THE KURDISH QUESTION
AND TURKEY:
An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict

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Islamic society without providing, at the same time, a new ideological framework which could have mass appeal. The solution that Mustafa Kemal and his leadership adopted was to emphasize Turkish nationalism as an alternative source of mobilization. One deputy, Rüşenî Bey, whom we have mentioned earlier, declared that the new religion of Turks would be nationalism. This was received with great enthusiasm by Mustafa Kemal. However, the nationalism that emerged was one which emphasized Turkish ethnicity and language. In the early 1930s this manifested itself in the introduction of the Turkish History and Sun-Language Theses, both of which had the full blessing of the government.

The Turkish History Thesis was first elaborated in 1930 in a book entitled Türk Tarhiinin Ana Hatları (The Principal Characteristics of Turkish History) prepared by a study group under the auspices of the Türk Öakları (Turkish Hearths). The thesis argued that Turks originated from Central Asia and migrated to different parts of the world spreading civilization. Continuity was established between the Turks living in Anatolia and their ancestors in Central Asia by arguing that all previous ancient civilizations in Anatolia, including the Hittites and the Sumerians, were Turkish-inspired. The Turkish History Institute (Türk Tarih Kurumu) developed this thesis through the creation of historical 'myths'. Turkish school textbooks were rewritten to incorporate this thesis and People's Houses (Halk vehrleri) were set up across the country to educate the people about their history and 'Turkishness'.

The Sun-Language Theory was based on the argument that only one language, Turkish, was spoken in Central Asia. According to the theory, Turkish constituted the basis of all languages. Current Anatolian Turkish was supposedly a continuation of this original form of Turkish. Language had become another tool for mobilizing national consciousness. The Turkish Language Institute (Türk Dili Kurumu) was established. Its purpose was to purify the language. A law was even passed which required the use (call for prayer) to be read in Turkish. According to Mersin-Alıç there were attempts to create 'a nation by design through the employment of the tools of the ethnic model with the aim of arriving at a Western type of national identity'.

In a survey of students conducted in 1958 Hayman and others concluded that these policies had been largely successful in substituting a Turkish national identity in place of religion. Similar observations were also made by Frey concerning the rural areas of Turkey. The likelihood of conflict increased as the Turkish History Thesis and the Sun-Language Theory led to the development of an argument that the Kurds were really Turks.

Gökalp had concluded at the end of an ethnographic field survey of tribes in the vicinity of Diyarbakır that there were a large number of Turkishmen tribes that had been Kirdizied over many years. However, at no point had he suggested that Kurds themselves were Turks. Yet in the 1930s intensive efforts were made to prove that Kurds were Turks. This 'scientific' reality was to be instilled into the hearts and minds of 'confused' Kurds. Accordingly, Kurds were 'mostly comprised of Turks who had changed their language', and the term Kurd 'was the name of a community that spoke a broken Persian and that lived in Turkey, Iraq and Iran'. In another study in the 1930s Candar provided a long list of tribal names and villages from eastern Anatolia. On the basis of an etymological study he concluded that people who thought of themselves as Kurds were in reality Turks.

In December 1936 the Governor of Tunceli (Dersim), Army General Abdullah Alpdoğan, argued that Kurds were in essence 'mountain Turks'. He criticized the practice of 'calling them Kurds. Of treating them as though they are of a different race'. In a book originally completed in 1945, M.S. Firat, himself an ethnic Kurd, observed that the descendants of the ancient Turkish and Turkishmen tribes who spoke Kourmanji and Zaza and who were referred to as Kurds were actually 'mountain Turks'.

With the opposition to modernization, particularly from religious circles, and the conviction held by Mustafa Kemal and his followers that Turkey continued to face serious domestic and foreign challenges to its integrity and security, more officials in Ankara were determined to encourage nation-building with a heavy emphasis on Turkish ethnicity, history and language. Ethnic nationalism rather than civic integration was clearly the order of the day. The government was relatively successful in neutralizing religious opposition. Likewise, most of the population who were not of Turkish ethnic background went along with these nation-building policies with little resistance. However, there was violent opposition from parts of the mainly Kurdish-populated areas of eastern Turkey.

Kurdish Nationalism – 1923–38

Oran has argued that the development of Kurdish nationalism was largely a reaction to the rise of a Turkish nationalism with its growing emphasis on Turkish ethnicity and language. Kurdish nationalism would evolve gradually. The lack of unity among the Kurds in the period before 1923 has been discussed in detail earlier. In March 1923 Yosif Ziya, a Bey Kurdish deputy in the Grand National Assembly, during a debate concerning the future of Mosul, could still deliver a moving speech which stressed Turkish and Kurdish fraternity and the inseparability of the two peoples.

As indicated earlier, the greatest challenge to the newly formed Republic was the major rebellion in spring 1925 led by the Kurdish religious leader Sheikh Said. The origins of this revolt may be traced to the establishment in May 1923 of a Kurdish nationalist party called Azadi. This was founded by Kurdish nationalists and officers from the Ottoman Army and was led by Haci Musa, once a prominent member of the resistance movement and then
the government in suppressing the rebellion. Hence it is difficult to speak of a widespread national consciousness among the Kurds in Turkey at the time of the rebellion. Arguably this revolt was an example of a charismatic religious figure playing a critical role in uniting several Kurdish tribes to resist the centralization which the authorities in Ankara were seeking to impose.

There were other Kurdish rebellions in the period between 1925 and 1938. These were uprisings against the attempted forceful assimilation of the Kurdish population by the dominant Turkish ethic core. Some Kurdish nationalist leaders were involved. But these outbreaks of violence were sporadic and unco-ordinated. Cleavages among the Kurds along tribal, religious and regional lines still persisted and worked against the formation of a Kurdish ethnic and national identity in Turkey.

The government became increasingly intolerant of any opposition to its policies. Mustafa Kemal and the leadership of the CHP, the single party in power, handpicked all parliamentary deputies. As a result, the constituencies mostly populated by Kurds had the lowest percentage of locally-born deputies. A Kurd who refused to support government policies on modernization and nation-building could not participate in the work of the assembly and government.

In 1930 the government accepted the recommendations of the Head of the Turkish General Staff, Field Marshal Fevzi Çakmak. According to Çakmak, civil servants of Kurdish descent in eastern Anatolia should be dismissed from their jobs and Kurds who had been involved in rebellions should be moved to western Turkey. In December 1935 the assembly adopted a law granting the government emergency powers to administer the area around Tunceli. People could be detained indefinitely and individuals refusing to abide by the laws and regulations of the country could be deported from the area.

These measures which aimed to assimilate Kurds and punish those who resisted led to deep resentment and frustration among the Kurdish nationalist elite. This was well captured by Dr Nuri Dersim who complained to the governor of Tunceli, General Abdullah Alpdoğan, that “on the one hand when we say we are ‘Turks’ we are told ‘no, you are not Turks, you are Kurds’. Yet, when we, the people of Dersim, say we are Kurds, they hit us hard and say that ‘no you are not Kurds, there are no Kurds’. This frustrated Kurdish elite was involved in the formation of the Kurdish nationalist Khoybun group in 1927 which participated in the rebellion around Mt. Ararat in 1930.

By 1939 the government had consolidated its rule over Kurdish populated areas in Turkey. As Van Bruinsessen noted: All the rebellions had remained regional and in many cases it was Kurds themselves who had played an active role in suppressing these rebellions. When Turkey had its first competitive election in 1950 which brought in a new government led by the Democrat Party (DP), there was little evidence of Kurdish nationalism in the country. Many Kurds by this time appeared to have been assimilated and the tribal leaders co-opted into the Turkish political system.
The Development of Kurdish Nationalism in Post-World War Two Turkey

In the post-World War Two period a Kurdish ethnic identity would eventually emerge. To some extent this was the product of the further modernization of society in Turkey. Consciousness of an ethnic identity would become less the exclusive preserve of a handful of Kurdish nationalists. Some of the educated and urbanized Kurdish youth would become radicalized and would burst onto the political scene. This politicized Kurdish youth would ultimately press for the formation of an independent Kurdish state. The gradual development of an ethnic self-awareness among the Kurds would at times clash with and on other occasions complement tribal allegiances. Tribal divisions and rivalries among the Kurds would persist. And the often more conservative and traditional Kurdish notables still based in the countryside would not necessarily share the views of urbanized and politicized youth.

The transition from a single to a multi-party system with competitive elections increased popular participation in politics. The participation rates in the elections during the 1950s in the provinces where more than 15 per cent of the population declared their mother tongue to be Kurdish, was high (Table 4.1). Özbudun has attributed this to the role of feudal and tribal leaders in Kurdish-populated areas who made people vote. According to him, the governing elite in the centre throughout the 1930s and the 1940s had been able to work with many rural notables. Local interests were recognized and in return reforms promoted by the centre were supported by these notables. However, by 1945 this political alliance encountered problems over the issue of land reform.

In the case of Kurdish-populated areas, however, this alliance between the CHP and the local elite continued in the 1950 elections. In the province of Hakkari the CHP received 100 per cent of the votes. By and large, the DP was less successful in Kurdish populated provinces. According to Van Bruinissen, the DP was more successful in these provinces in the 1954 elections because of the relaxation of forced assimilation policies by the government. By the 1957 elections economic difficulties in the country led to a general fall in the votes for the DP, but the CHP was particularly successful in the Kurdish-populated provinces.

Serious economic problems and political instability in Turkey resulted in military intervention in 1960. The military had been disturbed by the liberalization that had taken place under the DP, especially in eastern parts of the country. The armed forces believed that this had led to an increase in Kurdish national consciousness. The military arrested and deported to western Turkey 55 Kurdish notables, of whom 54 were members of the DP. The military also introduced a law to give villages Turkish rather than Kurdish names. They further considered introducing policies similar to the assimilation and resettlement policies of the one-party era. However, according to Van Bruinissen the liberal nature of the 1961 Constitution prevented this. This gave people more civil rights, the universities greater autonomy, and permitted students to organize their own associations. In this environment, some Kurds began to be increasingly aware of their ethnicity.

Change was gradual. The political participation patterns of the 1950s to a large extent persisted during the 1960s. Özbudun has noted that, unlike other parts of the country, voting participation rates continued to remain high in eastern regions in the 1960s. He attributed this to the persistent influence of tribal leaders and local notables. In her analysis of the 1965 elections, Abadan concluded that voting in eastern parts of Turkey was heavily dominated by a local elite closely associated with the dominant parties of the time.

There were indications in voting behaviour, though, of an increasing awareness of Kurdish ethnicity. The New Turkey Party (YTP), composed mostly of members of the local elite in eastern parts of the country, received more than 30 per cent of the votes in 1961 in the east. With six ministers the YTP was a member of the CHP-led coalition government between July 1962 and November 1963. Under the influence of the YTP one of the first important decisions that the government took in September 1962 was to

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### Table 4.1

**Average Participation Rates and Distribution of Votes by Political Parties in National Elections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election year</th>
<th>Participation rate (%)</th>
<th>CHP (%)</th>
<th>DP (%)</th>
<th>Others (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950 country average</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average for 15 provinces</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>53.4</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954 country average</td>
<td>88.6</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>56.6</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average for 15 provinces</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>52.8</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1957 country average</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>47.3</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>average for 15 provinces</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Note:** the 15 provinces are those where more than 15 per cent of the population declared during the 1965 national census that their mother tongue was Kurdish.
allow the 55 notables to return to eastern Turkey from western parts of the
country to where they had been deported by the military. The coalition
collapsed when the YTP decided to pull out after poor returns in the local
elections held in November 1963. The performance of the YTP dropped in
the following local and national elections but it still received more than 15
per cent of the votes from provinces with a high proportion of Kurdish-
speaking voters. According to Özdögan, in the 1969 elections the YTP
received more than ten per cent of the votes in almost a quarter of the villages
where Kurdish was spoken. The Turkish Workers’ Party (TIP) and the Reliance Party (GP) were two
other small political parties that received votes in Kurdish-speaking areas. At
its fourth party congress in 1970 the TIP discussed the Kurdish problem and
became the first legal party to recognize openly that ‘there is a Kurdish people
living in eastern Turkey’. The Marxist credentials of the TIP prevented it
from making many inroads into rural areas, but during the 1965 and the 1969
election the highest percentage of its votes came from Diyarbakır and Tunceli,
two provinces much associated with Kurdish ethnicity. The TIP was forced
to close down in 1971. By contrast, political parties which stressed Turkish
nationalism, such as the Turkish National Action Party and its predecessor
the Republican National Peasant Party, received low percentages of votes in
these areas.

Awareness of a Kurdish identity seems also to have manifested itself in
increased votes for independent candidates. This trend was already evident
in the 1960s as may be seen from the ‘Others’ column in Table 4.1, which
included independent candidates. Unlike 1961, in the 1965 and 1969
elections these independent candidates received a quite substantial vote,
especially in Kurdish speaking rural areas. For example, in south-eastern
Turkey in the 1969 elections independent candidates received 22.8 per cent
of the votes while on average for the country these candidates picked up 5.6
per cent. In south-eastern Turkey the independents constituted the second
largest group in terms of percentage of votes after the Justice Party (AP)
(which took the place of the DP after 1960), while the CHP trailed fourth
after the YTP.

Under their new leader Bülent Ecevit, the CHP performed well in the
1973 elections in Kurdish-speaking areas of eastern Turkey. Ecevit seemed
much more sensitive to the problems of eastern Turkey and his social
democrat position was popular among the Kurds. In the 1973 election
campaign Ecevit promised to solve the problems of eastern Turkey. However,
shortly after he came to power the CHP’s Kurdish supporters began to make
use of moderate nationalist slogans. This compelled Ecevit to renounce on his
campaign promises. As a result, in the 1977 elections the Kurdish electorate
favoured those independent candidates who were mostly former members
of the CHP but who were then willing to adopt a more nationalist stance.

Ergüder tentatively noted the growing ‘impact of ethnicity and sect on voting
behavior’ in the 1970s and concluded that ‘the Turkish culture and society
may not be as homogeneous as the Turkish Kemalist elite portrayed it to be’. Outside parliament, the political discourse that had once stressed under-
development as the source of the problems of eastern Anatolia had begun by
the 1970s to focus on Kurdish ethnicity and discrimination. Paradoxically,
the modernization of Turkey opened the way for the emergence of a new
form of consciousness among some of the Kurds who had become urbanized
and better educated. It was among this group of young people that the seeds
of a new discourse were sown in the late 1960s. This approach was at first
mainly couched in a leftist and class-based analysis which became known as
‘Eastism’ (Doğuçılık). The problems of eastern Anatolia were attributed to
exploitation and lack of development.

A series of large public meetings were held in 1967 to draw attention to
the problems of eastern Anatolia. These ‘meetings of the East’ (Doğu mitingleri)
were supported by the TIP and many left-wing groups. The government
accused the organizers of seeking to divide the country and called them
traitors. A young Kurdish participant noted that these meetings were not
about Kurdish nationalism and separatism but about the need to introduce
policies to develop the east.

The meetings raised public consciousness about the problems of eastern
Anatolia. Cultural and student organizations were formed which started to
promote Kurdish ethnicity. The largest and most effective of these was the
Revolutionary Cultural Society of the East (Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları),
established in 1969. Originally the aim of these organizations seemed to be
to persuade the government to recognize the Kurdish language and grant
cultural rights to the Kurds. Instead of religious, tribal and traditional themes
which Kurdish groups had made use of in the inter-war period, the leaders
of these cultural and student organizations would in time turn to more
revolutionary, radical and secessionist rhetoric.

It was argued that the pursuit of capitalist and imperialist policies had led
to the denial of Kurdish identity and the lack of economic development in
eastern Anatolia. Initially there was solidarity between Turkish and Kurdish
revolutionaries. The Federation of Turkish Revolutionary Youth, known as Dev
Geçim, an organization notorious for its use of violence, supported the ‘struggle
against fascism and imperialism, for ideological independence and the liberation
of peoples, including that of Turks and Kurds’. Kurdish Marxist revolution-
aries seemed to have more in common with their ‘Turkish comrades’ than
with the more traditional Kurds. Some of the most radical and violent leftist
groups in Turkey were led by Kurds such as Deniz Gezmiş. Gunter has noted
that although individuals like Gezmiş spoke openly of ‘a Kurdish people’ and
virtually incited the Kurds in eastern Turkey to secede, they were clearly
Marxist radicals first before being Kurdish nationalists.
The radical Marxist rhetoric employed by these groups and the escalating violence between them and right-wing nationalist forces led to serious instability in Turkey. In March 1971 the military clamped down and arrested many members of these organizations. When the pre-1971 radical organizations began to resurface in the mid-1970s after a general amnesty, it was evident that the ideological congruence that had once existed between Kurdish and Turkish Marxists had been weakened.

Turkish leftists argued that the cultural and economic liberation of the Kurds would come about as a result of a Marxist revolution led by the Turkish proletariat. Many of these leftists considered the Kurdish nationalists' demands as unimpressive if not reactionary. Kurdish leftists, on the other hand, wanted the Kurds to be recognized as a separate nation capable of leading their own proletarian revolution. One consequence of this rift was that the number of radical Kurdish leftist groups multiplied. Inset listed at least 12 Kurdish separatist groups in Turkey with Marxist-Leninist sympathies which were active in the 1970s. The PKK would become the most radical and influential.

The origins of the PKK may be traced to a meeting in 1977 in Diyarbakir organized by Abdullah Öcalan, who would become the PKK leader. At this meeting he and his immediate supporters adopted a document titled 'The Path of the Kurdish Revolution.' This depicted the Kurdish-populated areas of Turkey as a colony and argued that the Kurdish feudalists and bourgeoisie had chosen to collaborate with the Turkish ruling classes to exploit the Kurdish peasantry and working class. According to the document, a radical revolution was required to establish an independent, Marxist-Leninist Kurdistan where the peasantry and proletariat could enjoy true independence. This document subsequently became the programme of the PKK after its establishment in November 1978. The PKK's early activities were limited to small-scale armed operations and the recruitment of young sympathizers in a small area around Sûrek, the hometown of Öcalan. The 1980 military intervention in Turkey interrupted the activities of the PKK, forcing its leadership to flee abroad. It resumed its armed activities in 1984 and would play an important role in raising the Kurdish question to the top of Turkey's political agenda.

Van Brunissen has pointed out that by the end of the 1970s the activities of Kurdish nationalist groups were 'changing the self-perception of a considerable section of the Kurds. People who had long called themselves Turks started re-defining themselves as Kurds.' This development, together with the economic chaos, political instability and violence that characterized the late 1970s in Turkey, paved the way for the military intervention in September 1980.

The military were in favour of reintroducing what they regarded as strict Kemalist policies. The political discourse derived from these policies put clear emphasis on the 'Turkishness of Turkey', the unity of the nation and its territorial integrity. There was a major backlash against the conspicuous growth of expressions of Kurdish ethnicity and Kurdish nationalist ideas. Even a former CHP deputy and one-time member of the Ecevit government, Şerifettin Elçi, was sentenced to a year of imprisonment by a military court in March 1981 for having said in an interview that 'There are Kurds in Turkey. I am a Kurd.'

The harsh reaction against manifestations of Kurdishness was also reflected in the new Constitution adopted in 1982. This defined one of the fundamental tasks of the Turkish state as the safeguarding of 'the independence and integrity of the Turkish Nation, the indivisibility of the country, the Republic' (Article 5). This effectively made it illegal to express any idea that could be interpreted by the authorities as amounting to a recognition of a separate, Kurdish, ethnic identity. Another article noted: 'No language prohibited by the State shall be used in the expression and dissemination of thought' (Article 26). Subsequently in October 1983 Law 2932 was introduced to ban the use of Kurdish for the dissemination of information. The Constitution also made the establishment of associations and political parties very complicated. As already noted, political parties which supported activities 'in conflict with the indivisible integrity of the state' were banned (Article 68).

This Constitution was submitted to a national referendum in July 1982. Little public debate was permitted and participation in the referendum was meant to be compulsory. The Constitution was adopted by an overwhelming majority of more than 91 per cent with a similar rate of participation (Table 4.2).

### Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation rates</th>
<th>Average for 15 provinces</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country average (%)</td>
<td>Average for 15 provinces (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation rates</td>
<td>91.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Yes' votes</td>
<td>91.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'No' votes</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: see note to Table 4.1.
4.2). Many people voted 'yes' believing that the alternative was chaos of the kind that Turkey had experienced during the late 1970s. Furthermore, the stark 'yes' or 'no' options gave people little room for choice. The average approval and participation rates for the 15 provinces with Kurdish speakers of more than 15 per cent was a little lower than in the rest of the country. In some of the eastern provinces, such as Bingöl and Tunceli, acceptance rates were as low as 76.5 and 82.6 per cent, respectively, although ironically one of the highest acceptance rates of 96.4 per cent came from Ağrı, a province with a majority of Kurdish-speaking people according to the 1965 national census. The results in these provinces were of a mixed nature although it seems that Harris was largely correct when he argued that 'the prospect of increased limitations on ethnic expression' may well have induced people in provinces predominantly inhabited by Kurds to turn in lower approval rates.113

The Constitution also revitalized the Turkish Language Society and the Turkish History Society. They were expected to reintroduce the political discourse of the 1930s which had argued that Kurds were Turks. Articles and books claiming common ancestry for Turks and Kurds, as well as arguments that a separate Kurdish language did not exist suddenly proliferated. It was claimed that efforts to distinguish a Kurdish identity from a Turkish one were simply fabrications on the part of Western intelligence agencies and separatist groups which were seeking to divide up the country.114 When, in 1988, several parliamentary deputies of the SHP voted in favour of the 'Minority Languages' report of the Council of Europe they were accused of having fallen prey to the conspiracies of European countries to create a Kurdish minority in Turkey where one did not exist.

Besides encouraging the revival of Turkish nationalism, the military leadership also viewed religion as a political tool to boost national unity and weaken the influence of Marxist and separatist ideas. This new approach came to be known as the 'Turkish-Islamic Synthesis'. The military hoped that by strengthening the 'national culture', society and particularly the young would be shielded from the dangerous and divisive influences of foreign ideologies. Many intellectuals in Turkey considered this practice as an erosion of secularism and a major departure from the practices of Mustafa Kemal and his leadership. These policies did not prevent the Kurdish-populated areas of eastern Turkey from gradually sliding into violence once the PKK began to launch terrorist operations in 1984. The spiral of violence and counter-violence fuelled the growth of Kurdish national consciousness. According to Shaitkh Said's grandson and parliamentary deputy Abdullahi Farit, the government's repressive policies in the eastern parts of the country played a greater role in enhancing Kurdish national consciousness than the propaganda work of the PKK.115

In January 1988 Ali Eren, an SHP deputy, boldly asserted that the existence of the Kurds in Turkey was being continually denied and that parallels could be drawn between the situation of the Turks in Bulgaria and Greece and the Kurds in Turkey. Eren claimed that the Kurds were a national minority who could not speak nor write in their own language nor give their children the names of their choice. His remarks precipitated harsh criticisms from the floor of the parliament. Some accused Eren of violating the constitution. Others charged that he was drunk.116

However, by the late 1980s more books and publications were appearing in Turkey which focused on Kurdish ethnicity and challenged the official line. A growing number of journalists, politicians and citizens were becoming increasingly critical of the official denial of a Kurdish identity. In June 1989 President Turgut Özal announced that he himself had Kurdish blood. This marked a significant first step toward an eventual recognition of the Kurdish reality. In April 1991 the ban on the Kurdish language was lifted immediately after more than one and half million Kurdish refugees from Iraq poured into Iran and Turkey.

The 1991 elections brought to power a coalition government which included the SHP who had formed an electoral pact with the HEP. The HEP had been originally set up in 1990 by a group of nationalist Kurdish deputies most of whom had been expelled from the SHP for having attended a conference on Kurdish national identity in Paris in October 1989. The government programme promised major reforms for eastern Anatolia which would also address the 'Kurdish problem'. In December 1991, the deputy Prime Minister Erdal İnönü called for the recognition of the cultural identity of Turkey's Kurdish citizens. In March 1992 Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel openly announced that he recognized the reality of a Kurdish ethnic presence in Turkey.117 Seventy years previously Mustafa Kemal had openly talked about a Kurdish identity. After a long period of denial the Kurdish reality in Turkey was finally recognized.

Since the founding of the Republic, a political system had gradually evolved which accepted individuals with a good command of the Turkish language as 'Turks'. Their ethnic background was not important. The system had aimed to integrate many of these 'Turks' into the ruling elite. However, any expression of ethnicity - other than Turkish ethnicity - was perceived by officials in Ankara as a threat to the existence of the state itself. Therefore, while many Kurds were promoted to high positions in government, they were able to do so only as members of the Turkish nation. This included the children, grandchildren and relatives of those who led the Shaikh Said rebellion. Kurds served as deputies in the parliament, ministers in the cabinet, mayors of cities, state prosecutors and directors of large state enterprises.118 However, those Kurds who were conscious of what they perceived to be a Kurdish national identity were penalized by the state. This was the case of the 55 Kurdish tribal chiefs after the 1960 military coup and the fate of Şerifettin Elçi, former deputy and minister, in 1981.
In the late nineteenth century the ordinary people of Anatolia had not perceived themselves as Kurds or Turks. As Abdülmelik Firat has noted: “There were no Kurds and Turks then.” The unifying factor was Islam. Only in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire did the Ottoman elite of both Kurdish and Turkish descent become more familiar with the concept of ethnic identity. During the war against the occupiers of Anatolia, Mustafa Kemal and his supporters succeeded in mobilizing the support of Turks and Kurds as well as of many other Moslems of different ethnic backgrounds. These wartime leaders became the ‘founding fathers’ of the new Republic.

At the declaratory level Mustafa Kemal and his followers had aimed to achieve unity and modernization by mobilizing the population of Turkey behind a civic- and territorially-determined national identity. They had believed this would help to unite different ethnic groups under a common identity. In the pursuit of this objective, Mustafa Kemal and his followers planned to use the Turkish language as a key instrument. However, through the course of events talk of developing a civic, national identity was replaced by a policy which was increasingly perceived by Kurds as emphasizing secularism and Turkish ethnic identity. To some Kurds this was seen to be at the expense of their own religious, traditional and ethnic identity. Kurdish and religious opposition movements only reinforced the resolve of the regime to pursue its modernization plans.

In the late 1960s alternative voices on Kurdish identity began to emerge. The expression of Kurdishness came to be wrapped in a Marxist-Leninist rhetoric. The regime reacted by reasserting its standard political discourse and by denying the existence of a separate Kurdish identity in Turkey. Attempts to express Kurdishness were seen as direct threats to the cohesion of the state, instigated by external forces that sought to revive the Sèvres Treaty. There was a major departure from standard practice though when the Turkish government recognized the existence of a ‘Kurdish reality’. The political system in Turkey is going through a slow and painful transformation which may eventually allow for expressions of Kurdish identity. But current socio-economic problems and the growing conflict between Kurdish and Turkish nationalism aggravated by PKK terrorism need to be considered.

Notes
5. Y. Akgurs, ‘Çiz Tanzania Siyaseti’, *Türkiye Gişidi*, 31, (May–Dec. 1994). This article was originally published in 1904 in a newspaper called *Türk ve Caire*.
7. His ideas on this topic were eventually compiled in Z. Gökbal, *Türkiye’din Esasları* (Istanbul: Arkadaşa Basım, 1939).
19. B. Oran, op. cit., p.125.
20. For the texts of these two decisions see Ş. Gözübüyük and S. Kılıç, op. cit., pp.89–91.
22. See for example a speech made by the Deputy of Erzurum, Huseyin Avni in *TBMM Zabur Çerdeği*, I: 130, 1.11.1338 (1922), C: 2, pp.314–15.
24. The SDRA-E operated as an unofficial political party led by Mustafa Kemal. It was composed of his most trusted supporters. The group formed itself into the People’s Party (*Halk Partisi*) in Sept. 1923. Subsequently, the term ‘Republican’ was included in Nov. 1924. See M. Tunçay, op. cit., pp.354–6.
25. For the texts of these amendments see Ş. Gözübüyük and S. Kılıç, op. cit., p.95.
32. Ibid., pp.439–40.
33. For a detailed analysis of religion among the Kurds see M. Izady, *A Concise Handbook*.
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35. Z. Gökalp, 'What is a Nation?' in Berkes N. (ed.), op. cit., p.137.
36. T. Parla, Türkiye’de Siyasal Kültürlerin Resmi Kaynaklara Cilt 3: Kemalist Tek-Parti İdeolojisi ve CHP’nin Altı Ok’u (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınlari, 1995) p.188.
37. Ibid., p.128.
38. Ibid., p.110.
42. B. Oran, op. cit., p.159.
43. K. Kirinci, ‘Post Second World War Immigration from Balkan Countries to Turkey’, New Perspectives on Turkey, 12, (Spring 1995).
44. B. Oran, op. cit., p.187.
45. Quoted in M. Tunçay, op. cit., p.228, n.36.
47. For the full text of the law see T.C. Resmi Gazete, 21 June 1934, No. 2733.
48. This group included past immigrants from the Caucasus and the Balkans who were considered Turkish even if ethnically they might have been Albanians, Circassians, Pomaks, Tatars etc. These did not or could not speak Turkish for a variety of reasons. In respect to new immigrants the law authorized the government to determine who would be considered as ‘belonging to the Turkish culture’.
51. Ibid., p.141.
52. TBMM Zabı Tecrûdesi: 1, 68, 14.6.1934, C:1, p.141.
54. D. Mersin-Alca, The Impact of Turkey’s Nationalistic Culture on Foreign Policy Making as Observed in Turkey’s Relations with the Central Asian Turkic Republics (MA thesis, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Boğaziçi University, 1995).
62. B. Toprak, op. cit., p.70.
64. M. Tunçay, op. cit., p.325. For a recent study of this thesis see B. Ersanlı-Behar İkitdar.
The Kurdish Question and Recent Developments in Turkey

This chapter will focus primarily on developments in the 1990s concerning the Kurdish question in Turkey. However, the trans-state nature of this particular ethnic conflict should be borne in mind. Events in Turkey with regard to the Kurds cannot be totally divorced from activities elsewhere in the region. In particular, the ever-changing situation in northern Iraq has had an important influence. The regional dimension of the Kurdish question will be analysed separately later. One should note that the socio-economic problems, the escalating violence in south-eastern Anatolia and the increasing scale of migration within and out of the area have been adversely affected by developments in Iraq especially. The trans-state nature of the Kurdish question has had significant repercussions on politics in Turkey. How Western governments have perceived and reacted to policies adopted by the authorities in Ankara with regard to the Kurdish question in the country and in the region in general, and how Turkish officials in turn have responded to these reactions will also be examined in more detail later.

The Kurdish Question in Turkey Today: Preliminary Remarks

According to Andrews there are 49 identifiable ethnic groups in Turkey. The Kurds constitute the largest of these after the Turks. However, the size of the Kurdish population in Turkey remains disputed. According to Turgut Özal there were 12 million Kurds in Turkey. Two Kurdish deputies Muzaffer Demir from Muş and Mahmut Ahnak from Şırnak have put the Kurdish population at 15 and 20 millions respectively. Van Bruinessen has argued that a 'reasonable and even conservative' estimate for the size of the Kurdish population in Turkey in 1975 was 7.5 millions, which amounted to 19 per cent of the total population. This would put the population of Kurds in 1990 at 10.7 millions out of total population of 56.4 million. According to Izady the figure was 13.7 millions for the same year. There is a considerable discrepancy in these figures because they are based on intuitive guesses. The Turkish national censuses stopped collecting data on the basis of
ethnicity after 1965. Before then, people were asked questions during each national census about their mother tongue. This provided a statistical basis for establishing the number of Kurds even though the figures were not completely reliable. Mutlu has provided a thorough analysis of some of the inconsistencies associated with these figures before reconstructing the size of the Kurdish population for 1965. After readjustments, the Kurdish population then, according to him, stood at 3,130,390, representing 9.97 per cent of the population. This was compared with the census figure of 2,370,233 which accounted for only 7.55 per cent of the total. Accordingly, Mutlu estimated the size of the number of Kurds in Turkey in 1990 at just over 7 millions, more than 12 per cent of Turkey's total population (Table 5.1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographical Region</th>
<th>Number (000)</th>
<th>As % of total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>2,230.29</td>
<td>41.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-eastern</td>
<td>2,365.04</td>
<td>64.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aegean</td>
<td>296.99</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Sea</td>
<td>37.88</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Anatolia</td>
<td>579.38</td>
<td>5.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marmara</td>
<td>810.13</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td>726.55</td>
<td>8.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for all Turkey</td>
<td>7,046.26</td>
<td>12.60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Figures adopted from S. Mutlu, 'The Population of Turkey by Ethnic Groups and Provinces', New Perspectives on Turkey, 12 (Spring 1995) p. 49

This is a figure higher than the one calculated by Özsoy, Koç and Toros who introduced no adjustments into their calculations. They put the projected number of people whose mother tongue was Kurdish in 1992 at 3,620,458. This figure increased to 6,232,234 when the projected number of people whose second language was Kurdish was added to the earlier sum. On the basis of these two estimates the number of Kurds in Turkey would, respectively, amount to 6.2 or 10.7 per cent of the total population in 1992.

The large discrepancy between the figures cited for the size of the Kurdish population is also probably connected with the fact that there are different definitions of who is a Kurd. Mutlu has defined Kurds as those people 'who declared their mother tongue as Kurdish including Zaza, in the 1965 population census'. Zaza is generally considered to be a dialect of the Kurdish language mostly spoken by Kurds in the province of Tunceli; but there are also some Kurds who speak Zaza in the provinces of Erzincan, Bingöl and Diyarbakır. Zaza speakers are mostly Alevi. On occasions the larger grouping of Sunni Kurds have not considered Zaza speakers as Kurds or even Moslems. Van Bruinessen has noted that little research has been done to warrant a definitive statement on the relationship between Kurdish and Zaza.

There are many Kurds in Turkey who are conscious of their Kurdish identity but do not speak any Kurdish. This was even recognized by the leader of the PKK Abdullah Öcalan. In an interview he argued that, even if a separate Turkish state were set up, Turks would have to be used there for a considerable period. Many prominent public figures and politicians in Turkey are of Kurdish ethnic background but do not necessarily speak fluent Kurdish. A good case in point would be Hikmet Çetin who has served in government as Foreign Minister as well as Deputy Prime Minister. Furthermore, there are also many Kurds who are of mixed ethnic background. The late Turgut Özal had publicly stated that he was partly Kurdish. Given that Turks and Kurds have lived in the same area for many centuries intermarriage was probably quite common.

Kurdish nationalists tend to exaggerate the number of Kurds in Turkey. Turkish nationalists either tend to deny the existence of Kurds or to understate their numbers. One may argue that a Kurd is someone who considers him/herself to have a Kurdish ethnic identity, irrespective of whether Kurdish is the mother-tongue or not. However, in the case of Turkey, this inevitably raises the question of who is a Turk. Does the label 'Turk' refer to an ethnic background or to citizenship? How individuals perceive themselves is important. As noted earlier, individuals may perceive that they have a multiple identity. Which identity a person may choose to stress could be dependent on a particular context. And the largely psychological 'boundaries' between ethnic groups are not fixed. Different generations within a certain family could thus perceive themselves as either Kurdish or Turkish, or they may feel that they belong to both identities. A Kurd could consider him/herself to be a member of a specific tribe, hold a Kurdish ethnic identity and also feel him/herself to be a Turkish citizen. On the other hand, a Kurd who is a citizen of Turkey may reject a Turkish identity in any form. Therefore someone like Hikmet Çetin would consider himself an ethnic Kurd of Turkish nationality (citizenship). He would regard himself as a Turkish Kurd. There are a number of Kurds, though, who not only refuse a Turkish identity in any form, but also publicly take offence against Hikmet Çetin for holding a multiple identity.

By the 1990s a significant proportion of the population in Turkey considered themselves to be Kurds and they have been increasingly demanding the recognition of the right to express their identity. Although the government in Ankara recognizes the Kurdish reality in Turkey, and has gradually allowed
the Kurdish question to be more discussed and debated in the open, the
demands from a growing number of Kurds for broadcasting and education
in Kurdish have not yet been seriously addressed. The confrontation between
the Turkish government and the PKK, which aspires to set up a Kurdish state
through armed struggle, is a major complicating factor.

Many Turkish officials argue that Turkey is facing a terrorism problem
stemming from the activities of the PKK. Some believe that once terrorism
is contained the Kurdish question will by and large be resolved. However, to
others the issue is a socio-economic one. Some officials and politicians believe
that the terrorism problem is connected with the fact that the Kurds have
been unable to express their ethnic identity. These officials are of the opinion
that the problem of terrorism would diminish considerably once the Kurds
were allowed education and radio and television broadcasting in Kurdish.

In the mid-1990s the prevailing view held that if cultural concessions were
to be granted to the Kurds this could be the first step towards the disintegration
of the Turkish state. The conspicuous lack of leadership in the country and
a preference for populism among both Turkish and Kurdish politicians have
aggravated the situation. In the meantime, the violence in eastern and south-
eastern Turkey has continued unabated. Violence leads to migration and a
further deterioration of the socio-economic and political situation. This feeds
back into the Kurdish question, making it even more difficult to resolve.

**Socio-Economic Factors and the Kurdish Question in Turkey**

The areas traditionally inhabited by the Kurds have been the least developed
parts of Turkey. The eastern and south-eastern regions where most Kurds
currently live today have the lowest scores for two socio-economic indicators
(Table 5.2). Illiteracy rates of 35.5 and 44.0 per cent for these regions in 1985
were much higher than elsewhere in Turkey. Similarly, the number of medical
doctors per thousand people in 1990 was lower in the less-developed eastern
and south-eastern regions than elsewhere.

Gross per capita income figures for 1979 and 1986 in relation to the two
most prosperous western regions, the Marmara and the Aegean region
(indexed as 100), are shown in Table 5.3. The combined per capita income
scores for the eastern and the south-eastern region were the lowest for both
years. Car ownership is generally highly income-elastic and in Turkey it is
considered to be an important sign of economic prosperity. Only just over
six out of every 100 privately-owned cars in 1991 were registered in the eastern
and the south-eastern regions. These two measures would appear to indicate
the relative lack of prosperity in the mostly Kurdish populated areas of Turkey.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that this was the product of a
deliberate policy on the part of the Turkish government. The Black Sea region,

## Table 5.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Illiteracy Population in 1985</th>
<th>Number of Medical Doctors per 1,000 in 1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-eastern</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aegean</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Sea</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marmara</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Figures were compiled from *İl ve Bölge İstatistikleri* (Ankara: Devlet İstatisitik Enstitüsü [DIE], 1993) p.45 and *İller İhbarıyle Çeşitli Düzenlemeler* (Ankara: Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı, 1993) p.37

## Table 5.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Car newly registered in 1991 (%)</th>
<th>Per capita GNP in 1979 and 1986 in relation to two most prosperous regions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern + South-eastern</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>34.4, 29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aegean</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>100.0, 100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Sea</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>56.2, 47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>53.8, 2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marmara</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>100.0, 100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>69.1, 61.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** *İller İhbarıyle Çeşitli Düzenlemeler*, op. cit., p.67 and *Türkiye GSYİH Sofı Yurt İçi Hasılasının İller İhbarıyle Değerlendirilmesi* (İstanbul: İstanbul Sanayi Odası, 1988) p.367

which is not highly populated by Kurds (Table 5.1), also has low socio-
economic scores compared with the western regions of Turkey. If anything,
the government's public spending in the eastern and the south-eastern
regions has been proportionally higher compared to other regions. Between 1986 and 1990 the government spent 78.2 million TL in the eastern and south-eastern regions while the total revenues received from the two regions came to 26.2 million TL. During the same period, while the ratio of budget expenditures to public revenue was 1.4 on a nationwide basis, the regional ratio for eastern and south-eastern Anatolia was 3.0 (Table 5.4). In other words, the government spent three times more money than the revenues it collected from these two regions. Clearly, between 1986 and 1990 there has been a transfer of national budgetary funds from the developed western parts of Turkey to the less developed areas of the country.

The government’s efforts to develop the area were also supported by other indicators. As Table 5.4 shows, an overwhelmingly large proportion of public investment expenditures were channelled to the eastern and the south-eastern region between 1983 and 1992. A significant portion of this has gone to finance the gigantic South-East Anatolia Development Project (GAP). This ambitious project, when completed, will have 21 dams, 19 hydro-electric power plants and a complex network of irrigation canals covering eight provinces, seven of which are mostly populated by Kurds. However, a number of economic factors have prevented the mobilization of these public resources to improve the socio-economic situation in the eastern and the south-eastern region.

### Table 5.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Per capita public investment expenditure for 1983–92; index (Turkey) = 100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ratio of consolidated budget expenditures to budget revenues 1986–90</td>
<td>Per capita public investment expenditure for 1983–92; index (Turkey) = 100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern + South-eastern</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aegean</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Sea</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marmara</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: İller ibariyle Çeçitli Gösterger, op. cit., p.1 and p.16*

First and foremost the investment in these two regions has not been matched by private investment. As Table 5.5 indicates, the area is characterized by low levels of savings and credits.

### Table 5.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% of total bank deposits in 1991</th>
<th>% of total bank credits in 1991</th>
<th>% of investment certificates in 1992</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-eastern</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aegean</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Sea</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marmara</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>55.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: İller ibariyle Çeçitli Gösterger, op. cit., pp.17, 22 and 16*

The first two columns show there is little saving in the form of bank deposits and credits taken out from banks compared with the rest of the country. In a newspaper report on the banking sector in eastern and south-eastern Turkey it was noted that a growing number of banks were closing their local branches and that the banking sector there was fast becoming eroded. To some extent this suggests that there is little capacity for capital accumulation and private investment in the area. This is also reflected in the extremely low levels of investment allowance certificates obtained for these regions. This seems to indicate that private investors prefer to invest in the more developed and prosperous parts of Turkey, where they find larger and more dynamic markets as well as a relatively more skilled labour force. The low levels of purchasing power and education in the eastern and the south-eastern region as represented by the socio-economic indicators presented in Tables 5.2 and 5.3 seem to be discouraging private investment.

Another important factor that has affected the economy of the area concerns the sanctions imposed on Iraq as a result of the Gulf War. Before the sanctions, in 1988, Iraq was Turkey’s most important trading partner. Turkish exports to Iraq amounted to more than $1.5 billion. Inevitably, this trade benefited particularly the south-eastern area of the country and provided the basis for an important amount of economic activity that disappeared with the sanctions. The government’s decision during the
summer of 1994 to reopen the border with Iraq for border trading – it had been closed in 1992 due to PKK activities in the region – has brought some economic activity to an area where there were at least 10–12,000 idle trucks. However, this border trade, which has been limited to the transportation of relatively small quantities of foodstuffs to Iraq in return for 2 to 2.5 tons of petroleum per truck, in no way matched earlier levels of activity.

Robins has noted that the socio-economic disparity between these regions and the western parts of Turkey, especially since the early 1980s, has left the Kurds of the south-east with little stake in the prosperity of the new Turkey. The depressed nature of the economy in the area has also led to high levels of unemployment, particularly among the youth. According to a study prepared by the Diyarbakir Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the unemployment level in the provinces covered by GAP averaged 36 per cent. A frustrated youth is more likely to support the PKK. This contributes to a rise of violence in the area which in itself adversely affects economic activity as investors shy away; and violence leads to a migration of people and a flight of capital out of the area.

Violence and the Kurdish Question in Turkey

In August 1984 the PKK launched its first attack on military installations near Erzurum and Şemdinli in south-eastern Turkey. The PKK had been involved in limited acts of violence previously. As a result of PKK attacks and clashes between the PKK and the Turkish security forces 20,181 people have been killed between 1984 and the end of 1995 including 5,014 civilians (Table 5.6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Civilian</th>
<th>PKK</th>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>forces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984–91</td>
<td>1,278</td>
<td>1,444</td>
<td>846</td>
<td>3,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992–95</td>
<td>3,736</td>
<td>10,102</td>
<td>2,775</td>
<td>16,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5,014</td>
<td>11,546</td>
<td>3,621</td>
<td>20,181</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The figures for 1984–94 were compiled from Yeni Yüzyıl, 6 July 1995 and for 1995 from Turkish Daily News 8 Jan. 1996

As early as 1977 Abdullah Öcalan and his colleagues had adopted a programme which stressed the need to use violence. Their targets would be members of Turkish extreme nationalist groups and ‘social chauvinist’ groups (Turkish and Kurdish radical left-wing groups) as well as state collaborators and feudal landlords. With the military coup in Turkey in 1980 the leadership of the PKK fled to Syria and Lebanon where they opened training camps. In 1984 when the PKK returned to Turkey the range of their targets had expanded to include economic and military as well as civilian targets. It seemed that they aimed to polarize society along Kurdish and Turkish lines.

Economic targets have included electric power and communication lines, irrigation facilities, factories, petroleum installations, and road construction and maintenance equipment. The purpose was to weaken the presence of the state and disrupt its ability to provide basic public services. Tourism facilities and businesses catering to Turkish tourism in and outside Turkey have also been considered economic targets. According to reports prepared by the US State Department, in 1993 the PKK kidnapped 13 tourists and ‘bombed hotels, restaurants, and tourist sites and planted grenades on Mediterranean beaches’. In 1994 during numerous bombing attacks the PKK injured ten tourists, killed three, and kidnapped two Finnish holidaymakers. The PKK was determined to undermine an important source of foreign currency income for the government.

Attacks on military targets have usually taken the form of raids on remote gendarmerie stations as well as ambushes of units on patrol. The PKK had aimed to challenge the state’s ability to maintain security in south-eastern Turkey and thus impose itself as an alternative source of authority. The PKK has also attacked civilian targets to secure the submission of villagers in particular. In March 1987 the PKK issued instructions to raid and burn villages. This strategy continued until early 1990 when Öcalan dissociated himself from the extremely unpopular raids. The brutality of the raids had earned the PKK a similar reputation to that of the Shining Path guerrillas in Peru.

After a brief ceasefire unilaterally declared by the PKK had ended, violence intensified between 24 May 1993 and early October 1993 resulting in a death toll of 1,600 people which was unusually high. By autumn 1993 the PKK’s penetration of eastern and particularly of south-eastern Turkey was such that it had begun to introduce a clandestine administration of its own in the area. The Turkish press resembled this repressive administration to martial-law rule. This situation led to a government crisis after a Turkish general was killed during skirmishes with the PKK in the town of Lice. Calls for a declaration of martial law were averted with a reshuffle of the cabinet and a decision to harden the struggle against terrorism. The military was given carte blanche to combat the PKK more effectively. By late spring 1994 the military had considerably weakened the PKK and, according to a group of Turkish
journalists who visited the south-east, relative calm and security had returned to the region. Since then PKK attacks have been mostly directed toward the intimidating of villages that provide militias to the government and against Kurds whom the PKK defines as 'state collaborators'. It seemed that compared with the period between 1991 and 1994 the PKK's activities had diminished considerably in 1995. The organization declared another unilateral ceasefire before the national elections were held in December 1995. The government interpreted this as proof that the PKK's influence over the eastern and the south-east had weakened.

Teachers and schools have been another target of the PKK. According to a report prepared by the IHV, 128 teachers were killed between August 1984 and November 1994. The report attributed more than 80 per cent of these deaths directly to the PKK and noted that the families of these teachers were also attacked. The Turkish Minister of the Interior declared that 5,210 schools had been closed down in eastern and south-eastern Turkey in the period between 1992 and 1994 because of general insecurity there. According to government statistics the PKK burned down 192 of these schools, and according to Inset schools were targeted because the PKK believed that Ankara was using its national education system to assimilate the Kurds. The PKK had pledged to disrupt all educational activities until the teaching of the Kurdish language was allowed.

At the start of the 1994 academic year the PKK announced that only teachers who received their permission could work. The announcement came after the killing of six teachers in Tunceli and was followed by the killing of another four in Erzurum. However, since then attacks on schools and teachers appear to have subsided in spite of the threat issued by the PKK.

The government's reaction to the PKK threat was largely military in nature. The security policies introduced in eastern and south-eastern Turkey were based on the declaration of a state of emergency issued in July 1987. The emergency rule applied to ten provinces and must be renewed every four months by the Parliament. In March 1996 it was renewed for the twenty-sixth time. The law on which the emergency rule is based gives civilian governors the right to exercise 'certain quasi-martial law powers, including restrictions on the press and removal from the area of persons whose activities are believed inimical to public order'. The introduction of the state of emergency has also meant that the application of the ECHR has been suspended in those parts of the country. Furthermore, as Robins has pointed out, this state of affairs has 'curbed the application of Turkey's emerging political liberalization process in the region'.

The Anti-terror Law of April 1991 was also intended to deal with threats to domestic security and order caused by the PKK. A terrorist act was defined as actions involving repression, violence and force, or the threat to use force, by one or several persons belonging to an organization with the aim of changing the characteristics of the Turkish Republic including its political, legal, social, secular and economic system (Article 1). This broad and ambiguous definition coupled with the ban on any dissemination of ideas (Article 8), as previously noted, led to many detentions and human rights abuses. According to a list prepared by the IHV at the end of 1994, there were 95 intellectuals, politicians and academics under detention as a result of violations of the Anti-terror Law. One academic, Ismail Tepikt, has set a record for receiving sentences totalling up to 200 years in prison for his publications in violation of this law. An amendment to Article 8 of the law passed by Parliament in October 1995 has led to the reduction of some prison sentences. Subsequently, a number of cases in the courts were dropped and some convicts were released. However, commentators argued that the amendment had not brought about freedom of thought in Turkey.

The broad powers that this law gave to the authorities also led to allegations that the government has been implicated in 'mystery killings'. These appear to have started in 1990 with 11 unsolved murders. Since then 31 cases in 1991, 362 in 1992, 467 in 1993, 400 in 1994 and 92 in 1995 have been reported. In addition to the government, the outlawed religious group known as Hizbullah – an Islamic terrorist group active in south-eastern Turkey – and the PKK are also suspected of involvement in the mystery killings. A report prepared by the Turkish Parliament's Unsolved Political Killings Commission has also implicated Hizbullah and village guards in many of the killings. The report alleged that the military had given support to Hizbullah training camps in south-eastern Turkey. It claimed that most of the village guards were involved with arms smuggling and that they would kill rival members of their tribe and claim that they were members of the PKK.

The controversial village-guard system was introduced in April 1985 because of the enormous logistical difficulties of ensuring security in the mountainous and rural areas of eastern and south-eastern Turkey. The aim was to enable villages to defend themselves against attacks from the PKK. Originally it was believed that the village-guard system would provide income to areas that were economically depressed. Inset has likened the village-guard system to the Ottoman Hamidiye regiments which functioned between 1905 and 1908. The role of those regiments was 'to discipline the nomadic people of the region' and maintain 'the loyalty of Kurdish tribes to the central authority'.

As in the case of the Hamidiye regiments, the government has used the village-guard system not only to improve security in the rural areas but also to determine the loyalty of the villagers. Villages or tribes who have refused to join the system are suspected of being PKK sympathizers. However, over the years the village-guard system has become a source of serious complaint. Sadik Avundukoglu, a member of the Parliamentary commission investigating 'mystery killings', has even argued that the abuses committed by the
village guards helped to swell the ranks of the PKK fighters. In spite of frequent calls for its abolition, the number of village guards increased from just under 18,000 in 1990 to 63,000 by August 1994 when the Interior Minister announced that there would be no further additions.

The government has steadily increased its military presence in the provinces under the emergency rule. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the normal level of Turkish troop deployments in the area was around 90,000. This number had risen to 160,000 by June 1994. By the end of 1994, taking into account the number of police, special forces and village guards, there were 300,000 security forces deployed in eastern and south-eastern Turkey. The size of the security forces in the area remained roughly the same during 1995. Apparently, approximately one-quarter of the total manpower of NATO's second-largest army was deployed in the area against the PKK. In contrast, according to government figures the at the end of 1994 the PKK fighters numbered only 4,000 to 5,000. After the intense military campaigns against the PKK during the course of 1995 the government revised its figures and noted that the number of PKK fighters in Turkey was down to between 2,600 to 2,800. This appears to have forced the PKK to move into northern Iraq where the size of its force has increased to 3,000 to 4,000.

The trans-state nature of the ethnic conflict between the Turks and Kurds was clearly illustrated by the agreement signed in October 1984 between Turkey and Iraq which allowed the armed forces of both states to enter each other's territory in hot pursuit of rebel units. In practice, only Turkish chose to exercise this right, mounting four cross-border operations involving the army and the air force before the agreement was abrogated by Iraq in 1988 at the end of the Iran–Iraqi war. The defeat of Iraq following the Gulf War and the creation of a safe haven for Kurds in northern Iraq enabled the PKK to use the area. Since August 1991 the Turkish military has mounted several ground and air cross-border operations into northern Iraq. The government has also attempted, however, to develop better relations with the Kurdish leadership in northern Iraq to improve the security of the Turkish border. The failure of this policy and the growing influence of the PKK in northern Iraq led the government to mount two more cross-border operations in March and July 1995 involving 35,000 and 3,000 troops, respectively.

The mountainous nature of most of eastern and south-eastern Turkey has enabled the PKK to raid villages during night-time and retreat in the day. The PKK has attacked or used villages as a staging post near to Turkey's borders with Iran and Iraq. The military responded with a controversial village evacuation policy. Villages that the military were unable to protect were forcibly evacuated and at times burned to prevent them from being used by the PKK for logistical purposes. These villages were mostly along the Iranian and the Iraqi border and in mountainous areas. According to a report on migration and village evacuation prepared by Mazlum-Der, a fundamentalist religious group, 'in mountainous areas not one village has been left, except the ones belonging to the village guards.'

In autumn 1994 a government crisis erupted when the Minister responsible for Human Rights Azimet Köylüoğlu accused the military of burning villages in the province of Tunceli. Prime Minister Çiller attempted to deny these allegations by claiming that the villages had been burned by the PKK. The crisis reached comic proportions when she tried to convince villagers that helicopters that had attacked these villages belonged to the PKK. Members of the main opposition party in the Parliament argued that 1,500 villages in the province of Tunceli had been forcibly evacuated and that 250,000 people had been displaced. In August 1995 a similar crisis erupted when the security forces were accused of yet another round of forced evacuations in the province of Tunceli. The official figure for the number of villages and hamlets evacuated by the security forces was put at 2,253 in October 1995. However, the numbers of villages evacuated and burned were probably much higher. The PKK, too, in accordance with its 'Decree on Village Raids' has attacked and burned 'non-revolutionary' villages that do not support the national struggle for liberation. There are also villages that have been burned or vacated by their inhabitants after having been caught in the crossfire between the PKK and the security forces. Forests have also become a target as the security forces cleared wooded areas in eastern Turkey and the PKK retaliated by burning forests in western Turkey, especially around Istanbul during summer 1994. However, there were far fewer forest fires in 1995.

As part of their strategy the PKK has compelled many remote villages to provide food and shelter for its militants. In turn, these villages are harassed by security forces who often fail to distinguish between civilians and the PKK. The impossible situation that villagers often find themselves in was well captured by the words of a village headman (muhat) who said that they were 'the slaves of the military during day time and the slaves of the PKK at night.' Consequently, many villagers have chosen to migrate to urban centres.

A report prepared by a group of Turkish Parliamentary deputies concluded that the PKK's operations and the practice of village burning was fueling Kurdish nationalism and was forcing especially young people to join the ranks of the PKK. The Economist too has noted that Turkey 'may be winning battles against guerrillas but it is losing the war for the support of ordinary Kurds.' One of the most significant consequences of this escalating violence is that the Kurdish question has come to occupy a prominent place on the political agenda and has also increasingly attracted the attention of the West. The PKK leadership was correct to remark that violence made 'the world accept the existence of a Kurdish question.' The government has suffered both politically and financially. Ankara's inability to halt the violence and resolve the Kurdish question has seriously affected Turkey's relations with the West.
The cost of maintaining security in the region under emergency rule was estimated to be around $11.1 billion for 1994 (over 400 trillion Turkish liras at the time). For a country whose GNP for 1993 was approximately $173 billion this was a considerable sum. Many have argued that this high expenditure led to extensive domestic borrowing which resulted in an inflation rate of over 140 per cent during 1994. Expenditure involved in the mounting of several cross-border operations into northern Iraq must also be taken into account. The operation in March 1995 alone cost $65 million according to military authorities.

Government officials have attempted to justify these high costs by arguing that they are committed to ‘breaking the back of the PKK’. Prime Minister Çiller introduced a new slogan into Turkish politics when early in 1994 she announced that terrorism would ‘either end or end’ (‘ya bitecek ya bitecek’). The Chief of the General Staff Doğan Güreş, just before completing his term of office, stated that as a result of the campaign against the PKK terrorism had been brought under control. Many commentators remained sceptical as the PKK continued to attack civilians and teachers. However, the number of acts of terrorism involving the PKK dropped significantly from 4,063 and 4,012 in 1993 and 1994 to 2,059 in 1995 according to government statistics.

The previously mentioned report prepared by the Parliament on ‘mystery killings’ noted that many people had a vested interest in the continuation of emergency rule. Government security personnel employed in the region where emergency rule operated received extra pay. This additional money, which allowed the security police to enjoy a considerable increase in their living standards, has come to be referred to as the ‘Apo raise’, after the nickname of the PKK leader. The salaries of the village guards are often paid as a lump sum to tribal leaders who keep a large proportion for themselves. Dependence on these leaders has undermined the ability of the state to combat the drug trade in which these leaders are heavily implicated. The boom in the construction of apartment buildings in cities such as Van has been connected to drug trafficking. The high demand on land and housing caused by migration and higher salaries has significantly pushed up property prices and rents. These developments have created a group of people who have a stake in the continuation of the status quo.

Violence has also led to a certain degree of polarization in society. The funerals of victims of PKK attacks have become occasions for extreme Turkish nationalist demonstrations. There have also been reports of the mistreatment of Kurds in western Turkey. This has taken the form of the boycotting of Kurdish-owned shops, the denying of jobs to Kurds and the harassing of Kurdish immigrants in small towns. As Barkey has noted: ‘The combination of army operations and societal polarization has raised the consciousness of even the most assimilated Kurd’. Young men born in the eastern provinces of the country are sometimes discriminated against by officials who automatically suspect them of being PKK sympathizers. This situation has been aggravated by politicians who resort to thinly disguised populist speeches.

Gençkaya has noted that as a result of polarization, ‘Turkish and Kurdish public opinion can hardly understand each other’. However, what is striking is that this polarization by and large has not been widespread and has not actually manifested itself in the form of violent confrontations between ordinary Kurds and Turks. This may be attributed in part to intermarriage and the fact that many Kurds now perceive themselves also as Turks. Furthermore, the Kurdish question is increasingly being discussed publicly. In late 1995 and early 1996 there were several meetings and conferences where the Kurdish question was openly debated.

As a result of violence, many Kurds are rediscovering their Kurdish origins. This seems also to have raised ethnic consciousness in Turkey among other groups. Thus Kurdish immigrants settling in small towns in Thrace and areas just east of Istanbul have made Circassians, Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks much more conscious of their identities.

Migration and the Kurdish Question in Turkey

Since 1950 many people have migrated from the less developed regions of Turkey to urban and industrial centres in the western parts of the country. Shorter noted that whereas in 1950 18.1 per cent of Turkey’s population lived in urban centres, by 1970 this had risen to 35.8, and by 1990 56.3 per cent of the population lived in urban areas. Many people migrated from eastern and south-eastern Anatolia and from the Black Sea region in the period between 1980 and 1990 (Table 5.7). An overwhelming proportion of these

<table>
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<th>Rate of net migration in % for 1980-85</th>
<th>Rate of net migration in % for 1985-90</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aegean</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Sea</td>
<td>-3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Anatolia</td>
<td>-0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marmara</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>-5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-eastern</td>
<td>-2.3</td>
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migrants have moved to the Marmara region, principally to industrial cities such as Istanbul, Bursa and Izmit. Ayata studied migration in five out of the eight provinces covered by GAP. The study, based on a survey of 887 people, noted that while socio-economic factors remained important, political and security considerations also were responsible for migration. The upsurge in PKK attacks since 1992 resulted in a significant increase in migration within as well as out of the eastern and the south-east. Because of the general insecurity and instability in the area the poor mostly move out of rural communities into provincial urban centres. The relatively well off migrate from regional urban centres to cities in western Turkey.

The forced displacement of rural communities leads to another type of migration. Villagers may be ordered to evacuate their settlements. Much of this migration has been to urban areas in eastern and south-eastern Anatolia. An estimated 14,000 people have also sought asylum in northern Iraq. This is particularly striking given that in the past Turkey was traditionally a country of asylum for Kurdish refugees from Iraq. There are no general and systematic studies of this forced migration. It is difficult to differentiate between forced and voluntary migration. Only extremely tentative figures with regard to the scale of migration that has taken place within eastern and south-eastern Turkey may be given (Table 5.8).

### Table 5.8

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Population in 1990 and 1994 of Principal Urban Centres in the East and South-East Affected by Migration</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Estimated late 1994 (000)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990 (000)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batman</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diyarbakır</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakkari</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Şanlıurfa</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Van</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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According to official statistics, 307,000 people have been displaced as a result of the evacuation of rural communities. However, the scale of migration within and out of Kurdish-populated areas is much higher than this figure and greater than that suggested by Table 5.8. There are smaller towns in the region that have also received migrants who are not included in this table. Furthermore, urban centres near to eastern and south-eastern Turkey, such as Adana, Gaziantep and Mersin, have also received large waves of migrants in addition to the more distant cities of Antalya, Ankara, Bursa, Istanbul, Izmir and Izmit. Özer has argued that this migration accounts for a third of Istanbul’s total population of approximately 12 millions. On the other hand, one report has put the estimated number that have had to migrate within or out of eastern and south-eastern Anatolia at 2.5 to 3 million. Whatever the exact figure may be, given the short time span the migration that has taken place within the country is enormous in scale.

Mutlu argued that even after 25 years of migration more than 65 per cent of the Kurdish population still lived in traditionally Kurdish populated areas in 1990. Although his figures may have been accurate for 1990, after a later massive population movement probably a majority of the Kurds lived outside the east and the south-east by 1996. The projection that ‘in about two generations’ time the Kurds will ‘replace the Turks as the largest ethnic group in Turkey’ may thus not materialize. Urbanization will slow the Kurdish population growth rate. Intermarriage may also weaken a sense of Kurdish ethnicity. The affect of assimilation or integration on people’s identities also must be considered.

One solution to the Kurdish question in Turkey that has been advocated involves the establishment of a separate state for the Kurds. As regards the Kurds in Turkey alone, such a solution short of a massive transfer of population seems to be fast becoming impracticable. This may be one reason why Abdullah Öcalan has at times questioned the viability of establishing a separate state. This reality was also recognized by the late President Öcalan who had contended that the best solution to the Kurdish problem was to encourage the Kurds to migrate to the western parts of the country. Öcalan had believed that this would weaken separatist demands as most Kurds would reap the benefits of a more prosperous life there.

However, the short-term economic consequences of migration have been negative. A depressed regional economy has become further impoverished. The cities have become overwhelmed with people who have swelled the ranks of the unemployed. Living standards for many have dipped appreciably as a result of migration. The lack of security in rural areas, government restrictions on grazing at high altitudes and the evacuation of many villages have undermined the once thriving husbandry sector. Villagers have been forced to slaughter their herds to finance their move to urban areas. Once constituting an important source of income for certain areas, the tourist
industry has virtually disappeared. There has also been a flight of capital from these areas as the more prosperous have closed their businesses and small factories before moving to western Turkey.

As a result of this massive migration squatter areas in cities such as Adana have become a target for PKK recruiters. A report submitted to the Prime Minister's Office noted that the PKK, weakened in south-eastern Turkey, has changed tactics and started to move its recruitment and terrorist activities into urban areas with high concentrations of Kurdish immigrants. This migration could create security problems along the Mediterranean coast and thereby damage tourism. In addition to providing a major source of foreign currency for the government, the tourist industry also offers employment for many including Kurdish immigrants.

Recent massive migration into urban centres has resulted in a housing shortage and in a steep rise in unemployment. Immediately after the major riots that occurred in Istanbul in March 1995, the President of the Turkish Grand National Assembly Hüsamettin Cindoruk noted that explosive situations existed in at least nine urban centres around the country. Frustration with the economic situation has led some Kurds to participate in the lucrative, illegal drug business. Some of the village guards are involved with narcotics. The PKK also uses revenue from drug trafficking to finance its operations.

There has been no serious study of the political consequences of Kurdish migration in Turkey. However, a number of general observations may be made. Through migration, more Kurds have become aware of the socio-economic disparities within the country. This has made some Kurds, particularly the young, more conscious of their separate identity and also more vulnerable to the propaganda of the PKK. On the other hand, immigrants are often absorbed in the day-to-day difficulties of starting up a new life in the cities. Once settled, many seem to develop a vested interest in becoming integrated into a society that still provides considerable opportunities for upward social mobility. It should be noted that the security forces have had greater success in apprehending PKK activists in the large urban areas than elsewhere and have been able to pre-empt terrorist attacks. The security forces attribute this to the co-operation they have received from Kurdish immigrants.

The Role of the Turkish Government and the Kurdish Question

The impact of the late President Turgut Özal in reversing Turkey's traditional policy of denying the existence of the Kurds has been described. In March 1991 Özal had set a precedent by holding talks with Kurdish leaders from northern Iraq. Özal had encouraged an open discussion of the Kurdish issue in Turkey. In April 1992 he had even suggested that the allowing of radio and television broadcasting in Kurdish and the teaching of Kurdish as a second language at school could help the government to deal with the question more effectively.

The formation of a coalition government in November 1991 between the True Path Party (DYP) and the SHP had initially raised hopes that Özal's plans might actually materialize. The government protocol had promised a series of liberal reforms. Although there was no direct reference to the Kurdish question, the protocol mentioned that in Turkey there were different ethnic groups which should be able to express and develop their cultural identities. It was argued that this would actually strengthen not weaken the unity of the state.

The protocol was in part the outcome of an alliance that the SHP had formed with the HEP prior to the October 1991 elections. This alliance had boosted the SHP's electoral performance and had also opened the way for 22 Kurdish deputies with more radical views to be elected to Parliament. There had always been deputies of Kurdish origin in Parliament. However, this was the first occasion on which a group had entered Parliament with a definite Kurdish agenda. Although the protocol was the product of political compromise, it was thought to have been worded in a manner that could possibly have resulted in legislation allowing broadcasting and education in Kurdish. However, almost immediately problems arose.

During the Parliamentary oath-taking ceremony on 6 November 1991, some of the newly-elected radical Kurdish deputies refused to repeat parts of the oath which committed deputies to preserve 'the indivisible integrity of the country and the Nation'. This created considerable commotion. Gençkaya noted that: 'This accelerated the tension between hardliners from both sides from the very outset, decreasing the possibility of dialogue'.

In March 1992 14 of the HEP deputies that had entered Parliament on a SHP ticket resigned and rejoined their party. The split came shortly after the SHP went along with its coalition partner the DYP and renewed an extension of the emergency rule in the Kurdish-populated provinces of eastern and south-eastern Turkey. The SHP election programme had promised to end emergency rule and the village-guard system. A few days after the authorization was granted to extend emergency rule for another four months, Nevroz celebrations (traditional festivities to welcome spring) in Kurdish-populated areas were violently repressed by the security forces. These events led to the resignation of the 14 HEP deputies from the SHP. According to Robins, this was the end of the 'emerging relationship between moderate Kurdish nationalism and liberal Turkish thinking'.

Polarization within Parliament culminated in the closure of the HEP in July 1993. Before this happened some members of the HEP formed the Freedom and Democracy Party (ÖZDEP). However, ÖZDEP was promptly
The Kurdish Question and Turkey

shut down by the Constitutional Court. Similarly, the DEP, the successor to the HEP, was closed in June 1994. Anticipating the closure of the DEP, HADEP in effect another Kurdish political party, was formed in May 1994 and participated in the December 1995 national elections. Before the closure of the DEP the immunity of 13 of its Parliamentarians were lifted in March 1994 and a prosecution process started which led in December 1994 to the sentencing and imprisonment of seven DEP and one independent deputy. Four of these would be released following later court rulings. Then, in October 1995, the High Appeals Court confirmed the sentences of four of the deputies and called for the retrial of those who had been released. Six other DEP deputies who had fled abroad played a leading role in the setting up of a ‘Kurdish parliament-in-exile’ in the Netherlands on 12 April 1995. One exiled DEP official Yaşar Kayalar became the chairman of the parliament while the former deputy chairman of the DEP Remzi Kartal became the head of its executive council. The executive council committed itself to realize the Kurds’ ‘right to self-determination’. 76

Under pressure from hardliners within his party, it seems that the then Prime Minister Demirel lost interest in finding a political solution to the Kurdish question. Instead, he became absorbed in constitutional battles with President Özal concerning the sharing of executive powers. Demirel also appeared to give greater attention to foreign policy issues in the Balkans, Transcaucasia and Central Asia. The National Security Council (NSC), an influential body set up in 1960 to advise the government on defence and security issues and composed of the President, the Prime Minister, some members of the Cabinet, the Chief of the General Staff and the serving force commanders, acquired a growing say on the Kurdish question. 77

At the time there was a marked increase in violence as the PKK began to mount more raids into Turkey from northern Iraq. The NSC saw the situation in south-eastern Turkey as a product of separatist terrorism which required a military rather than a political solution. President Özal’s death in April 1993 led to a general deterioration of the situation. Özal had to some extent been able to balance the influence of the military in the NSC. The late President had been held in high esteem by the Kurds in Turkey and in northern Iraq. It was believed that Özal had helped to engineer the PKK’s unilateral declaration of a ceasefire in March 1993. He had apparently been pursuing a political solution. 78 After his death officials were unsure how to deal with the ceasefire.

Demirel worked to be elected President. The main coalition partner, the DYP, was thus absorbed in efforts to find a new party leader and Prime Minister. Military officials exploited this opportunity. The military looked upon the PKK’s ceasefire declaration as a sign of weakness and proof of the value of pursuing a military solution. Soon after her election Prime Minister Tansu Çiller briefly considered the possibility of allowing education and broadcasting in Kurdish. However, these ideas were subsequently dropped when she encountered opposition from hardliners in her party and the military. The new President, Demirel, also argued that ‘unless terrorism is solved, cultural issues cannot be debated’. 79

Barkey has noted that Çiller’s election as Prime Minister ‘strengthened the position of hardliners in Ankara. Her inexperience in security and foreign policy matters, the expectation that her primary focus ought to be the economy and the possibility of a serious challenge to her leadership of the party during its annual convention... deterred her... from challenging Demirel and the military on Kurdish issues’. 80 As indicated earlier, early in October 1993 Çiller fleetingly toyed with the idea of a Basque model, but quickly denied having entertained the idea when she faced strong criticism from her party as well as the military.

Through 1994 Çiller continued to oscillate. In preparation for the local elections in March 1994 she embarked on a policy to get ‘the PKK out of the Parliament’. This culminated in the lifting of the immunities of the DEP deputies. This populist approach did help Çiller’s party to receive the most votes in the local election. The Welfare Party (RP) considerably increased its votes in Kurdish-populated parts through a campaign that stressed Islamic brotherhood and promised a more ‘just’ world. Alarmed at the success of the RP, Çiller once more referred to the possibility of allowing private education and broadcasting in Kurdish in order to win more votes in south-eastern Turkey. 81 Again, the Prime Minister encountered opposition from the President who a few months earlier had declared that instruction in Kurdish was not possible. Demirel had alleged that if Kurdish-language instruction were permitted there would then be demands for schooling in other languages too. This, the President argued, would undermine the unity of the country. 82 For Demirel any concessions would be considered as a concession to terrorism and were unacceptable. 83 All the promises the DYP had made to the junior coalition partner, the SHP, about the implementation of a democratization package agreed upon in July 1993 were placed on hold until the PKK had been crushed.

The SHP was badly weakened by the DEP crisis and performed poorly in the March 1994 local elections. SHP members of the Cabinet and Parliamentary deputies have frequently called for the introduction of some form of education in Kurdish that would not undermine the official status of Turkish as the country’s official language. They have also advocated radio and television broadcasting in Kurdish. But the DYP refused to take up a ‘democracy package’ that the SHP had prepared in May 1994 which had included these provisions. 84 In December 1994, Murat Karayalçın of the SHP, the then Deputy Prime Minister, even advocated the need to discuss and debate the idea of a federation for the South-East and argued that ‘Özal’s approach was right’. 85
After the merger between the SHP and the CHP on 18 February 1995 a new government protocol was negotiated between Tansu Çiller and Hikmet Çetin, then leader of the enlarged CHP. This stressed the need to amend the infamous Article 8 of the Anti-terror Law. The protocol also called for several constitutional amendments but did not refer directly to the Kurdish question.

In July 1995 the government succeeded in getting through Parliament for the first time a package of amendments to the 1980 Constitution. Most significantly, the amendments have made it more difficult to lift the immunities of Parliamentary deputies and have possibly opened the way to a more open civil society by facilitating the formation of associations and political parties.¹⁶ As previously noted, in October 1995 Parliament amended the notorious Article 8 of the Anti-terror Law. It appears that an attempt was made to provide a tighter definition of 'separatist' propaganda. This was particularly important because anybody calling for a political solution to the Kurdish issue had run the risk of punishment. The amendments were also made to apply retroactively, allowing the courts to free some of the previous offenders. Though many critics found the amendments somewhat cosmetic it did appear that they opened the way to a relatively freer discussion of the Kurdish question.

National elections were held in December 1995. There was little discussion of substantive issues such as the Kurdish question during the election campaign which centred mostly around criticisms of particular personalities. The elections failed to produce a clear winner. Instead the votes were divided between the RP the Islamic party, and the two conservative parties, the DYP and ANAP. The two social democrat parties, the CHP and the Democratic Left Party (DSP) trailed behind. HADEP and the right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP) failed to win any seats because their votes did not exceed the national threshold of ten per cent.

After more than two months of political bargaining an ANAP–DYP coalition government was formed in March 1996 headed by the ANAP leader Mesut Yılmaz. The government programme did not make any direct references to the Kurdish issue but promised to phase out emergency rule gradually in south-eastern Turkey and mobilize funds to rebuild and develop the economy of the area.⁶⁵

Other parties refer both to the Kurdish question and a terrorism problem and believe that the two are related. These parties are prepared to accept new arrangements that could allow the Kurds to express their identity provided that this would not jeopardize the unity and integrity of the Turkish state. However, political parties are not monolithic entities. Groups of deputies and individuals within a party may hold different views.

The MHP and the DSP, and also the DYP which in early 1996 seemed to be dominated by hardliners, have been referring solely to a terrorism problem in Turkey. The most uncompromising position has been held by the MHP and their leader Alparslan Türkeş. The MHP leader has often argued that the problem in south-eastern Turkey stems from the support that foreign governments are giving to terrorism. Türkeş has been critical of those who talk about recognizing a Kurdish reality and who advocate the need to search for political solutions. According to him, these were either ploys to divide Turkey or ideas that would precipitate a process leading to the disintegration of the country.⁶⁸

An ardent Turkish nationalist, according to Türkeş, the Kurds were 'overwhelmingly of Turkish descent'.⁶⁹ Türkeş has been lobbying for the formation of an organization dedicated to fighting the PKK. This organization would employ 100,000 people including within its ranks experts in sociology, psychology, economics and intelligence.⁷⁰ Even though Türkeş has vehemently opposed education and broadcasting in Kurdish, the MHP is quite popular among Kurdish tribes that have supported the village-guard system. In September 1994 seven tribes joined the MHP and the leader of the Alan tribe Hamo Meral proudly stated in Kurdish that 'we are pure Öğuz Turks'.⁷¹ The MHP entered the 1991 national elections together with the RP in an electoral pact. Hence there are no separate statistics for the number of votes the MHP received. The MHP received around five per cent of the votes in the Kurdish-populated areas in the 1994 local and the 1995 national elections (Table 5.9). In the 1995 elections the party performed well in small towns along the Mediterranean and the Aegean coast but failed to exceed the ten per cent national threshold in order to gain Parliamentary representation. Before the 1995 national elections the party had 17 seats.

The DSP led by Bülent Ecevit has continued to adhere to the traditional nationalist and centrist policies of the pre-1980 CHP – the party Ecevit had led for many years. According to Ecevit, the problem in south-eastern Turkey was a socio-economic and not an ethnic one. To him, terrorism was a product of unemployment and external interference by Western powers which were aiming to set up a separate Kurdish state. He has called for land reforms to end feudalism in the region and pressed for the development of industry to alleviate unemployment. Ecevit was opposed to the village-guard system. He was also against separate education in Kurdish and has criticized those who advocate any form of autonomy.⁷² The DSP's traditional support of

The Role of Political Parties in Turkey and the Kurdish Question

Some political parties in Turkey believe that there is no Kurdish question but, instead, refer to a problem of terrorism. There are radical Kurdish political parties which are illegal in the country which advocate ideas ranging from cultural autonomy to the establishment of an independent Kurdish state.
to retreat from her relatively more liberal views on the Kurdish question. The veteran party member Abdullah Firat, the grandson of Shaikh Said, has also clashed with the hardliners and with President Demirel.

After having worked with Demirel for 37 years, Firat resigned from the DYP in February 1994 over his differences with the hardliners and Demirel on the Kurdish question.66 In September 1994 Firat led 33 deputies from several parties and signed a document calling on the need to discuss the Kurdish question in Parliament. The document declared that the problem could be resolved without threatening the unity and integrity of Turkey. Subsequently he was harassed by the police and prevented from travelling abroad. He entered the 1995 national elections as a candidate of HADEP and failed to be re-elected when HADEP could not meet the ten per cent threshold. Early in 1996 he was detained and held under custody while the authorities brought a case against him under the Anti-terror Law. Owing to his poor health and considerable public pressure in March 1996 he was released from detention pending his trial.

The DYP has continued to harbour many prominent Kurdish deputies under its roof, and as the successor of the AP which was active in the 1960s and 1970s, it enjoys considerable influence especially among conservative Kurds. Hence the hardening of the DYP’s position on the Kurdish question and its preference for a military approach did not seem to have cost the DYP votes in the 1994 local elections. However, in the 1995 national elections the DYP vote in Kurdish-populated provinces fell to just over 16 per cent. This was in part due to the decision of the party leadership to replace some of the traditional Kurdish candidates with individuals from outside the Kurdish-populated provinces who were not of Kurdish origin. The general deterioration in the economic performance of the country and the inability of the party, as the senior coalition partner in government, to address effectively the problem of migration resulting from the forced evacuation of villages were other important factors which accounted for the party’s poor performance.

Originally founded by Turgut Özal, ANAP has now retreated from Özal’s earlier position on the Kurdish question. A growing number of ANAP deputies had become critical of Özal’s radical position on the Kurdish issue. In the face of this criticism, Özal had even considered setting up a new party that ‘would embrace the Kurds’.67 Under the leadership of Mesut Yilmaz, ANAP has begun to follow a line somewhat similar to the DYP’s. However, Yilmaz has noted that ‘the party recognizes the social and cultural dimensions of the Kurdish problem and it is in favor of discussing the issue freely’.68 His position has tended to fluctuate between one supportive of Kurdish cultural rights and one in line with the official state position. In July 1994, soon after Çiller spoke of the possibility of education and broadcasting in Kurdish, Yilmaz had complained about her ideas to President Demirel.69 However,
when visiting the United States in March 1995 Yılmaz himself supported the teaching of Kurdish as an optional lesson in schools and backed the introduction of private Kurdish television. During the 1995 national election campaign he scarcely referred to the Kurdish issue. He had forcefully opposed a report published in August 1995 by the Turkish Chamber of Commerce and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB). The report was critical of current policies on the Kurdish question and called for liberal reforms. Yılmaz charged that the report read like a document produced by the CIA. Once Prime Minister though of a new coalition government, Yılmaz surprised many in March 1996 by announcing that the Kurdish question required a political and not a military solution. He referred to the need to introduce administrative, social and economic reforms.

There were a number of prominent deputies of Kurdish origin in ANAP, some of whom came from influential tribes. Kamran İnan, deputy for Bitlis, had served on several occasions as a Cabinet Minister. However, he has spoken little in public about his personal views on the Kurdish question. Şerif Bedirhanoğlu, the deputy for Van, was a descendant of the famous Bedirhans who played a central role in the Kurdish nationalist movements of the 1920s. He has favoured cultural rights for the Kurds, including the possibility of education in Kurdish. During Özal's leadership ANAP was very popular among the Kurds. However, as may be seen from its electoral performance in March 1994, it lost some of these votes. In the province of Malatya, the birthplace of Özal, the votes of ANAP went down almost by half from 41.1 per cent in 1991 to 23.1 in 1994 and 23 in 1995. The electoral performance of ANAP in the eastern and the southern provinces of Turkey has steadily declined (Table 5.9).

The SHP and the CHP held almost identical positions on the Kurdish problem before their merger in February 1995 when they took the name of the CHP. Both had opposed a military solution. Deniz Baykal, the leader of the CHP before and then after the merger, had taken pride in the fact that his party was the first to refer to the Kurdish problem in its party programme. The SHP and the CHP supported cultural rights for Kurds, including broadcasting and schooling in Kurdish. However, they both also emphasized that Turkish would remain the only official language and the public language of instruction throughout the country. Both parties had also opposed emergency rule and the village-guard system for eastern and southeastern Turkey. In June 1995 some CHP members of the DYP–CHP coalition government caused a crisis by refusing to sign Cabinet recommendations to Parliament to extend emergency rule for another four months. CHP ministers and deputies were outspoken about human rights abuses and about the village evacuation and burning practices of the military.

However, the SHP in the past and the CHP since the merger have failed to change significantly the course of the government on the Kurdish question.

After the HEP deputies split from the original SHP the number of SHP seats in Parliament was reduced to 65 out of 450 – too small a number to make an impact on the legislative process. Nonetheless, the CHP may be credited for keeping the democratization process alive by ensuring that the issue remained on the Parliamentary agenda. In July 1995 it played an active role in getting Parliament to adopt a series of amendments to the Constitution. They also lobbied for the revision of Article 8 of the Anti-terror Law. However, the inability of the SHP to deliver on its 1991 electoral promises and its failure to prevent the closure of the DEP resulted in the SHP becoming the party which lost the highest proportion of the votes in the Kurdish-populated provinces in the period between 1991 and 1994. In the 1995 national elections the performance of the Social Democrats within the enlarged CHP went from bad to worse as the percentage of votes they won in the Kurdish-populated provinces plummeted to just under six per cent. At the national level the CHP barely made it over the threshold with 10.7 per cent of the votes, obtaining only 49 deputies in Parliament (Table 5.9).

The RP has become one of the most outspoken critics of government policies towards the Kurds. According to it, Kurds and Turks are part of the Islamic nation (imamet). RP members believe that appeals to Islamic brotherhood could solve the Kurdish question. In autumn 1993, when the PKK threatened to attack all political parties active in southeastern Turkey, the RP was the only major party which maintained most of its operations in the region. In July 1994 the RP formed a committee to monitor government practices in southeastern Turkey. The following month, after touring the area Şevket Kazan, the deputy chairman of the RP, prepared a critical report on government practices there. This included a long list of recommendations for solving the Kurdish question and the terrorism problem.

The RP is in favour of lifting emergency rule, abolishing the village guards and finding a 'just' solution to the Kurdish question. However, the ambiguous 'just' solution slogan is one that the RP has used extensively across the country for a wide range of problems. The RP has been supportive of broadcasting and education in Kurdish. Its appeal to the common bonds of Islam has attracted those who have shied away from politicizing their Arab, Kurdish or Turkish ethnic identities. The use of religion and its organizational skills have made the RP the most popular party in the Kurdish-populated provinces and the RP has steadily increased its votes there. In an electoral pact with the MHP, the RP had received only 16.6 per cent of the vote in the region in 1991. In the face of strong competition from HADEP, the 1995 electoral performance of the RP in Kurdish-populated areas was particularly impressive (Table 5.9). HADEP's inability to pass the ten per cent national threshold meant that the RP swept most of the seats available in the Kurdish-populated provinces. The RP increased its number of seats in Parliament from 38 to 158 and took 38 of the 84 seats available in the Kurdish-populated provinces.
Before the 1995 national elections there were four small parties in the Turkish Grand National Assembly. The views of the New Democracy Movement (YDH), led by Cem Boyner, on the Kurdish question attracted much attention. The YDH was only officially registered as a political party in December 1994. In July of that year Boyner had spoken of the need to separate the Kurdish question from the problem of terrorism. He argued that, although violence had to be met by violence, the Kurdish question itself required a political solution. He was soon declaring, though, that the approach of the military was making a solution to the Kurdish question much less likely. Boyner became famous for his assertion that there was no Kurdish problem but rather a Turkish problem because Turks for a long time had failed to accept Kurdish ethnicity. According to Boyner, a solution would have been found when the phrase 'Happy is one who can say one is a Turk' is replaced by 'Happy is one who can say I am a citizen of Turkey'. But, as noted earlier, Prime Minister Çiller would refer to the latter wording in a speech in Karabük in January 1995.

Boyner's thoughts on the Kurdish question were considered to be close to those of late President Öcalı. Boyner himself actually declared that he would try to carry out what Öcalı had attempted to achieve. Boyner has demanded the recognition of the cultural rights of the Kurds. He has favoured strengthening local authorities and devolving powers to them on issues concerning education, culture and health. In line with the earlier views of Murat Karayalşın, the former leader of the SHP and Öcalı, Boyner argued that it should be possible to discuss the notion of a federation as one possible solution. However, Boyner himself believed that 'Turkey should remain a unitary state'. Although he claimed that in eastern Turkey he was winning the political battle while the state was winning the war, the YDH performed poorly in the national elections in 1995, receiving only 0.5 per cent of the total votes and 1 per cent of the votes in the Kurdish-populated provinces.

The HEP was founded in June 1990. As noted earlier, 22 of its members were elected when the HEP formed an electoral alliance with the SHP for the 1991 national elections. The SHP won 26 out of the 34 seats for the eight eastern and south-eastern provinces where the HEP had candidates. However, many of these deputies would quit the SHP and reform the HEP in 1992. After the HEP was closed down in July 1993 these deputies eventually established the DEP which held its first congress in January 1994. However, as described earlier, the DEP was also closed down by the Constitutional Court and seven of its deputies were sentenced to prison terms while six fled the country.

Both the HEP and the DEP stressed that the Kurdish question should be solved by democratic and peaceful means. But the exact nature of the solution was never clearly defined. Both parties gave the impression that the minimum they would settle for would be cultural concessions to Kurdish ethnicity. However, the deputies from both parties also seemed to allude to a 'bipartian state' as they emphasized a 'Turkish and Kurdish ethnic equality based on law'. Yasar Kaya, one of the ex-DEP activists in exile in Europe, interpreted this to mean a solution based on what he called the model of the former Czechoslovakia, adding that 'if the parties wanted to divorce later on, they could do that, too, as did the Czechs and Slovaks a few years ago'. Kaya considered this to be the DEP line and also the 'softest approach'. The former Czechoslovakia, of course, had not exactly been a shining example of a so-called 'bipartian state', bearing in mind in the Czech domination of the federation in the Communist era. One can only assume that Kaya probably had more in mind the nature of the eventual peaceful 'velvet divorce' between the Czechs and the Slovaks.

At the oath-taking ceremony at the newly-elected Parliament in November 1991, the HEP deputies had spoken in Kurdish and displayed colours associated with the PKK. During the DEP congress in January 1994 PKK flags were displayed and Turkey was depicted as an occupying and enemy country. The DEP was accused of being, in effect, the extension of the PKK in the Turkish Parliament. The tensions increased when a group of young military cadets were killed by a PKK bomb at a railway station near Istanbul in February 1994. The newly-elected leader of the DEP Hatip Dicle declared that in a war everyone in a uniform was a target. This precipitated a political and legal process that then led to the expulsion of 13 DEP deputies from Parliament and the closure of the DEP.

Although the DEP had called for more democracy and for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question some of the former DEP deputies were very intolerant of Kurds in other political parties. According to Yaşar Kaya, many prominent deputies of Kurdish origin serving in other parties, such as Hikmet Çetin, Kamran İnan, and Fehmi İşiklar, a former deputy speaker of the Parliament, were traitors who had betrayed the Kurdish cause. Remzi Kartal, one of the ex-DEP deputies in exile, was critical of the attempts of Şerifettin Elçi, the ex-CHP deputy, to form a moderate Kurdish party. Kartal complained that Elçi was aiming to divide Kurdish political opinion. Kartal's remarks came only days after the the PKK leader Öcalan had made a similar statement.

After the DEP's closure HADEP took up the Kurdish cause in Turkey. In contrast to the DEP the HADEP leadership has consciously followed a more moderate line on the Kurdish question. HADEP has maintained a distance from the PKK and has avoided any discourse that could be construed as separatist. According to Kemal Parlak, the chairman of HADEP in Istanbul, HADEP advocated a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question and was also a party which was interested in the problems of Turkey as a whole. Thus it was not surprising that HADEP would decide to run in the December 1995 elections in alliance with several small, socialist political parties.
HADEP received more than 20 per cent of the votes in eight of the 18 Kurdish-populated provinces. In Diyarbakir and Hakkari it received 46.3 and 54.2 per cent of the votes, respectively. However, HADEP performed poorly in major western cities with large Kurdish immigrant populations. As a result it failed to get over the national threshold and did not secure representation in Parliament. This generated considerable disappointment within the party and among many commentators in the media who argued that the national threshold had been unfairly low. Fears were also expressed that the exclusion of HADEP from Parliament might lead to its radicalization. However, the party leadership turned down a call by Öcalan to join the pro-PKK parliament-in-exile in Europe. HADEP officials also declared that they would continue their alliance with socialist parties and work for a political solution to the Kurdish question from outside Parliament. In the words of these officials: 'The Kurds have given us full support. Now we must face the people with the kind of programmes and propaganda which could secure the support of the Turks too'.

A large number of Kurdish groups operate outside Turkey. These include the PKK and the Kurdistan Communist Party (KKP) which advocate the use of violence. The Kurdistan Socialist Party (KSP) prefers political means to achieve its aims. The leader of the KSP Kemal Burkay, in exile in Europe, is in favour of a federal solution to the Kurdish question. At the end of its fourth congress in February 1995 the KSP called, inter alia, for the replacement of the present Turkish Constitution with one which guaranteed the rights and liberties of the Kurds. The KSP objected to the operations of the Kurdish 'parliament-in-exile' and has declined to participate in it, arguing that the parliament had been formed by the PKK and the DEP without adequate consultations with other Kurdish groups.

As discussed earlier, the PKK aims to set up a united and socialist 'Kurdistan' after a secessionist armed struggle. However, at the fourth congress of the PKK in 1990 a possible federal solution to the Kurdish question was discussed. It was argued that independence for the Kurds did not have to mean the creation of a separate state. This development, and Öcalan's readiness to talk about a federation as a potential solution, may explain why Öcalan backed a ceasefire in 1993. This was followed early in March 1994 by Öcalan's announcement that the PKK was open to all solutions and that it did not intend to divide up Turkey. Öcalan expressed similar views in an interview with the BBC. Öcalan argued that what the PKK wanted was a democratic union within Turkey, as the Kurds alone could not survive economically. In November 1995 Öcalan declared a truce and announced that the idea of a federation 'should not necessarily imply separatism'. Shortly before, in what appeared to be an amazing volte-face, Öcalan had declared: 'I am in love with Turkey. I am not a Kurdish nationalist.' To some, these were possible indications that the PKK was increasingly moving towards a political solution. Others argued that within the PKK there were hardliners who were against any compromise. Turkish officials considered the PKK truce as a political move to gain European goodwill. The PKK could also use the winter respite to reinforce its armed ranks.

It is quite possible that these fluctuations in the PKK's stated policy are no more than pragmatic deviations from a long-term objective to set up a united socialist, Kurdish state. Öcalan's views on religion appear to have varied too. The PKK's party programme of 1977 which had appealed to Kurdish nationalism and Marxism-Leninism had been highly critical of religion. However, the conservative and traditional nature of many Kurds forced the PKK to moderate its position on religion. The PKK even attempted to manipulate Islam for its political propaganda. The impressive performance of the RP in south-eastern Turkey during the local elections in 1994 also seems to have affected the PKK. A few months after the elections Öcalan argued that the struggle mounted by the PKK was in harmony with the essence of Islam. Öcalan declared that 'what is being repressed in Turkey is the Kurdish identity as well as Islam'. According to Öcalan, the PKK freedom struggle would liberate Islam and the Kurds by weakening the Kemalist hold on Turkey. The PKK's influence will largely depend on the policies that the government adopts towards the Kurdish question as well as on the effectiveness of HADEP.

It is important to note that throughout 1995 the Kurdish question was being debated much more extensively in the Turkish media. A growing number of interest groups were also becoming involved. In August 1995 a report on the Kurdish question prepared by an academic Doğu Ergil was published. This was commissioned by TOBB under the leadership of Yalçın Erez, himself an ethnic Kurd. The close relations Erez enjoyed with the government and Prime Minister Çiller led many to argue that the report had been actually requested by the Prime Minister. Erez was later elected as a member of Parliament for the DYP in December 1995 and was then appointed to serve in the ANAP-DYP coalition cabinet.

The TOBB report was based on a field survey of 1267 subjects, most of whom were Kurds. The report took a critical view of government policies and argued that it was not correct to define the Kurdish problem as simply one of terrorism. It was stressed that a large majority of the people surveyed wished to remain within Turkey; but many also called for a new political and administrative structure for the state. However, the report noted that only 4.2 per cent of those surveyed were in favour of holding talks with the PKK. Thus, in the words of the report: 'The solution does not lie with the PKK. An agreement should be reached with the people of the area.' The report triggered a lively debate. The decision of the authorities first to open an investigation into the report and then their decision in December 1995 to drop the case has been interpreted as evidence of a relative liberalization of
political life in Turkey following the amendments introduced to the Constitution and to Article 8 of the Anti-terror Law.

Prominent businessmen in Turkey have also started to express their opinions publicly. In November 1995 Savaş Sabancı announced his report on the problems of eastern Turkey. This came soon after allegations that he had recommended the ‘Basque model’ as a solution to the Kurdish question. The MHP leader Türkeş had complained that the [Sabancı] should mind his own business and not interfere with the business of politicians. 150 In his report Sabancı underlined that there was a need for the private and public sectors to co-operate to help develop the economy of the region. However, he added that building factories in the area would not help ‘without recognizing the cultural rights of Kurds’. 151 The prominent Jewish businessman and industrialist Ishak Alaton and Halis Komili, the chairman of the influential Turkish Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association, in interviews they gave to the media in December 1995 recognized the need to extend cultural rights to the Kurds. Alaton stated: ‘I am saying it very openly: there is a Kurdish problem in Turkey. There is a problem of Kurdish identity ... Terrorism is one thing, and finding a solution to Kurdish identity is a totally different thing’. 152

Two non-governmental organizations, the IHV and the IHDA, have been monitoring human rights abuses in eastern and south-eastern Turkey. They publish regular reports with detailed statistics on these. Another non-governmental organization the Turkish branch of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly (HCA) has also become active on the Kurdish problem. It organized a conference in Istanbul in January 1995 where the Kurdish question was extensively discussed. Subsequently, the HCA launched a project in which representatives from several cities and towns were to participate. This was intended to be an exercise in bridge-building between the Turks and the Kurds by encouraging civic participation.

Two large conferences were held in Istanbul in February 1996 where participants from several non-governmental organizations, together with politicians and intellectuals, debated the Kurdish problem. One of these conferences entitled ‘The Kurdish Problem and Democratic Solution Symposium’ was organized by the Kurdish Institute. This had been set up in 1992 but had for long remained inactive owing to state harassment. The other meeting, announced as a ‘Gathering for Peace’ conference, called upon the government to accept the PKK’s offer of a unilateral ceasefire and to open discussions to end the conflict. 153 The increasing interest of non-governmental organizations, businessmen and academics in the Kurdish question may well open new avenues in the search for a political solution.

As described earlier, several political parties in Turkey have also recently taken up what is in effect the issue of ‘minority rights’, with particular reference to the case of the Kurds. Among all of the legally-operating parties in Turkey there is a definite consensus that the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the state should not come into question. The granting of what would amount to ‘minority rights’ in matters such as education and broadcasting would have to be realized in a manner which would not be perceived as threatening to the unity of the Turkish Republic. Only limited forms of self-determination short of territorial self-determination could, in practice, be accepted by a future government.

It is generally accepted that the PKK is far from representing the views of the majority of the Kurds in Turkey. The number of PKK supporters has not been more than a few hundred thousand. 154 Many Kurds throughout Turkey appear to favour a solution that would allow them to express their identity within Turkey rather than outside the country. This has been reflected in:—

Kurdish participation in national and local elections, in the work of Parliament and in the government, as well as in political parties. The fact that participation rates in elections in Kurdish-populated areas have rarely fallen below the average for the rest of Turkey suggest that the Kurds largely remain integrated in national political life.

The Kurds in Turkey are represented in political parties and organizations which range from ones promoting Turkish nationalism to other illegal ones which advocate a separate Kurdish state. The Kurdish question is clearly a complex one. The Kurds in the country hold a wide diversity of views. However, the establishment of ‘Kurdish’ political parties — i.e., political parties based solely on ethnicity — is not permitted. The problems associated with the right of freedom of association with reference to minority groups will be discussed later. The Kurds, though, are not excluded from participation in the political system in Turkey. But, in spite of developments in 1995 and early 1996 in particular which have created an environment somewhat more conducive to open discussion, not all opinions and ideas with regard to the Kurdish question can be openly and freely discussed. The continuation of this state of affairs would only benefit the hardliners, both Turkish and Kurdish. However, an increasingly more active and aware civil society in Turkey might well encourage moderate Kurdish groups to prevail and in this way break the dominance that both the hardline Turkish and Kurdish nationalists have enjoyed.

Notes
2. These figures were cited during a television debate in the programme. Sıazar Meydanı, on ATV, 24 Dec. 1994.
33. Yeni Yüzyıl, 19 April 1995 and TDN, 18 April 1995. The report was not actually
officially released as some of the members of the Commission refused to sign the
report unless certain sections of the report were reworded in a manner less critical
of the security authorities. See Yeni Yüzyıl, 17 April 1995.
34. İ. İmset (note 16) p.105.
36. Öğuz İlker, 1 Aug. 1994.
IISS, 1995) p.36.
40. Yeni Yüzyıl, 23 Dec. 1994. The PKK put the number of its fighters at 30,000 while
local people put their numbers at 15,000. According to a US report, the PKK forces
numbered between 5,000–6,000. See Patterns of Global Terrorism, 1994, op. cit., p.47.
Region put the number of the PKK fighters at 6,000 including those in northern
45. This figure was cited by President Demirel during an interview with TDN, 2 Oct.
1995.
46. İ. İmset, 'Fighting Separatist Terrorism', Turkish Probe, 4 Nov. 1993, p.6.
47. Interview by the authors with the muhtar of a village in the province of Hakkari, June
1995.
50. Quoted in İ. İmset (note 16) p.78.
51. Öğuz İlker, 1 Jan. 1995.
52. For the thesis that the security expenditures fuel domestic borrowing and hence
inflation see R. Kayal, 'İç Borçların Sorunlusu: Güven difícisi Yeni Yüzyıl, 29 Dec.
1994.
53. TDN, 3 May 1995.
55. TDN, 8 Jan. 1996.
57. Ö.F. Gençkaya, 'The Kurdish Issue in Turkish Politica's in J. Calleja, H. Wiberg and
S. Busuttil (eds.), The Search for Peace in the Mediterranean Region (Malta: Mineva
Publications, 1994) p.211.
58. F. Shorter, 'The Crisis of Population Knowledge in Turkey' New Perspectives on Turkey,
12, (Spring 1995) p.18.
59. S. Ayata, GÜNP BOĞESİ NÜФUS HARKETLERİ ARASINDA, (Ankara: T.C. Başbakanlık, GÜNP
Boğesi Kalkınma İdaresi Basınlığı, 1994).
60. This section is mostly based on interviews held with officials as well as local people.


64. S. Mutlu, op. cit., p.50.


67. For a summary of the report see Yeni Yapıyl, 12 June 1995.

68. Ibid., 21 March 1995.


71. As information on the ethnic origins of the deputies in the Turkish Grand National Assembly is not publicly available scholars have made use of the listed places of birth of these deputies. For this information with regard to the first ten Turkish Grand National Assemblies see, F.W. Frey, The Turkish Political Elite (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1965). Gençkaya Ö.F., in J. Calleja et al. (eds.), op. cit., p.197, calculated that 23, 24 and 25 per cent of the 450 deputies in the 17th, 18th and 19th Grand National Assemblies were born in the mostly Kurdish-populated areas of Turkey. For 1995, the number of Kurdish deputies in the Parliament was between 100–125 according to J. Brown, ‘The Turkish Embroglio: Its Kurds’ ANNALS, AAPSS, 541, (Sep. 1995), p.117.

72. O.F. Gençkaya in J. Calleja et al. (eds.), op. cit., p.196.

73. R Robins, op. cit., p.667.


75. TDN, 19 April 1995.


78. TDN, 15 July 1993.


81. Ibid., 3 April 1994.


85. TDN, 26 July 1995.

86. Yeni Yapıyl, 7 March 1996.


90. Cumhuriyet, 1 July 1994; and Sabah, 1 Jan. 1995.

91. Quoted in Hürriyet, 24 Sept. 1994. For a report on the Kurdish supporters of the MHP see Akbıl, 12–18 Oct. 1995. Öğuz Türk is considered to be one of the first Turkish tribes to arrive in Anatolia from Central Asia.

92. He articulated these views in a very forceful manner during a debate on the Turkish television channel TRT-1, 9 June 1994.

93. The list of provinces is from 1965 Genel Nüfus Sayımı (Ankara: Devlet Islatistik Enstitüsü (DIE, 1969)). The original list on the basis of the 1965 census has 15 provinces except for a total of 67 with a population where more than 15 per cent used Kurdish as their mother tongue. The government increased the number of provinces in Turkey to 71 in 1989, 73 in 1990, 76 in 1992 and 79 in 1995. Those new provinces that incorporated parts of provinces in the original list of 15 with a Kurdish mother tongue population of more than 15 per cent were added to the list for 1991, 1994 and 1995. Hence the list for 1991 has 17 provinces, with Batman and Şırnak added, and for 1994 and 1995 18 provinces, with the inclusion of Iğdır.


95. See interview with Abdülmelik Fırat in TDN, 4 Nov. 1994.


98. Ibid., 13 July 1995.


101. Ibid., 15 March 1996.


111. Ibid., 27 April 1995.

112. TDN, 14 April 1995.


115. Öğuz Ükle, 2 and 5 May 1994.


118. Ibid., 11 March 1995.

119. Ibid., 17 April 1995.

120. İ. İnsat (note 18) p.231.

121. Öğuz Ükle, 14 March 1995.


123. TDN, 21 Nov. 1995.


125. PKK, Kürdistan Derbritimin Yolu, Program, (Köln: Serxweyêoy Yawemî, 1983) p.201.

126. İ. İnsat (note 18) p.137.

The International Dimension of the Kurdish Question

DEVELOPMENTS beyond Turkey have had a significant impact on the Kurdish question in the country. The trans-state nature of the Kurdish question must be taken into account. The massive exodus of refugees from northern Iraq in 1991 at the end of the Gulf War forced the world to focus its attention on the Kurds. This mass movement compelled Turkish decision-makers to deal with the Kurds in northern Iraq. Officials in Ankara had previously been ignoring these people. The Kurdish question has complicated Turkey’s relations with Iraq, Iran and Syria. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War signalled the beginning of a new era in international politics. In stark contrast with the past Western governments began to take a growing interest in Turkey’s human rights performance at a time when violence between the Turkish security forces and the PKK escalated.

The Launching of Operation PROVIDE COMFORT

The defeat of the Iraqi military by the UN coalition forces encouraged the Shia Moslems in southern Iraq and the Kurds in northern Iraq to rebel. The Kurdish nationalist uprising seemed to be successful until the Iraqi military turned against the Kurds after having crushed the Shiite revolt. By the end of March 1991 the Kurdish rebellion was about to collapse. The Kurds had mistakenly believed that the United States would enforce a no-fly zone over northern Iraq which would cover Iraqi helicopters and gunships as well as fixed-wing aircraft. The collapse of the Kurdish uprising was sudden and complete. Thousands of northern Iraqi Kurds were forced to flee from their homes ahead of the advancing Iraqi army. Military and civilian reports from the border began to pour in about Iraqi shelling. A flood of refugees retreated up the mountains along the Iraqi–Turkish border. In these circumstances the Turkish NSC convened an emergency meeting on 2 April.

The NSC decided to keep the border closed until the Security Council passed judgement. A letter was immediately sent to the Council calling for
Religio-Secular Metamorphoses: The Re-Making of Turkish Alevism

Markus Dressler

This article analyzes how the socio-religious minority of Turkish Alevis, in the course of the Alevi revival in the last two decades, adopted the language of religion as a means of empowerment in Turkey and Germany. In both cases, formations of Alevi identity in religious terms are encouraged by the specific discourses regarding legitimate formulations of identity. In Turkey, the question of Alevi recognition as a group legitimately different from Sunni Islam is entangled in ideological and material conflicts evolving around competing interpretations of Turkish nationalism, Islam, and laicism. Alevis are compelled to articulate their demands within this ideological framework if they want to advance their cause. In Germany, utterances of Alevi identity likewise adjust to the local religion discourse, and here often transgress the languages of Islam and Turkish nationalism. Though configured differently, both secular and national contexts encourage Alevis to standardize and objectify Alevism using the language and grammar of religion. This reformulation of Alevism is accompanied by a restructuring of traditional knowledge and practice in secularist terms, distinguishing between religious and secular spaces, languages, and practices.

Markus Dressler, Department of Religion, Hofstra University, 104 Heger Hall, Hempstead, NY 11549, USA. E-mail: markus.dressler@hofstra.edu. I am indebted to the anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments. I presented a very early version of this paper at the European-American Young Scholars’ Summer Institute on Secularization and Religion at the National Humanities Center, NC, in July 2004. Parts of a later version I presented at the AAR Convention in 2005.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, critical reflection on the history and politics of the category “religion” has entered the research agendas and classroom discussions within the broader field of religious studies. Most students of religion today will be familiar with a skepticism regarding the concept of religion espoused paradigmatically in J. Z. Smith’s famous dictum, “Religion is solely the creation of the scholar’s study” (1982: xi). More recent scholarship on the genealogy of the religio-secular and “world-religion” discourses has increased our understanding of the evolution of the modern concept of religion as well as its genealogical twin, the secular (Asad 1993, 2003; Masuzawa 2005). The differentiation between religious and secular spheres, languages, and practices characteristic of the discourse of religion emerged in conjunction with the rise of the modern nation-state, which established its authority to govern the newly imagined sphere of the secular qua definition and containment of the religious. Therefore, one can argue that within the semantics of the modern religio-secular paradigm, processes of “religionization”—i.e., the signification of certain spaces, practices, narratives, and languages as religious (as opposed to things marked as secular)—and “secularization” are constitutive of each other. While postcolonial studies has discussed the role of religion as a tool to legitimize and administer the hegemony of the nation-state, less attention has been directed to cases in which marginalized sociocultural communities have adopted the language of religion as a means of empowerment vis-à-vis assimilationist politics directed against them. Modern Alevism offers a compelling example of just such a case. Adjusting to the reigning religion discourses in Turkey and Germany, dominant Alevi currents display strong tendencies to “religionize” Alevism within the respective national frameworks.

The Alevis of Turkey make for roughly 15% of Turkey’s population [and are not to be confused with the Arab Alawīs (Nusayris)]. Roughly two-thirds of them speak Turkish, and the rest either the Kurdish Kurmanji dialect or Zazaki (as Kurdish, a northwestern Iranian language). Alevis insist on their difference from Sunni-Islam, manifested historically in their social and political marginalization within Ottoman and Turkish societies, their ritual and social practices, and a worldview strongly shaped by Twelver Shiite mythology, Islamic mysticism, as well as various non-Islamic traditions. Since the late 1980s, partially in response to a political climate which fostered the role of (Sunni) Islam as a constitutive part of national Turkish identity, Alevis began to claim their difference from the Sunni Islamic mainstream
more openly. They established new organizations and networks and formulated new meanings of Alevism. By now the process of institution building is consolidated and the legitimacy of a distinct Alevi identity is widely acknowledged. The debate on Alevism has entered a second phase in which questions concerning representation and internal organization have come to the forefront. The major challenge concerns the representation of Alevism vis-à-vis the Turkish public and state. While Alevis have recently been intensifying their endeavors to receive official recognition by the state, the debate on the terms and scope of incorporation into the state structure accentuates and deepens Alevi-internal divisions. The fierce dispute circles around a number of highly contested issues: *Is Alevism a religious formation and if so, is it part of the Islamic tradition, or rather a religion in its own right? Which organizations and spokespersons can legitimately represent Alevism?*

The debate on Alevism is embedded in the ideological and material conflicts evolving around competing interpretations of Turkish nationalism, Islam, and laicism, which frame public negotiation of sensitive identity issues to a great extent.¹ The mainstream interpretations of Turkish nationalism and laicism, as endorsed by powerful state institutions such as the military, the judiciary, the educational system, and the state bureaucracy, are rather authoritarian and espouse a notion of legitimate religion derived from Turkish-Ottoman political traditions. As I will show, these institutions are, though ostensibly secular, strongly influenced by Sunni Islam—particularly when it comes to the definition of legitimate religion. Alevis are compelled to articulate their difference within the parameters of this ideological framework if they want to advance their cause. The degree of the Alevis’ adjustment to this discourse becomes apparent when compared to debates on Alevism in Germany, where roughly half a million Alevis form the strongest Alevi community outside of Turkey. Here, Alevis can take advantage of a more liberal religion discourse, and enunciations of Alevi identity are not confined to the semantics of Islam and Turkish nationalism. At the same time, Alevism is becoming increasingly transnational as reflected in the networking of Alevi organizations, as well as in the growing importance of the Internet as a means of communication, information,

¹ The tensions between secular and Islamic sensibilities, ideologies, and cultural practices—be it against or within (as mostly) particular nationalist framings—have a history that goes back to the beginning of the republic, and even beyond into Ottoman times. See, for example, Hanioglu (1995), Bozdoğan and Kasaba (1997), Yavuz (2003), Cagaptay (2006), and Mardin (1989); for a classical modernist reading of the Turkish secularization project, see Berkes (1998).

² For a critical historical account of the authoritarian state tradition in Turkey, see Heper (1985).
and political agitation. Thus, Alevis have to manage the tensions emerging from the locally specific opportunity spaces in Turkey and Germany on the one hand and increasingly universalized conceptualizations of Alevism on the other.

This article discusses how contemporary formulations of Alevism in Turkey and Germany interact with the respective national discourses on religion. It starts off with an overview of modern transformations of Alevism in the context of the Turkish nation-state, followed by an analysis of contemporary conflicts between Alevis and state institutions, as well as Alevi-internal debates regarding its proper representation vis-à-vis the state, and the necessities of modern Alevi practice. The comparison with Germany shows that in either national context, Alevis try to empower themselves qua objectification of Alevism as a religious tradition. The respective tracks of religionization, however, reveal significant differences. Unlike in Germany, within the laicist definition of state–religion relations in Turkey Alevis seem to be able to obtain official recognition only if they identify their place in relation to the symbolic universe of the Islamic tradition. Thus, the challenges that Alevis face in the transnational perspective teach us something not only about the changing and contested nature of specific understandings of religion and secularity, but also about the local embeddedness of these understandings and their pertinacity against rivaling interpretations. Ultimately, universalist rhetoric notwithstanding, religio-secular discourses are always embodied in locally specific practices and in dialogue with the particular contexts in which they are embedded.

ALEVI TRANSFORMATIONS

Alevism (Alevilik) is a distinctively modern term and concept. The conceptual history (Begriffsgeschichte) of the term “Alevism” reveals how it gradually evolved since the second half of the nineteenth century, when different regional proto-Alevi groups seem to have begun to acquire a stronger we-group identity. Historically,

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For a concise overview of the historical evolution of Alevism, its textual traditions, religious practices, beliefs, as well as modern developments, see Dressler (2008).

With the term “proto-Alevi,” I pay tribute to the fact that Alevism, as it is used today to identify a particular socio-religious group and identity, is a twentieth-century concept.

Main external factors for this development were the Tanzimat reforms in the nineteenth century (which introduced the idea of freedom of religion in the Ottoman Empire), and correspondingly, a growing demand for religious and national self-determination articulated first by non-Muslim and non-Turkish minorities. For a contextualization of the Alevi case within this context, see Kieser (2000).
proto-Alevis were often pejoratively called *Kızılbaş* ("Redhead") and denounced as heretics. Many Alevis as well as historians trace the roots of Alevism to the *Babai* dervishes who played an important role in the Turkish conquest of Anatolia and the Balkans in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries (Ocak 1989). In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, parts of this tradition became submerged in the *Kızılbaş* movement. The *Kızılbaş* were followers of the Safavi Sufi order, whose charismatic leader İsmail established the Safavid Empire in 1501, and thus founded the Safavid dynasty (Sohrweide 1965). After their bonds with the Safavis started to loosen in the late sixteenth century, some of the Anatolian proto-Alevis began to recognize dervishes of the *Bektaşi* order as their religious mentors. With regard to the religious practices and beliefs of the overlapping *Kızılbaş-Bektaşi-Alevi* milieus, we find an array of practices and conceptions rooted in pre/non-Islamic traditions, which amalgamated over time with popular Islamic, and particularly Sufi, concepts, and are embedded in Shiite mythology. This symbiosis has, as in the case of other Middle Eastern communities at the margins of Islam such as the Yezidi, the Nusayri, and the Druze, defied assimilation into the mainstreams of Sunni and Shiite Islam (Kehl-Bodrogi, Kellner-Heinkele, and Otter-Beaujean 1997).

Following the secularization of Turkish society in the first decades of the Turkish Republic (founded in 1923), the evidence of kinship-based proto-Alevi identities slowly decreased and they gradually faded while the new term "Alevism," *Alevilik*, became more prominent. The transformations of Alevism in the twentieth century can be typified and summarized in terms of: first, secularization understood as decline of religious beliefs and practice; second, a turn to leftist ideologies; and third, a cultural and religious reorientation. Each of these idealtypical stages, which are historically and semantically interrelated, deserves attention.

As part of the secularization of the Turkish Republic, Sufi lodges were closed and all *tarikat* (Sufi order) activities banned in 1925. The ban included the practice of *dedelik*, the office of the *dede* ("elder"), the
central social and religious institution in traditional Alevism. There are accounts of how dedes were discriminated against by local state representatives in the early years of the Republic, although this discrimination should not be seen as the main reason for the subsequent decline of the dedelik. Much more significant was the economically motivated exodus to the urban centers since the 1950s, which often cut the regular personal interaction between dedes and their followers, called talibs, “students,” and thus undermined the social fabric of traditional Alevism (Shankland 2003: 135–136; Yaman 2006: 38). After a temporary period of Alevi political activism in the 1960s, driven by pretty much the same reasons as the recent Alevi revival—but with much less success—the younger Alevi generations began to turn to leftist ideologies in the 1960s and 1970s (Bumke 1979; Massicard 2005b; cf. Ata 2007). The dedes’ authority was further damaged, and quite often they were now portrayed as charlatans exploiting ordinary people.

The erosion of traditional Alevism was a gradual process, which took place with different speed and intensity depending on social and geographic location. Until the 1960s, Alevis were almost unnoticeable in Turkey’s public. This changed with the increasing polarization between ultra-nationalists and leftists in the 1960s and the 1970s. The militant right, on the one side of the political spectrum, denounced Alevis as Kızılbaş (i.e., heretics), Kurds, and communists, thus portraying them as at once threatening the religious, ethnic, and political identity of the nation. Indeed, Alevis overwhelmingly tended to the left, for the most part identifying with the universalistic worldviews offered by socialism and Marxism. If they did use Alevism as a point of reference, then they did so by reinterpreting Alevi symbols in line with their politics, which put them into conflict with those loyal to traditional Alevism (Bumke 1979: 543f.; Dressler 2003: 125f.). But the breakdown of the traditional hierarchies eventually facilitated the emergence of a new urban Alevi elite (Yaman 2003: 333). Unlike most dedes, this new secular Alevi elite, which is the brain and motor of the recent Alevi revival, has the social and communicative skills necessary to capitalize on the opportunities that emerged with the privatization of the Turkish media, and the concomitant gradual expansion of the public sphere since the late 1980s (Yavuz 1999).

8 With “traditional Alevism,” I mean Alevism as it was practiced before the impact of secularization and urbanization hit the Anatolian and Thracian countryside and impacted on the boundaries and social practices of Alevism.
From the late 1980s onward, Alevis put more emphasis on the religious dimension of Alevism. This development has to be situated in the context of the political and economic makeover of Turkey following the coup d'état in 1980. Aiming for the establishment of a neo-liberal order, the elites surrounding the Turkish military now systematically increased Islamic institutions as a bulwark against the left. Facilitated by a booming media sector, religion went public to an un-precedent extent. While in the 1960s and 1970s the political debate was shaped by Cold War polemics, which had put the extreme right, a growing bourgeois establishment, and a revolutionary left against each other leading to a political padlock and sporadic accesses of violence, the top-down orchestrated turn to religion after 1980 facilitated the rise of political Islam and would lead successively, with gradual political liberalization, to a reorientation of the political discourse along a reinvigorated secularist-Islamist fault line. Prime Minister Turgut Özal (1983-89), one of the prime architects of Turkey’s new economic liberalism, was a moderate figure in that regard. He supported the Turkish-Islamic Synthesis, an ideological project, which aimed at reconciling a universalistic Islamic with a particularistic Turkish identity and redirected the Turkish state ideology of Kemalism toward a conservative modernism, Islamic but secular, and committed to a nationalism directed against perceived separatist threats, be they ethnic or religious (Yavuz 2003: 69–75; cf. Seufert 1997). Though one of its obvious targets, the Alevis did not subscribe to this new ideology, which presented Turkish Islam as Sunni Islam and which paved the way for intensified efforts in assimilating them, as manifested, for example, in the establishment of mandatory religious education (based on the Sunni faith) in school (since 1982) and in the increase in mosque construction in Alevi villages—mostly against the will of their inhabitants (Dressier 2002: 203–209).

The Alevis had to adjust to the new parameters of Turkey’s post-1980 political discourse. With religion having become a major point of reference for political identity formations, many Alevis, formerly aligned with the now largely dysfunctional left, began to assert Alevi identity within a universalistic human rights discourse and secularist rhetoric of religious freedom and self-determination. Alevis now turned to their half-forgotten traditions, which they increasingly formulated in explicitly religious terms, thus to a certain extent appropriating the language of post-1980 Turkish identity politics. They began to forcefully confront Turkish society with their demands for recognition of Alevism as an identity significantly different from mainstream Sunni Islam. As a consequence, since the late 1980s, not only Turkey but also countries with significant numbers of Turkish immigrants such as Germany
witnessed reformulations of Alevism as a distinct worldview, way of life, cultural practice, and religion.

With the Alevi revival, public discussions on the nature of Alevism emerged. What is Alevism? and What do the Alevis want? became widely debated questions in the Turkish public. Alevi activists responded by stressing their difference from Sunni Islam, and demanding recognition by state and society as a legitimate community. They initiated an Alevi historiography from below and began to discuss Alevi beliefs and practices publicly; they founded Alevi organizations and created new Alevi spaces, networks, and media. This process was accelerated by a horrific incident in 1993, which had a profound impact on the Alevi revival. On June 2, thirty-five people—most of them Alevi—died after an incited mob chanting “God is Great” set fire to a hotel in Sivas, which hosted guests of the annual festival in honor of the Alevi poet Pir Sultan Abdal. Local security forces watched the horrific massacre without intervening. Another important incident was the military’s interference in Turkish politics in 1997. In the context of heightened anti-Islamist awareness, leading state officials turned toward the Alevis as allies in their fight against political Islam. Some went even so far as to promote Alevism as an example of a purportedly secular Turkish Muslim tradition, an interpretation popularized in 1998 with the notion of the Turkish Muslimdom, which was juxtaposed to (of course less secular and modern) stereotypes of Arab and Iranian Muslimdoms (Dressler 2002: 193–213).

Throughout the twentieth century, identity politics in Turkey remained strongly contested. The Kemalist modernization program entailed the control of public religion and the privatization of individual religiosity (referred to as laicism since the 1930s), and Turkish Nationalism was promoted as the new nation’s main source of identity (cf. Dressler 1999). Nevertheless, Sunni Islam maintained a strong influence on public discourse and on the worldview of a large part of the population (Seufert 1997). Compared to Sunnism, Turkish Alevism was relatively more affected by the social transformations of the last century. Drastic economic and social changes between the 1950s and 1970s led to a rural exodus, which destroyed traditional Alevism’s bonds of

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9 For this and other instances of anti-Alevi violence in the republic, see Jongerden (2003).
10 On 28 February 1997, the military-dominated National Security Council issued a manifesto discrediting the politics of the government coalition led by the Islamist Welfare Party. The manifesto addressed practices supposedly undermining the laicist foundation of the state. The increased pressure forced the government to subscribe to the manifesto and eventually step back; the Welfare Party was prohibited in the following year.
affiliation based on kinship and lineage. In the urban context, Alevism had to be recreated. Broader concepts of Alevism gained leverage which could provide a common identity beyond regional particularisms. Until the 1970s, they were often politically coined, but since the late 1980s, they began to recenter around notions of culture and religion. Identity claims in the name of culture and religion hit sensitive spots in the post-1980 public sphere and allowed the Alevis to enter the debate demanding their recognition as legitimately different but equal.

REPRESENTATION CONTESTED

In Turkey, public assertions of identity which challenge the hegemonic concept of Turkish nationalism alert Kemalist hardliners who stick to an exclusivist and narrow interpretation of the state mantra of “unity and togetherness” (*birlik ve beraberlik*). The guiding principles of Turkish nationalism have, since the early twentieth century, been ambiguous, wavering between racial, cultural, ethnic, and citizenship-based leitmotifs (Cagaptay 2006). To varying degrees, the prescribed Turkishness of the nation has always challenged the legitimacy of ethnically non-Turkish citizens and fueled particularistic and at times even seditionist ambitions, as, for example, in the case of the Kurdish separatist movement. Alevis are naturally afflicted by this dynamic since significant parts of the Alevis embrace Kurdish identities.

The situation is complicated by the fact that Turkish nationalism entails a rather

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11 Recent polls among Alevis indicate clear preferences for self-identifications in cultural and religious terms. Questioning 208 Alevis from two Ankara neighborhoods about the definition of Alevism, Kâmil Firat received the following distribution on his three pre-prepared responses: “true Islam,” 52.4%; “independent religion outside of Islam,” 1.9%; “way of life,” 45.2% (Firat 2005: 55). In a poll by Nail Yilmaz among 364 Alevis (equally divided among Istanbul and an Alevi village), a vast majority of 89.8% declared that Alevism was carrying “cultural/religious,” as opposed to “ethnic” (4.3%), “religious and ethnic” (4.8%), or “other” (0.5%) meanings (Yilmaz 2005: 210). Another poll by Ahmet Taşgan among Turkmen Alevis in the Southeast of Turkey showed similar results: among 309 surveyed, 35% defined Alevism as “religious subgroup” (*mezhep*), 29% as “culture,” and 36% as “way of life” (Taşgan 2006: 48). The results of two earlier studies, conducted in the 1990s, are not very different. Ali Aktaş asked a total of 1623 visitors of two Alevi centers (one in Istanbul, one in central Anatolian Hacibektaş) about their definition of Alevism and received the following responses: “religion (independent of Islam),” 10.4%; “religious subgroup” (*mezhep*), 43.4%; “Sufi order” (*tarikat*), 10.4%; “culture,” 16.1%; “way of life,” 16.9%; “other,” 6.8% (Aktaş 1999). Also compare the study by Hüseyin Bal, whose relatively small survey (45 persons) from two Turkish Alevi villages showed results congruent to those above (1997: 173). While none of these results can claim to be statistically representative for Alevis at large, taken together they still provide a reasonably clear picture about Alevi self-images, even if the terms are vague and their meanings would have to be further scrutinized.

12 The identity conflicts within Alevism along competing ethnic and nationalist configurations are comprehensively addressed in White and Jongerden (2003).
authoritarian form of laicism (Turk: laiklik—together with nationalism, one of the sacred principles of the state ideology of Kemalism), while implicitly maintaining a Muslim self-understanding. Indeed, there is a widely shared perception that the Turkish nation is Muslim, and, more specifically, Sunni. On this background, it becomes clear that Alevi claims of religious difference challenge both Turkish Nationalism and laicism, which perceive identity conceptions deviating from the Sunni-Turkish norm as threatening the internal peace and unity of the country, in powerful ways.

Alevis and the Directorate for Religious Affairs

For Alevis, the nonrecognition of Alevism is embodied in the Directorate for Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, hereafter DRA), which they accuse of trying to assimilate them into mainstream Sunni Islam. The DRA is a massive state bureaucracy, the budget of which exceeds that of many government ministries. It defines and organizes legitimate public Islamic practice and is responsible, among other things, for Islamic education, mosque construction and maintenance, issuing of legal opinions (fatwas), and the pilgrimage to Mecca. The organization of religion by the Turkish state perpetuates forms of religious control established in the late Ottoman Empire, where Christian and Jewish denominations had a considerable degree of autonomy while Alevis were not recognized. Unlike Sunni Muslims and those non-Muslim communities who were recognized as minorities following the Lausanne Peace Treaty (1923), Alevis never received official status or representation. Purportedly, religious Alevi spaces and activities are therefore illegal. While there have been concessions to the Alevis in the last decade, which show increasing de facto toleration of Alevism as a legitimate identity, this has as of yet not led to any serious endeavors to lift their institutional discrimination. The situation leaves the Alevis with two main options: either they oppose the symbols and institutions of the hegemonic discourse or they appropriate them, as well as possible, for their own purposes. Alevis who highly value loyalty toward the state generally support the integration of Alevism into the

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13 The term millet ("nation"), in late Ottoman times a legal term for recognized religious communities, maintained a strong religious connotation since the beginnings of its incorporation into Turkish nationalism (Zürcher 1999).
14 The term "non-Muslim" referred to Christians and Jews and not to Alevis, who were, after all, still considered Muslims, even if suspected of heresy.
15 For an excellent and concise treatment of the minority question as interpreted in Turkey following Lausanne, see Oran (2003); for a short discussion of the positioning of the Alevis within Turkey's minority discourse, see Dressler (2007).
DRA, while more state-critical Alevis argue for the abolishment of the DRA, urging the state to withdraw from the organization of religious affairs, which they regard as contradicting the state's principle of laicism—in this context interpreted by them along the lines of a more liberal secularism. The following statement, made in 1994 by its then-president Mehmet Nuri Yılmaz, still reflects the DRA's position on the Alevi question: "Alevism is not a religion. Nor is it a sect of Islam. Alevism is a culture" (quoted in Şahin 2001: 237). While the DRA has as of yet not shown any inclination to acknowledge Alevism as a distinct religious tradition, be it within or outside the abode of Islam, it recently seems to prefer a softer rhetoric, which stresses the place of Alevism within the Islamic tradition at large. As an example serves a press release from March 2004 by the DRA's current president Ali Bardakoğlu on the occasion of a conference organized by the Alevi Ehl-i Beyt Foundation:

Alevism, too, is part of our Islamic imagination. Like the other subgroups of Islam, it is an important orientation and thus a contribution which is worth our respect. The way in which Islam has been internalized by the Alevi people created a tradition which is compelling in its spiritual richness and affection... Alevis belong to the most important currents of our culture, and with their particularities there is no doubt that they will add... to the richness of the religious life of our country. (T.C. Başbakanlık Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı 2004)

At first, this statement might appear to entail a sympathetic recognition of Alevi difference. However, the addressed Ehl-i Beyt Foundation is a rather marginal Alevi organization, which supports an understanding of Alevism as a Turkish version of Twelver Shiism and represents only a tiny portion of the Alevi community. In this light, what appears as recognition of Alevism at first sight should rather be understood as support for a very particular interpretation of Alevism, one which is much closer to mainstream Islamic orthodoxy than the Alevism as understood by the majority of Alevis. In a more recent statement by Saim Yeprem, Deputy Chairman of the Diyanet's "High Counsel on Religious Affairs," the possibility of conceiving of Alevism as a legitimate subgroup (mezhep) of Islam is once more denied. Instead, Yeprem offers to classify Alevism as a "Sufi formation" (tasavvufi bir oluşum) (Çalışlar 2007).

Alevi-Internal Competition

Alevi-internal disagreement on proper representation vis-à-vis the state and the nature of Alevism is severe and furthers political and
organizational divisions. An example is the debate surrounding the Directorate of Religious Services of Alevi Islam (Alevi İslam Din Hizmetleri Başkanlığı, hereafter DRSA). As it turns out, the resemblance of the name to the DRA is programmatic. The DRSA was founded in November 2003 on the occasion of the “Third Convention of Anatolian Leaders of Faith,” an initiative sponsored by the CEM Foundation. The CEM Foundation (Cumhurıyetçi Eğitim ve Kültür Merkezi, “Center for Republican Education and Culture,” hereafter CEM) is a Kemalist and state-loyal Alevi association with its headquarters in Istanbul. Both the annually gathering Convention of Anatolian Leaders of Faith and the DRSA are part of CEM’s network, created to broaden its legitimacy and to position it as the most powerful player within the contested field of Alevi politics. In its founding document, the DRSA outlines its goals as follows:

To carry out the duties related to belief, form of worship, historical development, philosophy, social and ethical principles, as well as communication and culture of Alevi Islam; to guarantee, through training in religion, belief, and practice the enlightenment of society and, according to [the Directorate’s] aims, its application and supervision in the places of worship. The faith of Alevi Islam represents the Alevi-Bektaşi-Mevlevi-Nusayri as well as other belief groups which are based on this interpretation of Islam. (CEM Vakfi 2003)

The DRSA challenges the monopoly of the DRA and is a reaction to the state’s refusal to formally acknowledge Alevis and provide them with a share of the DRA’s competence and budget. The rhetoric through which the DRSA legitimates itself is certainly remarkable and reflects a major trend within the Alevi movement. Without using the contested terms din (religion) and mezhep (legitimate religious subgroup), it claims that Alevism is a particular interpretation of the Islamic religion. Distinguishing between belief, worship, philosophy, ethics, and culture, “Alevi Islam” is conceptualized with categories which could be taken from any traditional text book on world religions. Incorporating the Turkish Sufi traditions of the Mevlevi and Bektaşi orders, as well as the Nusayris, the notion of Alevi Islam is broadened to obtain legitimacy as an Islamic “interpretation” which incorporates a

16 Regarding the competing Alevi discourses and the major organizations associated with them, see Dressler (2002: 176–191), Massicard (2005a: 55–127), and Erman and Göker (2000).
wide array of groups at the periphery of Islamic discourse. The DRSA attracted considerable public attention upon its foundation, but it has not been able to establish itself as an authoritative Alevi voice—neither among Alevis outside the CEM network nor within the broader public. Its rhetoric nevertheless reflects a growing self-assuredness of Alevi communities daring to confront the hegemonic state interpretation of Islam.

In opposition to most other Alevi organizations, CEM distinguished itself since its foundation through a rather conciliatory position toward the state, and embraced nationalist rhetoric and symbols. When its demand for official state recognition did not lead to any significant policy change (although occasionally—especially prior to elections—well received by leading politicians), CEM decided to take a more aggressive stance. Thus, the DRSA has to be seen as an attempt to increase the pressure on the state regarding the Alevi demands. Since the CEM network voices its criticism against the DRA’s Sunni exclusivism from a position which is decisively state-loyal and Turkish-Islamic, it might be in the long run more successful than Alevi voices with a leftist and state-critical approach who oppose the Turkish-Islamic paradigm. On the other hand, its strong Kemalist rhetoric and demeanor seem to have tempered its political success since the Islamic conservative Justice and Development Party became the major political force following the general elections of 2002.

The politics of the CEM network and its charismatic leader İzzettin Doğan (born 1940) are highly disputed within the Alevi community. Reactions from Alevi umbrella organizations competing with CEM are very critical of the DRSA, questioning both its legitimacy and its aims. Ibrahim Karakaya, then general secretary of the Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association (Pir Sultan Abdal Kültür Derneği, hereafter PSAKD), which inherited much of the political ethos of the Alevi left of the 1970s and is extremely state-critical, believes that “İzzettin Doğan wants to establish his own sharia and Diyanet [DRA]. That might work in Iran, but it is contradicting the belief, culture, and philosophy of the Alevi-Bektashi in Turkey. We don’t have clerics (quoted in Önal 2003).” Karakaya implicitly accuses CEM of giving in to the pressures of Sunni-Muslim discourse. Unlike CEM, Karakaya not only vehemently criticizes the DRA, but demands its abolishment. He voices Alevi fears that incorporation into the state administration would undermine their independence from the state. Already at a very early point in the Alevi revival, this position has been put forward by Şahin Ulusoy, who belongs to one of the Alevis most prominent dede-lineages. As a member of parliament for the Republican People’s Party (CHP),
he gave in 1992 an extremely sharp speech in the parliament, in which he directly attacked the DRA's assimilatory politics against the Alevis and openly demanded its abolishment. Turgut Öker, president of the powerful Germany-based Federation of the Alevi Communities in Germany (Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu, hereafter FACG), also joined in the criticism of both CEM and the existing organization of religious affairs in Turkey. Claiming that "in Europe, there is no institution like the DRA" and demanding that "the state must not interfere in beliefs and should adopt the standards of the European Union," Öker capitalizes on his position from outside of Turkey and draws on international human rights conventions to challenge the Turkish discourse (Yaşar 2003).

One of the major criticisms put forward against CEM by rival Alevi organizations concerns its understanding of "Alevi Islam," which Karakaya regards as reactionary—especially if compared to the "modern" approaches of the Alevi Bektashi Federation (Alevi Bektaşı Federasyonu, hereafter ABF):

[The approach] of the ABF is fighting to defend the Alevi tradition, [which is] modern, laicist, democratic, and legal. Another approach is the approach of which İzzettin Doğan has taken the leadership, which defends the Islam thesis, and which depicts Alevism as a religion (din) within the Islamic civilization (İslamiyet)... There is no place for CEM within the Alevi-Bektashi organizations. (quoted in Önal 2003)

The ABF is the largest Alevi umbrella organization in Turkey and claims to represent roughly 400,000 Alevis through its local and national member associations, which include the PSAKD (Alevi Bektaşi Federasyonu 2002). Politically it is closely connected to the FACG. It strongly disputes CEM's legitimacy as an authentic Alevi organization. Kazım Genç, the president of the PSAKD, accuses CEM of having dismissed initiatives for a broad Alevi alliance such as the ABF, instead opting to pursue its particularistic interests and promoting the "idea of the Alevi Islam thesis." He denounces the creation of the DRSA as contradicting basic Alevi values of democracy and laicism and regards it as an act of treason against the Alevi faith: "[It] intends to assimilate

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17 In 1997, he repeated his position in a parliamentary debate on the DRA's budget for 1998. Since the previous year, Alevis received a relatively small amount of money from the state's budget (Massicard 2005a: 127). Ulusoy suggested that the Alevis should reject money from the state in order to preserve their independence—however, the Alevi associations opted to accept (Şahin 2001: 232f.; Shankland 2003: 161-163).
Alevism and is even more dangerous than the Diyanet [DRA] and the mandatory religious education it imposes” (Genç 2003).

The differentiation within Alevism along religious and political lines is a serious problem for all Alevi activists who try to enhance their legitimacy against a state which capitalizes on these divisions for its assimilation politics. While the competing Alevi organizations are united in their complaints against the state and the non-Alevi public concerning continuing discrimination, their visions of the nature of Alevism and its ideal positioning toward the Turkish state differ significantly. This disagreement is reflected in intensifying competition on symbolic and material resources. The polemical debate surrounding the foundation of the DRSA highlights the degree to which the question of Alevi representation is connected with the religious definition of Alevism. Ultimately, the answer to the question as to whether there should be a place for the Alevis within the state’s structure depends on how Alevism is defined in Turkey. If one conceives of Alevism as a religion (din) in its own right, then one might argue that it should get far-reaching autonomy in its religious affairs, as the recognized minorities already have. If Alevism is conceived as a legitimate branch of Islam (mezhep), then it is possible to demand its representation within the DRA or alternatively the creation of an official Alevi Directorate parallel to the DRA. Either option, however, requires a formal clarification of the religious status of Alevism. The debate takes place against the backdrop of continuous anti-Alevi prejudices in the non-Alevi public, where notions of Alevism as a deviation from the right path of Islam, that is a heresy, are still widespread. Such a view legitimates assimilation politics, which aims at redirecting Alevism toward the Islamic mainstream.

In fact I argue that it is the grammar of Turkish laicism that renders the question of the legitimate place of Alevism a religious one. Almost all of the publicly discussed interpretations of Alevism, whether put forward by Sunni Muslims or by laicist state representatives, employ religious terminology. Alevis do so, too, for example, when they describe Alevism as the true Shia, as a particular form of secular Turkish Islam, as a legitimate Islamic subgroup (mezhep), as the kernel of Islam, as mystical Islamic philosophy or Sufi order (tarikat), or as religion (din) in its own right. In competition with those religious interpretations, other Alevis conceived of it as a philosophical worldview, “way of life,” or as a revolutionary ethics, i.e., a kind of pre-modern class struggle philosophy. However, even those Alevis who reject the religion thesis are, given its dominance in public discourse,
inclined to relate to it. In a sense, Turkish laicism's obsessive anxiety about religion and its regulation pushes Alevis in a more thoroughly "religious" direction. The Sunni-dominated discourse as molded through Turkish laicism exerts a strong pressure on Alevis to streamline and theologize their beliefs. In order to be taken seriously as a player in Turkey's religio-political field, many Alevis feel that they have to first systematically reconstruct and solidify their tradition. Paradoxically, they can obtain official recognition by the laicist Turkish state only if they identify their place in relation to the symbolic universe of the Islamic tradition. Thus, they increasingly refer to Alevism in Islamic terms. In Turkey, the notion of Alevism as a distinct religious tradition independent of Islam is thus relatively marginalized.

**Redefining Dedelik**

The religionization of Alevism is epitomized in the new role of the Alevi dedes. With the Alevi revival, the dedes gained new respect and were assigned an important function in reconnecting Alevism with its traditions. For the survival of Alevism as a religious tradition with more than merely folkloristic appeal, the question of how to sustain the dedelik became a central concern. In the context of traditional, rural Alevism, the dede conveyed ritual, social, and judicial authority. He moderated conflicts, and represented sociopolitical power. His main ritual obligation was to lead the *ayin-i cem* ("celebration of community"), the central Alevi ritual. The dedes' authority to perform the rituals and to instruct on the rules of the mystical path is derived from their descent from recognized sacred lineages. Today, especially in urban environments, the mediating functions of the dede seem to be gone; they had been tied into the socioeconomic fabric of traditional Alevism, which largely eroded due to urbanization and secularization. But the dede is still regarded as indispensable for the rituals, and larger *cemevis* (*cem houses*) usually have a practicing dede employed to conduct the rituals. Today, Alevis

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18. These different interpretations of Alevism are not static in any sense, although they might appear like that if employed in political debate. Rather, they should be understood as flexible approaches that can, to a certain extent at least, be combined and cross-layered in multiple ways.
19. For a comprehensive discussion of the modern transformation of the dedelik, see Dressler (2006) and also Sökefeld (2002).
20. Dedes claim to be *seyyids*, i.e., descendents from the prophet Muhammad.
21. There are, however, still Alevi villages where social practices of traditional Alevism are maintained. Some villages still, or again, have regular cem rituals and to varying degrees acknowledge the leadership of resident or visiting dedes. But even in the village, the authority of the dede is limited by state institutions (Shankland 2003).
discuss how to reform and revive the *dedelik* in trans-regional and transnational urban contexts. Many Alevis still regard the *dedes* as the most authoritative carriers of Alevi traditions. However, their role as a main source of Alevi knowledge is contested by non-*dede* Alevis and by the new secular Alevi organizations which provide social and cultural services, which are for many probably more important than the Alevi rituals in which only few participate (Şahin 2001: 204–207). Non-*dede* Alevis publish on Alevism and cover a wide range of themes such as mythology, history, beliefs, and practices and thus participate in the production of new Alevi knowledge. While they still play an important role in providing religious legitimacy, the *dedes* play only a marginal role in the leadership of Alevi organizations. These organizations are mostly led not by *dedes* but by middle-class *talib* professionals. Crucial for the efficacy of the new Alevi elite are organizational and communicative skills (Şahin 2001: 156–159). The new secular leaders, and most successfully those who are familiar with the cultural codes of the Kemalist middle class, represent Alevism in public; they publish, speak at conferences, and participate in radio and TV talk shows. Their thusly gained media charisma reaffirms their authority and adds to their standing within the Alevi community (Yavuz 1999).

One major concern for contemporary Alevis is the *dedes'* state of education. Alevis are debating the kinds of knowledge a modern *dede* should have and the type of education he should receive. While some demand state support for Alevi-run *dede* education programs, others want to remain independent. Some Alevi organizations, such as CEM and the Alevi Academy (Germany), initiated programs for the education of *dedes*. In 2003, the Alevi Academy began an *Educational Program for the Perfection of the Dede*, developed in close cooperation with the FACG, covering an array of subjects from "The Alevi Path and Its Religious Principles" to "Comparative Religion," taught, depending on the subject, by *dedes* as well as non-Alevi academics (Alevi Akademisi n.d.). This project has been revived and expanded in 2006 under the leadership of the FACG. Such institutionalized forms of *dede* education are conducive to a homogenization of Alevism. There have been attempts by CEM as well as by the *dede* council of the FACG to standardize the *cem* ceremony (Şahin 2001: 222; Sökefeld 2002: 174). CEM recently began to distribute within its network a handbook for conducting the *cem* ritual (Alevi İslam Din Hizmetleri Başkanlığı 2006). The FACG's *dede* council has also published a calendar of sacred days.

\(^{22}\) For an excellent overview of Alevi literary production, see Vorhoff (1998b).
for Alevis, providing information on how to celebrate Alevi holidays (Şahin 2001: 222). While voices pushing for a standardization of Alevi belief and ritual are becoming more prominent (Yaman 2003: 344), critics urge not to sacrifice the plurality of Alevi practices which they regard as constitutive of the Alevi tradition.

The integration of dedes into the Alevi associations and the establishment of dede councils by the larger Alevi organizations reflect a secular remodeling of Alevi hierarchies. This new structure secures the dede’s active participation in the Alevi reformulation process, while at the same time limiting his authority to a newly defined religious sphere, effectively rendering the dede a religious specialist. The only sphere still dominated by the dede is the field of Alevi ritual. This compartmentalization of authority is part of the religionization of modern Alevism insofar as it establishes and normalizes boundaries between religious and secular spaces and practices.

ALEVI RELIGIONIZING IN GERMANY

As a minority, Alevis are to a certain degree forced to adjust their endeavors for recognition to the dominant legal and political discourses. In Turkey, state institutions and political parties have, despite some significant Alevi successes in the courts, not been very accommodating in supporting Alevi claims. The stagnation of affairs leaves the Alevis with two principal options: either to oppose the hegemonic discourse, or to play by its rules and appropriate them as well as possible for their own purposes. Public and legal recognition of Alevism is in fact much further developed in Germany. Here, Alevis do not face the same pressure to assimilate into mainstream Islam, and Alevi activists are more likely to define Alevism outside of an Islamic and Turkish nationalist framework.

The Alevis’ turn to a more explicitly religious self-representation in Germany has been encouraged by factors particular to the European

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23 A new debate on how to integrate Alevism more formally into the state administration of religion has been triggered from within the governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) in late 2007, promising among other things that it would consider recognizing cemevis as places of worship (İşik 2007). But as of yet (March 2008), no concrete steps in this direction have been taken.

24 Certainly, it has to be taken into account that the German situation bears other challenges for Alevis, which have to do with the local immigration discourse and the competition between Alevi and Sunni Turks for recognition and resources. Sökefeld (2003) provides an informed overview on the development of Alevi organization building and Alevi politics in Germany; see also Kehl-Bodrogi (2006) and Sökefeld (2008).
and German context. For one, since the end of the 1990s, German immigration politics began to recognize religion as an important factor for the integration of Muslim and especially Turkish immigrants into German society. Secondly, post-9/11 anxiety created an environment favorable for a modeling of Alevism as an alternative to the threat of Islamic fundamentalism, with which mainstream (Sunni and Shia) Islam was associated in public discourse (Kehl-Bodrogi 2006: 12-14; Sökefeld 2008). Alevi adapted to these shifts in the political climate and increased the dose of religious language in their public representation. Besides that they were also aware that claims for religious originality and autonomy promised the greatest chance for success in their quest for legal recognition.

Religious Education and the Objectification of Alevism

Since the late 1990s, Alevi engaged in developing curricula for religious education at elementary schools. In 2001, the FACG published an outline of the motivations and goals of Alevi religious education within a cooperative project which aimed at the development of a joined Sunni-Alevi curriculum (Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu 2001a). The paper specifies Alevi topics to be incorporated in curricula for Muslim education and draws sharp lines between Alevism and Sunni Islam:

Contrary to Sunni Islam, women in Alevism are equal to men in doctrine as well as in religious practice...Alevism does not know separation of the sexes. Alevi doctrine does not regard the veiling of women a matter of faith. Polygamy is forbidden in Alevi doctrine...Alevis despise blood feud...Alevism does not recognize a divinely revealed sharia law...Alevi pray individually...and do not visit mosques...Alevi do not do the pilgrimage to Mecca. Alevi do not fast at Ramadan, but 12 days in the month of Muharram. Alevi do not proselytize and regard the secular and democratic state system as guarantor of their religious freedom and [therefore] support this system. (Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu 2001b)

The text shows how some Alevi try to capitalize on negative representations of Islam in Germany. In statements like this, Alevism is presented as an alternative Islam, indirectly claiming a sense of superiority over Sunni Islam.25 Presenting themselves as the more modern,

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25 The idea of Alevism as the other Islam once in a while receives academic support, as, for example, expressed in the booklet by Christoph P. Baumann (1994). It also finds appeal in the
secular, and democratic Muslims, Alevis attempt to convert their position at the margins of the Islamic tradition into an advantage. In their competition with Sunni Muslims for political resources, they use anti-Muslim stereotypes in order to emphasize their own compatibility with "modern" values and ways of life (Sökefeld 2003: 145–148; Kehl-Bodrogi 2006: 12–14).

Unsurprisingly, attempts to create a joint Sunni-Alevi Islamic education failed. Alevis now focus on developing their own curricula independent from Sunni Muslim organizations. This forces them to go beyond their defensive stance against Sunnism and to represent Alevi belief in more positive terms. A summary description of the FACG’s Alevi religious education curriculum defines three major subjects on which religious instruction should focus: (i) the philosophy of the Unity of Being and the relationship between God and man, (ii) being human and/or liberation from egoism, (iii) and the meaning of mankind’s existence, or the unity of soul and body. With emphasis on belief rather than practice, Alevism is presented as a religious philosophy combining Sufi thought with modern humanistic values (the meaning of “being human,” emphasis on the responsibility for the protection of animals and the environment) embedded within a distinctively Alevi terminology (the unity of God-Muhammad-Ali) (Almanya Alevi Birlikleri Federasyonu 2002).

Already in 2000 and 2001, the FACG applied in the name of its local constituencies in several federal states for the establishment of Alevi religious education (Kaplan 2001). The first voluntary Alevi religious education classes opened in August 2002 at several public primary schools in Berlin, just one year after the (Sunni-Muslim) Islamic Federation (Islamische Föderation) began to offer religious education at some Berlin schools following a ruling in its favor by the Federal Administration Court in February 2000. The success of the Islamic Federation had created considerable unrest in the public due to its alleged fundamentalist tendencies, and the Berlin Senate’s subsequent willingness to grant the same right to the local Cultural Center of Anatolian Alevis (Kulturzentrum Anatolischer Aleviten), a member

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26 References are made to the doctrine of wahdat al-wuğūd ("Unity of Being"), the fight against the nafs (carnal soul, or ego), the notion of dying-before-death, and the ideal of al-insân al-kâmîl ("the perfect man").

27 In Germany, school education is under the sovereignty of the federal states (Bundesländer).
organization of the FACG, was certainly at least in part motivated by the political wish to support a version of Islam supposedly more akin to German sensitivities—even if knowledge about Alevism in the German public remained negligible (Kehl-Bodrogi 2006: 11–12).

In order to offer confessional education at public schools, Alevis have to obtain recognition as a religious community ("Religionsgemeinschaft") in a legal sense. This requires first of all a certain coherence of religious dogma and the existence of an institutional body which could authoritatively define the teachings of the community, supervise the development of curricula, and represent the community vis-à-vis the state (Spuler-Stegemann 2002: 247–254). Following the FACG’s application for conducting religious education, the State of North Rhine-Westphalia commissioned two scholarly reports to elaborate on the religious nature of Alevism and on whether the FACG fulfilled the criteria for a religious community. The first report, by Islamicist Ursula Spuler-Stegemann (2003), which discusses the religious status of Alevism from a religious studies perspective, concludes that the FACG in fact represents a religious community in the sense of the German law. The second report was written by a professor of jurisprudence, who approached the question of whether the FACG fulfilled the criteria for a religious community from the viewpoint of German law (Muckel 2004). This report, too, approved in principle of the FACG’s compliance with said criteria, and in 2006 the status of religious community was granted to the FACG (Kehl-Bodrogi 2006: 15; cf. Sökefeld 2008: 287). It is interesting to note the state’s practice of dividing religious and juristic competency in the evaluation of the FACG. As both Alevism’s validity as religion and the FACG’s fulfillment of secular legal criteria had to be assessed, theological and judicial judgments were intrinsically connected while still formally divided. Since their judgment on the religious and legal quality of the applying group had considerable weight, secular scholars were attributed a quasi-theological role in the evaluation process. This is particularly ironic in the case of religious studies scholars. Within secularist discourse, it paradoxically seems to be the supposed neutrality of “secular” religion scholarship that is regarded as precondition for objective quasi-theological assessment. Thus, the logic of the secular discourse constantly re-produces religion.

The application for the right to organize religious education at public schools heightened the Alevi-internal debate regarding the religious nature of Alevism. Developing curricula and teaching Alevism required its systematization in accordance with set standards for confessional education and further pushed the “discussion on how to define Alevism as culture or religion” (Şahin 2001: 224). The trend is toward
the latter. In the course of an overhaul of its statutes in September 2002, the FACG included therein a passus declaring that it would "define itself as a faith-based organization in line with the German constitution" (Kaplan 2005). While the turn to religious rhetoric is a general feature of the Alevi revival both in Turkey and Germany, Germany-based Alevi activists tend to be more inclined to openly differentiate Alevism from mainstream Sunni Islam, and sometimes from Islam altogether. A telling example is that of dede Hasan Kilavuz, former chairman of the FACG's dede counsel, who inaugurated a heated debate when he publicly declared the incompatibility of Alevism with basic features of Islam:

Alevilik is a faith (inanç) in its own right. Alevis possess a faith which sees God everywhere in the universe. Alevis performed their worship and beliefs for a thousand years in a modest and extremely pure form...We cannot connect the faith of the Anatolian Alevis with the basic principles of the Islamic religion. (Kilavuz 2005)

While the contexts for the establishment and recognition of Alevism in Turkey and Germany are very different, in both cases Alevis are obliged to specify Alevism's religious contours. Kilavuz' position is just one example of this. The continuing debate contributes to the religious objectification of Alevism, which I understand with Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori as the process by which "religion has become a self-contained system that its believers can describe, characterize, and distinguish from other belief systems" (1996: 38). Contributing to this process is the increasing scriptural fixation of the predominantly oral tradition of Alevism, which seals, as Krisztina Kehl-Bodrogi has put it, "the transformation of an esoteric doctrine into a public religion" (2006: 16). The driving forces behind this development are not the dedes, who play only a secondary role therein, but new secular Alevi elites.28 As a consequence of this opening of traditional authority structures, the debate on Alevism has been decentered, and while new centers are emerging, the variety of hearable Alevi voices has certainly increased. Thus, all Alevis who publish and publicly discuss aspects of Alevism participate in the undoing and remaking of Alevism—though to different extent depending on their weight within public discourse.

28 As an example, all but one of the members of the FACG's commission for the development of an Alevi curriculum are talibs (Kehl-Bodrogi 2006: 16).
Scholars of Alevism are also involved in this process, since academic work is in various ways implicated in the debates.\textsuperscript{29}

The debate on Alevism in Germany and the increasing religious recognition Alevis receive here impact also on negotiations of Alevism in Turkey. Through personal and institutional transnational networks, as well as by way of the manifold political relations between Turkey and Western Europe, developments within the European diaspora have repercussions in Turkey, and vice versa. The relative ease with which Alevis in Germany are able to receive recognition as religion, and the possibility of independent Alevi religious instruction in public German schools,\textsuperscript{30} illustrates the extreme differences in the respective national discourses of secularism and religion in general, and Islam in particular. In the long run, it will be interesting to observe to which degree the respective adjustments to the national discourses of religion—other sociocultural, political, and economic factors notwithstanding—impact on the formation of different Alevi sensitivities in regard of religion, culture, and politics. Currently, it appears that the extreme differences in the Turkish and West European contexts for the development of Alevism are likely to further already strongly advanced processes of differentiation within Alevism along linguistic/ethnic, political/ideological, and religious/cultural lines. While this differentiation, which historically has been part of the formation of Alevism at least since the 1960s, has already led to an array of fairly well institutionalized and competing “Alevi” formations, there might be better chances for a rapprochement between them if the political pressure from outside were to soften. One notable difference between the Alevi movements in Germany and Turkey is that in the former Alevis appear to be much more homogeneous and less divided along political and religious lines than in the latter. The relatively strong ideological differentiation of Alevism in Turkey can at least partially be attributed

\textsuperscript{29} I found myself several times in the ambivalent position of being consulted on matters of Alevi faith by Alevis themselves. On the other side—less ambivalent but more troublesome—I have also been accused of providing scholarly legitimacy for the Alevis’ endeavor to define Alevism as religion (Gönültaş 2003).

\textsuperscript{30} In Turkey, such a step seems very unlikely to be realized in the near future. In October 2007 and March 2008, the European Court for Human Rights and the Turkish Supreme Court, respectively, ruled in favor of Alevi claimants who accused the mandatory religion education in public schools to be in fact—despite claims to the contrary—biased in favor of Sunni Islam (Radikal 2008). While the Ministry of Education, responsible for the courses on “Religious Culture and Ethics,” points out increased incorporation of Alevi topics into the curricula and course books, this inclusion is, as critics maintain, still selective and more assimilationist than emancipatory (an argument made, for example, by Alevi activist-academic Ali Yaman in the TV talk show “Enine Boyuna,” TRT1, 14 March 2008). It seems unlikely that the recent judicial decisions will in fact have major consequences in the short run.
to the extreme constraints Alevis face in the Turkish public sphere, characterized by severe ideological fault lines, which further competition for limited political and economic resources. However, the logic of the situation would change in case Turkish politics were to follow up on its promises regarding further political liberalization so strongly pushed for by the EU in the context of EU–Turkey membership negotiations. The trend toward differentiation of Alevi discourses in Turkey might then, if probably not be reversed, at least loose momentum.

CONCLUSION

Roughly two decades ago, Alevis initiated a revival of Alevism, which has since led to new organizational formations (Alevi associations and umbrella organizations) and institutions (as, e.g., the modern dede) as well as attempts to standardize beliefs and rituals. The objectification of Alevism, resulting from the appropriation of post-1980 languages of religious authenticity in Turkey and the opportunities offered by the status of “religious community” in Germany, takes on increasingly specific religious forms. Some of the thusly remodeled formations of Alevism distinguish between lay members and religious specialists, conceptualize beliefs and practices, and might even gradually establish an explicit Alevi theology—as already demanded by some Alevi voices (Bahadir 2003: viii). All of this is not to say that traditional Alevism lacked religious features. But now Alevis are for the very first time engaging in a systemic reconstruction of their tradition along the lines of an implicit world religion model, and define belief, practice, philosophy, ethics, and culture of Alevism within the grammar of the secular–religious—an approach alien to traditional Alevi practice and worldview and in line with the politics of the modern nation-state. Such new formations of Alevism are in line with a religion discourse that gives preference to objectified universality as opposed to a plurality of valid local interpretations as characteristic of traditional Alevism. Most significantly, the objectification process has consequences for the character of Alevism as a communal culture. The reformulation of Alevism as a universal religion, which aligns itself with humanist ideals, the public exposure of traditionally secret rites and beliefs, and its new accessibility undermine traditional boundaries and affiliations based on kinship and lineage and replace them by chosen allegiances based on

31 Traditional Alevi worldview and ethics are grounded in the mystical distinction between the inner (batin) and the outer (zahir), which cannot be equated with binary constructions such as sacred/profane, or religious/secular (Dressler 2003).
class, ideological preferences (political, religious, ethnic), and convenience. As for the latter, in noticeable contrast to the politics of Alevi activists and pressure groups, average individual Alevis often display highly eclectic and situational approaches toward Alevi symbols and narratives, reflecting a trend toward an individualization of Alevi subjectivities. On the level of Alevi high-politics, however, the debate over Alevism is loaded with singularizing ideological ideas, which deepen the fissures between rival Alevi currents. While all Alevi activists are concerned with strengthening the public voice of Alevism, their approaches differ widely. The traditionalist Alevis fear that changes in the Alevi tradition and its institutions might in the end only accelerate its dissolution, while reformist Alevis see the formulation of Alevism as a prerequisite for its survival.

As I have tried to show, the ongoing objectification of Alevism in religious terms is embedded in complex economic, social, and political processes. Urbanization and the adaptation of Kemalist and socialist worldviews led to a dramatic dismantling of traditional Alevi practices in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Recent reformulations of Alevism, whether framed religiously or not, are historically and logically connected to the secularization of traditional Alevism, and relate strongly and programmatically to Turkish nationalism and laicism—positively or negatively. Within the parameters of this discourse, most reformulations of Alevism are negotiated in a grammar and language, which clearly distinguishes between religious and secular spheres and practices. This is what I refer to as Alevi religionizing.

The comparison between Turkey and Germany exemplifies how the modes of Alevi religionizing depend on local identity and religion politics, and the opportunity spaces it provides. While the German context provides Alevis with the freedom to conceptualize Alevism even outside of an Islamic framework, Alevis in Turkey face strong pressure to remain within the Turkish-Islamic discourse if they want to advance their case. In either context, religion functions as a matrix against which a distinct Alevi identity is established, and this is true even for those Alevis who reject the religious framing of Alevism and prefer to imagine Alevism as a culture, social practice, or philosophical worldview. The debates on Alevism circle around questions of origin and essence, and are articulated through a language which is based on the dichotomy of the secular-religious. In that sense, they are radically modernist. While critical discourse on religion has reached its post-secular turn as an act of emancipation from the modernist paradigm, the case of Alevism’s religionization is a compelling example for the continuous thriving of modernist semantics in public discourses on religion.
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