

TOWARDS REGIONAL PEACE

Civic Approaches to Conflicts

Helsinki Citizens' Assembly

Towards Regional Peace Civic Approaches to Conflicts

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Towards Regional Peace – Booklet Series

“No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.” Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom

Does a society where everyone lives in peace only exist in utopia? Whenever we mention peace, we find ourselves talking about conflict and wars. It appears that all talk about peace without forgiveness and confrontation is merely daydreaming. What keeps our quest for establishing and nurturing peace is the great number of people working for it...All work done for mutual support and solidarity among this cohort and promotion of the causes is extremely valuable.

The Helsinki Citizens Assembly has been organising meetings among academics, activists, students and local government representatives within the framework of the Black Sea Regional Peace Project. We published booklets under the heading “Towards Regional Peace” comprising of meeting minutes and articles at the end of every year.

At the end of 2011, we published “Social Booklets and Urban Transformation”, “Turkey’s Autonomy Issue”, “Military - Civilian Relations in Turkey”. In 2012 we tackled two problematic areas, the Kurdish issue and the Turkish - Armenian peace process with the “Citizenship in Turkey: Identities, Rights and Conflicts”. The main focus of our 2013 meetings were debates on how civil society initiatives can have a say in peace-conflict processes. This publication includes articles by Emine Uçak, Nil Mutluer, Cafer Solgun, Yetvart Danzikyan, Kuban Kural and Yiğit Aksakoğlu. All previous booklets are accessible through our website: <http://www.hyd.org.tr/>

Our meetings which we hope will contribute to the democratisation process of Turkey had two main targets; opening channels of dialogue to conflicting opinions and contributing to the argument of living together...This international project supported by the Crisis Management Initiatives / CMI since 2010 came to an end in 2013. We know that every single encounter and acquaintance made through these meetings is extremely valuable. We hope to continue the cooperation in the coming years and create new ways of sharing our experience.

Although the political agenda is disillusioning from time to time, the peaceful approach is the only viable one. We hope that our efforts will contribute to social peace and hereby thank all those who support us with their ideas, suggestions and criticism.

Helsinki Citizens Assembly

“Yes to the Resolution”

Meeting minutes Emel Kurma talked about what has been done within the hCa regarding the “Kurdish issue”. The projects undertaken in 2013 were based on the meetings held in the previous year. The peace talks between the parties could benefit highly from NGO support. Ferhat Kentel of the hCa commented on the vitality of the talks between İmralı and the government and said that important steps were already taken for peace and that even though the future was still an unknown, active participation was by all means much better than being a passive spectator. He added that a peace campaign in support of those who carry out the negotiations would be really powerful against those trying to hinder the process.

March 29th, 2013
Helsinki Citizens Assembly
İstanbul

The participants took the floor after the opening speeches. Opinions were expressed and the basis, possibilities and framework of a “peace campaign” in line with the expectations, anxieties etc. of the Sunni Turkish majority was discussed.

- Kurds want peace and voice it at every opportunity, even at their funerals. The other party, namely the state, is represented by the “peace process”. But the Turkish side has not, as of yet, said that they want peace, loud and clear. And this is exactly what we need. A lot of people are worried that the process might not work. As far as we can tell, the PM is testing the waters. The public is unsure too. NGOs should support those who carry out the process. We should tell the government that we want peace, we support them and that they should not worry. Of course ten thousand people will not be effective. Remember how there was an unexpectedly huge crowd at Hrant Dink’s funeral? It was as if this crowd was a turning point. I am talking about such a movement/campaign of the masses. How can we do this? We can contact the associations for the families of the martyrs (i.e. the families of the soldiers killed in the Kurdish conflict t.n.) We can get celebrities to give peace messages; such messages are welcomed by people, they are effective. We can work on the perseverance and

dissemination of this. For example, artists can accentuate peace with single but striking sentences on TV. We should organize journalists, academics and artists.

- We could organize a big march to support the peace process. Like the ones in the Catalan Region or the Bask one. What can we do get one million people to march? There isn't a massive public reaction against İmralı, I think there is public acceptance.

- If you remember, the biggest danger at the beginning of the nineties was that the society retired to its own ethnic identities and people got emotionally disconnected. We need to fix this. We need to revive the social desire to live together. Organising visits between families who do not know one another would be an idea. I think this will be much more effective than mass protests, sweeter and warmer too.

- Rather than mobilizing the activists already working on the subject, we should aim to bring civilians together and publicize these visits in the media. Ordinary people could participate and eventually take responsibility.

- An example is having 40 doctors from the west visit Kurdish cities and meet up with Kurdish doctors and have a debate.

- The Civilian Solidarity Movement has been doing this with 35 Anatolian organisations since 2006. The slogan for our project had been "volunteers hand in hand". We visited Adana and Kayseri with participants from other cities and had Ramadan tents. We had a scholarship project for students who wanted to continue their education. These interstate activities are very expensive. In the course of that project we had founded the "East and West Brotherhood Project". Last year, 30 representatives from Anatolia visited 7-8

cities...There was also the convoy Project. We could revisit that one as well.

- It is of course meaningful to create opportunities for more interaction among ordinary people, but I suggest that we organise an activity aiming at the two sides of conflict.

- When the US attacked Iraq there were a few major demonstrations. After the demonstrations in Istanbul and Ankara, people started getting mobilised in Anatolia. The youth in Antalya opened a "no war" banner in the sea. Organising a major rally in Istanbul is a good idea because of its possible ramifications.

- Let's work on a protest rally of hundreds of thousands of people. This will be a show down and is really important but what I am saying is that the activities nurturing the capillaries of social reconciliation are meaningful as well.

- A major rally/campaign might make it difficult for the government to take a back step in the peace process. Such a massive support will give the sides the moral high ground.

- For something to be strong, you need it to be natural. I don't see any intrinsic desire for this in society. Some are happy with the process some rather dubious. We need a psychology of peace in society. We can only gather such a crowd with AKP support.

- We can say that we want peace here and now, instead of trying to solve the social problem. Turks don't have to love Kurds and vice versa. But they have to get to know one another. The main problem is being able to live together as equal citizens. Long term steps for peace will solve many issues. We should primarily say "we want peace and an immediate ceasefire".

-The Peace Initiative said “No to War in Iraq” in 2002 and it worked. We can now organise a peace campaign. A symbol could be used, or maybe not, it is not crucial. One person can get up and say “I want peace” and use the logo. Then the logo could become more widespread. Let’s organise protests in many cities, they don’t need to be political. Just saying “we want peace” should be enough.

P.S.

In 2002, the “Peace Initiative” said that military intervention in Iraq would be sheer madness and it would cause huge destruction in the region and that US pressure on Turkey’s participation in war, aiming at maximising its regional interest should be resisted. It was not alone. All forces, organisations, policies saying “No to War in Iraq” were united. The unfairness and the drastic ramifications of this war was promoted with protest rallies, petitions, articles, vignettes, visits to the Turkish parliament and individual MPs and local meetings Opinion polls showed that 97% of the population was against the war and Turkey’s involvement was stopped with the refusal of the over the border permit on March 1st 2003. This was the victory of pacifists from all over the country, especially that of pacifists without the “but”. Oya Baydar, T24-10.10.2012

- These days, people communicate through symbols all over the world. One of these used in a campaign was that of a “key”, wishing that the key would open our hearts, our houses to one another. To maximise the impact of our campaign, we have to create it like an ad and aim for a civilian union free from affiliation with any of the political parties.

- The times we live in are riskier than ever. Everyone is worried. There are two sides

and we talk about what these sides say to one another but we do not know what their demands or thoughts actually are. An all-inclusive structure should be formed. For example there is the Eastern Brotherhood Platform, which expressed its views about the peace process but there is no practical component. It cannot transform itself into an organised structure. NGOs are not seen as vessels of pressure. People have invested a great deal of hope in peace, but I don’t think there is an initiative to deal with mistakes when necessary.

- It is obvious that the main actors do go ahead with the peace process. The impression we get from the central media however is that brakes are applied. This is why steps to ensure progress, especially those from the civil society are extremely valuable.

- I think a mass campaign and smaller activities could be run together. It will take time to organise a sizeable campaign anyway. The “No War” campaign took two years to put together. The developments of the day, like the Israeli Palestinian peace talks had an impact on the campaign. The resolution process in Turkey is being affected by so many events. Polls indicate a difference in the approach to the process between now and the time of the Habur incident. Everyone got really anxious before the funeral of the three female PKK members. All the messages conveyed there accentuated peace.

- There are many options regarding activities. An example is the SMSs the IHH sent to MPs reading “This will be the last time you touch your children without blood on your hands” asking them to stop the war.

- The Human Rights Commission of the Turkish Parliament declared that the death

toll of this war was over 35 thousand. This is a devastating fact. We could organise a symbolic gathering, say at a stadium, maybe not 35 thousand people, but a lot of people wearing white, so people can see what we have lost.

- We will never create the desired impact if it's only the Turks, Kurds or the leftists who organise these activities. We need to add the voices of people who live in western Turkey. We should organise meetings in Western Anatolian cities.

- The funerals of the three Kurdish women in Diyarbakır was a crucial call for peace. The attitude of the Kurds, their calm, their symbolic white scarves were all remarkable. What we need now is a mass protest in western Turkey saying "We acknowledge your call for peace, we support it". This funeral has shown us that the message from the Kurdish side is clearly "We are determined and will not be provoked".

- Our main focus should be the period between the ceasefire and peace; we should say "keep the negotiations going, leave the guns aside". We should even have an emotional, romantic, non-political approach like "you should make peace for the sake of our children."

- I think that the government had taken an irrevocable step. This period is completely different to that of Habur. The government had, in a way, said that it accepted the PKK as the representative [of the Kurds]. If the peace process fails this will be Erdoğan's fault. Every back step from now on will have repercussion on the big cities. There was not a huge negative reaction to the peace talks. Even the MHP's reaction was less than expected. This process has international ramifications as well. The Middle East is in the process of reshaping. Changes here will by all means, effect the

Middle East. The main emphasis should be on a violence free Turkey.

- There was mention of meetings in Anatolia. Toplum Gönüllüleri Vakfı (Volunteers for Society) had been organising meetings in many cities of Anatolia for seven years. They are very experienced now. Having religious people as speakers at these meetings would have a great deal of impact. There are many meetings around, for example those organised by the Gülen community.

- The process could look as a technical issue for the government and the other parties. We should make sure that the negotiations are proceeding at another level...on a civilian level...We need celebrities for this. People believe in actors in TV series. It would be good to use symbols for effective communication. We should come up with a brand new, inclusive and simple slogan.

- All that is said here is fine, but we should define a tangible mission. Do we want to run a campaign? Do we want to influence the government? Or the PKK? We have to have an organ to run the show. Who are these people? Who is the secretariat? We need a group working on communication strategy and another one to organise things. We can include regional actors.

- What mobilizes people is their emotions, not their minds. We react when something touches our heart, our conscience. This is why we have to access people's consciences, maybe using a colour, a symbol. We should not just use mainstream media but communicate through the internet, posters and the radio.

- The Word "peace" only has meaning among the leftists in Turkey. This is why we should think hard about our words and symbols.

What I suggest is a peace forum before summer. We could organise a big rally in the month of peace day.

- Let's say that the organisation and the government did come to an agreement. What will become of the hatred? Campaigns, marches could heal hatred.

- There is a road map issued by the parties and it is out but it does not really go the whole way. It basically ends at the ceasefire, there is no mention of recognition of the Kurdish people. A new definition is required at certain stages of the process but what about its aftermath? What we should say is that we, the people of Turkey want peace without prioritising any single identity. This is what the Kurdish people mean when they talk about dignified peace and emphasise that their demands will not harm Turkey in any way. It appears that there won't be a long period of time between the stages, by the look of things, there will be a ceasefire in April-May. We need to convey the message "We had enough, solve this problem" to the government as the silent majority living in this country and this can be done by people taking to the streets. Not with a congress, a forum or a meeting. These events take place everywhere all the time anyway. We should do something to inject the government with power and courage. We could use prominent people. We should mobilise the masses with the help of a few hundred people. Just a road

map will not be enough; we should support the process, the government, inject them with courage. This would be a major contribution to peace.

- The fighting parties are soldiers in uniforms and guerrillas in uniforms. I was never on bad terms with the Kurds, why should I make peace with them? What needs to be said is that hands should be off triggers. The PKK is not the whole story, a treaty accepted by them is not necessarily accepted by the guerrilla who had been fighting in their mountains for 30 years. Abdullah Öcalan does not speak for all the Kurds. A treaty signed by him will not necessarily be recognised by all the Kurds. What we want is a farewell to arms. This step should precede all others. This will resonate with the majority and increase the number of those who believe in peace.

- The government had made a crucial statement. The AKP base is unanimously pro peace but both Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms are on the rise and I fear that in case of failure, the price to pay will be very high.

- We should have a mixed group comprising of people from all walks of life, of different segments of the political spectrum in the establishment of a language for communication.

“The Kurdish Issue: Step by Step Towards the Peace Process ...”

Meeting minutes The meeting started with a presentation by Esra Güçlüer.

April 6th, 2013
Helsinki Citizens Assembly
İstanbul

Since 2002, The Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly has been conducting various studies which will contribute substantially to the formation of a civil platform working towards the transformation and resolution of ethno-political studies, within the scope of Karadeniz Peace Network supported by Crisis Management Initiatives.

In 2012-13, we picked two issues which are of key importance to Turkey’s democratization process. We allocated our meetings to the Kurdish issue with its extensive historical background, which has been overtaking the agenda for the last fifteen years, and the Turkish-Armenian peace, anticipated for a hundred years.

The most effective way of transforming prejudices against these two conflicts depends on supporting civil cooperation and confrontation between the parties. The main mission of the meetings was to discuss the ways to expose the majority of the population to different ideas and emotions. Another goal was to contribute to the arguments about the culture of living together, which could be achieved in our perspective through social negotiation.

“The Kurdish issue” has been approached under a myriad of headings by the hCa and other NGOs. There are many different perspectives; “identity issue”, “Turkey’s democratisation and human rights issue”, the “nation state building process and ethnic nationalism”, “international political relations” to name a few.

According to the TESEV report, not only the Kurdish participants but many non-Kurdish participants defining themselves as democrats, liberals, socialists and Islamists agree that what lies behind

the Kurdish Issue is the long in the tooth state policies based on denial, destruction and assimilation. Moreover, these analyses had not been challenged substantially by the more nationalistic participants who view the issue as a tool for manipulation by foreign powers.¹

“The Opening” declared to be the beginning of the resolution process in the Kurdish issue had started on the 29th of July 29, 2009 under the leadership of the Minister of the Interior, Mr Beşir Atalay at the Police Academy in Ankara at a meeting of fifteen intellectuals, journalists and academics. Initially named “the Kurdish Opening”, the initiative shortly acquired the name “democratic opening”. Later on the PM Tayyip Erdoğan preferred the name “the National Unity and Reconciliation Project”. The zenith of the process widely known as “the opening” had been the entry into Turkey through the Habur border crossing of a group of 34, 26 from the Iraqi refugee camp Mahmur, 8 from Kandil including some women and 4 children. The return of these 34 people, 8 of which were armed PKK members, after a brief investigation at the border promoted a great deal of optimism that the opening would accomplish its mission to lay down arms. However when the group was taken from Habur to Diyarbakır on an open-top bus, accompanied by the ecstatic support of tens of thousands of people, the furore caused in Turkish political life and the strong reaction by some parts of the society caused the “opening” to come to a halt just when it was thought to have reached its zenith.²

Another vital turning point took place in 2011. An audio recording was published on the Dicle Agency Website. The file, taken off after a few hours comprised of the recordings of a meeting which had taken place in Oslo, the capital of Norway, the coordinator of the peace talks between the Turkish state and the KCK (Group of Communities in Kurdistan). The claim was that Mr Hakan Fidan the head of the Turkish National Intelligence Agency held meetings with both Mr Öcalan the leader of the PKK and other PKK representatives under instruction from the PM, as “special representative”. After the news became public, the participants in the meeting were called to bear testimony. It was claimed that the prosecutor would question the role of MIT (National Intelligence Agency) in the organisation of the KCK and what went on in the Oslo negotiations. The MIT Law was changed in Parliament overnight on the 25th of February, Mr Fidan and other MIT members would now require a special permission from the PM to testify. So, they did not testify.³

The Committee of Wise Men, formed specifically to contribute to the Peace Process, held meetings with the general public and NGOs all over Turkey in 2013. The report of their southeast group mentioned that the Oslo process was instrumental in normalising the negotiations between the state and the PKK and introduced the parties to one another so they could get acquainted with the demands of the opposite side. The report went “The

[1] Yılmaz Ensaroğlu, Dilek Kurban :Kürtler Ne Kadar Haklı?:Türkiye'nin Batısı Kürt Sorunu'na bakıyor, (How Right are the Kurds, how does western Turkey view the Kurdish issue)

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[2] Cengiz Çandar, Dağdan İniş - PKK Nasıl Silah Bırakır?Kürt Sorunu'nun Şiddetten Arındırılması- TESEV raporu-2011 (Coming Down the Mountain-How Will the PKK Bid Farewell to Arms?Taking Violence out of the Kurdish Issue-TESEV report-2011)

[3] <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/140937-oslo-gorushmeleri-nedir>

peace/resolution process we are going through now is not actually brand new. It is based on the experience and background provided by the Oslo process. A while after the Oslo process was hindered, a recording of one of the meetings were on the internet, exposing the state taking the PKK and Öcalan as direct addresses. There was not an awful lot of reaction when all of this became public knowledge, however, there were quite a few people within the state apparatus, uncomfortable with these meetings. On the 7th of February 2012, there was an attempt to take the Head of the MIT (in charge of the Oslo meetings and the old administration of the organisation), into custody.” Another crucial event was the killing of three female PKK members in Paris in January 2103. Their funeral was a milestone in the process. “A funeral was organised in Diyarbakır for Sakine Cansız, Leyla Söylemez and Fidan Güngör. Messages of peace and tranquillity were issued at the funeral attended by thousands. Ahmet Türk said “Peace is based on mutual respect. Peace is formed by the peoples getting to know one another. Peace requires justice and equality.” at his speech.⁴

Permanent peace for Kurds requires the reorganisation of the political and legal systems on the basis of freedom and equality. And this obviously calls for a substantial social consensus where the majority of the society subscribes to the process.

After the presentation, hCa member Ali Bayramoğlu talked about the activities of the Committee of Wise Men Marmara Region branch and answered questions.

- I didn't warm to the idea when I was first

offered a spot in the Committee of Wise Men (CWM). I eventually said yes due to the feeling of responsibility although I had many reservations. What the government probably expected from us was a peace treaty. What we have at the end of this journey is the reactions and opinions on the current peace process. We were subjected to questions along the line of “Who are you then, do you work for the US?” frequently during our meetings. The main agenda of the meetings was peace and politics. We cannot deny that the Kurdish issue is on everyone's agenda with its insecurities and problems. The CWM meetings were a real eye opener both for the people and the committee members. The transformation of Hülya Koçyiğit from the Marmara group is very interesting. She had an interview in Bursa yesterday saying “I have been among crowds from very early ages, but it is only now that I notice injustice and inequality. They used to throw us roses in the past, now it's all mud.” As the Marmara-Thrace group of the CWM we have already been to Kocaeli, Bursa, Sakarya and Bandırma, we will be visiting Edirne and Kırklareli. There is a fast transition from combat to peace and this calls for social confidence as well as political. We are looking at identities, centres of victimisation. We encounter questions like “Will this end up badly?” “Could we even trust Tayyip Erdoğan?” It is quite evident that there is a lack of transparency...The AKP has a policy of giving people roles and tasks...I have a feeling that our reports will be more useful for us than the AKP. The dynamics of our work area are rather different. The most important items are the need for trust and social legitimacy. On the other hand there is an opening process in politics and people are far from satisfied. Both the Turkish and the Kurdish sides are in

[4] <http://www.agos.com.tr/haber.php?seo=binlerce-kisinin-katildigi-cenaze-torende-baris-mesajlari-yukseldi&haberid=4043> Messages of peace at the funeral attended by thousands

power, there is dual power where one side is looking for legitimacy and the other is looking into widening the political arena. There is lack of information on how the constitution will be formed. Even if there is consensus with Öcalan on leadership, a referendum will still be required.

It is hard to change the discourse and attitudes towards the PKK which had been around for so many years. An abstract demand for peace is everywhere, 70% of Thrace want peace for example. I always come back from fieldwork with very positive feelings. On the other hand there is the ingenuity of the support of the right wing and conservatives. They do not oppose the process itself but they have a totalitarian outlook at every stage. In Thrace on the other hand, there are issues of ownership and belonging. ..This type of nationalism is very different to those who promote violence. This is a segment which wants to preserve its Turkishness, but thinks very differently to the MHP. Once this process is completed, the end result will be wonderful. There will of course be obstacles and opponents but we cannot deny the real optimism about peace. Peace needs to be transformed in Turkey and then the nationalistic segments. I wish there was a left wing party working for this and speeding up the process.

- When you met the PM in Dolmabahçe as part of the Committee of Wise Men, did you have any questions as to how you were supposed to convey the process to the people, what you would mention? Are you making an analysis among different groups? Are there positive or negative suggestions from the participants?

- The Öcalan issue is rather sensitive, the

symbolism is really strong, the language and perception are there as sediments. There are no tangible proposals. We feel that all the details need to be put on paper. We take into account the views of different groups and identities. I personally do not think that Tayyip Erdoğan will take these reports into consideration. At this point, as a group of 8-9, we will tell the PM that we need a long project, maybe we can pen a report which can be put on the web. There were those who asked the question “What exactly is our duty within such a group?” and Tayyip Erdoğan did not respond to these questions in any way. All he said was “Let the peace process mature in your hands”. Our problem is that we have a party here and its leader is Recep Tayyip Erdoğan...There are good things and others which are not good at all. He kneads the dough in such a way that the dough sometimes doesn't take and when we say this is not the way to do it, we are seen as abject opponents. The more influence we have on this behaviour pattern, the better it is.

- It is significant that something which had been banned for years is now open for discussion. The whole process is extremely meaningful in the light of what people had been through until now. It needs to be supported. We have enormous gaps in Turkish democracy. If we have a look at the recent years, we can easily say that there is no aspect of the Kurdish issue free from debate. The fact that this issue is debatable now clears space for other issues.

-This year, 23rd of April, Children's Day and National Sovereignty Day has been the public holiday with the fewest flags in Izmir. I have a feeling the peace process might have something to do with this.

In the second part of the meeting, journalist

Balçıçek İlter shared the declaration prepared by the “Yes to the Resolution Coalition” with the members of the press and the participants.

Our times will make history in terms of the Kurdish issue. Crucial steps are taken. The door for a resolution is genuinely ajar for the first time ever. We find the resolution process vital. We believe that every step towards a resolution will prove that the doom and gloom created in these lands by death is not our destiny. We are not asking who would benefit from an end to armed combat and the blossoming dialogue process. An end to conflict would primarily mean that young people can live. It would mean an end to deaths.

An end to death...This is the most crucial point.

The sides have started talking to one another...This is the most crucial point. This is why we support the steps taken towards a resolution and say “No, we, the millions living in this country are pro peace” to those who oppose the process. We are mobilising millions supporting the resolution and aiming to be their voice. Supporting the peaceful resolution of this issue is our debt to humanity for the building of the common future of all people and identities.

WE SAY YES TO THE RESOLUTION!

After reading of the declaration, some participants said that the ‘Yes to the Resolution Coalition’ had many activists and NGOs from different segments of society and that they aimed at strengthening the support for peace and that the support for the resolution process should be reflected onto the streets.

Lawyer Gülden Sönmez of the IHH, said that peace was the best thing for everyone on planet earth and that for the first time ever, “we were so close to it”. She added that they planned a big march on the 26th of May in Istanbul and another one on the 5th of May on Istiklal.

PS: The Gezi Park incidents which started in Istanbul in June and eventually spread to many other places in the country affected the scheduled campaign activities of the “Yes to the Resolution” meetings.

Police violence during the incidents was noteworthy. The protests spread to Ankara, İzmir and many other places in Turkey after their start in Istanbul. Human rights organisations focused on people’s right to meetings and freedom of expressions during this period.

The Role of Civil Society in Social Peace and the Judiciary

Meeting minutes

May 18th, 2013
Burgazada-İstanbul



Since 2010, Helsinki Citizens Assembly had been organising meetings on current affairs aiming to get in depth insights into problems and look for solution proposals under the title “Civilian Solutions to Conflicts”.

We have continued to work on the Armenian issue. We aim to create a basis for the calm and objective debate on the Armenian Genocide whose centenary is fast approaching. Another mission is to facilitate dialogue and cooperation between the communities.

The first part of the meeting is allocated to an exchange of ideas and knowledge on the potential cooperation among NGOs. The second part will focus on the two events which left crucial marks on the Turkish public opinion. The fair proceeding of the judicial processes of these trials are crucial in the maintenance of social peace.

Fethiye Çetin, one of the attorneys of the Hrant Dink case said at an interview: "Losing Hrant Dink meant losing the opportunity to heal and cleanse ourselves, losing our dreams of living in a country which confronted its past and made peace with it. Once this case is solved, we will shed the shame and burden of the past, grieve together and walk towards a future where we can laugh wholeheartedly."

We are aware that the construction of peace both socially and between communities takes a lot of time and effort.

The meeting progressed with the participants taking the floor:

- A group of NGOs active in Turkey and Armenia are working on a project aiming to strengthen the relations between the EU and neighbouring countries and communities as well as increasing prosperity, security and stability in the region. The project is to be financed by the "European Neighbourhood Policy" of the EU. hCa is part of this. We are planning to organise two summer camps where we hope to create opportunities to teachers in Turkey and Armenia to share their problems and conflict resolution skills. One of these summer schools will take place in Armenia, the other in Turkey. We wanted to work on a tangible project nurturing intercommunity relations.

- Projects involving different professionals and especially teachers are of course valuable. However, they are drops in the ocean given the size of the problem we call the 'Armenian issue'. We need to reach the majority of the Turkish population. I can think of a few projects targeting many people. We could make short, low budget documentaries and put segments on YouTube. We have writers,

screenwriters who would be willing to help.

- The Turkish government's "resolution process" for the Kurdish issue is a soft policy. They could adopt a policy to normalise Turkish-Armenian relations. The civil society is ready to initiate and support such a process. You know that the Committee of Wise Men were formed during the resolution process of the Kurdish issue. We could contact these people and ask them to apply the same format of meetings to the Armenian issue.

- The opponents of the April commemoration seem to promote a different historical event every year. This year it was the Hodjali Massacre. The NGOs working on the Armenian issue should be braver and do much more.

- I don't think that organising a genocide commemoration in Taksim Square will contribute to the normalisation process.

- The biggest fear of the state is genocide recognition by the US and its ramifications. The second issue is the legal aspect and this is beyond the scope of NGOs. If we want to include the general public in the talk about the issue, we could start with children. We need more attention to authors like Halide Edip who lived through those times. We could show different points of views on historical events by focusing on people like her.

The second half of the meeting comprised of an update of the Zirve Publishing case by its attorneys Murat Dinçer and Erdal Doğan and an insight into its relationship with the Hrant Dink case.

- The Zirve Publishing case has been going on for five years. We always believed that these

murders were not committed just by five people and that there were others involved. These people need to be exposed. There was İlker Çınar, a 'secret witness' who came forward and confessed that they had been involved with the gendarme commander shot in Malatya. This secret witness illegally had serious training on Christianity at the general staff, became a priest in Tarsus and got into anti-Christian campaigning based on the training he received. İlker Çınar says he was manipulated into thinking that he was working for the state, where actually he was serving a gang. He talks about his relationship to TUSHAD (National Strategies and Operations Department of Turkey) and there is a new court case investigating this. İlker Çınar claims that the murder was the work of a TUSHAD unit. He adds that they prepared fake documents after the murder in order to manipulate the court case. These claims seemed to be weak at the beginning, they turned out to be quite tangible (with recordings, hard discs etc.) and the prosecuted had to accept some of the allegations. Their defence collapsed. Now, İlker Çınar will be interrogated and his statement will be taken. This person is both a suspect and a secret witness. The interrogation is scheduled to finish next week. This case is at a very crucial stage, it will shed light on the Hrant Dink and Ergenekon cases. We might get a glimpse of the big picture. This case also exposed 500 gendarme informants in Malatya only. We could say that the case is proceeding a bit better than the Hrant Dink case.

- What we essentially need is not that the culprits get the heaviest sentences, we need the truth.

- If the attorneys had not been following it closely, this case would have been done and

dusted three years ago. The general staff made three declarations about TUSHAD. They said it never existed, that it hadn't existed since 1999 and thirdly that foundation of such an organisation was never considered. Retired general under arrest for the Ergenekon Trial Hurşit Tolon, places a lot of emphasis on the case. The relationship between TUSHAD and the gendarme in Malatya is expected to be exposed and the Public Prosecutor Mustafa Bilgili will probably start another case. We came across a very interesting piece of information while we were following this trial: 22 different universities have research departments on the Armenian way of life and culture.

- Fatih Hilmioğlu, yet another secret witness, says that the murder was offered to him first but he refused.

- If the information about TUSHAD is out in the open in this trial, this will have a direct effect on the Hrant Dink trial. On the other hand, there might be changes to the commission. The prosecutor might start a new trial within the Dink case with the new evidence. If he doesn't, then the verdict of the Penal Department No.9 of the Supreme Court could be valid. As you know we have the Anti-Terrorism Law and this organisation needs to be trialled within this law.

- Our only hope in the Hrant Dink trial is that the prosecutor Muammer Aktaş does his job and considers the information regarding Zirve Publishing and TUSHAD. These two cases should merge.

- All these issues I have with Malatya point to the Turkish Armed Forces, how come then the government does not pursue the leads? There are all these links between Ergenekon and the

Malatya trials, but everything is clogged up when it is the Hrant Dink trial. Is this because the courts handling them are different?

- In Hrant's case, this structure got interlocked and those in charge of the case were masters of manipulation. As the hearings started, informants' letters started flowing in and they never stopped...This structure got interlocked around Hrant's identity as well. The reasons behind it are many.

- If both Hrant's murder and Zirve are the crimes of the same organisation, we could easily say that at Hrant's trial the police is at the forefront and the gendarme at the background. The Zirve trial has the gendarme on the forefront and the police at the background.

- They treated the police and the gendarme the same at the Hrant Dink murder but I believe this is wrong. The police was extremely negligent. We believe that General Hurşit

Tolon and some members of the police force were involved in the Hrant Dink trial.

For media coverage of the cases:

The Dink trial on its way to becoming another Zirve http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/dink_davasi_zirve_yolunda-1105338

The lawyers talk about the hardship they face at the Dink and Malatya trials <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/azinliklar/106121-avukatlar-dink-ve-malatya-davalarindaki-guclukleri-gazetecilere-anlatti>

The court asked MIT for the documentation on the Dink murder <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/ifade-ozgurlugu/144025-mahkeme-mit-ten-dink-cinayeti-belgelerini-istedi>

The attorneys for the Zirve Massacre asked Ergenekon prosecutors for some attention <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/119541-zirve-katliami-avukatlari-ergenekon-savcilarinda-ilgi-istedi>

The Transformative Influence of Official Human Rights Institutions on Social Conflict

Meeting minutes

October 1st, 2013
Helsinki Citizens Assembly
İstanbul



In the first part of the meeting, one of its members, Fatma Benli provided information on TIHK (Human Rights Institute of Turkey)

- Human Rights Institute of Turkey (TIHK) was founded in 2012 based on law no.6332. Its chair is Dr. Hikmet Tülen, the spokesperson of the Constitutional Court. Seven of its eleven members are chosen by

the cabinet, two by the President, one by YÖK (Higher Education Institute) and one by the Bar. It is administratively and financially autonomous. Its members are Asst. Prof. Abdurrahman Eren of the Istanbul University Faculty of Law, lawyer Fatma Benli, Constitutional Court Spokesperson Dr. Hikmet Tülen, lecturer Yrd.Doç.Dr. Levent Korkut, businessman Ömer Cihad Vardan, retired

honorary Supreme Court member Selamet İlday, İstanbul Şehir University lecturer Prof. Dr. Serap Yazıcı, SETA Director of Law and Human Rights, Yılmaz Ensaroğlu, Trabzon Karadeniz Technical University Asst. Rector and Trabzon City Human Rights Commission member Prof. Dr. Yusuf Şevki Hakyemez, İstanbul Şehir University Lecturer Prof. Dr. Nihat Bulut, Artvin Bar President İzzet Varan. Unfortunately, the Human Rights Higher Commission had not been functioning properly. The idea was to come up with a different institution. The budget is allocated by the PM's Office but it is autonomous. At this point we are busy with the foundation phase, the structure and regulations. The city human rights councils are still operating via the governors' offices but we would like to establish a better functioning human rights system independent from the governors' offices. We are going to train assistant experts. We have legal permission to establish regional offices. These will make our activities more efficient. We hope to address issues of inmates as well. Remember the claims of breach in İzmir and Antalya. The city human rights council dealt with the one in İzmir and we went to Antalya. We prepared a more general report based on our findings. The separation of young inmates, and a change in the position of the prison prosecutor were some of our suggestions. We first pinpoint what's going on in our reports and then come up with more general suggestions. We are working on a report on what happened in Gezi. We all need to take lessons from there. Three, four months ago we started talking to all sides participating in Gezi. We have visited many NGOs. We received their applications and reports. We have also written to the ministries of Justice, Health and the Interior requesting information on the stages of prosecution but haven't got all our replies yet. Our aim is to avoid knee-jerk reactions to social events but

instead prepare detailed reports after talking to all the parties involved. We know that sometimes the reports prepared by NGOs are not considered. We are hoping that a report coming from the state apparatus itself might be more effective. We hope that our reports will function as bridges. A report might facilitate the establishment of standards for police intervention to public protests – especially the use of tear gas-. We would also like to work on the detentions following the protests. We have already contacted the bar, the Human Rights Association (IHD), THİV and Mazlumder. We will talk to TURSAB, TOHAV ve TMMOB as well. We have been discussing the Gezi Park events with a myriad of groups and interestingly saw similar evaluations. The first step is to clarify the issue so we can come up with suggestions for a solution. We cannot do this with a knee jerk reaction.

- The work to be done for rights should not be limited to lawyers. Psychologists, sociologists, investigative journalists should be included as well. Human rights is an interdisciplinary area. It is like a "new religion". So we cannot really expect practical steps from theologians. We need people who work on understanding society, those who produce real information. If it's just the lawyers talking, it all boils down to a debate on what is right and what is wrong. An institution like THİK needs a good discourse analyst. If there is news in the local papers about hate speech, we need sociologists, psychologists to evaluate it.

- Could the THİK intervene when non-Muslim communities or individuals have legal problems with the state?

- Of course. If there is more than one application and we pen a special report on the issue, we can be effective on the solution.

We can correspond with the institution violating rights and look for a solution.

The participants shared their own versions of Gezi Park events and the police violence they witnessed.

- We can evaluate the Gezi Park events under several subheadings all of which are problematic. Take the use of tear gas as an example. There are three verdicts by the European Human Rights Commission all of which provide good guidance and are important. The Ministry of the Interior has its own regulations as well. It was also on the agenda of the annual general meeting of Amnesty International but at present a mature international regulation does not exist. The gas canister acts like a bullet when shot by a rifle. The general rule is that it can only be thrown at a 45 degree angle since this prevents fatalities which could occur when the target is hit on the head. Under no condition you can throw it at a target. At the meeting at the bar, they showed us a photo of the damage caused by a gas canister which hit the fridge of a kiosk at Baro sokak off Istiklal. It was devastating. When thrown from too close it can be lethal. Berkin Elvan was hit on the head with a gas canister, he is still unconscious at hospital. Using a gas canister to disperse a crowd is very different to throwing gas canisters at a crowd with all your might. We witnessed the latter in Istanbul. During the events, a small crowd already dispersing was attacked with 100-150 gas canisters. The police were not trying to control groups or isolate exuberant ones. The police were there to destroy its opponents. The way they were organised, their gas use was as if they were operating as a front.

- The police violence at Gezi Park cannot be assessed properly without going a bit further back in time. Labour Day just before Gezi

Park is very important. What happened in ODTU needs attention too. On the 1st of May, a group of 50-60 was attacked with about 100 gas canisters. This is something I personally witnessed. The group had been extremely well behaved, they had not damaged any cars, shops or houses. The governor's office issued a declaration on the 1st of May saying that "Up to ten people can get together and issue a press release but Taksim Square is closed for mass protests." This went on after Labour Day. There is a demand for a press release nearly every day in Istanbul and these people were subjected to tear gas every day. So, the situation was quite tense prior to Gezi as well. These are also why Gezi Park events had taken place. There is an initiative called "Yes to the Process" comprising of people providing civilian support to the government, the hCa is among its components. The coalition was planning a big march supporting the process but these people did not know what to do. If they did it in Taksim and were gassed, they thought they would look like a marginal group, on the other hand if the police did not interfere, then there was the risk that they would look like government supporters. It was an internal debate of course but Taksim in those days was as tight as a drum.

- This is what I witnessed on Labour Day. I went down to Beşiktaş. A group tried to get up to Taksim with no success and it was now 3pm. All the roads coming down to Beşiktaş were cut off by the police. There was a group comprising of CHP, ÖDP and the feminists. The CHP had its bus there, they were playing music, and it was a big gathering. There was an announcement from the CHP bus "We are all off to Taksim, let's disperse". The crowd was dispersing. We were all walking down slowly and the police started using water cannons on us. I just could not believe it. I turned back to look at what was happening.

We were clearing away anyway and I was wondering why anyone would do this. Then I saw that they were also throwing tear gas. I had 5-6 just around where I was. Everyone panicked. They were trying to squeeze into the side streets and a stampede was very much likely. People could have gotten trampled over just like in the Labour Day of 1977. There were a few people who kept their cool and prevented a disaster. We got into a barber's shop. Everyone was devastated. They closed off the roads, had State of Emergency and perceived everyone as potential criminals. On top of that boats were not operating that day either and it was like a deprivation area. Those who tried to leave could not do so either.

- A very central area in the city was isolated and turned into a high security zone based on the security needs of the PM's Office. This divided the city in a way.

- The same extraordinary conditions were in place at the protest at Beşiktaş against the privatisation of the Kadıköy pier. People were invited to show up with their thermoses and tea. They went easy on the gas since it was rush hour but there was a huge amount of police and armed vehicles for intimidation. Beşiktaş is a town planner's nightmare at the moment. The Maritime Museum has been moved somewhere else and reopened but one of the roads leading there was closed, a public pier was sold to a hotel. The PM's Office is just next door. This is why there is always a lot of police around.

- "Çarşı", the fan club of the Beşiktaş sports club is in the area and tension will prevail as long as the PM's residence is there as well. The fans gather in Beşiktaş before every game and walk to the İnönü Stadium together. In the days between May Day and the Gezi Park events a major altercation took place because

of a game. İnönü Stadium was going to be demolished and the very last game was on that day. When a large group wanted to walk to the stadium the police interfered to protect the safety of the PM's residence. It was later found out that the PM was at the residence at the time. The police asked everyone to disperse and followed up in a really harsh manner.

- The police was very provocative during the events. They have been "kettling", closing off an area and containing the protesters inside. This is what they did at Taksim. They got everyone together nice and tight and then tear-gassed them. This technique is used by other countries in a somewhat different way; to protect a space or building. This was not the case at Gezi Park. Who were they protecting? What were they protecting? Why would anyone throw tear gas at people who are already clearing away: to extend the event!

- An interesting point from Gezi Park was that the police was ordered to withdraw after three days, but they used up all the tear gas before withdrawal. As a result of this, the group at Gezi was able to resist for longer than expected and the process extended. This was completely due to police behaviour. That group would have probably dispersed more easily within the first three days but people interlocked against the harsh police tactics. The group was heterogeneous by that time. It was an organic group resisting police violence; clearing away and going home would be contrary to social conscience. You wouldn't want to leave your fiercest political opponents face to face with the police. The fact that the authorities thought they would be able to dissipate the crowds by using violence shows that they have no idea about political conscience.

- Here is another example; we know about the police mindset but they made many

technical errors. The intervention that took place the day before the park was evacuated for example. If the police will ever be taken to court, that was the crime they should be accused of. There were no warnings whatsoever and they attacked on a day when Taksim was absolutely packed. A group had a meeting with the PM and Taksim Solidarity was holding a meeting on the day to decide what to do. There were policemen in front of the AKM building, there was a verbal altercation between them and a few youngsters. Someone said they were intervening while we were just standing there. We never expected it, nobody did much and people were just hanging out. There was nothing against the police either. The photos of the intervention are just unbelievable. I had to be taken to the infirmary. If people were not calm there would have been a stampede. Everyone wanted to turn around and run away it was raining tear gas. We all ran away worrying if we would be hit on the head. I don't know what happened at that little altercation but the police was attacking like there is no tomorrow.

- I feel that we should also have a look at what happened at Kadıköy after Gezi. There were cases of police provocation in Kadıköy. There were protests there simultaneously with Gezi Park but there was no tear gas. Once Gezi Park was closed the police went to Kadıköy and started violence. We overheard police conversations from the houses we took refuge in, some of them were recorded and shared on social media. They were making plans to catch people and finish them off. Nobody was attacking them but it was as if they were acting if there was an army against them.

- There were cases indicating the methods used by the police during the meetings of the Wise Men as well. Some of their meetings

were attacked. There too, the police did not function properly. MHP and TGB members would fill up the halls to the brim and the police would not say or do anything about it but would beat them up when they saw them outside. How do they get their orders? Their superiors say something like "Beat up all those holding flags". From then on everyone holding a flag, regardless of being violent are treated as criminals. The members of the Committee of Wise Men had interfered protecting the right of the protesters. Let me tell you what happened in Pendik. The BBP people had already filled up the hall and were abusing everyone else. The local governor, and chief of police are all in one room. The local governor asked the Chief of Police what he planned to do. He said everyone should go home, there wouldn't be a meeting. The local governor asked the police chief to do his job and protect the people's constitutional rights. We witnessed dialogues like this. This is how the state talks to the state.

- The hCa has a project called "New Tactics in Human Rights". They had someone working on police training in Russia talk about how he got into that field of work, it was really inspiring. He said that after Gorbachev, they started travelling to other countries and were able to make observations. He said he always asked police officers he met at town squares and streets "how they would define their job". In Spain they said they were there to protect the constitutional regime, or that the police assists the implementation of law. However the Russian police said they were there to fight criminals. He had prepared matrices with these questions and answers.

- Another example of police behaviour is what happened in Değirmendere which was really badly destroyed by the Marmara Earthquake. I bumped into a Belgian rescue officer at the

end of the third day we were working nonstop, without sleep. I suggested that he left his dog with me and found somewhere to sleep. Right behind us there was a policeman with a car. I asked him if he would give the Belgian guy a lift. He said "I am not from here, I won't be able to find it". He did not say this because he is evil, but he is not aware that his main job is to protect the citizens and their belongings. It's as if they are there to beat people up with a stick. I always wonder why the police are not given first aid and evacuation training. They were not able to protect a handful of Fenerbahçe supporters at a football game between Fenerbahçe and Trabzonspor. I realised during that game that the police in Turkey have no idea how to save lives.

- I saw this on TV last night. The police were doing an ID check on the Unkapamı Bridge and bumped into someone with arms. The guy pointed the gun at the policemen. The police had no idea what to do with the guy. The guy hit one of the police officers with his gun, got into his car and drove off and a police officer kicked the car in anger. Who does something so incompetent? In the meantime traffic flows, there are people around. Police's job should be to pinpoint real danger, assess it and isolate it. There is a lot of investment in the security sector. For example England is about to take a new step; they are thinking of privatising this sector since training policemen is very costly.

- Have you contacted the bar regarding the harassment under custody cases during the Gezi Park events?

- The harassment of Mücella Yapıcı of TMMOB at detention is not acceptable. They claimed that giving her a strip search was legal. There are other cases like this young girl being harassed in a bus. There are photos proving it. The police is using other venues

since there is a reaction to violence at police stations. The bus is a grey area, there is no record and it is not a crime scene or anything. They used many buses as prisons during Gezi. They put people in buses and took them for rides for 12 hours. All this is not acceptable and have to be reported.

- In Sultanbeyli, a police officer had beaten up a minibus driver mistaking him for an activist. The driver lost an eye and they threw this guy in fire. This is an obvious crime against humanity.

- Turkey has knee jerk reactions from the past. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to suppress any seeking of rights violently. There is not much of a difference between the past and the present in this respect. Their means are different but it's always the same knee jerk reaction. In the past there was batons, chains and bats and now they have tear gas. The police is there to get people. What are the criteria of employment as a police officer? Do these people go through psychological tests?

- What we found out during strategic mapping for an hCa project in 2006-2007 is that policemen can have counselling when they say that they are not feeling well. However all the officers and their superiors added "Which mummy's boy will say that?" None of them want to be labelled an incompetent softie. At that point we suggested that this was made routine practice. We suggested that they used the group therapy method used on the Brazilian police. We suggested they devised a way where this would not be seen as anyone's weakness.

- We haven't spoken to them yet but there is also a police union called Emniyet Sen. They had a press release about how many police officers committed suicide during the Gezi

events. The Police Headquarters have denied the information and we don't know what happened next. The police are at the top of the list in Turkish suicide statistics.

- The police violence at Gezi was not solely directed at potential criminals, but all civilians including the elderly, kids and tourists. They use means and methods targeting everyone. There is no discriminating criteria. The experts have to sit down and determine the discriminating criteria at these events. They cannot gas a whole city.

- It is impossible to understand the mentality behind police violence. They threw tear gas at the tube station and hospitals. There were three young men hiding at the Şişli Etfal Hospital. The police entered the hospital with their superintendents. The chief physician and the doctors tried to talk them into taking the boys without throwing tear gas into the hospital. The police rough handled a civilian who backed this suggestion. They got angry blaming the guy for attempting to teach them how to do their job. Some volunteers suggested they went and found these people but the police did not listen and the next thing you know the whole hospital was tear gassed. There is no explanation for this.

- Journalist Ahmet Şık was injured, Sırrı Süreyya Önder's shoulder was injured, Sezgin Tanrıkulu was in intensive care. The people thought that they should go and support the MPs.

- The official attitude is what blew up the initial events. I don't know what their strategy was but they ended up amplifying the events.

- They say that the violence was because of some intelligence they received but this does not make any sense, how can one justify

smothering everyone, houses, hospitals in tear gas.

- Gezi Park activists were civilians. They were only shouting out slogans, Molotovs were not used. None of us have witnessed it. They continuously said people were using Molotovs and that there was violence but we were there, this was not the case. Here is another interesting observation. There was a support police crew from Diyarbakır. Their attitude was completely different to the Istanbul police. They had worked in Diyarbakır, were in conflict and knew that they themselves could get hurt. They were much softer than the Istanbul police provoked by their superiors.

- The government said that the Gezi Park protesters were staging a coup and the police took this as a licence to harass women and use violence. They thought that it was OK to stop people from using their constitutional rights.

- The police could have easily stopped those who tried to throw Molotovs if they wanted to, if they listened to the intelligence they received.

- There was this new movement in Istanbul for a fortnight and the Molotovs were only seen three or four times. Such a low proportion cannot incriminate the whole movement. The Gezi movement was a civilian upheaval completely devoid of violence. Everyone needs to get this right.

- However, some vehicles were burnt during Gezi.

- The levels of violence were really low in comparison to the magnitude of the exploding anger. We cannot say that the activists at Gezi retorted to violence.

- So, taking away a major square in a big city from the public and preventing demonstrations and suppressing the resistance with violence is not considered violent in itself. Using police force to transform a public park to somewhere people can only visit as customers is not considered vandalism or violence, but a civilian resistance by thousands is considered violent because a few vehicles were burnt down. Confiscating public property with rules and regulations involves much more violence than burning down a bus. On top of that, the confiscation of the public space would be irrevocable. Vandalism is the bridge you build destroying a forest. It is the coast that is filled and destroyed. It is the finished forest. You cannot compare this to one off events like the burning down of a vehicle or the broken glass in a shop window.

- Let's remember the youth riots in the migrant suburbs in France. The streets were on fire for days. The police did not tear gas the whole city as they were trying to control those kids. You can have altercations during protests anywhere in the world. Police force should be proportionate.

- We have to look for the urban transformation behind Gezi too. It had a huge impact. The people at Gezi were not only leftist groups, there were many displaced people. Some came from suburbia and they were not at all

organised, they were there by themselves resisting at the barricades. They had nothing to do with the so called illegal leftist organisations. The organisations themselves were hesitant at the beginning, they stood back and tried to see what was going on. The perception of 'illegal organisation' is wrong. A group is publishing a magazine, it is OK not to like it, but why would you say it is illegal? At the end of the day, there was personal resistance at Gezi. We are actually talking about something organised groups could not have put together. Of course there were many groups there, it was heterogeneous crowd. There were Kemalists for example. There were groups with the Turkish flag on motorbikes. They are there at every Youth Day, Republic Day too. They would appear at every public holiday and that is that. It would be wrong to say that they had organised Gezi and that they were plotting a coup. Some people might have wanted a slice of the pie but it is wrong to read the whole event through them. Imagine 100 people at Gezi, similar to those sitting at this table, but they are invisible since they do not carry flags or banners. Then you notice two holding a flag and they get to symbolise the whole movement. They were high on visibility and low on effect.

- We should also clarify the verdict regarding Gezi Park.*

[*] The news piece on the verdict in Radikal: The bloodbath at Gezi Park caused by the silence of the courts http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/gezi_parkindaki_kanli_bilancoya_mahkemenin_sessizligi_neden_olmus-1140387 the laws on making and changing conservation plans state that the institution responsible for the 'making, arranging the making of, approving and changing of such plans' is the Cultural and Natural Heritage Preservation Board. The Natural Heritage Preservation Board had not received any applications about the trees in Gezi Park or other landscape specifications, neither had it expressed any views or approval.

The views or approval of the Beyoğlu Council had not been sought on the amendments to plans.

The pedestrian and vehicular traffic in the area should not be handled with the regional planning initiatives within 'İstanbul Metropolitan Integrity' but a transport master plan on a macro scale.

- If this was the verdict, why did all of this happen 20-25 days later?

- This is a question for the government not Taksim Solidarity.

- This question should be answered by who had taken the issue to court. Stay of execution was the verdict so the Gezi transformation plans should have been cancelled.

- The lawyer of Taksim Solidarity said that they had not issued a declaration since they did not receive the detailed ruling.

- At the end of the day, all these events could have been controlled much earlier, without reaching epic proportions. Is the governor of İstanbul responsible for this? Or the Police Chief? There is a very obvious mistake. The Lord Mayor could have easily explained what was going on when the bulldozers first entered the park. They announced three days later that they were working on the sidewalks.

- The ombudsman criticised the governor's office during Gezi saying that there was "a state of emergency in İstanbul". It was good

criticism but nobody cared, maybe because the ombudsman selection process was not based on social acceptance.

- Taksim Solidarity, a bit more experienced in the area of organisation than the other groups was not up for a leadership role, they weren't interested in it and they wouldn't have had much luck if they were. Then there is Taksim Platform. They have had their own policies regarding the Taksim project for the last two years. A segment of this group came out as Taksim Solidarity. This was all de facto. However the behaviour patterns of the young people there are quite fresh and unusual. Those big shot opinion leaders at Taksim Solidarity couldn't have said "OK kids, now we are all going home". Nobody would have listened to them even if they did. Taksim Solidarity held many meetings without coming to any agreements in those days, the decision to disperse was indeed taken, but a few days were needed to let it sink in. The idea was to leave a symbolic tent at the park and leave. This had to be digested by the masses there but the police would not let this happen. Tear gas was used extensively that afternoon. We tried to tell the government representatives

(21.5.2009 approval scale 1 / 5000 ve 21.12.2010 approval scale 1/1000 Beyoğlu Protection Plans) The change of function in the area can take place under incumbency and only after the allocation of a similar nearby area as a park. There had not been a legal reasoning for incumbency although the regulation strictly calls for this, neither had there been the allocation of a similar area in the vicinity.

We have reached the verdict that the postponing of the planning of an area within the boundary of the plan requiring approval is an important deficiency that could have a negative impact on the whole plan. There were no specifications regarding the Taksim Barracks in the plans although a verdict already exists in the notes, therefore the suggested changes in the Conservation Master Plan are not compatible with town planning principles and planning techniques.

'After the lawsuit against the amendments in the Conservation Master Plan, the Taksim Square Landscaping Building Application Project of 31.07.2012 prepared by the IBB had been presented to the committee. Further to this the tunnels at İsmet İnönü (Gümüşsuyu), Siraselviler - Mete streets aiming to regulate the vehicular flow within the Taksim Square Pedestrianisation Project were annulled with the verdict no.758 dated 10.10.2012 IInd of the Regional Cultural Heritage Preservation Board.

The plans in question of the lawsuit need to be revised. It was mentioned that the transport project, part of the same plan, suggesting the heavy traffic between Tarlabası and Cumhuriyet streets to be transferred underground is compatible with law number 2863; the plans for the lawsuit regarding the tunnels in the İsmet İnönü -Mete -Siraselviler streets are not compatible with conservation regulations in their current state."

that the whole thing would dissipate in a few days anyway, but they would not listen to us.

- Kadıköy Yoğurtçu Park has tents too, they are still organising forums. All is peaceful until the arrival of the police.

- As the Gezi Park events took place, the motion banning the sale of alcohol after 10pm was passed. There were masses out in the streets saying “They are interfering with our way of life” and there is the government provoking the masses even further. The announcement that the third bridge over the Bosphorus would be named after Yavuz Selim was made that day and was offensive to the Alevis. The PM increased the tension with his speeches. The government insisted on a single representative for the Gezi Events passing on the demands of the masses. This was all wrong. What they faced was not a mass organisation, this was not a premeditated group. The government’s insistence was proof that they were operating within the “classical state mentality” and were incapable of reading the streets correctly let alone coming up with a creative solution.

- Yes, it’s all new and the old system is not equipped to deal with it. This is the case all over the world. People are in the streets in Bosnia to protest corruption, in France against the new airport, in Greece for the economic crisis. There is the Arab Spring, things are happening everywhere, in London, in Iran. This has been the case since Seattle. These mass protests are neither the first nor the last. The new situation requires a new understanding. Seeing it endemic to Turkey and as a conspiracy against the government would be a very shallow view point. The government obviously likes using these arguments to its benefit in the context of domestic politics and elections.

- Another point is all the NGOs using international funds. They were all declared traitors and claimed to be manipulated by foreign powers. When a political party uses communication techniques, the services of a company, an advertising agency, this is completely justified. However if an NGO comes up with a communication strategy for long term social transformation and funding it is deemed illegitimate. If NGOs use the same media as political parties, this is taken as planning a coup. What is wrong with NGOs cooperating with their international counterparts, exchanging ideas and tactics? At the end of the day they are exchanging ideas not arms. It is completely legitimate.

- The half day strike by KESK during the Gezi Park protests was very alarming for the government. Everything would have escalated much more had there been a general strike.

- This event consolidated the government’s view that everyone was getting organised against them. This was why the PM used the 27th of May analogy. There would of course be many different groups interested in acquiring benefits out of mass protests of this scale but it didn’t happen and what stopped it was not police violence. Even if there was a group of people dreaming of a coup during Gezi, they were marginal. We cannot say there were masses after a coup.

- The 27th of May and the 12th of September coups are of course part of our history. From this perspective, there were people who thought that the Gezi Park events could end up asking for military intervention. If there is a violent fight going on somewhere, vultures would be on the lookout. This is the law of nature. But the presence of the vultures would not mean that we will all die. Tayyip Erdoğan’s worries were unfounded, nothing happened

in the end. However, there must have been people there who would have wanted to profit from what was happening.

- There were also leftists who hoped socialism would culminate out of the events. Some said it was a revolution. How sensible is it to worry about socialism coming to the country based on these claims?

- There is the concept of the self-fulfilling prophecy. Surely, there is constant intelligence flow but not all of it is facts. You cannot do politics with the information feeding into conspiracy theories.

- On top of this the AKP has a great team. There are many valuable ministers. This team had some sort of leverage until 3-4 years ago but not anymore. There must be people who could analyse the Gezi Park events in a healthy way amongst the AKP. This is something I heard about. There are a few groups who

would not hesitate to resort to violence and they had been under state surveillance anyway. The PM should have left the council to deal with Gezi. Had they succeeded, this would have been a bonus for the AKP. The biggest mistake was that the PM interfered personally and personalised the whole thing.

- This might be a naïve sociological analysis but the Gezi Park events might end up maturing society. People might see that citizenship is something founded from the grass roots, not something presented by the state. There were people who experienced taking control of their own lives for the first time at Gezi. This is in a way the maturity exam for the secular segments. It might contribute, slowly but surely to the 'one man' fixation of society.

- The transformation of the fifty percent will determine the pace of Turkey's democratisation.

The Contribution of Civil Society to the Resolution Process

Meeting minutes November 16th, 2013
DUDE The Association for the Dialogue and Reconciliation Centre Helsinki Citizens Assembly

The meeting started with the opening speech of Yiğit Aksakoğlu of DUDE (Diyalog ve Uzlaşma Merkezi Derneği).

We would like to address the participation of civil society in the Kurdish issue. What should it be? What can it be? DUDE is working on an international conference scheduled for February 2014, perusing similar international cases. We feel that investigating cases outside of Turkey are more conducive to social peace. Unfortunately, civil society organisations are not part of the reconciliation process at the



moment. The agenda for negotiations is not public information and we are not part of the conversation. The conflict affects everyone and so will its resolution, but NGO participation in the talks is out of question at the moment. We could argue that participation in the process is a right. This is exactly what DUDE aims to facilitate.

The international examples define four main roles for civil society's participation:

1. Taking part in the negotiations, representing different areas as seen in the Liberian case.

2. Forming a parallel, advisory platform of negotiation as seen in Guatemala. Transparency is the key issue to facilitate official debate in the public sphere. In the Guatemalan case the issues agreed on at the referendum were refused based on the argument that the civil society did not have a very wide base. A very similar situation took

place in Congo; 66 of the 360 participants were from NGOs. 5 NGO members were signatories. The process was run under the heading “National Civil Society Dialogue.” There is a similar example from Afghanistan which is unique since the UN is involved as well.

3. Influencing the process with effective communication channels. A radio station was founded to support the process and provide good quality information in the Congo (Radio Okapi, radiookapi.net) broadcasting in five different local languages.

4. Getting involved when the official negotiations come to a halt and facilitate the continuation of the process. There aren't that many examples of this apart from the Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations. Should be kept in mind for emergencies.

The participants shared their ideas and suggestions:

- The process in Turkey seems to be at a bottleneck after all this time. Both sides should sit down and talk about the reasons of this deadlock; however I see deficiencies especially in the government's attitude. The NGOs cannot put enough pressure on the government either. Mihellemi Association has a radio program in Arabic in Kandil. Every single program talks about the process. The biggest problem is the lack of institutionalisation of a civil initiative. The Wise Men contacting the civil society with the process had not been influential either. They did not talk to the Arabs, Assyrians or Alevis. You have to include different ethnic backgrounds and faiths. We all know how the peace process is handled in the media; it is only mentioned when the PM talks about it.

When Barzani talks about the issue, people talk about the peace process. This process should get media coverage in its own right not only when the PM talks about it.

- The Peace Council focuses on using channels of communication to share ideas and suggestions regarding the process to influence opinion makers. We would like to build a social force by creating bases for dialogue; not only by issuing media statements and organising panels. We organised closed meetings at eight different places in Turkey. Our aim was to increase dialogue between NGOs and the people as we put pressure on the government. Everyone has their own definition of the peace process and we feel that the process progresses with setbacks along the way. We face this issue because the government does not have a specific plan. The decision makers avoid taking steps if they are not so sure they will be successful. There is also the perception that even in the case of failure, we will never go back to the initial state of conflict. The Oslo process is an example of this anxiety. There is something unique here, there is dialogue but no negotiation. There is no basis for it. Similar processes in other countries had legal regulations in effect first and negotiations restarted after this. It is also important to get the blessing, the approval of the majority. Geographically, this problem covers the whole of Turkey. We should not perceive it endemic to the Iraqi Kurdish region. It affects Kurds living in different regions and this is not a land issue.

- We have to acknowledge that the peace process materialised not only due to the inner dynamics of the AKP but also because the regional conditions were ripe. We are carrying out the peace negotiations under the guidance of a conservative government.

It is only natural that the process proceeds within its limitations. So we need to consider these factors when forming strategies. Could we organise simultaneous forums? Are there volunteer groups for this? Negotiations should be more inclusive and transparent but the problem has many variables. Channels of communication should be strengthened. The government is very well aware of its own limitations. They get opinion polls done very frequently and act accordingly. For example what's the white Turks' take on new envoys visiting İmralı? Encouraging the public opinion for peace is so crucial. The government had received a lot of criticism regarding the Committee of Wise Men and their meetings. These meetings did change the people's perception of the process for the better but could not reach their mission. The Diyarbakır meeting with Barzani, Perver and Tatlıses, all invited by the PM is a crucial part of this process despite all the political critique it received. A basic example is the normalisation of visiting Kandil, it is no longer a crime. I don't see the two parties meeting at the same table in the short run. Civil society could be the third eye in the process and work on strengthening the information channels of society and mobilise forces which could influence society. The language used by the media regarding the process needs to normalise. A Norwegian expert had once said at a similar meeting that "all processes are different but looking at common denominators on the way to resolution always helps."

- We have a unique process which requires a unique solution. The progress in the process without a legal infrastructure is unique to this case. The people who share the photos depicting the terrible conditions of the earthquake victims in Van could not stand the

mere mention of Barzani's name a few years ago. There is a double standard in perception. For example the independence of Kosovo is celebrated, the Turkish public is very positive but they still say Northern Iraq instead of Kurdistan. Independence of Kurdistan is not perceived the same way as the independence of Kosovo. If NGOs are going to be involved in the process in some way, they should work on permanent peace. Everyone writes reports in their own areas and are supportive but this is not enough. It is important to confront the past. The civil society should support them. Civil society should make sure peace is permanent, but technically cementing is the next step. We still haven't solved the inclusion issue. The peace process, negotiations and the social construct of peace will proceed on two different axes and NGOs should be active in both steps. We never had a ceasefire like this one before. The violence was fierce and people on both sides acted on different priorities. We need to make sure everyone supports the process so that the ceasefire is permanent. The initial stages will be normalisation, contribution to change in communication and perception and determination of the agenda.

- Women's Initiative for Peace has been very active in the last process. They organised many meetings, made observations and produced reports. They talk about international cases at the meetings. In May, they organised a meeting for women from all over Turkey. There were 102 peace processes between 1990 and 2012 and 585 treaties signed. This means that most treaties did not work but the decision was to reinstate them. How do we define peace on a social level? The government's take is to meet with Öcalan at İmralı. There is an important problem here, forming negotiation platforms in the civil arena and using communication channels

effectively would be more realistic targets. It is important to widen the definition of peace and being part of it later is important. What is our take on peace as civilian groups? It is hard to provide social support before talking about this first. This definition is very relevant as we build social peace. There was a very similar peace process in Cyprus –a process closed to society-. Opinion polls were made 30 years later. The reservations behind the opposition of women and the youth were discovered only then.

The Committee of Wise Men meetings were organised to test the waters. There was a need to gather information and extend the non-combative period. There are actually some efforts to include the civil society in the process; for example 10 different families from Diyarbakır and Adana were brought together. The first stage should comprise of finding ways of manufacturing information, mediating and bringing opinion leaders together with the public. These efforts should continue during the “resolution process”. Finally, I would like to draw your attention to the UN article no.1325. This item makes it compulsory for women to take part in the resolution process. The resolution process referred to here would be about two countries in conflict. It does not cover domestic situations but it can still be an important reference to make women’s inclusion in the process a must.

- We cannot call it “negotiation” process, but period of “non conflict”. Our biggest issue is that, contrary to all the other similar processes in the world, ours is a closed one. Even the reports of the Wise Men were not disclosed. However, the continuation of the process, even as it is now is very positive. There are two trajectories the civil society can take. The first one would be to work on diminishing social

polarisation. The west of the country is not as politicised as its east. This is because the 30 year old conflict had a much more severe effect on the east, did not have a huge reflection on the west. Therefore it is hard to politicise the west of the country. Meetings organised by opinion leaders, the sharing of what is talked about in the east, with the people of the west are very valuable. Secondly, pressure should be put on politicians for the continuation of the process. NGOs should be included in the process, so should unions, but we are all aware of the state of unions in the country.

There are many similar cases worldwide, which should be studied and adapted to Turkey.

- Before the process started the PM used an idiom like “baby steps” and this is how the process progresses. We were talking about peace in the midst of the Kurdish process and we continue to do so. In fact peace is something totally different, it is not a problem just between conflicting parties, and it effects the entire society.

We are talking about a government whose sovereignty focuses on the majority of the votes. The government feels powerful with national and international social support. They test the waters and adjust their steps. When the “Kurdish issue” is on the agenda, the sociology of the Kurds should be considered. Many Kurds are well informed on the details of the issue but the rest of the population has only started talking after the meetings of the Wise Men. The resolution process of the Kurdish issue will open the way for many others. For example the removal of ‘Our Oath of Allegiance’ from primary schools was shaped within the Kurdish issue. Many people had been against it after acquiring their

political identities during high school, but this was not voiced in the social realm. However, five, six years ago the Diyarbakır branch of Mazlumder started such a campaign. At the end of the day, the removal of 'Our Oath of Allegiance' is not something the government did all by itself, there was quite a push by NGOs for quite a while...this is how civil society works. We have many other issues like this one, an example is the building of the second parliament during the early stages of the republic and the formation process of a new nation. We should definitely talk about this. The way to social peace goes through here. The link between the Union of Education Law and the Kurdish issue should be a primary item on our agenda. This law is the main obstacle in front of education in the mother tongue.

There is a huge segment of society which looks depoliticised and doesn't care much about anything apart from being safe. Hence, it is important to talk about the resolution process at the Black Sea and Thrace regions; but who organises these meetings is equally important. The BDP visit to the Black Sea was a genuine effort which meant well but also a strategic mistake since it deepened the social conflict. There were some other visits under the east-west brotherhood project which were really useful. Everyone does things their own way we have to respect this. Some opinion leaders keep on handling the issue through people who are not interested. The blame language based on what the government did not do is hard on the majority of the population, the voters for the AKP. Once you mention the good deeds carried out by the government, you are labelled as an AKP supporter in a hurry, but we need to own the positive deeds of the process to encourage further ones. If we can visit Kandil, the 'Oath of Allegiance'

is removed from schools, these gestures indicate a social consensus. The only way the close link between the removal of 'Our Oath of Allegiance' from primary schools and the peace process will be seen is when social sensibility increases. And the last issue is that NGO work is regarded as 'elitist' by the society. The NGOs need to get down to the people.

-We need a common language to combat elitism. Confrontation is one of the main issues. There had not been a funeral resulting from conflict in the cities for the last 10 months. This is wonderful but the past had not yet been completely revealed. People's pain can only go away by talking to one another. For example, on the local level two mothers get together and talk. People there try to get over this problem by talking about it. There were many women at the "16th Women's Meeting", Armenians, Kurds, Turks, the religious ones and those who refuse to be pigeon holed. We made some halva at the meeting and focused on the common feelings around the halva. We need settings where a common language can blossom.

- As the Mardin Association of Youth and Culture, we don't have anything to do with the process. Young people say "older people just talk about it anyway". There is no talk about youth participation anyway. This process is just a "story" for them. However, all the fighters in this story are all young. What do they think about the whole thing? The most familiar thing in the history of the republic has been war and so that is what the young know best. They do not have as much experience with peace. The young were at the forefront of the Gezi Park events and they accomplished things. Hence, to change things we need a mass movement and a harsh reaction. The

rights of the youth to representation is not on the agenda of the civil society and universities. We know war so well, but are ignorant of peace. We need to talk to the youth about peace. Making peace is not easy. If it is going to happen, it is going to take a while. Focusing the energy of the youth on peace will be a major catalyst for peace.

-Our area of intervention as the civil society is extremely limited but we should have two crucial focal points: information should be public, legal regulations and constitutional reform should be done ASAP. What I mean by information becoming public is to do with the perception that such a conflict is endemic to our country. We have to change this. In the 90s, in many places in the world there were much more violent examples; but these days conflicts are handled through dialogue and negotiation. Yes, the resolution process in Turkey is structurally different to those of other countries but there are also similarities. We should check these out. The NGOs working on the issues have been aware of these for a while but now they need to be shared with the general public. It is obvious that we need legal regulations on freedom of expression and discrimination. How effective could peace be without them? We have to look at hate crimes and the police violence in Gezi. There can be no peace when certain segments of society are left out or marginalised.

- Inclusion without worrying about being pigeon holed as an AKP supporter is really important. It is hard to be included without taking sides. The NGOs have to own the process. An example is the ongoing trials which need to be followed. What can be done about justice during the interim periods? There are many examples in Argentina and the Balkans about trials. Turkish NGOs have

trouble finding the resources to work on.

- NGOs have a macro problem and that is the limitations of our space. These sure are tricky periods and it is evident the resolution process will take more than simple, elegant moves.

We could work on creating new areas instead of looking for common ground. After 30 years of war with so many casualties, you cannot expect to achieve peace after talking about it for 6 months. There will be zigzags along the way. I am not expecting an ideal moment of reconciliation either. Other examples in the world tell us that peace did not culminate solely on the efforts of governments, but with participation of democratic forces and civil society. We are not that happy with the government's attitude, but what are the NGOs doing? We should not be hiding behind constant criticism of the state. If we hope for a resolution, we have to confront the past.

We have to find out what happened, share it and publicise it. There are important ongoing trials which only go ahead with the efforts of the lawyers. It would be useful to follow them and form observation committees. The most crucial part of confrontation is the 'impunity'. We live with uncommitted rapists and murderers. They not only get away with their crimes, but are awarded by the system they are protected and promoted by the system. What we can do to contribute to the process would be following the trials. The trials are not going well. There should be social pressure on the courts but there is not. We should have a look at international examples. We should consult the experiences of other on this. Lets talk about how we can make use of the experience of others. We can start with the Temizöz trial since it was the first trial of this kind.

- It is important to carry out tangible deeds. We could organise a network on the needs of

different groups. Unions should be involved as well. There are other groups working with labourers. We seem to be forgetting them. Poverty and labour are issues we should work on.

-We mentioned the two different axes for inclusion in the political process and maintaining a deep perception of peace. It is important to demand legal regulations and follow them up, sharing the ongoing projects, awareness of the existing regulations like article number 1352 and using them are really important. The other axis is the construction of a positive peace. An umbrella website for all the associations working on the issue would be a good idea. This would have publicity and socialisation if issues. We had not been brought up with peaceful life skills and this is why we are struggling with the process. There is not that much work on what these skills are and how we could equip ourselves with them either. We should support those who work on the issues.

- It is important to equip people with peace skills. There was a research project in Diyarbakır in 2010 on the peace perceptions of children which revealed that they had major issues with self-confidence and self-worth. This reality is an indication that this process will walk very slowly. However, there is a very clear understanding of peace in the children's discourse. "Why would we throw stones at the police if we can use words to express ourselves? "The participation of girls left a lot to be desired. Their imagination and ability to analyse are very high; however their chances of participating in such projects is minimal since they are girls and children. It is very true that NGO work lacks coordination. From now on we should shift our focus from how we got here to where we are now. Otherwise we could

make the same mistakes. Field workers cannot publicise what is learnt, so coordination centres are crucial and meaningful. We need a centre to ask the right questions and publicising them well.

- Mazlumder and truth commissions held many meetings. It appears that the majority of the Turkish society do not see themselves as sides to the conflict. A lawful state is a must, a fair state is a must too. The following of trials which had turned into symbols and their conclusion could be keys to forming a fair society. There are provocations aimed at clogging or stopping the process. We need to pinpoint the basic values to maintain social peace. Those who can transfer the perception of justice and brotherhood to the language of society could manage to socialise peace; otherwise we will be far from it. If these concepts are devoid of meaning, we are far from social peace. If there is the perception that fraternity is jeopardised, we need to take steps to fix this and re-establish language.

- We need to decide what we want to do as NGOs. It is important to have a centre for coordination and sharing of information and the efficient use of communication channels are crucial. Let's be part of the peace process, let's have our place at the table is not a viable claim for the Peace Council. We have been beating around the process for ten months now. We have been trying to make a difference by making communication more efficient. Instead of looking for a way of getting a spot at the table, we should go for a more effective presence. Turkey does not follow an international model. Neither the government, nor Öcalan want an open process, they would rather keep it closed. So, the closest area of participation for us is coordination for sharing of information. Whatever we do, we cannot

get the NGOS apart from the political players, trade chambers, and unions to exhibit an attitude reflecting the sensibilities of the whole society. We prioritise our own sensibilities. I criticise NGOs within this context. The Peace Council cannot increase the number of their followers. Getting the coordination right might be a good start in terms of coming up with something new and meaningful.

- It is obvious that everyone is here to support peace but we need coordination. To outsiders we are a bunch of people who belong to a certain segment of society. Coordination amongst ourselves is crucial. We could get together every month and spend three hours together. We'll achieve our goals faster if we work systematically. Everyone is doing small, short term projects, but where is the pudding? We should be systematic, methodical and institutionalised.

- I don't agree that NGOs are that far off from the people. They are the civil society. I don't agree that NGOs need coordination. For example in Istanbul all organisations working on human rights meet every month. They have been doing this for the last three years. There is IHOP in Ankara, which brings together different human rights organisations. Many women's organisations are in contact with one another too.

- I don't think that the NGOs are on one side and the people on the other. We are the society, so how meaningful is it to talk about elitism or being far away from the people? We come from the society. There are institutions from many walks of life at this meeting. We need to make an effort to meet frequently and share what we have in common.

- We can have differences of opinion or

language at these meetings. We should be able to accommodate each and every different style. We might of course not agree on method or approach, but coordination would still be useful. Can the Peace Council do this? It is really important to carry out every project that will invoke optimism. We need to go for creative, productive blows which trigger the imagination, it might be more viable to use existing mechanisms instead of going for a new network.

- Constructing a common discourse is crucial and these meetings are useful for that. Our common goal is to place the resolution process in a legal framework. The government is going ahead with a political negotiation based on the justification of the past deeds of the state. Creating a new language to read the past and confronting wrongs done will have a major role in the construction of social peace. We need this for a healthy construct of the present day. Human life had not been respected, information was not shared, and those responsible for the wrongdoings got away with what they did. We need to put pressure in these areas.

- The Kurdish issue has many layers of conflict. The face to face conflict was one part of it and then there is the social conflict. I am talking about not wanting to be neighbours with certain people, not employing them. We need to acknowledge especially the decimation faced by the Kurds. The "white" Turks are not the only ones to make peace, there are still the Kurds. In the successful case studies, the process is not postponed and it is embraced by the parties, together. Peace needs to become mainstream. We are after positive peace. We are not only making up with the Kurds, everyone will make up with one another.

- We need to grab the opportunity presented by the resolution process to come clean with our past. This will be a harsh debate. Are we going to settle accounts or have closure and say goodbye, this is an important question. What I see is that the accounts will be settled through JITEM, Ergenekon and sexual abuse cases. The conflict period had affected the whole country. A family who had a loved one disappear or the family of a soldier killed could be more pessimistic about confronting the past, this would be justified, we cannot talk on their behalf. If we look at it through the NGO lens, there are two ways to go. One way would be to say let's not delve into the past as we are constructing a new Turkey. The opposition to this approach would be strong and hard to cope with. The second way could be to increase the pressure for a legal framework so that armed combat is not repeated.

- We need to acknowledge the difference in perception among the NGOs. I am specifically referring to the difference between those who use a secular discourse and those who do not. We can all get along accommodating both

discourses but the general public speaks the Islamic language. We can only get through to them using the same discourse to talk about concepts like 'justice' and 'social peace'.

- We should remember that the "resolution process" confronts the history of the Turkish Republic between Turks and Kurds.

- If we are going to settle accounts with the past, we need the truth, information about what had actually happened. For example the state was found out to be the real perpetrator in many trials where the original perpetrator was claimed to be the PKK.

- Since all peoples apart from the Kurds have become Turkish, we refer to them being '90% Turkish and Muslim'. We pretend that there are only Turks and Kurds. We should first fix our language. This comes naturally to many people, even the Kurds. The Armenians, Alevis, Assyrians and Caucasians and many other groups are extremely uncomfortable with this. Turkey has its own unique make up and we need a language reflecting this.



Turkish Armenian Relations - an Overview [1993 - 2013]

In addition to the meeting minutes and articles in this publication, we put together a time-line on the century old Armenian issue. The table below summarises the civilian steps taken for Turkish-Armenian reconciliation between 1993-2013. You can contact us on info@hyd.org.tr if you wish to contribute to our humble compilation.

1993-1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Turkey closed its Armenian border during the Nagorno-Karabakh armed conflict. * Armenian weekly AGOS was established in Istanbul. (April 5th) * A group of twenty five people, including Turkish businessmen and journalists visited Yerevan to explore avenues of cooperation. (February 3rd)
1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Turkey was accepted as a candidate for EU membership at the Helsinki Summit (December 10th-11th) Ever since, there has been a significant increase to establish civil partnerships between the two countries.
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The president of the Trabzon Chamber of Commerce, Şadan Eren said it is wrong to enforce the normalisation of Armenian-Turkish relations.(January 12th)
2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Turkish Armenian Reconciliation Commission was established in Geneva. The main purpose of the organization was to ensure interaction of official groups and NGOs in both countries. The association had six Turkish and four Armenian members. (July 9th) * Tigran Xmalian made a documentary about Armenian and Turkish folk music bands but could not complete it. * American University for Global Peace, TESEV and the Armenian Sociological Foundation (HASA) collaborated on a project on the perception of Armenian and Turkish citizens of one another. (2001-2002) * Armenian and Turkish musicians appeared in joint concerts in Armenia, Turkey and the USA with the support of American University for Global Peace. (2001-2002) * "Virtual Farming Wholesalers" was implemented by the Turkish Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC) and ICHD. Armenian and Turkish producers of agricultural goods cooperated on marketing their produce on the internet. (2001-2002) * Turkey and Armenia Non-governmental Organisations (TANGO) Network organised Turkish and Armenian journalists to visit one another across the border (2001-2003). * Centre for Research on Social Issues (TOSAM) and 'International Centre for Human Development' ran a project to establish intercultural dialogue. The participants were trained in cooperation in mediation and problem-solving. Twenty-two participants had the opportunity to visit the Milano Graduate School in New York. (2001-2003)

2002

- * Dialogue Between Turkish and Armenian Parliamentarians project was implemented with support from the Stockholm Parliamentarians for Global Action Organization. Armenian and Turkish Parlemantarians got together at a meeting.
- * Trilateral Media Commission members Azerbaijani New Generation Journalists Union, Turkish Association of Diplomatic Correspondents and Armenian Yerevan Press Club signed a protocol agreeing to meet again in 2003-2004.
- * Georgian, Turkish, Armenian and Azerbaijani mayors met to explore common steps to foster regional development within a project organised by the Centre for Proposing Non-Traditional Conflict Resolution Methods, with support from the American University for Global Peace.
- * Turkish Eurasia Cultural and Social Development Association and Armenian Transcaucuses Women's Dialogue group collectively organized activities for International Women's Day (March 2002)
- * Over 80 participants from Turkey and Armenia attended the two day conference "Civilian Approach to Turkish Armenian Dialogue" organised by Helsinki Citizen's Assembly.(June)
- * Provincial Towns of the South Caucuses and Marketing Network of the Caucuses ran a joint project called "Regional Trade Leaders Local Economy Working Group" exploring ways to improve the local economy.(2002-2003)

2003

- * International Center for Human Development and Centre for Social Research and Education implemented a project with three purposes. 1.To bring Armenian and Turkish businessmen who would be willing to take part in a joint chamber of commerce. 2. To encourage the use of MANEC (Marketing Network of the Caucasus). 3.To coordinate the activities of the Local Economy Working Group. (2003-2004)
- * Armenian Turkish Women's Magazine was published by the support of American University Center for Global Peace. (2003-2004)
- * Turkish and Armenian women made a joint declaration in Yerevan. Decisions of the economy, culture, health and politics comissions were conveyed to national and international platforms. Removal of incriminating and hostile statements from school books, student exchange programs and book translations were among the suggestions.

2004

- * Fethiye Çetin's book "Anneannem" (My Grandmother) was published by Metis.
- * Armenian and Turkish Rotary club members had a meeting. (March 18th-20th)

2005

- * Armenian and Turkish youth attended YavaşGamats the summer school organized by Helsinki Citizen's Assembly in Antakya (Antioch), Turkey. (July)
- * Boğaziçi, Sabancı and Bilgi Universities organized a conference "Ottoman Armenians during the decline of the Empire: Issues of Scientific Responsibility and Democracy" (September 24th-26th) The conference was held in Bilgi University, after being cancelled twice under pressure from the government and political parties and the prosecution's decision of stay of execution.
- * The postcards from the collection of Orlando Carlo Calumeno, "100 Years Ago Armenians in Turkey" was published. Editor; Osman Köker. Publisher; Birzamanlar, 2005.
- * Armenian representative of Muscovite "Dialogue of Civilizations" initiative organized a meeting in July, 2005. Cemal Uşşak, Prof. Dr. Metin Hülagu, Doç. Dr. Şakir Batmaz, Doç. Dr. Gülbadi Alan, and Doç. Dr. Süleyman Demir participated in the event with the support of The Journalists and Writers Foundation. The participants later organised the Symposium of Turkish-Armenian Relations in Kayseri, Turkey.

2006

- * Eurasia Partnership Foundation ran a project to foster dialogue between Turkey and Armenia.
- * Armenian International Policy Research Group and TESEV organized a meeting about Turko-Armanian relations. (December)
- * Eurasia Foundation led the project MerhaBarev with a wide range of organizations. Photography exhibitions were organized between Armenia and Turkey to improve intercultural dialogue. (December 3rd-24th)
- * Marmara Educators Association invited around twenty educators from Yerevan to Turkey to participate in a workshop "Turkish - Armenian Relations in the light of Perceptions and Facts". (June)

2007

- * Chief Editor of Agos Newspaper, Hrant Dink was killed by the armed attack 19 January 2007.
- * Armenian and Turkish photographers went across their own borders to take photographs. (March 22nd-25th)
- * Akhtamar Church opened. (May29th)
- * Eurasia Partnership Foundation supported Armenian Komitas State Quartet to give a concert in Istanbul. Bogaziçi Quartet was supported by the same foundation for their Yerevan concert. (2007-2008)
- * A website was established for Armenian and Turkish youth. It helped youth organizations to communicate with each other. (2007-2008)
- * The meeting of "European Integration and Dialogue between the Borders" was organized by young Armenian and Turkish activists and experts. Armenian and Turkish public opinion feedback was collected in field work. (2007-2008)
- * Yerevan Press Club and the ARI Movement ran a project getting Armenian and Turkish journalists to visit each other's countries. (2007-2008)
- * The Liberal Democratic Party, ARI Movement and the European Stability Initiative representatives attended a meeting in Yerevan. Armenian and Turkish organizations improved their relations during the meeting. A bulletin on Turkey - Armenian Relations was published. (2007-2008)

- * Analytical Centre on Globalisation and Regional Cooperation organized a meeting on foreign relations. Nigar Göksel and Cem Toker participated in the meeting in Yerevan. (May)
- * Armenian Golden Apricot Cinema Development Organization and Anadolu Culture held a joint workshop on "Armenian - Turkish film producers". A wide range of film experts and producers from both countries participated. (July-December)
- * A mutual dialogue between the Armenian and Turkish governments begun through the mediation of Switzerland, behind closed doors to avoid protest of the nationalist elements in both countries. Armenia stated that border and trade relations could not be normalized until genocide recognition.
- * President Abdullah Gul watched the soccer game between Turkey and Armenia in Yerevan becoming the first Turkish president to visit Armenia. (September)
- * Turkish Armenian Business Development Council ran the 'River Arax' project where Armenian and Turkish people made half hour long movies about the Aras river. (December 13th)
- * A group of Turkish intellectuals launched a campaign "I apologize to the Armenians". 31 000 people signed it. (December 15th)
- * TESEV and the Caucasus Media Institute organized a conference on the improvement of relations between Armenia and Turkey. The Karabakh issue was discussed together with others halting the reconciliation process between the two countries. (2008-2009)
- * The Human Rights Association organized two panels " A Democratic and Pluralistic Life is difficult without confronting 1915" and " What happened on the 24th of April,1915?" (April)
- * The Journalists and Writers Foundation representative Cemal Uşşak and Fatih University lecturer Doç. Dr. Gökhan Bacık participated in a meeting "Peace in the Caucasus and the Middle East". The meeting was organized by World Armenian Congress (WAC). (February).

- * Armenian Civil Society Institute and Civil Society Development Centre organized a meeting on “How to Improve Turkish - Armenian Civil Society relations” (March)
- * Caucuses Centre for Peace-Making Initiatives organized a film festival called “23.5” with the support of 1.500.00 + 1 and AGOS. Turkish short films were also shown in the festival. (March)
- * With the support of Eurasia Partnership Foundation, research on the status of Armenian migrants in Turkey was carried out. (April-August)
- * Diplomatic relationship was established between Armenia and Turkey. A meeting was scheduled between Sargsyan and the Turkish government. The meetings would continue until the day of Armenia-Turkey football match in Istanbul. (August)
- * The foreign ministers of Turkey and Armenia, Eduard Nalbandian and Ahmet Davutoglu declared they would sign an agreement on the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries on the 31th of October, in Geneva. (September)
- * Analytical Center on Globalisation and Regional Cooperation held in a conference to discuss diplomatic and social dynamics which had an impact on the protocols between Armenia and Turkey. (September)
- * Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation organized a meeting on improving relations between Armenia and Turkey in Istanbul. (October)
- * The Analytical Center on Globalisation and Regional Cooperation organized a meeting. Armenian and Turkish cultural and political figures took part in the event. (2009-2010)
- * The Workshops “In Adana 1909; A Perspective One Hundred Years of History, Memory and Identity” was held in Sakıp Sabancı Museum. This meeting was the fifth event organized within the centenary of the 1909 Adana massacre. (November 6th-7th)
- * A book of “TESEV: Armenians in Turkey” was published after eight years of research. The authors Kentel, Karakaşlı, Üstel and Özdoğan said that the book was a reminder to the Armenian and Turkish public to acknowledge their common history and get to know each other better.
- * The Caucasus Institute and TESEV organized a press conference and released the collectively prepared report “Turkey-Armenia Relations Breaking the Vicious Circle”.
- * TESEV publication: Turkey - Armenia Relations: Breaking the Vicious Circle. Aybars Görgülü, Sabiha Senyücel Gündoğar, Alexander Iskandaryan, and Sergey Minasyan.
- * Fatih University, the Journalists and Writers Foundation and the Yerevan Urban Foundation organized a workshop on “Evaluating the Turkish-Armenian Relations- the Women’s Perspective “. The event took place in Yerevan for four days. (November)
- * A summer school held in Armenia with Armenian and Turkish participants on Oral History Methodology. The project was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany.

- * Centre for Proposing Non-traditional Conflict Resolution Methods started exporting and importing cheese between Turkey and Armenia to improve relations.
- * Counterpart International Armenia and Third Sector Foundation of Turkey (TÜSEV) collectively organized a meeting about NGOs and their prospective fields of cooperation. The event was supported by Black Sea Trust and USAID. (April)
- * Armenia's governing coalition decided to cease negotiations with Turkey, referring to Turkey's statement that if there was no solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the negotiations would be futile. (April 22nd)
- * TESEV and the Caucasus Institute in Yerevan organized a meeting on analysing the Armenian-Turkish peace process. (May)
- * Society and Democracy Association held a meeting with the participation of ten Armenian and ten Turkish students in Istanbul. The subject was "Impressions on the other" (June 23rd-27th)
- * Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation organized a second meeting in Istanbul. (September)
- * Ani Dialogue held a meeting in Yerevan with the representatives of Armenian and Turkish NGOs. The participants focused on "Culture and heritage, Education and Research, the Environment, Human Rights and Democratization, and Media and Journalism. (October 13th-17th)
- * Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation organized its third meeting in Yerevan. (December)
- * With the leadership of Hrant Dink and Civilitas Foundations, some Armenian articles about Turkey were translated into Turkish. In the mean time, some Turkish articles were translated to Armenian.
- * Hrant Dink Foundation carried out a project to facilitate border crossings of Armenian and Turkish non-governmental organizations.
- * Armenian, Turkish, Georgian, and Azerbaijani youths participated in a meeting with the support of the ARI movement. They discussed cultural dialogue and suggested solutions to conflicts.
- * Anadolu Cultural Association and Yerevan Golden Apricot Film Festival participated in the second series of film workshops.
- * TEPAV expressed the idea of organizing a meeting on the agenda "reconstruction of historic silk road bridge in Ani". The purpose of the meeting was to ensure Intercultural dialogue and tourism between Armenia and Turkey.
- * Turkey - Armenian guidebook was published by the support of Eurasia Partnership Foundation and United States Agency for International Development (USAID). (http://www.epfound.am/files/esi_picture_story_-_turkey_armenia_manual_-_turkish_-_august_2010.pdf)
- * "The Country which Forgot its Name -A Dictionary of places whose names have been changed" was published. (Adını Unutan Ülke-Türkiye'de adı değiştirilen yerler sözlüğü) Author; Sevan Nişanyan -Everest publisher, 2010

2010

- * Human Rights Association (İHD) and Troup of Bare Feet (Çıplak Ayaklar Kumpanyası) organized a protest march on the anniversary of 6-7th September 1955 attack on minorities in Istiklal street. The participants chanted the slogan "never again" (September)
- * TESEV Publisher; Turkey-Armenia Dialogue Series: Analyse the Rapprochement Procces: Authors; Aybars Görgülü, Alexander Iskandaryan, and Sergey Minasyan.
- * The second "Speaking to One Another" camp organized in Turkey. During the camp, young people set up their own teams and studied oral history.

2011

- * GPoT supported six Turkish students to visit Yerevan. The students participated in a meeting and listened to Dr. David Hovhannisyan's presentations on Turkish - Armenian people's common stereotyping of each other. After the presentation, the students planned a documentary film about their visit to Armenia. (February)
- * Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation organized a meeting with an aim to improve relations between Armenia and Turkey. (February)
- * Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation held another meeting in Istanbul. (April)
- * Hundreds of Turkish intellectuals organized a memorial ceremony for the first time, in Taksim Square. (April 24th)
- * Developing of a sub-unit for Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council was suggested to act as a moderator and resolve possible conflicts between Armenian-Turkish businessmen in the absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries. (April)
- * Armenian journalists visited Istanbul for a month. (April 18th- May 5th)
- * Eurasia Partnership Foundation and Yerevan Press Club collectively organized an event in Yerevan. Turkish and Armenian NGOs and journalists participated in the meeting for three days. (May)
- * With the support of Global Political Trends Centre, five Armenian media experts came to Turkey to follow the Turkish elections. The journalists also met with Sabah, IMC TV and A Haber representatives. (June 6th-12th)
- * (TESEV) The second day of the Conference of the Democratization Program (June 25th) after the first session: " The Citizenship in Transition I: Hearing Turkish Armenians.
- * The report of "Hearing Turkish Armenians" was published. TESEV
- * The book of "Armenian History" was translated to Turkish and published by Aras. It was written by professor of history George A. Bournoutian.
- * "Sound of Silence-Turkish Armenians Speak" was published by Hrant Dink Foundation, within the context of the Oral History Project. It was also supported by the Olaf Palme Centre.

- * Eurasia Partnership foundation: the cinematography of Turkey and Armenia in 1960, conference and film screenings (June 8th)
- * In Muğla, Bodrum, the Independent Activists Bodrum Group organized a conference on the subject of "What Happened in 1915" (April)
- * Environmental Sustainability Workshop was supported by Izocam. Turkish-Armenian students and young professionals participated in the Environmental Sustainability Workshop in Yıldız Technical University, Education, Practice and Research Center.
- * Economy Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV) carried out a project on "Sustainable and Efficient Turkish-Armenian Cross-Border Partnerships Guide for building Confidence and Reconciliation". With the support of German Marshall Fund (GMF), the project notes were published as a book, called "Closing the gap: the Turkish-Armenian Civil Society Activities Overview in the last twenty years". (January)
- * Massacred Armenians were commemorated in the 97th. Anniversary of the Armenian genocide in Istanbul, Ankara, İzmir and Bodrum. (April 2012)
- * Say Stop to Racism and Nationalism Initiative suggested to organize the third commemorative ceremony of the Armenian genocide, in Taksim.(April)
- * The photography exhibition of "the Cultural Diversity in Old Diyarbakir" was exhibited in Tophane Tütün Deposu. The majority of over 200 photographs were from the beginning of the 20th century and the exhibition was intended to stay until the 10th of March. However, it had been extended by popular demand for one more day. The curator of the exhibition was Osman Köker from Birzamanlar Publishing. (March)
- * Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization's meeting has taken place in Istanbul, on the 26th of June. Although the President was invited, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs joined the meeting. . (June)
- * 3rd. Armenian-Turkish Cooperation Conference was organised on the 16th of June. Armenian and Turkish businessmen actively communicated with each other during the conference and some of them agreed to co-operate. (June)
- * Hrant Dink Foundation 2012 Oral History Project "Armenians in Diyarbakir"
- * Abukhamrents Church and the Church of Saint Prkich were restored in the Ancient City of Ani. The ancient city is at the Turkey - Armenia border and dates back thousands of years. The restoration work was conducted by the Director of Kars Museum and the project was supported by World Monuments Fund, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the U.S. Embassy.
- * BDP Van deputy Nazmi Gür, A member of the Armenian Parliament and Emerging Party of Armenia deputy Aragats Akhoyan, and businessman Osman Kavala visited Sabri Abi (the mayor of Van). (July)
- * As the road and rail border crossings await reconciliation protocols, it is said that Armenia continues to trade over the port of Trabzon. According to the statement by Armenia, 200 hundreds trucks with Armenian license plates had a permission to use Turkey as a transit route over the port of Trabzon. Agos news
- * Armenia-Turkey Youth Symphony Orchestra gave a concert with the soloist of Ashot Khachaturian. The Orchestra was conducted by Cem Mansur.(August)

2012

- * Turkish and Armenian young people carried out oral history research in Gyumri, Armenia. The young participants searched for the immigrants from Muş and took their photographs. They also had a conversation with the locals and examined the cultural heritage of the villages. Speaking to One Another (April 16th-29th)
- * Armenian non-governmental organization Yerkir's chairman Vahan Kepenekian and the board member Sevak Artsruni visited the mayor of Diyarbakır, Osman Baydemir, in 2012. The Armenian Civil Society Organization Yerkir is located in the city center of Lyon, France.
- * Hrant Dink Foundation has been running the "Turkey-Armenia Journalist Dialogue Programme" in cooperation with the Heinrich Böll Stiftung Association since 2009. In the 4th anniversary of the project, 10 Turkish journalists visited Armenia between the dates of 3rd and 9th May, 2012.
- * Turkish and Armenian women carried out the project "Beyond the Borders: We have bounded our stories". The participants shared their stories hoping to bring peace. (October 10th)
- * NGOs working on improving Turkish - Armenian relations in the recent years met in Istanbul. During the meeting, the representatives of Turkish Global Political Trends Center (GPoT), Economic and Social Studies Foundation of Turkey (TESEV), Economy Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), Anadolu Culture, Hrant Dink Foundation, Turkish-Armenian Business Development Council (TABDC) Armenia Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF), Yerevan Press Club (YPC) and Industrialists and Businessmen Association (UMBA) talked about their past and future activities. (July)

2013

- * Sezgin Tanrikulu, the deputy leader of the RPP (CHP) entered a research motion in parliament on the problems of the Armenian migrants in Turkey. (Agos, March 11th).
- * Hrant Dink Foundation, Galata Fotoğrafhanesi, Free Press Unlimited and Gymri Youth Initiative Centre collaborated on a multimedia show in Yerevan: "Beyond Waiting... Stories from the Turkey-Armenia Border" (August 27th-September 7th).
- * Hrant Dink Foundation, Heinrich Böll Stiftung Association and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized seven journalists from Armenia to visit Turkey within the "Turkish Armenian Journalists' Dialogue Program". The program aims to strengthen the cooperation between Turkish and Armenian journalists and contribute to healthier news networking. (October 31st- November 6th).
- * The Islamised Armenians conference organized by Hrant Dink Foundation, Boğaziçi University and the Charitable Armenians of Malatya Association took place at the Albert Long Hall of Boğaziçi University. (November 2nd-4th).
- * Turkish Foreign Secretary Ahmet Davutoğlu attended the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation meeting in Yerevan where he also met with his Armenian counterpart Edvard Nalbandyan. (December 13th)

Turkey on a Quest for Peace Our Duty to Create Permanent Peace and Democratisation on the Kurdish Issue

Cafer Solgun Polarisation has kept genuine problems away from the national and international agenda in an environment without proper debate.

*Researcher-writer,
President of the Association for
Confrontation* Ideological polarisation has had political ramifications. The world has turned into an arena of political influence between the USA and NATO as the leaders of the capitalist block, and the USSR and the Warsaw Pact representing the socialist block.

In 1989, the destruction of the Berlin Wall symbolised a new world order. In other words, the “artificially” ideological, political obfuscations between us and our real agenda were abolished and our suppressed problems saw the light of day. The most significant among them were issues of identity.

Issues of identity were of course present in the polarised world as well. However, even the most obvious ethnic or religious identity issues had to be expressed in relation to a given ideological camp. For example, the national movements in Africa, the Far East and the Middle East were all inspired by socialism and called themselves socialist.

The main reason for this was that socialism was more open to “national independence” efforts and demands. However, discourse and claims aside, most of these movements did not have much to do with socialist ideology but still felt the need to express themselves as such. This was the only way to secure international support. The USSR had established clear direct and indirect relations with such movements and was using these contacts as “leverage” against the USA and its allies within its Cold War strategy.

Europe too had its fair share of identity issues along similar lines. The IRA, fighting in England, was a nationalist movement with its issues and demands, but also had a socialist discourse and claims. The same

can be said for ETA, fighting for independence in the Basque country.

As ideological camps diminished, identity issues were revealed candidly and a dynamic resolution process started. The real problems were finally on the agenda.

In countries where the democratic experience is based on a solid social, economic and cultural foundation, the resolutions of identity issues were less painful. The first positive example of this is Czechoslovakia which divided itself into two different republics (the Czech and the Slovak) through a referendum without going through a period of conflict. Similarly, England started peace talks with the IRA and Spain had a ceasefire with ETA. The old colonies of Portugal, Spain and England in Africa turned into countries whose “independence” was recognised, and started a new set of economic and commercial relationships with their colonisers. The Apartheid regime was history in South Africa and Nelson Mandela became president after 27 years in prison.

Latin American countries are definitely worth mentioning during this period. All the guerrilla movements in Latin America supported by Cuba and the USSR started seeking peace and reconciliation with the states with whom they had been in bloody conflicts. In the first half of the 1990s, “peace” was made with all the guerrilla movements except the one in Columbia. Some of these guerrilla movements reinvented themselves as legal political parties and came to power in some countries. The old guerrilla leaders became presidents in countries like Venezuela, Brazil and Peru. We should also add that significant steps were taken in confrontation and democratic reckoning.

None of the countries which went through periods of conflict within identity crises solved their problems in full. Firstly, violence and conflict are not indispensable in the resolution process. Secondly, no matter how obfuscating ideological arguments are, all these issues push for a solution. Democratic values acquired through long and painful processes are the crucial key to peaceful solutions.

Turkey: The solution to the Kurdish issue requires a commitment to democratic restructuring

The Turkish experience differs from the direction of the recent past in many ways.

In the 1990s, as the longest standing conflicts were put to a democratic, peaceful resolution internationally, the Kurdish issue in Turkey turned into a mass insurgency. This is called ‘serihîldan’ in Kurdish. As the banned Newroz (New Year) celebrations became serihîldan, even the officials shooting at people and causing hundreds of deaths could not prevent the problem from turning into a mass movement. (In 1992, 57 people were killed during Newroz celebrations in Cizre alone, hundreds were wounded). The guerrilla funerals, initially cautiously attended family affairs, were eventually embraced by the whole community. Weddings and funerals turned into opportunities for local insurgencies against the official denialist policies. Legitimate Kurdish parties were formed and got numerous seats in parliament.

The governments of the 1990s didn’t properly assess the changing world order. The collapsed official ideology was not abandoned, not even within the isolated context of the Kurdish issue. This was the crux of the problem: Kemalism was a state ideology at war with

Turkey's ethnic, religious and cultural realities and the first step should have been purging. However, neither the political system nor the society was up for it. Even the victimised segments of society were far from being able to pinpoint core issues.

The official ideology did not have any problems sustaining itself during the Cold War period. US backed concepts like "fights against communism, separatism or reactionaries" were promoted in the name of protecting the principles and revolutions carried out by Atatürk. This period was now over and issues and their victims emerged without the need for ideological camouflage.

This local reality, as well as the changing world order demanded a radical assessment, thinking outside the box and starting a radical reconstruction effort in state and government with a fresh approach. For example, the collapsed arguments of the denialist ideology such as "Kurds are mountain Turks" or "there is no Kurdish language, what they speak is just bastardised Turkish" became utterly ridiculous.

But the state chose to "solve" the Kurdish issue with the mentality and methods used in oppressing the revolts of the past and called this "low density war". It adapted laws (the Anti-terrorism law, still in effect, legalises the violation of basic rights and freedoms and contradicts the minimum norms of the legal system) and waged a "dirty" war ignoring the law. The President at the time, Süleyman Demirel, justified this by saying that "all states sometimes act out of the routine" and later on "all states have a deep state within". Tansu Çiller, the Prime Minister at the time was boasting about being in full harmony with the military as she was busy preparing death

warrants for the Kurdish businessmen she accused of "financing terrorism".

Other realities encapsulating this period were thousands of unsolved murders, villages being burnt down and evacuated and millions of people uprooted from their homeland.

During this period, a psychology of fear and danger was created giving the impression that the regime was under threat of separatism and reactionary movements. The state attacked the insurgents with all its might and used the media to aid them.

This oppression and bloodbath had not been able to obstruct the reign of reality. There was no way to stop the mass rise of political, "reactionary" Islam. The AKP increased its votes to ensure a third term in government and hopes to continue ruling the country in the near future. It is confident in imposing its Islamic sensibilities on the rest of the society. Moreover, the Kurdish political movement is now stronger and more popular than ever. It has become "the local government" in Kurdistan. It has the power to form a group in parliament despite anti-democratic measures such as the election threshold. The PKK, having improved its armed existence, is now the most effective guerrilla organisation of the Middle East. The arrest and life sentence of its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, has not resulted in the weakening of the organisation.

The democratisation process and peace

As stated by Abdullah Gül, the President of Turkey, the Kurdish problem is the most crucial issue of the country since it is so very painful. First there was the "Oslo Process", then the party in power started a

process coordinated by Hakan Fidan, the undersecretary (i.e. chief) of MIT (National Intelligence Organisation), naming it the “resolution process”.

Öcalan’s influence on the organisation was called on to create a ceasefire and then the arms left the country. However, the process of the PKK militants leaving the country proved to be more complicated than expected. The Kurdish side did act within Öcalan’s call for an “end to the period of armed combat” at the same time demanding that official steps are taken for a longstanding peace and constitutional, legal reassurance.

We could say that the process hit a bottleneck at this point or see it as the real beginning. Turks and Kurds, apart from some marginal sections, are happy to see an end to funerals and keen to support the process. However, we cannot reach a political and social agreement as to how the process should lead to permanent peace. The process will run its course once this deadlock is cleared.

The initiation of the resolution process behind closed doors does make sense. Can it continue this way?

The recent developments had clearly shown that supporters of the closed doors policy are wrong.

This is a radical social problem with regional and international ramifications and severe economic implications. The state has committed to its solution at the highest level. Is it possible to resolve such a weighty problem only by negotiating with Öcalan in İmralı Prison and transfer the results to the PKK via a BDP delegation (based, of course,

on the expectation that the organisation will obey its leader to the letter)?

Is there a clear government policy, a state policy outlining the steps for permanent peace? Given that the solution to this problem is the most significant test en route to “the new Turkey”, is this perspective serious and responsible enough? Or is this a mere pre-election measure to ensure that the local elections are carried out in a more peaceful atmosphere, yet another barren, short-term, momentary measure as voiced by some critics? The PKK had been voicing clear concerns along these lines and giving warnings that arms can easily be picked up again, keeping their supporters on their toes.

These questions will find answers in the coming days.

However, the greatest influence in the transformation towards permanent peace is social attitudes.

The role of civil society

A peaceful, democratic solution to the problem, recognition of the basic rights and freedoms of the Kurds, the restructuring of the state around a new, civilian and democratic Constitution within a democratic framework will happen as the social will, the government and the political institution as a whole reposition themselves accordingly. This is the crucial dynamic for the democratisation of politics and the state.

Have the Committees of Wise Men organised by the government for the limited mission of informing the public of the Peace Process carried out their “duty” in just two months?

Definitely not. This is why the civil society needs to be an effective participant in the process on many levels with the support of all parties involved. Permanent peace requires a social covenant and the civil society will play a vital role in this.

An independent commission which focuses on permanent peace would be instrumental in this. It should remind the parties of their duties and responsibilities, organise activities, prepare reports and make sure that the process travels transparently. The experience of other countries could be relevant here.

Changing the limiting, oppressive laws regulating democratic politics, freedom of thought, expression and organisation, abolishing the 10% election threshold, a unique feature in the world, and abolishing the TMK (Anti-Terrorism Law) are prerequisites of democratisation as well as a message of confidence for the specific “Resolution Process”.

The negotiations on the new Constitution have hit a deadlock and the parliamentary commission handling them is temporarily suspended. I think the new steps will contribute to a new political atmosphere conducive to overcoming this bottleneck.

We should remember that the resolution is a ‘process’ since it requires a radical and fundamental transformation both on the social and official levels. Having said that, the relevance of the process should not be used as an excuse to postpone urgent matters for upcoming elections etc. This perspective would not only render the process dysfunctional, but shatter the hope and expectations of peace. The ‘process’ approach

should be taken as an opportunity for embracing issues.

Even the basic consensus – excluding the nationalistic-chauvinistic segments – on the nature of the problem as “the Kurdish issue” as opposed to an issue of “terrorism”, “security” and “underdevelopment”, denotes that we have urgent responsibilities in the recognition of fundamental rights and freedoms.

Living together in peace

It is common knowledge that the Resolution Process has the Kurdish issue at its core. This is not surprising since this is the “hottest” of our democratisation issues. On the other hand, we need to mention that the Kurdish issue is objectively the most crucial driving force of the democratisation efforts. The more we can strip ourselves from the denialist, assimilationist, violent and conflict mindset, the faster we can evolve into a society, a state, embracing democratic values and sensibilities. Democratisation is meaningful as a peaceful experience of living together in Turkey.

Democratisation is a process realising itself objectively within the specific conditions and issues of a given country. Its requirements, responsibilities and norms are universal. The approach to the Kurdish problem is a democratisation test for Turkey.

There are, however, other issues and areas where democratisation will be felt in parallel to the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish issue.

The progress we make within the Kurdish peace process is an indicator of a democratic transformation in mentality which sets the

stage for the resolution of other issues.

For example there are “equal citizenship” demands from the Alevis and other marginalised faiths. Freedom of religion, including atheism, is taking more and more space in our agenda as an issue of expression where equal respect is demanded for the many shades of the spectrum.

The discrimination against non-Muslims and the demands voiced by other ethnic identities to live and prosper in their native languages and culture are other issues awaiting attention.

Turkey has ethnic, religious and cultural plurality. Disregarding these characteristics and a nation state narrative forcing a Sunni-Kemalist identity is wrong. This project has collapsed long ago but we are not ready to admit it.

So, what do we replace it with?

The plurality of the country is enough inspiration to build a healthy, functioning democracy and helps us answer this question with more confidence.

All we need to acknowledge is the harmony of democracy, peace and living together.

The Kurdish Issue, the Resolution Process and Steps in Confrontation

Emine Uçak *Journalist-writer* “Peace ended up being regarded as a concession. This approach, proof in itself that the state of war is perceived as ‘normal’ indicates an unhealthy society. The path to peace may not necessarily be through confrontation of the past but there can be no peace for a society unable to deal with its own state of sickness. The peace in Turkey inescapably brings the ailments of the system to the agenda and demands that the republic is re-founded by the citizens, because the old peace was an illusion in so many ways. Let me conclude my notes from the South East with the words of a local: “A prostrate individual cannot found an upright state.”

Etyen Mahçupyan

The debate about the Kurdish issue reminds me of the ‘elephant story’. Everyone’s perception, interpretation is different but these assessments never reflect the whole picture.

It is now clear that having grasped the futility of violence and a security based approach, Turkey is now tackling its longest standing and most painful problem through democratic and peaceful means. Bearing in mind the historic and sociological background of what preceded it, and despite the ups and downs and progress at a snail’s pace, the process has nonetheless re-instilled hope in peace all over the country. The main focus of this article will be the Steps in Confrontation rather than political resolution.

The first thing we should remember within the historical context is the lack of consensus even on the naming of the issue. For years, the ‘statist’ viewpoint regarded the Kurdish issue from a security and terror perspective and tried to come up with resolutions reflecting this. But today, even the opposition accepts that there is an issue of identity

and rights which stems from the official policies of denial and assimilation.

Approaching the Kurdish issue within the framework of the 30 year old atrocities would be inadequate. The nationalist policies initiated by the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) became official after the declaration of the republic. The multilingual, multicultural, multi-faith Ottoman Empire reduced all identities, religions and languages to a single, acceptable definition of citizenship: a prototype which is ethnically Turkish and religiously Hanafi Muslim. The segments of the society out of line with this identity became 'the other' and were forced to assimilate in order to turn into the acceptable type of citizen. Resisters faced fierce oppression. The Kurds, among other groups, had their fair share of these policies over the years. The Kurdish rebellions of the Republican era were reactions to these policies. The state which repressed these revolts by force relocated the Kurds at different parts of the country.

Forced migration and intergenerational trauma

When this heavy inheritance paired up with the inhumane practices of the military coup of September the 12th 1980, the Kurdish issue reached epic proportions dominating the last 30 years in Turkey. The oppression and torture endured by many detainees, their friends and families pushed the Kurds to see 'going guerrilla' as the only viable option. The modern identity-building process had started as the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) became the only place for Kurds to fight for their rights. The PKK got broader acceptance in the nineties when systematic torture, unsolved murders, missing persons and forced

migrations intensified. Forced migrations, whose part in the deepening of the Kurdish Issue is still not fully understood, have been instrumental in the transfer of pain and trauma to younger generations.

Some interviews for the oral history project 'Malan Barkirin' we co-authored with Özlem Yağız, Yıldız Amca and Necla Saydam are snapshots proving that solutions based on denial and security concerns make problems larger and more intractable. The tragedies and unjust treatment during evacuations of villages, and forced migration has been instrumental in shaping of the current demands of the Kurds.

Here are some excerpts:

"At the moment my hatred is boiling over. I never hate individuals but I have 100 % hatred for this system..."

(Tevfik, Selamet's elder brother who died at the age of 11 when their village was sprayed with bullets by the military and village guards)

"As a people, we were never pro-war. But we were not able to communicate this to the west. They have no idea what the Kurdish people have been going through. And some know what's going on but choose to ignore it. We have been through Iraq. What we went through was horrendous. The Kurds were not keen to go into the mountains at all. They just had to."

(Garip, 27 years old, İstanbul)

"I really know this, that guy had nothing to do with trouble...Firat is married with kids. He has been in prison for three years now. Sometimes he calls from prison and tells his brothers 'Don't ever speak Turkish! Educate yourselves, speak Kurdish!' He has changed

a lot. This prison somehow contributes to education of the Kurds.”

(Yilmaz, twenties, Istanbul)

Forced migration and the corruption it causes is definitely worth mentioning, especially nowadays. I deliberately say nowadays since the reflection of what the Kurds lost during the years of conflict present themselves as tragic events trivialised as incidents of public disorder today, along with drug addicts who kill their whole families, an increase in the number of murdered women and people who died in land squabbles. All of these disruptions to public order are stem from the losses the Kurds have suffered, starting with forced migrations.

Those who persevered and stayed with their land against the odds were instrumental in the survival of Kurdish life and culture. The ancient culture, enriched with the experiences of the parents, was transferred to children without interruption. The trauma and suffering were embraced as much as possible.

The pain of those who were forcefully removed from their land is still being transferred from generation to generation. Poverty was not the only reason hundreds of thousands were forced to live in the urban outskirts of cities starting with Diyarbakır. Poverty is a result rather than the cause of the Kurdish issue and it became the destiny of the Kurds especially after forced migrations.

Another intractable issue the Kurds had to face has undoubtedly been corruption. The state has in a way supported drug use and prostitution thinking it was better that “losing people to the organisation (the PKK).”

Etyen Mahçupyan of The Committee of Wise

Men summarised his impressions of the Southeast under the heading ‘corruption’: “Drug addicts were seen as easy targets, and bought as informants by the military and the police. Drug use was widespread mostly in the regions where the police patrolled in armoured vehicles. Eyewitnesses state that it was routine practice for people in gendarme uniforms to toss drug parcels into rubbish bins. Young kids saw this and collected them from the bins.”

Etyen Mahçupyan argues that organised Kurds didn’t really mind this since “The resultant addiction fed the basis for the entitlement to protest on the streets. Young people had to grow up in a corrupt environment where drug dependency and political militancy walked hand in hand.”

These lost generations formed by forced migration were dropped from the agenda of both the state and the Kurdish movement not only in times of conflict but also when normality resumed. The only official policies regarding forced migration was the handling of poverty, like sending fridges to houses with no electricity. The Kurdish movement on the other hand always had new steps to take, new battles to fight. To be frank, there were not periods of normalisation long enough to review what was going on. They prioritised the tangible ramifications of forced migration like unemployment, poverty and formed food banks for families on the verge of starvation. However, the psychological and sociological aspects like the traumas passed on from one generation to the other and the diminishing cultural structure due to dislocation have not been addressed.

The movie ‘Min Dit’ where Evrim Alataş is the screenwriter is a striking narrative of what the future holds for several generations of

a Kurdish family with forced migration and unsolved murders. We see how little orphans meet with crime and prostitution right in the middle of the city and how a lost generation evolves. The movie had a great deal of reaction from the West as the first Kurdish movie and got reaction in the East because it portrayed the inertia towards the loss of these children step by step. Evrim Alataş, who lost her battle against cancer at a young age said the following in her last article in the daily Taraf. "There are these two kids in the movie, whose parents are killed by JITEM, who are orphans seeking their own revenge, who are shaped within an environment of violence and whose roads finally cross with those of murderous gangs in İstanbul...what I am trying to say is that there is no "happy ending" for these kids. Nobody goes to these kids and says "Come here darling, your parents were militants, now you are safe, you are in my loving hands."

We have not, as of yet, been able to tell people that we were inspired by a true story; there is a group which says "It is impossible to have these two kids completely abandoned in such a political city, this film is not a true depiction of us". There are different criticisms in the West."

The criticism Evrim Alataş received for Min Dit continues even today. The Kurds in particular insist on ignoring the damage of forced migrations and the trauma transferred to new generations. They are adamant that the solution should be merely political. But as I mentioned before, these recurring painful incidents indicate that social rehabilitation is called for as well as a political solution. Forced migration should be the first item on the confrontation and closure agenda. While we are at it, we should also address the other problems post conflict, namely land conflicts stemming from title deed issues in

the region. The latest deaths and events in Bismil and Muş call for a serious investigation on the issue. Mehmet Ali Aslan, the Director of the Midyat Based Mihallemler Association is a strong advocate of the issue. He says that to prevent new hatred, animosities and vendettas in the region, land title reform is called for in all the problematic regions and that the legal committees should not only be comprised of the local government but the past owners of the land and their neighbours.

The snail's pace of the process

The Kurdish issue and especially periods of conflict cost the Kurds and the country dearly. This cost is described as such in the report prepared by The Committee of Wise Men: "The Kurds have had to bear the heaviest burden; their existence was denied, native language banned, place names changed, they could not name their children in their own language. As if that was not enough, they were exiled, made to leave their homelands forcefully, and left completely to their own devices in the suburbs of big cities, in poverty. Where they went, they had to endure poverty and unemployment, both huge blows to human dignity. All these policies resulted in considerable economic, cultural and psychological damage. As violence and oppression skyrocketed and the number of deaths, those injured and the people going up the mountain increased, the trauma of the Kurds deepened. Especially with the new generations who see themselves as the ones who "lost it all" the trauma reached epic proportions. The main factor is the amount of deaths caused. The death toll of the 21 revolts in the first 14 years of the republic is over 45,000. The death toll of the conflict with the PKK is over 40,000.

The report also indicates that in addition to the social and economic cost, the Kurdish issue has hijacked the Turkish political and legal system for years. The report which highlights the fact that Kurds have been governed under a state of emergency for years, also says:

“Anti-terrorist law and some changes made to the penal legislation ended up in a separate legal system in the region. Moreover, since this problem was unresolved, Turkish democracy had not been able to leave military tutelage and the extent of democratic reforms had been limited. The democratisation efforts or transformation programs have always been stopped with the rhetoric of divisiveness. These reasons and others compounded the Kurdish problem into a complex issue with social, political, cultural and security components. In order to have permanence in the solution process, all these elements should be taken into consideration.”

The latest democratisation process and hope for peace

Solution plans were considered by the Turkish state from the single party period to the latest democratisation process. Reports, economic initiatives, those who have a say in the region taking part in political parties as representatives were parts of these efforts especially during the Özal years. However, most of these initiatives were sabotaged.. We need to emphasize that what makes the current process unique is the transparency and integrity of the approach. This process started by the AKP as “Democratic Opening”, renamed as the “Project for National Unity and Brotherhood” had accidents along the way, like the road to Habur. The KCK operations and the Uludere Massacre dented

the Kurdish view of the process. Vahap Coşkun of Dicle University describes this period as such:

“The lack of trust between the parties and slips into the rhetoric of violence results in declarations which are against the spirit of the process. Those who are uncomfortable with the process do their best to use these opportunities to further the damage. For example when Cemil Bayık says that the process is “heading towards collapse”, he voices the feelings of such people. And those on both sides, who have been longing for these words for a while, announce that the process they see as a make believe thing anyway, is at the end of its life.

Some are excited by the re-emergence of violence. Some lament the PKK, some the AKP. Some fuel the PKK, some the AKP... After periods of harsh rhetoric, the issue climbed up the agenda especially during the 2013 Newroz (Kurdish New Year), this time under the name “resolution process”. Although the parties have been accusing one another of sabotaging the process, the process is back up and running, albeit at snail’s pace, and the curfew is still in effect. Although the teaching of the mother tongue only being allowed in private schools in the latest democratisation package could be taken as an indication of the slow tempo of the process, these steps are not merely symbolic, they do show real determination.

On the other hand, the process needs to be interpreted through a humanitarian perspective since it has, despite all its shortcomings, strengthened the hope for peace tremendously. A lady in Diyarbakır said “Imagine yearning to be a mother for years and finding out you are pregnant, you are over the moon but can’t tell anyone since you

don't want to jinx it, something like that" to describe how she feels about the process. As these words indicate there is an overwhelming majority who see the process above politics and government. We should never forget that what we put aside as the resolution process is "a new beginning" and that it should be observed in the practices of daily life as well as through the political lens.

Steps in confrontation and foundation of justice

There is no doubt that this hope will only evolve into a permanent peace depending on how real the steps in confrontation are. Talking about the judiciary, the Anti-Terrorist Act should be marked as a major obstacle to freedom of expression and democratisation. Political thought can still be tried as a crime within the TMK (Anti-Terrorism Law) There were many negative examples of this especially during the KCK (Group of Communities in Kurdistan) trials. Since the TCK (Turkish Penal Code) determines the heavy penalties for members of terrorist organisations, there is no need for an additional criminal code like the Anti-Terrorist Law. A major deficiency in the latest democratisation package is that the TMK has not been annulled.

Another judiciary related issue is the transfer of court cases of the '90s to other cities from the ones where the events had taken place. The Uğur Kaymaz, Şerzan Kurt, the Çaldıran Executions and Musa Çitil cases are some examples. The latest court case transferred to Ankara was one where six people including, the retired General Mete Sayar, the ex-commander of the Şırnak 23rd Gendarme Border Division for killing six villagers in Görümlü, Silopi in Şırnak, on the 14th of June in 1993.

Saniye Karakaş of London University King's College who worked on "Impunity and state crimes" says that the light punishments given in cases transferred to other cities such as those of Uğur Kaymaz, Gazi and Metin Göktepe fuels the public opinion that the cases were transferred to protect the offenders:

"As the decisions to transfer these court cases are made, the needs of the perpetrators have been considered greater than those of the victims. This accentuates victimisation. The transfers are made without consulting the victims and to cities hundreds of kilometres away creating major obstacles for the participation of families and friends and the victims themselves. Participation in these court cases creates additional economic burden and as seen in the case for Ahmet and Uğur Kaymaz, the family and friends and other supporters are sometimes barred from entering the cities by the governor's office based on the Law for Meetings and Demonstrations. This contradicts the public nature of trials, limits attendance and scrutiny and is against the public interest. "

Another vital step in confrontation is the 'disappearances'. *The Unspoken Truth: Forced Disappearance* report prepared by the Centre for Truth, Justice and Memory categorises what needs to be done. The state-centred proposals include that all first degree participants among the state officials should be fired, calls for corporate reform, the abolition of the village guard system and trials carried out in an effective and timely way before the time allowed to bring a case to trial expires.

There should be a Truth Commission in parliament for the friends and families of victims, taking in alternative stories about

what happened in the past; tapping into the collective memory; establishing multi-faceted, comprehensive compensation schemes with the friends and families of the victims. This process should walk hand in hand with the grassroots organisations founded by these people.

The social proposals focus on engraving past events into the public memory with museums, commemorations and monuments, instilling the “never again” approach to prevent their recurrence; campaigns to publicise the ‘disappearances’ in different social segments, including information about the recent past in history books and promoting academic research on the subject.

The Circassians Among “The Others”

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Turkey has slowly but surely been living through a normalization process built on the rightful fight of the Kurdish people (with questionable methods), the victimization of the Islamic people symbolized by the headscarf, the pain inflicted on the Turkish left after the coup of September 12th 1980, the politicized agenda of the Alevi people and the victimization of “others”, those whose identities are trapped in the private realm. World events, the EU process and technological progress surely affected this mobilisation. Partial “independence”, the democratization which now seems to be a regular fixture on the agenda and the players of the “resolution process”, the victimized identities of the Kurdish political movement eventually brought this to the table.

Since Kurdish people were vocal about the oppression and suffering they had been through and bring their rightful demands to the agenda, they dominate ethnic debates in Turkey. This is absolutely normal. However, when the political players start talking about “The Turkish and Kurdish peoples”, “Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood” or the most optimistic version “Turks, Kurds and the others”, this contributes to a discourse which ignores or bluntly groups the others. This discourse labels some segments of society as “the others” and excludes them from politics and public office. It also seems to infiltrate into academia, the media and civil society.

However, every single one of these peoples put aside en masse as “the others” deserve to be seen with their own unique historical processes, sociologies and cultural characteristics. A deeper insight into them would also reveal how withdrawn and clumsy they are about political participation.

The Circassians were among the first groups confronted by the founders of the republic, the elite of the Committee of Union and Progress, who embarked upon forming a nation state within the CUP ideology out of the remnants of the multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural Ottoman Empire. The CUP regime, which had undertaken the Armenian Genocide within its maxim of cleansing Anatolia of non-Muslims, needed a strategy for another potentially troublemaker group, Muslim non-Turks. Assimilation was the answer.

The Circassians took their place in history, maybe as the first group disenfranchised by the new regime. They were not able to empower themselves and were totally neglected by the Turkish intelligentsia.

In order to understand the silence and the naive initiatives of the Circassians during the EU process of the 2000s, the democratization package and the Resolution Process, a historical, sociological and cultural examination is needed.

Those who escaped the blade of genocide

Every Turkish citizen going through the education system sees himself as a descendant of a people which originated in the steppes of Central Asia. The Central Asian rhetoric makes no sense for the Kurds, Laz, Armenians and Assyrians who lived in these lands for centuries, it is equally meaningless for the Circassians who migrated here from somewhere else. Teaching the children of a people living in these lands for 150 years that they are in fact Turks who migrated here from Central Asia is the most visible of the assimilation policies of the Republic of Turkey.

Despite the history taught by rote, the Circassians have their own narratives. First and foremost, it has been impossible for the Circassians to live here with their own identities.

The Circassians had single-handedly resisted Czarist Russia's Caucasian campaign for decades until their defeat in 1864 and had undergone a major genocide at the hands of the Russians. Hundreds of thousands of Circassians we could call 'survivors of the blade' who escaped the atrocities were exiled to Ottoman lands where they were accepted for the good of the Empire and settled haphazardly in small groups.

The circassian slice of the Ottoman settlement policy

The Ottoman state always had a settlement policy in accordance with its own needs. When Circassia was occupied by Russia and the Circassian population was expelled, the Ottoman Empire had been in search of ways of strengthening its Muslim population and re-implementing state authority in its remaining lands. They looked righteous accepting the Circassians but lost no time in prioritizing their own agenda and settled the new migrants all over Ottoman lands. The Circassians were scattered from the Balkans to Anatolia, reaching all the way to the Middle East, along borders, in between Muslim and non-Muslim populations or in the midst of potentially trouble-making communities. They were appointed as a pseudo-gendarmerie and were known to be the first "loyal guests" ready to jump to any mission during the decline and collapse of the Empire.

The Circassians in the Empire were a diaspora and latecomers; the main characteristic of the

relationship between them and the state was the reflex action of clutching on to the new country. The effects of this can still be traced is a struggle for survival (albeit giving up their own identity) which could easily be explained by a concept neglected in present day Turkey - "diaspora".

The Circassian identity in Ottoman times

The Ottoman Empire was home to many ethnicities. The governing power comprised of Circassians as well as others especially within the state bureaucracy and the palace avoided interfering with the cultural traits of these ethnicities.

After the partial increase in freedoms in the Second Constitutional Era of 1908, The Istanbul-centred Circassian intelligentsia got organised. The 'Çerkes Teavün Cemiyeti' aiming to nurture the Circassian cultural identity was very active during this period. The magazine Guaze in Circassian, using the Circassian Alphabet in the Latin script, the Circassian Demonstration School (an Ottoman first in coeducation) are examples. Women's initiative is a significant characteristic of these organisations. The 'Çerkes Kadınları Teavün Cemiyeti' (Circassian Women's Association) has a historical position in the Ottoman women's movement.

The Circassian elite were following Caucasian politics closely and formed lobby groups to influence developments in their former homeland. They were instrumental in the recognition of the independence of the short lived North Caucasian Republic by the Ottoman Empire in 1918.

The centre of the organization was Istanbul,

however they wanted to be active in Circassian settlements in Anatolia as well. The Circassian mobilization in Istanbul was not reflected in the periphery all that much but Circassians living in less urban areas – their traditional habitats – lived freely without any oppression of their identity.

The Çerkes Teavün Cemiyeti was closed down during the British occupation and did not get the chance to reorganize after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Republic.

The Circassians from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic

The Circassians actively took the side of Mustafa Kemal, the leader of the resistance movement. They were instrumental on the Western Front and in the congresses. There are many Circassian figures who got a mention in Turkish history, the most famous of whom is "Çerkez Ethem" (Ethem the Circassian).

Ethem Bey of Bandırma worked for Teşkilat-ı Mahsusa (Intelligence Agency) and started guerrilla warfare on the advice of another Circassian Rauf Orbay, by recruiting other Circassians to the independence movement, sometimes voluntarily and sometimes by force. He was instrumental in stopping the Greeks on the Western Front and gained the government in Ankara very precious time by oppressing many revolts by force.

He was notorious for banning people from speaking Circassian in his troops, fighting against Circassians in the revolts he suppressed. This "Circassian" guerrilla became apocryphal along with the "traitor" myth, all Circassians being tarred with the same brush.

Ethem Bey asked for right of free passage from Greece at the end of a conflict he had with the Ankara government and got labelled a traitor overnight and earned a brand new nickname “Ethem the Circassian”. This tarred the whole Circassian community for decades. Every single Circassian seeking expression in the public domain faces being branded “the Circassian Traitor”. Yet another event which had taken place in this chaotic period and never come to light which is a crucial obstacle especially for the Circassians living in Southern Marmara and taking part in daily public life.

The first relocation of the Republican era: The relocation of the Circassians of Gönen-Manyas

The relocation which started in December 1922 with the arrival of an order at Mürüvetler, a Circassian village off Manyas, resulted in 14 families being forced to resettle in various places in Anatolia and 33 having to sell all their possessions and living in limbo. The only crime they had committed was to be Circassian. These people were transported to different Anatolian cities like Kayseri, Niğde and Konya in animal wagons and were resettled in their new homes apart from one another.

This relocation, a smaller, less harsh version of the Dersim Massacres of 1938 is a common punishment used against potential opposition groups in the early years of the Republic. This relocation episode still begs more interest from historians with its many dark episodes during chaotic times.

The relocation had basically completed its mission. The pressure on the Circassians who were allowed to go back after a while never faltered; they lived their lives under

surveillance from the gendarmerie for many years.

The Gönen-Manyas Relocations were never erased from the social memory and are still considered a major setback against the nationalization of the Circassians with their own identities. In 1993, when the opening of a Caucasian Cultural Association was on the agenda, Circassians, especially over a certain age, strongly opposed the project and advised the youngsters to “be good”. This is tangible proof that the bad memories are still strong.

In 2013 an oral history project in the region detected that people over a certain age were very reluctant to talk; this also shows the ongoing effect of the past on Circassians.

Known as the “150’s” the relocation list comprised mostly of Circassians. The opposing comments from the Circassian MPs in the First and Second Parliaments were silenced by “go away if you don’t like it”. Such were the psychological obstacles faced by the Circassians shedding the ‘guest’ psychology and feeling that they belong here.

Circassian identity during the single party period

I have already mentioned that Circassians were the first non-Turkish group to be disqualified after the declaration of the Republic. The assimilation methods used on the Circassians who are Sunni Muslims but not Turks, who came from somewhere else, –demand interest from social scientists.

This was a period where religion became a state affair, peoples were oppressed, the more (Turkish) nationalised the Circassians were, the better it was for them. The most racist

discourses were voiced by the Circassians themselves who were among the Republican elite in considerable numbers. They were labelled as “Circassian Traitors”, suppressed by the “Gönen-Manyas Circassian Relocation” and pushed outside of public life and told to “go away if you don’t like it”. These are all obstacles encountered by the Circassians looking for acceptance and belonging.

The “Speak Turkish, Citizen” campaigns implemented during this period and the restrictions to freedom of organization hindered the expression of the Circassian identity both in its traditional rural habitat and in new urban settings. This period is significant in the assimilation process since Circassians were excluded from the public domain and limited to private life. Oppression was fierce and this resulted in the eradication of a substantial amount of oral history. Symbolic characteristics related to language, customs and identity were largely lost.

Circassian organisations during the Republican era

As the political atmosphere of the 1950s created partial freedom, Circassians, especially those in urban environments, got some breathing space. The Caucasian Associations founded in the 1950s mainly organized folkloric activities and balls. Circassians had to have the word “Turk” in the name of their associations. Political struggle seemed completely out of bounds since even their cultural activities were under tight control.

The urban migration in the 1960s, parallel to the industrialization of the country, had effected the Circassians and the protection of cultural characteristics had become really tricky even in the private realm. The urbanized

Circassians got active within community associations, still far from the politics of identity.

Circassian youths who migrated to Istanbul and Ankara for a university education got involved in the Circassian associations, bringing political activities to the agenda; but could not find themselves a place among the intensive left-right conflict of the times. A lot of Circassian youth also got involved in left wing organisations, but completely devoid of their ethnic identities. It is difficult to find examples of leftist discourse reaching the Circassian community.

The Circassian community, unable to develop political participation with their identities, were vastly affected by the movements in the Turkish political agenda and determined their political preferences accordingly.

The military coups taking place every decade had taken care of the blossoming naive politicization efforts within the diaspora.

The influence of the collapse of the USSR on the Circassian diaspora

The collapse of the USSR in 1989 started a new era for the Circassian diaspora. They then had the opportunity to form a new set of connections with their homeland the Caucasus, from which they were exiled in 1864 and which had been behind the Iron Curtain during the Cold War and started a new period in identity formation. The struggle to establish a cultural liaison led the diaspora to be periodically politicized with the wars in Abkhazia and then Chechnya. Their efforts to exert influence on these wars by street protests could be interpreted as their first foray into the political arena with their own identity. By

this time, they were greatly distanced from their ethnic identity and the politicization was short lived. The developments in the Caucasus were left in limbo and the diaspora withdrew from the political arena, however this period was significant in terms of identity formation. There was a huge increase in the number of Circassians moving back to the Caucasus, or frequently visiting the old homeland, raising another question about their sense of belonging. To belong to Turkey without making identity concessions or to return to the old homeland. This is the greatest dilemma for the Circassian diaspora.

The 2000s, demands for identity recognition on the agenda

At the beginning of the 2000s new debates and opportunities awaited the Circassians who during the 1990s were busy with the war in the Caucasus and inner issues within the diaspora. The war the AKP started against military tutelage and the EU process created a political opening, making the Kurdish issue, as well as other identity based ones, more visible.

Another agenda item for the Circassians was the Sochi Winter Olympics.

The Sochi Opposition Movement started with Russia nominating the city as a venue for the Winter Olympics and caused the Circassians to confront their own history. Sochi has been the capital of Circassia and the symbol of the Circassian Genocide. The anti-Olympic movement was organized on an international level with the help of the internet. The 'No Sochi' movement organized protests with thousands of Circassians and was a springboard for the diaspora Circassians becoming political. This opposition experience gathered within No Sochi was instrumental in

bringing issues within Turkey to the national agenda.

The EU membership process, a priority item for the AKP especially during their first years of power, presented opportunities for the Circassians. The concessions given by the state during the mother tongue discussions created a lot of excitement among Circassians. The two hours per week of Circassian broadcast on TRT created a lot of kudos among Circassians, despite its shortcomings.

The wider Circassian public was quite silent during the debate about broadcasts in the mother tongue and Circassian NGOs could not make much of a presence apart from a few novice remarks. However, youth organisations outside the traditional associations did manage to take part in the democratization debate with more confidence. The traditional Circassian organisations were also quiet about the partial changes in the constitution. It is interesting that those who overtly said "Yes, but not enough" during the 2010 constitution referendum process (which had groups who said "Yes", "No" and "Yes, but not enough" and those who boycotted the referendum) were all outside the traditional associations.

The debate on the new constitution should be noted as a period where the Circassians pushed political participation channels and voiced their demands.

There were Circassian organisations which forwarded their demands to the Constitutional Reform Commission of the Parliament, as well as increasing Circassian participation within the new constitution coalitions.

Circassian organisations have been very vocal about their demands in the semi-free

environment of the last decade. Mother tongue education, Circassian TV and the right to use their own surnames are all on the agenda in the new Circassian organisations which hold meetings in Ankara and Istanbul. Though not enjoying mass following, these demands are sure to find a substantial following, especially among the new generation of Circassians.

When we look at the Circassian attitudes towards the non-conflict environment called The Resolution Process, Circassians are in general positive about it, but reluctant to contribute to it. The current reaction of Circassian organisations could be summed up as “we are here too”, an attitude endemic to oppressed minority nationalism.

However, the Circassian youth, choosing to get organized outside of the traditional Circassian associations, have a more political perspective and are more vocal. The Circassians who were signatories of the “Yes to the Resolution Coalition” were all young people with an awareness of their own ethnic identity. The new generation of Circassians heralds a new era of political identity devoid of nationalism and exhibit a willingness to cooperate with other ethnicities in Turkey.

Being the diaspora

The diaspora is a widely debated concept among social scientists and will be more so as the problems of immigration become more visible. However there are not that many academics studying the issue in Turkey.

This might be due to the negative attitude towards the Armenian and Jewish diaspora in academic circles. There is no other way to explain why a country host to so many diaspora avoids the concept of the diaspora so fiercely. Political and academic debates seem to prefer the vagueness of “the Circassian

World” as opposed to the Circassian diaspora due to this phobia.

The myriad of works published in recent years speaks volumes about the common denominators of different diaspora. The historical processes and cultural characteristics of societies are different, however, there are many shared characteristics of diaspora stateless after the trauma of a major defeat. Fuelled by their survival instinct after losing their homeland, they do their best to adapt to their new countries.

Within this context, Circassians face the problems of being diaspora in Turkey. After 150 years, they cannot be “from here” with their own identities. This has a lot to do with the historical process of the country and the social engineering policies they were subjected to, but the real reason behind their inability to develop a resistance to the policies is their “state of being a diaspora”. Struggling to exist in areas allocated to them by the state and persevering this for generations is a common characteristic of societies turning diaspora after exile. This conceptualization is the only way to explain why the Circassians followed a state-centric attitude towards domestic politics and had always been supporters of official perspectives. Like many other diaspora, they are going through a new identity process in the fourth and fifth generations.

The diaspora experience of the last ten years where the fifth generation is in the streets and an increase in the number of youths claiming a political identity, although they cannot speak the language, denote a “new” era in identity formation. Whether this identity politics be clogged with nationalistic, archaic discourse

or whether they have a democratic politics cooperating with the Kurds, Armenians and the Laz will depend on the path chosen by the young generation. Early signs point to a novice but determined diaspora sympathizing with the Kurdish policies, eager to confront the Armenian Genocide, interested in other issues of Turkey in contrast with their elders known as devletlu (high rank statesman).

The repugnant political atmosphere

There is a further obstacle between the Circassians and political participation apart from their historical processes and their state of being a diaspora. The language used by the political players regarding democracy and basic human rights pushes the timid Circassian diaspora right outside politics. Although basic human rights and freedoms have been more widely recognized in the last ten years, identity demands still need attention. The language of the main political players of the country does not encourage participation. On top of that, it is not only the Circassians who are excluded from politics.

The main actors of Turkish politics would be the AKP and the Kurdish political movement for the last decade. The main opposition party, CHP are stuck in the Kemalist perspective of the 1930s and regurgitates old rhetoric rather than creating new policies. The identity politics of the MHP on the other hand is merely archaic nationalism.

The AKP has taken steps on the basic human rights and freedoms and democratization; however there is a huge difference between their attitude towards the Kurdish issue and others in terms of identity politics. The AKP policies are summarized by the PM Tayyip

Erdoğan when he said “We cannot have education in the mother tongue, this demand is a threat to the unity of our country. Look, now the Circassians have started!” about the Circassians who organized a meeting to express their own demands within the democratization process. The words of the PM are more than a political reaction, it is an important message to the Circassians, the majority of whom vote for him, that they would be valued in the eyes of the government as long as they kept quiet.

The language used by the Kurdish political elite who themselves had been subjected to the harshest of oppression and assimilation is no different when it comes to “others”. The BDP MP Sırrı Sakık said the following when answering Birgül Ayman Güler of CHP in Parliament. “Those who called this country home later on, those who came here from the Caucasus, from Bosnia, you are not the owners of this country, and you have to know your place.” This attitude is very familiar to the Circassians. It is very hurtful and tragic to hear a version of the 90 year old Kemalist discourse of “leave if you don’t like it” from the representative of a people who were themselves oppressed because of their ethnic identity. These words also show how the dominant official discourse draws political opponents’ policies in line with the state.

There is no need to explore how the CHP and MHP approach any demands based on identity. One is slave to Kemalist knee-jerk reactions and the other to nationalist rhetoric and there is no end to their assimilationist discourse, which makes someone else the other.

This style of politics produced by the main players pushes novices, like the Circassians, to

the private realm and keeps them away from politics.

Conclusion

As we have mentioned at the beginning of this article, Turkey is going through a serious “normalization” process with technological progress and the push from cyclical influences, the Kurdish movement and other identities fighting for survival. As the policies of the nation state are relaxed and a variety of identities become increasingly more visible, the democratization led by the government should be seen as an effort to keep up with the times.

The democratization process, the referendum for the Constitution and the “resolution process” will lead to a new social contract, a new constitution. Will the new constitution bring peace of mind? This totally depends on whether all the different identities will be stakeholders or not.

The two sides of the Reconciliation Process are the government as the representative of the state and the political players representing the Kurdish people. During this process where politics is to replace guns, the negotiations are vital for the Circassians as they are for all the peoples of Turkey. The Circassian diaspora, traditionally having a state-centric perspective due to the reasons we explained earlier, should do some serious soul-searching and acknowledge the Kurdish movement for creating an environment where the Circassians can voice their own demands. We

know well that whatever their methods, the Kurdish struggle for survival and the Kurdish political movement allowed many other identities including the Circassians to express themselves. Further to this acknowledgement, the Circassians should leave nationalistic, repulsive discourses like “we are here too” and start building a democratic political identity in solidarity with all other oppressed peoples.

Their own efforts will not be enough for increased political participation for the Circassians who are considered among the “others” when it comes to identities. The Circassians are thoroughly assimilated by the state and they need the state to acknowledge their basic rights and freedoms as well as encouraging them to use these rights. It is hard for people who have lived with fear of the state all through the Republic to suddenly start trusting the state. Both the state and political actors should fine-tune their discourse and implement programs establishing trust and encouraging political participation.

The new constitution should be the first item on the agenda of the Circassians, the government and other political parties. Turkey needs a Constitution supporting political participation by different identities, one which expands freedoms and has a place for everyone in it. It can then have peace of mind. Who will shape the new constitution? Will it be political haggling or the demands of the participants-? This is the democratic reckoning we need to face.

Real Resistance to Militarism

Assistant Professor 1980s, 90s...
Nil Mutluer News hour on the one and only TV channel viewers eat their dinner to.
The first stories usually cover the conflict in eastern and south-eastern
Nişantaşı University Turkey, about the official discourse on “terrorism”.
Communication Department The guerrillas who die are referred to as “those who divide” or
“terrorists”, whereas the soldiers are “martyrs”.

The dead bodies of the guerrillas are there side by side on the TV screen, their faces meticulously kept off screen to avoid censorship. Nameless, discarded bodies.¹ On the other hand, the names and rank of martyred soldiers are presented in full detail. They are buried with official ceremonies, their coffins wrapped up in the flag. The following day everyone is talking about the “enemy personified” at school, at work, in the street.

In the post 1980's period, the alienation of Kurds was based on the official line using many channels such as the media and education as well as political, social and economic discourse. This state creating “the other” out of the Kurds calls for the understanding of the founding ideology. This alienation indicates how the state founded its militaristic elements. It also explains why and how the Kurds were militarised.

Militarism not only affects men, but even more so women and children. Since the militaristic mentality groups women and children within the family, thus stripping them of their voice in what is going on. Militarism is not only limited to conflict within this spiral, but rather intrinsic to the dynamics of everyday life.

[1] Mutluer, N. (2011) “Disposable Bodies or Contested Masculinities in Everyday City Life: Internally Displaced Men in Tarlabası Istanbul”. (der) R. L. Jackson and M. Balaji *Culturing Manhood and Masculinities: The Politics of Gender and Identity Across the Global Context*. Champaign, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, p. 75-105.

We need to remind ourselves of the current basis of militarism in Turkey and of the civil war which has made its mark on the last 30 years of the country to make healthy steps towards peace and living together. To build a future in peace, we need to understand how it militarised the society as well as the Turkish and Kurdish sides.

The Foundations of the mentality

Militarist nationalism is among the dominant founding ideologies of the republic. The trauma of the diminishing borders of the Ottoman Empire, the uniform identity created by nationalism worldwide and the harsh conflicts right before the foundation of the republic. For example the War of Independence for Turks, the Catastrophe of Asia Minor for the Ottoman Greeks or the Armenian genocide and all those suppressed revolts like Koçgiri ... If we completely disregard such traumas, the main shaping ideology of a manageable republic was a modernist, militaristic nationalism.

Militaristic nationalism needs constant threats to its security to justify its existence. It raises doubt in its citizens and unites the society around fear with a single ideology. This dynamic of security versus threat suggests appropriate behaviour and indicates which life is more valuable to society through symbolism. The process cements itself through education and the media.

Since the Sunni Hanefi Turkish identity had been presented as the dominant one, Armenians, Greeks and Jews were considered minorities within the Treaty of Lausanne, whereas Alevis, Yezidis and Assyrians were left aside and continued their existence without the same civil status. Their access to resources was obstructed. They were not employed as equal citizens at official positions.

And the state did not avoid open and secret interventions whenever it deemed necessary. The male dominant, heterosexist structure of this framework only included women within the terms defined by militaristic nationalism. LGBT individuals, perceived as threats, were completely ignored.

These were not the only excluded groups. Those who reacted to the exclusion of others or their own, critics of the dominant ideology, were targeted by the militaristic national state. Different political views, as well as ethnic and religious differences, were picked up by the dragnet of the state. The political views oppressed by numerous coups were no longer discussed in society.

Within this framework, the Kurds became vilified by the Turkish state both with their identities and their militaristic policies especially after 1980. Although Kurds were adamant about preserving their identities since the early days of the republic, the state chose to assimilate them within the Turkish identity as most of them were Sunnis. The Alevis were excluded from the Muslim partnership reminiscent of the case of the Turkmen and Arab Alevis.

We talk about the emergence of Kurdish nationalism in the modern sense from the end of the 19th century led by the efforts of exiled tribal leaders, the republic completely ignored Kurdish existence from its early days. The suppressed revolts from the last periods of the Ottoman Empire, the Dersim Massacres of 1938, the denial of the Kurdish language, pressures on identity, arbitrary and systematic arrest and torture and the forced evacuations, fires, dislocations, and village guard policies of the 1990s have been the dominant official approach.

The rise of the Kurdish resistance

The Turkish assimilation policies in denial of Kurdish existence resulted in the tribes and communities in Kurdistan developing different tactics. Kurdish tribal leaders participated in politics in right and left of centre conservative political parties. Many of them did not make any reference to their Kurdish identities. Urban Kurds were active participants on the left of the political spectrum DDKO (Revolutionary Eastern Culture Party), PSK (Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan). The foundation of PKK was a turning point, since its representation of the Kurdish population and its armed reaction against the Turkish army forced the state to address the party it had marginalised. With the influence of the world identity movements, the Kurdish movement was also able to take a legitimate role in Turkish politics. The collapse of the Eastern Block in the Balkans and the disintegration of the Soviet Union facilitated the entry of ethnicity based mass movements into the international and Turkish agendas.

Through the official denial of the Kurdish identity until the 1980s, the state adopted the OHAL (State of Emergency) policies as the regional continuation of the coup d'état mentality. The 1990s not only define our present, but make up the internalised militarism of societies. The people of Kurdistan have been the primary targets of official militaristic policies with JITEM (Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism) and the YİBO's (District Boarding Schools) seen by some as concentration

camp. Systematic and arbitrary custody, unsolved murders and many more human rights violations have become routine in the Kurdistan of the 1990s. Forced migrations and village guards, both policies aimed at dividing the Kurdish society and still influencing the militaristic mentality of the whole Turkish society, were put into effect then.

Although the founding ideology of the PKK is based on the Marxist-Leninist perspective, the active catalyst carrying the movement into its present day position, especially after the 1990s, has been nationalism. The PKK was adamant about a grassroots organisational model, excluding the Kurdish intelligentsia from the word go. This attitude enabled an organic internalization of the movement by the masses, but also resulted in the centralization of the masses and intellectual development of the movement. This even resulted in exclusion within the Kurdish community.

From day one the PKK was against the discriminative, assimilative and armed official policies against the Kurds and legitimised armed insurgency against it. Its armed organisation was formed around certain values for the guerrilla structure and to feed it with the support of the masses. Abdullah Öcalan, the founder and leader of the organisation created the 'ideal' Kurdish identity. And he made sure that this identity was embraced by women and children, the prerequisite of nationalist structures.² The nationalist, militaristic ideology and the nation-state building process emphasises the placement of

[2] Keyder, Ç. (1993) "The Dilemma of Cultural Identity on the Margin of Europe". *Review*, Vol 16, No: 1 p: 19-33; Mayer, T. (ed) (2000) *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Setting The Stage*. London and New York: Routledge, p: 1-22, Enloe, C (2004) *The Curious Feminist*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, Mutluer N. (2012) "Normal Violence, Normal Death: The Political, social and domestic aspects of violence in Tarlabası" Collection of papers for the Conference on "Family and Violence", İstanbul: Türkiye Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı.

women and children within the family, since it sees the family as a vessel where to which its policies could be applied.³

The Kurdish nationalist movement, like every other nationalist movement, had roles cut out for men and women. Although these roles interacted differently in everyday life, they still formed the power base for the ideology. The positioning of the women in the PKK is not only crucial for the women themselves but also for determining the characteristics of the nationalism of the Kurdish movement. There is certainly a hierarchical organisation, especially around Abdullah Öcalan, yet horizontal organisation within the community is essential for open participation.

This horizontal relationship differentiates between the traditional woman and the guerrilla woman of the PKK. As Handan Çağlayan evaluates the roles given to women within Kurdish nationalism in her book *Analar, Yoldaşlar, Tanrıçalar (Mothers, Comrades, Goddesses)*, prior to the 1980s, women either had symbolic roles or threatening ones such as troublemakers, but that they were accepted as players in the 1990s.⁴ Around these roles, the women within the Kurdish movement were tagged as PKK guerrilla or mother.

As women, representatives of the family in conservative mentalities, became major players in Kurdish politics the guerrillas were

able to easily mingle within the people. Since, as the case is in all nationalism, women with the nationalist identity were perceived to be devoid of sexuality, this helped them get over the perception of the woman as a threat, which was common in conservative circles. The differentiation between mothers and guerrillas is of utmost importance within this structure for the maintenance of the internal hierarchy, division of labour and balance.

This, not surprisingly, resulted in women getting stuck in some roles. During my field study, Ayten was complaining now that the PKK, which she was so desperate to join to avoid domestic violence, rejected her due to her betrothal, the only role being left for her was that of a mother.⁵ Though modern ideologies like nationalism target static gender roles, the network of everyday life causes people to create multiple identities. Ayten tends to extend the role of the mother she feels she is trapped in by staying connected to different elements of the civil society not necessarily close to the Kurdish movement.

Guerrilla visits to villages become legendary by the Kurds internalising the nationalist discourse. The guerrillas are perceived as people who stand up to the inequality and pain inflicted upon Kurds for years. At that point for the Kurds supporting the movement there was no difference between the demands of the movement and personal resistance.

[3] Keyder, Ç. (1993) "The Dilemma of Cultural Identity on the Margin of Europe". *Review*, Vol 16, No.1 p19-33; Mayer, T. (ed) (2000) *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Setting The Stage*. London and New York: Routledge, p: 1-22, Enloe, C (2004) *The Curious Feminist*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, Mutluer N. (2012) "Normal Violence, Normal Death: The Political, social and domestic aspects of violence in Tarlabaşı" *Collection of papers for the Conference on "Family and Violence"*, İstanbul: Türkiye Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı.

[4] Çağlayan, H. (2007) *Analar, Yoldaşlar, Tanrıçalar: Kürt Hareketinde Kadınlar ve Kadın Kimliğinin Oluşumu*. İstanbul: İletişim. (Mothers, Comrades and Goddesses: Women and the Formation of the Female Identity in the Kurdish Movement)

[5] Interview with Ayten June 6th, 2007. Tarlabaşı, İstanbul.

Not everyone was happy with these visits. Some were uneasy about them since village visits resulted in state oppression through JITEM. Some, on the other hand, felt that they should support the PKK since it was the existing effective political player, by the same token criticising the past militaristic activities.

In my study on forced migration in Tarlabası, although the PKK was an important institution, ex-guerrillas brought up the fact that its internal hierarchy was discriminatory. And of course there are groups which do not associate themselves with the Kurdish political movement. Although nowadays there is a more flexible political community, some of these groups were only able to express their distance from the Kurdish political movement within the urban environment.⁶

The power balance shaped under war conditions made the modern nationalistic structure of the PKK relatively flexible. Although the PKK has a top down hierarchy, its connection to the community, the development of the European Kurdish diaspora after 1980 and the other players in the Middle East make the organisation more horizontal and flexible. And within this structure, how the leadership, nearly an institution in itself, functions is relevant to not only the organisation itself but to all those Kurds identifying themselves with the movement. Thus they redefine their connection to their experiences and politics and the Turks on a daily basis.

The militaristic facets of the State

Until I came to Istanbul, until I turned 10, I had no idea people were mortal...I

didn't know that they died naturally, since in my experience they were killed...If it wasn't for the killings, I might have known that there is natural death...Either the state,Hezbollah, or the PKK would kill the people around me.⁷

These words belong to the textile worker Zınar, was 25 when I interviewed her in Tarlabası for my PhD on forced migration. However, she was a 10 year old child when she came to the big city and found out that people could die of natural causes. When their village was evacuated by officials and her father put in jail, Zınar, the eldest boy, was sent to Tarlabası before her mother and siblings as the breadwinner of the family to live with his uncle. Her mother and siblings eventually made it to Istanbul as well. Then the father was released. The family division of labour is such that the father takes care of politics and Zınar has been the taking care of the economic side of things since she turned ten.

Although the "return to your village" law has been introduced, according to Zınar, there is no village to return to. Their village had been demolished and there were serious infrastructure issues. Although they cannot return to their own village, they are still happy to go back to Kurdistan, to Amed (Diyarbakır), but also feel bitter since her father is now behind bars for the KCK law suit. They have no idea why he was put under arrest. Zınar is still supporting her family. Their family story is one of the relatively milder versions of what hundreds of thousands of forced migrants had to go through.

The official assimilation policies of the late

[6] Şentürk, M. (2008) "Yoksulların Yaşam Stratejileri: Küçük Mustafa Paşa ve Balat Örnekleri (Life Strategies of the Poor: The Cases of Küçük Mustafa Paşa and Balat)". MA Thesis in Sociology. İstanbul: İstanbul University.

[7] Interview with Zınar, November 25th, 2007, İstanbul.

1980s and early 1990s gave the Kurds two options: Either agree to become village guards or leave their villages within the forced migration scheme. Village guards would be armed by the officials against those who didn't subscribe to this system. Those forced to migrate had to do so with no preparation, nowhere to go, leaving behind devastated villages. Those who opted for towns and cities close by had to face poverty and exclusion.

Their village life was no rose garden even prior to forced migration. Some of them said life at the YIBO's (Boarding District School) resembled the military. Those who stayed in the villages did not have much peace of mind either. Official assimilation policies manifested themselves in the members of the armed forces raiding the villages, humiliating and killing the inhabitants. What Ömer went through in his childhood had a lot to do with him leaving school. His experiences are from everyday life before migration:

Riot vans...Both of them were crawling on the ground and riot vans were following them. Sometimes there was only a centimetre between them. What I want to say is that they were forced, I don't know what to say, I have never seen torture like this...I bet it can only happen in this country...my soul was destroyed! It was not just the school, but I didn't even want to see my homeland.⁸

The militarism of the 1990's also affected the primary preferences of those who witnessed the events first hand. Zinar did not join the PKK since she had to make a living for her family and Ömer did not join because he does not believe in war, they both support the PKK and its affiliated political parties. Ömer does

so even though he criticises the PKK every now and then.

Forced migration and the village guard system divided Kurds and armed a group of them against others. This armament did not only divide the Kurds as the PKK and the others, it at the same time turned the armed village guards into agents of blackmail. They blackmailed the villagers who refused to be armed by threatening to turn them in to the gendarmerie for being "PKK supporters". Probably the most violent of these events had been the one that took place in Bilge Village of Mazıdağ, Mardin on May the 4th, 2009 where a total of 44 people were killed including 6 children and 16 women.

The issue was covered up as an honour killing at the beginning. What we eventually ended up with was a network of murder suspects among village guards and a conflicting network encompassing migration, deserted and claimed goods and businesses. To cut a long story short, the official step to divide the Kurds resulted in a militaristic power struggle among the citizens.

All martyrs are holy

Those who eked out an existence between life and death seem to naturalise some of the deaths; especially those of martyrs which are legitimised by militaristic nationalism. Political conflict determines the relationship of everyday life with violence and militarism. A concept like martyrdom may be included in the concepts which construct manhood and womanhood in everyday life. For example, martyrdom is one of the first steps of the normalisation of violence, especially for males.

Martyrdom, with its references to military

service, where the discipline of being an ideal soldier for your nation has ramifications on the way men relate to other men and women in daily life.⁹ Giving up one's life or family if need be, not hesitating to apply violence to one's opponents and legitimising violence emerges in the practices of daily life. Although daily life does permit pluralistic relations, it also establishes political categories.

As Zınar criticises the violence she had witnessed in Kurdistan and emphasizes that she had only seen "natural death" in the city, she normalises death in cases of martyrdom. Martyrdom is accepted as a relevant in the circumstances, an unquestioned category within systems naturalising violence as a solution in pursuit of dominance or survival.

Since the Kurdish movement had introduced the concept of martyrdom for the dead guerrillas, the first association Zınar had with the word "martyr" was with the guerrillas. Zınar, who had a problem with people who did not die "naturally" of old age normalised death in the case of martyrdom. She approached martyrdom as sacred, normal, a natural stage experienced when necessary as if it is unrelated to death. In the process, she normalised the martyrdom of the Turkish soldiers as well, deeming it sacrosanct and respecting it as well as the martyrdom of the "resistance" guerrillas she defended.

The normalisation of the death discourse is proof of how violence is internalised. No side is exempt from violence in Turkey. A version of the martyrdom discourse resembling Zınar's is voiced by Şükrü who came to Tarlaşa

from the Black Sea Region in Northeast Turkey due to economic reasons: "for the good country"¹⁰. Şükrü is quite the nationalist when he calls the guerrillas terrorists and he has a discriminative discourse towards the Kurds.

Solidarity with other ethnic groups is dependent on circumstances and so is martyrdom, the fingers of militarism extending into everyday life. Continuing with Şükrü, when he talks about their everyday life in Tarlaşa, he accentuates cooperating with the Kurds, although he feels closer to the Roma people than the Kurds.

"We have been living together with the Roma people for years. The Kurds arrived later. We also work together. The Roma are more hospitable. So are the Kurds, but the Roma a bit more. The Roma know how to go out and have fun. The Kurds are more conservative, more introvert. They are also involved in politics. Things are a bit easier going with the Roma."¹¹

Although the discourse of martyrdom does not have a direct effect on the economic affairs of Şükrü, in everyday life the shared discourse he has with the Roma on martyrdom and identification with Turkish nationalism makes him feel closer to them socially and politically. Although everyday life provides plurality and togetherness, the nationalistic discourse determines the categories of near and far within political events. A Kurdish family, who has no problem whatsoever with having Turkish friends and neighbours, has photos of family members who are guerrillas

[9] Selek, P. (2008) *Sürüne Sürüne Erkek Olmak. (The Tedious Struggle for Manhood)* İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları; Mutluer, N. (2012) *Tactics in Between: Gendered Citizenship and Everyday Life of Internally Displaced Men in Tarlaşa* İstanbul. Unpublished PhD, Central European University, Budapest.

[10] Interview with Şükrü. December 18th, 2008. Tarlaşa, İstanbul.

[11] Interview with Şükrü. December 18th, 2008. Tarlaşa, İstanbul.

or “martyrs” on the walls. As the conversation deepens, the same family takes out the photos of members doing their military service, out of the drawers.

Politics based on the Kurdish identity continuously reinforced the sanctity and the disposability of giving one’s life for the motherland. Since the 1980s, the deaths of young Turkish and Kurdish citizens were normalised around the discourse of martyrdom. In the meantime, there was no mention of how war affected the lives of women and children. Death no longer evoked a reaction, it entered everyday life as an ordinary entity. Nationalist militarism shaped everyday life with its despair and violence became the norm. Militarism was internalised, and became part of the routine within society during the process.

Violence during the peace process

Talking about violence during the peace process may sound inappropriate, but in a political climate where life and death clash, death is normalised and we cannot talk about an end to such long term traumas. The antimilitaristic, feminist activist Cynthia Enloe states “the end of war does not coincide with the end of the trauma it caused.”¹² It is important that the history of war and the traumas it has caused are revisited.

This of course does not mean that the wounds will not be healed and that a fresh start is not possible. However, it is crucial that the new period has to be genuine about changing the

old mentality and creating a new one. This change necessitates the understanding of when war had begun, when it ended and its characteristics.

This is exactly where the problem lies within the peace process in Turkey. Bahar Şahin, in her article “Kürt Meselesinde Şiddet ve ‘Muhabbet’ İhtimali Üzerine Yeniden Düşünmek”, (Violence in the Kurdish Issue and Re-Thinking the Prospect of a “Conversation”) establishes that it was very hard to pinpoint the beginning and end to state violence in the 1990s.¹³ The official human rights violations and the undercurrent of conflict never seems to end.

On the other hand, although it is said that “violence has ended”, there still is a discourse and politics based on violence. The other side is not persuaded without the language of violence. An apology for the Roboski Massacre which occurred just before the peace process is still long overdue, KCK prisoners are still behind bars, the government feels free to offend Kurds whenever it feels like it, Kurdish hunger strikes in reaction to official steps clogging politics all contribute to the renewal of the mentality of the politics accustomed to life and death since the early days of the republic.

Sincerity and good faith

“The task of a critique of violence is that of expounding its relation to law and justice” says Walter Benjamin.¹⁴ Steps in this direction are no surprise. We seem to bump into them

[12] Enloe, C. (1989) *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. London: Pandora. Enloe, C. (2000) *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*, London: University of California Press, Enloe 2004.

[13] Şahin, B. (2012) *Violence in the Kurdish Issue and Re-Thinking the Prospect of a “Conversation” ; Towards Regional Peace*, hCa publications, Istanbul.

[14] Benjamin ([1921] 2010) *Şiddetin Eleştirisi Üzerine. (On Critique of Violence)* Istanbul: Metis Yayınları, p19-42, 19

continually. A new constitution based on social consensus, elimination of the Anti-Terrorism Law, freeing of the KCK prisoners, punishing military acts and enterprises is needed, not the ideas in political law suits. Ensuring the participation of all offenders at all court cases like the September 12th, not only the 28th February one in which the government is particularly interested, fixing the injustices in the trials of Madımak, Hrant Dink, Pınar Selek and similar trials... The list goes on. As all the items in this list are carried out within a framework of equal citizenship, freedom of faith and thought, steps for changing the mentality and the social acceptance of the authenticity of this change will be made. This legal approach also forms the first steps in the solution of unresolved murders.

The healing of military wounds is crucial. Even if the state passes a 'bringing them home' law to compensate for the forced migration laws, such a law would be very hard to implement as is. There are major problems of infrastructure in the villages burnt down or destroyed and migration has significantly impoverished Kurds. The law has to take all of these factors in consideration and work on applicable resolutions. The trauma caused cannot be resolved by monetary compensation alone and apology and compensation efforts should be embraced by all segments of the society. The village guard system should be abolished immediately and ways of fighting the military mentality it started should be developed. The guerrillas are an important component of the Kurdish society and hence the peace process. Within this perspective, the way back should be paved with sincerity and authenticity to make it real for the Kurdish people.

The peace process cannot be perceived as

independent of the Turkish side. Civilian steps, as well as official ones, are crucial from the Turkish side for the real and genuine development of the social peace process. Mass participation in the apology and compensation process and an awareness of what happened during war should be transferred to the Turkish side in a transparent way. Although the Turkish side is the majority, it is quite weak in terms of organisation and fighting for one's rights. It is engaged with the changing nationalistic values of the dominant political milieu and the market economy. It is also manipulated about what happened during war. The Kurdish movement on the other hand enjoys widespread organisation from its political and militaristic structure to its people. Also, some aspects of it can be criticised; the significant mileage it made in the process of constructing its fight against the state, in terms of human rights, sexism and egalitarianism is undeniable.

This opportunity gives the Turkish side the key to not only confronting the Kurds, but also facing their own traumas and confronting past discrimination.

Militarism is a double-edged sword. The only way out is to leave it behind together. Criticising the Turkish spiral of violence and walking towards peace requires an integrative approach. This antimilitaristic process should include women from the groups affected most by war. They should be accepted as natural components of the process and those who do not perceive themselves as Turkish or Kurdish should not be excluded, but embraced. The answer is in reconstructing the current legal and judicial systems, which currently suffer many pitfalls, and making sure that all actors participate in the peace process. Such an approach would be a crucial milestone for real and genuine peace.

The critical point here is not to create “others” while all of this goes on. The government and other political players should not point their fingers at “new others” such as Alevis, atheists, feminists and Gezi participants. The formation of “new others” as the process is being discussed reveals a mentality reluctant to change it. However, as is, the authenticity and the reality of the peace process is under scrutiny. The possibility of a genuine resistance against internalised militarism disappears.

Gezi, Armenians, Kurds...

Yetvart Danzikyan

Journalist, writer

I am writing this article three months after the fading of the social upheaval we might name the Gezi Resistance. The end of July was roughly when it all faded. The upheaval which started in the last week of May had reached its peak in the first weeks of June and the protesters were removed from Gezi Park with police violence. In the following weeks, the movement continued especially in İstanbul, Ankara, İzmir and Hatay with funerals, commemorations and forums but lost its acceleration gradually by the end of July.

There are two major viewpoints in Turkey for Gezi. The government and its close circles see the Gezi Resistance as an international conspiracy which also includes coup supporters where Kemalists try, and sometimes manage, to dominate. The left wing and its affiliates see this as a well justified social dynamic. In the middle of these two major camps is the highly confused Kurdish movement. The Gezi Resistance which blew up right at the most crucial phase of the resolution process, just as the PKK guerrillas were pulling out, left the Kurdish movement in limbo. Indeed Sırrı Süreyya Önder, an MP for the BDP, was one of the first to light the initial spark. However, as the first spark turned into a full blown insurrection, the Kurdish movement did not take to the streets as usual, but made do with a few symbolic tents at the entrance of the park. They participated in the protests and commemorations with their main organisations, but to those of us who know the true meaning of Kurdish presence in a demonstration, these were merely symbolic efforts. Later on the representatives of the Kurdish movement said they believed the resistance was justified and they themselves had the same demands and pointed at the presence of Kemalists, nationalists and the opposition to the resolution process as an excuse, attracting criticism from some left wingers. However the majority of the left-

democratic front supporting the resistance thought the Kurdish standpoint was politically mature and well thought of. They also had issues with the presence of the Kemalist/nationalist groups (though they did not feature prominently), but the most crucial point was that the Kurdish movement did not take any steps to jeopardise the delicate resolution process. This attitude eventually evolved. Cemil Bayık, a high ranking PKK officer who spoke in Kandil weeks after the fading of the resistance said that not showing mass support for the resistance was a mistake. The HDP administration who had recently left the BDP to form a new political party to participate in elections in the west as ‘members of the Turkish nation’ (translator’s note : as opposed to Turkish ethnicity) defined their party as “the embodiment of Gezi”. The dynamic unleashed with the Gezi Resistance naturally attracted the attention of all the political fronts in Turkey. However, like most movements lacking a clear foundation or direction, it cannot be explained in traditional terms.

Parallel themes sometimes took centre stage and sometimes faded away but they made themselves felt all through the resistance. The existence of these themes were seen as proof of the transformative power of the Gezi Resistance. It is hard to tell if the transformations have taken place and there is a segment finding these interpretations extremely optimistic since the movement had already faded and it is impossible to test the existence of its power. However, those who followed the resistance closely have personally witnessed this theme. Observers state that these first time protesters, who stumbled upon the Kurdish and Armenian issues in the streets and witnessed the official cover up, got acquainted with the realities and conditions Armenians and Kurds had been enduring for

years and began to understand them. It is a controversial issue which cannot be ignored and Gezi was proof that the possibilities are there and initial steps were taken.

Let’s start with the Armenian issue; Gezi Park had a special significance for the Armenians and Turks (and of course Kurds) who are familiar with the urban and community history of the area. The northern extension, not Gezi Park itself was a confiscated Armenian cemetery. It started where the main body of the park ended and a small bridge was built and went all the way to the Harbiye Officer’s Club which used to be an Armenian cemetery in Ottoman times. When the epidemics in the last year of the empire resulted in a ban on burials in all urban cemeteries, this one fell into disuse but the land belonged to the Armenian community foundations. After a lengthy legal battle, the state confiscated the land belonging to the cemetery and the chapel where the Divan Hotel stands today was demolished. In the following years the Divan Hotel, TRT Radio and some housing was built on this land. In the middle stood a little park between the boundaries of the main body of Gezi to the Hilton Hotel. This part of Gezi is considered to be part of the Armenian cemetery. This however is not the end of the story. It is said that gravestones from the cemetery were used in the building of some of the stairs of Gezi overlooking Taksim Square. There is another important detail. There used to be a monument for the memory of the victims of 1915 within the cemetery area until the 1920s.¹

Gezi Park has symbolic significance for the Armenian community and the social, ethnic imbalance of Turkey. The park was also symbolic in terms of a greater closure whose size engulfed the real symbolism I just mentioned.

[1] For the history of the cemetery and the story of its confiscation pls see: <http://www.istanbulermenivakiflari.org/tr/istanbul-ermeni-vakiflari/vakif-listesi/beyoglu-uc-horan-yerrortutyun-ermeni-kilisesi-vakfi/24>

The park used to house artillery barracks known as “Topçu Kışlası” built in Ottoman times. Interestingly enough, the architect was a member of the Armenian Balyan family. This was never an architectural landmark for the city and many town planners and architects supported its demolition. It lost its function in time and its courtyard eventually got some use as a football field.

İsmet İnönü, the second president of the single party era had a new plan for the whole area which had the valley up to Maçka as a green area and comprised of an open air theatre and a hall for sports and exhibitions. The barracks were demolished with this plan and replaced by Gezi Park. It was referred to as İnönü’s Gezi in its early years. The AKP would be settling accounts with the İnönü era it promotes as the pinnacle of oppression of the believers by building a copy of the old barracks and taking steps to sterilise the building for the new bourgeoisie by having a mall inside it. Killing two birds with one stone, however unlawfully.

So symbolism in the critical period we mentioned at the beginning would be replaced by a symbolic conflict between the republic and the pious. The building of the mall was an indicator of another symbolic conflict, between the old dwellers of the city and the new bourgeoisie. These two symbolic conflicts have dominated Turkey in the last decade. We could add that the old secular middle classes intimidated by the acceleration in urban transformation initiatives in the AKP period, non-Muslim minorities living in the historical neighbourhoods right in the centre of urban transformation and the low income Kurdish-Alevi population struggling in the outskirts for years had also taken part in this resistance. The demolition of the park and its replacement by barracks was probably of symbolic significance for them. A sign that it was their turn now. This definition would

be vaguely valid for the segments giving Gezi Resistance its main character.

To get back to the point, some groups tried to add another dimension to the resistance by saying that the park was the continuation of a confiscated cemetery, or even the cemetery itself. Some Armenian activists taking part in the tents in the park and some journalists trying to broaden their scope had tried to bring this dimension to the agenda but these voices were smothered in the wars of symbolism and state violence.

Could these voices have been louder or more insistent? This is debatable. Some field observations tell us that the old Armenian cemetery somewhat got into circulation although not that forcefully. This was however registered as an earlier version of urban destruction. The struggle to show it as the continuation of the minority annihilation policies of the Republic in the footsteps of the Committee of Union and Progress was unsuccessful. Another opportunity to show this as a result of the uniform Turkist policies of Mustafa Kemal and the CHP was missed, the interaction achieved was only minimal.

One of the interesting coincidences was that the Divan Hotel, among the institutions opening its doors to the victims of state violence, is situated where the Armenian chapel once was. The hotel belongs to the Koç Group founded by Vehbi Koç, a major player in the secular-bourgeois front. And the group, namely the hotel, attracted a lot of sympathy from the resistance and hatred from the AKP. The equilibrium is a tricky one. During the resistance, a second and more major reckoning was between a prominent group in the resistance, feeling instinctively closer to the Kemalist-nationalist segments without a clear position on the Kurdish issue and the political Kurdish movement and namely the Kurdish issue. Groups closer to the political

Kurdish resistance had been at the park from the beginning with PKK flags and marches and posters of Öcalan but were marginalised in the bigger picture when everyone showed up at the park with their own version of the resistance. The opposition from Kemalist groups faded away without much ado. In one of the critical press conferences of Taksim Solidarity, the umbrella organisation for the resistance, declared that it was inappropriate for Süreyya Önder to take the floor since he was a political party member. This went by unnoticed. As state violence escalated and got minimal coverage in the mainstream media controlled by the government, there was mention of “Western Turkey now understands what the Kurds had been going through for years.” These interpretations were taken with a grain of salt at the beginning. Since there was a question still lurking in people’s minds: some segments of the nationalist front and those who had been disinterested in the Kurdish issue until now seemed to have more empathy but was this a tactical position? Or was there a genuine interaction, resonance between the two segments? Coming up with a clear answer was difficult in the heat of the moment. A bit later, the Kurdish movement had organised a big march in Lice against the building of new police stations contrary to the spirit of the resolution process and was proactive in stopping construction of a specific police station. The group who marched to the police station were shot at by the security forces and a young man named Medeni Yıldırım lost his life. When this happened, the peak of the resistance was behind us but the fire was still burning. There were protest marches in Ankara and Istanbul and some of the participants were from the Kemalist and nationalist fronts. Whenever people commemorated those who died during the resistance, Medeni Yıldırım was also mentioned. This picture put the interpretation “Now the West has a better understanding of what the Kurds had been going through” back into circulation. When the BDP co-

leader Selahattin Demirtaş pointed out the Kemalist opponents of the resolution process among the resistance on those particular days, whatever mileage gained was clogged with the nationalist segments taking this statement out of context and overreacting.

Currently, the political Kurdish movement has been trying to protect its gains by making conciliatory statements. We cannot however talk about determining where we stand at the time of writing of this article.

What was the Sunni religious front’s reaction to all of this? The days of resistance had deepened the divide between the pious under the power of the centrifugal force of the government and the others resisting the pull of the government and its harsh authoritarianism. The rift was now more visible. The AKP was insistent about defining this dynamic as coup supporting foreign-power conspirators with its media, commentators and advisors. However, there also were circles adamant about not seeing the events through the government’s lens and these people insisted that the demands of the streets were to be heard. The declaration which started debate within this segment was signed by some Islamic intellectuals and directors of Mazlum-Der. Let’s remember the following sentences criticising the government reaction.

“O Muslims!

Our lives are changing. Our children will inherit a different world. We are building a generation who judges value with shopping malls and consumption. We need to free ourselves from an idealism focusing on power, status and money to avoid turning into a mean, selfish, haughty community devoid of ethics and sacrifice. Our neighbourhood is fractured. We are moving towards a society where the rich and poor pray at different mosques. Do you not want your children to be neighbours with a poor or disadvantaged

person? This culture of consumption crystallising in shopping malls is dragging us into times we will not be able to bounce back from.

We should be grateful to these activists resisting the barracks, residences and shopping malls the PM insists on building; ‘I want it, it will happen’ as if in competition with Ağaoğlu. We should at least try to see where they are coming from.”

The original text from where this excerpt is taken ignited a heated debate among Islamic circles and some members of Mazlum-Der closer to the government had resigned from this NGO when other member signed this declaration.²

Gezi Resistance surely had a transformative power over its participants. There were signs indicating this. We can also talk about a more attentive state of eavesdropping on Turkish-Kurdish relations and to a lesser extent Turkish and Kurdish-Armenian relations. This is defined through a small segment of urban, well-educated Turks dominating or partially dominating public life. The government had completed its consolidation phase before the Gezi Resistance. The army, the police force, the judiciary, the media and the bureaucracy were all theirs, all centrally managed. Gezi influenced this in two ways: it showed that at some instances the opposition can be consolidated or that it could have the means to give it a go despite all the reservations of its constituents. We should not see the opposition as the actual political opposition, but a common ground for those marginalised by the official discourse, founding authority and eventually the AKP. It also proved that it can cause fractures in the consolidation of the government. It is important that the media felt the urge to apologise and even did their job for

a few days. The differences of opinion on the issue among cabinet members are important too. Currently the Gezi Resistance and the dynamic it created seems to have faded away. This by all accounts has a lot to do with the government’s assault on the resistance with all its ideological and physical might. However, the progression of social movements is interesting. It is hard to foresee some, however once certain movement and dynamics are unleashed, nothing is the same ever again. All seems to be quiet now. But what is done cannot be undone. Maybe things are brewing in the social consciousness.

[2] For the full text, signatories and debate pls see: http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/mazlum_derde_gezi_parki_catlagi-1138337

The Role of Civil Society in the Peace Process

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Turkey is travelling through crucial times. We are at the initial stages of a peace process where society is reduced to mere spectators. The acknowledgement of only two conflicting parties has led to a process closed to the rest of society. But the opportunity for all parties to contribute to the peace process and say something about peace is of utmost importance. Peace will affect us all, as did war. We could very well argue that participation in such a vital process is a right. The aim of this article is not to question the involvement of civil society in the process, but to determine what can be done for social peace and how.

We have recently founded The Association for the Dialogue and Reconciliation Centre (DUDE) to explore how civil society can contribute to the peace process and how we can cooperate with other NGOs. We will probably make some mistakes along the way, learn from them and publicise our findings. It will be a learning curve since ways of inclusion and contribution to the process are currently non-existent.

We researched the contributions of NGOs to the reconciliation process in societies suffering from conflict. We came across many articles on the peace/reconciliation processes. A very significant conclusion is that peace processes with high NGO participation lead to a much more sustainable social peace. Civil society's participation in the process is a right which makes a significant difference to results.

A perusal of different sources regarding the role of civil society in the peace process gives us a few fundamental options:

- i- Taking part in the negotiations,
- ii- Forming a parallel, advisory platform for negotiation,

- iii- Influencing the process with effective communication channels,
- iv- Getting involved only when the official negotiations come to a halt.¹

The negotiations carried out in Liberia in 2003 is an example to the “**involvement of civil society in peace negotiations**”. The examples here are a church based organisation and a network of women’s organisations² -although they could not participate in the 1990’s- they managed to be directly involved in the 2000’s.³ There is a major difference between this example and the Turkish peace process. The United Nations were an arbitrator in Liberia demanding civil society participation. The involvement of women as a value added in the process is noteworthy. The network of women’s organisations founded then is still active today.

An example to the “**formation of a parallel civil society forum**” is the Guatemalan process between 1994 and 1996. Civil society itself took the initiative here. Civil society organised meetings with similar agendas to official ones. The aim was to produce alternative documentation. A crucial difference between this example and the Turkish peace process is that the participants of the NGO forum in Guatemala

were informed of the agenda of the official negotiations.

A significant demand of the forum from day one was the sharing of information.

On the other hand, despite the inclusive nature of the process, there were problems with the implementation of the decisions taken and some negative developments, such as the rejection of some necessary constitutional amendments in a referendum. In this example, despite extensive participation by civil society, the emphasis is on the institutionalisation of mechanisms of participation. On the other hand, the fact that civil society was not able to create a unified mass movement had a negative impact on the process.⁴

The civil society in Congo participated in the negotiations and formed a parallel forum and run these two complementary roles together. 66 of the 360 negotiators in 2001 were representatives of the civil society and eventually signatories in the treaty as members of sub commissions.⁵ They also organised parallel meetings under the ‘National Dialogue for Civil Society’. The representatives of the participating organisations supported the peace process socially.

[1] For more detailed information about this framework: <http://www.osloforum.org/sites/default/files/CivilSocietyandPeaceNegotiations.pdf>

[2] For more information about this organisation : <http://www.marwopnet.org/>

[3] For a summary of the history of the conflict in Liberia and peace negotiations: <http://www.wmd.org/resources/whats-being-done/ngo-participation-peace-negotiations/history-conflict-liberia>

[4] Alvarez, E., Prado Palencia T., *Guatemala’s Peace Process: Context, analysis and evaluation*, in *Owning the process: Public participation in peacemaking, Accord, 2002*, <http://www.c-r.org/accord-article/guatemala%E2%80%99s-peace-process-context-analysis-and-evaluation#sthash.zec1NR0p.dpuf>

[5] Kongo’daki barış görüşmeleriyle ilgili özet bilgiye şuradan ulaşılabilir: <http://www.wmd.org/resources/whats-being-done/ngo-participation-peace-negotiations/history-conflict-democratic-republic#sthash.iDpQfnUw.dpuf>

A similar parallel forum was founded in Afghanistan in 2001, again by the UN. Here is an anecdote from there. During the negotiations, an international participant asks a local NGO representative what can be done to fund the resolution process better. The NGO forum member says they should not increase funding. He is worried that civil society will be professionalised and the giver and taker dynamic will have a negative impact. An interesting anecdote.

The third item mentioned – “**involvement by means of effective communication**” – comprises of the activities the NGOs undertaken in many different countries. This heading covers activities like creating platforms of debate and communication, carrying out polls, creating interactive spaces (workshops, websites etc.) and organising referendums on specific issues. For example, the National Peace Council founded in Sri Lanka in 1995 made a call for the participation of the civil society in the negotiations and turned this into a campaign. Norwegian mediators blame the failure of the 2002-2003 peace talks in Sri Lanka on the lack of a human rights perspective and the exclusion of NGOs who would have been the advocates of this perspective.

A website was founded in Congo in 2003 to provide public information on the peace negotiations, together with a UN supported radio station (Radio Okapi⁶). Both became reliable, trustworthy channels of information on the peace process.⁷ The radio station is still on air in 5 different languages.

Last but not least, “**getting involved only when the official negotiations come to a**

halt” is among the possible activities of NGOs. Where negotiations come to a halt, civil society can take over by producing drafts for treaties and political documents to facilitate the continuation of the process. A prerogative for this is the regular production of information regarding the process during negotiations and communications between organisations.

All these methods aim at increasing civil society participation and making the peace process permanent. However, since they all have different contexts, a new model emerges from each and every one. Turkey needs a model tailored for its own needs. Participation by women and the youth are crucial. We should talk about methods of facilitating this ASAP and develop new models.

This process will not be an easy one and those who benefit from conflict will do their best to ruin it. We hope that civil society will transform the political culture in Turkey in the long run and improve participation and democratisation in many areas.

[6] <http://radiookapi.net/>

[7] <http://www.osloforum.org/sites/default/files/CivilSocietyandPeaceNegotiations.pdf>