

POWER-SHARING

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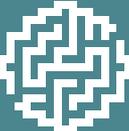
DECENTRALIZATION

IN THE CONTEXT OF THE KURDISH

ISSUE AND POLITICAL PEACE

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HAKİKAT ADALET HAFIZA MERKEZİ
TRUTH JUSTICE MEMORY CENTER



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Abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party	Partiya Azadî	<i>Partiya Azadî</i> (Freedom Party) for Justice, Faith and Freedom
BDP	Peace and Democracy Party		
CHP	Republican People's Party	PDK-Bakur	Northern Kurdistan Democrat Party (<i>Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê – Bakur</i>)
CUP	Committee of Union and Progress		
DPT	State Planning Agency	PDK-T	Kurdistan Democrat Party - Turkey (<i>Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê – Tirkiye</i>)
DTK	Democratic Society Congress		
DTP	Democratic Society Party	PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party (<i>Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan</i>)
EU	European Union	PSK	Kurdistan Socialist Party (<i>Partiya Sosyalist a Kurdistanê</i>)
FSA	Free Syrian Armeer		
GAP	Southeastern Anatolia Project	PYD	Democratic Union Party (<i>Partiya Yekitiya Demokratîk</i>)
HDP	People's Democratic Party	SNA	Syrian National Army
HPG	Halk Savunma Kuvvetleri (Hêzên Parastina Gel - HPG)	UN	United Nations
HSD	Suriye Demokratik Güçleri (Hêzên Sûriya Demokratîk - HSD)	USA	United States of America
HÜDAPAR	Free Cause Party	YPG	People's Defense Units (<i>Yekîneyên Parastina Gel</i>)
İBBS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics	YPJ	Women's Defense Units (<i>Yekîneyên Parastina Jin</i>)
IMF	International Monetary Fund		
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria		
KCK	Kurdistan Communities Union (<i>Koma Civakên Kurdistanê</i>)		
KKP	Kurdistan Communist Party		
KRI	Kurdistan Region (Iraq)		
MHP	Nationalist Movement Party		
MİT	National Intelligence Organization		
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development		
PAK	Kurdistan Freedom Party (<i>Partiya Azadiya Kurdistanê</i>)		
PAKURD	Kurdistani Party (<i>Partiya Kurdîstanî</i>)		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research addresses the topic of political peace and power-sharing in the context of the Kurdish issue. The research considers decentralization in the context of power-sharing, and it explores whether this decentralization can bring about political peace in regard to Turkey's Kurdish issue, as well as what kind of promises it holds beyond the Kurdish issue. The report focuses on the 2013-2015 Solution Process and its aftermath to discuss the prospects and limitations of decentralization.

Discussions about cases in different temporal and spatial contexts show that there are six determining dynamics with respect to power-sharing and decentralization. (1) The historical and political tradition of the respective country determines the organization of the state and shapes power relations. (2) The issue of decentralization is directly related to the democratic imagination and experience in a country. (3) The issue of decentralization is not limited to the institution of politics and by extension the organization of the state, but also comprises the local and regional inequalities, distribution of resources, and demands for development in a country. (4) Discussions on decentralization have political (democratization) and economic (development) as well as institutional/administrative dimensions. (5) As discussions on the post-1980 neoliberal policies and the transformation of the state have shown, decentralization cannot be limited to the power relations between central and local actors. It also includes political, administrative, economic, spatial and social dimensions. (6) Power-sharing and decentralization are important in the resolution of intra-state conflicts and peacebuilding.

If we look at the discussions in Turkey, we see that all six of these aspects are applicable here. As a result of the centralizing policies that were introduced within the scope of the modernization of the Ottoman Empire, the Kurdish beyliks ("principalities") and governments were largely dissolved in the first half the 19th century. Resurfacing on the agenda in the final years of the Ottoman Empire, the issue of decentralization gained particular currency between 1918-1923 and even entered the Constitution of 1921, but with the foundation of the Republic and the 1924 Constitution, it largely disappeared from the agenda. After its eclipse following the foundation of the Republic, it would take until the 1990s before the issue of decentralization really reentered the discussion in the context of the resolution of the Kurdish conflict. Although emphasis was often put on economic development and rationalization of the organizational structure of the state in discussions regarding a federal model, federal states, or the Spanish/Basque model, these discussions were principally motivated by the search for a solution to the Kurdish conflict.

The last 20 years have seen three major dialogues towards a solution of the Kurdish issue: the İmralı Process (1999-2004), the Oslo Process (2008-2011), and the Solution Process (2013-2015). All three attempts resulted in failure. Over the course of these processes, varying demands have been voiced by Öcalan, the PKK/KCK, and the DBP/HDP. These proposals pivoted around different concepts such as democratic republic, democratic autonomy, and local democracy and included different models ranging from administrative decentralization at the local scale to regional administrative and political decentralization. Apart from the DBP-HDP, the majority of the Kurdish opposition demanded a federation. While it did not support the thesis of a “democratic republic,” which did not involve power-sharing, it sympathized with the proposal for autonomy as an interim solution facilitating a “final solution” of the Kurdish issue.

Since 2002, the governing AKP has been pursuing a relatively stable policy and has not supported any demands in terms of political decentralization. On the other hand, it has advocated for the localization and the strengthening of local governments as part of a decentralization of competences. Thus, the reforms carried out in the 2000s within the frame of such a decentralization of competences took the form of a deconcentration, which increased the central administration’s local administrative capacities.

Until the Solution Process in 2013-2015, the CHP and the social groups it represented opposed all dialogue and negotiations, while also refusing all attempts that could open the door to decentralization. Softening its opposition during the Solution Process, the CHP now advocated full adoption of the European Charter of Local Self-Government to strengthen the autonomy of local governments. In general, the MHP consistently opposed all attempts to resolve the Kurdish issue. It considered even limited reform attempts as campaigns for a new “Sèvres”.

In the 2000s, geopolitics became the main determining dynamic through which the Kurdish issue in Turkey was framed. The establishment of Kurdish territorial sovereignty in the KRI constituted a new “point of reference” in the Kurdish issue, leading parameters to shift for both Kurdish politics and Turkish politics. The establishment of an autonomous/federal region in Rojava in 2012 constituted the second geopolitical turning point. Overall, Rojava had a greater impact than the KRI.

In the period following the failed Solution Process of 2013-2015, a great setback occurred in Turkey with respect to political power-sharing. The transformation that took place in this period can be defined through the two concepts of recentralization

and deconcentration. On the one hand, the power of the central administration increased, while on the other hand, the center's capacities in terms of administrative pluralism at the local level expanded on an unprecedented scale. Having experienced a partial democratization in the 2000s, Turkey took a course towards authoritarianism in the last five years. In current democracy indexes, Turkey is classified as a country between "moderate autocracy," authoritarian regime and deficient democracy, hovering on the edge of authoritarianism.

This backsliding in terms of political power-sharing can be attributed to five basic dynamics. The first of these dynamics is the armed clashes that spilled over into the cities after the failure of the Solution Process. The 15 July 2016 military coup attempt, and the state of emergency declared afterwards constitute the second dynamic. In relation to the state of emergency, the policy and practice of appointing trustees should be underlined as a third significant dynamic. The appointment of trustees led to the virtual elimination of the municipalities in all provinces and districts where the HDP had formed the local government and turned these municipalities into subdivisions of the governors' and district governors' offices. More importantly, this policy of appointing trustees, which was first implemented in the Kurdish regions, evolved into a political understanding and governmental technique that spread all across Turkey. The "Turkish-style" presidential system which came into force under the official name of the Presidential System of Government constitutes the fourth dynamic. While the introduction of this system brought about a recentralization of administrative and political power in the executive, it also led these powers to spread to the local administrations. Finally, one needs to underline the changes that have taken place in the geopolitical dynamics of the Kurdish issue in the last five years. This period saw an unprecedented internationalization of the Kurdish issue. Once an isolated internal concern within Turkey, it had transformed into a cross-border regional problem in which the United States and Russia became actively involved.

Taking into account the almost two centuries-long historical and political evolution of the Kurdish issue, five major obstacles with respect to power-sharing and decentralization need to be highlighted: (1) The survival discourse and the historically grown security concern pervading the Turkish state and mainstream Turkish politics, (2) the ultra-centralist tradition of state and politics, (3) regional inequalities and the centralization/clustering of economic resources, (4) the shadow cast upon decentralization by the Kurdish conflict and (5) the limitations

of Turkish politics regarding the Kurdish issue and the instrumentalization of the Kurdish issue.

There are also five main opportunities and sources which decentralization can benefit and draw from, as well as three major possibilities that it has to offer: (1) the historical experience regarding decentralization, (2) the experiences with local and regional government in the context of public administration, (3) the post-2000 reform attempts regarding local and regional administration, (4) a consensus among mainstream political parties concerning the strengthening of local governments and (5) Turkey's political geography. The three major possibilities offered by decentralization are the following: (1) Inclusive and balanced growth, (2) increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of public services through a modernization and rationalization of the public administration and (3) strengthening democracy by enabling checks and balances on the vertical plane.

If all of these obstacles, opportunities, sources and possibilities regarding political power-sharing and decentralization are considered, two options come to the fore: (1) administrative decentralization at the provincial level and (2) administrative and political decentralization based on geographical regions. The first option has the potential to put an end to violence in the Kurdish issue in the short term. However, the second alternative, which would allow political power-sharing for an inclusive and stable solution, emerges as the more rational choice. In linking the resolution of an intra-state identity-based territorial conflict to the issues of democratization, inclusive and balanced growth, and the modernization and rationalization of the public administration, this alternative further offers a more inclusive model.

INTRODUCTION

One of the central issues in the political resolution of intra-state identity-based territorial conflicts like the Kurdish issue is power-sharing. Despite its vital role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes, it can be said that until today, this issue has not been sufficiently discussed in the context of the Kurdish issue. Although there have been a number of discussions revolving around different political ideas, such as the implementation of a federation, democratic autonomy, localization, and local democracy, none of the three major attempts to end the Kurdish conflict, i.e., the İmralı Process (1999-2004), the Oslo Process (2008-2011), and the Solution Process (2013-2015), reached a point where this issue could have been discussed (Çiçek 2015).

Within Kurdish politics, the issue has been discussed at different times on the basis of different concepts, and has been considered one of the main agenda items of the dialogue processes (Çiçek 2016; Akkaya and Jongerden 2011). In contrast, this issue has been largely excluded from the discussion by the Turkish state and Turkish politics, with one exception being early 1990 president Turgut Özal's discourse, which left the door open for the possibility of a federation (Doğan 1994). The other exception to this argument includes then-Prime Minister Tansu Çiller's references to the Basque model (Milliyet 1993). Despite these efforts, the Kurdish politics and Turkish politics are markedly different in their approach to discussing potential solutions. In the 2000s, after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power, the issue was mostly addressed in the context of public administration reforms and a strengthening of local governments, (Dinçer and Yılmaz 2003) and deliberately left out of the agenda discussions regarding the political solution of the Kurdish conflict.

This study addresses the issue of political peace and power-sharing in the context of the Kurdish issue. More specifically, it focuses on two questions: "Can decentralization in the context of political power-sharing bring about political peace in Turkey's Kurdish issue?" and "What can decentralization as part of power-sharing promise beyond the Kurdish issue?" In this respect, it focuses on the 2013-2015 Solution Process and its aftermath to discuss the prospects and limitations of decentralization. Along themes like administrative and political decentralization, this study looks at the limits of political power-sharing, different scales like the local and the regional, and different actors' divergent discourses, approaches and attitudes regarding the topic.

While focusing on the Solution Process and its aftermath, the study historicizes the issue of decentralization in order to provide an in-depth analysis of the relevant discussions and to render visible the prospects and limitations of the discussions about

decentralization in the context of the Kurdish issue. In this sense, it situates the issue of local governments in a historical context reaching back to the last period of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Republic.

In methodological terms, the historicizing perspective is complemented by a comparative approach. To this end, the study reviews the global discursive frameworks/ contexts of discussions on decentralization within the scope of power-sharing. In addition, the events that occurred after the Solution Process are considered in comparison to the 2017-2018 Catalan crisis.

The report consists of four chapters. The first chapter provides a theoretical and historical introduction with respect to the discussions on political power-sharing and decentralization. To start with, the discursive frameworks regarding the issue of decentralization are reviewed. Secondly, a background analysis concerning the discussions on decentralization from the last period of the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Republic until the 2013-2015 Solution Process is carried out to historicize the problem, providing a kind of archaeology of the lack (and/or impossibility) of decentralization or, vice versa, of centralism in Turkey.

The second chapter essentially deals with the issue of decentralization in the context of the 2013-2015 Solution Process. Within this scope, political actors' approaches, positions and discourses regarding the issue will be analyzed. The Solution Process is moreover considered in relation with the different stages in the search for peace that has continued from 1999 until today.

The third chapter focuses on the period after the Solution Process in which trustees started to be appointed to municipalities in line with policies that identified the Kurdish issue with a "security" or "terrorism" problem threatening the integrity of the Turkish state and nation.

Taking into account the main findings of the discussions in the previous chapters, the last chapter analyzes the major obstacles, opportunities, sources, and chances with respect to power-sharing and decentralization in the context of a political solution to the Kurdish issue in Turkey.

The main result revealed by this research is this: There is a direct relationship between the formation of the political regime in Turkey and the Kurdish issue. Mainstream Turkish

politics has instrumentalized the Kurdish issue as a functional resource in building a centralist, nationalist and authoritarian regime. Conversely, transcending the resolution of the Kurdish issue, decentralization and political power-sharing can serve as valuable resources in the establishment of a pluralist democratic regime.

In view of the historical trajectory of the Kurdish issue and the approaches of the main political groups, it appears that a form of administrative decentralization excluding collective rights and political participation will not satisfy the demands of the Kurdish opposition. In contrast, power-sharing around a binational or multinational federal structure will get stuck in the barrier posed by the historically grown concern for survival of the Turkish public and mainstream Turkish politics. While the problem of mother tongue and identity, local-regional socio-economic development, political participation, and social freedom constitute the critical issues from the point of view of the Kurdish public, security and national integrity are the major issues of concern for the Turkish public. Considering the current impasse reached in the Kurdish conflict, regional administrative and political decentralization stands out as a possible scenario for solution that could both meet the demands of the Kurds and overcome the historically grown fears of the Turks.

Regional administrative and political decentralization can be considered as a constitutive component in establishing democracy throughout the country, as in Spain. That said, another possible solution is a gradual transition. While proposing regional administrative and political decentralization for a permanent and stable solution in the Kurdish issue in the medium and long term, the report argues that administrative decentralization at the provincial level can be conducive to ending violence in the short term. Particularly broadening administrative decentralization in such a way that the administrative competences concerning the mother tongue issue are delegated to local governments can be an important step towards a solution. Also, after decentralization at the provincial scale has been accomplished, regional decentralization might follow.

In an era where metropolitan urban areas gain more importance with each passing day in Turkey as elsewhere, regional decentralization moreover offers an overarching solution by connecting political power-sharing not only to the resolution of the conflicts rooted in the Kurdish issue but also to three other major problems, namely: democratization, inclusive and balanced growth, and increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of public services through a modernization and rationalization of the public administration.

POWER-SHARING AND

DECENTRALIZATION:

A THEORETICAL AND

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION

When dealing with a difficult-to-solve and century-old problem like the Kurdish issue, starting out from a historical contextualization and a review of experiences in different spatial and temporal contexts can prove to be a useful method. Such an approach makes it easier to overcome the tendency dominating almost all mainstream political movements which claim the Kurdish conflict (in addition to most other issues in Turkey) to be a problem “unique to us.” By historicizing the problem and anchoring it in a comparative perspective, this approach will make it possible to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the problem without drowning in quotidian discussions, and to develop a more realistic view of the potential alternatives for its solution.

Before moving on to analyze the discursive frameworks regarding decentralization, the concept of decentralization itself needs to be clarified. Even though the concepts local government, subsidiarity, and decentralization are used synonymously, each actually points to different arrangements. The first of these is *deconcentration*, which refers to the creation of local extensions of the central government. This arrangement, which is also conceptualized as *yetki genişliği* (“decentralization of competences”) (Keleş 1999, 148; 2006, 21) or *merkezi yerinden yönetim* (“decentralization of government”) (Ender and İncioğlu 2013, 118) in Turkish, refers to the creation of field administrations of the institutions of the central government and the delegation of certain competences and responsibilities to these administrations. The field administrations are operated by officials appointed by the central government and responsible for the implementation of policies and decisions made by the center. In this sense, they do not have a political identity vis-à-vis the central government.

The second arrangement is *delegation*, which could also be interpreted as another form of deconcentration. Signifying the “transfer of some authorities and responsibilities regarding the provision of certain services to independent institutions or organizations” (Çam 2015, 22), delegation is also translated to Turkish as *yetki aktarımı*, *yetki devri*, and *yetki göçerimi* (Ö Bozkurt, Ergun and Sezen 1998, 262), each of them referring to a transfer or delegation of authority. Although the semi-autonomous local/regional institutions formed through the transfer of authority are not part of the hierarchy of the central government, they are nonetheless answerable to and under the control of the central government. Examples include regional institutions created to manage large-scale projects in areas like infrastructure, energy, agriculture, and transportation and public enterprises founded to provide certain services (Çam 2015, 22-23).

The third arrangement is defined by the concepts *decentralization and devolution and frequently* translated to Turkish as *ademi merkezîyet* ("decentralization"), *yerinden yönetim* ("local government"), and *yetki devri* ("transfer of authority"). Basically, this is the type of arrangement that usually becomes the topic of political debates and it is also the one covered by this report. Decentralization means the creation of government bodies at the local or regional level which are situated outside the hierarchy of the central government and have their own legally established governmental organs and elected decision-making bodies as well as certain corporate, political, and fiscal authorities. The central government defines a number of authorities and responsibilities to be delegated to or shared with these local government bodies. The most important aspect here is that the population is governed by locally elected institutions which constitute legal entities outside the hierarchy of the central government. Just like deconcentration, decentralization involves the delegation of certain authorities and responsibilities by the central government to local governments, but unlike deconcentration, the power of local governments does not derive from the favor of the central government. In some places, such as Switzerland, Germany, and the United States of America (USA), these administrative and political bodies have actually existed longer than the central government (Keleş 2006, 22). In summary, decentralization, in a flexible and broad sense, as preferred in this report, includes different types of local government, ranging from local neighborhood councils to a federal state.

Decentralization is generally categorized into either political decentralization or administrative/governmental decentralization. In the case of administrative/governmental decentralization, local governments do not have legislative and judicial powers and enjoy only a limited number of executive authorities. In contrast, within the scope of political decentralization, local governments have executive powers as well as various levels of legislative and judicial powers. Decentralization mainly occurs in federal states and constitutionally grants a certain level of autonomy to the local government bodies (Keleş 2006, 22-23). As a matter of fact, beyond the effective and efficient provision of public services by local governments, the issue of political decentralization is mostly discussed in such a way as to include political norms like democracy, autonomy, citizenship and participation (Çam 2015, 23; Keleş 2006, 89–105).

Discursive Frameworks Regarding

Decentralization

A look at different case-studies on decentralization conducted in varying spatial and temporal contexts allows us to identify six frameworks in which the issue is being discussed:

1. Historical and political context
2. Discussions on democracy
3. Development
4. Modernization and rationalization of the public administration
5. Neoliberal transformation of the state
6. Conflict resolution and power-sharing

Historical and political context

Discussions in this context highlight the determining impact of the historical and political tradition in the modern state's respective geographic location on present socio-political systems. Accordingly, in order to understand the present situation and anticipate potential developments, one needs to grasp their historical evolution and pay attention to the boundaries posed by the latter, for the historical and political tradition regarding the state determines the organization of the state at the local or regional level as well as its functions and boundaries (Bafail 2009b).

In studies that stress the historical and political tradition, the substance of a state occupies an important position. Emphasis is placed on the opposition between unitary and federal models of the state. Arguments in favor of a unitary state primarily include functionality due to homogeneity, equal and balanced distribution of resources among administrative and political units established under the central government, and implementation of policies determined at the country level in all local governments (Çam 2015, 19-20).

A federal state, on the other hand, is based on power-sharing grounded in a specific constitutional framework. A federal state is essentially non-centralized, as power is shared between several centers that together constitute the federal state. In this sense, contractual/constitutional noncentralization and the structured dispersion of powers constitute the two

main principles of federal systems (Elazar 1991, 34). Federalism goes beyond structural arrangements; it indicates a new relationship, a new mode of political and social behavior. (1) Partnership between individuals, groups and governments, (2) cooperative relationships that make the partnership real and (3) negotiation among the partners are highlighted as the three basic principles for sharing power (Elazar 1995, 1-2).

Comparing government forms and performances in thirty-six countries, Arend Lijphart determines that unitary states are generally centralized and governed by a majoritarian democracy. In contrast, federal states are mostly decentralized and rely on a consensual model of democracy (Lijphart 2012, 1-4)

In studies on countries such as those in Western and Eastern Europe, the USA, and Canada, other important aspects include the historical administrative tradition (John and Copus 2012, 29-30), historical events and processes occurring during the formation of the modern state (Cole 2012, 308-10; Pine 2015, 21), local government and local power tradition (Kymlicka 2002, 20; Bafoil and Kaya 2009, 4-5; Keleş 2006, 22; Çam 2015, 22) and the ways in which minority demands are met (i.e., within a framework of equality and justice or within a framework of security) (Kymlicka and Opalski 2012).

Theories of democracy and decentralization

Decentralization refers to a transformation beyond the scale at which decisions are made or the distribution of power between central and local/regional authorities (Hutchcroft 2001). A holistic and inclusive approach requires addressing the issue of decentralization from a broad perspective that goes beyond the central-local relations to include various other dimensions such as power relations, the status of the legislature and the judiciary, the electoral system, and the system of political parties (Bulpitt 1972, 299; Fesler 1965; Hutchcroft 2001, 536-66; Appleby 1945, 43-51). In this regard, a first distinction can be made between majoritarian and consensual models of democracy. Whereas a majoritarian democracy is based on values such as unanimity, competition and contention, a consensual democracy, also known as a “negotiation democracy” (Kaiser 1997), promotes values such as inclusiveness, bargaining and compromise. When considered in terms of decentralization, majoritarian models tend to centralize political power in the hands of the majority, while consensual models of democracy try to share, distribute and limit political power. As Lijphart's research shows, consensual democracy clearly is more democratic and achieves better representation than majoritarian democracy. It is also slightly more successful in terms of government performance (Lijphart 2012, 1-2; 255-94).

Another distinction proposed in this respect is between collective agency and shared responsibility (Goodin 1996, 331). This two-axis analysis framework allows us to better understand the distribution of power. For example, a consensual democracy is based on multi-party and multi-actor interactions in the cabinet, the legislature, the government, and interest groups, or briefly, on collective agency. On the other hand, it relies on the division of power and sharing of responsibilities among institutions at different levels such as administrative units, state institutions, independent high courts and central banks (Lijphart 2012, 5). Therefore, a consensual democracy embraces collective agency and shared responsibility and involves veto players that can ensure the distribution of power in the different tiers and areas of government (Tsebelis 2002).

In this context, one should also touch upon discussions on radical democracy (Laclau and Mouffe 2012; Mouffe 1993; 2005, 52; Tosun 2001, 98-147; Üstüner 2007). Although the radical model of democracy does not directly include debates on decentralization, it does consider difference and antagonism as constitutive elements of politics. Moreover, its importance derives from the fact that it considers differences as equivalent, and proposes to utilize politics as well as institutions, discourses and actions to transform the relationship between these differences into an antagonistic relationship without turning them into each other's enemies. In fact, it points to the construction of political spaces that will enable the mutual recognition and transformation of said differences.

There are several other concepts that need to be highlighted in the context of discussions that link democracy and decentralization. These concepts include: participation and active citizenship, (Vera-Zavala 2006; Kahraman, Keyman and Saribay 1999; Genro and Souza 1999; Barber 1995, 183–200), subsidiarity (a basic organizational principle of the European Union (EU) (European Union 1992), governance (often used instead of the term government) (Mairate 2006; Benz and Papadopoulos 2006, 2–3; Bafail and Kaya 2009, 3–4; Toksöz 2008; 2018, 9–17), and finally, multi-level governance (Pasquier 2009; Hooghe, Marks and Marks 2001; Keating 1998; Lequesne and Le Gales 1997).

It can be argued that decentralization deepens and consolidates democracy in five ways, especially in large states in terms of their territory and population. Decentralization (1) nurtures democratic values and a corresponding political culture. (2) In this way, it increases transparency, accountability and responsiveness with respect to local interests and needs. (3) It opens new channels for access and participation to groups/ identities/differences that were formally marginalized before, thereby strengthening the legitimacy of the administration by increasing representation and the sense of ownership.

(4) It functions as a check and balance mechanism and structure vis-à-vis the central government, especially on the vertical plane, and increases stability. (5) It allows the opposition to build up and concentrate political power (Diamon 1999, 117-60; Aktar 2014, 13-15).

Meanwhile, there are five main pitfalls of decentralization. (1) If reduced to the sharing of power and authority between the local and central government alone, it can lead to an intensification of authoritarian rule at the local scale. (2) If it is not backed up by democratic norms, it may fuel intolerance towards minorities at the local and regional level. (3) It can weaken the solidarity and distribution of resources between local and regional governments, resulting in deepening inequalities. (4) It can increase spending and waste in the state and public services. (5) It can also further foment ethnic and national awareness. Decentralization may moreover give rise to problems like decreasing capacities of the state at all scales, failure to secure financial sustainability of local governments, failure to determine the optimal scales of local governments, and inability to transform authoritarian legacies (Diamon 1999, 117-60; Aktar 2014, 14-16). In order to avoid these pitfalls, the issue of decentralization needs to be addressed in a broader framework beyond the relationship between local and central government. The configuration of the administrative and political structure in each local government, the rights of various minority groups and their participation in the political sphere, the distribution of resources between local governments, the unity, solidarity and integration between local governments, the check and balance structures and mechanisms between local governments themselves and between local governments and the central government, and the rationalization and modernization of the state rank among the most critical issues to be considered with respect to decentralization.

Development and decentralization

In European countries such as Spain and Italy, regionalization and decentralization became a topic of discussion in an attempt to accommodate the longstanding cultural and political demands of particular regional communities. The restructuring of the state on the basis of regional autonomy has also strengthened the regions and enabled them to develop (Colino and del Pino 2012, 380; Piattoni and Brunazzo 2012, 344–45). Unlike the cases of Italy and Spain, regional decentralization in France came up mainly in the context of debates concerning regional development. Eliminating the inequalities that existed between Paris and the rest of the country in regards to development was the main driving force of the regionalization wave that would continue until the late 1960s.

The French Socialist Party pioneered the decentralization reform in 1982, and as part of the reforms carried out in 2003-2004, decentralization attained constitutional status. In France, regions mainly emerged and developed according to a “functional vision” in line with discussions on balanced regional development. Today, the French regions generally constitute “a level of coordination rather than a political level that imposes norms and policies” (Pasquier 2009, 39–44; 50).

Another important experience that allows us to think through the interrelation between decentralization and development is the post-Soviet transformation of Central and Eastern European countries and their EU membership processes. In these cases, especially in order to adapt to the EU’s regional policy and to manage the structural funds in this regard, decentralization has been adopted as a form of development management strategy and different administrative models have blossomed depending on the countries’ historical and political tracks (Bafail 2009b; Benz 2007, 255). The “sustainable development” goals developed under the leadership of the United Nations (UN) are another important factor that served to bring the issue of decentralization to the agenda on a global scale.

There are many arguments suggesting that decentralization will lead to greater development. First of all, by ensuring checks and balances between local/regional administrations and between the local/regional and the central level, a decentralized structure allows for a more balanced spatial development. Second, as local problems and needs will be more accurately identified in a decentralized structure, opportunities for more effective intervention emerge. Third, decentralization makes it easier to mobilize local human, material, and knowledge-based resources for local development. Finally, by improving participation opportunities and by strengthening bonds of belonging, decentralized administrative structures increase ownership of plans, programs and projects. On the one hand, this facilitates implementation processes, while on the other hand also strengthens monitoring and evaluation processes, thus increasing public control and making it possible to create more transparent and accountable administrative structures and mechanisms.

Modernization and rationalization of the public administration and decentralization

Creating a “modern” and “rational” state in order to achieve political (democratization) and economic (development) goals can be distinguished as a fourth discursive framework with respect to decentralization. Accordingly, decentralization increases effectiveness

and efficiency in the public administration and the provision of public services. Especially in countries with a large population and territory, central governments relying on a top-down approach to administration fall short of ensuring effectiveness and efficiency when it comes to the determination of public needs and demands, the identification of problems and the provision of public services. By contrast, a more inclusive perspective based on a bottom-up approach, also referred to as “management from below,” offers more space for local actors and assigns them with different roles, and therefore increases effectiveness and efficiency in public service provision. This is due to the fact that government encompasses vertical networks at local, regional, national and international scale as well as horizontal networks comprised of public, private and voluntary organizations at each scale. In this sense, increased effectiveness and efficiency in public administration can be achieved through strong cooperation and partnership between different actors with different resources in these layers (Bafail and Kaya 2009, 3–4).

Concerning the modernization and rationalization of the state, one should underline the “New Public Management” approach that became prominent in the 1980s. This approach can be defined as the transfer of management techniques developed in the private sector to public institutions. According to this model, the state should be handled like a private company and the administrative-political system should be restructured on the basis of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. In the public sector, there is also a requirement for both “organizational modernization” as well as “staff modernization” (Astleithner and Hamedinger 2003, 55). In recent years, many countries—including Turkey—have experienced the closer relationship between the private sector and the public sector. Topics such as total quality management, strategic management and planning, performance management, and performance-based budgeting have been on the public administration agenda demonstrates that management strategies and techniques developed in the private sector are spreading to the public sector within the framework of “modernization” and “rationalization”.

The New Public Management approach determines flexibility and subsidiarity as the two main characteristics of a modern administration of the state. Accordingly, flexibility makes it possible to adapt to the continuous changes in the areas of economy, politics, culture, technology, and environment at local, regional, national, transnational and international scale and to manage the uncertainties caused by these changes. Subsidiarity, on the other hand, allows for the mobilization of local humanitarian, material, knowledge-based, cultural and/or symbolic resources in the face of a

changing environment and newly arising problems, and enables actors to develop original solutions in addition to more general ones (Ökten, Şengezer and Hökelek 2003).

More common and popular in terms of the modernization and rationalization of the state is the concept of governance. The governance approach was first used in the private sector in the USA in the 1970s and then transferred to the public sector by international institutions like the EU, the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) and the UN. One of the two main arguments in support of governance is that it promotes democratization; the second being that it “increases the quality of administrative processes”, also known as, “efficiency” (İzci 2018).

Neoliberal policies, the transformation of the state and decentralization

At this point, one should also mention the criticisms expressed concerning the modernization and rationalization of the state promoted under different names, as for example state reform and public administration reform. While there is a widespread tendency to treat the issue of decentralization within the framework of democratization, socio-economic development, and modernization and rationalization of the state, approaches focusing on neoliberal policies consider it as a part of the neoliberal transformation of the state. From such a perspective, administrative and political structures are undergoing a market-oriented liberalization in line with the agenda for economic liberalization introduced and propagated by international actors like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and OECD in the 1980s (Güler 2003).

According to this approach, state reforms in line with neoliberal policies help to remove national barriers to capital. With localization weakening national sovereignty, policies aimed at downsizing the state eliminate the social state. While neoliberal policies transform the state from a direct producer and provider to a mere regulator of services, the governance structure curtails the influence of citizens in decision-making processes, which representative democracy had allowed to expand under the name of participation. We observe a transition to an administrative and political structure in which capital is decisive. In this sense, decentralization should not be considered as a power-sharing problem between local/regional and central governments alone, but as a part of the general transformations occurring in the economic, political and administrative structure (Ataay 2006; Güler 2006; 2003, 3; Sancar 2002; Stahre 2004; Uyar 2002; Şengül 2002; State Planning Organization 2000; Toksöz 2008, 10-11).

Experiences in different countries show that the issue of decentralization really does function as part of the neoliberal transformation of the state. In the 1980s, a market-oriented transformation of the state began in both developed liberal Western economies and developing countries (Keleş 2006, 39).

While these criticisms are partially valid, it seems problematic to treat neoliberal policies and decentralization as identical or to establish a deterministic relationship between them. First of all, critical discussions focusing on the wholesale transformation of the state, especially highlighting the problems it creates in the social sphere, are no justification for a preservation of or return to centralized and uniform administrative and political systems. After all, central and uniform states have mostly implied authoritarianism in the political sphere, multi-scale uneven spatial development in the socio-economic sphere, and exclusion, inequality, growing patronage relations and administrative inefficiency in the provision of public services.

Secondly, it should be emphasized that central governments and authorities are decisive in these transformation processes and that these models, which are “imposed” from the outside, are not implemented in a uniform manner. The neoliberal transformation of the state does not unfold in spite of the center but is carried out and determined in its path by the center itself.

Third, the historical and political context of each country is a determining factor in shaping the model that ultimately emerges. For example, a detailed examination of the public administration reform worked out by Turkey in the 2000s during the EU membership process, the changes in municipal laws, the introduction of the Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS), and the process leading up to the formation of regional structures like the development agencies allows us to see that all these processes involve a deconcentration rather than decentralization.

Finally, after having envisioned and supported decentralization in the 1980s, neoliberal policies supported centralization, especially in developing countries, in the wake of the global economic crisis in the 2000s. Central authorities opted for legal, administrative and institutional regulations to be able especially to directly manage raw material resources and urban rent at the local and regional level. The “Ministries of Urbanization” established in Brazil and Turkey can be shown as an example of this novel tendency towards centralization (Toksöz 2015, 1).

Decentralization for conflict resolution and peacebuilding

According to Kymlicka and Opalski, unlike the “orthodox liberal” view, which argues that ethno-cultural differences should be relegated to the private sphere, the “liberal pluralist” view considers the public expression and institutionalization of ethno-cultural differences as a precondition for a stable and just democracy (Kymlicka and Opalski 2012, 1). According to Kymlicka, who focuses on the difference between immigrant peoples and indigenous peoples/national minorities, the ethno-cultural demands of immigrants in countries such as Canada, Australia, Britain and the US have led to the development of different forms of multiculturalism. By contrast, models of regional autonomy or multinational federalism developed in places such as Quebec, Puerto Rico, Catalonia, and Scotland, where non-immigrant indigenous peoples and national minorities were territorially concentrated and constituted the majority in their respective regions. In places where indigenous peoples live, such as the Native Americans, Inuit in Canada, Sami in Scandinavia, or Maori in New Zealand, varying forms of self-government emerged (Kymlicka and Opalski 2012, 6-7; Kymlicka 2002). Especially in the second half of the 20th century, repressive policies against national minorities were abandoned and ethno-cultural demands accommodated, leading to the development of multinational federations or self-governments as forms of territorial autonomy. This played an important role in the consolidation and deepening of Western democracies. The new approach did not only resolve the issue of conflicting national identities by peaceful and democratic means, but also secured a high level of economic prosperity and thriving individual freedoms across the country (Kymlicka 2002, 31).

In order for a central state to see power-sharing as a resolution mechanism in ending intra-state identity-based territorial conflicts, concerns about separation and irredentism¹ must be cleared out of the way. Actual membership in or development of a common vision for membership in supranational structures like the EU can facilitate the state’s “renunciation of security policy” and divert minority groups from separatist agendas, thus enabling “unity in diversity” (Kymlicka and Opalski 2012; Bafoil and Kaya 2009 , 7). In situations where these concerns are more pronounced or aggravated by the respective context, it becomes more difficult for self-government or federal multinational solutions to materialize (Kymlicka 2002, 65; Kolsto 2002). Kymlicka identifies the existence of a neighboring state related to the ethnic/national

¹ The idea of the reunion of a state with a population which is outside the borders of the respective state, despite being of the same origin and culture. In other words, irredentism is a political movement that advocates the annexation of territories of neighboring countries.

group that demands power-sharing and historically strong ties between the national minority and foreign powers/states as the two main factors limiting the chances of these solutions.

Despite the fact that many states rely and act upon the premise that “devolution of power and power-sharing nourish centrifugal forces,” research on ethno-nationalist conflicts shows that denying or abolishing the self-governance rights of national minorities increases conflicts, whereas self-government regulations reduce the likelihood of violent conflict (Gurr 1993; Hannum 1990; Lapidoth 1996; Horowitz 1991, 224; Hislope 1998). There is no realistic alternative to territorial autonomy or multinational federalism that could also end conflict in cases where national minorities clearly constitute the majority in their historical homeland and have an established tradition of self-government (Kymlicka 2002, 69; Kolsto 2002, 210).

Identity-based territorial conflicts are mainly rooted in the multi-layered relations of domination between ethnic/national groups in the country and the ethnic/national polarization they cause. Relations of domination and polarization reduce the ability of ethnic/national groups to live in peace and make them more vulnerable to the risk of intra-state conflict (Collier, Hoeffler and Soderbom 2004; Elbadawi and Sambanis 2000; Bates 2001).

Research in the area of conflict resolution and peacebuilding highlights the importance of power sharing and recognition of community rights in the resolution of protracted identity-based conflicts. It is observed that governments in countries hosting such conflicts generally pursue four different approaches: (1) ethnic cleansing, (2) repression, (3) partition/separation, and (4) power-sharing. Despite the political difficulties it poses, power-sharing is the most viable option among these. According to Charles W. Maynes, “consociational democracy,” in contrast to Anglo-American democracy, which is based on individual rights, including community rights, can offer a solution to ethnic/national conflicts that have become a problem around the globe (Maynes 1993). Also, Caroline Hartzell shows in her work that peace agreements involving political, economic, military and territorial power-sharing are stronger and long-standing. Power-sharing not only increases the likelihood of peace, but also makes it easier for peace to become permanent. Institutions play a critical role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding; and only institutionalized solutions will make it possible for the conflicting parties to overcome the security dilemma and establish new social relations based on cooperation (Hartzell 1999; Hartzell, Hoddie and Rothchild 2001; Hartzell and Hoddie 2003).

According to the data of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, 48 of the 83 agreements signed in the context of 31 intra-state territorial conflicts that occurred in 23 countries in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa during the period 1975-2018 involved territorial arrangements such as autonomy, federation, independence, referendum, local power sharing or the strengthening of local governments. On the other hand, when temporary or partial agreements or agreements limited to a peace process are excluded and a classification is made accordingly, only 18 out of the 83 agreements cover all aspects of settling disputes (full agreement). Territorial arrangements were included in all of these 18 agreements.²

For example, the conflict between the Indonesian state and the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka - GAM), which lasted for about 29 years (1976-2005), ended with extended autonomy granted to the Aceh region (Çiçek 2018, 109-42; Aspinall 2005, 75-84). Likewise, the conflict that started in the Bangsamoro region located in the Mindanao island group in the Philippines in the early 1970s ended with the peace agreement signed between the Philippines state and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in 2014. The peace process, in which Turkey took part as one of the four mediating states, guaranteed the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region and eventually the region was given ample administrative, political and economic powers (Çiçek 2018, 75-108; Söylemez 2016, 112-24; International Crisis Group 2019). In the United Kingdom/Northern Ireland conflict too, the result was power-sharing. As a result of the agreement, the Northern Ireland Assembly was restored with legislative and executive power and a new Northern Ireland Executive was formed (Democratic Progress Institute 2013). Power-sharing was also influential in ending ethnic/national conflicts and consolidating democracy in Spain's Basque and Catalan regions (Thomas 2012, 5-21).

Following the dictatorship under General Francisco Franco that had lasted from 1939-1975, the transition to democracy laid the groundwork for meeting regional demands (Edwards 1999). Demands for autonomy were not only voiced in Catalonia, the Basque Country, Galicia, Valencia and Andalusia but seen and supported as part of building democracy throughout Spain (Juberías 2013, 232). Spain was restructured as a regional state through the introduction of an administratively and politically decentralized structure. Drawing from the opportunities provided by the experience of pre-Franco autonomy and a tradition of political struggle spread over the century (Edwards 1999),

² The 1976-2018 Peace Agreement Data Set is accessible online. See: <https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/index.html#peaceagreement>, accessed 01.10.2020.

Catalonia was established in 1979 as one of the autonomous regions by a special statute. Catalonia has a parliamentary system at regional scale and the administration consists of the regional parliament, the regional president and the regional government (Edwards 1999).

The search for independence in Catalonia, which has a history of at least three centuries (Juberías 2013), was revived especially in the 2000s. Between 1979-2003, Catalan politics was dominated by the center-right party Convergence and Union (Convergència i Unió - CiU), which favored expanding and deepening autonomy. In the 2003 elections, in which reform of the autonomy law was the main political agenda, the CiU lost its dominance and a left coalition made up of the left, socialist and communist parties and the green movement replaced the previous government. In the same period, the center-right party was replaced by the center-left the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español - PSOE) led by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero in the center of Spain. These changes in the political configuration both in Catalonia and throughout Spain created new opportunities, and eventually, the new autonomy statute was adopted in 2006 (Aktoprak 2015). The new statute defined Catalonia as a "nation," established equality between Spanish and Catalan, and declared it a right and responsibility for the citizens of Catalonia to learn Catalan. In 2010, following an application by the People's Party (Partido Popular - PP), the Constitutional Court found 14 articles of the new law, which constituted its basic components, to be unconstitutional and reinterpreted 27 further articles to the disadvantage of autonomy.

Following the decision of the Constitutional Court, more than one million people gathered on the streets of Barcelona on 10 July 2010 in protest, chanting "We are a nation, we decide!" (Catalan News 2010). The protests turned into a massive pro-independence demonstration (Catalan News 2014). When attempts of the Government of Catalonia in 2012 and 2013 to hold a referendum on independence were blocked, a non-binding plebiscite was proposed and announced by President of Catalonia Arthur Mas. About two million of the 5.4 million voters participated in the plebiscite held on 9 November 2014 and more than 80% of them voted in support of independence.

The elections held in September 2015, 10 months after the plebiscite on independence, were won by a coalition of two right-wing and two left-wing parties favoring independence (Real Instituto Elcano 2019, 24) and the Catalan Parliament decided to hold an independence referendum on October 1, 2017 (BBC News 2018). The referendum was held even though it had been declared unconstitutional by the

Constitutional Court and the central government ordered a police intervention, which had approximately a thousand people injured (Generalitat de Catalunya 2017; Phillips 2019). On a turnout of 43.03%, 92.01% of those participating in the referendum voted in favor of independence and 7.99% voted against (The Independent 2017). The Catalonia Parliament unilaterally declared independence on October 27, 2017.

On the same day, following approval by the Spanish Senate, the Spanish Government dismissed the Government of Catalonia, dissolved the Parliament and assumed direct control over some of the autonomous administration's powers. About two months later, on December 21, 2017, fresh elections were held in Catalonia (BBC News 2017). Catalan politicians did not offer any particularly strong resistance against this decision but chose to string out the struggle for independence. According to some allegations, Madrid's threats regarding a potential military coup were decisive in this decision (Phillips 2019).

Decentralization in Turkey:

Historical Background

The Kurdish issue is a socio-politically and historically constructed phenomenon. Its history of nearly two centuries dates all the way back to the early 19th century. In order to understand what is happening in this issue today, and to make predictions about its future, we need to look into this past. The past of an issue constitutes a certain path. This path, in turn, leads to a path dependency. On the one hand, historical processes shape the present in terms of ideas, interests and institutions, while on the other hand determining the boundaries of possible routes. Moreover, "path dependency" can create a "lock-in effect," leading actors to be trapped within the boundaries set by the past, even though there may be better alternatives with respect to a certain issue (David 1985; Page 2006; Liebowitz and Margolis 1995; Hall and Taylor 1996).

The six discursive frameworks/contexts regarding decentralization summarized above are important also in respect of an archeology of the last two centuries of the Kurdish issue, which emerged in the last period of the Ottoman Empire and was then inherited by the Republic of Turkey. A detailed discussion of the history of the Kurdish issue, which spans more than two centuries, cannot be provided in this brief report, but it is necessary to point out the main historical turning points and points of reference in order to better understand current debates on decentralization.

Ottoman centralization policies and the first Kurdish rebellions

Research on the historical roots of the Kurdish issue and the discourses of different Kurdish political actors indicates that there are two major turning points: (1) the Ottoman Westernization and modernization during the 19th century, and (2) the founding process of the Turkish Republic at the beginning of the 20th century. In the Ottoman Empire, where power-sharing between central and local/regional administrations had been pronounced in earlier periods, a process of modernization based on the western nation-state model in the 19th century (Mardin 1973) brought about the abolition of decentralization in the political and administrative structure and led to the gradual formation of a centralized and homogeneous power structure. The issue of decentralization, which continued to be debated around the concept of autonomy (*muhtariyet*) in relation to the Kurdish issue and minorities until the 1921 Constitution, was largely dismissed with the 1924 Constitution.

There are several dimensions to the Kurdish issue. The question of identity, regional disparities and uneven development of the Kurdish regions, as well as aspects concerning democracy and citizenship like victimization, self-esteem, dignity, and justice are some of the problem's more frequently highlighted dimensions (Çiçek 2015). However, tracing the root causes of the issue, it can be argued that it essentially is a problem of sharing territorial sovereignty. Sociologist İsmail Beşikçi, one of the foremost references with respect to the Kurdish/Kurdistan issue, considers the latter to be a problem of an international colony (Beşikçi 1992). On the other hand, sociologist Mesut Yeğen, another important expert in the field, states that it was the post-imperial nation-state building process that gave rise to the problem (Yeğen 2006, 18-19).

For centuries, the Kurdish lands constituted a buffer zone between the Ottoman and Safavid empires. Even though the Ottoman state made great efforts to establish direct rule in these areas (Hassanpour 1992; Xanî, n.d.; Şemo 2005; Aktar 2014, 24-25), the Kurdish principalities, located far from the center and along the border, were able to remain as semi-independent sociopolitical structures with extensive and non-uniform authorities in economic, political, legal and administrative terms from the 16th to the mid-19th century.³ The status of the Kurdish principalities was gradually dissolved, and

³ Referring to a legal code, Evliya Çelebi states that there were two types of rule in the Kurdish principalities in the Ottoman Empire: (1) Kurdish *beyliks* ("principalities"), or *sanjaks* ("districts"; literally "banners" or "flags") and (2) Kurdish Governments. The Kurdish *sanjaks* were like other *sanjaks* and the *timar* system ("fiefdom") applied here too. However, unlike the other *sanjaks*, *sancakbeys* ("lords of the banners") were not appointed from outside and the Kurdish nobility ruled the *sanjak*. The right to rule a *sanjak* was passed from father to son. If the *sancakbey* did not have any sons, the Kurdish

as a result of the centralization policies developed as part of the westernization and modernization of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, direct rule was established as the dominant model in the Kurdish lands (Özoğlu 2004, 54-67; Aktar 2014; van Bruinessen 1992, 135; O'Shea 2004, 9, 15; N. Kutlay 1997; Vali 2003). In this sense, we can interpret the period that ended with the 1847 dissolution of the Botan Principality, the last Kurdish principality ruled by Bedirhan Bey, and the establishment of the Kurdistan Province,⁴ which was directly connected to the central government, as the first turning point as far as the more recent history of the Kurdish issue is concerned. As a matter of fact, it is seen that the first Kurdish rebellions broke out in the 19th century, long before the Republican period, as a reaction to the Ottoman modernization and the centralization policies developed in this context.

Pre-Republican autonomy debates and the 1921 Constitution

Before the Republic was founded on the basis of Turkishness, decentralization figured as an alternative in discussions on a state and society founded upon either Ottomanism or Islam. From its inception in the era of Mahmud II (1808-1839), the idea of Ottomanism was one of the influential movements until the beginning of the 20th century. The promise of Ottomanism was to ensure equality among the Ottoman subjects without discriminating between languages and religions. In the mentioned period, this idea was reflected in regulations such as the 1839 Reorganization Edict, the 1856 Reform Edict and the 1876 Ottoman constitution.

The political agreement concerning Ottoman identity, which acknowledged religious and linguistic/ethnic differences, was largely upheld and followed until 1912. The agreement, which Barış Ünlü describes as the "Ottoman Contract,"⁵ was interpreted in two different

bey chose a *beyzade* ("son of prince"). On the other hand, Kurdish governments existed in places that were difficult to reach or close to the border. In some cases, these governments did not pay taxes or provide soldiers and only recognized the Ottoman authority (also see: Özoğlu 2004, 56-59).

⁴ In 1846, the Kurdistan Province was established by merging the province (eyalet) of Diyarbakır with the districts (sanjak) of Van, Muş and Hakkari and the sub-districts (kaza) of Cizre, Botan and Mardin. Located in a central area of Kurdistan, convenient for transportation and logistical support, and thus making it possible to rule the Kurds with an "iron fist," Ahlat was determined as the home base of the Anatolian Army. While the central government allocated a total of 67,500 kuruş for the administrative affairs of the Mosul Province, 80,000 kuruş were allocated for the Kurdistan Province. According to the 1847-1867 State Yearbooks, the Kurdistan Province was established and administered directly by the central government. The Kurdistan Province was merged with the Mamuret-ul-Aziz Province in 1867 and the newly established province was named Diyarbakır Province (for detailed information see: Özoğlu 2004, 60-62; S. Bozkurt and Akpınar 2011, 93-130).

⁵ For a comprehensive analysis of the construction of identity, society, and the state based on Ottomanism, Islam and Turkishness during the

ways among the Young Turks. Non-Muslims, especially Armenians, and non-Turkish Muslims such as Albanians and Kurds understood it within the framework of building a decentralized political system based on collective rights. By contrast, the cadres dominating the CUP envisaged a central regime under the hegemony of Turkishness, in which ethnic and religious minorities were given certain rights and represented in the parliament (Ünlü 2018, 101-20).

Prince Sabahaddin, one of the foremost advocates of decentralization, stated that “all of the peoples that make up the Empire want a regime that is in harmony with their needs and wishes” and pointed to a political regime based on collective differences as a solution. According to the Prince, “dispensing with centralization means that everyone is the absolute master of their own home [emphasis added] under the general rule of a common policy.” Addressing Turkish and Armenian liberals, Prince Sabahaddin argued that the demands of the Armenians were part of the reconstruction of the Ottoman Empire and regarded these demands as “an integral part of the conditions that secure the normal functions of a progressive administration within the confines of broad administrative autonomy.” Saying, “I have no doubt that the special interests of the Armenians can very well match with the general interests of the Ottoman Empire,” the prince called on Turkish and Armenian liberals to act in unison “for the common homeland to rise” and usher in “the beginning of a new era” (B. Koçak 2019 , 184–86).

The years between 1908 and 1912 saw the emergence of a number of political organizations that advocated the collective rights-oriented Ottoman Contract represented by Prince Sabahaddin⁶ and preeminent Kurdish personages such as Seyit Abdulkadir and Emin Ali Bedirhan joined these newly founded parties (Özoğlu 2004, 99). However, most of the cadres who played a leading role in the declaration of the Second Constitutional Era in 1908 envisioned a more limited space for non-Turks within the association around Ottoman identity. Accordingly, this was largely necessitated by the conditions required to bring down the regime of Abdul Hamid. As Birgül Ayman Güler puts it, “Prince Sabahaddin saw the solution to securing the unity of the Ottoman Empire in a form of organization that tied decentralization to the possibility of a federal structure. On the other hand, the Union

last period of the Ottoman Empire and the formation of the Turkish Republic see Ünlü (2018).

⁶ The Ottoman Liberty Party founded by Prince Sabahaddin, the Ottoman Democrat Party founded by Albanian Ibrahim Temo and Kurdish Abdullah Cevdet, both co-founders of the Committee of Union and Progress, and the Freedom and Accord Party supported by non-Muslims were defending cultural rights and decentralization to varying degrees (Ünlü 2018 , 112). For more detailed information on this issue see Tunaya (1998).

and Progress movement chose to pursue a mode of decentralization that was grounded in a framework of devolution [emphasis added]" (Güler 2007, 13).

In his work *Three Types of Policy* [Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset], written as early as 1904, Yusuf Akçura, one of the founders of the CUP, carries out a "rational" analysis of the policies of the Ottoman Union, the Islamic Union and the Turkish Union and suggested the Turkish Union as a viable solution. Likewise, Mehmed Nâzim Bey, also one of the founders of the Committee and one of the leading figures in the declaration of the Second Constitutional Era, where Abdul Hamid II restored the Constitution and promised to reopen the Parliament, said the following about decentralization:

"Prince Sabahaddin is dead; he exists no more; his program of decentralization, of autonomous nationalities and provinces is abandoned. The Committee of Progress and Union wants centralization and a Turkish monopoly on power. It wants no nationalities in Turkey. It does not want Turkey to become a new Austria [-Hungary]. It wants a unified Turkish nation-state with Turkish schools, a Turkish administration, [and] a Turkish legal system." (Hanioğlu 2001, 260).

The great territorial losses sustained by the Ottoman Empire in the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 - including places such as Macedonia and Western Thrace, which were the homelands of most of the central cadres of the CUP, and important cities such as Thessaloniki - ended the political pursuits around a common Ottoman identity entirely (Üngör 2016, 41-111; Özoğlu 2004; 69, 80). As a matter of fact, in the environment provided by the First World War between 1914-1918, the material and symbolic existence of the Armenian people was largely erased and the Anatolian lands were significantly Islamized (Dündar 2008; 2011; 2013). Later, the population exchange between Turkey and Greece within the framework of the 1923 Lausanne Peace Treaty would in large part put an end to the presence of Greeks in Anatolia and the country would be cleansed of non-Muslims by state violence, considerably completing the "reconstruction of space, collective identity and community based on Sunni-Muslim identity" (Çiçek 2015, 88).

As a matter of fact, Abdul Hamid II (1876-1908) had been pondering the ideology of Ottomanism in the context of a Turkish-Muslim identity and, already in those years, he had had the aim of forming a kind of "proto-nationalism," as Şerif Mardin calls it (Mardin 1973, 176). That said, Islam gained particular currency as a unifying identity in the aftermath of the Balkan wars. Between 1912-1923, when the state was faced with the threat of extinction and the unifying power of Turkishness very limited, the Unionist

and Kemalist cadres started to give priority to Islam as a common identity (Ünlü 2018, 120-58). During this period, the issue of decentralization based on collective differences came to the fore in the context of Muslim fraternity.

In the context of the Kurdish issue and decentralization, there are two important aspects in this period that should be underlined. First of all, nationalist sentiments grew stronger among the Kurdish political elites, who had largely adhered to the Ottoman Convention until after World War I, and the demand for an independent or autonomous Kurdistan began to be more voiced more audibly. The Society for the Advancement of Kurdistan, which was founded in Istanbul in 1918 by the Kurdish elites which mostly ranked in the Ottoman bureaucracy, constituted the main center of this new political tendency. In general, the religious leaders of the Naqshbandi tradition led by Seyit Abdülkadir were in favor of autonomy and the caliphate, while those leaders under the leadership of Mehmet Emin Ali Bedirhan, who were educated in the West and had no religious motivation, took a pro-independence and secularist stance (Bozarıslan 2005; Özođlu 2004, 81-120). Meanwhile, the decisive factor in the socio-political mobilization of the Kurdish masses was the "Muslim Contract" and there was no social movement based on Kurdish nationalism (Bozarıslan 2005, 205; Özođlu 2004, 123-24; Ünlü 2018, 120--58).

The second important aspect is that between 1918-1923, confronted with the demands of the Kurdish political elites for shared territorial sovereignty, the Unionist and Kemalist cadres emphasized equality between Kurds and Turks within a general framework of Islamic unity and accepted the demands of Kurds for autonomy (Bozarıslan 2005, 206-7) For example, in an interview with journalists from Istanbul in Izmit Pavilion on January 16-17, 1923, Mustafa Kemal said the following in his reply to journalist Ahmet Yalman:

"(...) Rather than envisioning a Kurdishness on its own, some sort of local autonomy will be established in accordance with the Constitution. So, if a district's [liva] inhabitants are Kurdish, they will rule themselves autonomously. (...) The Turkish Grand National Assembly consists of the authorized deputies of both Kurds and Turks, and these two constituents have united all their interests and destinies."
(Atatürk's Complete Works Vol. 14 2004, 273-74)

As pointed out by Mustafa Kemal, the Constitution of 1921 envisaged a political system based on the autonomy of provinces and sub-districts. The 1921 Constitution, which envisioned a different political union than the 1924, 1961 and 1982 constitutions prepared during the Republic period (Demirkent 2018), was a decentralist constitution

in terms of both its preparation and content. First of all, the 1921 Constitution was made possible by the “congress governments”⁷ that began to form at the local level as a result of the dissolution of the administration in Istanbul after the First World War. The Grand National Assembly, which played the role of the constituent assembly and prepared and adopted the 1921 Constitution, goes back to these local congress governments. 14 articles of the 1921 Constitution, which consisted of a total of 23 articles and one additional article, concern the provinces and sub-districts which are granted autonomy. Article 11, which regulates the autonomy of the provinces and was adopted without any dispute on the merits, reads as follows:

“The province is constituted as a legal person vested with autonomy in local affairs. Except for matters that concern more than one province such as foreign and domestic policy, religious, judicial and military affairs, international economic relations and the public taxes and interest of the government, arrangement and administration of affairs related to foundations, madrasas, education, health, public works, and social assistance is placed under the authority of the provincial councils.”(Demirkent 2018)

The 1921 Constitution gave authority to the central government in affairs that involved many provinces, like domestic and foreign policy, judiciary, defense, international relations, and taxes, and left the arrangement and administration of foundations, madrasas and education, health, economy, agriculture, public works and social assistance to the “Provincial Councils.”

Another important aspect that should be underlined regarding the 1921 Constitution is that it was drafted right after the Treaty of Sèvres. The Treaty of Sèvres, signed on 10 August 1920, envisaged the establishment of an independent Armenian state in the territories comprising the provinces of Trabzon, Erzurum, Van and Bitlis, and the establishment of an autonomous Kurdistan, which should be granted the right to hold a referendum on independence, in the south of these provinces. Considering that the first negotiations on the 1921 Constitution took place in November 1920 and that it was adopted on January 20, 1921, it can be said that the issues of an independent Armenia and an autonomous Kurdistan played a constitutive role in the 1921 Constitution and that the autonomy arrangements were mainly designed in response to these issues.

⁷ The Congresses of Erzurum and Sivas are frequently mentioned in relation to these local congress governments. However, Bülent Tanör remarks that as many as 30 congresses convened between 1918-1920. For a more detailed discussion on this topic see Tanör (2009).

Indeed, Mustafa Kemal's above-quoted statement, made two years after the adoption of the 1921 Constitution, at least confirms that the Kurdish issue played the role of a constitutive dynamic with respect to the issue of autonomy.

The foundation of the Republic and the establishment of direct rule by means of the 1924 Constitution

With the foundation of the Republic of Turkey as an extremely central unitary state in 1923 and the subsequent adoption of the 1924 Constitution, the books on the issue of decentralization, which had been on the agenda until the first years of the 19th century within the scope of the Kurdish issue and policies towards ethnic/national and religious minorities and fundamental to the 1921 Constitution, were largely closed (Bozarşlan 2000, 22–23). During this period, “Ottoman society went through two shifts of identification and dis-identification. The first process was a shift from Ottoman patriotism to Muslim nationalism, the second one a shift from Muslim nationalism into Turkish nationalism” (Üngör 2012, 51). The foundation of the Republic led to the construction of an “ethnicized, centralized, and political space” (Natali 2005, 91).

The state used its coercive force to suppress the Kurdish rebellions that occurred during the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century in response to the Ottoman/Republican modernization and the centralization policies developed in this context. This culminated in the 1937-38 Dersim Massacre, which resulted in large-scale casualties and forced displacement, and simultaneously, direct rule was asserted all across Turkey. In other words, the “implicit contract” (Mardin 1991, 108) between the Ottoman and Kurdish elites ended with the foundation of the Republic. The “obstacles” to the project of the ethno-nationalist incorporation of space and time (K. Ökten 2004) based on the “Turkishness Contract” (Ünlü 2018, 159–205) were largely removed.

During the single-party regime between 1923-1950, the First General Inspectorate was established in the region comprising the provinces of Elâzığ, Urfa, Bitlis, Hakkâri, Diyarbakır, Siirt, Mardin, and Van in order to form an authority that would replace the martial law which had been declared after the suppression of the Sheikh Said Revolt in 1925 and lifted in 1927 (Tuncay 1999; Keskin 2007, 155-59). Introduced right after the martial law had been lifted and covering almost the entire Kurdish region, the General Inspectorate was later considered as a “general administrative arrangement that could be used elsewhere in Turkey” (Tunçay 1999, 179) and was implemented in different regions such as Thrace and Çukurova. Steps taken towards a “reform” of the Kurdish region during

the days of the Ottoman Empire were continued in the Republican period by means of the 1925-1927 martial law, the General Inspectorate in 1927-1952, and the state of emergency regime in the 1987-2002 period (C. Koçak 2010, 293-94). If we take into account the three military coups that took place between 1960 and 1980, it can be argued that the Kurdish region was governed by an uninterrupted martial law or state of emergency regime until the 2000s.

Following the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Turkey, the issue of decentralization was largely reduced to a municipal issue. In 1920, there were 15 provinces with 36 appendant livas and 17 independent livas, which were directly connected to the center and had a status similar to the provinces. Between 1920-1924, administrative borders were rearranged, creating 74 new provinces which corresponded to livas/sanjaks in terms of their geographical size. Nuray E. Keskin, who works on the territorial organization of the Republic, states that various concerns such as “preventing the government from falling into the hands of the enemy in case of occupation,” “managing ethnic/religious minorities,” “preventing conflict,” “securing/protecting the loyalty of the tribes,” “subjecting the tribes to control,” and “maintaining order” were decisive in determining the administrative borders of the provinces (Keskin 2007, 137).

When the 1924 Constitution—which established an extremely centralized unitary political system—was adopted to replace the 1921 Constitution with its emphasis on decentralization, the provinces (vilayet) which had enjoyed autonomy as the basic administrative units and kind of resembled regions, were abolished and new provinces (il) with relatively more narrow borders were established as the field administrations of the central government. The foundation of the Republic initiated a process of “economic, political, and administrative centralization of the new regime” (Keskin 2007, 142). As Keskin states, “the administrative authority at the provincial level was left to the field organization of the central government, and the special provincial administrations operated under close control and supervision by this mechanism. The territorial organization of the Republic rested upon rejection of the regional basis and revocation of the alternative of local government at the provincial level”(Keskin 2007, 119-20). Following the enactment of the Municipality Law in 1930, municipalities, whose legal foundation had been created in the period of the Ottoman Empire by the Provincial Public Administration Regulation issued in 1871, began to form the main institutional framework of discussions on local government and decentralization in Turkey (Toksöz 2015). “In the years 1935-1957, selective changes are made in the

administrative landscape, the structure and principles of which were largely established in terms of administrative division. Between the years 1958-1980, almost no changes were made on the administrative level" (Keskin 2007, 120).

In the Republican period the issue of political decentralization fell off the agenda entirely and the extremely centralized administrative and political government structure left limited space to municipalities. Structured as the local extension of the center within the scope of deconcentration (Toksöz 2008, 41), municipalities were authorized in a limited number of areas including cleaning, municipal police, fire brigade, park and garden services, superstructure works, social services and culture.⁸ Municipalities continued to operate as local administrative units under administrative tutelage and with very limited financial resources until the early 2000s (Toksöz 2015, 7–8).

Transition to the multi-party system, development and the “Eastern Question”

Together with the transition to a multi-party system, the issue resurfaced on the agenda, albeit limited in scope, in the context of subsidiarity and local and regional development. However, these discussions remained limited to deconcentration in administrative areas, the focus mainly being on modernization and rationalization in the public administration (Dinçer 2020, 13–14).

The program of the Democrat Party (Article 20), which would come to power in 1950, stated that local government was to be strengthened in order to increase political participation and service efficiency (Democrat Party 1946). In practice, however, centralizing rather than decentralizing tendencies got stronger. For example, mayors were directly appointed in metropolitan cities such as Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara in this period, while they should have in fact been elected by and from those among the city council, according to legislation. Likewise, the prime minister of the period directly involved himself in development works in Istanbul (Toksöz 2008, 43; Toksöz et al. 2009, 38).

Local administrations, which remained under the “complete control and sovereignty of the central government” until the 1960s (Kazancı 1983, 41), were weakened even further by the 1961 Constitution. While the 1924 Constitution (Article 91) had stated that deconcentration (*tevsi-i mezuniyet*) and separation of duties and authorities

⁸ The 1930 Municipality Law can be accessed online. See <http://www.yds.gov.tr/dosyalar/1326978039-1580.pdf>, accessed 22.10.2020.

(tefrik-i vezâif) would be taken as basis in the administration of the provinces, the 1961 Constitution (Article 115) made away with the separation of duties and authorities (Aktar 2014, 39-41). Previously elected from within the elected municipal council, as per the arrangement made in the 1961 Constitution, mayors were now taking office following direct election. This birthed a tradition that continues until today: the municipal councils, which expanded the space for negotiation and consensus in local governments, were weakened and the office of the president was strengthened. On the other hand, the new constitution abolished the taxing authority of municipalities, which previously had had the power to generate income, even if limited, through fees, charges and similar income-generating resources, thus increasing their financial dependence on the center. On a brighter note, the dismissal of mayors and the suspension of municipal councils were tied to judicial guarantees (Toksöz 2008, 44; 2015, 7-8).

Another important adjustment that reinforced the centralization tendencies in Turkey in the 1960s was the establishment of the State Planning Organization (DPT). During the two decades of planned development that marked the period between 1960-1980, five-year national development plans were prepared based on a central planning approach. On the one hand, policy-making and planning authorities regarding economic and social development were centralized, on the other hand, the central government also took greater control of the management and distribution of public resources (Toksöz 2008, 44).

While the first (1963-1967) and second (1968-1972) five-year national development plan pursued the goal of “regional development” and were grounded in a “regional planning” approach in order to eliminate inter-regional inequalities and provide for balanced spatial development (State Planning Organization 1963; 1968), this approach was abandoned in the third term and a new policy defining “priority regions for development” was adopted (State Planning Organization 1973). The DTO highlighted the drawbacks of the term “region” in justification of this policy change. Accordingly, in the new strategy, “which will prevent that the detrimental effect to the overall plan caused by the kind of development displayed by certain administrations in the past will spill over to the regional level [emphasis added]... the basic principle is to direct those regions defined as priority regions for development towards the goals of long-term development in areas with potential and to ensure economic and social progress in accordance with the principle of national integrity [emphasis added]” (State Planning Organization 1973, 938).

In the 1960-1980 period, the most important event that brought the issue of decentralization back into discussion was the 1973 local elections. After the opposition won 41 of the provincial municipalities in the elections, the conflict between central and local governments deepened and raised the issues of the autonomy, administration and financial resources of the municipalities (Toksöz et al. 2009, 38-39). The experience of “communitarian municipalism” (Kamalak and Gül 2013) in the cities ruled by the social democrats between 1973 and 1977 became an important reference in terms of both the empowerment of municipalities vis-à-vis the center and an alternative municipalism that amplified political participation and focused on economic and social rights (Şahin 2013, 342-43; Güler 2013). After the Republican People’s Party (CHP), which had won 33 of these 41 municipalities, including the municipalities of Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Antalya, Mersin and Kayseri, came to power following the 1977 general elections, the Ecevit Government established the Ministry of Local Administrations (Özaslan 2015) and initiatives to strengthen the local administrations increased. In the government program, Ecevit defined the purpose of the Ministry of Local Administrations as “removing the administrative and financial bottlenecks of local governments and making arrangements that will make these administrations effective and functional, thus strengthening democracy” (Turkish Grand National Assembly 2013, 5398). However, the change of government and the subsequent military coup of September 12, 1980, interrupted these discussions without any notable transformation in the relations between central and local administrations having materialized in the meantime.

The Kurdish opposition, suppressed by state violence following the foundation of the Republic, revived in the 1960s after nearly 20 years of political silence. In these years, the Kurdish opposition, which was organized as a part of general Turkish politics, framed the issue as the “Eastern Question” (Bozarşlan 1966). The term “Eastern Question” implied the state violence against the “East”, while simultaneously emphasizing the inequality between regions and demanding development for the “East” (Bucak 2021, 103–7). The slogan “Factories and Roads for the West, Police Stations for the East,” which was chanted in the so-called Eastern Meetings held between 1967-1969, summarizes this policy (Bozçalı 2006; M. N. Kutlay 2006).

By the 1970s, the “right” wing of the Kurdish opposition chose to remain within the Islamist, nationalist and conservative Turkish politics, whereas the “left wing” broke loose from Turkish politics and became radicalized (Bozarşlan 2012; Yeğen 2006, 174-81; Marcus 2007, 15-32; Barkey and Fuller 1998, 24-25; İmset 1993, 26-27). In the 1970s, many Kurdish parties, including the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Partiya Karkerên

Kurdistan - PKK), were founded and the thesis that “Kurdistan is a colony” became the common discourse of these mostly illegal parties in these years (İmset 1993, 405-43; “The Kurdish Question Between 1971-1980” 1988). Especially with the 1980 coup, state violence became more widespread and intensified, increasing the radicalism in Kurdish politics and forming the basis for radical action (Bozarslan 2000).

The 1982 Constitution, neoliberalism and the transformation of the local administrations

The 1982 Constitution that was prepared after the 1980 military coup increased the tutelage over local governments and brought the centralist structure in Turkey to a climax (Aktar 2014, 11). Like the 1961 Constitution, the 1982 Constitution emphasizes the principles of unity of the administration, centralization, subsidiarity, and deconcentration but also includes three original regulations concerning the centralizing tendency. Firstly, unlike the 1961 Constitution, Article 126, which regulates the central administration, states that “[c]entral administrative organizations comprising several provinces may be established to ensure efficiency and coordination of public services,” thus defining the supra-provincial public institutions as a part of the central administrative organizations. Secondly, Article 127 concerning the local administrations states that the central government has the power of “administrative tutelage” over local administrations. Finally, the judicial guarantees provided to local administrations by the 1961 Constitution (Article 116) were abolished and the Minister of Interior was vested with the authority to dismiss local administrative bodies and their members from duty. As a matter of fact, beginning in 2016, the dismissal of mayors in municipalities governed by mainstream Kurdish politics and the appointment of trustees to replace them, in other words, the elimination of the municipal councils, would be based on the aforementioned constitutional regulation (Arikboğa 2020).

Another important development that should be underlined in the context of the post-coup local governments is that a neoliberal approach started to become dominant in public policies and services. In this period, in which the state underwent a market-oriented transformation, social rights were curtailed and social policies dwindled, while privatizations spread across the country. Formerly occupying the position of a producer in both economic and social terms, the state now turned into a market-oriented regulatory and supervisory actor. According to the brand of “neoliberal municipalism” that developed in tandem with this transformation, the authority of local governments to intervene in local prices of goods and services like bread or dolmuş rides was taken away from them, marking the transition to a “price system determined by free market conditions” (Toksöz 2015, 9–10). In addition, parallel to the

transformation at the central scale, local public services were privatized, while municipalities turned from institutions directly producing services to institutions distributing services through procurement. The role of the municipalities was limited to resource allocation, supervision and regulation. As citizens turned into customers, municipalities turned into institutions operating like private enterprises, local public services also became significantly commercialized. While they are actually supposed to work for the public interest with the authority and resources bestowed upon them by the public, municipalities became market-oriented institutions generating and distributing rent (Çiçek 2011, 35-47, 61-66).

Within the scope of neoliberal municipalism, one should also underline that the zoning powers of the municipalities expanded. With the transfer of zoning authority, which plays a crucial role in the production of urban rent, to the municipalities, a kind of rentier municipalism became more pronounced and widespread and rentierism gained influence in local politics too (Toksöz 2015, 9-10).

Another critical issue, which is related to the sharing of urban resources and rent management, but also comprises different dimensions such as rapidly increasing urbanization, the spatial expansion of urban areas, and the increasing need for planning and coordination in service provision, is the establishment of metropolitan municipalities. By virtue of a legal arrangement made in 1984 based on the 1982 Constitution, metropolitan municipalities were established in Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara. Following the introduction of this two-tier municipal administration structure, many authorities of the lower-level municipalities, especially zoning authorities, were transferred to the metropolitan municipalities (Toksöz 2015, 8-9). While the local governments in Turkey, who did not enjoy political authority, had already been under the heavy administrative and financial tutelage of the central government and limited in their resources, the metropolitan municipality regulation further limited the powers and resources of lower-level municipalities. On the other hand, metropolitan municipalities started to stand out as new administrative domains and political actors vis-à-vis the central government.

The European Charter of Local Self-Government

The centralized structure, which was increased with the 1982 Constitution, lasted until the early 2000s. In this period, Turkey signed the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Though it did not bring about a structural transformation or lead to any significant changes in practice, the Charter should be mentioned nonetheless, since especially after the 2000s, both mainstream Kurdish politics and the dominant

strands of Turkish politics saw it as a resource in the context of strengthening local governments or local autonomy.

The document, prepared by the western European co-founding members of the Council of Europe, who have a strongly decentralist structure, was opened for signature on October 15, 1985 and entered into force in 1988. Based on the idea that “the safeguarding and reinforcement of local self-government in the different European countries is an important contribution to the construction of a Europe based on the principles of democracy and the decentralization of power,” the Charter served as a guideline for most member countries, especially Central and Eastern European countries, with respect to strengthening the administrative and financial autonomy of local governments. With the Additional Protocol, which was adopted on November 16, 2009 and entered into force on June 1, 2012, the charter was amended by regulations regarding citizens’ “right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.”⁹

However, the Charter is not binding for the member states of the Council of Europe. Likewise, despite containing general principles of administrative and financial autonomy, it does not provide a model for the member states in this regard. Moreover, the Charter grants member states the right to make reservations with respect to certain articles.

Turkey signed the European Charter of Local Self-Government on 21 November 1988. Adopted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TGNA) on December 9, 1992, the Charter entered into force on April 1, 1993. Although Turkey has signed the Charter, it has made reservations regarding almost all articles granting political, administrative and financial autonomy to local governments or widening their autonomy in these areas (Aktar 2014, 99-104).

Consequently, Turkey’s adoption of the European Charter of Local Self-Government has not led to any changes in practice. None of the seven legal regulations prepared for the reform of local governments from 1982 to the early 2000s were accepted (Aktar 2014, 45). The Law on Provincial Public Administration adopted in 1913 and the Municipality Law adopted in 1930 remained valid until the mid-2000s and determined the institutional boundaries of local governments in Turkey.

⁹ For the Charter, see <https://rm.coe.int/168007a088> ; For the Additional Protocol, see <https://rm.coe.int/168008482a>

The 1990s: Discussions on a federation and the Basque model

The signing of the Self-Government Charter was not the only significant development in the 1990s. Around the same time, debates regarding different models like a “state” (eyalet), a “federation” and the “Spain/Basque model” gained momentum within the scope of a “domestic solution” to the Kurdish issue. In fact, security concerns had already sparked discussions on a system of federated states after the 1980 military coup. Decree Law No. 71, published in the official gazette no. 18181 dated October 4, 1983, envisaged the establishment of regional administrations and regional governorships. By this decree, eight regions/states with centers in Erzurum, Diyarbakır, Adana, Kayseri, Ankara, Konya, Istanbul and Izmir were established. However, the decree, which had been prepared based on President Kenan Evren’s proposal, was rejected by the government due to concerns about its implications for the unitary state structure and the army’s approach (Köker 2017).

In the 1990s, unlike the regional governorships, which had been discussed in relation to security concerns, various forms of decentralization were debated in the context of a political solution to the Kurdish issue. In a statement to the newspaper *Hürriyet* on October 15, 1991, then-president Turgut Özal said, “We should discuss everything, including the option of a federation.” This statement resembled a breakthrough in that it broke the taboos regarding the Kurdish issue. According to Cengiz Çandar, who was a close associate of Özal’s, the President did not favor a federation. In fact, he did not think that an ethnic-based federation would benefit the Kurds, given the regional disparities in terms of development and the fact that a significant part of the Kurds lived in the western regions. Nevertheless, he maintained that all options, including that of a federation, should be discussed in the context of the political solution of the issue (Doğan 1994, 323-27; Çandar 2013).

Speculation that Özal wanted to resolve the Kurdish issue around a federation model that included the Iraqi Kurds continues to this day. However, Çandar states that Özal advocated a state system. According to Çandar, Özal did not see the federation as “a realistic and useful practice that would fit in with Turkey’s administrative tradition and current structure.” He was of the opinion that a “state system” that was not based on ethnic identities would “be realistic and economically efficient and make a significant contribution towards the solution of the Kurdish problem.” Accordingly, the existing provinces were to be grouped in order to establish a maximum of 10-12 states. Özal envisioned this state system, which he never mentioned publicly, together with a US-style “presidential system” (Çandar 2007; 2014).

Another push in this issue was made by then-Prime Minister Tansu Çiller. In a statement to the press on October 10, 1993, Çiller said, “We will also benefit from Spain’s experience,” which provoked then-President Süleyman Demirel to respond, “Don’t seek the solution in Spain!” (Al Jazeera Türk 2013b). There is no consensus on this issue in the higher ranks of the state but it appears that with this bold statement, the prime minister had pointed to the model of “political regionalization” of the Basque (Euskadi) Autonomous Community as a possible solution of the Kurdish issue, thus sparking a public debate. The Basque community is one of the 17 autonomous communities in Spain, whose status, though similar to a federal system, is defined as that of a regional state (Marcou, Gazaryan and Syoboda 2000, 28–33). In any case, the fact that proposals regarding a federation and regional autonomy were voiced at the level of the president and prime minister in the 1990s, when violence in the Kurdish issue had become more intensified and taken the form of a “low-intensity warfare,” is an important historical reference.

Kurdistan: the special/autonomous region of the State

The policies and practices towards the construction of a centralist and unitary administrative-political structure that originated from the Ottoman Empire and further developed following the foundation of the Republic continued throughout the 20th century. Meanwhile, the state’s rule in the Kurdistan region, the provinces and districts where Kurds constituted the majority, was distinctly separate from the unitary structure, constituting Kurdistan as a special/autonomous region in the “negative” sense. To put it more clearly, while the state was established as a centralist and unitary structure and proclaimed to be a unitary state, it implemented administrative, political, economic, cultural and military policies outside this structure in the Kurdistan region and created special administrative structures to pursue these policies.

It is beyond dispute that other than a Turkish cultural identity, there is a Kurdish cultural identity in the Kurdistan region. Despite all the oppressive and assimilationist policies implemented throughout the Republican period, Kurds have continued their resistance and efforts to preserve their cultural identity and especially their language, which forms the core of this identity. Consequently, the state has largely maintained its assimilationist language and cultural policies towards the region, although there have been a partial recognition and a limited opening in the 2000s.

In addition to cultural policies, the Kurdish region was moreover ruled by a special/autonomous administration outside of the unitary structure. After the suppression of the Sheikh Said Revolt in 1925, the region was ruled by martial law for about two years before the General Inspectorate was established, a kind of state of emergency that lasted until 1952. As a result of the coups of 1960, 1971 and 1980, military rule in the Kurdish region continued. While the western part of Turkey entered a period of relative normalization especially after 1983, a state of emergency was declared in the region in 1987 and this special/autonomous form of rule, which almost entirely covered the Kurdistan region, continued until 2002. Following the relative normalization between 2002 and 2015, a trustee regime was introduced at the municipal level in 2016 after the conflict had spilled over into the urban centers of the region. This regime has prevailed since then.

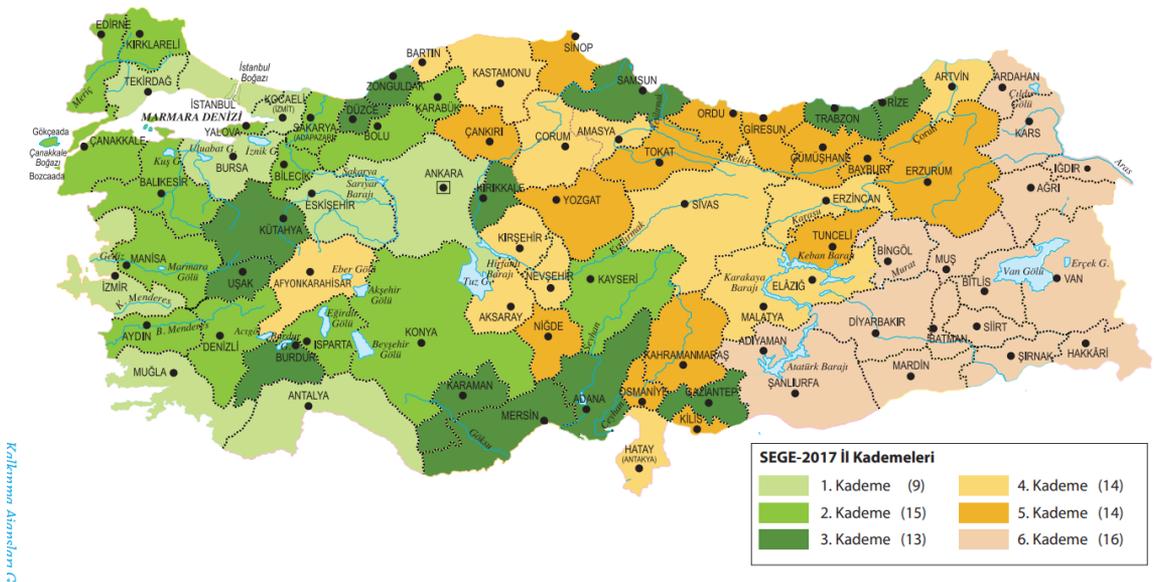
One should underline the military nature of this special/autonomous administration in the Kurdistan region. In this sense, it can be said that to a certain extent, the management of military structures in the region – and we might also include the police here – remained outside Turkey's unitary structure.

The Kurdish region was excluded from the unitary structure not only in cultural, administrative and military terms but also in socio-economic terms. There is no uniform, unitary structure in Turkey in socio-economic terms. On the contrary, differentiated socio-economic areas have been constructed throughout the history of the Republic. Almost all of the Kurdistan region was kept as the “periphery of the periphery” and its resources were systematically transferred to the western provinces and regions. Today, according to almost all socio-economic indicators, the provinces and districts where Kurds constitute the majority are the poorest and most deprived regions of Turkey. In the first years of the Republic, Istanbul and Izmir and their surroundings were significantly more developed than the other provinces. There was however no significant difference in development between the other provinces and regions. The First Five-Year Industrial Plan of 1933 was introduced in an attempt to achieve a geographical spread of socio-economic development. However, in the years that followed, this development was largely limited to the western parts of the country. Although regional inequalities have been emphasized in all national development plans since 1963, the disparities between regions has continued to increase in the past years (Çiçek 2012; Massicard 2009).

At this point, one should mention the Southeastern Anatolia Project (Güneydoğu Anadolu Projesi - GAP). Initiated in 1977 with a focus on energy and irrigation projects, the GAP

started to be presented as a regional socio-economic development project to the public in the 1990s. It did not however have a remarkable effect on reducing regional inequalities. This was due to the fact that despite all the assertions and rhetoric concerning regional development, it was mainly handled as an energy project. Those aspects that could have led to social and economic transformations on a regional scale were neglected. After almost half a century, energy projects have been completed to a great extent, while very limited progress has been made in terms of the irrigation projects. According to the data of the GAP Regional Development Administration, by the end of 2019, 76% of the energy projects were completed and put into operation. The 28.4 billion dollars obtained in revenues were used to finance the investments made in the GAP so far. In addition, 16% of the energy projects are under construction. By contrast, only 32% of the irrigation projects have been completed. The rate of irrigation projects under construction is only 7%.¹⁰ Recent socio-economic data confirms this observation. According to the data of the SEGE-2017 Socio-Economic Development Ranking of Provinces and Regions, last updated and published by the Ministry of Industry and Technology in 2017, almost all of the provinces that make up the least developed sixth-stage region are predominantly inhabited by Kurds (Acar et al. 2019).

Map 1. SEGE-2017 Provinces' Development Stages



Source: Salih Acar, Leyla Bilen Kazancı, Mustafa Caner Meydan & Mustafa Işık, İllerin ve Bölgelerin Sosyo-Ekonomik Gelişmişlik Sıralaması Araştırması SEGE-2017 (Ankara: Kalkınma Ajansları Genel Müdürlüğü Yayını, 2019), 37.

¹⁰ Up-to-date data on the GAP is accessible online. See: www.gap.gov.tr/en/

It should be noted that this table in Map 1 is not new. Similar maps were included in the studies conducted by the State Planning Organization in 2011 (General Directorate of Regional Development and Structural Adjustment 2013), 2004 (B. Dinçer, Özaslan and Kavasoğlu 2003), 1996 (B. Dinçer, Özaslan and Satılmış 1996), 1982 (State Planning Organization 1982), and 1968. All these maps confirm that almost all of the provinces and districts in which Kurds constitute the majority represent the least developed region of Turkey. The most important aspect compelling attention here is that the state, which for many years associated the Kurdish issue with backwardness and feudalism rather than an ethno-political issue (Yeğen 2011b), has failed to make any noteworthy progress in the socio-economic development of the region; the inequality between regions has increased as a result of the economic policies implemented by the state.

The table above shows that the Kurdistan region lies outside of Turkey's unitary structure and constitutes a special/autonomous region for the state. During the Ottoman period, Kurdistan was comprised of local administrative-political structures like the principalities and therefore rather fragmented in administrative and political terms. In the 19th century, it was in large part transformed into a cultural region within the scope of westernization and modernization policies. However, as a result of the policies implemented throughout the history of the Republic, a political region in the "negative" sense was constructed by the state with distinct boundaries not only in cultural but also in administrative, socio-economic and military terms. Characterized by special administrative structures and military and police organizations on the one and the by now chronic regional socio-economic inequalities on the other hand, this negative construct has brought the borders of Kurdistan into sharp relief.

The centralization policies, whose origins date back to the early 19th century, continued until the early 2000s. If the decentralization debates led by Prince Sabahaddin in the early 1900s and the 1921 Constitution with its decentralized character in terms of both its content and way of preparation are set aside for a moment, one could say that there is a continuity in the Ottoman-Turkish modernization with respect to centralization.

The discussions on decentralization of the 1990s evolved into concrete actions and initiatives in the 2000s. The next section will focus on the 2013-2015 Solution Process to discuss the post-2000s decentralization discussions and practices in the context of efforts towards achieving political peace regarding the Kurdish issue.

THE 2013-2015

SOLUTION PROCESS AND

DECENTRALIZATION

The late 1990s and early 2000s represent an important turning point in the Kurdish issue. Although there had already been initial contacts between the parties in the 1990s regarding an end to the conflict and a restoration of peace, the main initiatives started after the PKK's leader Abdullah Öcalan was captured and subsequently handed over to the Turkish National Intelligence Agency on February 15, 1999. Another important reason why 1999 marks a turning point is that the EU accession process gained momentum, paving the way for radical changes in the context of the Kurdish issue. In the local elections held on April 18, 1999, the People's Democracy Party (HADEP), the mainstream Kurdish party, became a part of the local governments in the special provincial administration and municipalities for the first time. This trend continued without interruption and even expanded in many cities until the policy of appointing trustees to the municipalities would be implemented in 2016 (Çiçek 2017). Another important development that gave rise to radical changes in the context of the Kurdish issue in the 2000s undoubtedly is the AKP's rise to power in 2002. This caused a major shift both in the power relations in Ankara and in the Kurdish space.¹¹

In addition to the developments in Turkey's domestic political sphere, radical changes in the geopolitical context of the Kurdish issue have completely altered the framework of Turkey's Kurdish issue. Until the first half of the 2000s, the main dynamic through which the Kurdish issue was framed¹² was Turkey's EU accession process. In 2003-2005, this framework was replaced by "geopolitics" after the Iraqi Kurdistan Region (KRI), a kind of "semi-state" (Özdemirkıran 2013), had been established and attained relative stability (Çiçek 2015, 292-312). This first sea change in the geopolitical equation of the Kurdish issue was followed by the establishment of Rojava¹³ in the Kurdish region of Syria in 2012. The impact of these geopolitical developments has been ongoing since 2003 and still constitutes the main dynamic framing the Kurdish issue in Turkey today.

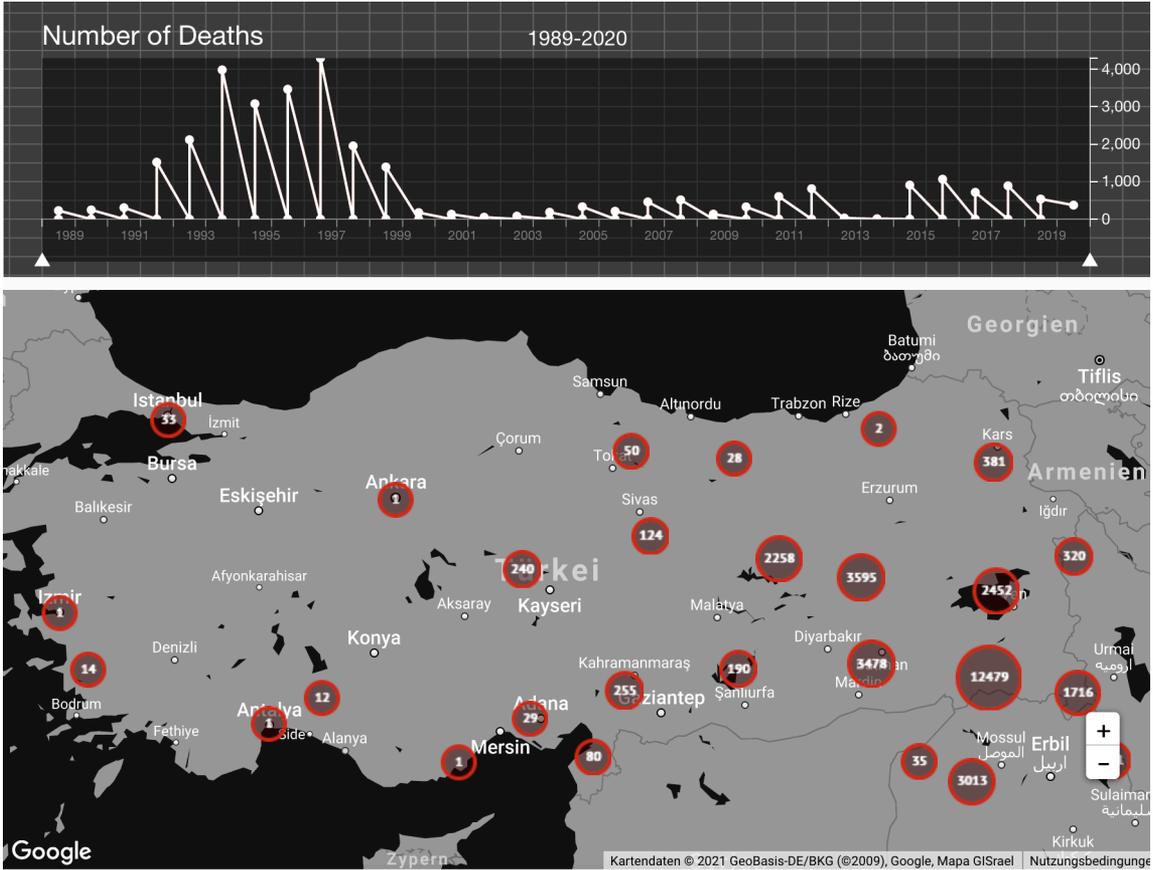
11 I borrow the concepts of the "Kurdish space" (espace kurde) or the "Kurdish sphere" (sphere kurde) from Jean-François Pérouse. These concepts draw attention to the variable and fluid geographical, cultural, economic and political boundaries of Kurdish mobilization (Perouse 2005).

12 I borrow the concept of the frame from Erving Goffman. According to Goffman, by framing, collective actors such as the state, political organizations, social movements, political leaders, and mainstream media present "schemata of interpretation" to individuals or groups, allowing them to "locate, perceive, identify, and label" events and occurrences by organizing their experiences and guiding their actions (Goffman 1974).

13 Rojava means west in Kurdish. In the terminology commonly preferred among Kurdish political activists, the part of the Kurdistan region located within the borders of Turkey is called Bakur (north), the part in Iraq Bashur (south), the part in Iran Rohjilat (east), and the part in Syria Rojava (west). In using the term "Rojava" to designate the Kurdish regions of Syria, the Partiya Yekîtiya Demokratîk (Democratic Union Party) relied on this established terminology to ensure unity between the cantonal administrations following the declaration of the latter during the Syrian civil war in 2012. Although different names such as "Northern Syria" and "Northern and Eastern Syria" came into use later, Rojava is still widely used by both Syrian Kurds and Kurds outside Syria.

In the period of 1999-2015, there were three main dialogue/negotiation processes aimed at ending the Kurdish conflict and resolving the issue: (1) the 1999-2004 İmralı Process, (2) the 2008-2011 Oslo Process and (3) the 2013-2015 Solution Process. The İmralı and Oslo processes took place privately and were concealed from the public. By contrast, the public was kept relatively informed about developments during the 2013-2015 Solution Process. The temporal distribution of casualties in the Kurdish conflict depicted in Figure 1 clearly shows the impact of these processes. The following subsections will take into account these three dialogue processes as well as developments outside these processes to discuss them in the context of decentralization and political power sharing.

Figure 1. Temporal and spatial distribution of casualties in the Kurdish conflict (1989-2019)



Source: UCDP - Uppsala Conflict Data Program (uu.se), accessed 12.02.2021.

Note: The top graphic in the figure shows the number of casualties based on years, while the map below presents the spatial distribution of these casualties.

The İmralı Process (1999-2004) and the “Democratic Republic” thesis

The first dialogue process on the Kurdish issue commenced during the trial of Abdullah Öcalan. The PKK abandoned its founding goals of establishing an “independent, united, and democratic Kurdistan” in the Kurdish territories in Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, and instead altered their vision to solve the problem within the current political borders of Turkey.¹⁴ This vision became more prevalent following the capture of Öcalan. During the İmralı Process, Öcalan proposed the model of a “democratic republic” as a solution of the Kurdish issue. In essence, this proposal for a “democratic republic” included the democratization of the Republic in line with EU law, as well as the recognition of the linguistic and cultural rights of the Kurds as “constitutive elements” of the Republic (Öcalan 1999; 2001).

The most important feature of the “democratic republic” approach was the new framework it presented for the Kurdish issue. Prior to 1970, the leading argument that “Kurdistan is a colony” was first articulated by Dr. Şivan (Sait Kırmızıtoprak) (Bozarıslan 2012) and became the main working thesis of most Kurdish organizations, including the PKK. However, in the second half of the 1970s (Imset 1993, 405-43), the Kurdish issue was framed as a matter of territorial sovereignty. Similarly, the debates on a federation and the Basque model in the 1990s marked attempts to evaluate how territorial sovereignty could potentially be shared within the existing political boundaries. By contrast, Öcalan abandoned this claim to shared territorial sovereignty in his thesis of a “democratic republic,” noting that the Kurdish issue was a “democracy issue,” while arguing that his model was normatively better and more functional. According to Öcalan, the last two centuries in the history of the Kurdish issue “have shown that the Kurdish question cannot be solved through bourgeois-nationalist and feudal-autonomist approaches” (Öcalan 2001, 159). He asserted that models of shared territorial sovereignty such as a federation or autonomy would foster reactionary social structures like feudalism and tribalism. These models would not only prevent the development of democratic values, but also they were not even a viable option because of both the internal linguistic differences among the Kurds, and the fact that many of them were scattered across the metropolitan cities of Turkey (Öcalan 1999).

¹⁴ In an interview with Mehmet Ali Birand that was published in the newspaper *Milliyet* on June 16, 1988, PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan expressed that they were ready for a political solution. The search for a “domestic solution” became more intensified after the collapse of the Soviet Union, leading to unilateral ceasefires in 1993, 1995, 1998 and 1999. For a more detailed analysis on this issue see Çiçek (2016; 2018).

Discussing his thesis of a “democratic republic,” Öcalan refers to some of the speeches made by Mustafa Kemal in the 1920s, who highlighted the idea of autonomy and concludes that autonomy at the level of local governments would be a contemporary model for a solution. That said, Öcalan does not attach central importance to the issue of local governments in the course of his discussion on the solution of the Kurdish issue but mainly focuses on the “democratic republic” thesis that would bring about “democratic unity” between Turks and Kurds (Öcalan 1999).

The proposal for a “democratic republic” was met with little enthusiasm in Turkish politics. The dominant nationalist Kemalist cadres of the period held talks with Öcalan at İmralı Prison (where Öcalan was and still is held). The Kemalist cadres did not develop any significant policy towards democratization or the recognition of linguistic and cultural rights via the security bureaucracy. However, the PKK followed Öcalan’s call and withdrew almost all of its armed forces from Turkey in 1999 in order to pave the way for the peace process. After undergoing a five-year restructuring process,¹⁵ the PKK announced that it was terminating this peace procedure on June 1, 2004 because the state had not taken any of the recommended steps towards peace. The PKK began to redeploy its troops within the Turkish borders. Despite having eliminated armed clashes almost entirely, these disputes resumed in 2004 and continued to increase until the beginning of the 2008 Oslo Process.

Similarly, the “democratic republic” thesis did not prove popular among Kurdish political movements outside of mainstream Kurdish politics either, as most Kurdish political groups were critical of the thesis. Beyond that, many groups considered this thesis a “betrayal of the Kurdistan cause.” As a matter of fact, during this period, the theory that the PKK was founded by the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) in order to suppress the Kurdish cause of national freedom rose in popularity. This theory also proposed that Öcalan was working for the state and it became voiced much more audibly in the public sphere.¹⁶ In addition to different Kurdish political groups, even some names from within the PKK viewed Öcalan’s new political attitude as a “betrayal” and defined it as “a counter-revolutionary move” (Pir 2001).

¹⁵ Following the capture of Öcalan, extensive changes took place within the PKK with respect to its ideological and political identity, its political goals regarding the Kurdish issue, its means and methods of struggle, and its institutional structure. As part of these changes, the name of the PKK also changed. The PKK used different names during this period before it finally turned into a complex of organizations called the Kurdistan Communities Union (Koma Civakên Kurdistanê - KCK). For a detailed discussion of these changes see Akkaya and Jongerden (2011; 2012) and Çiçek (2016).

¹⁶ For a news-analysis portal where these kind of views are frequently expressed see : www.nerinaazad.co, accessed, 21.11.2020.

The first geopolitical turning point: establishment of a federated Kurdish state in Iraq

While the İmralı Process continued, there was a development that affected Turkey's Kurdish issue in its very foundations and constituted a new point of reference. Following the US military intervention, a regime change took place in Iraq in 2003 and after decades of political and military struggles, Kurds were involved in building the new regime at both the central and regional level. Jalal Talabani, President of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (Yekitî Nîştimanî Kurdistan - YNK) became the head of the state of Iraq, while Masoud Barzani, the head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (Partî Demokratî Kurdistan – PDK), became the head of the federated state KRI, which was established as part of the new regime.

The establishment of the KRI radically changed the basic parameters of Turkey's Kurdish issue. The fact that the Kurds had now become a party to the state in Iraq and had started to govern themselves within the scope of shared territorial sovereignty altered the framework for both the Turkish state and politics, as well as for different Kurdish political groups in Turkey. From the perspective of the Turkish state and Turkish politics, the concerns for survival in relation to the Kurdish issue became aggravated, while Kurdish politics had found a new resource in terms of both their normative horizon and their ability to mobilize. Above all, the KRI became a new point of reference for Kurds in Turkey. While the Kurds in Turkey were being deprived of mother tongue education, being limited in their rights to political participation due to an extremely central government, and living under conditions of chronic socio-economic deprivation, their brothers and sisters had established territorial sovereignty just across the border. Kurdish became the first official language of the region and the second official language of Iraq and after years of poverty, they entered into a period of rapid socio-economic development. This new reference has had an impact on many people, from ordinary citizens who were not affiliated with any political party or group to mainstream Kurdish politics, to members of the Free Cause Party (HÜDAPAR) and politicians of the AKP. In fact, with the KRI achieving relative stabilization during the 2003-2005 period, this new geopolitics of the Kurdish issue replaced the EU membership process as the main dynamic framing Turkey's Kurdish issue.

Besides offering a new cognitive and normative framework, the KRI has become a repository of motivation and legitimacy for most Kurdish groups. Moreover, in creating opportunities for cross-border relations and partnership between many Kurdish

political groups, including HÜDAPAR, as well as Kurdish groups in different fields such as civil society, media, economy etc., the KRI has served as a new institutional and organizational resource with respect to different facades of Kurdish opposition in Turkey.

As discussed in the following sections, the KRI has made significant contributions to the growth of the Kurdish opposition in Turkey. It has expanded the political space organized around Kurdish identity in Turkey by offering a new image and imagination of Kurdishness, especially to religious and conservative Kurds who had until then remained distant from mainstream Kurdish politics. It contributed to the relative pluralization of Kurdish politics by offering new normative, strategic and institutional resources for Kurdish political groups that advocated a federation and a conservative image of Kurdishness.

The most important influence of the KRI has been on mainstream Kurdish politics. After mainly anchoring the Kurdish issue in the project of a “democratic republic” between 1999-2004, following the establishment of the KRI, mainstream Kurdish politics created a new framework around the concepts of “democratic confederalism” and “democratic autonomy.” In short, the “democratic republic” thesis, the dominant political view between 1999-2004, excluded all forms of territorial sovereignty such as autonomy, a federation or independence and framed the Kurdish issue as a matter of general democratization and recognition of linguistic and cultural rights in Turkey. The democratic confederalism and democratic autonomy thesis re-introduced the Kurdish issue as a matter of “political status” that transcended the domestic demand for democracy, promoting it as an open-ended project including demands for different forms of sharing territorial sovereignty. Undoubtedly, this normative reorientation in mainstream Kurdish politics cannot be understood when reduced to the establishment of the KRI alone, but requires taking into account the Iraqi Kurds’ attaining territorial sovereignty.¹⁷

At this point, it should also be noted that the KRI consistently supported a peaceful solution of the Kurdish issue in Turkey (Cumhuriyet 2014; Gazete Duvar 2019). On November 16, 2013, within the scope of the Solution Process, KRI President Massoud

¹⁷ For comprehensive discussions on the radical change in the geopolitical equation of the Kurdish issue with the emergence of the KRI and then Rojava, which was established in the Kurdish region of Syria in 2012, and their impact on Turkey's Kurdish issue see Çiçek (2015; 2018). For an analysis of geopolitics as a new dynamic with a particular focus on the Turkish state see Yeğen (2020b; 2020a).

Barzani held a meeting with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Diyarbakır – also joined by folk singer Şivan Perwer, an important figure in the construction of Kurdish identity – and called on the Kurds to support the peace process.¹⁸ This marked one of the most important moments of the KRI's favorable stance. The political and social relations between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds undoubtedly played an important role in this. Actually, the KRI's wish to establish good political and economic relations with Turkey can be identified as the main dynamic in this respect, since the Kurdish conflict had not only limited Turkey's relations with the KRI, but the PKK/KCK's presence in KRI territory and Turkey's cross-border operations since 1983 had also constituted a major source of instability for the KRI. As a matter of fact, there is a direct relationship between the trajectory of the Kurdish issue and Turkey's relations with the KRI. Turkey started normalizing and improving its relations with the KRI in 2007. During this period, efforts to end the Kurdish conflict were increased, as reflected in the 2008-2011 Oslo Process and the 2013-2015 Solution Process. In a similar manner, Turkey's relations with the KRI deteriorated as the Kurdish conflict became more aggravated following the end of the 2013-2015 Solution Process.

The AKP's public administration reform attempts (2003-2007)

The geopolitical shift in the Kurdish issue was not the only important development in the days of the İmralı Process. Around the same time, a sea change occurred at the very center of Turkish politics. Following its great success in the general election on November 3, 2002, the AKP (which had taken over the Islamic political tradition in Turkey) formed the government, alone. Having declared the overhaul of the public administration as one of its political priorities, the AKP prepared a bill for a comprehensive reform of the public administration in 2003 (Dinçer 2020, 27). The draft law was accepted in parliament on July 15, 2004, right after the end of the İmralı Process, and adopted as the Law No. 5227 on the Basic Principles and Restructuring of the Public Administration. The aim of this comprehensive public administration reform was to abolish all legal regulations regarding the special provincial administrations and municipalities and to create a new public administration system (Toksöz et al. 2009, 42). The law focused on effectiveness and efficiency in public services and also predicated an overall transformation. Despite some literature and contrasting views, (Güler 2003; Dinçer 2020), the law did not imply a radical change in terms of decentralization.

¹⁸ The speech made by Barzani in Diyarbakır can be accessed online; see <https://tv.haberturk.com/tv/gundem/video/iste-mesud-barzaninin-diyarbakirdan-verdigi-turkce-mesaj/104213>, accessed 20.02.2021.

However, in view of its emphasis on participation, subsidiarity, human rights and freedoms, justice in public services and non-discrimination, it is possible to say that the “governance”-oriented regulation did introduce some novelties after all (Dinçer 2020, 20-26; Dinçer and Yılmaz 2003, 29).

The most important aspect to underline from the draft law targeting public administration reform is that mainstream Kurdish politics were not included in the legislative process (Massicard 2009). Leading figure and architect of the legal initiative, Prime Ministry Undersecretary Ömer Dinçer, stated that they had embraced participation and conducted various meetings, workshops etc. with a variety of groups. This included different actors from political parties, civil society, civil and military bureaucracy, and those of the judiciary. This was supposed to ensure that the law would be truly democratic in terms of both substance (content) and procedure (process). But while the actors negotiating the draft bill included the Presidency, the CHP, the General Staff, judicial institutions, civil society and the media, the mainstream Kurdish politics was not represented (Dinçer 2020, 40-94).

An examination of the regulation in terms of its substance shows that it preserved the unitary and centralist structure, while increasing the administrative powers, duties and responsibilities of local governments as a part of the deconcentration of authorities. The proposed law preserved the “administrative tutelage” of the central administration over local administrations (special provincial administrations, municipalities and villages). This was introduced with the 1982 Constitution and included a regulation that vested the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the authority to intervene in said local administrations. Almost all public services were left to the central administration. According to the bill, the central administration would be in charge of tasks in all of the following areas: justice, defense, security, intelligence, foreign affairs and foreign policy, finance regulation, treasury, foreign trade, customs and markets; preparation of national economic, social and infrastructural plans, and implementation of programs and projects aimed at eliminating regional disparities in terms of development; national education, religious affairs, social security, land registry and cadastre, population and citizenship, emergency management and civil defense, and duties and services related to foundations.

Nevertheless, the bill also contained some novelties that deserve to be noted. The first of these is the arrangement regarding “general” and “special” administrations, which was in fact cited as one of the reasons by then-President Ahmet Necdet Sezer

for vetoing against the bill. Contrary to the traditional approach, the bill specified the duties and powers of the central administration as “special,” while defining the remaining powers as “general,” and leaving them to the local administrations. Secondly, the principle of subsidiarity, which had also figured in previous laws, was listed among the basic founding and operational principles of the public administration. Accordingly, “duties, powers and responsibilities are given to the most appropriate and closest unit with respect to the beneficiary of the service.” As a matter of fact, with the provisional first and second articles of the law proposal, the duties and powers as well as the buildings, tools, equipment, movable and immovable properties, receivables and debts, budget appropriations and staff of the field organizations of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the General Directorate of the Social Services and Child Protection Agency, and the General Directorate of Youth and Sports were mostly transferred to the special provincial administrations and partially to the municipalities. Finally, within the scope of deconcentration, the bill offered some ministries the opportunity to establish field organizations at the regional level, with regions being made up of a number of provinces.

Broadening the area of special provincial administrations, in which the governor basically was the chief executive, and strengthening, even if only partially, the municipalities, the reform initiative did not pose “the slightest threat to the unitary structure” (Dinçer 2020, 87-88), as AKP officials frequently underlined. In the words of Ömer Dinçer, the transfer of authority from the central government to the local administrations “was foreseen within the scope of services and not meant to be of a political or administrative nature. In this respect, it coincided with the priorities of our country” (Dinçer 2020, 94). Despite these “sensitivities” which were obviously related to the debates on decentralization and power sharing in the context of the Kurdish issue, the reform initiative did not only face constitutional obstacles but also met with social, political, bureaucratic and judicial resistance (Dinçer 2020, 37-93; Toksöz et al. 2009, 42). First, the draft law was vetoed by then-President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and after it had been annulled by the Constitutional Court, the issue disappeared from the agenda altogether. In the grounds for his veto, the President emphasized the unitary and centralized tradition of the state.¹⁹

¹⁹ The grounds for veto presented by President Ahmet Necdet Sezer are openly available online. For detailed information see: <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/basin-aciklamalari-ahmet-necdet-sezer/1720/6352/5227-sayili-kamu-yonetiminin-temel-ilkeleri-ve-yeniden-yapilandirilmasi-hakkinda-kanun>, accessed 15.11.2020.

In the face of such political and judicial resistance, the AKP chose to withdraw the bill, whose purpose had been a thorough overhaul of the public administration. In 2004 and 2005, the AKP changed the Special Provincial Administration Law, the Municipality Law and the Metropolitan Municipality Law. But due to the political and judicial resistance by the Presidency, Constitutional Court and CHP, revisions were made in these bills. The articles in the Special Provincial Administration Law and the Municipality Law that defined local administrations as “administrative units with general authorities” were removed from both laws. This regulation left those duties, powers and services which were of a common local nature and had not been assigned to any other public institution and organization by any legal provision, to local administrations. Likewise, the Constitutional Court annulled an article authorizing municipalities to open pre-school education institutions following an application of the CHP (Aktar 2014, 48-49).

The legal regulations in question did not lead to any radical changes in the relations between the central and local administrations. However, the Metropolitan Municipality Law, the Municipality Law and the Special Provincial Administration Law included an important regulation concerning the autonomy of local administrations, as each of them recognized the relevant local administration as a “public legal entity with administrative and financial autonomy.”

Territorial Units for Statistics and development agencies

During the EU harmonization process, another important arrangement in respect to public administration that was implemented in order to meet management needs at the regional scale is the three-level Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics (NUTS) and the establishment of development agencies for the 26 second-level regions.

In line with the decision of the Council of Ministers in 2002, “for the purpose of collecting and developing regional statistics, conducting socio-economic analyses of regions, determining the framework of regional policies and creating a comparable statistical database in line with the EU Regional Statistics System, the NUTS has been applied nationwide.” Turkey’s 81 provinces were determined as third-level regions. 26 second-level regions were formed by grouping the provinces, and these second-level regions were grouped once again to form 12 first-level regions (See: Appendix 4).²⁰

²⁰ For details regarding the classification see: <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2002/09/20020922.htm>, accessed, 13.11.2020.

Following the three-level regional classification, development agencies were established for each of the 26 second-level regions. The law number 5449 adopted on January 25, 2006 provided the necessary infrastructure for these agencies. Like previous legal initiatives, this legal regulation too was met with political, social and judicial resistance (Massicard 2009). In their objections, the CHP, the Istanbul Bar Association, and the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) particularly emphasized that the law “contradicted the unitary structure,” violated “national interests,” and was to be understood as “preparations for a state system.” For example, the title of a statement made by the Istanbul Bar Association read as follows: “The Law on Development Agencies is against our unitary structure and our national interests” (Kolcuoğlu 2006). Thus, due to TMMOB’s appeal to the Council of State and the CHP’s appeal to the Constitutional Court, the legal regulation on development agencies could only be completed in 2008.

In this regard, it should also be mentioned that the attribute “regional” was removed from the agencies’ names. The “drawbacks” of the word “region”, which had figured in expressions like “regional development” and “regional planning” in the 1970s, were pointed out again in the 2000s. In the face of such resistance, the name of the body was changed from “regional development agency” (in the first draft of the bill) to “development agency” (Massicard 2009).

Despite all the objections and claims spearheaded by the nationalist left that the bill was “against the unitary structure,” the development agencies in fact were a centralized arrangement in terms of both their way of preparation and their content. The law was prepared with a top-down approach, without taking into account the demands, expectations, opinions and suggestions of local actors and without their participation in the process (Massicard 2009). Examined in terms of its essence, the law emerges as a response to the demand for the localization and regionalization of development necessitated by the EU membership process. As such, it reproduces the centralist system, in particular because the development agencies are far from guaranteeing that development is managed under the leadership of local and regional actors. Designed as the regional organizations of the DPT and coordinated by the governorships of the provinces they comprise, the agencies are under the direct control of the central administration. Financially speaking, they are very limited in their resources, far off from the potential to finance any local investment. In brief, the development agencies are an arrangement that strengthens the administrative capacity of the central administration at the regional scale through a kind of “regional deconcentration.”

The Oslo Process (2008-2011) and Debates on Democratic Autonomy

The Oslo Process, which began in September 2008, i.e., four and a half years after the İmralı Process had ended, should be noted as the second major attempt to engage in dialogue in order to solve the Kurdish issue. The Oslo Process, which lasted until July 14, 2011, differed from the İmralı Process because state representatives led by the MIT met not only with Öcalan, but also with the Kurdistan Communities Union (Koma Civakên Kurdistanê - KCK), which had been established as the successor of the PKK. The Oslo Process began under private discussions, and later was announced to the public under the name “Democratic Opening” by Beşir Atalay, the Interior Minister of the period, on July 29, 2009 (Habertürk 2009). Although then-Prime Minister R. Tayyip Erdoğan confirmed that these talks took place (Derviş 2012), their details have not been made public until today. However, the KCK revealed that the first contacts allegedly had been established in September 2008 through the mediation of a third party and that the talks had continued without interruption until June 2011 (Çimen and İnce 2013).

Reforms: democracy and cultural rights for the solution of the Kurdish issue

During this process, also known as the “Kurdish Opening” and “National Unity and Fraternity Project,” the importance of democratization for the solution of the issue was stressed in public statements made by the AKP government. On November 13, 2009, a speech was given on behalf of the government during a TGNA session regarding the democratic initiative. One of the most important actors, Atalay, said that the process pursued two crucial aims: “The democratic opening has two main interrelated goals: first, to end terrorism, and second, to raise the standard of our democracy” (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi 2009). Government officials mainly emphasized a widening of individual rights and freedoms in their statements. The opening did not touch upon collective political and cultural rights, which otherwise could have led to the issue of decentralization. During the parliamentary session, criticisms were voiced by the CHP and the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), who claimed that the initiatives would create a different nation. Ömer Çelik, who responded to these criticisms on behalf of the government, stated that the democratic initiative was a state project and underlined that “the Government will in no way allow any form of autonomy, neither within a federation nor within in a unitary structure” (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi 2009).

The considerations of Ömer Dinçer, the architect of the 2003-2007 public administration reform attempts, regarding this topic show that the perspective on decentralization of even the most reformist wing in the AKP was limited to the broadening of local governments' powers (Ö. Dinçer 2020, 99--100):

“One of the most important negative consequences of being unable to complete the restructuring (in the public administration) is that demands for “democratic autonomy” have appeared on the agenda. The BDP and the Kurdish politicians supporting them wanted “democratic autonomy.” This demand poses a great danger for the integrity of the country, as it implies political decentralization. However, if decentralization in services could have been achieved with the Public Administration Reform Project, which was blocked by the status quoists due to their concern that it would cause the unitary structure to deteriorate, such demands would have been cut off [all emphases added].”

It can be said that the European Charter of Local Self-Government marks the AKP's upper limit regarding the sharing of power between the central administration and local administrations. The AKP's election program for the general elections on June 12, 2011, closely before the end of the Oslo Process, in a section called “Advanced Democracy” under the heading “Citizen and Result-Oriented Administration,” stated that local administrations would be fully authorized in accordance with the Charter (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi 2011, 27).

In consonance with the emphasis on individual rights and freedoms, two important steps were taken within the scope of linguistic and cultural rights during the Oslo Process: On January 1, 2009, the first Kurdish state channel TRT-6 (later named TRT-Kurdî) started broadcasting and on September 11, 2009, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) decided to open the “Institute of Living Languages in Turkey” at Mardin Artuklu University. In addition to Kurdish language and literature, graduate programs in Arabic, Persian and Syriac languages and literature could be opened at the institute. Later, in a decision finalized on January 26, 2011, the YÖK approved the university's request to open a Kurdish Language and Literature Department offering a four-year undergraduate program.²¹

We do not know what kind of demands the KCK formulated vis-a-vis the AKP government's ventures to open the TRT-6 channel, the Institute of Living Languages and the Kurdish

²¹ For a chronology of the Kurdish conflict covering the period between 1978-2017 see Çiçek (2018, 315–52).

Language and Literature Undergraduate Program for the expansion of linguistic and cultural rights within the scope of democratization. However, since 2007, the KCK had begun to articulate the demand for “democratic autonomy” for the solution of the issue, and this demand continued to be the central political discourse of the KCK and the mainstream legal Kurdish party, the Democratic Society Party (DTP) and its successor, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) during the Oslo Process. In addition, one of the two critical events ending the process was the Democratic Society Congress’s (DTK) declaration of democratic autonomy on July 14, 2011.

Democratic autonomy or regional decentralization

Although the demand for democratic autonomy has been publicly articulated since 2007, it originated in debates dating back to 2004. Öcalan introduced two new concepts for the solution of the Kurdish issue between 2004 and 2007: democratic confederalism and democratic autonomy (Akkaya and Jongerden 2014). In developing the two concepts, he was inspired by the work and concepts of Murray Bookchin,²² the founder of the social ecology movement. Bookchin, in summary, “offers a vision of a reconstructive, ecological, communal and ethical society and proposes a confederal social organization based on self-government and direct democracy as an alternative to the existing hierarchical forms of social organization and the ecological and social problems they entail” (Çiçek 2016, 376). Öcalan defined democratic confederalism, which he described as society’s non-state self-organization, as a political and social formation capable of ensuring unity among the Kurds, who are living under the political rule of four different countries. Accordingly, democratic confederalism could provide “state + democracy” and enable the Kurds to continue their political and social existence under these states without touching the existing political borders. While the focus of democratic confederalism was on the unity of Kurds living within the borders of all four countries, democratic autonomy essentially referred to a bottom-up model of confederal organization for the Kurds in Turkey (and after 2012 also in Syria)²³ based on local and regional assemblies - although Öcalan stated that Arabs, Persians and Turks might also employ this model (Çiçek 2014).

Commenting on democratic confederalism and democratic autonomy, Öcalan used the concept of democratic autonomy not only to refer to self-organization based on local

²² For more detailed elaborations on this topic see Bookchin (1996; 2010).

²³ The democratic autonomy model developed by Öcalan would inspire and be employed by the administrative and political organization led by the Democratic Union Party of Syrian Kurds in 2012. For more detailed discussions on this issue see Duman (2016) and Taştekin (2016).

councils, but also in the context of a restructuring of the administrative and political structure of the state. He made the first statement on this issue during his lawyer meeting on May 4, 2005, where he proposed a “reform of the Republic,” implying a restructuring of Turkey based on 25 regions within the framework of a semi-presidential system with two chambers, namely a congress and a house of representatives:

“The Republic needs reform. I am saying this so they can discuss it. I would propose to replace the Turkish Grand National Assembly by two organs (...) I suggest creating a Republican Senate. (...) And a kind of semi-presidential government elected by the presidency. (...) A House of Representatives specific to Turkey. There are 81 provinces in Turkey. I actually thought that Turkey could be structured in such a way as to include 25 regions, with 7 of them predominantly inhabited by Kurdish people and 18 of them by Turkish people, while other identities would not be denied. These regions would have their own local parliaments. (Lawyer: Sounds a bit like the Athenian city-state). Yes, it does, it kind of resembles the state system in Germany. 81 provinces are meaningless. They lack their cultural, social, or meaningful counterpart. (Lawyer: And it creates a huge economic burden.) Exactly. One could think about a Congress of Representatives based on local regions.”

The most striking point here is the similarity between Öcalan's proposal for a new political-administrative structuring based on a 7+18 model comprised of 25 regions, and the 26 second-level regions formed in 2002. Within the 26 regions, these provinces were predominantly inhabited by Kurdish people and had been classified into 7 regions. This indicates that the arrangement made within the scope of the NUTS had been discussed during the meetings between Öcalan and state officials.

The democratic autonomy model developed by Öcalan was later adopted by the mainstream of legal Kurdish politics and advocated in the political arena. This model was first presented to the public at the DTK's founding congress in Diyarbakır on October 26-28, 2007. In the final declaration, the DTK referred to preparations for a new constitution and proposed the project of democratic autonomy for the “democratization of Turkey and a peaceful solution to the Kurdish Question.” According to the DTK, “democratic autonomy, which is synonymous to democratic self-government, means filling the Democratic Republic with life” (Bianet Bağımsız İletişim Ağı, 2007). In the DTK declaration, this model, which proposes a decentralized administrative and political structure not based on ethnic identity but on geographical classification, is

described as follows:

“In this decentralization-based administrative model, a regional assembly comprised of provinces with intensive mutual socio-cultural and economic relations and, similar to the provincial councils, elected into office, will be in charge of service areas such as education, health, culture, social services, agriculture, maritime affairs, industry, zoning, environment, tourism, telecommunication, social security, women, youth and sports on behalf of the state, meanwhile excluding services related to foreign affairs, finance and defense as well as security and justice services, which are to be carried out by the central administration and regional administrations together (...) This does not imply federalism or autonomy based on ethnicity but a new stratified and democratic administrative reinforcement between the central government and the provinces. Each of the regions will be named with the proper name of that region or the name of the largest province within the reach of the regional assembly. In essence, the Regional Assemblies to be established in Turkey – the number of which might be 20-25 - are a contemporary, democratic political and administrative structure facilitating the work between the Turkish Grand National Assembly and the provinces and ensuring greater participation of the people in the administration.”

The Spanish or the Italian model?

In proposing a kind of regional political and administrative decentralization, the DTK's model of democratic autonomy recalls the “regional state model” based on a unitary structure in Italy and Spain, which is also considered as a semi-federated model (Colino and del Pino 2012; Piattoni and Brunazzo 2012; Toksöz et al. 2009). As part of the transition to democracy in Spain after Francisco Franco's death in 1975, a kind of regional state based on 17 “autonomous communities” was created with the 1978 constitution in response to the Basque, Catalan and Galician peoples' demands for autonomy and independence. The new constitution, which emphasized the protection of all peoples, cultures, traditions, languages and institutions of Spain, recognized the regions' right to autonomy. According to the second article of the Constitution, “[t]he Constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish nation, the common and indivisible country of all Spaniards; it recognizes and guarantees the right to autonomy of the nationalities and regions of which it is composed, and the solidarity amongst them all.” According to the constitution, the wealth of the different language modalities

of Spain is a cultural heritage requiring special respect and protection, and Castilian as well as the other Spanish languages will be the official languages of the autonomous communities. Another important feature of the Spanish model is that it does not envisage a uniform autonomy, including different autonomy models that vary according to the specificities of each region. Indeed, there was not one single regulation for all regions in Spain but each autonomous region was established with a particular law. Besides, regions enjoy varying levels of administrative and political autonomy.

Italy, a unitary state, has a political-administrative structure based on 20 autonomous regions. As in Spain, regional governments in Italy have not only administrative but also political autonomy. In addition to executive powers, the regions also have legislative powers, albeit limited. Historically a country with a unitary and centralist tradition, Italy saw the creation of a total of 20 autonomous regions, five of which have special status,²⁴ by virtue of the 1947 Constitution. Meanwhile, the 15 general autonomous regions were formed after 1977. Likewise, in the 1990s and 2000s, legal regulations were made to strengthen the status of the regions. Today, Italy has a decentralized administrative and political structure consisting of municipalities, provinces, metropolitan cities and regions. According to the constitution, all of these four components (municipalities, provinces, metropolitan cities and regions) constitute autonomous structures.²⁵

The model of democratic autonomy based on 20-25 autonomous regions proposed by the DTK is similar to the forms of government in Spain and Italy in terms of regional decentralization. It demands the establishment of autonomous regions within the unitary structure. However, unlike the models of Spain and Italy, the autonomous regions are not determined based on ethnic/national identities but on geographic units only. In this sense, the model does not envisage one single Kurdish region based on cultural geography, which would resemble the Basque, Catalan and Galician regions in Spain or the five special-status regions in Italy. Rather, regions are to be created by grouping the 81 existing provinces. Finally, in contrast to the arrangements in Spain and Italy, where the autonomous regions differ from one another, the DTK's democratic autonomy model proposes uniform autonomous regions for the whole of Turkey.

²⁴ These five regions are the following: (1) Friuli-Venezia Giulia, (2) Sardinia, (3) Sicily, (4) Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol and (5) Valle d'Aosta.

²⁵ For a short comparative analysis of the administrative-political structures of Spain and Italy see Toksöz et al. (2009).

The ambiguities of democratic autonomy

The DTK announced to the public the democratic autonomy project. The project was further elaborated and accepted as the Democratic Society Party's Political Charter Concerning the Democratization of Turkey and the Solution of the Kurdish Question at the DTP's second extraordinary congress on November 7, 2007.²⁶ However, the following years saw the publication of different texts by different actors like Öcalan, the KCK, the DTK and the BDP, which lacked overall coherence and consistency.²⁷ In addition, local and central representatives of mainstream Kurdish parties (BDP/DBP²⁸, Peoples' Democratic Party - HDP) interpreted democratic autonomy in different ways (Çiçek 2015). Over time, these differences gave rise to some justified criticisms regarding the ambiguities of democratic autonomy.

The ambiguities of democratic autonomy can be grouped under five headings. The first ambiguity refers to the applied concept of this democratic autonomy. Despite being treated as a proposal for administrative-political reform and as a way to offer opportunities for power sharing between the central administration and local/regional administrations, democratic autonomy also suggested that it did not include this type of reform and appealed to the society rather than the state. In this sense, it presented a "model for self-organization" of mainstream Kurdish politics. The second ambiguity concerns scale. Mention was made of different scales, including 20-25 regions, the 26 development agency regions, the seven existing geographical regions, 15 regions, 81 provinces, and one single Kurdish region. The various scales discussed have yet to be resolved, and there does not seem to be one particular scale that is privileged over the others. The third ambiguity concerns the geographical premises on which democratic autonomy rested. Although we can mostly distinguish a socio-economic and cultural classification that is not based on ethnic/national communities, democratic autonomy was also presented as an "autonomous Kurdistan" by both Öcalan and the DTK in the 2010s. The fourth ambiguity is related to duties and powers. For example, the DTK had left the authority regarding defense and foreign relations to the central government in the model announced in 2007, but in the model announced during the Oslo Process, it was stated that democratic autonomy aimed at "an organization along eight

²⁶ The charter is available online. See: <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/dtp-siyasi-tutum-belgesi-7661752>, accessed 20.11.2020.

²⁷ For a detailed analysis these texts see Yeğen (2011a; 2011c, 93-100), Gürer (2015, 230-325) and Ersanlı and Bayhan (2012).

²⁸ The mainstream Kurdish party Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), founded in 2008, joined the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) in June 2014. In July 2014, it changed its name to the Party of Democratic Regions (DBP) and became a regional party.

dimensions, namely political, legal, self-defense, social, economic, cultural, ecology and diplomacy, and generating a political will in order to build a democratic autonomous Kurdistan" (Yeğen 2011a, 1–2). The inconsistency continued in the BDP-led Labor, Democracy and Freedom Bloc's election program²⁹ for the 2011 general elections which took place just before the end of the Oslo Process. The program contained the decentralization model published by the DTK in 2007, which was based on 20-25 regions and did not represent the country's ethnic/national communities geographically. Finally, one should underline the ambiguity regarding legal status. There were models pointing to legal statuses that would correspond to local and regional decentralization, while again others referred to confederal statuses that included areas such as defense and diplomacy and even transcended national borders (Paker 2011).

In a way, the ambiguities concerning democratic autonomy show that the project is not sufficiently conceptualized and that there is no single model which all actors agree upon. This is rooted in the fact that mainstream Kurdish politics is a coalition movement, and includes different social groups in terms of their political, religious, linguistic and class background, as well as a complex set of organizations mobilized in a cross-border space, rather than one single organization. One possible interpretation of this scenario could also be that "democratic autonomy is an unfinished, incomplete dynamic process in theory and practice" (Gürer 2015, 8). It could also be argued that these ambiguities were the result of a deliberate choice to leave an open door for negotiation. After all, retaining interpretative openness gives mainstream Kurdish politics the opportunity to manage internal linguistic (Zaza, Kurmanji), religious (Alevi, Sunni-Muslim, Yazidi), class (lower classes and middle classes), and geographical differences (such as Serhat, Dersim, Diyarbakır, and Hakkari) and to unite and mobilize the otherwise internally quite differentiated social opposition (Çiçek 2015).

Despite its ambiguities regarding the dichotomy between administrative and political reform and self-organization, scale, geographical units, authorities and responsibilities, and legal status, the project of democratic autonomy provides a relatively clear framework concerning four main issues: (1) constitutional recognition of the Kurds, (2) pluralist identity policies and education in the mother tongue to ensure reproduction of Kurdish cultural identity, (3) a mode of local or regional decentralization that would encompass all of Turkey and enable the Kurdish people to exercise their right to self-

²⁹ The election manifesto is openly available online. See: <http://www.ertugrulkurkcu.org/haberler/emek-demokrasi-ve-ozgurluk-bloku-secim-beyannamesi/>, accessed, 20.11.2020.

governance, and finally (4) a radical participatory democracy based on neighborhood, district, provincial and regional assemblies (Çiçek 2012; 2014; Yeğen 2011c).

The attitude of the opposition

Unlike the democratic republic project, the democratic autonomy proposal of mainstream Kurdish politics was welcomed by other Kurdish groups, albeit critically. Apart from mainstream Kurdish politics, the Kurdish opposition in Turkey basically has two other centers of gravity. The first of these is comprised of the socialist, communist, social democratic or liberal nationalist Kurdish parties and groups. In the 2000s, these groups included the social democratic Rights and Freedoms Party (HAK-PAR), the liberal democrat-leaning Participatory Democracy Party (KADEP) and the classical nationalist Kurdish Revolutionary Democratic Movement (Tevgera Şoreşgerên Demokrat ên Kurd - TŞDK). These groups emerged as a result of the reorganization of the Kurdish parties and organizations of the 1980s and the 2000s. Many of these groups have a rather limited social influence, and mainly advocate a federation that would enable the sharing of territorial sovereignty between Kurds and Turks as a solution for the Kurdish issue. Mostly critical of and distant from mainstream Kurdish politics, they viewed democratic autonomy as an interim solution that could facilitate a federative solution. In fact, the BDP and the nationalist Kurdish parties and groups, who had harshly criticized and avoided contact with mainstream Kurdish politics in the 2000s, formed an alliance in the 2011 general elections (Çiçek 2015, 247).

Secondly, mention should be made of Islamic Kurdish groups. The dominant approach in this group, which is mostly represented within the AKP, focuses on localization. However, other organizations, such as the Association of the Oppressed (which became the HÜDAPAR in 2013) and the Zehra Community, founded under the leadership of former Hezbollah cadres, do not dismiss different options ranging from political decentralization to a federation. The main criticism of democratic autonomy voiced by most of these Islamic Kurdish groups is related to the way mainstream Kurdish politics interpreted autonomy, rather than the demand for autonomy for the Kurds per se. It should be noted that along with the groups advocating a federation, the Kurdish economic elites too expressed considerable criticism on this issue. In essence, they contended that mainstream Kurdish politics was employing the notion of democratic autonomy because it sought to establish an economically closed and politically authoritarian and monist structure under its own rule (Çiçek 2015, 141-81).

The most trenchant criticisms concerning democratic autonomy, however, came from the MHP and CHP. The MHP held the opinion that the Oslo Process was tantamount to “the imposition of a new Sèvres” that would lead to the division of the country and therefore fiercely opposed it. Accordingly, Turkey was facing a question of survival, since discourses like those around a “democratic republic” or “individual cultural rights” were essentially an expression of attempts to “establish a separate state.” Thus, recognition and formalization of differences by the government in line with individual rights and freedoms would lead the country towards gradual division. According to the MHP, which outright dismissed all options for political or administrative decentralization, even accepting languages other than Turkish in the public sphere posed a threat to national unity. The problem was essentially framed as a problem of “individual liberation” from poverty, feudalism, and terror. What was needed to overcome these problems was social and economic measures as well as a resolute fight against terrorism (Grand National Assembly of Turkey 2009).

Like the MHP, the CHP acted rather counterproductively in its opposition of the Oslo Process. It accused the AKP government of “negotiating with terrorists” and promoting “separation.” Speaking on behalf of the CHP in the parliamentary meetings, Deniz Baykal, the party’s leader of the period, considered the democratic opening process to be equal to the process of creating a new nation and judged it to be effectively disintegrating the country along communal lines. Again, like the MHP, the CHP opposed the state’s attempts to open up a space for languages other than Turkish and completely rejected negotiation on the issue of administrative or political decentralization. According to the CHP, people could express their ethnic identity and back their respective agendas via non-governmental organizations, and they were certainly able to speak their mother tongue. However, it would not be possible for the state, which had to be “blind” to ethnic identities, to provide mother tongue education. For the CHP held that the Kurdish issue essentially was an economic and social problem and that therefore these were the areas the government should focus on reforming (Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi 2009).

Notwithstanding its hard line regarding decentralization and language, the CHP’s overall position partially softened after its chairman changed. Like the AKP, the party now stated that the annotations placed on the European Charter of Local Self-Government could be lifted. Speaking at a rally in Hakkari in the run-up to the 2011 general elections, the new party leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu announced that they would accept the Charter as it was (Habertürk 2011).

The Oslo Process ended in failure on July 14, 2011. Analysis of the failure of the process is beyond the scope of this report. However, one aspect regarding decentralization is worth mentioning. The Process was ended by two incidents that occurred on the same day. 13 soldiers and 7 KCK members died in armed clashes that ensued after a commando battalion had been ambushed in Silvan district of Diyarbakır. Shortly thereafter, the DTK, the umbrella organization of mainstream legal Kurdish politics, unilaterally declared autonomy. As a result of the extraordinary meeting held on that day, the DTK announced that they declared the establishment of “Democratic Autonomous Kurdistan” because the state was not willing to resolve the Kurdish issue and called for “the recognition of Democratic Autonomy as the status of the Kurdish people within the scope of a Democratic Constitution, prepared in the spirit of the 1921 Assembly and finalized subsequent to consultations” (Evrensel 2011).

The Solution Process (2013-2015),

Local Democracy and

Democratic Autonomy in Rojava

In the 17 months that passed from the end of the Oslo Process until the Solution Process, nearly 1,000 people lost their lives as clashes flared up again. Unlike the İmralı and Oslo Processes, which had been shrouded in secrecy, the Solution Process was conducted relatively publicly (Bayramoğlu 2015, 51). The process started with a delegation of Kurdish politicians visiting Öcalan on January 3, 2013. Two and a half months later, Öcalan relayed to his followers that the time had come to lay down arms at the March 21, 2013 Newroz celebrations in Diyarbakır, attended by hundreds of thousands of people. Moreover, mainstream media outlets aired Öcalan's messages live all across Turkey. Later, the Wise Persons Committee, which was established as the process unfolded, held meetings at the provincial level in seven regions, which partially ensured society's sense of ownership regarding the process. To a certain extent, these meetings also served to collect people's opinions and suggestions concerning the process and convey them to the government. Moreover, various legal regulations were made regarding the process and the “Law on Ending Terrorism and Strengthening Social Integration” (no. 6551) was passed on July 16, 2014 (Çiçek 2018, 184-86).

The Solution Process failed to reach consensus with respect to four main areas after

two and a half years of dialogue, and the process ended in failure in the aftermath of the June 7, 2015 elections. The areas where consensus failed to be achieved were (1) the structures and mechanisms to be established for conflict resolution and reconciliation and who would participate in them, (2) the negotiation agenda and the framework for reforms, (3) the method, period and relevant legal regulations of the disarmament of the KCK, and (4) the cross-border dimension of the Kurdish issue, especially concerning the canton-based democratic autonomous administration in Rojava (Çiçek 2018, 186-87).

The contradictory attitudes of Kurdish political actors

If we consider the Solution Process in terms of decentralization, we see that Öcalan, the KCK, the mainstream legal Kurdish party BDP (DBP) and the HDP, established in 2014 under the leadership of the BDP, offered different proposals such as the strengthening of local democracy and local governments in addition to the demand for democratic autonomy that had been articulated during the Oslo Process. These actors' attitudes were characterized by inconsistencies and gave rise to contradictions.

Öcalan, who has been developing almost all of the models and concepts advocated by mainstream Kurdish politics for the solution of the Kurdish issue, brought up many different options for discussion. These ranged from the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which, as far as political power-sharing is concerned, provides only a limited level of administrative decentralization and is moreover not binding in this regard, all the way to a form of political decentralization which includes legislative power and demands a say for local administrations in areas such as economy, diplomacy, and self-defense, thus resembling federative solutions. However, Öcalan argued that within the Solution Process, a strengthening of local governments as part of a country-wide democratization initiative would be sufficient in order for the PKK to disarm and armed clashes to cease, declaring the final solution of the Kurdish issue to be a matter of political struggle.

In his first meeting with the BDP delegation on January 3, 2013, Öcalan stated that a cessation of hostilities should be achieved before the constitutional and legal reform process would begin. In the context of reforms, he also touched upon the issue of political power-sharing. Öcalan referred to the European Charter of Local Self-Government in this regard, while also talking about legislative powers and economic autonomy, basically pointing to an expanded form of political decentralization: "I don't even mention language education. The right to legislate and economic autonomy will

be granted. The reservations in the Charter of Local Self-Government will be lifted." On the other hand, in the meeting on February 23, 2013, he said, "If we insist on democratic autonomy, that means we will be sabotaging [the process]," and stated that the European Charter of Local Self-Government would be sufficient: "The Kurds will express and govern themselves freely. At the moment, insisting on a law will provoke allergic reactions. Perhaps in the future. The European Union Charter of Local Self-Government for example. Besides, if they would remove that caveat, that would resolve the issue to a great extent" (Öcalan 2015, 14, 22, 26).

Öcalan's statements were met with much criticism and he was accused of having abandoned the goals of independence, a federation and autonomy. In his meeting with the BDP delegation on April 3, 2013, Öcalan responded to these criticisms, stating that he had not given up anything, but that these alternatives were the subject of legal-political struggle and that democratization enjoyed priority (Öcalan 2015, 56-57). Concerning political power-sharing, he proposed a reform of local governments within the scope of an initiative called "Democratic Turkey." According to Öcalan, "local councils should have a say in matters like economy, local security, education, culture, health, etc. And this also solves the issue of mother tongue education." Öcalan addressed political power-sharing within the scope of local administration reform and, deviating from uses of the term employed during the Oslo Process, redefined democratic autonomy as "the civil society organization of the Kurds." In the Oslo Process, democratic autonomy had signified a civil self-organization based on organization from below, while it was used in such a way as also to include a model of administrative and political decentralization based on 20-25 regions. By contrast, in his first draft proposal for a solution, which he presented to the state and which would later provide the basis for the 10-point outline for a solution announced to the public at the Dolmabahçe meeting, Öcalan suggested the establishment of eight commissions³⁰ and discussed democratic autonomy within the framework of the "Civil Society Commission" (Öcalan 2015, 93-94).

"Civil Society Commission: The Kurdish problem will not be solved by way of sharing the state, that is, through a solution federating the state. The Kurds will organize themselves as a civil society within the state. You are the first

30 These commissions were: (1) Legal Commission, (2) Socio-Economic Commission, (3) National Pact Commission, (4) Women's Emancipation Commission, (5) Ecology Commission, (6) Civil Society Commission, (7) Security Commission and (8) Truth Research and Monitoring Commission.

ones I am telling this: In rendering society civil, we will force the state to take initiative to solve the issue. The MHP, racism etc., these are all obstacles. By both democratizing and strengthening the civil space, we will steal the thunder of these nationalist fanfares. We will organize the Kurds as a democratic civil society, not through the state. This also involves democratic autonomy.”

Unlike Öcalan, the KCK did not understand democratic autonomy along the lines of a civil society organization but in the context of the Kurds being accepted as a society and granted the right to govern themselves. For the KCK, the “Democratization Package” (Türkiye Gazetesi 2013) announced by the AK Party government on September 30, 2013 was inadequate. In the “Declaration on a Democratic Solution” issued on October 10, 2013, it put forward three demands for the success of the Solution Process, one of them being democratic autonomy (Demokrat Haber 2013):

“There are basic conditions for solving the Kurdish question as far as its substance is concerned. Until these basic demands have not been met, any discussion or action will be void. These basic demands, parameters and conditions are clear. They constitute a whole, they cannot be thought of as separate from one another. First: constitutional and legal guarantee of Kurdish existence, identity, and culture as well as recognition of the Kurdish identity and freedom of thought and association. Second: approval of self-government, i.e., democratic autonomy, as required by the recognition of the Kurds as a society. Third: admission of mother tongue education at all levels, given the fact that the Kurdish people are in the target of a cultural genocide.”

It can be said that the issue of democratic autonomy created a problem between Öcalan and the KCK leadership in the Solution Process. In a meeting with the BDP delegation that took place right after the above-quoted statement, Öcalan responded with the following when reminded of the demands of the KCK: “The eight dimensions of the democratic nation are important to me. They (the KCK administration) should focus on it too. They are not really scientific, but I don’t care” (Öcalan 2015, 158). The KCK leadership, on the other hand, announced to the public that it approved the frameworks presented by Öcalan (Al Jazeera Türk 2013a; Agos Gazetesi 2015), while simultaneously continuing to voice its demand for democratic autonomy. Thus, when the Solution Process resulted in failure after the elections on June 7, 2015, the KCK declared self-government and turned towards establishing democratic autonomy. For example, in his message to the Kurdistan National Congress (Kongreya Neteweyî

ya Kurdistanê - KNK), KCK Executive Board member Murat Karayılan interpreted the declaration of democratic autonomy as part of “the process of establishing a free Kurdistan” (Amerika'nın Sesi (VOA) 2015).

The BDP-HDP's role in the Solution Process was rather limited when compared to Öcalan and the KCK. Mainly facilitating communication between Öcalan and the KCK, the BDP-HDP also contributed to generate social consent concerning the process. It did not, however, (or was unable to) determine the course of the action. As in the Oslo Process, the mainstream of legal Kurdish politics viewed democratic autonomy in terms of both self-organization and administrative and political decentralization.

When analyzing the BDP-HDP's attitude regarding democratic autonomy, the first point to be underlined is the founding of the HDP and the transformation of the BDP. The BDP had been the main platform representing mainstream Kurdish politics until April 2014, when, following Öcalan's suggestion, it was replaced by the HDP, which had been established on October 15, 2013. At its third congress, the BDP also changed its name to Democratic Regions Party (DBP). It still continued to play the leading role in the HDP, whose other elements were made up of different opposition groups from within mainstream Kurdish politics. While the HDP's political work covered the whole of Turkey, the DBP defined its main goal as establishing democratic autonomy and began to focus on the Kurdish region. As a matter of fact, in the local elections held on March 30, 2014, the mainstream of legal Kurdish politics had BDP candidates competing in the Kurdish region, while supporting HDP candidates in the western parts of Turkey.

While the DBP took it as a mission to build democratic autonomy, the HDP, of which it was a leading component, continued to express the demand for democratic autonomy across Turkey. In the March 30, 2014 local elections, the HDP advocated a model of “democratic and autonomous local and regional government” and, with only minor revisions, included the model of regional decentralization based on 20-25 regions, which had been discussed in the Oslo Process, in its local election program (Halkların Demokratik Partisi 2014a). The HDP maintained its demand for democratic and autonomous local and regional government in the 2015 general elections that took place just before the Solution Process ended. In its election program, the HDP addressed the issue in a similar framework under the heading of “Democratic Autonomy and Local Democracy” (Halkların Demokratik Partisi 2015).

Despite the different attitudes of Öcalan, the KCK, and the DBP-HDP concerning

democratic autonomy, the framework advocated by Öcalan became the main frame for the negotiations carried out with the AKP government in the Solution Process. Accordingly, a strengthening of local governments and an expansion of civil society were to take place in order to resolve the Kurdish issue. In this sense, the framework of “democratic autonomy,” used in the sense of both self-organization and administrative and political decentralization at the regional scale during the Oslo Process, was replaced by the notion of strengthening local governments and expanding civil society, which could be taken to refer to administrative decentralization at the local scale (of the 81 provinces). Democratic autonomy was redefined as limited to the issue of bottom-up “self-organization” in the sphere of civil society.

On February 28, 2015, after nearly two years of dialogue, a joint press conference was held by the İmralı Delegation and government representatives at the Prime Ministry Office in Dolmabahçe to present the framework which the parties had agreed upon in the Solution Process. On this occasion, the 10-point framework drafted by Öcalan³¹ was shared with the public. Under its second article, “the definition the national and local dimensions of the democratic solution,” the topic of autonomy was taken up. During a meeting that had taken place about three weeks earlier, Öcalan had stated that, “taking into account certain sensitivities,” he had used the concept of “local democracy” instead of democratic autonomy and contended that they would carry Turkey towards local democracy (Öcalan 2015, 410). The “local democracy” approach was later confirmed by the politicians joining the İmralı Delegation. For example, Hatip Dicle asserted that there had been an agreement with the state on the concept of local democracy during the Solution Process (Eskin 2015). Likewise, according to İdris Baluken’s claim, the Solution Process saw the preparation of different “legal arrangements, which have been advanced until the final stages in the presence of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and which delegate many central level powers to the local.” In fact, Öcalan mentioned these

³¹ These 10 articles, also known as the so-called Dolmabahçe Accord, were as follows: (1) The definition and content of democratic politics, (2) the definition of the national and local dimensions of the democratic solution, (3) the legal and democratic guarantees of free citizenship, (4) the relationship of democratic politics with the state and society and its institutionalization, (5) the socio-economic dimensions of the Solution Process, (6) treating the relationship between democracy and security in a way that will protect public order and freedoms, (7) legal solutions and guarantees regarding women, culture and ecological problems, (8) the development of a pluralistic democratic approach to the concept, definition and recognition of identity, (9) defining the democratic republic, common homeland and nation by means of democratic criteria and providing legal and constitutional guarantees within a pluralist democratic system, and (10) a new constitution that aims to assist internalization of all these democratic changes and transformations. Images of the Dolmabahçe meeting are accessible online. See for example Al Jazeera Turk (2015).

preparations indicated by Baluken in his meeting with the İmralı Delegation on April 26, 2014 (Öcalan 2015, 284).

“There are two pillars to reaching a solution in the Kurdish issue. 1- A local government law needs to be enacted in accordance with the European charter on local government. Further, they should remove the reservations placed on the European Charter of Local Self-Government. 2- There is need for a democratic law on civil society, which concerns the DTK’s own existence and exceeds the scope of the existing Law on Associations. They should arrange this as a parliament of democratic civil society. Let me explain by giving you an example. Before the Turkish Grand National Assembly was founded, there were the so-called Associations for the Defense of Rights. The DTK is in the position of these associations right now. The Kurdish issue will be resolved through these two laws [emphasis added].”

Kurdish parties and opposition groups other than the DBP-HDP maintained their earlier positions on political power-sharing during the Solution Process. In summary, liberal, left-socialist and communist Kurdish parties and groups and Islamic nationalist movements such as the Islamic Initiative for Rights, Justice and Freedom of Kurdistan (Azadî) advocated a federation and considered the demand for democratic autonomy as a preliminary step to facilitate a “final solution.” Those, on the other hand, who were mostly organized within the AKP but also affiliated with a wide range of other political groups, also including more radical Islamic movements like the HÜDAPAR, advocated decentralization and self-government of the Kurds in local governments.

Despite these continuities between the Oslo Process and the Solution Process, there were also two important changes that need to be highlighted. Firstly, a political pluralization took place in the Kurdish space. Numerous Kurdish parties were established after the Oslo Process. Many of these parties lacked mass support and were organized only in a few provinces. Nonetheless, the founding of socialist, communist, liberal, Islamic and nationalist parties implied a pluralization of the political space. The parties founded during this period include the Freedom and Socialism Party (October 2011), the HÜDAPAR (December 2012), Azadî (June 2012), the Northern Kurdistan Democrat Party (Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê - Bakur - PDK-Bakur, April 2013),³² the Kurdistan Democrat Party - Turkey (Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê -

³² The PDK-Bakur, which had previously operated illegally, adopted a legal, transparent and legitimate mode of operation at its 10th

Türkiye - PDK-T, April 2014), the Kurdistan Party (Partiya Kurdistanî - PAKURD, May 2014), and the Kurdistan Freedom Party (Partiya Azadiya Kurdistanê - PAK, October 2014). In addition, the Kurdistan Socialist Party (Partiya Sosyalist a Kurdistanê - PSK) was founded in May 2016 and the Human and Freedom Party in May 2018. Finally, in June 2019, the Azadî Movement became a party and changed its name to Partiya Azadî (Freedom Party) for Justice, Faith and Freedom.

While the HÜDAPAR, the Partiya Azadî and the Human and Freedom Party pursued policies building upon Islamic references, all of the remaining parties were founded under the leadership of secular movements and the former cadres of Kurdish parties of different orientations that had mostly been established before 1980. With respect to political power-sharing in the context of solving the Kurdish issue, the HÜDAPAR advocates the strengthening of local governments and the election of all local leaders by the people (HÜDAPAR 2012). According to the Partiya Azadî, “The Kurds want a state, there is no problem in choosing whatever form is best suited. There are various options, from the unity of the Ummah to a federation, to a nation, to a confederation.” (Hareketa Azadî 2014). The Human and Freedom Party argues that “Kurds have the right to choose autonomy, a federation or independence and [that] they should be the only ones to decide about and approve of the Kurdish people’s right to self-determination” (İslami Analiz 2017).

The Rights and Freedoms Party (HAK-PAR), which was established in 2002 and the first party to oppose the DBP-HDP tradition, “as a matter of principle adopts the right of peoples to self-determination in the Kurdish issue. For the solution of the problem, it advocates for the democratic and federal restructuring of Turkey based on the equality of the Kurdish and Turkish people” (Hak ve Özgürlükler Partisi 2013). Like the HAK-PAR, the Participatory Democracy Party (KADEP), founded in 2006, championed the model of a federation. According to the KADEP, Kurds have the right to self-determination and the solution to the problem is in “a liberal, pluralist, participatory, secular, democratic federal system” (Katılımcı Demokrasi Partisi n.d.).³³

One of the secular parties established after the Oslo Process, the ÖSP (which transformed into the Kurdistan Communist Party [KKP] in November 2018), “aims at a federal solution with the equal participation of the peoples as a short term target

congress held in April 2013.

³³ At its 2016 congress, the KADEP decided to dissolve itself and merged with the T-KDP (Kürdistan 24 2016).

in the current conditions. Strategically, it advocates independence” (Kürdistan Komünist Partisi 2011). The PSK states that the Kurds’ right to self-determination could be realized through separation and a bi-national federation and that they would opt “in favor of a democratic federation” (Kürdistan Sosyalist Partisi 2020). The PAK defends the right to self-determination, which it understands as the right to establish a state. According to the PAK, “the goal of a state in Kurdistan should include the struggle for even the smallest achievements and this can mean an equal two-state federation, confederation, or federated or confederal state, but it can also take the shape of an independent state” (Kürdistan Özgürlük Partisi 2014). Claiming to follow the tradition of Mala Mustafa Barzani, the T-KDP also holds up the right to self-determination and argues that self-determination could mean autonomy, a federation or independence for Kurds in Turkey (BBC News Türkçe 2017b).

The PDK-Bakur, the second party claiming to follow the legacy of Mala Mustafa Barzani, also emphasizes the Kurds’ right to self-determination but advocates independence: “The solution proposed by our party is for the colonizer to withdraw from our country so that a plebiscite on self-determination can be held in a free environment under the supervision of the international community, as accepted by international conventions. While leaving the choice to the people of Kurdistan, our party stands in favor of independence” (Vengma 2017). The PAKURD, which operates mostly in a virtual environment and can be considered as a kind of e-party, like the PDK-Bakur, champions independence and Kurds’ right to establish a state (Demir 2020).

There was a second change in Kurdish politics when compared to the Oslo Process. During the Solution Process, efforts among Kurdish political groups to achieve “national unity” increased, leading to a greater number of attempts to create partnerships between different Kurdish parties and the DBP-HDP. The joint efforts of the BDP, the HAK-PAR, the KADEP and the TŞDK for “national unity” in the context of the 2011 general elections, just before the end of the Oslo Process, were followed by the “Kurdistan Conference in Turkey” held on 17-18 September 2011 and the “Unity through a Collective Mind Meeting” that took place on 10 March 2012. Both secular and Islamic groups participated in these meetings (Çiçek 2015, 247).

Upon Öcalan’s suggestion, the “Northern Kurdistan Union and Solution Conference” was held in Diyarbakır on June 15-16, 2013 within the scope of the Solution

Process. While the HAK-PAR did not join the conference and the HÜDAPAR was not invited, participants included DBP-DTK representatives, secular groups such as the KADEP, ÖSP and TŞDK, Islamic groups such as the Zehra Community, the Platform for a Return to the Fundamentals, the Tigris-Euphrates Dialogue Group, and Mazlum-Der, prominent non-governmental organizations in the region, prominent representatives of Kurdish capital, and representatives of national and religious minorities in the region. Emphasizing their support for the Solution Process in the final declaration of the conference, the groups also asserted that “the Kurdish problem cannot be finally resolved without Kurdistan attaining a legal status.” The participants of the conference agreed that “the peoples of Kurdistan have the right to determine their status (e.g., autonomy, federation, or independence) according to their own choices” and that this right should be “left to the decision and approval of the people of Kurdistan only” (Star 2013).

These efforts to accomplish national unity between the Kurds also had a partial impact on the general elections on June 7, 2015. In the elections that took place just before the Solution Process came to an end, the DBP and DTK and the ÖSP, the Revolutionary Democrat Kurdish Association (DDKD) and the Azadî Movement formed the “Kurdistan Election Alliance” and decided to participate in the elections together with the HDP. As its most fundamental demands, the election alliance specified “a status for Kurdistan, mother tongue education, admission of Kurdish as official language and constitutional guarantees for Kurdish identity” (Özgürlük ve Sosyalizm Partisi 2015). The KADEP, PAK, PAKURD, PDK-Bakur and T-KDP, on the other hand, preferred to stay out of the alliance. The PAK made a statement on this issue, announcing that “it will not support any party or candidate that does not clearly and explicitly embrace the national democratic rights and freedoms of the Kurds and does not include these values in their party and election program,” and ultimately did not participate in the elections (İlke Haber 2015). The HÜDAPAR and the HAK-PAR, which included the PSK at that time, preferred to participate in the elections as independent parties.

In summary, with respect to political power-sharing in the context of the Solution Process, Kurdish parties other than the BDP-HDP mostly emphasized the Kurds’ right to self-determination and demanded the recognition a status for Kurdistan. Autonomy, a federation, and independence were generally emphasized as the three main forms for this status. Independence was held up as an ideal, while a federative model based on two nationalities/nations stood out as the more realistic

solution under the given circumstances. The only exception among these parties is the HÜDAPAR, which contended that local governments should be strengthened and all local leaders chosen by election.

The AKP's policies getting stuck in freedom of expression and cultural rights

In the Solution Process, much like earlier in the Oslo Process, the AKP again presented a framework for reform allegedly conducive to democratization and addressed the issue of political power sharing within the framework of strengthening local governments. However, the reforms made within the scope of the process remained limited to expanding the rights of expression and association and the recognition of individual cultural rights that strengthened the use of Kurdish in the public sphere.

Throughout the Solution Process, the AKP left out demands for autonomy and emphasized the strengthening of local governments. Hatem Ete, Chief Advisor to the Prime Ministry, confirmed Hatip Dicle's statements, propounding that the lessons learned from the Oslo Process had been the starting point for the Solution Process and that the issue of autonomy was not part of the Solution Process. In support of Öcalan's explanations, Ete further stated that autonomy could be the subject of political struggle following disarmament (Yeni Asya 2015). Similarly, Deputy Prime Minister Yalçın Akdoğan stated on several occasions that autonomy was not within the scope of the Solution Process and that the AKP would not accept it either (Hürriyet 2015a). Responding to the discussions on autonomy, Ahmet Davutoğlu, the prime minister of the period, buttressed Ete and Akdoğan's statements, emphasizing that autonomy was not within the scope of the Solution Process but that the AKP's reforms concerning local governments would continue (Al Jazeera Türk 2014). The AKP government's approach regarding this issue was reflected in the consensus framework announced to the public at the Dolmabahçe meeting two years later. While Öcalan's 10-point document framed political power-sharing as "the local dimension of the democratic solution," Akdoğan, spoke on behalf of the government and pointed to a democratization process that would advance fundamental rights and freedoms without mentioning local governments or autonomy (Al Jazeera Türk 2015).

The AKP government presented its "Democratization Package" to the public on September 30, 2013. This package featured different items like establishing an anti-discrimination and equality board, including the respect for lifestyle in the Turkish Penal Code, abolishing the headscarf ban in public institutions, expanding the right to

assembly, demonstration and march, protecting personal data, opening the election system and election threshold for discussion, making it possible for parties to adopt a co-presidency, lowering the vote threshold for political parties to receive treasury aid from 7% to 3%, and facilitating membership in political parties. In addition, as regards the recognition of cultural rights, the reform package contained provisions to open the way for education in different languages and dialects in private schools, clear the way for villages to re-adopt their old names, end the student oath ritual in primary schools, and recognize the right of political parties to make political propaganda in different languages and dialects (Türkiye Gazetesi 2013). Also, in the first month of the process, on January 23, 2013, oral defenses in the mother tongue were permitted in the courts as part of the initiative to expand cultural rights (Hürriyet 2013).

The most important development in the course of the Solution Process that is worthy of discussion in terms of decentralization concerns the Law No. 6360 on metropolitan municipalities. This law was passed on November 12, 2012, i.e., after the Oslo Process and immediately before the Solution Process was announced to the public, in a period when contacts were probably resumed behind closed doors. The law started to be implemented in the second year of the Solution Process following the local elections held on March 30, 2014. Although it created an important change in Turkey's local administration system, this legal regulation did not become an important topic of discussion or negotiation during the Solution Process.

As a result of the new arrangement, the number of metropolitan cities in Turkey increased from 16 to 30. The extension of the municipal borders to the provincial borders, previously applied in the provinces of Istanbul and Kocaeli by way of exception, began to be implemented in all 30 provinces. Previously, municipalities had only been responsible for urban areas. By virtue of the new law, all villages within the borders of the 30 metropolitan cities were turned into neighborhoods and both metropolitan municipalities and district municipalities were put in charge of urban and rural areas. The special provincial administrations were abolished in the 30 metropolitan cities and their authorities, with respect to municipal services, were transferred to the district and metropolitan municipalities. In addition, competences in areas such as agriculture, livestock, and rural development were transferred to the municipalities. Although the regulation encompasses only 30 of the 81 provinces, as of 2020, 65.2 million, or approximately 78.36%, of the total population of 83.6 million live in these provinces according to the data of the Turkish Statistical Institute.

Whereas the authorities and area of jurisdiction of the municipalities in the 30 metropolitan cities increased significantly, the district municipalities' position vis-à-vis the metropolitan municipalities were weakened, as the metropolitan cities took the path of “centralizing the local” (Toksöz 2015, 11). Besides, the expansion of the powers and ambit of the municipalities did not go hand in hand with an increase of their resources, leaving them financially dependent on the central government. According to the data of the Revenue Administration,³⁴ the total share of the general budget revenues transferred to the local administrations, comprised of municipalities, metropolitan municipalities and special provincial administrations, was between 15-16% between 1985-2001, then decreased to 12% between 2002-2008 and finally went down to 11.5% after 2008. Although the jurisdiction of the metropolitan cities expanded as a result of the Law no. 6360, which entered into force in 2014, the shares they received from the general budget tax revenues remained constant.

Although the law partially strengthened local administrations by expanding the powers and jurisdiction of metropolitan municipalities, it also included articles that increased the power of the central administration at the local level, in this sense implying a kind of deconcentration. The most important point to be underlined in this regard is the “Investment Monitoring and Coordination Presidencies” that were established within the governorships. As a result of this new institutional body, all local investment activities previously carried out by the special provincial administrations that used to be elected were now centralized within the governorships, the provincial extensions of the central government. The new units were moreover authorized to “execute and monitor all kinds of investments, construction, maintenance, repair, and assistance to be done in the provinces by the ministries and other institutions of the central administration or other public field institutions and organizations, as well as all related works and transactions necessitated by them” (İçişleri Bakanlığı 2014). Fikret Toksöz underlines that the trend towards re-centralization, which occurs in the name of financing development and coping with financial crises in many parts of the world can be observed in Turkey, as well. Established in 2011, the Ministry of Development, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Urbanization, and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies served to increase the central government’s capacity to intervene in local affairs (Toksöz 2015, 10–11).

The AKP government excluded the issue of autonomy from the Solution Process and framed political power-sharing as a strengthening of local administrations. However,

³⁴ These data are available online. See: https://www.gib.gov.tr/sites/default/files/fileadmin/user_upload/VI/GBG/Tablo_10.xls.htm, accessed 05.12.2020.

it did not entirely close the door on debating the issue. Especially in the context of the presidential system, the AKP mentioned a state system, which is an idea that was introduced by Kenan Evren and Turgut Özal in earlier days. For example, when Prime Minister Erdoğan appeared on television in a joint broadcast of Kanal D and CNN Türk on March 29, 2013 in the first months of the Solution Process, he stated that there had been a state of Kurdistan and a state of Lazistan in the Ottoman Empire, that there was no reason to be afraid of this and that a state system, mostly encountered in developed countries, accelerated economic development and strengthened democracy (Son Dakika 2013).

The CHP: Yes to social peace, no to the Solution Process

The CHP did not support the Solution Process. However, it backed the demands for “social peace” in relation to the solution of the Kurdish issue. The party understood the Solution Process as an isolated “negotiation process” between the AKP government and Öcalan/ the KCK which did not allow social control and participation. It pointed to the Assembly as an alternative mechanism for solution and suggested the establishment of a “Social Consensus Commission” within the Assembly, in which all parties could participate. In connection with the Social Consensus Commission, the CHP supported the establishment of the “Wise People” and, different from the AKP’s proposal, suggested that this group should collect the opinions and suggestions of public, private and non-governmental organizations and the people and carry them into the parliament (T24 2013).

Getting together with the editors-in-chief of various newspapers for a press conference in Istanbul, the CHP Chairman commented on his party’s stance regarding both the Solution Process and the solution of the Kurdish issue. According to Kılıçdaroğlu,

“The CHP is in favor of searching for a solution, of social peace and solidarity. It wants all citizens to live in peace, trust, unity, and solidarity. However, as to the “negotiations process” carried out by the AKP, whose contents are not yet disclosed, we have serious concerns and these concerns are shared by our people. The CHP wants lasting social peace. The AKP, on the other hand, wants to instrumentalize the sensitivities of our Kurdish fellow-citizens for its own political purposes. The CHP is attaching priority to protecting our country’s geographic and national integrity and security in its search of a democratic, social and sustainable solution. The AKP, on the other hand, engages in adventurous pursuits and commitments that will endanger the integrity and security of the country. According to the CHP, the address for solution is the Parliament. According to the AKP, it is Öcalan. The CHP says, let us do what the people want, let us find a

compromise, while the AKP tries to impose its will and says, “I will handle it and I will have the people accepted it through my wise men” (T24 2013).

At the same meeting, Kılıçdaroğlu also argued that the AKP did not have a roadmap for the solution of the Kurdish issue and that it instrumentalized the Solution Process for the elections. According to him, the collective rights mentioned by Öcalan were “the harbinger of social segregation,” while “individual rights and freedoms are the mortar of democracy, equality and the unitary structure of the state.” According to the CHP, “the Kurdish problem is a problem fueled by imperfect democracy, violations of rights and inequalities. Our primary duty is to clear these foundations and to pave the way for individual rights, equality and freedoms in order to ensure the peace, welfare and happiness of our citizens” (T24 2013).

The CHP’s most important proposal regarding political power-sharing in the Solution Process concerned the removal of the annotations placed on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which would pave the way for regulations on administrative decentralization. During the Oslo Process, CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu stated that they would remove the reservations placed on the Charter during a rally held in Hakkari in the run-up to the June 11, 2011 elections and he repeated this promise at the CHP’s convention held on September 5, 2014 (Anadolu Ajansı 2014).

The Impact of the MHP’s Discourse on Leftist/Socialist Circles

During the Solution Process, the MHP remained loyal to its rhetoric of a “new Sèvres,” which it had already embraced in the Oslo Process. In February 2013, MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli claimed that the AKP had accepted the demand for autonomy in return for support for the transition to the presidential system (Cumhuriyet 2013). Bahçeli contended that the AKP was pursuing a “project of dividing the country” and that it would soon issue political amnesties and pave the way for autonomy (Sözcü 2014). According to the MHP, the “local and national dimensions of the democratic solution” articulated in the Dolmabahçe meeting indicated a project aimed at the establishment of autonomy and, ultimately, of a national state (Cumhuriyet 2015).

Later, Bahçeli’s discourse concerning an alleged “give-and-take” between the presidential system and autonomy would also have an impact on leftist/socialist circles in Turkey. Especially Öcalan’s statements in favor of a US-style presidential system during his meetings with the İmralı Delegation reinforced these beliefs. As a matter of fact, HDP Co-

Chair Selahattin Demirtaş stated that the HDP did not support the presidential system and that they would not negotiate on this issue (Evrensel 2014b). In his speech at the parliamentary group meeting on March 17, 2015, in one of the critical moments towards the end of the Solution Process, he addressed Erdoğan: “We will not make you president!” Many attributed this to the “influence of the Turkish left on the HDP” (Karaca 2015). These kinds of assumptions also stand out today in criticisms of the HDP’s relationship with left politics and its Türkiyelileşme policy³⁵ (A. F. Işık 2020).

The second geopolitical turning point: the construction of “democratic autonomy” in Rojava

Another important issue that needs to be emphasized in terms of political power sharing in the context of the Solution Process is the Syrian civil war that started in March 2011 and the construction of democratic autonomy in Rojava as of July 2012. Whereas the Solution Process had been taken up on the condition that “democratic autonomy was excluded,” with “local democracy” being the largely agreed upon formula in terms of political power sharing, a model of democratic autonomy was established in Rojava.

On July 19, 2012, amid the Syrian civil war, the People’s Defense Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel – YPG) and the Women’s Defense Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Jin – YPJ), the armed wings of the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekitiya Demokratîk – PYD), seized power in the cities of Kobanî, Efrîn (Afrin) and Dêrîk (Al-Malikiyah), subsequently followed by other cities. This led to the establishment of the Rojava region, comprising three cantons and their respective administrative centers in Kobanî, Cizîre (Jazira) and Efrîn. Between January 21 and 29, 2014, “democratic autonomy” was declared in the cantons of Cizîre, Kobanî and Efrîn (Evrensel 2014a). In the period between the start of the attacks of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) on the city of Kobanî in autumn 2014 and their ultimate repulsion with the support of the US-led International Coalition forces in January 2015, Rojava gained an unprecedented level of international visibility and support. The autonomous regions were united on March 17, 2016 under the name of the “Democratic Federation of Northern Syria” (BBC News Türkçe 2016).

One of the main dynamics triggering the Solution Process in the first place, Rojava was also one of the most important reasons for its failure (Çiçek 2018, 181–208; 268–76; Çiçek and Coşkun 2016). In the letter read to the public at the Diyarbakır Newroz celebrations,

³⁵ T.N.: Türkiyelileşme refers to the process of becoming a party that represents the whole of Turkey.

Öcalan had addressed the Kurdish issue in a cross-border context. Writing that “the door leading from armed resistance to democratic politics is opening” and taking Kurds and Turks to be the “two main strategic powers of the Middle East,” he invited them to take the lead in ushering in “a contemporary modernity” and building “a democratic order” in the Middle East and Central Asia (Euronews Türkçe 2013). Later, in his meeting with the İmralı Delegation on July 21, 2013, Öcalan drew attention to the importance of Rojava, saying, “the solution in Turkey is the solution in Syria, the solution in Syria is the solution in Turkey” (Öcalan 2015, 111). In fact, contacts were established between the AKP government and the PYD within the scope of the Solution Process and PYD Co-Chair Salih Muslim came to Ankara several times to meet with Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials. The last visit of Muslim, who first came to Turkey in July 2013, took place on February 22, 2015, about a week before the Dolmabahçe meeting (Zaman 2013; Tanış 2016).

Öcalan argued that the insistence on the demand for democratic autonomy in Turkey would block the Solution Process and instead suggested that the Kurds in Syria established cantons and “democratic autonomous regions,” similar to those in Switzerland (Öcalan 2015, 120, 179). In view of the AKP government’s negative attitude regarding Rojava, he underlined the importance he attached to Rojava, saying “We will never let the Kurds dissolve within the Syrian central state. This is our red line.” After all, the “democratic autonomy” model he had developed for the solution of the Kurdish issue in Turkey between 2005 and 2007 was coming to fulfillment in the Kurdish region of Syria after 2012 (Duman 2016; Taştekin 2016).

The KCK was directly involved in the construction of Rojava. The PYD and YPG, who are leading the construction of democratic autonomy in Rojava, see Öcalan as their leader and they share the KCK’s normative values in ideological and political terms. Likewise, many members of the KCK from both Syria and Turkey rank within the PYD and YPG today, including positions at the administrative level (International Crisis Group 2016; Duman 2016, 80–81). Moreover, the KCK and its armed wing played an active part in Rojava. According to Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) General Commander Mazlum Kobani, thousands of Kurds trained by the PKK were among the many other Kurdish forces who had answered their call and came to Rojava to fight. Hundreds of them lost their lives, some left, some stayed, and many joined the civilian life in Rojava.

The DBP-HDP offered both intellectual and mobilizational support to the project of democratic autonomy in Rojava. When Kobanî was under the attack of ISIS, the HDP

issued a statement addressing the Turkish public and the international community, in which it criticized Turkey for pursuing a policy geared towards “preventing the formation of an autonomous Kurdish region,” and called for the protection of democratic autonomy in Rojava. According to the HDP, “the democratic autonomous system in Rojava is the guarantee for a democratic future of the entire Middle East and should be supported. Today, the Kurds are out in force on the stage of history and from now on any policy excluding is null and void” (Halkların Demokratik Partisi 2014b).

Moreover, the DBP-HDP constantly mobilized its audience in Turkey for Rojava. In the protests that unfolded on October 6-8 following ISIS’s attack on Kobanî, this mobilization spread to almost all Kurdish cities. Protesters occupied the streets in many cities were occupied and the government temporarily lost control, before Öcalan intervened with a call from İmralı Prison to put an end to the incidents. 46 people lost their lives in the protests in the Kurdish region, which unfolded as a much more severe version of what had happened during the Gezi protests (İnsan Hakları Derneği 2014). As a matter of fact, these protests, also known as the Kobanî protests, constituted one of the main turning points causing the Solution Process to result in failure.

Like the DBP-HDP, most other Kurdish parties too stood behind Rojava. Most of the Kurdish parties in Turkey leveled criticisms against the PYD’s domestic policies in Rojava, accusing the PYD of being monistic, of not being inclusive enough, of excluding other Kurdish parties in Syria and putting pressure on them, and of defending autonomy rather than a federation. Notwithstanding these criticisms, they supported the Syrian Kurds in establishing their own administration in their territory. Despite Kurdish parties’ different attitudes in this regard, Rojava became part of the initiatives for “Kurdish national unity” in the Solution Process. For example, at the “Northern Kurdistan Unity and Solution Conference,” which convened in 2013, as a recommendation by Öcalan, the participants rallied behind Rojava and made a call for national unity and alliance: “We express our support for the people’s revolution that took place in Rojava (Syria) and which the people carried through by their own efforts and their own unique policy. We consider it important to ensure its [Rojava’s] unity and alliance in the person of the Kurdish Supreme Council” (Star 2013).

To sum up, the construction of democratic autonomy in Rojava caused a second major shift in the geopolitical equation of the Kurdish issue. Following the establishment of the KRI in 2003 and its relative stabilization in 2005, geopolitics became the main dynamic framing Turkey’s Kurdish issue. In this respect, Rojava created a second wave effect. But for several reasons Rojava had a stronger influence on Turkey’s Kurdish issue than the KRI. First of

all, we need to underline the ideological, political and organizational affinity between mainstream Kurdish politics in Turkey and Syria. Mainstream Kurdish politics did not make any significant effort in Turkey during the establishment of the KRI but in contrast mobilized every means available for Rojava. Second, unlike the Kurds in the KRI, Rojava Kurds speak the same dialect of Kurdish (Kurmanji) as the majority of Turkey's Kurds. Third, another factor that needs to be highlighted is geography. While the border between the geographical parts of Kurdistan in Turkey and Iraq measures 384 km, the length of the border shared with the part in Syria is 911 km. Also, the former mostly runs through the mountains, while the latter is in the plain. Fourth, following on from the linguistic and geographical factors, the economic, social and cultural relations between the Kurds of Turkey and the Kurds of Syria have been much stronger in the last century when compared to the Kurds of Iraq. Finally, Rojava had a much greater impact in the international arena than the KRI. Especially after ISIS's attack on Kobanî, the awareness, interest, sympathy and support that formed in the international arena regarding the situation and struggle of Syrian Kurds in particular, but also of all Kurds in general, rose to levels far beyond anything alike in the past. Today, the Kurdish issue, which largely maintained its status as Turkey's domestic problem even after the establishment of the KRI, has evolved into a cross-border problem involving imperial powers like the USA and Russia.

The impact of the developments in Rojava was not limited to the Kurds and Kurdish political movements, but also deeply affected the opposition parties, the Turkish state, and the AKP government. Both the civil and military bureaucracy and the mainstream parties in Turkey considered the formation of an autonomous or federal Kurdish region in Syria as a matter of survival and built their policies on preventing such a region from forming. Although the Turkish state and the AKP government claimed that they were not opposing the achievements of the Kurds in Syria and that their concerns were with a so-called "terror corridor," the statements they issued clearly revealed that their main concern was the "formation of a Kurdish administration" in Syria, as earlier in the KRI.

Immediately after the Solution Process had started, the AKP government stated that it would consider establishing relations with the PYD. However, one of the three conditions put forward in this regard was that "no fait accompli is created in the region." Ahmet Davutoğlu, the foreign minister of the time, listed these conditions in his statement on April 10, 2013: "1- They [the PYD] will not take sides with the regime, 2- They will not create a fait accompli (i.e., they will not create a de facto situation and declare a region by themselves) until the parliament to be elected by the Syrian

people is formed, 3- They will not support terrorism in Turkey” (Yeni Şafak 2013). On the other hand, then Prime Minister Erdoğan articulated Turkey’s position more bluntly. Following the geographical unification of the Kobani and Cizîre regions and the growing likelihood of a merger with the Afrin region as a result of the YPG-YPJ taking control of the Gri Spî (Tel Abyad) district on June 15, 2015, at a time when the Solution Process had largely ended although this had not yet been openly announced, Erdoğan made the following statement: “I am calling out to my entire nation, to the whole world. We will never allow the establishment of a state in the north or south of Syria. I want this to be known. We will continue our struggle in this matter, whatever the cost” (Gazete Vatan 2015). Responding to the questions of journalists on February 7, 2016, after the Solution Process had already ended, Erdoğan went even further in saying that Turkey would not repeat the “mistake made in Iraq” and openly expressed that Turkey’s main concern had to do with an autonomous or federal Kurdish region rather than the PYD leadership. He said: “I did not want to repeat the mistake that happened in Iraq in Syria. I was in favor of the 1 March resolution, those who were against it did not mention this. There was some secret backstage lobbying going on. If Turkey had gotten involved in Iraq in the context of the March 1 resolution, the situation in Iraq would not be what is right now” (Karar 2016).³⁶

This political attitude adopted by Turkey came with practical implications. In April 2014, when the Solution Process was still underway, the AKP government began building a four-meter-high border wall that crossed six provinces and stretched out along the entire 911-kilometer border to Syria. By the same token, Turkey made pressure to have the Rojava administration excluded from the political attempts to end the Syrian civil war within the scope of the UN-backed Geneva talks and the Astana meetings led by Russia, Iran and Turkey. After the Solution Process, the Turkish army, together with the Free Syrian Army (FSA), entered Syrian territory where it formed administrations.

The MHP supported the AKP government’s policies towards Rojava. Especially after July 15, 2016, after allying itself with the AKP, the MHP became actively engaged in developing these policies. The CHP, on the other hand, did not display a particularly strong opposition with respect to Rojava in the first year of the Solution Process. For example, after ISIS’s attack on Kobani, the party suggested that Turkey should send troops to the city, where the relatives of many fellow citizens lived. Despite the fact that some CHP deputies voted in favor of a motion submitted to the Parliament on October

³⁶ On March 1, 2003, the Turkish parliament rejected a government motion that would involve Turkey in the Iraq war and allow 62.000 U.S military troops to be deployed in Turkey for 6 months.

2, 2014 by the AKP government to send Turkish troops to Syria and Iraq, the CHP did not support the resolution as a party. According to the CHP, the purpose of the motion in question was not to combat ISIS but the Assad regime (BBC News Türkçe 2014). In the context of the ruling party's Syria policy, the CHP mainly criticized the AKP for pursuing a religious and sectarian policy in the region. The CHP repeatedly called on the AKP to normalize its relations with Assad (Milliyet 2013).

The CHP later reversed its soft opposition into support for the AKP government. In the debates on a mandate for military action in 2015, the CHP claimed that the AK Party had "played a major role in the disintegration of Iraq and Syria." Yet, different, from the stance it had taken in the previous one, it supported the new motion since it allegedly targeted not only the PKK but also ISIS and would prevent ISIS attacks like the one in Suruç from repeating (Hürriyet 2015b). In line with this mandate, it also offered full support for Turkey to enter Syria's Jarabulus region in August 2016 and establish an administration. According to CHP Deputy Chairman for Foreign Relations Öztürk Yılmaz, this did not only serve to keep ISIS away from the borders, but would also prevent the merger of the Cizîre and Kobanî regions with the Efrîn region (Milliyet 2016). Commenting on the same issue, Kılıçdaroğlu claimed that the government was late "to launch an operation in Syria." In the words of Sinan Birdal, the CHP "has been reeling from shy opposition to the intervention in Syria, to shy support, and from there to a position where it contended that it could have carried out this military operation more successfully" (Birdal 2016).

In this section, the 2013-2015 Solution Process was discussed within the framework of decentralization in the context of peace initiatives. A few points should be underscored in conclusion. First of all, it seems that there are varying demands with respect to decentralization and political power-sharing along the axis formed by Öcalan, the PKK/KCK, and the DBP-HDP.

Second, Kurdish parties and groups outside of mainstream Kurdish politics mostly advocate for a federation. While these groups did not support the "democratic republic" thesis, they saw democratic autonomy as an interim solution that facilitated the "final solution" of the Kurdish issue and therefore supported it.

Third, the AKP has pursued a relatively stable and consistent policy since 2002, and does not support any demands for autonomy that would imply political decentralization. On the other hand, it has advocated localization and a strengthening of local governments within the framework of deconcentration.

FROM THE SOLUTION PROCESS TO TODAY: RECENTRALIZATION AND DECONCENTRATION

Fourth, the CHP and the social groups it represents played a largely antagonistic role regarding the Kurdish issue and decentralization up until the 2013-2015 Solution Process. The CHP opposed all dialogue and negotiation processes, while simultaneously standing against all attempts that could open the door for decentralization. The more recent proclamations that the reservations placed on the European Charter of Local Self-Government were to be removed should be noted as the only progress in this regard.

Fifth, the MHP generally opposed all attempts to resolve the Kurdish issue. It considered even limited reforms as attempts to impose a “new Sèvres.”

Finally, it is necessary to emphasize geopolitics. By the 2000s, geopolitics became the main determining dynamic through which Turkey's Kurdish issue was framed.

The geopolitics of the Kurdish issue, especially the situation in Rojava, became more influential after the Solution Process. The post-2015 period, when the Rojava issue was the main determining dynamic, is discussed in the next section.

The end of the Solution Process after the June 7, 2015 elections coincided with an immensely violent rekindling of armed clashes. Unlike past incidents, these hostilities mostly occurred in urban areas. As had happened at the end of the Oslo Process, autonomy was declared. These declarations of “self-government” occurred in many places, accompanied by armed units that were introduced as “self-defense” units. The state's response was extremely harsh. After the urban clashes, the venue of the Kurdish conflict changed place, essentially shifting to Rojava. Immediately after the end of the clashes, a second incident occurred in Turkey that had the impact of a political earthquake. A state of emergency was declared in the aftermath of the military coup attempt on July 15, 2016, undermining Turkey's limited democratic foundations over the course of a period of nearly two years.

This chapter discusses the “setback” that occurred with respect to decentralization and political power-sharing in the period after the failure of the 2013-2015 Solution Process. The topics discussed in this chapter include the local declarations of democratic autonomy and the reactions these provoked on the part of the state and the AKP government, the appointment of trustees to the municipalities, the independence referendum in the KRI, and finally Turkey's military interventions in the regions of Rojava and the administrations it created there.

The Declarations of Self-Government and Urban Clashes

When the developments of this period are analyzed in the context of decentralization, the first point to be underlined is the following: The end of the Solution Process coincided with the declaration of “democratic autonomy” – just as at it had in the Oslo Process. However, unlike the Oslo Process, democratic autonomy was not declared by the DTK on a regional scale this time, but separately in each province and district by the “local people’s assemblies” established here. Likewise, instead of bodies like the elected and democratically legitimized municipal councils in Catalonia, these “local people’s assemblies” were not representative and included only a limited number of people. It should be noted that during this time, the provincial and district municipalities in 11 provinces, especially the metropolitan municipalities of Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van, were under the administration of the DBP-HDP. Moreover, while the method of choice in Catalonia had been a referendum, in which the whole community was able to participate and which thus better served to reflect the will and political preference of the people, the self-government declarations took place as “press releases” at the district scale with the participation of a very limited number of people.

Another important aspect regarding the declarations of democratic autonomy was that in many places, these declarations of “self-government” were flanked by so-called “self-defense” units, armed units formed under the leadership of KCK militants and militias. Nonviolence had been one of the most important aspects in Catalonia, both in the organization of the independence referendum and in the events that followed it. Despite the arrest of most of the politicians who led the referendum and the dose of police brutality, Catalans, in keeping with their history of political struggle, chose to fight back nonviolently. In Turkey, on the other hand, clashes broke out in all districts where autonomy had been declared. In some places these clashes went on for months.

Whereas the Spanish state and central government responded to the Catalanian independence referendum with judicial and police methods, the Turkish state, led by the AKP government, responded to the formation of armed units and declarations of autonomy in urban centers with military and police operations. The declarations of autonomy and the clashes started in the Varto district of Muş in August 2015. From there, they spread to the cities of Diyarbakır (Sur and Silvan districts), Mardin (Nusaybin, Dargeçit and Derik districts), Şırnak (Şırnak, Cizre, Silopi and İdil districts) and Hakkari (Yüksekova district). According to official figures, during the most intense

period of the clashes between July 24, 2015, and May 23, 2016, a total of 4,949 KCK members lost their lives, 2,583 of them in Turkey and 2,366 of them abroad. 483 security forces (police, soldiers and village guards) lost their lives during the clashes (Hürriyet 2016b). According to the Report of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TİHV), between August 16, 2015 and August 16, 2016, “at least 111 indefinite and all-day curfews were declared in 9 provinces and at least 35 districts [emphases in original]” In addition, “the most basic rights to life and health of at least 1 million 671 thousand residents of the regions were violated [emphasis in original]” According to the TİHV report, at least 321 civilians, including 79 children, 71 women, and 30 persons over the age of 60, lost their lives in the clashes (TİHV 2016). According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, which monitors and records conflicts in many parts of the world, approximately 2,000 people lost their lives in the clashes in 2015 and 2016 (UCDP 2019).

In addition to the loss of life, a tremendous destruction of urban space occurred during this period. The historical city of Sur, located in the city center of Diyarbakır, the Şırnak city center and the Cizre, Silopi and İdil districts of Şırnak, the Nusaybin district of Mardin and the Yüksekova district of Hakkari were among the places in which the clashes waged most horrendously and caused a great number of casualties and a large-scale destruction of the urban fabric (TMMOB 2019). According to UN data, between 355,000 and half a million people were forcibly displaced (OHCHR 2017, 14).

Despite the fact that the clashes continued for almost a year and caused many casualties, the forced displacement of a great number of people and a large-scale destruction of space, they were not met with any significant reaction, neither in Turkey nor in the international arena. The HDP and DBP embraced the self-government declarations and stood behind them. With the clashes ongoing, the DTK convened in an enlarged meeting on December 26-27, 2015. In the final declaration, the DTK stated that “we want to declare to the public an elaborate outline of the previously presented notion of democratic autonomy, which the HDK [the People’s Democratic Congress], the DBP and the HDP also included in their programs” and published a 14-point declaration. This declaration, except for a few minor revisions, once again brought the proposal for regional decentralization based on 20-25 geographical regions to the public’s attention (Sözcü 2015b).

CHP Chairman Kılıçdaroğlu opposed the DTK’s proposal for self-government and regional autonomy, asserting that “there will be no self-government in the territory of the Republic of Turkey.” However, he announced that the CHP aimed to strengthen local governments (Halk TV 2015). On the other hand, the CHP claimed that the AKP government had caused the clashes in the cities with the position it had taken in the Solution Process and criticized that the

interventions led to forced migration, urging the government to act within the limits of the law in its “fight against terrorism” (Milliyet 2015). The MHP, on the other hand, supported the urban military and police operations carried out by the AKP government. Chairman Bahçeli interpreted the proposals for self-government and autonomy submitted by the DTK and HDP as a separatist demand aiming to dissolve the state and called for those responsible for this proposal to be punished and sanctioned (Hürriyet 2016a).

There has not been any noteworthy response to the urban clashes in the international arena, especially from the EU and its member states. As the conflict was continuing, the EU emphasized that Turkey's security concerns were justified, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of “limiting the scope of the intervention and preventing any ramifications for the local population.” It called on political leaders to return to the peace process (T24 2015). The USA called for a political solution, while also urging Turkey to guarantee the protection of civilians and fulfill its legal responsibilities in the ongoing military operations. US State Department spokesman John Kirby said: “We hope that a political process will be initiated between the Turkish government and the PKK to bring justice and lasting peace to all Turks. We understand that Turkey needs to take security measures. However, necessary measures should also be taken to protect civilians and to make sure that the country fulfills its legal responsibilities” (Sözcü 2015a).

The July 15, 2016 Coup d'état Attempt, the State of Emergency and Trustees

While the violent clashes continued to exert their impact on the cities, a military coup attempt took place in Turkey on July 15, 2016, which the government, aided by the parliament and civilians, was able to thwart. However, the subsequent state of emergency, first declared on July 20, 2016, lasted for two years and largely dissolved the country's limited existing democratic foundations. Utilizing the powers provided by the state of emergency, the AKP government, together with its political ally, the MHP, targeted and criminalized oppositional individuals and institutions in areas such as politics, civil society, media and academia, and significantly restricted the spaces in society where they could act. In fact, it established direct control and rule of the central government in all of these areas.

During this two-year period, there were 57 suicides and suspicious deaths related to the (emergency) decree-laws. In addition, a total of 70,689 people, including 209 journalists, 12

MPs and 95 mayors, were arrested. In the same period, a total of 135,856 people, including 6,081 academicians and a large number of employees of the Ministry of National Education, the Ministry of Interior and the Police Department, were dismissed from public service. Likewise, the work permits of 22,474 people working in private education institutions were cancelled, while 24,490 teachers were suspended (Devrimci İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu 2018, 5). In addition, a total of 160 media outlets, including 30 TV channels, 30 radio stations, 47 newspapers, 6 news agencies, 18 magazines and 29 publishing houses, were shut down. Within the scope of the decree-laws, 48 health institutions, 2,271 education institutions, 848 student dormitories and hostels, 360 training/study centers, 139 foundations, 1,412 associations, 15 universities and 19 unions were closed and their assets confiscated. Again, a total of 942 companies with a total market value of approximately 60 billion TL and employing at least 45 thousand people were transferred to the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) (Altıok 2018).

During the state of emergency, Turkey suffered a great setback in terms of decentralization and power-sharing. Trustees were appointed to almost all municipalities where the DBP-HDP was in power. In a first step, the elected mayors were dismissed from office and in most cases arrested. Then, the central government appointed officials to replace them, mostly the governors and district governors of the respective provinces and districts. Thus, municipal councils were disabled and municipalities began to be run exclusively by appointed bureaucrats. In other words, provincial and district municipalities were transformed into departments affiliated to governorships and district governorships.

The Decree-Law No. 674, issued on September 1, 2016, brought an amendment to the Municipal Law No. 5393, paving the way for the mayor and council members to be dismissed and replaced by trustees by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. As a result of this new legal regulation, it has become a sufficient condition for mayors or council members to be dismissed from their offices if they have an investigation pending against them on account of "aiding and abetting terrorism or terrorist organizations." The arrangement further stipulates that the municipal councils in the municipalities where trustees have been appointed will only convene if called in by the mayor, thus dissolving these municipal councils (Resmî Gazete 2016).

Just as the central government in Spain had suspended the autonomy rights in Catalonia, discharged the regional government, and dissolved the regional parliament, the AKP government in Turkey appointed trustees to almost all municipalities under the rule of the DBP-HDP immediately after the mentioned decree-law had been issued. Since September 11, 2016, elected mayors have been dismissed in 95 of the 102 municipalities ruled by the DBP-HDP. These included the Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van metropolitan municipalities, as well as 7

provinces, 63 districts and 22 town municipalities. In this period, nearly 300 mukhtars were dismissed with trustees appointed in their place. 93 co-mayors, including the co-mayors of the Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van metropolitan municipalities, and hundreds of municipal councilors were arrested in the same period (Halkların Demokratik Partisi 2019, 20). 18 deputies, including HDP Co-Chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, have been arrested since the trustees were appointed. Seven of these deputies and many of the mayors, including Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality Co-Mayor Gültan Kışanak, are still in prison.

The suspension of autonomy rights in Catalonia was temporary. New elections were scheduled on the day the regional government was dismissed and the parliament dissolved, and fresh elections were held within two months. The newly elected Catalanian Parliament – in which, again, pro-independence parties constituted the majority – and the Catalanian Government took office. In Turkey, by contrast, there were no new elections after the appointment of the trustees and the appointed officials continued to run the municipalities until the regular election date. In the elections held on March 31, 2019, after about 30 months of trustee rule, the HDP candidates won the municipal elections in Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van as well as in 5 provinces, 45 districts and 12 towns. However, trustees began to be appointed to municipalities once again starting from August 19, 2019. Among the 65 municipalities under HDP's rule, trustees were appointed in a total of 48 municipalities, including 3 metropolitan municipalities, 5 provincial center municipalities, 32 district municipalities and 8 town municipalities. In addition, 38 co-mayors were arrested. 17 of them are still detained (Halkların Demokratik Partisi 2020a, 7; 2020b, 7).

The practice of appointing trustees did not draw significant criticism in Turkey. The AKP government was able to take advantage of the atmosphere created by the urban clashes and the opportunities created by the state of emergency to continue to pursue this policy without encountering serious resistance. It should be noted, however, that the provincial and district municipalities affected by the clashes were not the only places where trustees have been appointed. In the second cycle of this policy after the March 31, 2019 elections, though rather faint and limited, the opposition began to raise objections. These objections were fueled by the fact that investigations had already been launched prior to the elections and that mayors were dismissed four months after the elections, essentially without having really exercised their leadership in office (Deutsche Welle 2019). However, remaining limited to symbolic visits and statements, these objections were far from exerting any notable pressure on the AKP.

If the four-month period between March and August is set aside for a second, the trustee regime, which abolishes the right to active and passive suffrage, has continued since September 2016. While the electorate in the Kurdish regions is generally divided between the HDP and the

AKP, almost all of the local administrations are presently ruled by elected and/or appointed AKP members. Thus, it should be noted that the region has been governed by a single-party or party-state rule for a period of more than four years now.

Similar to the dismissal of the regional government and the dissolution of the regional parliament in Catalonia, the trustee policy did not trigger serious reaction in the international arena. Actors such as the EU and the USA merely expressed their “concern” in this respect. Maja Kocijancic, spokesperson of the EU High Representative for Foreign Policy and Security, commented that the dismissal of the mayors “is of serious concern as it puts the respect of the democratic outcomes of the March 31 elections into question” (Deutsche Welle 2019). On the other hand, responding to a question asked on the subject at the Daily press briefing, US Department of State Spokesperson Morgan Ortagus stated that “it is always concerning when you see the removal of elected officials and then their replacement by unelected officials” (Sputnik Turkey 2019).

The “Turkish-Style” Presidential System and the Return to Authoritarianism

Over time, the policy of appointing trustees has expanded across Turkey as a new governmentality, a new understanding of politics and a new governmental technique. In fact, as the discussions in the previous chapters have shown, there is a historical relationship between the state's policies and practices towards the Kurdish issue and the Kurdish space on the one and the formation of Turkey's political regime on the other hand. When looking at the policies implemented in the Kurdish region, it can be argued that the latter has served as a kind of preliminary testing ground or laboratory for the construction of the political regime in Turkey. There is a direct relationship between the General Inspectorates, the institutional arrangement by means of which the Kurdish region was governed between 1927-1952, which represented a kind of martial law, and the construction and consolidation of the single-party regime in Turkey. Just as the General Inspectorates, which were first introduced in the Kurdish region but later also applied in the Thrace and Çukurova regions, the trustee policies too had its repercussions and ramifications across Turkey.

Following the transition to the presidential system *alla Turca*, officially called “Presidential Government System,” the scale of the policies and practices concerning the appointment of trustees have, in a sense, expanded. On the one hand, the AKP government

re-established the power of the central administration during the state of emergency, leading to a kind of recentralization. On the other hand, as the executive gained strength in the center, this caused a spillover from Ankara to the local level where the center increased its capacities in terms of administrative pluralism. In other words, a combined process of recentralization and deconcentration has taken place in Turkey during the state of emergency. The central government's capacity to intervene in the political and social spheres both expanded and increased throughout the country, from the center to the local level. The legal regulation paving the way for the appointment of trustees to non-governmental organizations and the discussions about the "trustee rector," sparked by the appointment of a rector to Boğaziçi University from outside, should be noted in this respect.

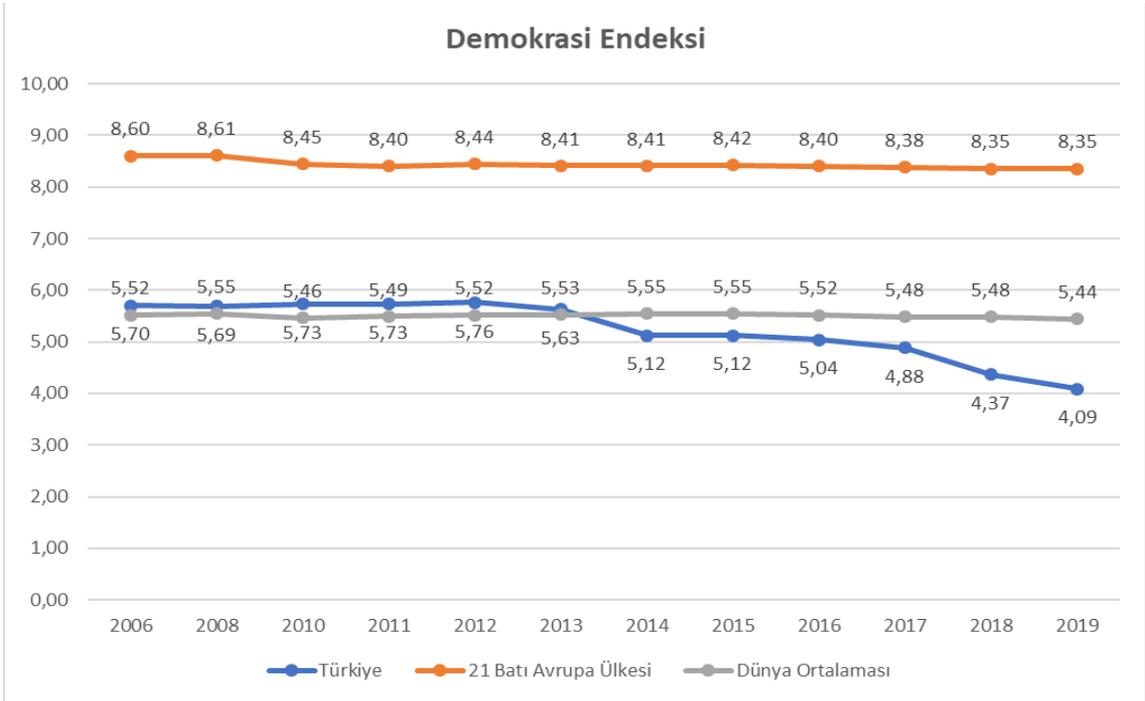
Together, with the presidential system *alla Turca* a new governmentality has emerged: everything is determined by the central government, the Assembly is disabled, channels for participation for the social opposition are blocked, the appointed rather than the elected are in command, and accountability mechanisms as well as checks and balances have been abolished. This governmentality has affected many areas. Its impact has undoubtedly been most visible during the Covid-19 pandemic. Civil society and the opposition have largely been sidelined in the management of the pandemic at both the central and local levels. The amount of data shared with the public regarding the pandemic was very limited. More importantly, while appointing trustees to the metropolitan municipalities of Diyarbakir, Mardin and Van, the central government directly intervened in the pandemic-related aid collection and distribution activities of municipalities in metropolitan cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Antalya and centralized all aid activities in order to take direct control. During the pandemic, this new centralized management system, which has spread and extended to the local level, was the reason that the fundraising accounts of Istanbul and Ankara metropolitan municipalities were frozen (Gazete Duvar 2020), Mersin Metropolitan Municipality's free bread distribution service was interrupted (Sözcü 2020), and the activities of Eskişehir Metropolitan Municipality's 25-year-old food bank were suspended (Evrensel 2020).

Despite the notable progress towards democratization in the 2000s, which was aided by the reforms carried out in the EU accession process, the authoritarian tendencies that have become visible in recent years increased dramatically due to the State of Emergency. In the Democracy Index prepared by The Economist Intelligence Unit, Turkey ranked 110th among 167 countries with a score of 4.09 on a scale of 1-10 in 2019 and was classified as a "hybrid regime" between authoritarianism and flawed democracy, but mostly hovering on the edge of authoritarianism.³⁷

³⁷ The Democracy Index ranks states on a scale of 1-10, classifying them as "authoritarian" for a score of up to 4 points, as "hybrid regimes" for

Turkey was developing from a hybrid regime towards democracy in the 2000s. It reached its highest democratic standards in 2012, with a score of 5.76, and therefore was classified as a “hybrid regime,” but close to a flawed democracy. The decline in democratic standards that started in 2013 became especially dramatic in 2014 and Turkey declined to 5.04 points in 2016. The second major regression began in 2016 and Turkey came close to countries in the authoritarian regime category with a score of 4.88 in 2017, 4.37 in 2018, and 4.09 in 2019 (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2020, 18).

Figure 2. Turkey’s comparative democracy index, 2006-2019



Source: This chart was prepared using the 2020 data of the The Economist Intelligence Unit (2020).

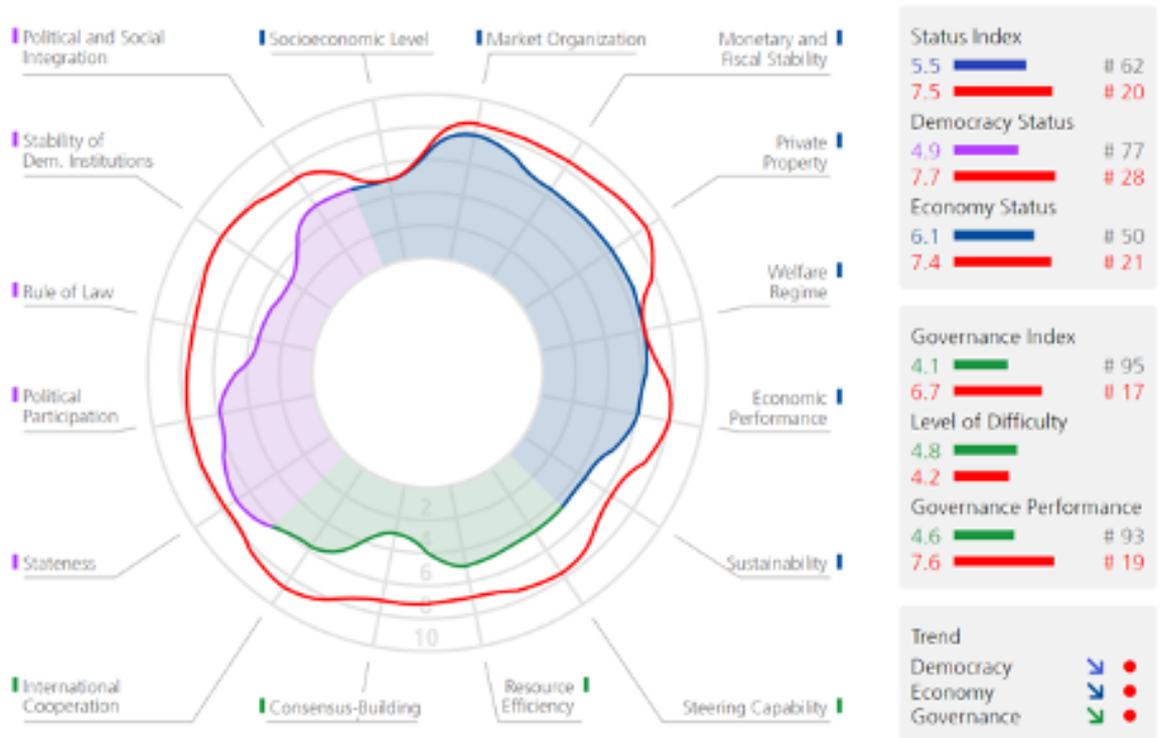
When considering Turkey’s situation in terms of the parameters used in the democracy index, it is evident that the country’s score was 3.08 in “electoral process and pluralism,” 5.00 in the “functioning of the government,” 5.00 in “political participation,” and 2.35 in “civil liberties” in 2020 (The Economist Intelligence Unit 2020, 12). As show in Figure 2, Turkey represents a typical hybrid regime in terms of government functionality, political participation and political culture but displays the features of an authoritarian regime

scores between 4.0-6.0, as “flawed democracies” for scores between 6.0-8.0 and as “full democracies” for scores between 8.0-10.0.

especially with respect to the “election process and pluralism” and “civil rights” items.

The Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), another important study monitoring the democratic transformation in countries, confirms this dramatic regression that has occurred in Turkey in recent years. According to the BTI, Turkey’s democracy level was 7.05 on a 1-10 scale between 2006-2008 and peaked at 7.65 between 2010-2012. This value decreased to 7.55 in 2014 and 7.25 in 2016. Despite this decline, Turkey continued to rank among the countries in the “defective democracy” category in the 2016 index. In 2018, Turkey’s democracy status dropped dramatically to 5.55 and it was listed as a “highly flawed democracies.” This decline continued in 2019 and 2020. As of 2020, Turkey ranks 77th among 137 countries with 4.92 points and is classified among the countries in the “moderate autocracy” category. The political, economic and governmental regression in Turkey is strikingly displayed in Figure 3 (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020).

Figure 3. Turkey’s political, economic and governance transformation, 2012-2020 comparison



Source: BertelsmannStiftung, “Transformation Atlas,” https://atlas.bti-project.org/1*2020*CV:CTC:SELTUR*CAT*TUR*REG:T AB, accessed 09.01.2021.

Note: The inner circle reflects the data of 2020. Purple represents the “political transformation,” blue the “economic transformation,” and green the “governance transformation.” In contrast, the red-colored outer circle represents the situation in 2012, when Turkey’s democratic standards were at their highest.

The political transformation index in the BTI is calculated according to five parameters: (1) political and social integration, (2) stability of democratic institutions, (3) rule of law, (4) political participation and (5) stateness. A comparison between the most current 2020 data and the highest status of democracy in 2012, reveals a striking decline in all five areas. The greatest setbacks, however, have occurred in the stability of democratic institutions and the rule of law. According to the 2020 data, Turkey scored 7.0 in the field of stateness, 5.8 in the field of political participation, 3.5 in the rule of law, 3.0 in the stability of democratic institutions, and 5.3 in the field of political and social integration. In other words, Turkey displays the characteristics of countries with defective democracies in the field of stateness, while ranking among highly defective democracies in the field of political participation and political and social integration. The country is a moderate autocracy when it comes to the rule of law and stability of democratic institutions (BertelsmannStiftung 2020).

Geopolitical Turning Points: Rojava and the Iraqi Kurdistan Region

While authoritarian tendencies gained strength in Turkey following the urban clashes after the failed Solution Process and the state of emergency subsequent to the coup attempt, there were also some significant changes in the geopolitical dynamics of the Kurdish issue. The military and socio-political mobilization of the Kurds in Iraq and Syria and their respective impact on the regional and international scale have become the main dynamics determining the post-Solution Process period in Turkey's Kurdish issue. During this period, the changes in the geopolitical equation of the Kurdish issue were instrumentalized by the AKP and its coalition partners and used as a resource in the construction of their authoritarian regime.

Rojava: a new space of conflict

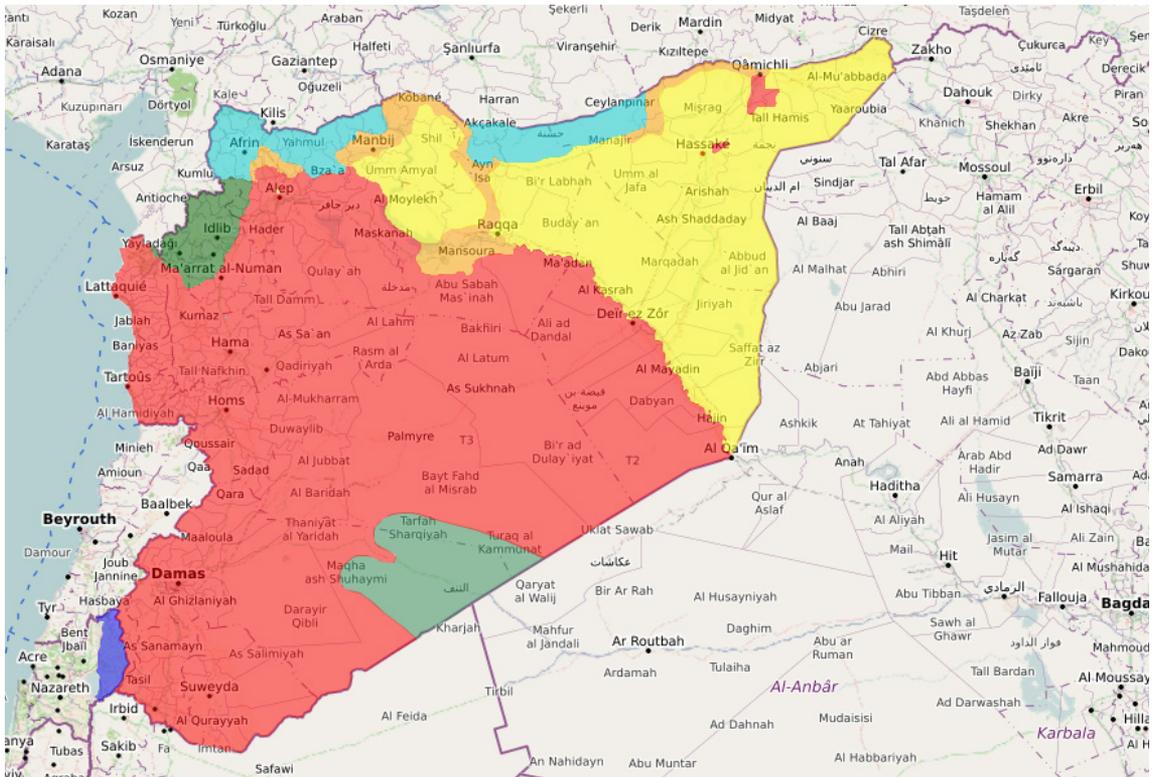
Treated as an item of concern in the Solution Process, Rojava became the main site of Turkey's Kurdish conflict during the state of emergency period. On the one hand, the AKP administration utilized its trustee policy and practices to establish direct central rule and control over all municipalities under HDP administration via the governorships and district governorships. On the other hand, it pulled out all the stops to prevent the

emergence of an autonomous or federated territorial Kurdish sovereignty in the Rojava region.

Since August 2016, Turkey has conducted three militarily interventions in the Rojava region and has established itself in Syrian territory together with the FSA (later restructured as the Syrian National Army [SNA]), which is mostly made up of jihadist groups. Deploying its military forces in the Jarabulus and Al-Bab regions between August 2016 and February 2017, Turkey has created a buffer zone between Efrîn, one of the three main centers of Rojava located west of the Euphrates, and Kobanî and Cizîre, which are located east of the Euphrates, and has prevented attempts to achieve geographical unity in Rojava. After clashes between January and March 2018 that resulted in the death of thousands of people and the displacement of more than a hundred thousand people, Turkey entered the Efrîn region. Then, on October 9-23, 2019, Turkey established its presence in the cities of Grê Spî (Tel Abyad) and Serêkaniyê (Ras Al-Ayn) and in the region between the two cities, which is located between Kobanî and Qamishlo (Map 2).

While Turkey's military interventions continued, attempts went on in the Rojava region to establish administrative and political rule in addition to military rule. In Rojava, which consists of three cantons, the "Democratic Federation of Northern Syria" was declared on March 17, 2016 and a constitution was prepared by the constituent assembly. Elections for communal co-mayors were held on September 22, 2017, and elections for town, district and canton councilors took place on December 1, 2017 in the three regions of Cizîre, Euphrates and Efrîn. With the SDF taking control of the predominantly Arab regions of Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor between 2017 and 2018, the area under the control of the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria expanded significantly to the south. As a result of this enlargement, the name of the region was changed to "Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria" by the Syrian Democratic Council on September 6, 2018.

Map 2. The latest situation in the Syrian civil war (2021)



Source: Syrian Civil War Map - Live Map of the Syrian Civil War, accessed 11.01.2021.

Note: The red areas are under the control of the Syrian government, while the yellow areas are under the control of the Kurdish-led Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. The brown regions are under the joint control of the Syrian government and the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. The blue areas are under the command of Turkey and the jihadist forces it supports. The green area is ruled by Tahrir al-Sham, the National Liberation Front and different jihadist groups supported by Turkey. In the light green area, US-backed groups are in command.

The Iraqi Kurdistan Region and its independence referendum

In addition to the developments in Rojava, the independence referendum in the KRI on September 25, 2017 was another important geopolitical development that had an impact on Turkey with respect to political power-sharing in the context of the Kurdish issue. At a time when even the municipal governments, which already enjoyed limited powers and were held under administrative, political and financial tutelage, were abolished in Turkey as a result of the policy and practice of appointing of trustees, an independence referendum took place in the KRI. 72% of the approximately 4.6 million

voters participated in the referendum in Kurdistan, 92.73% of them voting “Yes” for the independence of Kurdistan (Rudaw 2017).

The Kurdistan Independence Referendum, which took place around the same time as the Catalanian Independence Referendum, did not receive much support in the international arena. In fact, Israel was the only country to support the referendum. While international powers such as the USA, Russia and the EU wanted the referendum to be postponed or cancelled, the UN announced that it would not play any part in the referendum. Following a request of the Iraqi central government, Iran closed its border gates, banned all entries and exits, and closed its airspace to planes departing from the KRI. It also conducted joint military exercises with the Iraqi army at the border (Çiçek 2015, 276–81; BBC News Türkçe 2017a).

Like Iran, AKP-ruled Turkey, having mobilized all its resources to prevent the formation of an autonomous or federated region in Rojava, strongly opposed the Kurdistan Independence Referendum. Considering the independence referendum as a “national security issue” (Anadolu Ajansı 2017), Turkey tried to stop the referendum with political, economic and military threats. On September 18, one week before the referendum, the Turkish Armed Forces held a joint exercise with the Iraqi military forces at the border. Two days later, warplanes bombed PKK camps in Zab, Avaşin-Basyan, Metina and Garê in the KRI. Two days before the referendum, a motion prolonging the mandate to send troops to Syria and Iraq for one year was accepted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (Euronews Türkçe 2017). Moreover, President Erdoğan announced that they unilaterally closed the Habur border gate between Turkey and the KRI on the day of the referendum (Kekilli 2017). This decision was followed by Turkey closing its airspace to aircraft departing from the KRI (Dünya 2017). In this period, there was speculation about a joint military intervention in the KRI by Turkey, Iraq and Iran, implementing economic sanctions such as a complete closure of the Habur border gate, a suspension of delivery in the Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline and other energy projects, as well as the restriction of Turkey’s investments and trade in the region (Özçelik 2017).

While the establishment and development of the KRI after 2003 had played a decisive role in the formation of the Kurdish issue in Turkey and served as an important resource, the PKK/KCK and PYD did not support the independence referendum for several alleged reasons. This included the claim that the timing was inappropriate, that a national alliance had not been achieved, and that the era of the nation-state was over. By contrast, the HDP declared its support, declaring, “proceeding from the principle

of peoples' self-determination, we will show all kinds of support and solidarity to the peoples." But while it had mobilized its institutional and human resources for Rojava, the HDP did not play an active part in the independence referendum of the KRI. Meanwhile, other Kurdish parties including the HÜDAPAR supported the independence referendum (Aydın 2017).

Despite the military, political and economic threats from the Iraqi central government to Turkey and Iran, in addition to the calls by global powers (such as the USA, the EU and Russia) for adjournment or cancellation, the Kurdistan Independence Referendum eventually took place. On October 16, 2017, about three weeks after the referendum, the Iraqi army and Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization) forces entered Kirkuk. Within a few days, the peshmerga, the KRI's military forces, withdrew from all disputed areas without any notable resistance. As a result, the KRI government lost control of approximately 40% of the lands previously under its rule (Çiçek 2018, 276–81). The economic and political crises that emerged between the Iraqi central government and the KRI during the referendum period have not been completely overcome until the present.

The geopolitics of Kurdistan and Turkey's growing concern for survival

The radical changes in the geopolitics of Kurdistan have increased Turkey's concerns for survival (Altun 2017; Özçelik 2017; Kekilli 2017). While Turkey has not been able to demonstrate the political skill to solve its own Kurdish issue and continues to see the latter as a "terror and security issue" threatening its national security, two Kurdistans have been established in its south in the last 20 years. One of them is striving to become a federated state and gain de facto independence, while the other is autonomous/federated and seeking to achieve official autonomy/federation. To put it more clearly, two "Arab models" for the solution of the Kurdish issue have evolved and continue evolving in the south of Turkey in Iraq and Syria.

Meanwhile, Turkey's Kurdish issue is growing by the day. Between 1991-2014, mainstream Kurdish parties, today represented by the HDP, were active in eight provinces on average and reached a maximum of 6.5% of the votes in elections. With the 2013-2015 Solution Process, the HDP grew rapidly and was able to receive as much as 11-13% of the votes. Moreover, the political legacy represented by the HDP has increased its reach from 8 to 20 provinces. In the last elections, the HDP received 50% or more of the votes in 11 provinces, including metropolitan cities such as Diyarbakır,

Van and Mardin. In 11 metropolises, including provinces such as Istanbul, Izmir, Antalya, Mersin and Adana, the support it received from voters (5-17%) was big enough to affect the election results (Çiçek 2017).

Regarding Turkey's opposition to developments in Rojava, it should be noted that the country showed a similar reaction when the KRI was established in 2003. However, especially from 2007 onwards, its relations with the KRI became more amicable and good political and economic relations with the region developed (Öğür, Baykal and Balcı 2014, 43–45; Özdemirkıran 2013). When the Solution Process ended, Turkey began to consider the Kurds' pursuit of establishing and expanding their territorial sovereignty in both Rojava and the KRI as a matter of survival.

At least five reasons can be highlighted as to why the changes in the geopolitics of the Kurdish issue were treated as a matter of survival threatening “national security” in Turkey. First, the establishment of another Kurdish territorial sovereignty in the Rojava region that follows the precedent of the KRI serves as a new normative resource for Kurds both in Turkey and around the world. The administrative and political models developed in Syria and Iraq constitute “points of reference point” for the Kurds of Turkey as well. Thus, Turkish politics will have a difficult time trying to solve and manage the issue solely by granting individual cultural rights and limited administrative decentralization.

Second, Rojava and the KRI do not simply function as a normative resource. They are also resources for mobilization at the institutional and organizational level. For example, the HDP has been able to maintain its position at around 11-12% of the votes (Cumhuriyet 2020) despite the fact that Turkey has chosen to manage its own Kurdish issue by means of violence after the Solution Process and practically effectuated a shutdown of the party through heavy judicial and police violence. In part, this is certainly due to the reactions this violence has provoked, but on the other hand, it can also be attributed to the motivating impact of the achievements made by the Kurds in Rojava and the KRI. Likewise, the mobilization of Kurds all over the world, especially in European countries and the USA, played an important part in increasing the visibility of the Kurdish issue in the international arena. It should also be noted that Rojava and the KRI have become new havens for dissident Kurds in Turkey. In the past, Kurdish politicians and activists mostly turned to Europe as a result of police and judicial violence. Now they are settling not only in Europe but also in Rojava and the KRI.

Third, Turkey's Kurdish issue and the Rojava issue have become fused to a significant degree. Rojava was part of the agenda in the Solution Process before it became the main venue for the clashes between Turkey and the PKK/KCK following the breakdown of the process. As underlined in the previous sections, when compared to the KRI, Rojava's impact regarding Turkey's Kurdish issue and the mobilization of Turkey's Kurds was much more drastic. The political debates in Turkey around the Kobani protests are enough to confirm the observation that the two have become fused.

Fourth, in the light of developments in Rojava and the independence referendum in Kurdistan, the international visibility of the Kurdish/Kurdistan issue has risen far beyond earlier levels. In particular, Turkey's military interventions in Rojava drew international attention not only to the Syrian Kurds but, in fact, to all Kurds. Even the increasing number of news in international media in recent years about topics related to Turkey's Kurdish issue singlehandedly testifies to this growing interest.

Finally, imperial powers such as the USA and Russia became directly involved in the problem. The US had already supported the establishment of the KRI in 2003 and has maintained relations with the Kurds for nearly two decades. However, as a result of the Syrian civil war, the internationalization of the Kurdish issue has taken on a different dimension. Taken together, the facts that both the USA and Russia have their forces and bases in the northern and eastern regions of Syria, that Russia mediated between the Autonomous Administration and the Assad regime, and that the USA has been making efforts to bring together the Kurdish parties in Rojava and create a common political leadership throughout 2020, demonstrate the current degree of internationalization of the Kurdish issue.

Considering the above issues, it can be said that the developments in Rojava and the KRI have fostered authoritarianization in Turkey, which has not been able to resolve its own Kurdish issue by political means. Moreover, it can be argued that the increasing concern for survival reduces the chance of a shift to alternative models of political power-sharing that are conducive to a solution of the Kurdish issue. On the other hand, the "Arab models" that are developing in the south of Turkey as novel solutions to the Kurdish/Kurdistan issue – as said before, a cross-border and regional problem – could force Turkey to develop a new reform within the framework of administrative and political decentralization and a "Turkish model" for the solution of the Kurdish issue. The high political, economic and diplomatic costs it currently causes at home and abroad show that Turkey's policy is not sustainable. More importantly, although

it might seem that Turkish politics and the Turkish state have “gained” from this current “survival”-oriented policies in the short term, these policies strengthen the likelihood that the Kurdish issue will come with much heavier “costs” for Turkey in the long term. When the current situation is compared with the 1999-2004 period, which saw a withdrawal of the demands for political power-sharing in the Kurdish issue, it becomes evident that the “political costs” of the issue are increasing for Turkey with each passing day. The internationalization of the Kurdish issue and the involvement of imperial powers such as the USA and Russia are the most important indicators of this growing possibility. Last but not least, the history of the Kurdish issue shows that the policy of “terrorism and security” and the violent tools of enforcing this policy serve no purpose other than to defer the solution of the issue and increase the losses it causes. The experiences of the Iraqi and Syrian Kurds confirm that this dysfunctional policy has no future.

In this and the previous two chapters, the dynamics of political power-sharing and decentralization from the last period of the Ottoman Empire to the present have been analyzed from a historical and comparative perspective. Taking into account the obstacles, opportunities, resources and chances that emerged during this historical process, the next chapter puts forward suggestions for short-term political peace and a permanent and stable solution in the medium and long term.

POWER-SHARING AND

DECENTRALIZATION:

OBSTACLES, OPPORTUNITIES

AND ALTERNATIVES

Considering the historical process from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic and from the 1921 Constitution to the present, what are the alternatives for Turkey in terms of political power sharing and decentralization? Considering different practices in different times and places, what is the ideal form of power sharing and the best decentralized solution for the resolution of an identity-based territorial conflict such as the Kurdish issue? And, given the current circumstances, what could be a realistic scenario with respect to the resolution of the Kurdish issue and political peace?

This chapter seeks to answer the above questions, while taking into account the discursive contexts regarding political power-sharing and decentralization and the historical background of the Kurdish issue. In this context, the main obstacles in the way of any possible developments towards political power sharing will be discussed. In addition, the opportunities and chances that could lead to such a development are evaluated. Finally, taking into account the existing obstacles and opportunities, a potential model for power-sharing and decentralization that can provide a permanent solution to the Kurdish issue in Turkey is presented.

The main thesis is the following: in the short and medium term, an expanded form of administrative decentralization is the more likely scenario in Turkey. Such a solution could end the Kurdish conflict and convince the PKK/KCK to disarm. However, regional administrative and political decentralization is required for an inclusive and permanent solution.

Obstacles

As discussed in the previous sections, it can be said that there are five main obstacles to political power sharing and decentralization in Turkey. These obstacles are the following: the historically grown security concerns and discourse of survival, the ultra-centralist tradition of the state and politics, regional inequalities and the centralization/clustering of economic resources, the shadow cast upon decentralization by the Kurdish issue, and the limitations of Turkish politics regarding the Kurdish issue and the instrumentalization of the Kurdish issue.

The historically grown security concerns and discourse of survival

The biggest obstacle to political power sharing and decentralization undoubtedly is the historical security concerns and concern for survival. The losses of territory incurred in

the last period of the Ottoman Empire are at the base of this concern. This period constituted a turning point in Turkish politics and the Turkish state tradition and has served as a decisive point of reference in the formation of the state and politics throughout the Republican period.

The opposition and socio-political mobilization of the Kurds, which started before the foundation of the Republic and basically continued throughout the 20th century (excluding relative political silence in the 1940-60s), has maintained this concern for survival and security that dominates Turkish politics and the Turkish state. The dimensions and outcomes of the conflict that has been going on since 1984 further increased this concern.

It can be said that the concern for survival in Turkish politics and the Turkish state increased in light of the dramatic changes that occurred in the geopolitical equation of the Kurdish/Kurdistan issue in the 2000s. The establishment of a federated Kurdish state and the search for independence in Iraq, as well as the emergence of an autonomous/federated region in the Rojava region of Syria, the attempts to officialize this structure have greatly increased the historically grown concern for security and survival. The remarkable growth of mainstream Kurdish politics in Turkey in recent years, its strong socio-political mobilization across a region of about 20 provinces, and the fact that it can rely on a base large enough to shape policy-making processes in the metropolises have considerably increased this concern for survival in the last five years.

Finally, it is necessary to talk about population and geography. In addition to all the dynamics above, the size of the Kurdish population in Turkey and the fact that the Kurds still constitute the majority in their historical homelands, despite strong migration to the metropolises, fuel the concern for survival. Moreover, the geographical region where the Kurdish population is concentrated occupies an important position in Turkey's geography. From the point of view of Turkey, this is further aggravated by the fact that it is again Kurds who are living in the regions on the other side of Turkey's borders with Iraq, Syria and Iran. In summary, demographic and geographical dynamics that the state can almost impossibly steer by means of political engineering constantly stoke up the historically grown concerns for survival of Turkish politics and the Turkish state.

The ultra-centralist tradition of state and politics

Secondly, it is necessary to underline the ultra-centralist tradition of state and politics in Turkey. If we exclude the decentralization debates at the beginning of the twentieth century and in the 1921 Constitution, which was prepared and enacted under war conditions, there is an ultra-centralist state tradition that originated in the Ottoman period in the early years of the 19th century and continued after the foundation of the Republic, lasting well into the 2000s. Although the strengthening of local governments was part of the agenda regarding a modernization and rationalization of the public administration in the multi-party years, these discussions focused on the strengthening of the central government's field organizations within the framework of deconcentration rather than on decentralization in the proper sense.

Although the EU reforms in the 2000s included some reforms intended to strengthen local governments, this mainly concerned a transfer of powers from the central government to the special provincial administrations, which were under the aegis of the governorships, within the framework of deconcentration. In this period, the administrative powers of municipalities were partially expanded. In addition, the legal reforms included provisions regarding the administrative and financial autonomy of local governments. However, the ambit of local governments has been considerably restricted following the establishment of new ministries and the introduction of new regulations at the ministerial level after 2010. In summary, the dominant approach in this period was not decentralization, but deconcentration in the sense of a strengthening and expansion of the center's administrative capacities at the local level.

In line with the centralist state tradition, there is also an ultra-centralist tradition of politics in Turkey. Almost all of the political parties, including the mainstream Kurdish parties demanding decentralization, are institutions and domains that reproduce this ultra-centralist tradition of government. In this sense, the fact that the parties, which play a vital role in the decentralist transformation of the state, have a centralist tradition themselves, constitutes an obstacle that cannot be ignored.

Finally, the transition to the Turkish-style presidential system reinforced the centralist tendencies that had already been dominating state and politics.

Regional inequalities and the centralization/clustering of economic resources

The problems of chronic regional inequalities and the clustering of economic resources in a handful of centers pose a significant obstacle to political power sharing and decentralization in Turkey. For one of the main functions of politics is the management and allocation of material and symbolic resources. In this sense, there is a direct relationship between political power and the centralization and unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources.

Since the sharing of political power and decentralization in Turkey will imply the distribution of economic resources in a greater number of centers and among a greater number of actors, it is obvious that the actors and structures who are shaped by this centralist tradition of resource management will not favor such a transformation. Given that the history of these issues is at least as old as the Republic itself, it will moreover not be easy to resolve the regional inequalities and the concentration of resources in the western regions in metropolitan centers like Istanbul, Izmir, Kocaeli and Bursa. Reversing such a historical trend and implementing a new policy that ensures a balanced spatial distribution of resources will involve considerable challenges.

The shadow cast upon decentralization by the Kurdish issue

Fourth, it is necessary to underline the shadow cast upon political power sharing and decentralization by the Kurdish issue in Turkey. Political power-sharing and decentralization facilitate the resolution of identity-based territorial conflicts but cannot be reduced to this issue alone. The advancement of democracy, the elimination of regional inequalities and balanced spatial development, and the rationalization and modernization of the public administration are the three main issues with which political power sharing and decentralization are related.

Political power sharing and decentralization will play an important role in overcoming the problems in these three areas in Turkey. However, Turkey's century-old Kurdish issue renders these three issues invisible in discussions on political power-sharing and decentralization, preventing them from being effectively addressed and discussed. Moreover, in the discussions on the subject, the issue is treated as a set of problems limited to the Kurdish region and the Kurds.

The instrumentalization of the Kurdish issue in the construction of an authoritarian regime

Finally, it is necessary to evaluate the historical and current limitations as well as the instrumentalizing approach of mainstream Turkish politics regarding the Kurdish issue. The most important point to be underlined in this regard is this: the Kurdish issue plays a critical role in the formation of the political regime in Turkey. It has been utilized as a functional and substantial resource in the construction, conservation and consolidation of authoritarianism from the first years of the Republic to the present day. Mainstream Turkish politics have instrumentalized the Kurdish issue while constructing this authoritarian regime. In Turkey, the Kurdish space has been the main testing ground where state violence and the institutional tradition it rests upon have been produced and put into practice. However, the sphere of action of the authoritarian regime's elements did not remain confined to the Kurdish region, but spilled over and spread to the whole of Turkey. While we have indeed witnessed this pattern throughout the history of the Republic, the most recent example undoubtedly is the policy and practice of appointing trustees. The appointment of trustees to the municipalities where mainstream Kurdish politics was in power formed the basis for the central government's intervention in the work of the metropolitan municipalities in cities such as Istanbul, Ankara, Mersin and Eskişehir, as seen during the Covid-19 pandemic. Likewise, the "trustee rector" controversy sparked by the appointment of a rector to Boğaziçi University from outside and the regulation paving the way for the appointment of trustees to non-governmental organizations in 2020 demonstrate that the state's mode of governing in the Kurdish space shapes its general mode of governing.

It can be said that the Kurdish issue has been instrumentalized not only in the political-administrative sphere but also in the socio-economic sphere. Based on the principle of multi-layered unequal development, the capitalist economy constantly produces inequality between countries, between regions within countries, between cities within regions, and between districts and neighborhoods within cities. In general, these inequalities develop through the transfer of resources from underdeveloped to developed regions. Ethnic/national and religious/sectarian identities and gender inequalities play a functional role in this unequal development and in most cases these multiple inequalities coincide. To put it more clearly, ethnic/national, religious/sectarian and gender-based differences function as a resource in the construction of class relations in the capitalist economy. A similar observation can be made when examining Turkey's socio-economic indicators in the context of the Kurdish issue. In this sense,

the legacy of this process of class formation based on ethnic/national identities and the actors and structures that have emerged in this historical process pose a considerable obstacle to a political, institutional and social transformation in the opposite direction.

The limits of mainstream Turkish politics with respect to the Kurdish issue make it difficult to solve the problem based on political power-sharing and decentralization. In this regard, there are tough limits that need to be overcome in at least three areas. The first of these is the ideational and intellectual limits. There is only a very limited ideational and intellectual repertoire with respect to the scope, emergence, formation and solution of ethnic/national issues that could help to overcome the issue. The imagination of mainstream Turkish politics regarding the solution of ethnic/national and religious/sectarian identity issues in general, and the Kurdish issue in particular is confined to a rather narrow horizon. Identity-based problems and decentralization issues have largely been resolved, especially in liberal and social democracies like the European countries. A considerable ideational and intellectual repertoire has accrued concerning this topic. However, neither the secular right nor the Islamic conservative right in Turkey have a political tradition that would come with the necessary intellectual and ideological repertoire and formation to be able to offer solutions to ethnic/national issues such as the Kurdish issue.

In connection with these ideational and intellectual limitations, there are also political boundaries to mainstream Turkish politics which are not easy to overcome. There have not been too many political debates and solution proposals with respect to political power sharing and decentralization in Turkey. Until today, discussions on this topic have not gone beyond the modernization and rationalization of the public administration. Likewise, there has not yet been any party to present and discuss proposals for a political solution that establish a relationship between political power-sharing on the one and democratization, socio-economic development, balanced spatial development and resource allocation, and identity-based conflicts on the other hand. Except for the federation debates in the 1990s and the scant discussions on a state system after 2010, there is a yawning gap in this field. Precisely because of this gap, the public administration reform initiatives in the 2004-2007 period were considered divisive by the secular right, while presented as a revolution by the Islamic conservative right, which owned the project, even though these initiatives amounted to nothing more than deconcentration and limited expansion of the administrative powers of the municipalities.

Alongside these limitations in the ideational and intellectual as well as in the political spheres, it is necessary to underline the limits at the level of social mobilization. As much as political parties and movements, the political and social mobilization of their social bases is a complicating factor with respect to advancing political power-sharing and decentralization for a solution of the Kurdish issue. Among the bases of almost all parties, a political culture excluding pluralist identity policies and political power-sharing has emerged as a result of long years of political mobilization. Therefore, it can be said that, as of yet, not only in the ideational/intellectual and political spheres but also in the social sphere there is a lack of capability to “get the gist” of the century-old Kurdish issue and to develop a decentralist solution that would allow for political power-sharing.

Politics can lead attempts to overcome the limitations regarding the Kurdish issue. However, mainstream Turkish politics does not focus on finding solutions but in fact instrumentalizes the Kurdish issue. This approach sometimes takes the shape of discourses on peace and dialogue intended to moderate the Kurdish conflict, while unfolding in the form of state violence and discourses of “terror and security” at other times. The main focus of both policies is not solving the issue but preserving or re-establishing the power relations in Ankara. This instrumental reasoning is typically exemplified by the cyclical dialogue and resolution processes and returns to violence in the period after 1999.

The most important point to highlight at this stage is that this approach dominates mainstream Turkish politics in its entirety. This is confirmed by the fact that even today, none of the parties in the mainstream of Turkish politics has a model to offer for the solution of the Kurdish issue, although the latter has by now persisted for almost two centuries and caused great human and financial losses. There is not a single mainstream Turkish party proposing a systematic solution to the main parameters of the Kurdish issue, most notably including the issue of linguistic and cultural rights such as mother tongue education and official language regulations, administrative-political arrangements such as the strengthening of local governments and decentralization, and the issue of violence, which spans several dimensions such as disarmament, reorganization of the army and police, forced displacement, enforced disappearances, confronting the past and revealing the truth.

Opportunities, Resources and Chances

The obstacles listed above show that a decentralist political and administrative arrangement that ensures political power-sharing in Turkey will be very difficult to introduce. On the other hand, there are opportunities, resources and chances that will make it possible to overcome these challenges. In view of the discussions in the previous chapters, at least eight main opportunities/resources and chances can be highlighted:

1. The historical experiences regarding decentralization
2. The experiences with local and regional government in the context of public administration
3. The post-2000 reforms regarding local and regional administration
4. The chance for a modernization and rationalization in the public administration
5. The chance for socio-economic development and balanced spatial growth
6. Turkey's political map and the need for decentralization
7. The Presidential Government System and local governments as a check and balance mechanism
8. Consensus among the political parties of the mainstream concerning the strengthening of local governments

The historical experiences regarding decentralization

The historical experiences regarding political power-sharing and decentralization constitute the first opportunity for political and administrative transformation in Turkey. Three important resources should be highlighted in this regard. First of all, although the demands for autonomy and/or the discourse around "Kurdistan" are considered unacceptable in the dominant strands of Turkish politics today, the Kurds' local autonomies during the Ottoman period, which lasted until the middle of the 19th century, remains an important administrative and political legacy. Although they all embrace the Ottoman tradition, mainstream Turkish politics and parties tend to ignore this legacy. However, in the 2013-2015 Solution Process, then Prime Minister R.T. Erdoğan's references to the state system and the existence of the Kurdistan and Lazistan provinces in the Ottoman Empire show that this historical experience can be utilized as a resource.

Secondly, it is necessary to underline the debates on decentralization in the early 20th century led by Prince Sabahaddin. The debates held at that time constitute an important source both as an ideational and intellectual repertoire on the subject and in terms

of presenting an example of political organization and mobilization based on this discourse.

Finally, the 1921 Constitution constitutes an important historical legacy. A permanent solution to the Kurdish issue requires a new political order and social contract. At this point, it should be noted that the Kurdish issue is a constitutional issue. The 1921 Constitution, prepared during the founding years of the Republic and provided for the autonomy of the provinces, serves as an important source in this respect.

Experiences with local and regional government

Experiences with local and regional government in Turkey throughout the history of the Republic are another important source. In this regard, one should mention both the local administrations, comprised of the provinces, special provincial administrations, municipalities and mukhtars, as well as the local and regional organizations of the ministries.

Local and regional government experiences in Turkey have been shaped mainly within the framework of the principle of deconcentration. Public administration at the local and regional level has been but an extension of the central administration. But with its local and regional administrative capacity deriving from a century-old administrative tradition, it nevertheless offers a functional resource for a decentralist administrative and political structure. In this sense, deconcentration creates a suitable basis for the transition to a decentralized structure. For example, if governors would be elected and if the governorships, like the municipalities, would be run by elected officials, a decentralized system at the provincial scale could be built by way of transforming the existing provincial administrations.

In this regard, one should underline the municipalities. A century of experience with municipal government is the most important source for political power-sharing and decentralization. Despite the political, administrative and financial tutelage of the central administration, municipalities represent an important institutional structure and tradition for Turkey's democratic order in terms of both the localization and socialization of politics and the formation of a balancing power vis-à-vis the central administration. In this sense, municipalities form the basis of a decentralization reform in Turkey.

Public administration reforms

The public administration reform initiatives in the 2000s and their respective outcomes as well as the various regulations that would follow constitute another important opportunity/resource with respect to political power-sharing and decentralization. The first aspect to be underlined in this regard is the recognition of the administrative and financial autonomy of special provincial administrations and municipalities between 2004-2007. Although the autonomy of local governments is considered a taboo in politics in Turkey, the administrative and financial autonomy of both provincial administrations and municipalities was recognized within the scope of the public administration reform in the 2000s and was included in the laws that were passed in those years. Although this autonomy was rather limited, the fact that administrative and financial autonomy was included in local government law at all is important to note.

The three-level classification of regions and the establishment of development agencies for the 26 second-level regions can be considered as another important opportunity within the scope of public administration. Although these agencies were modeled as units under the central administration in line with the principle of deconcentration, they generated a remarkable administrative capacity with respect to regional socio-economic planning. While this capacity creates an opportunity for decentralization at the regional level, it also provides the opportunity to establish a relationship between decentralization and political power-sharing on the one hand, and socio-economic development, resource allocation and balanced spatial development on the other hand.

Finally, it should be underlined that the law no. 6360, which entered into force in 2014, changed the structure of the metropolitan municipalities. Despite all the limitations and problems of the regulation, the relative strengthening of metropolitan municipalities in the 30 metropolitan cities, where more than three quarters of the population of Turkey live, may form the basis for regional decentralization in Turkey.

Chances for a modern and rational public administration

In today's world, pervaded by constant change and uncertainty and characterized by the diversification and localization of production and consumption systems and the growing importance of speed and flexibility, it is important to build a modern and rational public administration which is centered around public interest. As the Covid-19 pandemic

has shown so far, despite all of the claims to the contrary, administrative structures in which power and authority are centralized are far from providing effective and efficient public services. Accurate and rapid identification of problems and needs, inclusive and flexible planning, implementation based on the mobilization of multiple resources, and an effective monitoring and supervision system based on the participation of citizens and civil society all require a decentralized public administration.

An inclusive decentralization reform that is sensitive to local differences and takes into account the physical geographies, especially the water basins, as well as economic, social and demographic variables will bring about a modernization and rationalization in the public administration that will elicit a more effective and efficient structure in the provision of services. Such a reform initiative would provide the opportunity to improve local and regional planning processes, ensure conformity and consistency in implementation processes, and improve management of financial, human and knowledge-based resource.

The chance for inclusive and balanced spatial development

The century-old tradition of centralized rule in the socio-economic sphere has restricted development, while at the same time engendering huge inequalities between provinces and regions. Thus, a dynamic of migration unparalleled in any developed western society has taken place in Turkey, with more than 30 million people having moved from their place of residence to another place, mostly the metropolitan cities, for a better life since 1975. In other words, 40% of the total population and more than half of the adult population have migrated (Ağirdır 2020, 274–78). This alone confirms the failure of the centralist administration in managing economic and social development.

Political power-sharing and decentralization can offer an opportunity for inclusive and balanced spatial development for Turkey. Localization and regionalization in the management of the economic and social spheres will, above all, ensure a remarkable improvement in the determination of socio-economic policies. In contrast to the ultra-centralized administrative structure, this localization will make it easier to determine local needs, to implement solutions in an accurate and timely manner, to correctly analyze deficiencies and obstacles as well as resources and opportunities, and to quickly adapt to changing conditions in case local and regional governments are strong. Determining socio-economic policies and plans in each local and regional unit

instead of determining them in Ankara will make it easier to solve existing problems and achieve socio-economic development. In such a structure, it will be easier for the central administration to focus on common problems and to ensure balance and coordination between provinces and regions.

Just like policy-making and planning processes, the management and mobilization of human, material and knowledge-based resources too will become more effective and efficient in a decentralized public administration. Together with policy-making and planning processes, implementation processes will also improve. Currently, the resources of provinces and regions are transferred to the provinces of Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Antalya and Adana-Mersin and the regions within their ambit (Keyman et al. 2017, 21–23; Işık 1995). Although provinces like Eskişehir, Kayseri, Konya and Gaziantep joined this group of centers after 1980 (Keyman et al. 2017, 195–203), uneven spatial development prevents an inclusive development and causes the resources in the rest of the country to be underutilized. Each local administration knows the problems and needs of its community better than Ankara. In this sense, decentralization will enable a more effective mobilization of more resources. In addition, transferring decision and implementation processes from the center to local and regional administrations will facilitate the monitoring and supervision of these processes.

Decentralization has the potential to increase diversity and competition in the social and economic spheres because the socio-economic indicators of the provinces and regions vary considerably. For example, while Istanbul's image as a global city sets it apart from all other provinces of Turkey, there are notable differences between other cities too (Ağırdir 2020, 86–87). While Ankara is quite advanced in the service sector and medium-level technology production, Antalya's development is mainly based on tourism and agriculture. On the other hand, high-yield production and research and development are clustered in Eskişehir. In cities like Konya, Kayseri and Gaziantep, a lot of ground has been covered in the manufacturing industry. Logistics and agriculture are thriving in Adana and Mersin, while cross-border trade is at the forefront of the economy in Van (Keyman et al. 2017). In order to achieve an inclusive growth that pays attention to all these differences, a localized and diversified decision-making mechanism in the management of the economic and social sphere is required.

Undoubtedly, a decentralized public administration will have its most important impact on the spatial distribution of socio-economic development. A decentralized structure including financial autonomy can at least serve to stop the transfer of resources between

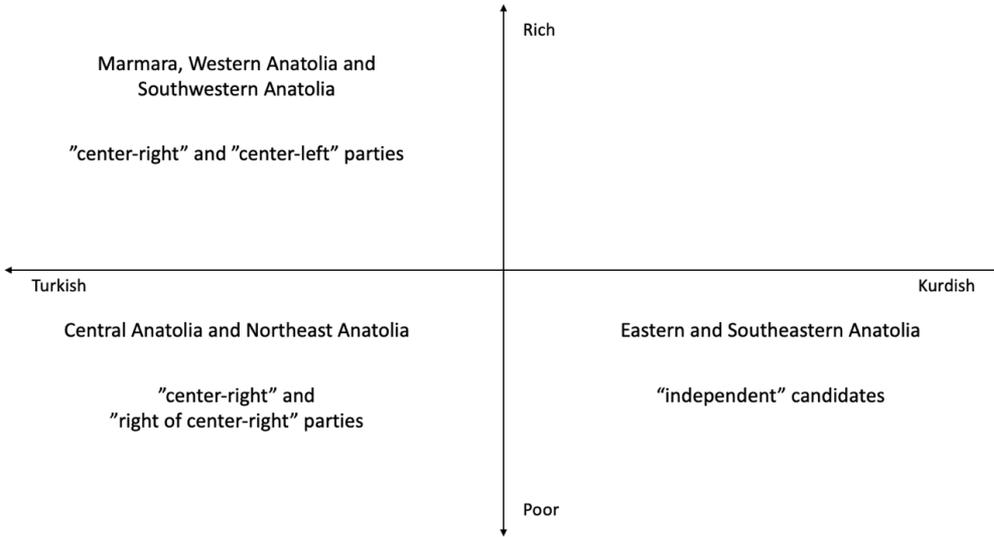
regions. Thus, a balance can be struck between the resources obtained from the provinces and regions and the public expenditures made in these regions. In addition, a “balancing” resource transfer from developed provinces and regions to underdeveloped provinces and regions could be implemented in order to resolve historical inequalities. This would pave the way for good high schools and universities or well-equipped hospitals to be developed not only in Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara, but in all regions. In this regard, remarkable improvement can be achieved in the quality of public services in each of the 30 metropolitan cities, if not in all of the 81 provinces. Likewise, flexible, fast and on-site management processes are needed in the face of different local conditions in crisis situations, such as the Covid-19 pandemic or in disasters such as earthquakes. In this sense, a public administration strengthened and localized in line with a decentralist approach will be more effective not only in normal conditions but also in circumstances of crisis.

Turkey’s political map and the need for decentralization

Turkey’s political map offers an important resource for decentralization and holds remarkable chances for politics to become pluralistic and competitive. Election research shows that Turkey is politically divided and that different political-geographical regions have formed. Moreover, the differentiations among these regions are relatively stable.

Murat Güvenç and Hasan Kirmanoğlu’s study *Turkey’s Atlas of Elections: 1950-2009* shows that the political geography in Turkey is shaped along two axes. One of these is the Kurdish issue, the other is socio-economic inequalities. The election results of nearly 60 years show that Turkey is divided into three main regions on these two axes: 1) the Kurdish region (Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia), 2) the Central Anatolian Region and the Black Sea Region (Central Anatolia and Northeastern Anatolia), and finally 3) the Marmara Region and the coastline (Marmara, Western Anatolia and Southwestern Anatolia). According to the results of the research, in the first political-geographical region it is predominantly “independent candidates” who have a strong social base, while in the second it is mostly “center-right” parties, and in the third it is mostly “center right” and “center left” parties (Figure 4) (Güvenç and Kirmanoğlu 2009, 124–25).

Figure 4. Turkey's political-geographical regions and political tendencies (1950-2009)



The studies carried out by the research and consultancy company KONDA between 2011 and 2020 classify the political geography in a similar manner (Ağirdır 2020, 206–21). Accordingly, Turkey's political geography is shaped by the Kurdish issue on the one hand and the level of socio-economic development on the other. In the western part of the country, there is a correlation between the level of socio-economic development and the division between secular and religious-conservative identities. Roughly speaking, there are three main political-geographical regions along the mentioned axes in Turkey. The first of these is the Kurdish region, the second is made up of the Marmara, Aegean, Inner Aegean and Mediterranean regions, and the third is comprised of Central Anatolia and the Black Sea region. The main dynamic shaping the political map of the Kurdish region is the Kurdish/Turkish distinction, and this region is the most socio-economically disadvantaged region of the country. By contrast, the second region is the socio-economically most privileged region and secular politics are mostly supported here. On the other hand, the third political-geographical region is socio-economically privileged when compared to the first, but is disadvantaged when compared to the second region and mainly religious/conservative. According to KONDA's studies, Turkey's coastline is dominated by the CHP and partially by the Good Party, while the mainstream Kurdish parties represented by the HDP have garnered the most social support in the Kurdish region today. In Central Anatolia and the Black Sea region, on the other hand, the AKP and MHP generally receive the highest number of votes.

Although these studies show that socio-economically, culturally and politically, Turkey consists of three main geographical regions, it should be noted that each of these regions is characterized by internal differences. There are important political, cultural and socio-economic differences between the coastal city of İzmir and its surroundings and the Antalya region. The situation is again different in the area around Adana and Mersin. Central Anatolian provinces such as Eskişehir, Ankara, Konya and Kayseri, Gaziantep and Trabzon are each characterized by significant differences. The same is true for the metropolitan cities of Diyarbakır, Şanlıurfa, Mardin and Van in the Kurdish region and the regions within their spheres of influence. In this sense, while determining the units for decentralization in Turkey, it is necessary to take into account not only these three main political-geographical regions, but also the differences within these regions.

The establishment of a decentralized structure throughout Turkey would allow for the more effective realization of different political visions at the local and regional level. In ensuring the localization and pluralization of politics, this may contribute to the strengthening of political competition. By ensuring the localization of political parties over time, decentralization may further contribute to the democratic transformation of politics. Currently, politics in Turkey is mostly done in the center. Even in local elections, the rivalry between the parties is mainly shaped by nationwide political issues. Beyond that, political parties are currently institutions where an ultra-centralist and leader-oriented political culture is produced. In this sense, decentralization can assist the localization of politics and political parties in Turkey and the creation of a stronger bond between politics and daily life.

Local governments as a check and balance mechanism

Decentralization can contribute to the construction of a political regime based on the separation of powers and power-sharing in Turkey by strengthening the check and balance mechanisms. In Turkey, checks and balances are mainly discussed in the context of the relations between the legislative, executive and judiciary. However, structures and actors like universities, the media, economic areas, social movements and non-governmental organizations also form a part of the system of checks and balances in well-functioning democracies.

On the other hand, the above-mentioned mechanisms refer to the horizontal plane of the system of checks and balances. In order to achieve real power-sharing, checks and balances within the organization of the state should also be ensured on the vertical

plane. A decentralized structure will allow for the emergence of a local economic, political and cultural power that can check and balance the center on the vertical plane. By strengthening the local governments, it will further enable a balance and mutual control between local and regional governments on the horizontal plane.

Although the construction of check-and-balance mechanisms is a historical problem, it has gained even more importance in light of the Presidential Government System, which has been in practice since 2017. In this sense, decentralization is important for Turkey to exit the process of authoritarian consolidation, which it has stumbled into in recent years, and establish democracy.

Finally, it is necessary to underline the consensus that has emerged among the opposition parties on a “strengthened parliamentary system.” Discussions on system change provide an important opportunity for a decentralist restructuring of both politics and the public administration. However, it is important that the issue is not reduced to securing the separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judiciary and strengthening the parliament alone. By including potential structures and mechanisms of checks and balances on both the horizontal and vertical planes in these discussions, it will provide an important opportunity for Turkey to depart from of its authoritarian path and turn back towards democracy.

Political consensus concerning the strengthening of local governments

Equally important to the conciliatory stance among the opposition parties on the strengthened parliamentary system is the consensus among the mainstream political parties concerning the strengthening of local governments. Although there is no consensus on a concrete model, the fact that opposition parties entertain a common political vision and discourse on this issue offers an important opportunity for decentralization.

As underlined in the previous chapters, the HDP advocates local and regional self-government. The CHP, on the other hand, states that the reservations placed on the European Charter of Local Self-Government would be removed and local governments strengthened accordingly.

The other opposition parties also advocate local administration reform. Founded in October 2017 under the leadership of Meral Akşener and rapidly gaining a significant

base, the Good Party put an emphasis on “local democracy” in its first election and announced that “meeting the service needs of the people by the nearest service unit is the priority target.” The Good Party promises to restructure local administrations by means of a “Local Administrations Reform Law.” This promise is associated with democratization and the modernization and rationalization of the public administration (İYİ Parti 2018, 33).

The Felicity Party (Saadet Partisi) also proposes a local administration reform, stating that “the administration system should be changed according to local needs in order to deepen democracy and create a participatory and pluralistic political regime.” Relating the issue of local government reform to both democratization and the rationalization and modernization of public administration, the Felicity Party wants to grant ample powers to local governments when compared to other parties. In its party program, the Felicity Party states that “except for general and obligatory services such as defense, foreign policy, justice, internal security, taxation and coordination of services, a program will be implemented to transfer the administrative duties of the center to the provinces and local administrations,” thus presenting a more advanced reform framework with respect to decentralization than the mainstream Turkish parties (Saadet Partisi 2019, 35).

The Future Party (Gelecek Partisi), which was founded in December 2019 under the leadership of Ahmet Davutoğlu, like the Good Party and the Felicity Party, advocates the reform of local administrations for the purpose of democratization and the rationalization of the public administration. According to the Future Party, “a fully democratic public administration and local government” are needed for both democracy and the economy to thrive. According to the party, “effective localization and local government are urgently needed in Turkey in order to guarantee a healthy, efficient and sustainable central government.” Therefore, the public administration should be reformed and local governments strengthened “in line with a democratic and rational approach” (Gelecek Partisi 2019, 51–53).

The Democracy and Progress Party (Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi - DEVA Party), founded under the leadership of Ali Babacan, also promotes the strengthening of local governments in reference to democracy and rationalization of public administration. According to the DEVA Party, “the strengthening of local governments is imperative with respect to guaranteeing the proper, efficient, and effective use of resources, the improvement of democratic representation and the consolidation of

a democratic culture. In order to strengthen the economic and political stability of our country, the right steps should be taken in the area of local governments” (DEVA Partisi 2020, 30).

Decentralization: Beyond Peace in the Kurdish Issue

What are the possible alternatives in Turkey that emerge when both the discursive contexts and historical references as well as the above-stated obstacles, opportunities, resources and chances with respect to political power sharing and decentralization are considered together? In view of the current situation, two basic alternatives emerge: (1) administrative decentralization at the provincial scale and (2) administrative and political decentralization at the regional scale.

The first alternative could end the Kurdish conflict. However, the second alternative stands out as the more rational option as regards an inclusive and permanent solution to the problem.

Administrative decentralization as a way to end the Kurdish conflict

A model of administrative decentralization that strengthens the administrative and financial capacities of local governments at the provincial level and increases their powers and responsibilities can end the Kurdish conflict in the short and medium term and solve the problem of violence in the Kurdish issue.

Currently, there is a political consensus on administrative decentralization. Even though the AKP has gravitated towards an authoritarian consolidation following the transition to the Presidential Government System, it pioneered the most important public administration reform initiatives in the history of the Republic in the 2000s. On the other hand, today, all of the mainstream opposition parties seem to agree on strengthening local governments for the sake of advancing democracy and accomplishing a rationalization of the public administration.

It can be said that there is a similar consensus in the Kurdish space. There are three main tendencies among Kurdish parties: localization, autonomy and

federation. The Kurds mobilized around the AKP largely support localization. On the other hand, the mainstream Kurdish Party HDP advocates democratic autonomy, which is open to varying interpretations ranging from administrative decentralization to an integrated autonomous Kurdistan region. The other Kurdish parties established in the 2000s mostly advocate a federation. A limited number of parties favor independence. Those who champion the project of an autonomous, federated or independent Kurdistan support local administrative decentralization, even though they do not see it as a final solution.

Finally, one should mention the attitude of Öcalan and the KCK on this topic. If the overall approach of Öcalan, whose influence on the HDP and KCK is considerable, and his different proposals for solution in the period after 1999 are considered as a whole, it would seem that administrative decentralization can prompt the KCK to lay down its arms and thus purge the century-old Kurdish issue of violence. This is corroborated by the various proposals for a solution which Öcalan has been submitting since 1999 around concepts like “democratic republic,” “democratic autonomy” and “local democracy” as well as by the most recent verbal agreement in the Solution Process concerning the strengthening of local governments and the preparations and initiatives for legal reform in this respect.

The KCK’s attitude can be said to be more ambiguous. During the three major dialogue processes between 1999 and 2015, the KCK displayed a more maximalist approach regarding their political demands in comparison to Öcalan. Nonetheless, it basically accepted Öcalan’s suggestions. At this point, it can be argued that a dialogue and negotiation process that would include a practical if not official recognition of Rojava, and would convince the KCK to lay down its arms in Turkey in exchange for administrative decentralization. Such a framework could at least be a reason for widespread satisfaction in society, forcing the KCK to disarm.

The new powers, responsibilities and resources that administrative decentralization would provide to local governments are an important topic of discussion. There is need for detailed discussions and negotiations on this issue. Meanwhile, in order to put an end to the violence in the Kurdish issue it is critical that the local governments are vested with the powers to admit mother tongue education and make it possible for public services to be provided in Kurdish as well as in Turkish. For today, the only demand on which there is consensus among Kurdish parties of

different political orientations and the majority of the Kurdish society is the mother tongue issue (Ağirdır 2020, 304). The recognition of the right to education in the mother tongue and the multilingualization of public services can be accomplished as the result of administrative decentralization at the provincial level.

Autonomous regions/provinces for a stable and inclusive solution

Administrative decentralization at the provincial scale can put an end to violence in the Kurdish issue. Yet in order to end an identity-based territorial conflict like the Kurdish issue, which has left behind great devastation over the course of almost two centuries, and to achieve a permanent and inclusive solution, a regional administrative and political decentralization that enables political power-sharing is required. In this respect, the regional state models in Spain and Italy can be considered as the main references for the solution of Turkey's Kurdish issue. Such a solution could take shape after administrative decentralization at the provincial level has already been accomplished. Or, as in Spain, regional decentralization could take place as a constitutive component of the transition to democracy.

Taking into account the conceptual and historical references concerning decentralization, it appears that a regional administrative and political decentralization based on geographical units is likely to offer a stable and inclusive solution to the Kurdish issue. At least four main arguments can be underlined in this regard. Firstly, regional decentralization will satisfy the Kurds' demands for identity and participation in political life, while at the same time relieving the concerns for survival of the dominant strands of Turkish politics and the Turkish state.

In an administrative and political structure where the authorities and responsibilities in areas such as education, health, culture, transportation, economy and environment are left to regional governments, Kurds would have the opportunity to preserve their linguistic and cultural identities and pass them on to new generations as well as to organize their socio-political lives. On the other hand, a model of administrative and political power-sharing based on geographical units rather than an integrated Kurdistan region will dispel the historically grown concerns for survival of Turkish politics and the Turkish state. The developments that have unfolded in Iraq and Syria in the last two decades have increased this concern to such an extent that it cannot possibly be ignored today. It is to be expected that this concern would further decrease if the KCK

would disarm and such violence cease to be an issue.

Second, a regional governance model based on several regions is more in keeping with the historical tradition than an integrated Kurdish/Kurdistan region. The linguistic, sectarian/religious, economic and geographical differences among Kurds led them to establish a patchwork of fragmented governments during the Ottoman period. These differences are still relevant today, not only among the Kurds of Turkey, but also among the Kurds of Iraq, Syria and Iran. Although the discourse suggesting that Kurdistan is divided is met with strong approval among the dominant strands of nationalist Kurdish politics, it can in fact be seen that the political structure in the past was made up of fragmented Kurdish governments rather than an integrated Kurdistan. The influence of this past can still be observed in the social structure today. As primary spatial foci, differentiated both geographically and economically, socially and culturally, Van, Bitlis, Dersim, Hakkari, Diyarbakır, Mardin, Cizre, and Şanlıurfa are the main cities in which we can trace this past until today.

Third, regional decentralization allows us to link the reorganization of the political and administrative structure in Turkey with not only the Kurdish issue but also countrywide political, economic and administrative issues. An approach that limits or reduces political power-sharing to the Kurdish issue usually runs the risk of embedding the problem in an equation of gains and losses or winners and losers. This precludes a comprehensive and calm discussion of the issue. In contrast, regional decentralization allows to directly link the resolution of an identity-based territorial conflict like the Kurdish issue with at least three fundamental countrywide issues. The first of these is democratization, the second is inclusive and balanced growth, and the third is the rationalization and modernization of the public administration. Hence, this model offers the opportunity to set up an overarching equation. Considering that more than three quarters of the population in Turkey reside in its 30 metropolitan cities and that this concentration will increase in the coming years in parallel with the global trend of metropolitanization, there is need for the creation of supra-provincial metropolitan city-regions in order to increase political participation, create a more rational public administration and foster socio-economic development.

Finally, regional decentralization offers a more inclusive solution framework for the Kurdish issue itself. The Kurdish issue has mostly been dealt with along two main axes in Turkey so far: the recognition of the identity and collective rights of the Kurds

and the cessation of violence. However, the Kurdish issue requires a much more inclusive solution. The first issue to be underlined in this regard is the inequalities between provinces and regions and the distribution of resources. By linking the issue of administrative and political power-sharing with the issue of inclusive and balanced growth, regional decentralization has the potential to focus on and find solutions to the socio-economic inequalities, widespread and deep poverty and resource allocation both throughout Turkey and between Kurdish regions and provinces. This is particularly important given that socio-economic inequalities and the issue of resource allocation are often ignored in debates concerning the Kurdish issue.

Similar to the socio-economic dimension, regional decentralization also has the potential to offer an inclusive solution to the Kurdish issue regarding its political and social dimensions. When several issues like the recognition and expression of linguistic (Kurmanji/Zazaki) and religious (Alevi, Sunni, Yazidi) differences among Kurds, the recognition of ethnic/national groups and religious minorities other than the Kurds in the Kurdistan region and the participation of these groups in political and social life are taken into account, regional decentralization emerges as a solution that will contribute to political and social pluralism in the Kurdish region. For example, in such an administrative and political system, Kurdish Alevis will have the opportunity to organize and express themselves in the Dersim region, while an inclusive and pluralistic structure guaranteeing the participation of Kurds, Arabs and Assyrians in political and social life can be built in cities such as Mardin and Siirt.

Decentralization must be ensured not only in administrative but also in political terms. Unlike administrative decentralization, political decentralization involves giving legislative and judicial powers to local/regional governments (Keleş 2006, 22–23). Administrative decentralization, for which France is a good model, presents a framework limited to rationalizing the public administration and providing public services more efficiently and effectively. In addition to the rationalization of public administration, the development of political norms and structures concerning issues such as democracy, citizenship, participation, pluralism, collective identities, power-sharing, checks and balances, and management and distribution of resources, are important in administrative and political decentralization, such as in Spain and Italy (Çam 2015, 23; Keleş 2006, 89–105).

It is possible to carry out detailed academic studies and case studies regarding the authorities, responsibilities and resources of regional governments.³⁸ However, it should be noted that this issue is essentially a matter of political negotiation. In addition, instead of one symmetrical arrangement for all regions, different management models can be developed according to the specific conditions of each region, as in Spain and Italy. Today, an administrative model to be developed for regions centered in Istanbul or Ankara should be different from an administrative model for a region centered in Antalya, Adana/Mersin or Van. After all, these regions exhibit considerable demographic, socio-economic, geographical and cultural differences. Despite all these differences, the integrity of the administration should be based on the principle of decentralization. In this sense, areas concerning all regions, such as foreign relations, defense, justice, finance, treasury, foreign trade, and customs services, could be left to the central administration. Meanwhile, in consideration of the principle of universality, all remaining public services such as education, health, economy, transportation, historical and cultural heritage, environment and urbanization would fall to the local/regional administrations. In this regard, the models of Spain and Italy and the 1921 Constitution constitute important references.

Equally as important as their authorities and responsibilities, is the scale of regional administrations. As underlined in the previous chapters, there are different scales in public administration that can serve as a basis for regional administrations. The 30 metropolitan cities, the 26 second-level NUTS regions (development agency regions), the 12 first-level NUTS regions, the 15 meteorological regions, the 18 highways regions, and the 26 State Hydraulic Works (DSI) regions are the first to come to mind. A new scale can be created that is related to these regional classifications. The metropolitan law that came into effect in 2014 abolished the special provincial administrations in the 30 metropolitan cities where a large part of the population lives. In this sense, regional administrations could be designed as expanded provinces by restructuring the special provincial administrations on a regional scale. One could also take into account the province system of the Ottoman Empire to create new regional/provincial administrations.

There are noteworthy academic studies on this subject. The reports *Suggestions on*

³⁸ For detailed studies on this topic see Benedikter (2009), Ackren (2009), Toksöz (2014), and Güner (2015).

the New Constitution for Local and Regional Government (Yeni Anayasada Yerel ve Bölgesel Yönetim için Öneriler) (Uygun 2012) edited by Oktay Uygun and Regional Government in Turkey: A Model Proposal (Türkiye’de Bölgesel Yönetim: Bir Model Önerisi) (Toksöz and Gezici 2014) edited by Fikret Toksöz and Ferhan Gezici, each prepared with the support of a large advisory board for the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), constitute important references in this regard. For example, although Toksöz and Gezici’s comprehensive study does not propose a concrete scale, the authors do provide a detailed discussion of the criteria that should be taken into account in determining a scale. Accordingly, environmental criteria, social criteria (referring to the historical and social background), financial criteria, the cost of transformation and institutional criteria need to be considered together (Gezici 2014, 25–29).

When determining a new regional scale, at least six different scales should be taken into account, namely (see Appendices for details):

- 1. Geography:** Turkey’s 26 river basins
- 2. Historical tradition:** the Ottoman province system
- 3. Functionality:** the 16 functional regions determined by the DPT (1982)
- 4. Socio-economic development:** First-level and Second-level NUTS regions
- 5. Administrative build-up:** the regional structures of public institutions and private sector organizations
- 6. Metropolization:** the 30 metropolises

As Gezici underlines, the determination of new regions/provinces should be based on detailed studies carried out together with experts, and on social participation and consent. In this sense, the process should not be carried out in a top-down manner by the central public authority alone with the assistance of experts, but rather with the participation of local governments, non-governmental organizations and citizens in all provinces. Only if the newly established structure is embraced by society will it be possible for the regional/provincial administration to advance democracy, socio-economic development, and effectiveness and efficiency in the provision of public services. This can be achieved through a bottom-up approach that relies on public discussion, dialogue and negotiation.

After decentralization: Separation or a common future?

The proposal for regional administrative and political decentralization could be criticized from two different angles. According to the dominant view in mainstream Turkish politics, local or regional autonomy will prepare the ground for separatist policies and pave the way for an independent Kurdistan. On the other hand, according to those groups in Kurdish politics, which pursue a nationalist policy and see the solution of the Kurdish issue in a federation or in independence, regional decentralization, though it might indeed be regarded as a first step towards a “final solution,” will not meet the needs and demands but further shatter the territorial integrity of Kurdistan (Çiçek 2015, 211–40; Dönmez 2014).

While regional decentralization may pave the way for an independent Kurdistan, the answer is much more complex in regards to the specifics of how it will shape the future. The possibility of decentralization leading the Kurds to sever their ties with Turkey or even to unite with the Kurds of Iraq, Iran and Syria to form an independent Kurdistan, or to build a common future in Turkey is dependent on the course of Kurdish-Turkish relations. The main issue to consider here is this: The century-old Turkish policy on the Kurdish issue has failed and has largely ceased to be an option. As the outcomes of the two-century history of the Kurdish issue show, this policy, which has caused great losses and should be opposed from a normative point of view, has largely lost its operational relevance too. There are two options in the foreseeable future: (1) a deterioration of the ongoing conflictual relationship that has entered into a crisis following the developments in the geopolitics of Kurdistan, or (2) building a common future.

Regional decentralization offers an opportunity to escape the crisis and to build a common future. As in the case of Spain/Catalonia, it can substantially meet local and regional demands and needs, while simultaneously enabling the construction of a democratic regime across the country. Such a model would completely free the Kurdish issue from violence, but could undoubtedly also follow a trajectory similar to what happened with the independence referendum in Catalonia. However, even in such a case it would be ensured that, like in Catalonia, political means and methods prevail.

Regional decentralization might disrupt the territorial integrity of the geographical region of Kurdistan. The distinctions between the Kurdish regions may deepen over time. Likewise, the political, cultural and economic competition between these regions as well as the economic, political and social relations established by each region with both the central administration and other regions in Turkey might increase. On the other hand, territorial integration might increase even further if regions are formed by grouping the existing provinces. All this is the subject of politics. What is most important here is that different approaches can be expressed and discussed in the political sphere without being rendered illegitimate.

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

This research addressed the topic of political peace and power-sharing in the context of the Kurdish issue. Guided by the questions of whether decentralization, considered in the context of power-sharing, can bring about political peace in Turkey's Kurdish issue and what kind of promises it holds beyond the Kurdish issue, the report focused on the 2013-2015 Solution Process and its aftermath to discuss the prospects and limitations of decentralization.

Taking into account the almost two centuries-long historical and political construction of the Kurdish issue, five major obstacles with respect to power-sharing and decentralization need to be highlighted: (1) The survival discourse and the historically grown security concern pervading the Turkish state and mainstream Turkish politics, (2) the ultra-centralist tradition of state and politics, (3) regional inequalities and the centralization/clustering of economic resources, (4) the shadow cast upon decentralization by the Kurdish conflict and (5) the limitations of Turkish politics regarding the Kurdish issue and the instrumentalization of the Kurdish issue.

On the other hand, there are also five main opportunities and resources as well as three major chances with respect to decentralization: (1) the historical experiences regarding decentralization, (2) the experiences with local and regional government in the context of public administration, (3) the post-2000 reform attempts regarding local and regional administration, (4) the consensus among mainstream political parties concerning the strengthening of local governments and (5) Turkey's political geography. The three major chances offered by decentralization are the following: (1) inclusive and balanced growth, (2) increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of public services through a modernization and rationalization of the public administration and (3) strengthening democracy by enabling checks and balances on the vertical plane.

In view of all these obstacles, opportunities, sources and chances, two options come to the forefront: (1) administrative decentralization at the provincial level and (2) administrative and political decentralization based on geographical regions. The first option has the potential to put an end to violence in the Kurdish issue in the short term. However, the second alternative, which would allow for political power-sharing for an inclusive and stable solution, emerges as the more rational choice. In linking the resolution of an intra-state identity-based territorial conflict to the issues of democratization, inclusive and balanced growth, and the modernization and rationalization of the public administration, this alternative further offers an inclusive model.

The Kurdish issue and the conflicts it has given rise to have so far served as a useful resource in the construction of authoritarianism in the political field and inequality in the economic field in Turkey. In this sense, power-sharing and decentralization are important not only for the resolution of the Kurdish issue and the building of political peace, but also for the transformation of the socio-political and socio-economic sphere in Turkey as a whole. Considering that there are differing/conflicting approaches to the issue, an inclusive discussion with the participation of different social groups is required. What is needed in order to address the issue in all its dimensions and achieve a social consensus is a discussion process in which different views and approaches can be expressed without being rendered illegitimate.

APPENDICES:

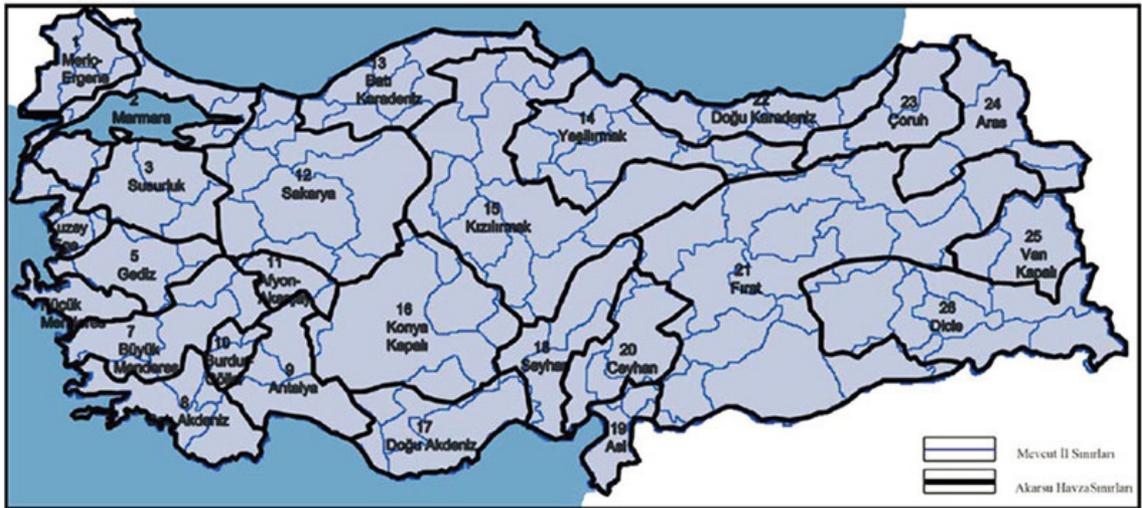
POSSIBLE SCALES FOR THE

DETERMINATION OF REGIONAL

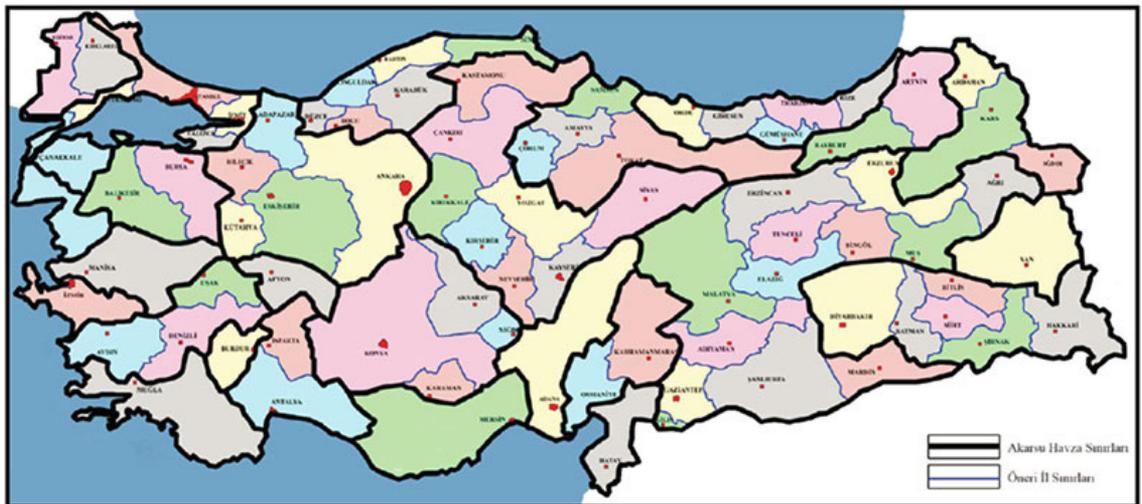
ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS

APPENDIX 1. Geography and

Environment: Turkey's 26 River Basins



Source: Efe and Aydın (2009)



Source: Efe and Aydın (2009)

APPENDIX 2. Historical Tradition:

The Ottoman Province System

Comparison between the borders of the Ottoman provinces and districts and today's provinces

Ottoman Empire		Republic of Turkey			
Province	District	Province	Boundary change		
			%50+	%50-25	%25-
Aydın	İzmir	Province			+
	Manisa	Province			+
	Aydın	Province			+
	Denizli	Province		+	
	Muğla	Province			+
	Midilli	Outside of border			
Konya	Konya	Province			
	Antalya	Province			
	Burdur	Province			
	Hamid	Province (Isparta)			
	Niğde	Province			
Hüdavendigâr	Brusa	Province (Bursa)			+
	Karesi	Province (Balıkesir)			+
	Bilecik	Province		+	
	Kütahya	Province		+	
	Karahisar	Province (Afyon)		+	
İzmit	İstanbul	Province			+
	İzmit	Province		+	

Ottoman Empire		Republic of Turkey			
Province	District	Present Status	Boundary change		
			%50+	%50-25	%25-
Edirne	Edirne	Province	+		
	Kırkkilise	Province (Kırklareli)			+
	Tekinrdağı	Province (Tekirdağ)			+
	Dedeağaç	Outside of border			
	Gümülcene	Outside of border			
	Gelibolu	District (Çanakkale)			
Biga	Biga	District (Çanakkale)			
Ankara	Ankara	Province		+	
	Kırşehir	Province (Kırşehir)		+	
	Yozgat	Province		+	
	Kayseriye	Province (Kayseri)	+		
Trabzon	Trabzon	Province	+		
	Samsun	Province		+	
	Gümüşhane	Province		+	
	Rize	Province			+
Erzurum	Erzurum	Province		+	
	Erzincan	Province		+	
	Beyazıt	District – Doğu Beyazıt (Ağrı)			
Bitlis	Bitlis	Province		+	
	Muş	Province			+
	Siirt	Province		+	
	Çapakçur	Province (Bingöl)	+		

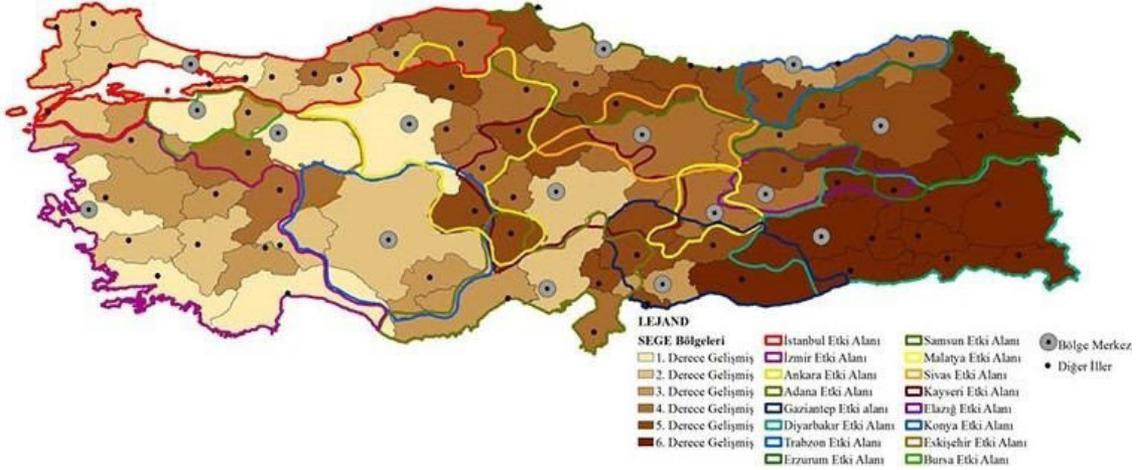
Ottoman Empire		Republic of Turkey			
Province	District	Present Status	Boundary change		
			%50+	%50-25	%25-
Diyar-ı Bekir	Diyaribekir	Province (Diyarbakır)		+	
	Ergani	District (Diyarbakır)			
	Mardin	Province		+	
M. Aziz	Harput	Province (Elâzığ)			
	Malatya	Province	+		
	Hozat	District (Tunceli)			+
Sivas	Sivas	Province			+
	Amasya	Province		+	
	Tokat	Province			+
	Karahisar-ı Sarki	District – Şebinkarahisar (Giresun)			
Adana	Adana	Province	+		
	Silifke	District (Mersin)			
	Cebeli	-			
	Bereket	-			
	Sis	-			
Halep	Halep	Outside of border			
	Urfa	Province		+	
	Maraş	Province (Kahramanmaraş)			+
Van	Van	Province		+	
	Çölemerik	Province (Hakkâri)	+		
Kastamoni	Kastamoni	Province (Kastamonu)		+	
	Bolu	Province	+		
	Sinop	Province			+
	Kengiri	Province (Çankırı)			+

Source: Efe and Aydın

APPENDIX 3. Functionality:

Functional Regions

The 16 functional regions determined by the State Planning Organization (1982)



Source: Yurttaşlık Derneği, "Bölgesel İdare ve Yerel Demokrasi", Yurttaşlık Derneği, 2016, <https://yereldemokrasi.net/bolgesel-idare-ve-yerel-demokrasi>, accessed: 15.02.2021.

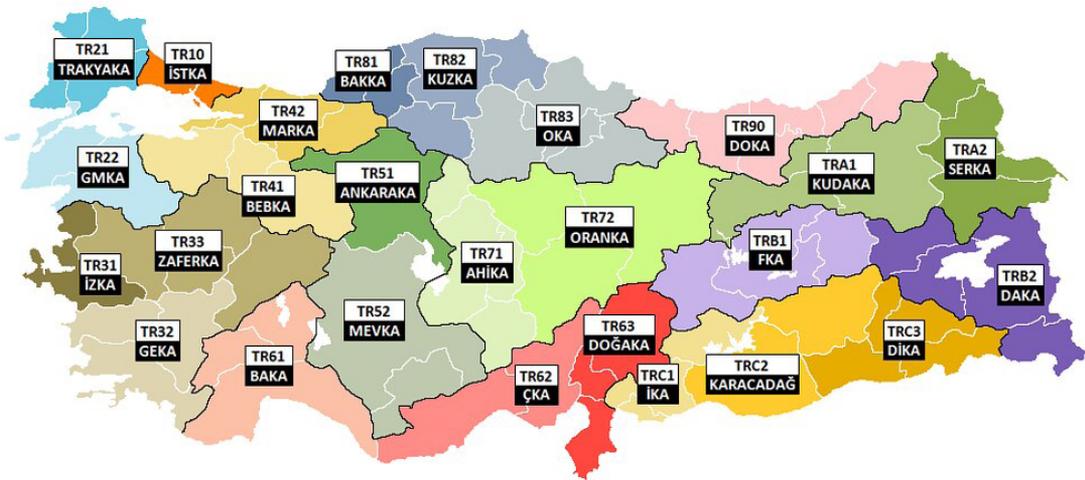
APPENDIX 4. Socio-Economic Development: Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics

The 12 First-Level Nuts Regions



Source: Türkiye'nin İşlevsel Bölgeleri - Coğrafyacı (cografyaci.gen.tr), accessed 15.12.2020.

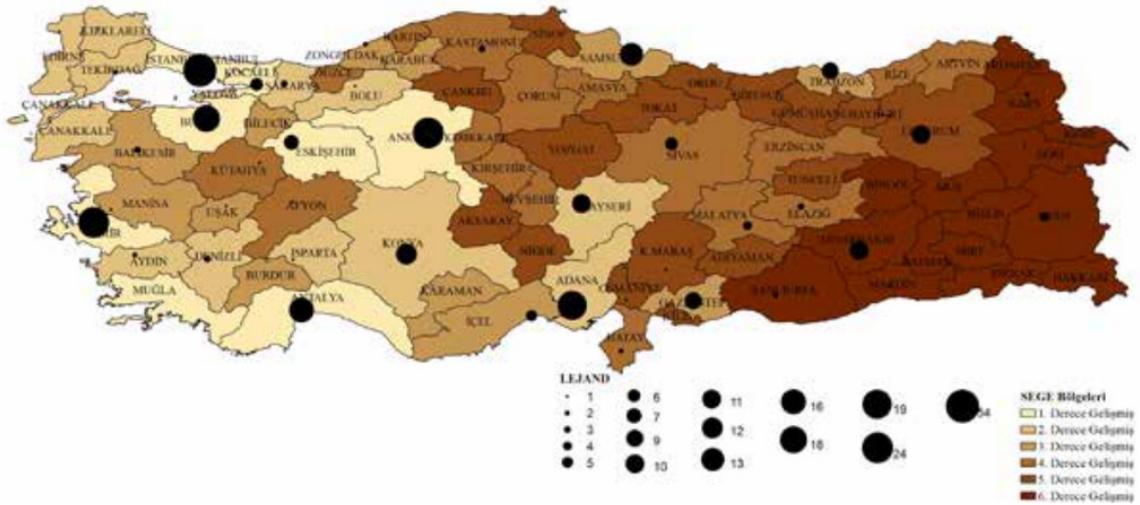
The 26 Second-Level NUTS Regions and Development Agencies



Source: Türkiye Kalkınma Ajansları İndeksi (wowturkey.com), accessed 15.12.2020.

APPENDIX 5. Administrative Build-Up: Regional Organization of Public and Private Institutions

The Provincial Distribution of Different Public and Private Institutions' Regional Organizations



Source: Gezici (2014: 25); URL:

https://www.tesev.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/rapor_Turkiyede_Bolgesel_Yonetim_Bir_Model_Onerisi.pdf

Note: The size of the points varies in proportion to the number of regional organizations of public and private sector organizations.

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This research addressed the topic of political peace and power-sharing in the context of the Kurdish issue. Guided by the questions of whether decentralization, considered in the context of power-sharing, can bring about political peace in Turkey's Kurdish issue and what kind of promises it holds beyond the Kurdish issue, the report focused on the 2013-2015 Solution Process and its aftermath to discuss the prospects and limitations of decentralization.