunately, this is correct; the opinion and approaches of the PKK and KDP are against each other in certain cases. For example, the Kurdish National Congress in delayed because such

a disagreement. Also, Masoud Barzani has asked the PKK to lay down their weapons and come to stay in the KR-I for as many years as they want until a general amnesty is issued by the Turkish government for the PKK member, because having the PKK in the mountain is a bit risky for the KRG, too.

AH: How dangerous is it for the KRG?

BB: Well, there is always the possibility for war with the Turkish government, which is not good for the KRG at all, and the possibility for a civil war within the Kurds, too.

AH: To what extent the changes in Rojava from the establishments of cantons to ISIS attack to Kobani to 7-8 October, 2014 protests have affected the Kurdish Question and the reconciliation process in Turkey?

BB: This also has positive and negative sides; on one hand, the Kurds in Syria have their self-rule after the civil war in Syria. This is almost similar to the experience of our brothers in the south (KR-I) with the Iraqi regime. So, this is an encouragement for the Kurds in Turkey, because the Iraqi Kurdistan was liberated and now Syria is, and the next place would be Turkey. The negative side would be that it changed Turkey's perspective about the Kurds in Syria, because from the beginning Turkey declared that they did not want the Kurds in Syria to have a de facto state in Syria. Also, from the beginning Turkey has helped the Syrian oppositions such as Free Syrian Army, Al-Nusra, and etc. I don't want to say that Turkey helped ISIS, but Turkey helped anyone that fought against Assad. In the end, the war changed toward/against the Kurds and some Kurds believe that Turkey has helped ISIS. For example, when the ISIS captured Mosul, some of the AKP member said that ISIS was not a terrorist group and it was just representing the Sunni voice of Iraq, but then bit by bit they changed their minds.

About the protest of 7 and 8 of October, it really had a negative impact on the reconciliation process. It decreased people's hope in the AKP, and even people's beliefs in the PKK lowered, because there were many casualties; only in Diyarbakir around 15 people were killed.

AH: What are the reasons that would make Turkey dislike the achievements of the Kurds in Rojava?

BB: Turkey does not want to see the Kurds in Syria to have their own autonomy while the Kurds in Iraq have their own government, because this would encourage the Kurds in Turkey to have similar achievement.

....

The policies of the PKK are not right in Rojava. They want to be the only arm force in Rojava; this mentality is a totalitarian mentality. Kurds want democracy, and this is neither democracy nor freedom. They don't allow the Kurdish political parties to practice politics freely. For example, YANKS [a collection of small Kurdish political parties in Syria] members have been beaten up for their disagreements with PKK.

AH: But is that what the PKK is doing, because their only problem seems to be with arm forces? They say you are welcome to do politics without arm forces?

BB: To start with, who gave the right to the PYD and PKK to decide who is going to have arm forces and who should not. The political parties should have the right to practice politics freely and to have arm forces if they want to. This unilateral policy of the PKK is really dangerous for the future of Kurds in Syria, because the KDPS wants to have arm forces just like PYD.

AH: How united are the Kurdish political parties in Turkey?

BB: The biggest problem with doing politics in Kurdistan north is that there is one big powerful party like PKK, which I mean HDP, and there are four to five really small and powerful Kurdish parties. The problem originates from the coup d'état in 1980, because before then there were many powerful Kurdish political parties Party Socialist Kurdistan, PAK Party, and Party Rizgari, and for example the Municipality of Diyarbakir was run by Mahdi Zana, but after the coup, all of the parties were closed, which put an end to all of the Kurdish political activities. Then, when the PKK came to power, everyone rounded around them overtime, and this made the PKK strong and stronger. So, the relation between Kurdish political parties in Turkey is not good, and it is due to the different balance of power. If you look at KRG, there is KDP, PUK, and Goran, which makes a distribution of power between them, but in Kurdistan of Turkey, there is one powerful PKK and many small parties.

The thing is now PKK is very powerful, which give the PKK the upper hand and has shaped its unilateral power and totalitarian ideas, but still the PKK allows for other political parties to do politics unlike the 1979 and 1980s when PKK killed many members of other political parties. When I was the president of the HAK party from 2008 for two terms, our relations was good with the BDP and we were exchanging visits. We formulated four points that summarized the Kurdish demands and presented together to the Turkish Parliament in 2010, but after this our relations have abolished and stopped.

AH: Why?

BB: I think it is all because of the mentality of the PKK, because they don't want to see any party getting a bit strong; they don't have the tolerance for the other parties.

AH: How is the relation between the KRG and the Kurdish political parties in Turkey?

BB: It is not bad. You know sometimes it is good and sometimes it is not. The relations between PKK-HDP and KDP are good and bad periodically. For our party, it is fine. I have visited KR-I and meet with Barzani and Talabani several times and with the Islamic parties, too. So, our relation is at a medium level.

AH: Isn't it a bit sad that the relations are not really strong between KRG and Kurdish political parties in Turkey while KRG enjoys a really strong relation with Ankara?

BB: You are right. The thing is KDP and PUK are not some much concerned with the big Kurdistan. They just want to take care of their own Region in Iraq and have money for that. This was the same strategy with Mala Mustafa Barzani, and they see their relations with Ankara more important than their relations with the Kurds in Turkey.

AH: Finally, though I read most of your party website, I would like to hear from you about your party mission and goals.

BB: We say that Kurdish Question is a question of a nation and a country: Kurds and Kurdistan. The Kurds thrive for their self-determination; there are two ways for this. First, the Kurds would live in Turkey in a federal system, and second, for the Kurds to have their own independent state. We want to earn the Kurdish right through dialogue and soft politics, absolutely not through violence and war. Also, we want a democratic Turkey, where the Kurdish rights are protected, because if Turkey is democratic, the Kurdish rights will be given, and the opposite is true. We hope for the all of the parties in all four parts of Kurdistan to be united without outside intervention and stabbing each other in the back.

Interview with Cemalettin Hasimi, Director General and Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister of Turkey on January 20, 2015. Duration: Approximately 65 minutes. Location: Headquarter of the AK Party in Ankara.

Language: English.

Arez Hussen (AH): To what extent have the changes out of the peace process in Turkey meet the expectations?

Cemalettin Hasimi (CH): It depends on the political position. It is been something that aspired from different political positions. Many different voices have been heard that we need to find a final settlement for the Kurdish Question, but politically, there was no complete political vision to ask the question of maintaining the peace process. AK Party, specifically the leadership of Taib Erdogan, convey to people that is possible to solve the Kurdish Question with peace and violence is not the only option, and there are other ways to solve the Kurdish Question, because previously, apart from certain political groups or certain intellectuals academic people, the majority of people and leaders believed that the only way to respond to Kurdish Question is to increase violence. Erbakan and Turgul Ozal were the exceptional leaders. In terms of the expectation, obviously, it is a difficult process, but overall I believe the public has somehow bought the idea that peace can be established in Turkey with negotiations. To speak about certain technical issues, there are certain anxieties and certain difficulties. We have passed through several difficult moments; at certain time, people has certain kind of disappointment, but people understand that it is a long difficult process; so, increasing support for the solution process display that people already bought that in terms of the expectation, including Kurdish and Turkish population. Obviously, there are certain groups that are against the peace process. Overall, except for some minor voices, all people support the peace process, which is a huge psychological success for our party, because now even when they criticize the peace process, they do not say that they are against the whole process, but they say that they are against the way the peace process in being implemented. And, that is a big psychological and political gain, because previously you could not discuss the Kurdish Question; some people would tell you that there were only a problem of terrorism and now at least 80% of the people, according to certain polls, are with the peace process, not the use of violence.

AH: In your opinion, what are the major barriers to the process?

CH: My personal opinion, one thing would be the way leadership within the PKK is makes it difficult. Second issue is that the Kurdish Question now, particularly PKK, is the use of violence is an international and regional issue now while the peace process is limited to Turkey. Right now, we have PKK issue in Syria, in KR-I, and in Iran. Also, there are European PKK; this international aspect of the issue combined with the radical changes in the middle make it difficult for the peace process. The leadership issue of the PKK, there are certain leaders in the PKK that does not like.

AH: How do you see the relations between KRG and the Turkish government? What is the nature of the relations?

CH: It has been a tough process for both sides. The relations between KRG or KRG leadership in the beginning and the state leadership were partial relations such as the attempts by Togut Ozel or Necmettin Erbakan. Most of the time the security groups from Turkey would have relationships with the KRG, and the whole nature of the relations were based on security oriented relationship. Meaning that if the KRG was against the PKK, they would have some reactions, and military would be the mediator of the relations. But, with the coming of the AK Party, as a part of the opening to the region, Kurdish opening has been a strong part of that process, because one thing distinguished the leadership of the AK Party as a political party from the previous governments and parties, the AK Party have not had any existential struggle with the Kurds and Kurdish identity. They have always believe in Kurdish identity and it is a part of reality of Middle East. If you read the writings of Prime Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, before political career as an advisor to the Prime Minister, he argues that there are four main actors in the region: Kurdish community, Turkish community, Arab community, and Persian community. For a state leader to stay Kurdish community are fact and they are reality in the Middle East is a difficult one.

Second, the difference was on the basis of policy difference; I guess it was in 2005 or 2006 when direct talk with KRG began. Before that there were different negotiations and meetings and different gathering and conference, but there were no direct talk. In 2007-2008, there were a conflict between the two sides, but after our discussions have brought us to this day that the KRG is a strategic partner to Turkey and become a door to Middle East. Right now, in trading, in political relation, and in social relations, KRG is a big partners in every manner. There are set of different interest for both sides.

AH: How structure the relations between KRG and Turkish government is? By structure I mean that some people think that they relations are only between KDP and AK Party.

CH: Well, when you say the AK Party, you are referring to the governing party in Turkey for the last 13 years and the party that got more than 50% of the votes; when you Barzani's party, we are talking a party that has been in the Kurdistan region for the last 100 years. We would love to have further relations with YNK (PUK) or/and Goran Party, and the other political groups; Turkey is probably the only country that has a direct relations with all of the actors on the ground in the KRG, including the Islamic parties, but obviously, they have not been in the government; if Talabani and his party were in Erbil [runs the government] we would have more meetings with him. Because Taib Erdogan is in Ankara we have the same relation, but realize the fact that

without the leadership of Taib Erdogan and leadership of Davutoglu such a relation would not have been possible. And, without the leaderships of KRG such a relations would be impossible. We are doing everything we can to have positive relations to have relations with all of the parties in KRG. As you know, we are opening a representative office of the Turkish Consulate in Sulaimani, too, to increase our relationships. Also, more technical details would be that Erbil is closer to Turkey and many people from Erbil can speak Badini [a Kurdish dialogic that is spoken in Duhok and Zako in KR-I]. Hawler has always been the center of attraction for long time. Sulaimani was kind more distance from Turkey and has been closer to Iran; at least that we the perception. Also, the PKK was another factor.

AH: What do you mean that PKK was another factor?

CH: Well, they have been more popular in the other side [Sulaimani] like having more sympathy from Sulaimani side. Turkey has tried to be neutral in its relations with the all of the side, but obviously, because of those reasons Turkey might be closer to one party than another, but overall Turkey has good relations with the KRG. So, that criticism is not fair.

AH: What is your respond to the people who say that energy deals between KRG and Turkey are party based and they are mostly between Barzani's party and AK Party, and there are certain deals that only few people from both side are aware of them?

CH: Well you have to know that Nechirvan Barznai is the Prime Minster and he would know more about the deals than others, but if you look further, you see that Qubad Talabani has always been in the meeting since he has became the Prime Minster. You have to know that we are now going through a fragile phase and I believe these criticisms are not fair to neither Turkey, KDP, nor the relations. You have to know that he [Nechirvan Barzani] is the Prime Minster and he is in charge of the process from the KRG side, and Taib Erdogan was the Prime Minster until last August and he was in charge of the process; also, there are other ministers and someone like Qubad Talabani are always involved in the process.

AH: How important these relations are for the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

CH: The Kurdish Question in a regional one, but in the end of the day each country has its own dynamic and the Kurdish Question is different in each country. But the Kurdish Question in Turkey is something that Turkey has to deal with inside, and it is a country based problem. It is easier to say that there is no Kurds in Turkey than saying there is no KRG. So, when we accept the existence and the reality of the KRG, it will impossible to negate the Kurds in Turkey. So, it

has been an encouraging factor to recognize the reality of the Kurds in Turkey. Second, it has been quite an effective factor on the public perception to the Kurdish Question in Turkey. When the KRG is with Turkey and in favor of Turkey and supporting Turkey on many different levels, it is much easier to tell the public that the peace process is a peaceful one and we should continue doing it, particularly, the economic relations and deepening economic ties and depending political gains in the region for both sides. For 100 years, it was impossible to quote the word ‘Kurdistan’ publicly, Mr. Taib Erdogan said that four times. It might be something small for the outsider, but it was unimaginable for other people from inside. And he said it referring to the KRG in the presence of the President of the KRG, which automatically broke the psychological barrier. Also, Masud Barzani could function as a facilitator.

AH: That is a very interesting point that I will come back to after asking this question. How happy do you think is the PKK with the relations between KRG and Turkey?

CH: In terms of political representations BDP and HDP, some of them are happy and some are not. Figures like Layla Zana has been quite supporter of that relationship, but there are some other people who does not want to see that relations, who I cannot mention their names. Then, the question is who the representative of the Kurdish people is in Turkey. In terms of PKK, there had been fights between PKK and Kurdish groups like YNK (PUK) and KDP in Iraq. Recently, the PKK has announced a conton in an area that is a part of the KRG and Barzani has harshly criticize that. So, who is happy and how is not, I cannot give you a certain answer. We know it was PYD who neglected the Erbil agreement even though they signed the agreement. In the very beginning PYD was very critical of Peshmarge forces going to Kobani though they were calling for help from many different sides. So, rather than protecting the Kurdish city, they were trying to protect their positions, because it was the same PYD that excluded none PKK and none PYD forces there such as the KDPS forces.

AH: Back to a statement you made earlier, “KRG could be a good facilitator in the peace process.” How possible is this considering the historical tension between PKK and the political parties in the KRG?

CH: What I meant that at certain time there were certain statements made by KDP leaders that helped acting as a facilitator. How possible that is, that depends on the dynamics; KRG could give some advices to the PKK that arm struggle is not the solution and this is the age of talk.

AH: What are the potentials of the KRG that could help in bringing a solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

CH: The majority of the PKK fighters live in the KR-I, and they are in talk with them. The peace process and the negotiations are direct talks between PKK and the Turkish government. Turkey has been very critical with having a third party or third eye as a negotiator, because there is direct talk. But obviously, the main issue is trust, so having the support of the Kurdish groups like KDP and PUK will be a positive step for both sides. It is not an issue of mechanism, but it is an issue of encouraging both sides to talk and negotiate more.

AH: Between two quotes, “the problem that some people in the PKK is that some of them do not want to see Barzani as the representative of the Kurds instead of Ocalan. So, they see a competition between both leaders.” What is your comment of this statement?

CH: I don't know how true statement is, but resolving the Kurdish issue is much bigger than a competition between the Kurdish leadership. So, some people argue that Kurdish groups need to get together. So, the discussion is more between them to decide, but we need to know that Barzani has been the strongest political figure. Barzani is a long standing name among the Kurdish groups and before PKK, they had their own political representation in Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Turkey. So, the PKK is not the only group that had armed group in different countries. Some people want to believe that, but we have had Turkish KDP, KDP in Iran, and in Syria before PYD expelled them. So, there are these sides, and the decision is in the hands of the Kurdish groups to get together, and Turkey will not have a final saying in this as a country or state because it is their decision.

AH: How much the PKK actually represent the Kurdish Question in Turkey? Or how much the PKK has *hijacked* the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

CH: If you look at the elections and the polls, the AK Party is getting more support among the Kurdish people. At least 60% of the Kurdish people are supporting AK Party. The BDP has never passed beyond the 7% threshold. The Kurdish population is higher in Turkey compared to the other countries. Despite all of the activities and criticisms on the ground against the Turkish state, they have never been able to get more votes than the AK Party. When AK Party competes with the BDP, it also competes with the other parties: the leftist party, republication party, and etc. But BDP is only competing only with AK Party. The AK Party despite all of the securitization of the Kurdish Question in Turkey, the AK Party has made historical changes in this regard, which would not have been possible without the leadership of Erdogan and Ahmet Davutoglu. We are talking about a country that was assuming there was no language called Kurdish, and the same country is now broadcasting in Kurdish officially. We are talking about a

country that lost about 40,000 people in a war and can you imagine the psychological impact and everyone was subject of propaganda machines by media and military for the last 30 years; and the denial of the Kurdish Question and that the Kurds were happy about their own lives in Turkey; so, there were the perceptions. It might be easy for to understand how difficult and stupid such preconceptions were, but as a villager living in the west of Turkey and has no idea about the political dynamic of the region, it is quite normal and expected, and it would not be surprising for him to criticize and accuse the government for dividing the country. There is not a single day city in Turkey that does not live because of the war. So, it is almost impossible to gain such a public support to revolve the Kurdish Question, and AK Party has managed to do so. That is a huge success. The success since the beginning of the peace process are great; the wise committee people were involved in the peace process and the regional powers and cities based workshops to have the country understand the importance of peace. So, the whole country has gone through a tremendous psychological and social education and change in terms of the Kurdish Question. The Prime Minister and the President made repeated reference to the Kurdish Question in their speeches.

It is not an easy process, because it requires some brave political moves, and considering the military power over politics and different groups tried to overthrow the government; just look at the recent discussions between the government and Gulen Movement. The first thing they wanted to do was blaming the Chief Intelligence that he was selling the country, and he was almost imprisoned with many fake accusation and that he was selling the country to PKK. Look at their newspapers and journals, they accuse the AK Party for selling the country and that AK Party is betraying the country. But outside of the country, they speak with the liberals and say different things, but on a national level they have a different language. Previously, it was a military group. So, while Taib Erdogan was trying to consolidate the power, he was also simultaneously trying to resolve that has been a part of the Turkish reality for the last 100 years.

AH: How important Abdulla Ocalan is in the peace process? Does he have the final word?

CH: First of all, he is not in a position to decide the fate of a nation; he is in a position to decide the fate of the PKK. These are two different things. Second, the political culture of the PKK has been shaped by one man leadership. Yes, we know there are different political voices in the PKK and the leadership, but Abdulla Ocalan is the uniting factor; he has been in person since 1999. There are some changes, and there are certain new people and figures like the Syrian Kurds gaining more power, but he is still in charge. Being a strong leader does not mean ignoring all of the dynamic, but it means that you manage to govern that. Yes, Ocalan had some difficulty recently, but there are certain moments of crisis that his voice was the final voice. Now, for the PKK Ocalan is a way for them to get out of the mountain and live their lives. I don't think any rational

man want to live his whole life in a mountain. Let's set aside all of these romantic talks about fighting for your nation, people want to end their struggle and find peace. Abdulla Ocalan is a chance that unites all of these different positions, but this does not mean that no other group in the PKK has no saying in the peace process. The fact is that Ocalan among the youth and the women is the most inspiring leader and among the pro PKK groups. But obviously, they do not have a saying on the future of PKK. In terms of public support, he is only leader and he has the final saying, but in terms of military decision, I don't think he is the only one. There are certain people rising to power despite Ocalan's order.

AH: There is a big elections coming, are we expecting big steps in the peace process and Kurdish Question?

CH: The HDP decided to go publicly in the coming election; I don't think they will pass the national threshold. I believe in terms of public support, people are tired of having violence. At the end of the day, Pro-PKK forces must make a decision: either they will stay in the peace process or withdraw from it. I don't think any political leader of PKK or BDP have the luxury of withdrawing from the peace process, because this will affect their public support. Continuing to fight is something expensive. In that case, they will not be able to put the blame on a government that tried so hard in democratizing the country. So, trying to sell the idea of arm struggle against the government and the state is something that the public would not buy. I hope this would not have a negative impact, because I don't think the BDP will pass the 10% threshold.

AH: To what extend the changes in Rojava has affected the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

CH: It has been subject of exploitation. Our policy toward Syria has been crystal clear. Turkey has been pushing for Kurdish representation in the Syrian opposition, and Turkey has been asking to have all of the voices of the legitimate Syrian oppositions together including the Kurds, Arabs, Turkman and the Islamic, but PYD for a long time had implicit and explicit relations with the regime even the fact they (PKK) have been quite during the time of Hafiz Assad and Bashar Assad. Ahmet Davutoglu has a personal investment in asking Assad during the time of direct talks to give the Kurdish people their identity back to those who did not have identity. The number of these Kurdish people was around 400,000, and they were not allowed to go to school with the Syrian people and buy prosperity.

The Turkish policy toward the Kurdish groups in Syria and the oppositions were clear so that no one would make a decision on the future of Syria without negotiations with the other groups, but that is not what happened. PYD acted unilaterally and decreased the power of the oppositions and continued to have positive and sometime quite difficult relations with Assad's regime. Overall, the situation in Kobani, let's fight against ISIS together, but let's not forget that

ISIS is a consequence of the Syrian regime. Setting aside the Syrian regime and simply focusing Kobani is an insult to the suffering of the other people in the other cities like Halab, Alepo, and so on. But the pro-PKK forces over there have completely acted unilaterally, and that has been the basic criticism of Turkey from the beginning.

AH: How involved Turkey has been in Kobani? To summarize a general opinion of the people in the KR-I, people were upset with having Turkish tanks on the boarder that “prevented” people from Kurdistan of Turkey to go to Kobani and defend the city; also, Erdogan’s statement that “Kobani is just a city, why people are so concerned about it.” What is your comment on these statements?

CH: There have been many misperceptions about Kobani as if we are not caring about Kobani; that is not true. Second, we are the only country that accepted 200,000 people from Kobani. The number of people we accepted from Kobani is bigger than the whole number of Syrian refugees. There not a single country on earth that would accept 200,000 refugees in a week, but Turkey did so. In terms of humanitarian aid, we have done everything. We have sent more than 500 trucks of aid to the Rojava region. But simply certain groups want to make PYD the only representative of the Kurds in Rojava is not acceptable; ask those people who have been expelled from Rojava because they were not pro PKK, and ask the Kurdish leaders who are not pro PKK and how they were treated. So, it is unfair criticism to say Turkey has been following an opportunistic line toward Kobani. We have accepted 200,000 refugees in a week. It is unfair criticism.

AH: So, clarify this; Turkey has sent aid to Kobani; Turkey has accepted 200,000 refugees; Turkey has tried to negotiated and have everyone participate in Rojava, then why the protest happened in Turkey, which resulted in the death of more than 40 people?

CH: A week ago the Prime Minster stated that the negotiation would continue. The BDP had agreed that there would be no protests in the meetings, but suddenly something happened and PKK has exploited the situation. There are certain groups who wanted to miss the picture and bring political gain out of Kobani. Everyday 60,000 people from Kobani are given food and aid.

AH: Has Turkey tried to get involved in Rojava through Barzani?

CH: Anyone who is aware of the historical reality of Kurdish region in Syria would know that Barzani has been there for a really long time. PKK is not the only Kurdish party and pro-KDP forces have been in Syria even before the PKK and PYD. That would unfair criticism toward Barzani and toward Turkey. He had been three before us and before PKK. The PKK was there

only when they were being used as a tool against Turkey by the Assad regime. That was the only time PKK was in Syria. It is quite easy to forget the history, but that is the reality. Barzani does not need our help to get involved in Syria, and we don't need Barzani to be our speaker while talking to the Kurdish parties in Syria. Turkey has been involved in Syria for long long time, but obviously, in terms of political interest, yes the presence of Barzani is a positive asset for us, and the presence of Turkey is a positive asset for Barzani and for the KRG, because PYD is exploiting every situation to create a block against Turkey. What President Erdogan said was not about downgrading the suffering in Kobani and downgrading the threat of ISIS in Kobani, it was simply to have the International Communities' attention to the massacres, the use of violence, and bombing of the cities, but there was no attention. So, why such a interest to Kobani? And this was a fair criticism of liberal western media, which was an unfair treatment to the situation and suffering in Syria. This was a reminder to be serious about Kobani and to have necessary tools against ISIL. Why they are watching what is happening in Alepo and the other Kurdish and Christian cities in Syria and don't do much about it. International Communities has been watching what is happening in Syria for the last four years, and you cannot simply compel us to forget your responsibility in that process with only focusing on Kobani. About 55,000 pictures of Assad's torturing in the camps have been disclosed and the International Communities' response was condemnation.

AH: Is Turkey involved in the Kurdish National Congress in anyway?

CH: No.

AH: Then what is your comment on this statement, "Turkey really wanted to have Barzani as the leader of the Congress while PKK refused to have so, and this is the main reason for the delay of the Congress."

CH: From the beginning the Kurdish National Congress was led by Barzani and he was the one calling for such a gathering. As far as I know, PKK has been trying to push that Congress to their party congress; we know all of the Kurdish political parties have criticized PKK for this act with the exception of PUK. Barzani is a legitimate leader and he is the President of the KRG. You cannot compare a leader of an armed organization with a legitimate, elected, and representative individual; at the end of the day you are talking about an armed organization that is on the terrorist group in all EU, US, and European countries. It is illogical to camper these two. Do we expect to have Murat Qarailan and Cemil Byak coming down from the mountain and running the Congress, that would be a party congress.

AH: Do you have any final thoughts or anything that I did not mention that you would like to elaborate on?

CH: Peace Process is a tough process and it will take time, but comparing to the other examples, we have made a strong achievement, and I think it will continue on the same path. One thing that is curtail for us, the government and AK Party, is that we are trying to apply one of the most complex way for conflict resolution that would be the first time in the region.

Interview with Mehmet Galip Ensarioğlu, the member of the Turkish National Assembly from the AK Party on January 20, 2015. Duration 46 minutes. Location: Turkish National Assembly.

Language: Turkish with English Translation.

Arez Hussen (AH): How satisfactory are the changes out of the peace process in Turkey?

Galip Ensarioglu (GE): Satisfactory means getting results, because satisfaction is closely related with getting results. This kind of solutions and peace process can be achieved in different ways. It can happen in one year or ten years. We have already examined examples in different parts of the world like South Africa, Spain, and Ireland. We took these examples and based on these examples we have made some programs and examinations in these Kurdish issue, because this Kurdish issue has different characteristics and issues. Now we are in a position to get the result.

AH: To what extend the program they have prepared matches the three demands of the Kurdish politicians: education in mother tongue, regional autonomy, and ..?

GE: Although we took different example of countries like Ireland, South Africa, and Spain, the Kurdish issue is completely different from these countries. For example, the PKK organization is very different and none these other countries had problematic neighboring countries like Syria and Iraq.

So, in our agreement with the PKK at this stage does not include anything like regional autonomy or regional government. We have to basic pillars for the solutions to the Kurdish problem: on the basis of equality, which means the Kurds will have the same rights as the Turks.

So, education in mother language is also included in this. So, Turkey is not the same as Iran, Syria, or Iraq.

AH: What does he mean by “not same”? How different Turkey is?

GE: Kurds living in the western part of Turkey comprises 75% of the Kurds in Turkey. So, they are completely interconnected with the Turkish society and they have spread out the whole country. So, this means the regional government is not possible. One thing is the equal citizenship. So, this was the first pillar.

The second pillar is the solution of the violence, and we are in the negotiation process at this stage. So, we are working on legal amendments and constitutional changes for the violence to go down and for the PKK guerillas to be inserted and reintegrated with the society.

AH: Could you elaborate further on that plan for inserting PKK members to the society, again?

GE: There are nearly 10,000 people. 10,000 immigrants in the Makhmor camps, and there are also some political refugees in Europe. In northern Iraq, there are many political refugees, and there are thousands of political pensioners in jail. After giving up the weapons, the basic issue would be integrating these people in the society. They will also integrate in the politics, too.

AH: How would PKK and pro-Kurdish political parties accept these solutions? How do they react to these solutions?

GE: So, we have 100% trust in Ocalan.

AH: Does he have the final word?

GE: Yes, the final word is with him. Of course, both the state and the PKK have some difficulties explaining these plans and decisions for the members. Because the PKK cannot tell their fighter these decision at once, and they have to explain the plans well for them.

AH: How possible is it for the PKK to lay down their arms considering what is happening in the Middle East?

GE: You are very right, because when we started the negotiation process years ago, both PKK and Ocalan said that this is the end of the violence. The Rojava issue did not exist in the beginning of the peace process, but now the PKK is biasing its power in Rojava. If you know that they formed their arm power based on the Erbil agreement.

AH: If PKK goes to Rojava, that is not a problem for Turkey?

GE: This is based on an agreement. They formed some cantons there and they are very satisfied with that now, because they could not achieve this in Turkey. So, they are satisfied with what they have achieved in Syria.

AH: How much does the Turkish government agree with the cantons?

GE: The problem is how much the PKK is satisfied with this, not turkey. We will give an alternative and ask them to leave the Turkish territories and do what they want to do outside of Turkey. So, this is an artificial spring. Assad did this, because he said Turkey caused this problem for me, so I will leave these territories for the Kurds. Tomorrow if Assad comes back or any other government comes, these cantons will go away and will not survive. So, the advice from Turkey is that these cantons would join the Syrian National Consul to get rid of Assad together and take part in the politics.

AH: Won't having cantons in Rojava by PKK give them power in negotiating with Turkey?

GE: Of course got this privilege, but if Turkey is very important for these cantons.

AH: Has Turkey supported these cantons?

GE: If Turkey did not let Peshmarga fighters and heavy arms to go through Turkish land to these cantons, they would have collapsed. We have treated about 1,000 fighters from these cantons in our hospitals, too.

AH: This might be a too direct question, what about those tanks on the borders of Kobani?

EG: These tanks are for the protections of our territory.

AH: What does he say to those people who say that Turkey prevent people from southeast Turkey to go to defend Kobani?

GE: There is nothing like that. Everyone can cross to the other side without a problem, and all of these are propaganda of the PKK nothing else.

AH: So, the whole protests happened in Turkey, which resulted in the death of more than 40 people, were based on falsified information?

GE: Yes, Yes. I am a Kurd, too, and I give very importance to the rights of the Kurds, but those information were fabricated.

AH: To what extend Turkey used Barzani to get involved in Rojava? How?

GE: 100%. You have Peshmarga flying to Urfa airport and going to Kobani and we opened our doors, and we allowed sending heavy arms to be sent Kobani.

AH: What about the years 2011 2012, in the beginning when the war in Syria started and when Cemil Bayk made a statement the Rojava is for the PKK, did Turkey try to use Barzani to have an influence on Rojava?

GE: Barzani in 2012 said that these 16 political parties would come together and form the Kurdish National Congress, and we agreed with these political move. But after signing the agreement by all sides and the PKK, the PKK sent its fighters to Rojava and oppressed the other arms forces. PKK committed two political crime against 22:10. PKK does not want to have any other political parties except for itself.

AH: How important the KRG is for the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

GE: You cannot really think of the Kurdish problem in Turkey without thinking or talking about the autonomy in northern Iraq. While trying to solve your own problem with the Kurds in your territory, you can make amenity with the Kurds in Iraq and you have to continue the process simultaneously. So, Turks and the Kurds have to form an alliance and Kurds in Iraq and Syria have to be included in these alliances.

AH: How have the relations between northern Iraq and Turkey affected the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

GE: When the policies of the Turkish State changed toward the Kurds in Turkey, this has direct consequence on the relations with northern Iraq. This was a paradigm change toward the Kurds; after 80 years of these policy, and the Turkish State does recognize the existence of the Kurds, and this will have a direct influence on the Kurds in northern Iraq. So, Turkey also accept their existence, too.

AH: Well, which one came first? For example, which one has an effect on the other, like the relations between KRG and Turkey will have an effect on the Kurdish Question in Turkey or the improvement and progress in the Kurdish Question in Turkey will affect the relations between KRG and Turkey?

GE: When the policy with Kurds in Turkey changes, this will have an effect on the relations with KRG.

AH: But relations between Turkish government and KRG are a lot stronger with the relations between Turkish government and pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey.

GE: You are right that our relation is stronger with the KRG in comparison with the our relations with the pro-Kurdish political parties, because in the KRG, there is a structure there and because the negotiation process has not ended and it is still happening.

AH: What mechanism or tool does the KRG have would help in finding a solution for the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

GE: The basic idea in the beginning was that the PKK fighters would go to northern Iraq with their arms, and they would come back without arms. And the KRG would help them there. And the KRG will mediate.

AH: But, how?

GE: The upper level [high ranking members] of the PKK are living there now. There are 10,000 people living in the mountain. The support of the KRG is very important, because the high level of people are living there and they will stay there for a while. Also, the KRG could help in explaining the situation for the Kurdish people and have them understand the steps of the process.

AH: How structured is the relations between KRG and Turkish government? Is it a relation on a party level or government level?

GE: This is not a party policy or relations, but it is a state policy, because in past the Turkish State did not accept their existence, but now the Turkish state recognized them and welcome them here. So, this is a state level. In the past the Turkish state had secret relations with the KRG, but now you have Barzani coming to Diyarbakir and being greeted by the Prime Minister on an official level.

AH: What is your opinion on this statement, “The relations between KRG and Turkey are relation between KDP, which Barzani’s party, and AK Party.”

GE: Turkey had a very deep state policy, but AK Party changed these state policies. In the past, there was an underground state [deep state] and it had a red line that no Party and no Prime Minister could change it. Now, we have a new body and we have removed all of the barriers, and this is state policy now. But, of course MHP and CHP are still against and disagree with some of the new policies. So, if they come to power on day, they might change things and make things go back to what they were regarding the Kurdish Question in Turkey.

AH: Back to Barzani’s visit to Diyarbakir, a lot of people think that this was a great achievement for the Kurds because Barzani visited Diyarbakir and Erdogan used the word “Kurdistan” for the first time. On the other hand, a lot of people think that this was a betrayal from Barzani against the Pro-Kurdish political parties because the visit was before the election and Barzani was used as an election propaganda tool.

GE: Quite the contrary, it was a big risk in respect to AK Party.

AH: How?

GE: Most of the voters of AK Party are from the western part of Turkey and they are Turkish; also, they have some sensitivity toward the Kurdish Question. This is a big political risk by AK Party.

Barzani or the KDP or the KRG might feel like they are closer to the AK Party than to the PKK>

AH: Has the KRG pushed the Turkish government in any way for finding a quick solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

We know Barzani is every eager for the solution and with the peace process. They always advise all the Kurdish people in the area and ask them to deal with their issue with true politics and solve their problems with politics.

I was together with Barzani while he was visiting Osman Bydamir, the former mayor of Diyarbakir; there Barzani said, “We are living together in this region, and the regime did all of those bad things to us, not the people. We are brother with Arabs, Turks, and Persians. So, we have to solve our problems with politics and talking.”

AH: There is a big election coming in June, are we expecting big changes in the solution process?

GE: In the coming months some kind of big steps will be taken by all sides; all of the parts from Imrali, from PKK, and the government. And all of the sides will have to act and behave responsibly.

AH: Do you have any last thoughts or statements to make?

GE: The solution process will be a good example for the problems in Middle East and the region. The Turks cannot be ... with the Arabs in Iraq and Syria. The Kurds and the Turks are very close together geographically and they are very interconnected together, so we have live together peacefully. This was the case in Europe, in the past they used to fight each other, but they realized that killing was not the solution. They formed a common future to live peacefully and that is what we are going to do.

AH: Is the peace process in Turkey going in a fast or slow speed?

GE: These issues are not easy to solve and the process is going well and it will actually go in a faster pace because of the developments in the Middle East.

Interview with Nazmi Gur, the member of the Turkish National Assembly from the HDP (former BDP) on January 9, 2015. Duration 63 minutes. Location: Turkish National Assembly.

Language: Mostly English; very little Kurdish Kwrmanji.

Arez Hussien: To what extent the Turkish peace process has met the expectations in Turkey?

Nazmi Gur: The peace process and the expectations of the Kurds so far is a process, there are lots of difficulties and handicaps. This is not only because the Kurds create the handicap, but it is because of the historical background of Turkey and the Kurds, the historical relations between the Kurds and Turks in Kurdistan and Anatolia as well as the regional status quo in the middle east. I see now the Kurdish land, the mother land, has been divided between four different countries. Each country has its own political system and pressure on the Kurdish people and deny the Kurds and assimilation and so called or what we call “white genocide” which is a cultural genocide. When you turn back to the history in that way, you can see that the expectations of the Kurds and the existence of status quo of the Kurdish land create huge problem. Sycipiko, a 100 years ago set such a system and divide the Kurdish land and at that time there was no Kurdish unity, and the Kurdish nationalism was quite weak. So, the countries could easily control Kurds and divide. If you look at the historical background of the Kurds, their main expectation is having a united Kurdistan, which is a dream of all of the Kurds. But on the other hand there are also realities, which is the existence of national states over the Kurdish land, and their occupation on the Kurdish land. If you go back to history, you see the countries that have Kurds have united against Kurds and they have created some agreement like Baghdad pack and Algeria pack; and all of these mechanisms were to stop the Kurdish movement.

The Kurdistan part of Turkey is the biggest part of the big Kurdistan, approximately 20 million Kurds; at the beginning there were a lot of uprisings here, from Shaix Abubaidulla, from Mahmud Barzenji, to Shaix Said, and many others; the Kurds stand for their rights, and rise for their rights, but unfortunately all of the uprisings were finished bloody by the Turkish government. So, after some decades PKK create such a movement and they have started in August 15, 1984, which was a new armed struggle, and it has been more than 30 years of the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish armed forces. Now, the Kurds in Turkey have a new

strategy in Turkey, which we call it democratic autonomy. This will perhaps give all of the expectation of the Kurds, such as the recognition of the Kurdish identity, having right of education in mother tongue, and perhaps autonomy, which is what we are seeking for. The peace process was mainly based on this strategy, which was mainly drawn by Mr. Ocalan. This new strategy was implemented by all of the Kurdish political actors in Turkey. So, our expectations is having full democracy in Turkey and freedom for Kurds. You can remember this slogan in south Kurdistan by all of the Kurdish leaders such as Mam Jalal and Barzani, they would say, "Democracy for Iraq, and freedom for Kurds." Now, we are in the same stage and we are very proud of our bashwr people and brother and they could create a federation, which is the first recognized and legal statues for the Kurds in the Middle East. We follow them and with unity of the Kurdish people, I can say we can reach to our expectation soon, if this negotiation between Ocalan and Turkish government succeed, we will reach to our aim.

AH: Ok, but so far has the expectations of the politicians have been achieved, underachieved, or maybe overachieved?

NG: You know the struggle for freedom never ends. There will be some crisis and sometimes we can feel we are almost reaching solution and sometimes we can feel we are too far from solution. It happened recently from October 5-7, which were huge demonstrations against Turkish-Daish corporation against Kobani. There were millions of people on the street. Many people about 40 lost their lives; everyone thought that the peace process was finished, but later by the call of Mr. Ocalan and Mr. Salahatin Damirtas the process came back to live. Now, the process has reached a new stage, which we call it, the stage of official negotiation. Since two year ago, we called it the period of dialogue, and now this new stage is a negotiation period. After this stage, we will be expecting to have a kind of agreement between the Kurdish movement and Turkish state. Of course, the stage after that will be the implementation of this document, which requires necessary radical changes in the Turkish constitution and the Turkish legal system; Three main points we hope to achieve: recognition of the Kurdish identity, the right of education in mother tongue, and autonomy. In these three areas we hope to have consensuses with the Turkish state, if not, of course, the struggle will go on.

AH: In your opinion, how structured the relations between the KRG and the Turkish government is?

NG: I remember the first time President Barzani and Mam Jalal traveled to Turkey, they were received in a very low level and the Turkish officials. Also, there were a lot of attacks from the Turkish media on them. They were considered as tribe leaders. At that time, Turkey declared having a Kurdish Federation as a redline and they said that they were completely against it. With

the struggle of our brother in south of Kurdistan, we also kept supporting them, they succeeded on having a federative statues in Iraq, and it was written in Iraqi constitution. Of course, we salute and celebrate their historical success. When turkey really understood that they could not prevent creating a defacto state in south of Kurdistan, they tried to change their policy. In that period the struggle of the PKK as well as the Kurdish movements in Turkey gave huge support to south.

But, there is also the period of BraKwzhi (civil war), which is a black page in Kurdish history. But even at that time, we did not lose our sympathy with our brother in the south and our support to the Kurdish state in south of Kurdistan. Unfortunately, our brothers understood that in a very late stage, because we are surrounded by our enemies. If each Kurdish movement in each part of the Kurdistan have relations with the state against another Kurdish movement in that state, this is unacceptable and not good. The Kurdish movements in each country must trust in their only people and they should not get direct support from Iraq, Iran, or Turkey against another Kurdish movement. Because they might just want to use Kurds against Kurds. For example, in Turkish there is a very special expression for that, “Eti Etak ekrlmak,” [birak yesinler birbirlerini] which means let the dogs each other. This term was used against the Kurds, because the Kurds were used against each other many times. So, the Kurds must only trust in each other and should not have diplomatic and political relations with other states against other states. But, we always support having good relation of the KRG with Turkey, and we openly declared. Also, as a political party, we have very good relations with the KRG.

AH: Very shortly, you said “our struggle gave a huge support to our brother in the south,” what did you mean by this? Could you provide some examples of this? Also, if you could elaborate with example on the Kurdish saying “eti etak etirmek”?

NG: from 1993 up to 1995, the Turkish government organized lots of military operation to the Iraqi land; at that time, we know that PUK and KDP supported the Turks and fought against the PKK. There was also a civil war between the PUK and the KDP, and that is why each of them created a government in Hawler and Sulaimani. So, this is what we don't want and what we are against. So, this is what get the Kurds weaken in the region and that is why we call it Brakwzhi. If we stop this Brakwzhi and get united with one voice, we will be considered a very big player in the political games in the area. Another example I can give you is the creation of National Kurdish Congress. It has been six year we are fighting and working for that, but for some small family and group interest this has not been realized. While the Middle East is reshaping again, the Kurds are still in small groups and small parties, and are not united. Then, there will be no room for the Kurds in the area. That is why we say the Kurds of four countries and parts of Kurdistan must be united including the ones in Diaspora and be one voice and stand for their rights and defend the Kurdish people. But, if some political parties listen to the enemies of Kurds

and play some dirty games in order not to have the Kurdish Congress, the Kurds will be the losers again, which we don't want to be.

AH: I will read some a statement and I would like to know your thoughts and comments on it: "A lot of people think that the relation between KRG and Turkey is a highly politicized and individualized meaning that it is a relation between a certain party in the KRG and a certain party in Turkey or just between certain individuals, instead of a structured relation between two governments."

NG: We know that the Kurdish government is having a Kurdish unity and having another Kurdish states in the Rojava Kurdistan and having autonomy for Kurds in Turkey. If the Kurds in north pole come together to say we have a Kurdistan here, just a small village, Mr. Erdogan will be against it. We should not forget that. The Kurdish leaders in the KRG must really understand that. We are not against political, economic, diplomatic relations between KRG and Turkey, because it is constitutional and we are living in the world of interdependency. If Turkey fully recognize the KRG as a state and as representative of the Kurds in the south of Kurdistan, that is not a problem at all, but on the other hand, we know there are some hidden relations, which we are really suffering from. There are two small examples I could give you. First, just before the election Mr. Barzani visit Erdogan and Erdogan received him in Diyarbakir. If you ask people in Bawkr, they will tell you that this was a direct support to AKP, and they invited some Kurds who support KDP to support the AKP. This is completely un-expectable attitude. Another example, before the local election in my hometown, Van, Nechirevan Barzani came and he had a small meeting with some tribe leaders in Van and he openly called them to support the AKP, not BDP. Imagine, the HDP leader, Sallahedin Demirtas, visit Baghdad and invite people not to support KDP or PUK and vote for other parties. But, with all of these things, we stand for the Kurdish people in Bashwr and we support their federative structure, and they have to understand that there is no real supporter of the Kurds and friends of the Kurds expect for the Kurds. AKP will not stay forever in the government, the KRG has to look strategically into the region.

AH: One fear that a lot of people politicians and people had in the KR-I was that if the AK Party would lose the last election, that would have marked the end of the relations between the KRG and Turkey!!

NG: That is a real dangerous in the case of the loss of the AKP. Maybe the AKP will stay for the next four years, but for the next 10 to 20 year it will not happen, because if the government change, the policies will completely change in case of having such a private relations. Also, such a private relations will not big result for the people. For example, these oil relations, I was told a Bashwri friend, who is a professor, that there was a secret agreement of total of 3 billion dollars

for exporting gas and oil of Kurdistan to Turkey through pipeline, but the Turkish minister, Taner Yildiz, openly said this is a private sector agreement and it was not an agreement between state and state, because Baghdad is there, and unless Baghdad approves it, it will not be an international agreement. Some personal relations like the one between Erdogan and Nechirevan Barzani will not have a long impact on the Kurdish Turkish relations.

AH: Briefly, could you elaborate on the changes that occurred in the relations between Ankara and KRG after the developments in Rojava. How have the relations between the KRG and Turkey changed since then?

NG: I think these relations that we are talking about must be based on institutional relations. KRG and Turkish relations should be long term relation. Otherwise, it will not any good result for interest of the Kurdish people. If the KRG and Turkey relations are based on a way that is against the interest of the Kurdish people in the north, perhaps this will not be the expected one and there will be trouble, but if the relations are for the interest of both sides, we are not against it.

AH: In what ways the Kurdish peace process and the Kurdish question in northern Kurdistan have been affected by the developments in Rojava and Kobani?

NG: This is our time after 100 years. The 21st century will be the Kurdish century. So, Kobani resistance showed that and having Peshmarga in Kobani was great. From Ibrahim Kalil (border point between Turkey and KRG) to Srwch, which is about 400 to 500 klm people celebrated the passages of only 150 Peshmarge forces was great. And they were very like a symbol and their symbolicness was more powerful than their weapon. They united Kurds, and they gave huge moral to Kobani people. Having Peshmarga over there had huge meaning for the Kurds. On the other hand, in Makhmor, Diyala, Kirkuk, Khanaqin, and in Shangal there are PKK fighters fighting ISIS side by side and shoulder by shoulder with the peshmargas. This also gives us a hope that we the Kurds must be united, and if we are, we could do everything we want. The idea is all of the forces on the ground the PKK, PYD, the KRG would unite and they fight in the field to defend Kurdistan against those Daish attacks. But on the political level, if we are separated.

AH: Are we separated?

NG: If we are separated, we cannot do everything for our Shahids for our martyrs. So, that is why we call and invite all of the Kurdish political components to come together in the Kurdish National Congress to have one voice politically against Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. Now, Russia has

a new initiative by the end of this month, on the 26th January that calls for an international conference between Syrian regime and the opposition including the Kurds. So, all Kurds must support this initiative and be united for the right of the Kurdish people in Syria. How the Peshmarage fighting in Kobani gives us hope, we have to also fight on the international and political levels together for the rights of the Syrian Kurds to have political statues.

AH: To highlight a couple of points you mentioned and then ask another question, it seems great you have Peshmarage fighting in Kobani and you have PKK fighters fighting in Iraqi Kurdistan against ISIS, but how united the Kurdish political parties are on a political level? To be more specific, how could the KRG contribute to a solution to the Kurdish Question in Turkey given the face the historical tensions between the political parties in the KR-I and PKK?

NG: KRG is only the representative of the bashwri Kurds (Kurds in Iraq). If they feel like they are the only representative of all of the Kurds in the whole world, this is not true. There are only five, six, or maybe seven million Kurds in bashwr, and according to the Iraqi constitution there are only four Kurdish cities Sulaimani, Erbil, Duhok, and Zako; Makhmor, Kirkuk, Dyala, Khaneqin, and Shangal are not included in the KRG and they are the disputed areas. Do you think the KRG is representing them? Do you think the KRG has a legal power in Kirkuk or do they have representatives in the KRG parliament? No, there are not. Are there any representatives from Diyarbker, Kobani, Afrin, and Iran? No, and this means that they are only representative of their region. If president Barzani wants to be the representative of all Kurds, we must have the Kurdish National Congress as soon as possible. Otherwise, he will only represent himself, his party, and his region. We are (the Kurds in Turkey) 25 million and we are the biggest geographical portion of Kurdistan with the biggest population, how KRG is going to represent us in the world. That is not possible, because we are here.

AH: How has Turkish government/KDP in the Kurdish question in Turkey?

NG: going off recorder.

AH: You gave two very interesting examples, are these information confirmed or public? Where could I get my hands on them?

NG: The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs made statement on this and if you read them, you could get some information.

AH: The reason why I am keying on this is because if I go back to the Iraq Kurdistan and ask certain politicians within the PDK, they would most probably reject these statements.

NG: going off recorder.

AH: What mechanism or tools does the KRG have that could help in mobilization of the Kurdish political parties or in helping find a solution for the Kurdish Question in Turkey? Or has the KRG pushed the Turkish government in any way to find a solution?

NG: I think the KRG has been supporting the peace process for two reasons. One, as Kurds they (changing the language to Kurdish Kurmanji) 'if you are a Kurd, you have to be one hand and support your Kurdish brother.' The second reason is because of some diplomatic relations with Turkey, because Turkey may have some difficulties maybe KRG and Barzani could create lots of back channels to PKK and having such a covered diplomacy and in the negotiations; and these are logistical supports, which are very valuable. If the KRG use its full capacity for the solution of the Kurds in Turkey, there will be an enormous contribution.

AH: How could they contribute?

NG: I think we have to go back to the Kurdish National Congress, and the KRG and the president Barzani will have more influence on Turkey through that. In addition, they have a private challenge of relations with the Turkish government. So, if they use this, it will help a lot in the Kurdish Peace Process in Turkey. Of course, there are some logistical supports as well.

AH: You gave two examples, which are Barzani's visit to Diyarbakir prior to the election and Nechirvan Barzani's visit to Van, were these visits expected?

NG: it was unexpected, and he had a meeting with Davutoglu and some Kurdish leaders there, and they told us before hand, they he gave them a statement to support the AKP not the HDP.

So, these were great disappointments and people got really angry at these visits. They visit the heart of Kurdistan and they did not visit the municipality in Van that is run by Kurdish people. I was there, and we sent Nechirvan a message to invite him and receive him, but they said no.

AH: It seems these were big disappointments for your party and it sounds like a stab in the back, but are there any specific examples where the KRG supported the Kurdish questions in Turkey?

NG: What we want it real relations between brothers. We want to make a bridge between bakwr and bashwr in order to make those boarders meaningless between us. We want to make cultural, educational, and corporation bridges between us. We have of course lot of good relation but we want to have more open dialogue and more open relations and more direct relation than having this boarder between us.

AH: How important the disarmament of the PKK is for the peace process in Turkey?

NG: There is no such a thing as the disarmament of the PKK in Turkey, and I don't think the PKK is going to disarm themselves; you see the Daish attacks and what is happening in the Middle East, so the Kurds need their own defense forces, and they need to defend themselves. If Kurds disarm themselves, who are going to defend them? In bashwr, we have Peshmarg. Do you think Peshmarge can defend all Kurds in the area, which is not possible. So, Kurds wherever they are, they need have their own forces to defend themselves.

AH: But the disarmament of the PKK was a proposal, and it slightly happened until the Khapor incident!!

NG: It is natural to have this during the peace process in Turkey, but this is one of the main subjects of negotiations, which is going to be discussed by the end of the negotiation. There are lot solutions to this. If you examine the peace process between the British government and the IRA, you could see former IRA members become police forces in Northern Ireland. So, such a process or agreement should be done for PKK guerillas. They could easily be regional police forces in the bawrk Kurdistan.

AH: Is that even a possibility given the fact that PKK is considered a "terrorist organization"?

NG: Even the IRA was a terrorist organization, too, and don't forget that the PUK and KDP were also on the terrorist list, and as far as I know, only last month they were removed from the American list. So, they are now legitimate forces of the Kurdish people in bashwr.

AH: Does the road of peace goes through Qandil or Diyarbkcr and by Diyarbkcr I mean the Kurdish political parties in Turkey? How important Mr. Ocalan is for the peace equation and how important Qandil is for the equation? Is it true that Mr. Ocalan has the final word?

NG: That is true that Ocalan has the final word and he has an enormous power on his organization in Qandil as well as in Diyarbakir. Millions of the Kurds support him. And Amad is considered as the capital of entire big Kurdistan, and people here full support for Mr. Ocalan and Qandil. Qandil is the political center of the Kurds and it has its own specialty, because Qandil has not only be a home for the PKK, but also a home for the PUK and KDP, too, until they have reached to what they have now.

AH: So, if Qandil has a special gravity and name, then how important the role of the pro-Kurdish political parties is the peace process?

NG: The HDP now has a very important role. Actually, there are four main... two of them are assembly people democratic assembly in Diyarbakir and people democratic assembly in Ankara, and they have very important role. BDP has a very important role.

AH: Are they facilitator between Imrali and the government?

NG: the HDP has more role in facilitating. Now Mr. Khatip Dicle is the leader of the KCD (Koma Cewatin Kurdistan) also participated in the negotiations. Of course, our party has three parliament members and they participated in the negotiations and visited the island, Qandil, and Ankara.

AH: How close the Kurdish political parties in Turkey are to the KRG?

NG: Yes, we have very good relations with the KDP and PUK as well as all of the other political parties in KR-I like Goran and the Islamic movement. We have such an equal distance between all of those political parties in Kurdistan. Also, we have a good relation with the KRG as a government, and the Kurdistan Parliament. We want to strengthen our relations with all Kurdistan forces, but our aim is to create this Kurdish National Congress as soon as possible.

AH: Is there any specific plans or dates for the Congress?

NG: Yes, there is a kind of new initiative between the parliament members in the Kurdistan Parliament to create a Kurdistan Parliament association in Erbil.

AH: In your opinion, how important the success of the peace process in Turkey would be for the KRG?

NG: They have to give an answer to that, but in my opinion, it is important for two reasons. One, they have great interest with Turkey a kind of peace and stability will also be very good for the KRG region to have more trade and more economic relations with Turkey. On the other hand, it will be good for them to have better relations with the Kurdish political parties in bakwr Kurdistan.

AH: There is an election coming in June, do expect any big changes before the election considering the fact that in the most recent visit to Imrali Mr. Ocalan stated that we need concrete plans?

NG: No, NO, we don't expect any dramatic changes before the election. What Mr. Ocalan said that he urged the Turkish government, because the Turkish government always misuse this seize fire and peace process to get more votes in the election, and they want to earn more time. They do not want to make steps before the election. This is a very risky attitude.

AH: How risky?

NG: If the AKP does not want to have any steps, the war will start again, which we don't want to, that is why Mr. Ocalan urged the government to have concert steps before the election, but we are not expecting any, because we know the AKP. But, we will keep pushing them and forcing them, and we will see what the next three months will show us.

AH: Are you expecting any participation by the opposition parties like CHP and MHP?

NG: No, we don't think so, and we don't think they will participate. But we are going to participate in the election in June as a party and the threshold is very important, which is such a huge barrier for us, but we are strong enough to pass it this time. Before the election if the AKP make promises, but good promises on paper, in written statement like Good Friday Agreement signed by government and the Kurdish side that they would make all of the necessary steps after the election, such as changing constitution and laws. Then, we can talk about improvement. If not, and if the AKP just wait and buy time, turn around the issues, there will be lots of risk for the seize fire.

AH: My final question, do you think the KRG will have any effect in this coming election in Turkey?

NG: I hope not, they should not intervene in our internal issue and they should not support the AKP, because Kurdish people get angry.

Interview with Sertac Bucak, the Chairperson of the KDPT or KDPN party on January 11, 2015. Duration: 148 minutes. Location: Headquarter of the KDPT in Diyarbakir.

Language: English.

Arez Hussen (AH): To what extent has the peace process that was stated by AK Party met the expectations in Turkey?

Sertac Bucak (SB): The peace process is very important because it show that both the government of Turkey and the PKK understand that the Kurdish Question cannot be solved by violence. The peace process is a way to bring normalcy and harmony back to Turkey, and it started with the democratization of Turkey by party that was Islamic background. Many things have changed since the democratization process and these rounds of negotiations are possible because of that. Also, the EU and the US wanted for the peace process to happen, and the KRG, including Masoud Barzani, Nechirvan Barzani and Jalal Talabani, have had an impact on the start of the process. The peace process will also be very good for the relations between KRG and Turkey.

AH: But the achievements out of the peace process so far, have they met what people and the political parties expected, or not?

SB: The expectations of the people were too high in the beginning, but these expectations were destroyed by the propaganda of both sides: the PKK and the government. By propaganda, I mean when the peace process is on, both sides use soft language with each other, but when the process stops, they go back to the same harsh language as before the peace process. So, the language of peace can be constructive during peace negotiation, but the language of violence can be destructive in this process. The problem is that the public is not fully updated with the details of the negotiations; we just declarations from both sides and nothing else. Now the criticism is that

the negotiation process has taken too long, but I think this kind of negotiation does take long time.

I also think the neighboring states such as Iran, Syria, and Russia have played a negative role in abolishing the peace process. In the past and nowadays, they have used their good relations with the PKK against Turkey.

AH: Do you mean that countries like Iran, Syria, and Russia want Turkey to look at the Kurdish Question from a security point? What exactly do you mean by that?

SB: I think the problem is power. I think Iran wants to have a Kurdistan.

AH: I am sorry!

SB: A Kurdistan.

AH: Where?

SB: Even a big Kurdistan, but a kind of Kurdistan that is under their control. Turkey also has changed its attitude toward independent Kurdistan; when the KRG wanted to declare independency six months ago, they chose to be silent; they did not support it, but did not reject it at the same time.

AH: So, no reaction from Iran, is it because the face of KRG is represented by Masoud Barzani, who is from the KDP, which has good relations with Turkey, not Iran? How?

SB: The question of independence in the KR-I needs to be a national question, not a party one. So, all of the parties and organizations need to unite for this cause, but I think Iran was using its good relations with the YNK [PUK] in order to slow down the independent process. Iran wants a KRG that deals more with Iran than Turkey. The Kurds need to realize the historical power struggle between Iran and Turkey and use it in their advantage as much as possible.

AH: To what extent has the Kurdish peace process been affected by the developments in Rojava?

SB: The question of Rojava is heavily linked to the PKK; the PYD wants to be the only power in Rojava, which is not correct and which is a violation of the Duhok agreement, too. They need allow for other political parties to participate in the power.

AH: Haven't they allowed for that, because there are around 22 political parties in Rojava without arm forces? For you, only having arm forces is a participation in power?

SB: The YPG is the armed forces of only PYD. If you want to have a national army, all of the sides should be able to join and have forces in the army, but PYD only allows for its armed forces to exist in Rojava. For example, there are around 3600 well trained fighter in the KR-I, who were not allowed to go to Rojava. They wanted to go, but they were rejected. The main reason why the forces did not want push for going to Rojava is to avoid a civil war with PYD, because a civil war in Rojava now means the end of Rojava.

The PYD has good relations with Assad, and sometimes the salaries of teachers and employees from Rojava as still being paid by the Assad regime, and they used this relation to install their power there. In the beginning the PYD kind rejected the PKK, too, but we know that PYD is affiliated heavily with the PKK. It is important know that PYD has it is own structure and mechanism for governing, but when it comes to making big decisions about the future of the Syrian Kurdistan, they communicate with the PKK. Everyday there are three to four martyrs of PKK coming from Rojava, and this shows Rojava as a symbol of success for PKK, which encourages the Kurds in north. Overall, I don't think the case of Rojava plays a negative role in the peace process of Turkey, because you have collations involved in Rojava and Peshmarge forces passed through Turkey to go to Rojava.

AH: What is the nature or the structure of relations between the KRG and the Turkish government?

SB: We need to divide the answer of this question into two phases: Before and after ISIS intervention in Iraqi Kurdistan. Before the ISIS attack, it was good for the KRG to have good relations with Turkey, because Turkey is a member of NATO, has good relations with Europe, and enjoys good economic progress. Also, the new Turkish government has good attitude toward the KRG, and the relations are on official and high ranking level. President Barzani was greeted as the president of the KRG in his Kurdish clothes, and for the first time the Prime Minister pronounced the word "Kurdistan." Also, people were able to go around with a Kurdish flag everywhere; so, this was a historical change.

AH: You triggered a very important point that might help me rephrase my question again, are the relations between KRG and Turkey based on relations between certain individuals and parties from both sides, or they are on state level?

SB: You should look at the relations as from a state level perspective; that is right that president Erdogan was the president of AK Party and prime minister at the same time, Nechirvan Barzani was the Prime Minister of the KRG and member of the KDP, and Barzani was the President of Kurdistan and President of KDP, but all of their meetings were done on a state level. So, when tomorrow there is a power change, the relations will be transferred to those other people, but you have to know that in state relations personal relations really matter.

AH: What is your comment on the following criticism? “The relations between the KRG and Turkey are heavily based on party relations and individual relations rather than state level.”

SB: The Kurds should think together like a team. We still have the old mentality of not being united, which is harmful. If the Kurds in south achieve something, I would consider it as an achievement for the Kurds in north, too. One picture that is always in my mind is when John Kerry came to Kurdistan, President Barzani greeted him, but after him there was Nawshirwan Mustafe, the head of the Goran Movement, and then Qubad Talabani, two representatives from the two Islamic parties, and Nechirvan Barzani. For me, this picture is very important, because it shows a coalition government between all of the parties in south. One important point to know is that the regional states will do their best to divide the KRG, because they don't want to see a strong united KRG. For example, when the PKK announced its canton in Shngal [a laughter], I think some regional neighboring states were behind this.

Before ISIS attack, the KRG was heavily depending on Turkey due to its problems with Maliki's regime, but when Turkey decided to be silent for the attacks of ISIS on Kurdistan, the KRG presented itself as the defender of the world and now it has the support of the US and most of the European countries. Also, nowadays President Barzani is recognized as an international leader, which means that KRG does not have to take Turkey into consideration as before.

AH: How important are these relations between the KRG and Turkey for the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

SB: The role of the KRG has been very important, because both Mr. Barzani and Mr. Nechirvan Barzani have lobbied and pushed the Turkish government in the past two years to resolve the Kurdish Question in a peaceful manner; also, they have been pushing the PKK to continue with the peace process and not to block it.

AH: How do they do the lobbying with Ankara and the PKK?

SB: They have been lobbying by promising Ankara that they would convince their Kurdish friends to stay calm and to talk to the PKK to stay within the process, which means they could provide the Turkish government with a guarantee of peace. Also, the perspective of the Turks have changed about the Kurds due to the economic conditions, not the Turks love the Kurds, but the Turks love the money, oil, and energy of the Kurds.

AH: Back to the importance of KRG and its relations with Turkey, from your observation, can you give any examples of when KRG pushes Turkey for find a solution for the Kurdish Question?

SB: Last year, Mr. Nechirvan Barzani visited Turkey several times, which was effective for the Kurdish Question. Also, you have Layla Zana who has delivered a couple of letters from Ocalan to Barzani and the other around. So, she is like the voice of between both sides. We should not forget the role of Mam Jalal. It is petty that he is out of the business of politics.

AH: Given the historical or periodic tension between PKK and the political parties in the KRG, how has or how could the KRG talk or push the PKK and the Kurdish political parties in Turkey?

SB: In the 1990s, before the establishment of the KRG and the US-Iraq war, the political parties like KDP and PUK tried to use PKK against each other. But after the establishment, they needed to have peace with each other and with the PKK, and now because there is no tension between them, they talk to each other and help each other. For example, you have the PKK guerrillas in Kirkuk and Shingal fighting together with the Peshmerge forces against ISIS. Nowadays, because of the threat of ISIS, there is more engagement between the KRG and the PKK. Recently a group of PKK-KCK delegates were greeted by the Kurdistan Parliament.

AH: Do you think the closer the KRG and PKK is the less close KRG would be with Ankara?

SB: Why do you think PIJAK suddenly stopped its arm operation against Iran, because PKK has good relations with Iran. I think right now everyone wants to have an influence on the politics of the KRG, including the PKK. For example, the deceleration of the cantons in KR-I were a part of that plan. One thing I don't like about the politics of the parties in the KRG is the involvement of

the outside actors in solving the internal political problems. For example, why would PUK as for the help of Iranian government to solve its internal party problems.

AH: How does this relate to the PKK?

SB: The PKK also has good relations with Iran, and now the PKK is trying to side with the PUK in opposite to KDP. I think the Kurds need to be united on fighting ISIS and to show the world a good example of democracy.

AH: How could Turkey make the best use out of the KRG in solving the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

SB: First, the KRG can use its international allies to push turkey for a solution. Second, they can talk to the PKK and have them agree with the terms of the peace process. Third, the oil of the KRG could give it an upper hand in talking to Turkey, because Turkey need the energy.

AH: What is your opinion on Barzani's visit to Diyarbakir? Some politicians consider it as a stab in the back for the Kurdish parties, because the visit was used as election propaganda.

SB: These propagandas have always been common, but you need to look at the content of Barzani's speech in Diyarbakir. Also, after that, he went to the Diyarbakir Municipality and met with the BDP Mayor and Parliament members. Everyone was satisfied with his answers and the meeting, but afterward, some of the leftists people within BDP, who don't want to see good relations between KRG and BDP, started making these propagandas. Mr. Barzani never asked to support AKP. Also, Mr. Erdogan used the word "Kurdistan" for the first time, which was really important.

To add one more thing, in the European Parliament, they asked Mr. Barzani about his opinion on the PKK, and he openly answered that PKK was not a terrorist organization, and this really helped the PKK.

AH: How much of the Kurdish Question is represented by the PKK in Turkey?

SB: There is difference between being the strongest organization and being the representative of the Kurdish Question in Turkey. There is no actual representative of the Kurdish Question in Turkey, because if you look at the elections, the AK Party has gained the most votes in the

Kurdish areas. If my party would win the majority of the votes, I would not call our party the representative of the Kurdish Question, because the Kurdish Question is an issue of a nation, not one party. We have to know that the PKK is the strongest organization and they have armed forces, and now they are leading the negotiations with the government, but the PKK tries to monopolies all of the power for itself, which is a violation of democracy in the modern world.

AH: What have been the main advantages and disadvantage of having the PKK represent the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

SB: To be the only representative puts the PKK in a situation to make mistakes easily, and they have made a lot of mistakes. For example, from the idea of an independent Kurdistan, they moved to the idea of autonomous democratic project, which nobody knows what it is, even they themselves don't know what it is. The PKK fought against every Kurdish organization and party and killed a lot of people from their party and outside; even Mr. Ocalan himself said, "We should confront the reality about the violation of human rights in Turkey and the violation of human rights inside the PKK, too."

It will be better for the Kurds to think in a pluralist way, and not to force the public to accept only one party.

AH: If someone tell you that the road to a solution to the Kurdish Question goes through Qandil Mountain and it starts from Imrali, what would you reply to this as a representative of a Kurdish political party in Turkey?

SB: There are three stages of the peace process: the democratization of Turkey, which has enabled the government to talk to the PKK, then the disarmament of PKK, and the final stage should be meeting the demands of the Kurdish people. Our party's suggestion is a call for all of the Kurdish political parties to unite. And, the final station should be giving the Kurds a political statue whether it is autonomy or federalism.

AH: After talking to a lot of Kurdish people and politicians, it seems that the idea of self rule and autonomy is not strong, because most of them talk about the right of education and recognition of Kurdish language as an official state language.

SB: You should ask this question to the PKK, because we don't see any move from their side about this.

AH: What are your party's demands?

SB: Our first demand is having a new constitution, because with this constitution you cannot go any further. Also, for the Kurds need to have their own projects and have equality. The Kurds need have plans and strategy?

AH: Do those plans and strategies require the disarmament of the PKK?

SB: If you have armed forces in Turkey, there is the danger of conflict. Also, Turkey say that the armed forces should leave the Kurdistan of Turkey as a stage of the peace process.

AH: So, you mean leaving Turkey, not disarmament considering what is happening in the Middle East!!

SB: The disarmament is not a topic of discussion now. Maybe when Rojava goes well, they can go there. Why are they fighting? For Parliament representation or cultural rights, they don't need to fight for these.

AH: One might argue that if it was not for the armed struggle of the PKK, the Kurds would not have reached this stage, when the government is listening to their demands and working on constitutional changes?

SB: The whole problem with the PKK is power; they say that Mr. Ocalan is only one to decide the final answer, but when I look at Ocalan, he does not seem to be the one to make the final decision and wants to have a cumulative decision. I believe we will have more political success without the armed struggle.

AH: How is the relation between Kurdish political parties in Turkey? How is "brayety Kurd" (Kurdish brotherhood)?

SB: It is not functioning, because the PKK is the strongest party, and you have many other small parties. But, during the last election, the HDP was established and made a coalition with the Turkish leftist parties to have a Turkish project for all of Turkey, not just for the Kurds. So, they wanted not only to deal with the regional Kurdish problems, but with the national Turkish problems: a party for all Turkey. I don't know they are confused and make everyone confused.

AH: Briefly, do they consider other parties?

SB: If you are powerful, they do. If you are not, they don't.

AH: How are the relations between the Kurdish political parties in Turkey with the Kurdish political parties in KRG?

SB: The PKK has its own branch in KR-I called PCDK, and they have practical relations with all of the political parties. For Iran, they have PJAK. My party has relation with the KDP, because we are following the same path and ideology of Mala Mustafa Barzani. One day all of the four part of Kurdistan will be united and it is better to have the same party in all of the four parts of Kurdistan.

AH: Tell me more about your relations with the KDP? What kind of relations do your parties have?

SB: We are brothers and we have the same program and think Kurdistan, but we live in Kurdistan Turkey. The developments in KR-I, we consider it as our achievement and very important. We are interested in a strategic coordination and solidarity among the Kurdish parts without interfering in the internal or domestic issues. For example, our brother in the Iraqi Kurdistan know better what do there than me, I can only support them.

Another example, during the national election in Turkey, there were three candidates: Mr. Erdogan, another candidate from CHP, and Salahettin Demirtas. So, the HDP run for the presidency with a coalition with the Turkish left without asking for our help. At the same time, President Barzani in the KRG has a project of referendum and independency of Kurdistan; Turkey chose to be silent and did not react to this. So, I decided to make a political move and said that our party would support Mr. Erdogan for the presidential election. I was sure that the Mr. Demirtas would not win the election plus they did not ask for our help. At that time, I thought it was better for the Kurds to have Mr. Erdogan as a president and decided to support him.

AH: How was the reaction of the HDP at that time?

SB: AHHH, they were super angry and they called me a traitor. They accused me that I got support from AK Party and that I was an agent of Barzani in Turkey.

AH: So, you made this announcement on Rudaw TV from Erbil, were you accused for having Mr. Barzani's influence to reach this conclusion?

SB: No Mr. Barzani. I made that decision because I consider myself Kurdistani and I think of the best of all of the four parts of Kurdistan. The achievements of my brothers in south would be achievements for me. I am always ready to support a Kurdistani project, but that project by HDP was not Kurdistani, only the candidate was Kurdish.

AH: How wasn't the project Kurdistani and it was a Turkish project?

SB: Yes, only the candidate was Kurdish. It was a coalition between the HDP and all of the Turkish marginal leftist parties.

AH: Are we talking about the deep state, because I have a hard time understating the Turkish leftist part of your talk?

SB: No, I don't want to say deep state, because it is a harsh way to say it and I don't have any evidence to prove that. The PKK had this project and it was a Turkish project, but I think for the Kurdistan and I don't have anything to do with a project of Turkey. Also, the Turkish government did not make any statement about Mr. Barzani's referendum plan while before if a Kurd would have a plan to have a country in North Pole in arctic; the Turkish state would have stood against it. The Vice President of AK Party said that if the Kurds don't have any other options in Iraq, they have the right of self-determination.

AH: One may argue that the Kurds need to be united, but at that time, you were not united with them and sided with the AK Party, what would be your respond?

SB: The PKK united with the Turks, too. Mr. Demirtas was a candidate of both the Kurds and the Turkish leftists.

AH: But, don't you think solving the Kurdish problem in Turkey goes through Turkey, because you have to be strong enough in Turkey to be able to push for your rights?

SB: Yes, the Kurds need to be united to be stronger; they should discuss their agendas together and go forward in a democratic process. For example, we all knew that Mam Jalal was a candidate of the Kurds for the presidency of Iraq. But with the PKK, they did not ask for our help, rather they ask some Turkish parties for help.

AH: If the PKK had asked you for support, would you still have stuck with your decision?

SB: They did not, but if they had, we probably would have had a different political agenda.

AH: How was the reaction of the KDP in Iraq toward your statement?

SB: They did not reject and did not support it at the same time. They just looked at it, because it was the decision of me and my party. So, in politics if you don't reject something and chose to be silent, it means you accept it.

I truly believe the Kurds should be united and should have one language while talking about the national interests of the Kurds.

AH: What stops you and your party from having a common language?

SB: We have different language with the PKK, not with the other Kurdish political parties. We have good relations with them for example with PAK, Azadi movement, and HAK party. The PKK only talks to us when they are in danger and want help. So, it is better for us to work hard and try to mobilize the Kurdish people in our own ways, so that we would stronger and they PKK would then listen to us.

AH: So, to talk to the HDP, the PKK needs to approve this?

SB: Listen, the PKK, which is represented by the HDP, decide on things and the HDP make the practice of the decision.

AH: Moving to Rojava, from your observation, how has the Turkish government tried to get involved in Rojava through President Barzani?

SB: I am afraid Mr. Erdogan will use its influence by Mr. Hakan Fidan on Mr. Ocalan to get involved in Rojava.

AH: How?

SB: They can do it.

...President Barzani did his best to unite the Kurdish political parties in Rojava and to avoid having a civil war among the Kurdish parties that how the Erbil agreement came about, but later the PYD violated the agreement and took over the income of the custom house between KRG and Syria. Basically, the PYD does not want to share the power in Rojava. After the ISIS attack, the Duhok agreement came about between the KRG and PYK with the monitoring of US. Mr. Barzani used his utmost power to convince the International Community to bomb ISIS in around Kobani. Then, Peshmerga forces were allowed to go to Kobani to fight against ISIS. Then, the Kurdistan Parliament decided to send Peshmarge forces to Kobani through Turkey. This was a political momentum for the Kurds.

AH: How do you think the PYD think of the KRG now?

SB: I think this will have a positive effect on the Kurds in Rojava, because if you fight side by side it is something else.

AH: On my way to Diyarbakir, I met a Kurds from Kobani and he told me that Kobani has become the symbol of unification of the Kurds; it seems that on a micro level, people are united, but is that the same case with the macro level, with people on a high political level?

SB: I think the demands of the PKK are distractive on the people's level, because they have made a lot of propaganda against the Peshmarge forces in Shangal that the Peshmarge forces escaped and could not defend the people, but YPG itself could not defend Kobani and 200 villages were evacuated under the PYD control. On the official level, there is disunity between the Kurds, and the neighboring countries are happy with that. Do you think Iran, Turkey, and Syria would be happy if the Kurds are united? So, these cantons ideas are to stop the Kurdish independence. If you have Rojava and South united, you will have oil pipeline going to the Mediterranean Sea without the help of any neighboring countries. On the other hand, you have to know that the KRG has good relations with the US, and the International Communities would rather see a strong KRG than a strong Iran.

AH: Very briefly could you elaborate on the propaganda of the PKK against the KRG as you referred to?

SB: After the ISIS attack on Shngal, they said that the Peshmarge forces have left the Yazidis and they were massacred by the ISIS.

AH: But they were massacred by the ISIS?

SB: You can say two things. You can say some Peshmarge commanders made mistakes and Mr. Barzani himself is investigating the case, but to make propaganda and say that Peshmarga forces run away during a war, this was the propaganda and that ISIS was close from Erbil and if it was not for the help of the PKK guerillas, things would have been different now.

AH: Does these propagandas have any level of truth?

SB: If you are a friend, you can say that you made a mistake, but if you are not, you can say that you run away and left people behind. The other propaganda is when Mr. Barzani dug the trench around Erbil to the boarder, everyone called him “khandeqchi” [trench maker].

9.2. Email Interview with KRG Politicians

Email interview with Dlawer Ala'Aldeen and Athanasios Manis. Ala'Adeen is currently the President of the Middle East Research Institute in Erbil, Iraq, and he was a former Minster of Higher Education in the KRG. Manis is also a senior research fellow at MERI.

Language: English.

Arez Hussen (AH): How structured are the relations between the KRG and Turkish government? By structured, I mean what seems to be the nature of the relations and are there particular people behind the ingenuity of the relations?

Dlawer Ala'Aldeen and Athanasios Manis (DA&AM): The relationship has not been institutionalized so far. It is mainly a party-political relationship underpinned by close relations between KDP and the AKP government (top-down). Strong economic ties have been forged between the business communities of both countries. Therefore, the relationship moves beyond security and touches also upon energy, trade and economic cooperation. The economic crisis in Kurdistan is a litmus test for the economic aspect of Turkey-KRG relations. For the time being, Turkey has been supportive to the KRG's economic prosperity and it is trying to keep it afloat through bilateral loans despite the fact that Baghdad refuses to make budget transfers to the KRG as part of the 17% deal.

In terms of other political actors' stance, CHP, the main opposition party in Turkey seems to endorse good relations with the KRG. However, MHP is lukewarm and skeptical about this relationship. HDP is very much in favour of this relationship as they believe that the KRG can have a positive role in the peace negotiations. On the KRG side, all the political parties appreciate the significance of Turkey for the KRG. There is still a lot of space for further development of the KRG-Turkey relations that will include more political actors.

(AH): How have these relations changed since the ISIS attacks on Mosul on June 2014, later on Hawler, and since the developments in Rojava (Kobani) considering the general public opinion in the KR-I on Turkey's reaction?

(DA&AM): There has been a lot of criticism from all political parties, including parts the KDP with regard to Turkey's stance towards the KRI when ISIS threatened Hawler in August 2014. The main criticism has been that Turkey's reaction was very slow and disproportionate compared to the assistance that Iran provided in the first days of the crisis. Turkey's public image was damaged. Kurdish parties could not hide their disappointment and publically criticized both AKP and KDP.

However, this skepticism was ephemeral. The KRG continues to enjoy excellent relations with the Turkey. Kobani has been a window of opportunity for both the KRG and Turkey to reestablish the good public profile of their relationship. By allowing Peshmerga forces to enter Kobani through its soil, Turkey proved that it has the capacity to play a constructive role and that it was reconsidering its stance towards the Kurds of the region.

(AH): In what ways the KRG-Turkey relations have helped in the reconciliation process in Turkey? Any specific examples!

(DA&AM): The KRG is trying to play a constructive role in the peace process by encouraging both sides to move ahead with a solution that can be acceptable by both sides. The KRG has made it clear to Turkey that a solution to the Kurdish question will solidify their partnership even further. The KRG pays a lot of attention to the respect of human and cultural rights of the Kurds in the region. The KRG has close relations with the HDP in Turkey. So far, Turkey has not asked the KRG to play a mediating role between the two sides.

(AH): In your opinion, how has President Barzani's visit to Diyarbakir affected the reconciliation process considering the harsh criticisms from some Kurdish politicians in Turkey to the timing of the visit?

(DA&AM): President Barzani's visit to Diyarbakir carries great symbolic significance with it. It shows that the closest ally of Turkey among the Kurdish political elites does not pursue closer cooperation with Turkey uncritically and unconditionally. President Barzani stood by the Kurds of Turkey on one hand, and encouraged the Turkish state, HDP and PKK on the other in constructive dialogue that can bring an applicable solution.

(AH): What mechanisms/tools/strategies does the KRG have that could help in solving the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

(DA&AM): The KRG has good relations with the Turkish state through the KDP's political link, trade and energy, and with the PKK through the PUK, PYD and other security aspects. If the KRG makes good use of its combined political capital with all actors involved in the peace process in a timely fashion, it can play a crucial role in making sure that the peace process gains momentum, especially in the first difficult steps in which actors lack trust for each other's intentions. Accordingly, the KRG can facilitate dialogue and make sure that the hard-liners in both sides are isolated.

(AH): How important will the success of the peace process be for the KRG and the future of its relations with Turkey?

(DA&AM): The success of the peace process will remove a major thorny issue from the agenda of the KRG-Turkey relationship and most importantly it will definitely help a lot to institutionalize it by isolating the most critical voices on both sides. If the relationship between Turkey and the Kurds of Turkey relapse into conflict, this will strain the KRG-Turkey affairs in all certainty. It will be difficult for the KDP to go against the popular support of the KRI towards

the Kurds of Turkey. Therefore, the peace process is the only option for securing beyond doubt strong security and economic relations between the KRG and Turkey.

(AH): To what extent has Kobani been a uniting factor between the Kurdish political parties considering the lack of success of both Hawler and Duhok agreements?

(DA&AM): Kobani can be considered a milestone. It brought all Kurdish parties closer together than ever, and paved the way for further negotiation. Of course, the issue of approximation is complex and requires a lot more time, effort and political will.

Email interview with Safeen Dizayee, the Spokesperson of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Language: English.

Arez Hussen (AH): How structured are the relations between the KRG and Turkish government? By structured, I mean what seems to be the nature of the relations and are there particular people behind the ingenuity of the relations?

Safeen Dizayee (SD): After the gulf war of 1991, a new chapter commenced in Kurdistan relations with the outside world. Turkey was no exception. under late president ozal, these contacts were established and matured in a short time. however the relations were mainly wit the main two political parties, kdp and puk. it was a new experience and rather difficult times for both sides. on one hand Turkey was dealing with an authority in Iraqi Kurdistan with its representations in Ankara at a time that it was still a taboo to talk about the kurds or their existence in Turkey. in the 1990s, although much of the contacts of the representatives were through the ministry of foreign affairs, but such relations were mostly indexed around security matters. since KRG had no economical incetives to offer to Turkey at the time with international embargo and lack of funds for developments etc. the new government of akp at the outset and after regime change in Iraq felt that it can by pass KRG and deal directly with Baghdad. for a good 5 years this was the case and in february 2008, it almost led to a military confrontation between Turkish forces and peshmergas. soon after that and concentrated diplomatic work behind the scene, efforts were exerted to remedy the problems. and it worked.

Today the KRG-Ankara relations are at its best and there are many reasons and vested interests which has obliged both sides to come to terms. Kurdistan and its existence was enshrined in the new Iraqi constitution and became a reality to be dealt with by both regional and international powers. KRG became a factor of stability and a region of economical prosperity and offering ample opportunity for economical developments, energy opportunities, investment potentials etc. all these factors and social reasons with inevitable changes in the region, brought sides together and to act more pragmatically and develop bilateral ties. KRG is official received in Ankara at every visit to meet the highest authority, including the president of the republic of Turkey

(AH): How have these relations changed since the ISIS attacks on Mosul on June 2014, later on Hawler, and since the developments in Rojava (Kobani) considering the general public's opinion in the KR-I on Turkey's reaction?

(SD): The attack of ISIS on Kurdistan was not expected to happen so soon, since ISIS was claiming to fight the shiate regime in Baghdad and defending the rights of the sunni in Iraq. at a time when most sunni idps were taken refuge with KRG. when mosul was about to fall, KRG offered Ankara to evacuate Turkish diplomats and bring them to safety. Ankara always underlined that they act carefully and will stand by KRG at all times. when ISIS attacked Kurdistan, the expectations from Ankara was that they would move immediately to help peshmergas and provide assistance. this did not happen as expected which led to disappointment. however certain supplies of ammunition and humanitarian supplies were provided but was kept low profile due to the 49 Turkish hostages in the hands of ISIS and also with the presidential elections in Turkey. Turkey has provided assistance and built several idp camps in duhok province plus since September turkish armed forces are providing training to the peshmergas in two separate camps in Kurdistan. perhaps most important assistancw was the passage to peshmerga forces to use Turkish territory and reaching kobani. despite all these, our expectations are much more from Ankara.

(AH): In what ways have the KRG-Turkey relations helped in the reconciliation process in Turkey? Any specific examples! And/Or what mechanisms/tools/strategies does the KRG have that could help in solving the Kurdish Question in Turkey?

(SD): All political parties in Kurdistan, parliamenta, presidency and KRG are supportive of the peace process in Turkey. a process that will end the decades long conflict and bloodshed and end with the guarantee of democratic right of the kurds in Turkey. KRG and its prime minister has contributed a great deal to this process by both convincing pkk leadership to end its military operations and Ankara to be more forthcoming in opening dialogue with the pkk and its imprisoned leader. ofcourse its a process that will take time and will face obstacles with its own enemies, but it has come a long way , yet a long way to go. KRG will continue to support peace process since there is no other way to resolve this issue.

(AH): In your opinion, how has President Barzani's visit to Diyarbakir affected the reconciliation process considering the harsh criticisms from some Kurdish politicians in Turkey to the timing of the visit?

(AH): To what extent has Kobani been a uniting factor between the Kurdish political parties considering the lack of success of both Hawler and Duhok agreements?

(SD): There are times when symbolic issues can be very meaningful and instrumental in bringing about changes and reforms. In 1992 when President Barzani visited President Ozal at Cankaya Palace in his Kurdish outfit, it was a very big event and made every Kurd in Turkey and elsewhere proud. Having Barzani in Diyarbakir with his Kurdish outfit and on stage with the Prime Minister was symbolic but a sign of important changes in the mentality of radical elements in Turkey to be persuaded with the policy of acceptance and co-existence. I believe that such an event should not be downgraded nor to be viewed as a tool in the hands of the state. Of course Mr. Erdogan benefited from this event, but it was of benefit to the Kurdish issue at the same time.

(AH): How are the relations (power relations) between the KRG and the Kurdish political parties in Turkey, including the PKK? Why?

(SD): There are times in history where calamity of people has not been a uniting factor. With the ISIS attack on Kiri and Kobani later on, it moved the conscience of the Kurds wherever they were, irrespective of their political background or which part of Kurdistan they were from. Kobani was such an example and brought people together and paved the way for Peshmerga forces to be sent to defend the besieged population, the same can be said about Shingal and many other places.

(AH): How important will the success of the peace process be for the KRG and the future of its relations with Turkey?

(SD): KRG has tried to be on equal terms with all political parties in all parts of Kurdistan and of course the PKK with its extended parties in Turkey are at the forefront. But that does not mean that the political scene should be monopolized by the PKK alone. There should be opportunities for other entities to operate freely and add to the democratic values and principles.

(AH): The Kurdish National Congress, what have been the main reasons behind its delay and to what extent have the regional powers like Iran and Turkey tried to influence or get involved in the Congress?

(SD): It is certain that wars and conflicts can not resolve problems. the only way forward is to have democratic solutions through dialogue and peaceful means. its of vital importance that all parties concerned should continue with the ongoing process, despite set backs. this , no doubt, will bring more stability and prosperity to the region and will ofcourse have a positive repercussion on KRG.

(AH): Do you have any final thoughts or something you would like to talk about that I did not mention?

(SD): National congress is an idea of the president of Kurdistan region of Iraq for the last five years or more. the whole idea is to bring unanimity and stance that kurds are for peace and do not want to be engaged with violence in achieving their goals. ofcourse events have changed and will continue to change, therefore future agenda of such congress has to be according to the events of the day. one of the main reasons for the delay, as far as I know, was due to the fact that pkk was trying to bring more of its own members and associations into the congress and deny the chance to other political entities to participate. however, this issue is confined to the office of the president and KRG is not the final decision maker.

Email interview with Falah Mustafa, the Minister of the Foreign Relation of the KRG.

Language: English.

Arez Hussen (AH): How structured are the relations between the KRG and Turkish government? By structured, I mean what seems to be the nature of the relations and are there particular people behind the ingenuity of the relations?

Falah Mustafa (FM): The ties between the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Republic of Turkey continue to grow and strengthen by each passing day. The leadership on both sides share a similar vision for a strong relationship bonded together by political and economic cooperation.

Three Turkish airline companies are flying to Erbil and Slemani; Turkish universities and schools are open throughout our region, and they are heavily involved in the construction of key and strategic projects in Kurdistan. Also, we have established strong energy cooperation. Turkey has become our gateway to the international oil market.

Our policy is to continue strengthening these ties for the betterment of our people.

(AH): How have these relations changed since the ISIS attacks on Mosul on June 2014, later on Erbil, and since the developments in Rojava (Kobani) considering the general public's opinion in the KR-I on Turkey's reaction?

(FM): We still enjoy extensive economic, trade and political ties with Turkey and we are committed to continue our bilateral cooperation in all fields. Turkey is an independent country; it pursues policies that are in her national interest.

We thank the Turkish government for opening a corridor for the Kurdish Peshmerga forces to move from the Kurdistan Region through Turkey to Kobane

(AH): In what ways have the KRG-Turkey relations helped in the reconciliation process in Turkey? Any specific examples!

(FM): We support the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question in Turkey. We have made concerted efforts to help both sides to carry out the peace process in Turkey in order to end decades of violence and bloodshed.

The leadership of the Kurdistan Region has been able to play a very positive role in the peace process and we intend to continue supporting this process.

(AH): In your opinion, how has President Barzani's visit to Diyarbakir affected the reconciliation process considering the harsh criticisms from some Kurdish politicians in Turkey to the timing of the visit?

(FM): As I mentioned, the leadership of the Kurdistan Region is very supportive of the peace process. At the invitation of then the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President Masoud Barzani visited Diyarbakir and delivered a speech where he reiterated his stance for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question in Turkey.

President Barzani's visit was a step forward towards further solidifying the peace process in Turkey.

(AH): How important will the success of the peace process be for the KRG and the future of its relations with Turkey?

(FM): The success of the peace process in Turkey will further strengthen bilateral ties between the KRG and the Turkish government. We are for peaceful coexistence because accepting each other will lead our countries to more prosperity.

(AH): To what extent has Kobani been a uniting factor between the Kurdish political parties considering the lack of success of both Erbil and Duhok agreements?

(FM): We have always encouraged the Kurdish political parties in Syria to work together and to solve their disagreement through negotiations. The presidency of the Kurdistan Region has made continued efforts to convince all parties to reach an agreement and to unite their forces in the face of security threats facing the Kurds. Unity among Kurdish groups is of paramount importance to achieve a better future.