TURKISH NATIONALISM AND KURDISH REFORM

October 2013

Pluralism, Human Security & Sustainability Centre
Centre du pluralisme, de la sécurité humaine et du développement durable

Table of Contents

P L U Pluralism, Human Security & Sustainability Centre
Centre du pluralisme, de la sécurité humaine et du développement durable S E C

Turkish Nationalism and Kurdish Reform*

I. Introduction

The latest round of talks between the government and the armed Kurdish insurgency, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), in progress since late 2012, remains the best chance for peace.[1] The new talks started, Turkish officials argue, not because casualties had become a decisive issue for either side, but because jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan indicated his readiness for a settlement.[2] Regional developments, particularly in Syria and Iraq, also clearly played a role (see Section II.D below).

Opposition political parties have been vocally against the process (see Sections III and IV below), but the public has so far shown little objection to the state's engaging Öcalan. The mysterious killing of three PKK women in Paris in January 2013 and the careful reactions of both the Turkish government and Kurdish movement to the possible provocation, revealed support for the talks from both the public and the negotiating sides.[3] The army's reflex to fight on has also been contained.[4] In a May 2013 survey (commissioned by the ruling AKP), 91 per cent of respondents said "everyone should take responsibility for a Kurdish settlement", while 81 per cent said the process is for "the happiness of all".[5] There have been no clash-related casualties since mid-March, despite several incidents between the army and the insurgency and a rise in kidnappings by the PKK.[6]

* Plusec-Pluralism, Human Security and Sustainability Centre/Plusec-Centre de pluralism, de la sécurité humaine et du développement durable (Plusec) retained the International Crisis Group to conduct this research and analysis and to prepare this report.

[1] In a televised interview on 19 December 2012, Prime Minister Erdoğan revealed that Turkey's National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) had been in talks with Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed leader of the insurgent Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), since the previous month. For previous reporting on the issue, see Crisis Group Europe Reports N°222 *Turkey's Kurdish Impasse: The View from Diyarbakır*, 30 November 2012; N°219 *Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement*, 11 September 2012; and N°213 *Turkey: Ending the PKK Insurgency, 20 September 2011*.

[2] A senior Turkish official said Öcalan "has read a lot of books … has become anti-violence … wants to be more democratic". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, February 2013. In the leaked notes of a meeting with BDP deputies on 23 February 2013, Öcalan said he restarted the process to prevent "a coup" against Turkey's National Intelligence Organisation and the prime minister by what he called "parallel states" in Turkey. Notes published in *Milliyet*, 28 February 2013.

[3] The women, including PKK co-founder Sakine Cansız, were assassinated in Paris on 10 January, drawing Kurds' suspicions immediately to the "deep Turkish state". French police charged a Turkey-born Kurd with the crime on 21 January, and the case continues.

[4] During a major 1999 ceasefire, Turkish forces killed hundreds of retreating militants. This time, the prime minister promised, there would be no operations during withdrawals.

[5] "Survey reveals overwhelming support for settlement process", *Today's Zaman*, 6 May 2013.

[6] Two soldiers died on 2 May after stepping on an old mine in the eastern Iğdır province. On 3 June, the first PKK-army clash since mid-March in Şırnak left one soldier wounded. On 28 June, Turkish soldiers fired on a crowd demonstrating in Diyarbakır's Lice district against construction of a gendarmerie outpost, killing one and wounding ten, while the protestors set construction workers' tents on fire. The PKK said a 4 July attack on an outpost was retaliation for the killing of the protestor. The PKK kidnapped two engineers in Bitlis province on 23 June (released on 27 June), a construction site manager in Tunceli on 25 June (released on 10 July), a gendarmerie sergeant in Diyarbakır on 28 June, three vehicle operators at a quarry in Bitlis on 9 June, a construction foreman in Çukurca on 13 July and four construction work-

But as the 2014 local and presidential elections near, and both sides vacillate between small, conciliatory steps and hardline rhetoric, this new quiet is hanging by a thread.[7] Any collapse of the ceasefire would certainly come at a heavy price. The demise in June 2011 of the round of secret talks that began six years earlier triggered the worst upsurge in violence the country has seen since the 1990s, killing at least 928 people by March 2013.[8]

This report analyses the 2013 peace process. It then examines the nationalist constituencies that have long dominated thinking on the Kurdish and PKK questions, often causing ideologues and politicians to oppose more rights for ethnic Kurds and others. The government hesitates over democratisation to address major Kurdish grievances partly because of its belief that "public opinion won't accept it".[9] Through interviews primarily in Bursa, Istanbul, Erzurum and Ankara, the report explores whether that view has become out-dated and whether, if the government summons the political courage to see through what it started, the public would be likely to go along.

II. The 2013 Peace Process

A. *A Question of Timing*

As peace talks picked up momentum in 2013, the government allowed unprecedented visits to Öcalan's prison on İmralı Island by the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). After one such visit, BDP deputies during 21 March Kurdish New Year celebrations in Diyarbakır province read out a message from Öcalan saying "the era of weapons is over" and heralding a time for "politics and ideas to speak".[10] He did not mention disarmament or a future status for Kurds, instead calling on the PKK to withdraw its units beyond Turkish borders and dismissing claims that Turkey's Kurds wanted a separate state. The PKK declared a ceasefire on 23 March, and a first small group of around fifteen armed militants (out of an estimated 2,000 in Turkey) started leaving for northern Iraq on 8 May.[11]

The Kurdish movement sees three phases to the current peace process. These are outlined in Öcalan's February 2013 letter to the PKK leadership. The first phase comprises the withdrawal of armed units; the second, democratic reforms from the government (including setting up commissions in and outside of the parliament to assess and help the process); and the third, integration of the PKK into political and civilian life following disarmament. [12]

The government accepts this general outline, but the two sides disagree about when each phase ends. The Kurdish movement sees the start of withdrawals in compliance with Öcalan's call as fulfilling the first phase, whereas the government has insisted on the full withdrawal of PKK fighters from Turkey before it takes steps in the second stage. In the absence of major reciprocal moves or a

---

ers in a gendarmerie outpost on 12 September (the last four were released the same day] On the other hand, thanks to the ongoing process and the ceasefire, the PKK was not blamed for the two car bombs that killed 53 Turks in Hatay's Reyhanlı district on the Syrian border on 11 May 2013, which the Turkish government blamed on the Syrian regime.

[7] Local elections are due in March, presidential elections in July; parliamentary elections are scheduled for June 2015.

[8] According to Crisis Group's unofficial count from open sources, the upsurge killed at least 304 security forces, police and village guards, 533 militants and 91 civilians.

[9] Crisis Group interview, senior AKP official, Ankara, September 2012.

[10] BDP co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş reiterated that the era of armed struggle was "definitely over for the PKK", but added the militants were "waiting in the mountains" of northern Iraq. "Demirtaş: PKK için silahlı mücadele dönemi kesinlikle kapandı" [Demirtaş: Era of armed struggle definitely over for the PKK], *İlke Haber*, 23 May 2013; and Neşe Düzel, "Selahattin Demirtaş: Demokrasi olmadan PKK dağdan inmez" [Demirtaş: PKK won't disarm without democracy], *Taraf*, 23 April 2013.

[11] A BDP official said the withdrawals were symbolic: "Thousands of civilian guerrillas will spring up [if the process fails]. It will come to a point even the BDP can't control". Crisis Group interview, Bursa, June 2013.

[12] "İşte Öcalan'ın 3 aşamalı çözüm planı" [Öcalan's three-phase plan for a solution], *Zaman*, 27 February 2013.

roadmap from the government, the PKK complains, its concessions are one-sided.[13] Sabri Ok, a high-level PKK member, said on 25 July that the ceasefire would end on 15 October if the government did not legislate the steps agreed for phase two. Cemil Bayık, the co-president of the Kurdish national movement's umbrella organisation, the Kurdistan Communities Union (Koma Civakên Kurdistanê, KCK), said on 5 September that the insurgency was suspending withdrawals because it felt cheated by a "false package" of reforms, and PKK units would shoot back if attacked.[14]

In early August, a deputy prime minister said Ankara was determined to continue peace efforts.[15] And the government did make gestures, setting up a new parliamentary commission in May to assess the process, with the participation of AKP and BDP (the opposition boycotted); giving deceased Kurdish politician Şerafettin Elçi's name to a new airport in Şırnak province; moving Öcalan to a larger cell; and a meeting of the prime minister with relatives of the 34 Kurds killed in Uludere in December 2011.[16] A notable democratisation package announced on 30 September breathed new life into the process by promising to legalise education in mother languages in private schools, among other things (see Section IV below). The nationalist opposition voiced criticism, but overall there was no public reaction to these small steps.[17]

AKP also made efforts to change the constitution, a core party pledge since 2007 that is theoretically supported by all political parties and desired by the public. After it began a third term in power in 2011, AKP set up a constitutional reconciliation commission with three members from each of the four parties represented in parliament. But the group has largely been bogged down in political bickering and nationalist posturing.[18] As of end-September 2013, the parties had agreed on only 59 of 172 articles, none of them relating to the issues sensitive for the Kurdish process.[19]

---

[13] Prime Minister Erdoğan said on 15 August that the PKK had failed to fulfil its promise, removing only 20 per cent of its forces, most of them female, under-age or ageing.In a rebuttal a few days later, the PKK said the percentage was incorrect, their forces had done their part, and they were continuing to withdraw. "PKK: Yüzde yirmi tespiti saptırma" [PKK: Twenty per cent is misleading], *Milliyet*, 20 August 2013. BDP's co-chairman, Selahattin Demirtaş, said on 27 June that 80 per cent of the PKK had left their posts and were heading to the border. "Demirtaş'tan çekilme açıklaması" [Statement about withdrawals from Demirtaş], *Sabah*, 27 June 2013. Citing Turkish gendarmerie and police reports, another source said withdrawals were at 25 per cent in early August. "PKK silah bırakıp şehre iniyor" [PKK is disarming and coming to the cities], *Taraf*, 11 August 2013.

[14] "They don't want to solve the problem, they just want to crush us, to make war … the process is collapsing". Statement to BBC Turkish Service, 5 September 2013.

[15] "There is not even a slightest weakening of will on either side …. The process is continuing on a normal trajectory [without] problems". Deputy Prime Minister Beşir Atalay, quoted in Fadime Özkan, "Başbakan yardımcısı Beşir Atalay: Süreç gayet yolunda, biz bu işe asılıyoruz" [The process is going well, we are pushing ahead with this], *Star*, 5 August 2013. Similarly, Interior Minister Muammer Güler said the plan was to work towards democratisation and normalisation steps once the armed elements had withdrawn from Turkey, followed by the third phase involving the elimination of all weapons and movement to a political platform. "PKK'nin restine Güler'den cevap" [Güler responds to PKK raising the stakes], CNN Türk, 29 August 2013.

[16] The village of Uludere (Roboski in Kurdish) has been a traumatic symbol for Turkey's Kurds since December 2011, when the air force, mistaking them for PKK militants, fatally bombed 34 Kurdish villagers smuggling oil products on mules and horses near the Iraqi border.

[17] Nationalist Action Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli said sarcastically the government might as well name the third bridge in Istanbul after Öcalan. "Bahçeli: Başbakan 3. Köprüye Öcalan'ın ismini mi verecek?" [Will the prime minister name the bridge after Öcalan?], Doğan News Agency, 14 July 2013.

[18] "The commission is on life support. It's better if they just pull the plug". Crisis Group interview, AKP official, Ankara, June 2013. "No one knows what was agreed in the commission. I am an AKP deputy, and I don't even know. Society isn't discussing the constitution anymore". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013.

[19] Deadlocks remain, particularly over the first four articles: the first three state that Turkey is a republic and list its characteristics (including being a secular, democratic, unitary state loyal to the nationalism of the republic's founder, Atatürk, with Turkish as its language). The fourth article makes the first three unchangeable. At one point, CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu said the first four articles were the party's redlines (its constitutional proposals reflected this), but later said that CHP's proposals in the constitutional commission are not binding for the entire party, its position on education in mother languages and other issues can change, and the only true red line is preservation of secularism. "Kılıçdaroğlu: Senin TC ile alıp veremediğin ne?" (Kılıçdaroğlu: What is your problem with the 'Republic of Turkey'?),

B. *Overcoming Turkish Fears*

On 3 April, the government announced a list of 63 academics, journalists, businessmen, entertainment celebrities and civil society figures who would join delegations of "Wise Persons" tasked to explain the peace efforts and gather feedback from the public in each of Turkey's seven geographical regions. In over two months, they held 60,000 meetings throughout the country. Their reports, presented to the prime minister, highlighted concerns among both Turkish and Kurdish publics regarding the peace process (see Section IV below).

The Wise Persons could not change decades of scepticism in a couple of months. They faced some nationalist backlash, but the reactions against them were not as prohibitive as initially feared or as the pro-nationalist media made them out to be.[20] Instead, the leader of one of the groups explained, they showed how dialogue could affect attitudes.[21]

> Political perceptions quickly changed into human ones in the meetings. A Kurdish mother who could not speak Turkish told of how three of her children in the mountains and her husband [were killed] by the police, adding "I cry after other people's children, too, I know what it is like to lose a child". It changed the entire atmosphere in the room.[22]

The Kurdish movement made a rare attempt to explain its version of a solution to western Turks, when a delegation of BDP deputies visited the nationalist Black Sea region in February 2013. But it cut the visit short after protests and attacks by small but violent mobs in Sinop and Samsun provinces.[23]

C. *A Heartening Distraction*

Focus on the peace process was distracted by a wave of unrelated protests that started in Istanbul on 27 May 2013 over government plans to construct a shopping complex on Gezi Park in Taksim Square. The demonstrations and harsh police crackdowns with pepper gas unexpectedly spread through other urban centres and continued for weeks.[24] Five people were killed, and Erdoğan and AKP struggled to retain their support base amid an uptick in authoritarian rhetoric and damage to the government's image at home and abroad.[25]

Hürriyet, 27 April 2013; Amberin Zaman, "CHP'nin kırmızı çizgileri yumuşuyor" [CHP's red lines are softening], *Taraf*, 17 June 2013.

[20] In the Black Sea region, for instance, even in the worst cases, there were only 60 or 70 people demonstrating. Wise Persons Black Sea region delegation report made available to Crisis Group, 2013. BDP officials in western, conservative Bursa province said demonstrations against the Wise Persons there also did not exceed 50 people and involved the Workers' Party and youth arms of the Nationalist Action Party (MHP). Crisis Group interview, June 2013.

[21] "As they deliberated, they became more moderate". Crisis Group interview, Fuat Keyman, member of Wise Persons Aegean region delegation, Istanbul, June 2013. "The effort to move the issues, which have been progressing on a platform of violence and hatred for the past 30 years, to one of dialogue was met with a positive reaction". Member of the Wise Persons Mediterranean region delegation, personal report made available to Crisis Group, June 2013.

[22] Deniz Ülke Arıboğan, head of Wise Persons Marmara region delegation, personal report on Wise Persons visits (in Turkish), 2013, available on www.denizulkearibogan.net.

[23] A BDP official said the visit was planned long in advance and such a reaction was not foreseen. Crisis Group interview, Bursa, June 2013.

[24] Protestors were mainly secular, urban, middle class youth unhappy with what they perceived as the government's (particularly the prime minister's) authoritarian style, felt their identity and values were threatened and were frustrated that opposition parties did not represent them. See also Crisis Group blog "Turkey's protests: Politics of an unexpected movement", 4 June 2013, http://bit.ly/15OBA00.

[25] A MetroPOLL survey of politicians' popularity on 3-12 June found that 72.5 per cent of Turks liked President Gül as a political figure, 53.5 per cent liked Prime Minister Erdoğan, 29.3 per cent liked the nationalist MHP opposition leader Devlet Bahçeli, and 26.7 per cent liked main opposition CHP's leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. *Today's Zaman*, 16 June 2013.

The pro-Kurdish BDP was divided over the protests, and the Kurdish movement mostly stayed out of them.[26] A non-Kurdish BDP deputy, Sırrı Süreyya Önder, found fame early on by standing in front of a bulldozer to prevent it from entering Gezi Park, which, when later occupied by protestors, witnessed rare scenes of camaraderie between Kurds and left-wing and even nationalist Turks. In social media, some mainstream Turks supported Kurdish protests against the construction of a gendarmerie post in the Lice district of Diyarbakır, particularly after soldiers killed a Kurdish demonstrator on 28 June. On the same day, Turks marched in secular neighbourhoods of Kadiköy and Beşiktaş in İstanbul to show support for the Lice protests. This is new for Turkey's Kurds, who have always felt most Turks did not share their pain and saw them as at the "other".[27]

D. *Regional Complications*

Upheavals in the Middle East, particularly involving Kurds in Syria and Iraq, have renewed Turkey's interest in solving its Kurdish issue at home. They also make this goal harder to reach. Ankara clearly wishes to extend its influence into Syria and Iraq as much as possible, in particular reinforcing its close relationship with Iraqi Kurds.[28] However, the decision to publicly stand up for ousted President Morsi in Egypt increased a sense that it risked becoming trapped in the region's complexities and distracted from domestic reforms.

In Syria, Turkey initially reacted negatively when the PKK's sister party, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), announced plans to set up an independent council to run Kurdish regions in the north on 19 July 2013.[29] Ankara sent troops to the border, put other forces on alert and signalled readiness to intervene militarily.[30] Then, showing how events had changed old reflexes, it invited PYD leader Saleh Muslim to Turkey in July and August for meetings with high-level officials.[31] Turkish nationalists still

---

[26] BDP's Istanbul organisation met on 8 June, asking for the government to apologise to the public; BDP deputy Sırrı Süreyya Önder said Gezi events showed Kurds and Turks can struggle together. On the other hand, another BDP deputy likened protestors to coup-plotters on 30 June, saying they seek to achieve through other means what they could not at the ballot box.

[27] The brother of the killed nineteen-year-old said, "when I saw on television people carrying my brother's picture in Istanbul, Ankara, and Mersin, I felt touched, and that helped heal my sorrow". "Could a murder derail the Kurdish peace process?", Al Monitor, 8 July 2013.

[28] "The future cannot be constructed with their [post-First World War] Sykes-Picot maps, with colonial methods, and with newly concocted [Western] state understandings based on artificial maps and mutually hostile nationalist ideologies. We will break the mould drawn for us by Sykes-Picot". Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, speech to Dicle University, 15 March 2013. Deputy Prime Minister Beşir Atalay referred to the "brotherhood" of the Kurds and Turks in the region: "Look at Nusaybin [in Turkey] and Qamishli [in Syria]. The borders are such that it looks like a road goes through the same city". Fadime Özkan, "Başbakan yardımcısı Beşir Atalay: Süreç gayet yolunda, biz bu işe asılıyoruz" [Deputy PM Atalay: The process is going well, we are pushing ahead with this], *Star*, 5 August 2013. See also Crisis Group Europe Report N° 255, *Blurring the Borders: Syrian Spillover Risks for Turkey*, 30 April 2013.

[29] Turkish priorities are to maintain the unity of Syria, by stopping Kurds from declaring autonomy, and avoid clashes on the border. Fighting between the PYD and the al-Qaeda affiliated al Nusra front killed four Turks in July-August 2013 in the border town of Ceylanpınar, across from Ras al-Ain. But persistent reports suggest that Syrian opposition fighters crossed the border at Ceylanpınar point to a fight against the PYD in November 2012, though Turkish officials deny this. See Crisis Group Report, *Blurring the Borders*, op. cit., p. 25. For more on PYD, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°136, *Syria's Kurds: A Struggle Within a Struggle*, 22 January 2013.

[30] Prime Minister Erdoğan said the formation in north Syria "is the structuring of the PKK terror organisation … and this is indeed among our sensitive equilibriums. We will not say 'OK' to this formation from here …. It is impossible for us to tolerate a terror structuring …. It is, of course, our most natural right to intervene there". Interview with Kanal 24, 25 July 2013.

[31] Turkish officials called for the PYD to join the Syrian National Coalition and not seek de facto autonomy in northern Syria, while assuring the PYD that Turkey would stay out of the fighting between Syrian Kurds and al-Qaeda-linked groups. In turn, the PYD assured Turkey no declaration of autonomy was planned. "Turkey meets with PYD leader, other Syrian Kurds", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 15 August 2013.

protest that talking to the PYD legitimises the PKK, but their objections have less weight, as Turkey is openly negotiating with the PKK and publicly sticking to the peace process.[32]

In the meantime, Ankara is increasing cooperation with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, particularly in trade and energy.[33] Once again, traditional wisdom holds that nationalists would oppose any such understandings with Syria's and Iraq's Kurds, due to concern that they would encourage Turkey's Kurds to form a joint state with their regional kin.[34] But Prime Minister Erdoğan and AKP have defied this supposed reflex with no apparent domestic political backlash.

III. Who Are the Turkish Nationalists?

Nationalism encompasses three ideologies with few consistent social or geographic distinctions: *ulusalcılık, milliyetçilik* and *Atatürkçülük,* with the last often overlapping with, but not limited to, the first two. *Ulusalcılık* is a relatively new term, referring to the secular, republican Kemalist ideology, more sympathetic to left-wing politics and focusing on preserving the homogeneous Turkish nation state created in 1923. Its main political representative is the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP). *Milliyetçilik* is a right-wing, conservative ideology with Islamist undertones glorifying parts of Ottoman culture and history, including spreading a Turkish-Islamist ideology to the world and underlining kinship with other Turkic peoples. It applies mainly to the Nationalist Action Party's (MHP) constituency (and the smaller Great Union Party, BBP). *Atatürkçü* (pro-Atatürk) signals attachment to the principles of the republic's founder, often including but not limited to a Turkish nationalism that brushes over ethnic distinctions, saying simply all who see themselves as Turks are Turks.[35]

The Turkish Republic has nationalist roots, and patriotism is taught from birth, but Turkish nationalism is not the majority ideological affiliation. According to a September 2012 survey, just 22 per cent of the population define themselves as primarily nationalist (15 per cent *milliyetçi*, 2 per cent *ulusalcı*, 5 per cent *ülkücü,* or idealist nationalist, which refers to members or sympathisers of MHP's radicalised youth organisation, also known as the "Grey Wolves"*)*, while 28 per cent list *Atatürkçü* as their defining identity.[36] In a January 2013 poll, 17.5 per cent called themselves *milliyetçi*, 3 per cent

[32] "Imagine that for years you have been taking steps to resolve the Kurdish issue at home, to give your Kurdish population's rights back to them. It would be a contradiction if you oppose when the Kurds in Syria want their rights, too". Mehmet Ocaktan, editor in chief, *Akşam*, interview with Haber Türk Gündem, 13 August 2013.

[33] Iraq is currently Turkey's largest export partner after Germany, and with planned oil pipelines, could also become a significant import partner. Prime Minister Erdoğan and KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani discussed in Turkey on 31 July details of a pipeline to carry oil from northern Iraq to the Turkish border, expected to start export of 200,000 barrels per day in 2016. Barzani reportedly assured the Turks the KRG opposed division of Syria and declaration of an independent Kurdish state during a Kurdish National Conference planned this autumn. "Barzani eases Turkey's concerns over Kurdish conference", *Today's Zaman*, 2 August 2013.

[34] "Turkey was unable to stop the creation of a [Kurdish] regional administration in northern Iraq. Now with an autonomous region in [northern] Syria and democratic autonomy [for Turkey's Kurds] at the end of the peace process in Turkey, there can be a Kurdish confederation". Armağan Kuloğlu, retired major general, interview with Haber Türk Gündem, 13 August 2013.

[35] As part of the new state ideology in 1923, Atatürk's Turkish nationalism puts emphasis on the will of different peoples to live together as one nation. In a survey, only 10 per cent of the *Atatürkçü* group favoured a second official language, but 68 per cent supported freedom for different cultural identities. "Anayasaya Dair Tanım ve Beklentiler Raporu" [Report on constitutional definitions and expectations], The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), September 2012.

[36] "Anayasaya Dair Tanım ve Beklentiler Raporu" [Report on constitutional definitions and expectations], The Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), September 2012. Most of the remainder consider themselves conservatives (around 16 per cent), *islamcı* [pro-Islamic] (around 19 per cent), democrat (7 per cent) or social democrat (around 6 per cent).

ulusalcı and 16 per cent pro-republican and pro-Atatürk.[37] This suggests that only half the population or less is primarily aligned with ideologies that usually oppose reforms needed to address Kurdish grievances.[38]

Most nationalists focus on preserving one nation and the unitary state and reject approaches they think would lead to Turkey's division. A small ultra-nationalist minority within the *milliyetçi* group privately talks of a radical "love Turkey or leave it" approach that potentially accepts splitting the country:

> We should hold a census to find out how many Kurds there are, and hold a referendum among them on whether they want to separate from Turkey. If the majority says "yes", we should … let them have their state. But then all Kurds [from western Turkey] should also go there. I bet they would ask to join Turkey again after a few months …. If the referendum doesn't pass, however, there should be [an all-out effort] to eradicate the PKK from the mountains and to [eliminate] Öcalan.[39]

A. *The Republican Peoples Party (CHP)*

The main opposition CHP received around 26 per cent of the national vote in the 2011 elections. Its strongholds are along the western Aegean and Mediterranean coasts and Tunceli province in the south east.[40] Set up in 1923 by Atatürk, it has been close to the armed forces, the prime promoter of traditional Turkish nationalism. CHP appears relatively open to democratisation, emphasising secularism and European Union (EU) membership, but retains authoritarian tendencies from its past.

The party is not homogenously left-wing; it includes a sizeable *ulusalcı* faction but also a liberal group and remnants of centre-right parties that imploded in the early 2000s. It has alternated between supporting the peace process and criticising it, accusing the government of a lack of transparency.[41] On 5 January 2013, shortly after the process became public, CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu said, "we will support, not hinder the process". He then changed course, saying on 28 April that the process was the "first phase of a more comprehensive plan to establish a Greater Kurdistan on Iraqi, Syrian and Turkish soil".[42] Gülseren Onanç resigned as deputy chairperson shortly after saying the same month that polls showed 65 per cent of CHP voters supported the Kurdish opening, although party officials do not publicly link the two events. In May, some CHP deputies issued a "call to unity" opposing talks with the PKK.

---

[37] "Kemalist" was used for the pro-Atatürk segment. 38 per cent saw themselves as primarily conservative, 17 per cent as either social democrat or socialist. "Türkiye Sosyal-Siyasal Eğilimler Araştırması" (Survey on Turkey's Social-Political Tendencies), Kadir Has University, January 2013.

[38] In a January 2010 poll, 50 per cent called themselves *Atatürkçü* and 45 per cent nationalist, but the survey allowed them to choose multiple identities. Poll by Adil Gür quoted in "Türkiye'nin yüzde kaçı Atatürkçü?" [What per cent of Turkey is pro-Atatürk?], *Milliyet*, 27 January 2010.

[39] Crisis Group interview, Turkish bureaucrat, August 2013.

[40] Some 8 per cent of CHP's support comes from voters who define themselves primarily as nationalists (5 per cent *milliyetçi*, 3 per cent *ulusalcı*), while some 67 per cent are pro-Atatürk (*Atatürkçü*). "Anayasaya Dair Tanım", TESEV, op. cit.

[41] A party official said, "we are not informed about what is going on in the peace process. There is no debate about it in parliament. It was not brought about by social consensus". Crisis Group interview, Bursa, June 2013.

[42] "CHP'den İmralı sürecine destek" [CHP supports the İmralı process], *Milliyet*, 6 June 2013; "Erdogan-Öcalan'a ortak olmayız" [We won't join with Erdoğan-Öcalan], *Hürriyet*, 28 April 2013. On an August 2013 visit to Iraq, Kılıçdaroğlu said "we did not support the process, because we did not know how the issue could be resolved. But we want it resolved". "Kılıçdaroğlu, 'PKK sorununu çözecekse, Irak da rahatlayacaktır'" [Kılıçdaroğlu, Iraq will be relieved when PKK solves its problem], IHA, 21 August 2013.

While the official party position appears undecided, even confused, its constituency is more positive toward the peace process. In the Aegean region, a CHP stronghold, the Wise Persons delegation said,support for a settlement was growing and could soon reach 70 per cent.[43]

B. *The Nationalist Action Party (MHP)*

MHP was founded with a far-right, Turkish-Islamist ideology in 1969 by former Colonel Alpaslan Türkeş. Its militant youth arm, called *Ülkücüler* (idealist nationalists, referring to the individuals), *Ülkü Ocakları* (referring to the idealist nationalist "hearths", or clubs) or the Grey Wolves, rallied against communism and the left in the party's earliest days.[44] MHP received almost 13 per cent of the nationwide vote in the 2011 elections.[45]

MHP politicians and pro-MHP media have been against a Kurdish opening since its inception and describe it as treachery. The party held its first rally against the process in conservative, western Bursa province in March 2013, and other rallies followed in İzmir, Erzurum, Adana, Konya, and Elazığ.[46] MHP's leader, Devlet Bahçeli, promised to have Prime Minister Erdoğan impeached for treason over the talks with the PKK.[47] A party official argued that the process was "setting up a parallel state in the region".[48] MHP's youth arm has been responsible for the most organised opposition throughout the country, particularly against the Wise Persons' meetings.

The party's vision for Turkey is a national unity that "supersedes differences in language, religion and ethnicity".[49] For MHP, the problem in Turkey is not a Kurdish problem, but one of relations between the individual and the state: "It is about individual freedoms. We are looking at a new constitution to … solve the problems with the freedom of media and checks and balances".[50] Some see any Kurdish problem as one only of regional economic backwardness.[51] MHP considers the PKK a terrorist organisation that can only be beaten militarily and wants to cut off all communication with Öcalan and move him from his island jail to a common prison.[52]

Although the party leadership has attacked the process, its voter base seems to have a more conciliatory approach and has not taken to the streets in large numbers, as demonstrated by relatively modest turnouts for MHP protest rallies in the western cities of Bursa and Izmir.[53] An elderly MHP voter said, "I can't say I support the peace process, but I say 'let's wait and see'. It is good if there really will

---

[43] Wise Persons Aegean region delegation report made available to Crisis Group, 2013.

[44] A wolf is the mythical mother of the Turks in national legends and symbolises honour.

[45] Around 72 per cent of its voters define themselves primarily as nationalists (39 per cent *milliyetçi*, 33 per cent *ülkücü*), 17 per cent as pro-Atatürk. "Anayasaya Dair Tanım", TESEV, op. cit.

[46] In Bursa, an angry crowd of supporters chanted: "Tell us to strike, and we will strike, tell us to die, and we will die." MHP leader Bahçeli responded: "Don't worry, the time will come for that, too." The Bursa state prosecutors office started an investigation against him for "inciting enmity among the public".

[47] MHP leader Bahçeli said on 30 August, "the AKP has given the country away to the PKK …. The prime minister is looking for ways to divide the country". On 7 May, a day before PKK withdrawals were to begin, he said it was "a crime to watch and remain inactive as terrorists leave Turkey". "AKP ülkeyi PKK'ya peşkeş çekmiştir" [AKP has given the country away to the PKK], *Sözcü*, 1 July 2013.

[48] Crisis Group interview, Oktay Vural, MHP parliamentary group deputy chairman, Ankara, July 2013.

[49] MHP 2011 election manifesto (in Turkish), www.mhp.org.tr.

[50] Crisis Group interview, Oktay Vural, MHP parliamentary group deputy chairman, Ankara, July 2013.

[51] "[There are] regional inequalities in development. If we [increase the welfare] of every region, Kurds' demands will disappear …. There are problems imposed on the south east. Whatever my problems are in Turkey, theirs are the same". Crisis Group interview, pro-MHP businessman, Bursa, June 2013.

[52] MHP 2011 election manifesto, op. cit. Devlet Bahçeli advocated the death penalty (abolished in Turkey) for Öcalan in an interview with CNN Türk, 24 August 2010, http://bit.ly/1cEyM7k. A party official asked: "If it is a solution to find and kill Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan, why is it not a solution to kill [PKK's military leader] Murat Karayılan?" Crisis Group interview, Oktay Vural, MHP parliamentary group deputy chairman, Ankara, July 2013.

[53] Bursa residents said the MHP rally had 15,000-20,000 people, with many bussed in from other provinces. The estimates for its April 2013 Izmir rally vary between 350,000 (MHP) and 50,000 (AKP). Crisis Group interviews, June 2013; "Mitingde sayısal tartışma" [Debate about numbers at the rally], *Yeni Asır*, 21 April 2013.

be no more deaths. We will also test the PKK's sincerity".[54] Despite the party's emphasis on a security-oriented approach, some of its voters concede that past efforts for a military solution failed and hurt Turkey as a whole.[55]

C. *Justice and Development Party (AKP) Nationalists*

Nationalist voters, cadres and factions also feature within the ruling AKP.[56] In 2009, after it publicly launched a democratic opening to push for Kurdish reforms, it showed its sincerity by censuring some loud critics within the party.[57] Still, the prime minister himself has often engaged in nationalist rhetoric, to the point where the BDP blames him for encouraging violence against Kurds (for instance, suggesting BDP deputies should lose immunity from prosecution and advocating a return to the death penalty).[58] Erdoğan's mixed messaging appears to be part of a strategy to camouflage the government's intended policy by catering to what is assumed to be strong Turkish nationalist voter sentiment.[59]

AKP does face electoral risks in pursuing the PKK and Kurdish peace processes. MHP will probably try to outflank it with radical nationalist talk, an approach that neither reflects the thinking of all its members nor Turkey's urgent need to find a new understanding with Kurds. AKP should not follow MHP down this dead end, especially since the political downside to reforms appears limited. A former AKP minister believes that reforming constitutional citizenship and the definition of Turkishness, for instance, would cost AKP up to 5 per cent of its voters.[60] But AKP could lose many more votes if fighting restarts and soldiers' funerals return to western Turkish towns and newspaper front pages.

In fact, Erdoğan might not face major popular resistance if he truly committed to democratic reforms. According to a leading Kurdish member of AKP, the few in the party who say the Kurdish reforms would not pass in parliament or would not be accepted by the people appear to do so not because of feedback they get from the public, but because of their own nationalist upbringing.[61]

---

[54] Crisis Group interview, Bursa, June 2013. The Kurdish co-founder of a peace platform in western Bursa province said, "out of 100 emails we get, only three to five include insults, 30 may be negative reactions of some sort, but 65 are supporting us. An MHP supporter concongratulated me. I think there are many people within AKP or MHP who are silently supporting us". Crisis Group interview, Rüştem Avcı, İlle de Baris (Peace no matter what) platform, Bursa, June 2013.

[55] "It is good that there are no more deaths, but more importantly, if Turkey had not spent all that money on fighting terrorism, I wonder how many Turkeys it would be worth today!" Crisis Group interview, Bursa, June 2013.

[56] Some 15 per cent of AKP supporters define themselves as nationalists (all *milliyetçi*). "Anayasaya Dair Tanım", TESEV, op. cit.

[57] AKP member of parliament (MP) from Kastamonu and former state minister Murat Başesgioğlu resigned in 2010, saying the opening was a last drop in his problems with the party. Ankara MP Zekai Özcan, arguing the 2009 opening was destroying the unitary state and legitimising the PKK, resigned in April 2010 and joined the MHP in August 2010. Antalya MP Ziya İrbeç resigned in January 2011, calling the Kurdish opening a "wound" in national unity.

[58] "When the language of the government [towards Kurds] changes, the entire society's language can change". Crisis Group interview, BDP official, Bursa, June 2013. About the prime minister's frequent changes of position, the MHP parliamentary group deputy chairman complained: "There are so many Erdoğans. Which one do I believe?" Crisis Group interview, Oktay Vural, Ankara, July 2013.

[59] "[Erdoğan] has amazing leadership. He says one thing in the morning, something else in the evening, and no one questions it. He can send someone to İmralı [to talk to Öcalan] while himself talking about hanging him". Crisis Group interview, AKP official, Ankara, July 2013.

[60] Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013. A Turkish pollster said the processes have only cost AKP 3 to 4 per cent, even if nationalist parties have benefited from drumming up Turkey's old national unity reflex. Adil Gür, quoted in "Gür: BDP barajı aştı, AKP düşüşte, MHP yükselişte, CHP karışık" (Gür: BDP passes the threshold, AKP in decline, MHP on the rise, CHP is confused), *Akşam*, 4 May 2013.

[61] Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013.

D. *Other Groups*

Despite the ideological divide between them, the far-right, nationalist, pro-Islamic Great Union Party (BBP) and the socialist, secular, Workers' Party (IP) – both polling less than 1 per cent of the vote – both refuse to acknowledge a Kurdish problem in Turkey and voice the same conspiracy theories about the process being a U.S./Western plot to create a puppet Kurdish state in the region.[62] Traditionally a nationalist actor, the army is a staunch supporter of a security-oriented approach.[63] Since it came to power in 2002, however, AKP has steadily limited the military's political role; thus its reaction to the latest talks has been muted. [64]

There are also groups that at times play a positive role in the process. For instance, the faith-based, non-political Hizmet (Service) movement of self-exiled Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen has been considered a nationalist actor in cultural terms with its promotion of Turkishness, particularly through the opening of Turkish schools worldwide and conduct of a big annual Turkish language contest. The Kurdish movement sees its well-organised Turkish rival behind the arrests of its activists and as a threat to its sway over Kurds.[65] Still, the Gülenists have recently taken a reformist position on some of the central issues, such as mother languages and ethnicity, with Gülen saying he is open to education in mother languages and other figures speaking positively about redefining citizenship and Turkishness.[66]

IV. **Recommitting to Reform**

While most mainstream Turks do not oppose democratic rights for Kurds or members of other groups as individual, equal citizens of a unitary Turkey, defining these as a collective right still causes discomfort.[67] Even ultra-nationalists say they have nothing against Kurds and blame all problems on the PKK, with the implication that Kurds and Turks are brothers as long as the former accept a Turkish identity and do not demand specifically Kurdish linguistic, ethnic or self-governance rights.[68] For

---

[62] BBP was founded by a former head of MHP's youth wing who believed the term "Kurdish issue" was an insult to Kurds put forward by the PKK to prepare for secession. He urged an uncompromising fight against terror. Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu, quoted in "Kürt sorunu kavramı Kürtlere hakarettir" [The concept of a Kurdish problem is an insult to Kurds], Digitürk-Keçi, December 2007. IP does not see a Kurdish problem in terms of democratic rights, but from a class-based approach says it arises mainly from feudalism and lack of development in the south east. 2006 party program, www.ip.org.tr.

[63] See, for instance, Altay Tokat, retired lieutenant general and former gendarmerie head, *Mücadele ve Çözüm: PKK Bölücü Terörü* [Struggle and Solution: PKK's Separatist Terror], (Istanbul, Nergiz).

[64] Referring to the coup-plot cases started in 2007, in which some 1,000 high-ranking officers have been arrested or brought to trial, a retired brigadier general said, "I don't think the army wants to do anything [to derail the Kurdish process]. It is subdued …. An army that can't react [to its officers being arrested in large numbers] won't react to anything else". Crisis Group interview, Haldun Solmaztürk, Ankara, July 2013.

[65] See Crisis Group Report, *Turkey's Kurdish Impasse*, op. cit.

[66] "Accepting the principle of education in mother languages is a necessity for a state that is fair towards its citizens …. [But] Kurdish parents need to teach Turkish to their children". Fethullah Gülen, interview with Iraq's Kurdish language *Rudaw* newspaper, in Turkish on fgulen.com, 27 June 2013. A leading figure in the movement announced that its schools were ready to give education in mother languages, adding that the practice would unite Turkey, not divide it. He added: "A large part of Kurds and Muslims in this country don't feel themselves as part of the Turkish concept …. A more inclusive definition can be created". Cemal Uşak, deputy president, Writers and Journalists Foundation, quoted in "Gülen cemaati okullarının Kürtçe eğitime hazır olduğunu düşünüyorum" [I think Gulen movement schools are ready for education in Kurdish], T24, 19 April 2013.

[67] According to MetroPOLL's research in September 2013, 50 per cent of Turks support democratizing reforms as a solution to the Kurdish problem (without talking to the PKK), while another 36 per cent believe there should also be dialogue and negotiations (with the PKK). Only 8 per cent supported a military solution. "People overwhelmingly support democracy as answer to Kurdish issue". Today's Zaman, 6 October 2013, http://bit.ly/GCKnc9.

[68] A much-used slogan is "Türk-Kürt kardeş, PKK kalleş" (Turks and Kurds are brothers, PKK is the backstabber). "They call it the Kurdish problem …. Kurd is one thing, the PKK terrorist organisation is another …. We are [indivisible] with

decades, the issue was portrayed simply as the PKK problem in the south east; many Turks, therefore, believe eliminating the PKK and ensuring the equality of citizens under the law would solve all injustices.

In previous reports, Crisis Group has outlined five grievances most Kurds want the government to address: using mother languages in education and public life; introducing a decentralised local government structure; removing ethnic discriminatory bias from the constitution and laws; lowering the national election threshold for political parties; and amending anti-terrorism laws to decriminalise non-violent dissent.[69]

Kurdish frustrations were partially addressed in a 30 September AKP democratisation package, importantly including measures to allow some classes in Kurdish in private schools and removing the morning pledge of allegiance, which Kurds felt was discriminatory.[70] Implementation will be subject to further legislation and changes in regulations. Nationalist media outlets have already described the package as a concession to the PKK.[71] The PKK criticized it as "trying to satisfy society with crumbs".[72]

A. *Mother Languages in Education*

The most widely-heard demand among Turkey's Kurds is the right to education in Kurdish, as well as the right to use it in all areas of life including public services. The current constitution and laws are major obstacles, although officials believe the 30 September promise to introduce some Kurdish lessons requires no constitutional changes.[73] There is a need to defuse deep fears among nationalist Turks that allowing full education and public services in mother languages would lead to a parallel state and division of the country. A middle-class western Turk explained her concern:

> Education in mother languages may not have faced a strong reaction under normal circumstances. But now it is not clear to me what is happening in this [peace] process. On the Kurdish side, you hear statements like "we want autonomy". There is clearly talk of a [separate] Kurdistan [in Turkey].[74]

---

the Kurdish people like a nail and the skin under it. [Terror] is a black thorn between us". Pakize Akbaba, president, Association of [Turkish] Martyrs' Mothers, interview with Ulusal Kanal, 2013, http://bit.ly/17wCZZD. "It's wrong to say all Kurds are PKK …. there are Kurds who have done a lot for Turkey". Crisis Group interview, MHP supporter, Bursa, June 2013.

[69] Crisis Group Report, *Turkey's Kurdish Impasse*, op. cit. To these, an AKP official added some form of a truth and reconciliation commission (he called it a "confrontation commission"), and an AKP MP said he would support this. Crisis Group interviews, Ankara, July 2013. Kurds consider it crucial that Turks know and understand what has happened to them, but even today, few Turks know what occurred in the south east during the 1980s and 1990s.

[70] The package announced by Prime Minister Erdoğan supported discussing the lowering the electoral threshold; state aid to political parties that receive at least 3 per cent of the national vote (thus to BDP); lifting a ban on women's headscarves in the public sector; lifting the ban in the political parties law on election propaganda in languages other than Turkish; increasing penalties for hate crimes and setting up a Discrimination and Equality Board; and allowing reinstatement of (mostly Kurdish) names for villages and towns.

[71] For instance, see "PKK'ya jest" [A gesture for the PKK] and "Türbanın altından anadilde eğitim çıktı" [Education in mother language was behind the moves on headscarves], both in *Aydınlık,* 11 August 2013.

[72] "The AKP government has shown that it has not understood the Kurdish question and has not adopted a serious approach towards resolving the question … instead of settlement [it] has chosen a policy of non-settlement … [of] buying time and winning another election … in an attempt to continue and devise a cover for political colonialism and cultural genocide". Statement, Copresidency of the KCK Executive Council, 1 October 2013.

[73] "Demokratikleşme Paketi'nden çıkan Kürtçe eğitim, anadilde eğitim anlamı taşımıyor'" [The Kurdish education in the Democratisation Package does not mean mother-language education], *Radikal*, 1 October 2013. The constitution says the language of the country is Turkish, and its Article 42 on education bans the teaching of any other language as a mother tongue to citizens in schools. An exception is made for non-Muslim Greek, Armenian or Jewish schools, a historical legacy from the Ottoman "millet" system that treated self-regulating religious communities as the building blocks of society.

[74] Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013.

A July 2013 survey found that citizens are divided: 48.2 per cent supported Kurds in predominantly Kurdish areas receiving education in their mother language, 47.9 per cent were opposed.[75] The government has as yet made no attempt to explain international best practices on language education to the larger public. Prime Minister Erdoğan has zigzagged on education in mother languages, initially rejecting it outright.[76] But if he acted to fully guarantee this right, he could find himself pushing at an open door. There are conciliatory approaches in his own party. An AKP official argued that the official language should be Turkish, but there should not be any obstacles to studying in Kurdish, adding that "people can't choose their mother language or race. You can't get anywhere with bans".[77] Indeed, there has been very little public backlash to the government's previous steps broadening the use of Kurdish.[78] And an expert said mother languages are not the top concern about Kurdish issues in the opposition CHP's stronghold of Izmir.[79]

CHP supports the right to use mother languages, including in broadcasting, art, and private classes; however, it stops short of openly backing education in mother languages.[80] In their proposals for a new constitution, CHP and MHP keep the country's language as Turkish, not leaving room for second languages. However, a CHP official voiced a personal view that full-time private Kurdish schools could be opened, and another conceded that the party could lift its opposition in the future.[81]A CHP member of the parliament's constitutional reconciliation commission has said forcing children to start education in a language they do not understand sets them back years.[82] Nevertheless, strong intra-party divisions are evident on this issue.[83]

The MHP is resolutely opposed to education in mother languages, saying that people can learn them at home. A senior official reasoned that such a move would reduce mobility in jobs, could give rise to a debate on sovereignty and that answering Kurds' demands on this issue would only hasten what he saw as an eventual demand for independence.[84] An MHP supporter said:

---

[75] Survey by MetroPOLL, "Poll: Public supportive of cemevis [Alevi houses of worship] warm to education in Kurdish", *Today's Zaman*, 17 July 2013.

[76] On 26 June, he said the government had no plans to start mother-language education. He repeated this in August, adding he would do nothing that would lead to Turkey's division. "Erdoğan says PKK did not fulfil promises", *Today's Zaman*, op. cit.

[77] Crisis Group interview, Bursa, June 2013.

[78] Between 2002 and 2012, AKP legalised private Kurdish language classes and opened a state TV channel broadcasting in Kurdish and Kurdish language institutes in universities; most recently it introduced electives in mother languages at state schools.

[79] Crisis Group interview, Fuat Keyman, member of Wise Persons Aegean region delegation, Istanbul, June 2013.

[80] CHP 2011 party program, in Turkish, www.chp.org.tr.

[81] "Given the sensitivities today, we don't find education in mother languages appropriate. But we look at the EU, to France, Belgium, and so on …. Things can change". Crisis Group interview, Bursa, June 2013, and telephone interview, September 2013. Moreover, when CHP suggested new language in the clause on education that "the state takes precautions to ensure that everyone can benefit from the right to education in an effective, equitable and undisrupted manner", it signalled possible future revisions concerning education in mother languages.

[82] CHP deputy Rıza Türmen, quoted in "Kürt çocuğundan 5 yıl çalıyoruz" [We are stealing five years from Kurdish children], *Taraf*, 23 September 2013.

[83] During a debate on mother languages, a nationalist CHP parliamentarian said the "Turkish and Kurdish nations are not equal, they are not on the same level …. There is no Kurdish issue in Turkey. [AKP] has made this a Turkish problem". "CHP seçmeninin çoğu ulusalcı" [Majority of CHP voters are nationalists], *Akşam*, 28 Ocak 2013.

[84] "Will giving them education in mother languages end problems? Language is an area of sovereignty, it is a flag. [They have] a desire to share sovereignty". Crisis Group interview, Oktay Vural, MHP parliamentary group deputy chairman, Ankara, July 2013. Around the time of its "Turkish" themed Konya rally, a twitter top trend on 20 August was "Our language is Turkish, our party is MHP", and on 23 August, "Our language is Turkish, our castle is MHP".

> It is enough that anyone who wants to learn Kurdish can do so today …. If we give education in Kurdish, the generation ten years later won't speak Turkish. They will say "we are different". It would be sowing the seeds of division![85]

The Pro-Kurdish BDP has said a continued ban on education in mother languages is a deal-breaker for it, as is the categorisation of all citizens of Turkey as Turks.[86] It wants full rights to use mother languages in private and public life, and says the state must ensure access to quality education in mother languages. To allay Turkish concerns, a deputy suggested a model that included obligatory Turkish lessons.[87] BDP's proposals for a new constitution, like the AKP's, describe Turkish as the "official" language, leaving the door open for other secondary languages on a regional basis.

It would take time to switch to nationwide education in mother languages, and there are capacity concerns. According to an AKP deputy, the education ministry is unable to bring the two main Kurdish dialects, Kurmanjî and Zazaki, into the curriculum at this point. A former Turkish teacher said there are more pressing problems than mother languages at poorer public schools, such as 60-child classrooms, dirty bathrooms and overall "chaos".[88]

International best practices and research show that education in a mother language is an essential building block for academic achievement and better command of other languages (in this case, Turkish).[89] A bilingual education model, keeping Turkish alongside Kurdish, should also ease Turks' concerns about Kurds not speaking Turkish in the future.

The government and the nationalist opposition ought to keep in mind that previous steps, including Kurdish private lessons and optional Kurdish classes in public schools, broke taboos but encountered little demand in the Kurdish-majority areas. Full education in Kurdish might face the same fate, given the economic and cultural dominance of Turkish. Government steps and social change have already broken through many mental blocks to language reform. Even a supporter of the far-right BBP espoused a new tolerance:

> What are you trying to achieve by banning a language that is already spoken? It is a crime against humanity to deny the existence of a language that is a person's mother tongue. We shouldn't even be discussing this today.[90]

B. *Decentralisation*

Kurds and Turks alike see the need for local government reform. Protests against urban development projects in Istanbul (Section II.C above) illustrate the pent-up demand nationally for participation in local policy-making, but decentralisation is a sensitive issue for Turkish nationalists, who see a federal system as the road to Kurdish secession. According to a Turkish bureaucrat, "every nation wants its own state, and Kurds are no different".[91] A columnist in a pro-CHP newspaper voiced a common concern:

> The real, important goal [of the process] is to free Öcalan. Then, of course, it will be accepted that Kurds and Turks are two main elements of the state …. What [Prime Minister Erdoğan]

---

[85] Crisis Group interview, pro-MHP businessman, Bursa, June 2013.
[86] Düzel, "Selahattin Demirtaş", op. cit.
[87] Sırrı Süreyya Önder, quoted in "BDP offers Bulgarian model for education in Kurdish", *Hurriyet Daily News*, 6 September 2013.
[88] Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013.
[89] For more, see Vahap Coskun, Şerif Derince and Nesrin Uçarlar, "Scar of Tongue", Diyarbakır Institute of Social and Political Studies (DISA) March 2011.
[90] Crisis Group interview, Turkish bureaucrat, Istanbul, August 2013.
[91] Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, August 2013.

> constantly repeats in rallies as "one nation, one flag, one state" will soon become "two nations, two flags, two states".[92]

Still, with many political and cultural changes dependent on a new constitution, decentralisation is an easier issue on which concrete steps can and should be taken.[93] Though some argue there may be problems with implementation,[94] a small step was already taken with the AKP's new municipalities law, passed with little nationwide debate in November 2012.[95] From the Kurdish movement's perspective, it was a positive move. An AKP official explained:

> The [Turkish state] establishment was up in arms saying the law was separatist .... [Prime Minister Erdoğan] did not want to openly tell the public that the law was also answering Kurdish demands, but he shouldered the criticisms about it. He did not back down.[96]

The opposition is critical of the law, though there are disagreements about whether it amounts to decentralisation.[97] When Prime Minister Erdoğan mentioned the possibility of electing governors in the future – and in one TV interview even broke a republican taboo by positively mentioning the old Ottoman ethno-geographical terms "Lazistan" and "Kurdistan" – nationalists said he was preparing the ground for a presidential system and a federation.[98]

Once again, apart from scepticism about the way the municipalities law was passed, there was little public reaction. Political opposition to the idea is not major. The left-leaning CHP supports increased powers for local governments, financial strengthening within a unitary structure, mainly by increasing local fund-raising capabilities.[99] It also wants to lift Turkey's reservations on the Council of Europe's European Charter on Local Self-Government.[100] The right-wing MHP also supports strengthening local government's financial resources, but says that a sufficient administrative framework is already in place and there is no need for centrally-provided services like policing and health to be done locally.[101]

The Kurdish movement's BDP proposes the most boldly decentralised system, foreseeing local assemblies that take over education, health, culture and tourism from the central administration and re-

---

[92] Cüneyt Arcayürek, "Devekuşu Örneği" [Like an ostrich], *Cumhuriyet*, 28 June 2013.

[93] "It can unlock 70 per cent of the negotiations on the Kurdish issue. AKP is open to this". Crisis Group interview, AKP official, Ankara, July 2013.

[94] For instance, the head of an Ankara think tank said that low per capita GDP and regional inequalities necessitate a transition period before Turkey can switch to a truly decentralised system. Crisis Group interview, Taha Özhan, head, Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (SETA), Ankara, July 2013.

[95] Among other things, it adds thirteen new metropolitan municipalities to the existing sixteen, including three predominantly Kurdish ones in Van, Mardin and Urfa; ties smaller municipalities into the central district; increases revenues through higher tax shares; merges the provincial general assembly with that of the province's main city; disbands special rural administration units under the centrally-appointed governors and gives their budgets to mayors; and increases the number of metropolitan council members.

[96] Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013.

[97] "This is a federalism law. We don't have regional governments in our constitution". CHP deputy Birgül Ayman Güler, quoted in "Büyükşehir yasası federasyon mu getiriyor?" [Is the metropolitan law bringing a federation?], *Sabah*, 25 October 2012.

[98] Erdoğan on Kanal D and CNN Türk's joint broadcast, 29 March 2013. See Ümit Özdağ, "PKK ile Müzakere, Mütareke ve Kirli Barış Sürecinin Analizi" [An analysis of negotiations, armistice and the dirty peace process with the PKK], 21. Yüzyıl Türkiye Enstitüsü [21st Century Turkey Institute], 7 May 2013.

[99] "CHP kurultayından demokrasi ve özgürlük bildirgesi" [Statement on democracy and freedom from CHP general assembly], 20 July 2012; and CHP 2011 election manifesto, in Turkish, www.chp.org.tr.

[100] Crisis Group interview, CHP deputy and member of constitutional reconciliation commission, Ankara, July 2013. Turkey signed the charter in 1991, but with reservations on nine articles that would strengthen local authorities by involving them in the central decision-making process; allow them to determine their own internal structures; give them more freedom over financial resources; permit them to associate with other local governments, domestic and foreign; and give them the right to judicial recourse if barred from exercising their powers.

[101] Crisis Group interview, Oktay Vural, MHP parliamentary group deputy chairman, Ankara, July 2013.

placing appointed governors with elected regional presidents.[102] It is nonetheless careful in its constitutional proposals to underline the territorial integrity of Turkey.

C. *Ethnic Discrimination*

The word "Turk" represents more than an ethno-linguistic identity in Turkey. It is primarily used to define citizenship of the country and is a cornerstone of the current (1982) constitution: "anyone who has citizenship ties to the Republic of Turkey is a Turk" (Article 66).[103] This interwoven Turkish identity is fundamental for many Turks, not just overtly nationalist ones. News in early 2013 about the removal of "Republic of Turkey" signs from some government buildings provoked outrage.[104] There is a broad desire to keep a reference to the Turkish nation in the new constitution, while putting emphasis on equal citizenship.[105] This overlaps with most Kurds' desire to live as equal citizens in a democratising Turkey.[106]

Lack of knowledge about Kurdish history is a barrier for some Turks, who still believe Kurds do not constitute a distinct nation, or even a different ethnicity, and have no literature, science or culture of their own, but merely a mixture of Turkish, Arabic, Hebrew and Persian cultures and languages.[107] A BDP deputy complained that her MHP colleagues in parliament even questioned whether Kurdish was a separate language.[108]

In proposals for a new constitution partially leaked to the media, AKP suggests using "Turkish nation" (*Türk milleti*) in the introductory phrases and "citizen of the Republic of Turkey" to define citizenship. CHP and MHP want to preserve a reference to Atatürk's nationalism, while BDP and AKP want to remove it. CHP and MHP both emphasise strengthening individual rights.[109] Like AKP, they would retain a reference to the Turkish nation in the introductory phrases (*Türk ulusu* for CHP, *Türk milleti* for MHP). To describe citizenship, CHP would keep the current wording but emphasise equality of all citizens,[110] while the MHP does not see a need to change the existing definition.[111] An MHP of-

---

[102] Party co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş said autonomy or federation were not part of the current negotiations. Düzel,"Selahattin Demirtaş", op. cit.

[103] The concept of "Turkishness" to describe a citizenship tie to the Republic of Turkey was introduced in the first (1924) constitution and has remained in the subsequent ones.

[104] The government said some signs were removed for maintenance and later replaced, but many Turks, mainly from the *ulusalcı* segment, have put the letters "TC" in front of their names on social media in protest (short for Türkiye Cumhuriyeti, Republic of Turkey). The left-wing youth group Genç Türk (Young Turk) conducted a signature campaign in May-June 2013, directed against the Kurdish initiative, carrying signs that read "TC forever". "Removal of TC from government buildings is baby-killer Öcalan's request, and over 300 signs have been removed so far, especially in the south east. We are against negotiating with [him and the PKK]". Crisis Group interview, Genç Türk member, Istanbul, May 2013.

[105] Wise Persons delegation reports, made available to Crisis Group, 2013.

[106] Crisis Group Report, *Turkey's Kurdish Impasse*, op. cit.

[107] For instance, citing secret military documents, Saygı Öztürk recites arguments about Kurmanji Kurds and Zazas being respectively a Turkmen clan and a line of Hittite Turks on the Iranian border. *Örgüt Pazarı* [Marketplace of Illegal Organisations] (Istanbul, 2013), p. 193.

[108] "They were saying things like 'three thousand words came from Persian' …. We take this as an insult". BDP MP Meral Danış Bektaş quoted in "CHP ile MHP kart kurt ediyor" [CHP and MHP are talking nonsense], *Taraf*, 23 August 2013. This is mainly a result of the rise of Turkish nationalism after the 1930s, when foundations like the Society for the Study of Turkish History and the Society for the Study of Turkish Language were established to proove that all Muslim ethnic groups in Turkey were descendants of Turks. See Cenk Saraçoğlu, *The Kurds of Modern Turkey* (New York, 2011), p. 53

[109] CHP recognises ethnic identity at an individual level, stressing "integration not assimilation", while saying the state should have no ethnic bias. CHP's willingness to allow fuller expression of ethnicity is constrained by its view of terrorism as a major national threat. It calls the PKK a terrorist organisation in its party program and says "it is Turkey's right and duty to expel the PKK from northern Iraq". CHP 2011 party program, op. cit.

[110] "There were discussions within CHP; some said we can say 'citizens of Republic of Turkey', but in the end we decided to use 'Turk' to describe citizenship …. Kurds are right about [several] things. We should emphasise that the definition of citizenship is not based on race, ethnicity, language or religion. We should underline that it is a legal bond between the

ficial said his biggest concern is preventing Turkey becoming a country where "people choose their neighbours based on ethnicity". Pointing out that Turkishness is a sociological, not a racial tie, he added:

> Why do we even call [the country] "Turkey" then? We call the cuisine "Turkish cuisine", and the culture "Turkish culture" …. Won't [removing Turkishness] from the constitution cause discomfort among Turks? What we need to do instead is to enhance the inclusiveness of Turkishness, [not] split it up.[112]

Some Kurds living in western Turkey say ethnic discrimination is already entrenched, that Turks are in denial, and there is a need for positive action to counter the tendency. A recent study showed that Kurds from Diyarbakır living in Muğla province have a hard time renting houses or getting jobs once they reveal their identity.[113] Interviews among middle-class, non-Kurdish residents of western Izmir province revealed stereotypes and labelling of Kurds as "ignorant and cultureless", "benefit scroungers", "disrupters of urban life", "invaders" and "separatists".[114]

Finding compromise will require countering the fear among many Turks that recognising others' ethnic identities means the extinction of their own.[115] As AKP suggests, the definition of a Turkish nation or the Turkish people could remain in the preamble of a new constitution, while more should be done to make the definition of citizenship truly neutral. The Kurdish movement's BDP, however, wants to eliminate ethnic undertones by using "people of Turkey" in the introductory part of the constitution and "citizen of Turkey" under the citizenship definition.

D. *Anti-terrorism Laws*

The framework for Turkey's anti-terrorism legislation includes Law 3713 (on fighting terrorism), prepared under the 1991 state of emergency, and the June 2006 Law 5532 that amended it. The latter introduced longer sentences and widened the definition of terrorist crimes, including making the media accountable for printing terrorist propaganda.[116]

Many Kurds and some Turkish nationalists agree on at least the need for change, if for different reasons. The BDP calls for the anti-terrorism laws to be completely abolished, but this is difficult as long as outlawed, armed organisations exist in Turkey. For the Kurds, the main frustration is use of the laws since April 2009 to arrest several thousand Kurdish politicians, officials and activists, mainly from the BDP, in operations against the PKK-linked Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) and its

---

individual and the state based on equality". Crisis Group interview, CHP deputy and member of constitutional reconciliation commission, Ankara, July 2013.

[111] MHP argues that Article 10 of the constitution (everyone is equal in front of the law, regardless of language, race, ethnicity, sex or religious and political belief) neutralises any ethnic undertones elsewhere. Crisis Group interview, Oktay Vural, MHP parliamentary group deputy chairman, Ankara, July 2013.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Leyla Neyzi and Haydar Darıcı, *Özgürüm Ama Mecburiyet Var* [I Am Free But There Is An Obligation], (Istanbul, 2013), pp. 157-158.

[114] Cenk Saraçoğlu, *The Kurds of Modern Turkey*, op. cit., pp. 21-24.

[115] The Wise Persons Marmara region delegation head said Turks are not against Kurdish identity gaining respect, but fear that Turkish identity will lose respect. They see discussions about removing "TC" signs, the flag or federalism as attacks on Turkish identity. Deniz Ülke Arıboğan, personal report, op. cit.

[116] For details, see Volkan Aytar, "Daha Karanlık Bir Geleceğe Doğru mu?: Terörle Mücadele Kanununda Yapılan Değişiklikler" [Towards a Darker Future?: Changes to the Anti-Terror Law], TESEV, 2006. In addition to the listed laws, Penal Code Articles 220 (forming criminal organisations), 301 (degrading the Turkish nation, state or its institutions) and 318 (turning the people against the military) are used in an anti-terrorist context, and may need revision.

Turkish assembly offshoot (KCK/TM).[117] The army and nationalists oppose the way the law has been used in anti-coup plot cases involving hundreds of officers as well as one MHP and two CHP deputies.[118]

The problem for reformers is to pin down precisely where resistance to changing the anti-terrorism law is. According to an AKP official, the government sees the discharge of KCK suspects as an important step to advance the peace process, but the judiciary resists: "Some courts allow releases, some don't …. The forensic department blocked the release of sick inmates [a key BDP demand]. The justice minister really wants to make [releases] work …. We are facing a giant judicial block. We have to fight the [legal] system over time".[119] The head of an Ankara think tank counted over 1,000 KCK releases since April 2013 and suggested that a middle ground could be found on a case-by-case basis even if the law is not changed.[120]

AKP seems favourable to amending the law, but the 30 September reform package (see above) did not include any changes to the anti-terror legislation, though initial media reports had indicated that the definition of membership in a terrorist organisation – the most common charge in KCK trials – would be narrowed to allow releases.[121] Attempts to reform the system in the past year by judicial measures resulted in few KCK suspects being freed; a BDP official even complained they caused new cases to be opened.[122]

The political opposition is divided on anti-terrorism law reform. The right-wing MHP is against immediate changes, saying "ideology matters", and Kurds are not worse off than Turks when facing the legal system.[123] The left-leaning CHP supports redefinition of terror crimes to exclude non-violent acts and shortening of pre-trial detention.[124] A CHP parliamentarian blamed AKP's attempt to be all things to all people:

> It was the AKP that made it a terror crime in 2006 for children under eighteen to throw stones; it was the AKP that increased pre-trial detention time for terror crimes to ten years in 2005. Now it is passing "reform packages" …. The AKP blames the judiciary but [it can fix it] ….. It was able to pass a law overnight for [intelligence head] Hakan Fidan [to prevent him from testifying in court].[125]

---

[117] Some were later released or sentenced, but many remain in preventive detention, charged with membership of or aiding a terrorist organisation, but not with a violent act. According to an AKP official, the Kurdish movement is partly to blame for mixing legal and illegal entities: "The state had made the distinction between legal and illegal entities in the 1990s. Why did the PKK mix it up again? Why is a mayor a member of KCK for instance?" Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013.

[118] On 5 August 2013, in a main case, called Ergenekon, and after a trial lasting more than five years, an Istanbul high criminal court sentenced nineteen people, including a former chief of the general staff, to life sentences on terrorism charges. The appeals process is expected to last a year. The other coup-plot case, Balyoz (sledgehammer), is also on appeal.

[119] Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013.

[120] Crisis Group interview, Taha Özhan, SETA head, Ankara, July 2013.

[121] "We have a legal logic that says 'how can there be non-violent PKK propaganda?' The law in Turkey is as conservative as the politicians". Crisis Group interview, AKP deputy, Ankara, July 2013.

[122] The fourth judicial reform package, approved on 11 April, changed the definition of terrorism to exclude printing statements of terrorist organisations and attending unauthorised demonstrations. "The anti-terrorism law and Turkish penal code need to be changed in line with universal legal norms. But I don't think that will solve anything because the [KCK and Ergenekon] cases are political, not legal". Crisis Group interview, Haldun Solmaztürk, retired brigadier general, Ankara, July 2013.

[123] Crisis Group interview, Oktay Vural, MHP parliamentary group deputy chairman, Ankara, July 2013. "Kurds are making too big a deal about this, it's a problem nationwide, and Ergenekon jailings are also not fair. It's not just about Kurds". Crisis Group interview, pro-MHP businessman, Bursa, June 2013.

[124] "CHP kurultayından demokrasi ve özgürlük bildirisi", op. cit.

[125] Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013.

Further down the road, legislating an amnesty for the PKK or Öcalan would need careful and convincing arguments. It would be difficult to accept for many Turks, who would consider it an injustice to the families and memories of Turkish soldiers and civilians killed in the 30 years of conflict and remain unaware that two thirds of the casualties have been on the Kurdish side and that millions of Kurds were displaced.[126] This leads to contradictory statements from the government. In early August, Deputy Prime Minister Beşir Atalay said the government was evaluating militants' return to Turkey.[127] Then on 15 August, Prime Minister Erdoğan said he was not considering a general amnesty for the PKK.[128] Nevertheless, the public may accept some form of amnesty eventually. Even in the Aegean region, where many dead soldiers' families live, there seems to be a tacit consensus that these issues can be discussed in five years or so, if peace holds.[129]

E. *Political Representation*

The biggest gap between political practice and the popular will is Turkey's 10 per cent national electoral threshold for a party to enter parliament. It was introduced with the 1982 constitution and reinforced by the 1983 Law 2839 on Election of Deputies.[130] The rationale was to keep small parties out of parliament and maintain stability after the chaotic 1970s, but its main effect now is to make it harder for the Kurdish movement's main legal political party, the BDP – which polls 6-7 per cent of the vote – to enter parliament. Kurdish candidates have instead to contest elections as independents, win a majority in their constituency and then join the pro-Kurdish party once in office. In theory, all agree the threshold is too high, but as an AKP deputy put it, "everyone complains about it until they are in power; then they forget about it. There needs to be stronger social pressure to change it".[131]

Prime Minister Erdoğan had previously ruled out lowering the threshold citing concerns about stability and implying it could result in coalition governments.[132] But in a 30 September announcement on planned reforms, he said the government would discuss whether to keep the existing system or choose an alternative to be put forward by the AKP, including a 5 per cent threshold or none at all.[133] Even an AKP official said concerns about instability are unfounded, as the only other party that could pass even a 5 per cent barrier now is the BDP.[134] The left-leaning CHP has proposed lowering the

---

[126] "Öcalan put a bullet through a three-month-old baby's heart. He is a baby-killer! He is a rapist! He is a vampire! …. He looks like a cannibal; he is not human …. Now, we have made him the crown on our heads? … I won't forget [the death of my son] for a lifetime. Even if my son came back to life and said 'mother, forgive my killers', I won't!" Pakize Akbaba, president, association of martyrs' mothers, interview with Ulusal Kanal, 2013, http://bit.ly/17wCZZD.

[127] Crisis Group interview, Ankara, February 2013; Fadime Özkan, "Başbakan yardımcısı Beşir Atalay: Süreç gayet yolunda, biz bu işe asılıyoruz" [Deputy PM Beşir Atalay: The process is going well, we are pressing ahead with it], *Star*, 5 August 2013. An AKP official said the government needs to let militants enter political life. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013.

[128] "Erdoğan says PKK did not fulfill promises", *Today's Zaman*, op. cit. Channelling the sentiments of his support base, the main opposition CHP leader, Kılıçdaroğlu, said the environment in Turkey is not suitable for a general amnesty. "Kılıçdaroğlu: Hükümet çözüm süreci için önemli adım atsın, CHP destek verir" (Kılıçdaroğlu: If the government takes important step for a solution, CHP will support it), T24, 8 August 2013.

[129] Crisis Group interview, Fuat Keyman, member of Wise Persons Aegean region delegation, Istanbul, 11 June 2013.

[130] Article 69 in the constitution says election laws are regulated to ensure "fair representation" and "stable governance". Article 33, paragraph 1 of Law 2839 specifies the 10 per cent.

[131] Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013.

[132] "In systems where there are no election thresholds, you cannot find confidence and stability. Over the past decade, we have obtained stability and confidence in our country, which has been possible thanks to a government structure without coalitions …. We don't want to ruin the performance of our country". "Erdoğan says no plans to lower election threshold", *Today's Zaman*, 26 July 2013.

[133] Erdoğan said these changes might be accompanied by new constituency arrangements that could end up helping the dominant party raise its share of parliamentary deputies.

[134] "I think it should be lowered to 5 per cent. With 7 per cent, elections will be very tense and tough in south-east Turkey". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013.

threshold to 3 per cent (also BDP's suggestion) and is open to removing it all together.[135] The right-wing MHP is less enthusiastic, but agreeable to discussing it as a "technical matter". It does not want to do so, however, as part of the talks with the PKK and does not think there is a pressing need for a change.[136]

As protests throughout Turkey in summer 2013 demonstrated (see Section II.C above), a significant segment of the population feels the current system does not adequately represent their views and values. There is also much less resistance from the nationalists on lowering the threshold than other reforms linked to the Kurdish process.

V. A Turkish-Kurdish Perception Gap

There is lack of empathy toward and knowledge about the Kurds and the Kurdish issue among many Turks who consider themselves nationalists. Kurds feel this is discrimination, but some Turks are not even aware if and how they discriminate. Many think Kurds can have any job they want, live anywhere they want, access all the services they want, so have no reason to feel resentful. A Turk in the capital expressed her confusion: "There are many Kurdish ministers, members of parliament, even presidents. When I look at a person, I don't [discriminate and] say 'this is an Alevi' or 'this is a Kurd'".[137] But others disagree: "In this country a Kurd can become a lawyer, an undersecretary or a president. But he can't be a Kurd. Peace will only come when a Kurd can be a Kurd".[138]

There is also blatant discrimination. In western Bursa province, a middle-class MHP supporter said neighbourhoods that are unsafe are those occupied by "easterners", a euphemism for Kurds: "They come and take over everything. Then they stone our public busses because we have Turkish flags on them". Another MHP supporter said, "Kurds in Bursa are the mafia. They are gangsters, thieves. Kurds are lawless. The highest amount of stolen electricity is in [Kurdish] Diyarbakır province. They feel they have a right to do this".[139] A Turkish shop owner in Istanbul said he does not like doing business with "the easterners", because they are uneducated, rough and do not pay on time.[140] Some Turks resent Kurds for being outside the system, exploiting loopholes, making illegal gains and evading taxes, mainly in the south east, while Turks subsidise them through taxes and government incentives.[141] As previous Crisis Group reporting has shown, however, Kurds in the east and south east feel alienated from the state, discriminated against and deliberately held back economically.[142]

Kurds make an effort to underline that their problem is with the state, not other Turks. A BDP official said, "it is due to the PKK's line that the situation has not deteriorated into a civil war in Turkey.

---

[135] "We initially said 3 per cent, because we weren't sure people would accept zero. But after the Gezi protests, we decided it should be removed totally". Crisis Group interview, CHP deputy, Ankara, July 2013. Pro-CHP media repeated calls for lowering the threshold, calling it "a betrayal to the public and to democracy". Ümit Zileli, "Ülkemizi geri almak" (Taking back our country), *Cumhuriyet*, 11 July 2013.

[136] "We are not in favour of removing the threshold. Right now we don't think there is a representation problem in parliament, but we are assessing the issue. Whether it should be 10 per cent or 8 per cent is a technical matter". Crisis Group interview, Oktay Vural, MHP parliamentary group deputy chairman, Ankara, July 2013. MHP supporters generally do not favour a threshold lower than 7 per cent. Crisis Group interviews, Bursa and Ankara, June-July 2013.

[137] Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013. CHP's Tunceli deputy, Kamer Genç, said the number of Kurdish ministers proves there is no Kurdish issue. CNN Türk, 1 September 2013.

[138] Interview with a university student in the Black Sea region conducted on 6 May 2013, Wise Persons Black Sea delegation report, made available to Crisis Group.

[139] Crisis Group interviews, Bursa, June 2013.

[140] Another agreed, "this is in the Kurds' genes". Crisis Group interviews, Istanbul, August 2013.

[141] "There is economic disparity between the west and east of the country, but I don't know if the backwardness is intentional on the part of the state, or simply a mismanagement". Crisis Group interview, Turkish public-sector employee, Ankara, July 2013.

[142] Crisis Group Report, *Turkey's Kurdish Impasse*, op. cit.

The PKK is clearly fighting the government. Turks live in ease in the south east".[143] A Turkish bureaucrat from Elazığ disagreed: "When I was a child, I used to get my nose broken [by Kurds] in school because I was Turkish …. If you ask Turks in Elazığ what they think about Kurds, they will say Kurds are bloodthirsty and uncivilised".[144]

Dialogue is helping to bridge mistrust and misperceptions on both sides. In addition to exchanges in Wise Persons meetings and nationwide protests that unexpectedly created empathy (see Sections II.B and II.C above), other local or national platforms can also help.[145] Having gone through alienation themselves, some Kurds are ready to extend an olive branch to Turkish nationalists:

> We Kurds have felt as "the other" for a long time. Now, most Turks don't oppose the peace process or Kurds obtaining their rights, but those who do oppose it, such as the ultra-nationalists, should not be made into the new "other". The state should be careful not to alienate anyone.[146]

A. *De-demonising Kurdishness*

While it is encouraging that there has been little backlash to the limited steps on linguistic and cultural rights for Kurds, distrust between Turks and Kurds has deep roots in decades of official denial that Kurds existed, as well as the portrayal of the low intensity war between the PKK and the Turkish state solely as a terrorism problem. Reversing this way of thinking will be uphill work. Paradoxically, given the macho nature of nationalist rhetoric, a major problem is fear, principally concern about losing the concept of a Turkish nation and territorial integrity stemming from belief that the PKK does not want to end its armed struggle or abandon its ultimate goal of a separate Kurdish state on Turkish soil.[147] A common version of the scare scenario includes constitutional recognition of Kurdish identity and languages, then establishment of an autonomous region that turns into a federation, and finally a separate entity that joins a united independent Kurdistan with the Kurds from Iraq, Syria and Iran.[148]

In parallel with these fears about separation, Turks are hesitant about giving public prominence to the PKK -- designated a terrorist organisation by the EU, the U.S. and other countries – and its head, Öcalan, whose role has so far been central to the peace process. AKP should seek to persuade Turkish public opinion that this is not a cause for concern. On the contrary, having strong leaders on both sides (Erdoğan and Öcalan) deeply trusted by their own constituencies is an opportunity for peace.[149]

Similarly, Turks worry about signs that the PKK is exploiting the relative calm to expand physical control of the predominantly Kurdish regions and establish local militias. In the north-eastern city of Erzurum, ethnic Turks feel threatened by rising proportions of ethnic Kurds in cities around them. They say they are overwhelmed by much larger Kurdish families, and, when travelling, feel obliged to take big detours around areas where the PKK is believed active.[150] Some feel that negotiating with the

---

[143] Crisis Group interview, Bursa, June 2013.

[144] Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, August 2013.

[145] One such is İlle de Barış (Peace No Matter What) in Bursa. Its co-founder said, "everyone 'wants peace, but ….' All problems start with that 'but'. We lost our ability to think as civilians 30 years ago and started thinking that the state's rhetoric was our own …. We want peace. There is no 'but'". Crisis Group interview, Rüştem Avcı, June 2013.

[146] Crisis Group interview, Bursa, June 2013.

[147] "Is there a guarantee those who leave [under militant withdrawals] will not come back?". Crisis Group interview, Bursa, June 2013.

[148] These phases are described under "stages of forming a separate Kurdish state" by a retired lieutenant general who served in the south east. He adds: "Expecting terrorists to lay down arms is an empty hope". Altay Tokat, *Mücadele ve Çözüm*, op. cit., p. 34.

[149] See Didem Collinsworth, "The Kurdish movement and the peace talks with Turkey", Crisis Group blog, 13 March 2013. "Turkey allowed Öcalan to play the part of a leader. Turkish status quo and the PKK have created a semi-mythological Öcalan …. [Öcalan and Erdoğan] are very similar; they both have a strong ability to transform their base …. Erdoğan does not trust the PKK. He trusts Öcalan". Crisis Group interview, AKP official, Ankara, July 2013.

[150] Crisis Group interviews, Erzurum, January 2008.

PKK is tantamount to admitting defeat: "The ultimate goal of a terrorist organisation is to sit at the same table as the state it targets".[151]

The Kurdish movement's recent statements and actions have intensified these negative feelings among the Turkish public.[152] For instance, BDP deputy Pervin Buldan stirred up fears when talking about Syrian Kurds:

> We say "get over it" to the AKP, because the [Syrian] Kurds have obtained their [autonomous] status. The status achieved in Syria will soon also be achieved in Turkey through the Kurdish people's struggle. No one can fool the Kurds any more .... There may be boundaries between Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey, but all Kurds are one body, one voice, one heart in a united Kurdistan.[153]

A new PKK local militia calling itself "public order units" held publicised graduation ceremonies in Şırnak province in June 2013 and in Diyarbakır in July, parading masked recruits in uniforms and having them conduct road checks.[154] There have also been strong, vocal demands for Öcalan's freedom and a general amnesty for the militants, both sensitive issues for Turks. The PKK's military leader, Murat Karayılan, said in June that Öcalan would be freed later in the peace process.[155] The BDP issued a statement on 30 June listing Öcalan's freedom among its main requests, and a BDP official told Crisis Group:

> Öcalan and the PKK are not the causes of the Kurdish problem; they are the result. They need to be freed and allowed transition to a civilian life. We know it's not something that can be resolved in a few days, but if Öcalan is still in jail ten years from now, it means the process isn't working.[156]

Moreover, the "Conference on Unity and Solution [of the PKK and Kurdish problems] in North Kurdistan", held in Diyarbakır on 14-16 June 2013 (for the first time using Kurdistan in its name) ended in a clear, vocal demand for release of Öcalan, self-determination for Kurds through autonomy, federation or independence, removal of the PKK from international terror lists and recognition of Kurdish as an official language.[157] Turkish nationalists took to social media; comments like "prime minister, don't you see Diyarbakır?" was among the most-used phrases on Turkish Twitter on 18 June.

Nevertheless, reactions from the Turkish public were still limited. Likewise, the tone of Kurdish interlocutors is less provocative than the Kurdish national movement's statements and emphasises a common future with Turks if problems can be resolved – a view needing more emphasis from movement leaders.[158] Turkey's Kurds, particularly the urban youth, back some of the above positions, par-

---

[151] Crisis Group interview, Haldun Solmaztürk, retired brigadier general, Ankara, July 2013.

[152] Nationalist media reported the BDP's pro-reform "Government, take a step!" rallies in Diyarbakır, Mersin and Adana on 30 August as a "show of force".

[153] "Pervin Buldan: 'Öcalan'ın isteğiyle Meclis komisyon kurdu'" [Pervin Buldan: The parliament established a commission upon Öcalan's demand], Odatv.com, 7 August 2013.

[154] Called the Patriotic Democratic Youth Movement (Yurtsever Demokratik Gençlik - Hareketi, YDG-H), they carried pictures of Öcalan and PKK flags. KCK leadership member Duran Kalkan asked: "Will the Kurds not defend themselves? If the process moves forward, Kurds will have their public order, police and self-defence units. These are not rights only reserved for the Turks". "Duran Kalkan: Süreç ilerlerse Kürtlerin de polisi olacak" [If the process progresses, the Kurds will have their own police], T24, 17 July 2013.

[155] "Karayılan: Abdullah Öcalan özgür olacak" [Öcalan will be free], Doğan News Agency, 26 June 2013.

[156] Crisis Group interview, Bursa, June 2013.

[157] The name of a 25-26 March gathering in Ankara was "Democracy and Peace Conference".

[158] Crisis Group Report, *Turkey's Kurdish Impasse*, op. cit.

ticularly regarding Öcalan's health and freedom and the future of PKK militants.[159] Most still favour a reasonable compromise, however. It is noteworthy that the Kurdish national movement party receives well below half the total Kurdish vote, while perhaps one third of Kurds vote AKP.

The possibility AKP wants and needs BDP support in parliament to legislate a presidential system for Turkey raises more shared concerns among Turks and Kurds than is usually realised.[160] For some Turks, a presidential system means switching to federalism, hence again inciting fears of an eventual division, and raises concerns among many about yet more powers for Erdoğan. Some Kurds are also hesitant to grant more authority to the prime minister, whom they view as unreliable.[161] Even an AKP deputy acknowledged it was unfortunate that the presidential system issue emerged simultaneously with the Kurdish solution process and left questions in people's minds.[162] To protect the peace process, AKP must keep it clearly separate from Erdoğan's presidential aspirations.

Turkey's Kurds have their own fears about the process that are little known to Turks. They think promises will not be kept, complain that the government's language is not one of peace, and criticise continued fortification building by the security forces. The Wise Persons delegations found that Kurds think they are making all the sacrifices and want to see steps from the government.[163]

B. *Reforming the Education System*

The education system is a main source of nationalism, misperceptions about Kurds (and others) and perceived external threats against the state. Addressing a Kurdish frustration, the government announced it would remove the pledge of allegiance all students (through high school) must recite every week that begins with "I am a Turk, I am honest …" and ends with "Happy is the one who says 'I am a Turk'!"[164]

Textbooks do a poor job of representing the common history of Turks and Kurds. Few Turks know Atatürk not only recognised the existence of Kurds but talked about giving them local autonomy.[165] With the establishment of the republic on 29 October 1923 and during the building of a unitary nation

---

[159] Following his brother Mehmet's 1 July 2013 visit, the Democratic Society Congress (DTK, an umbrella organisation of Kurdish NGOs) applied to the justice ministry on 10 July to send an independent delegation of doctors to examine Öcalan. BDP deputies joined demonstrations in August in Şanlıurfa, Mardin and Diyarbakır provinces to draw attention to his health. Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin said there are full-time doctors on the island and no health concerns. "Öcalan ile ilgili flaş açıklama" [Breaking news announcement about Öcalan], Anadolu Agency, 1 August 2013. Nationalists think the demand to send doctors is opening the way for his release. "You will see, first they'll say he has prostate cancer, then reflux, and then he will be released upon reports prepared by a delegation of perhaps all international doctors". MHP deputy Yusuf Halaçoğlu, quoted in "Apo'yu kurtarma yasası" [Law to save Apo], *Sözcü,* 11 July 2013.

[160] A June 2013 survey by MetroPOLL found only 31 per cent of Turkey's citizens supported a switch to a presidential system. "Survey reveals growing public apprehension over democratisation process", *Today's Zaman*, 16 June 2013.

[161] Crisis Group Report, *Turkey's Kurdish Impasse*, op. cit.; Wise Persons delegation reports made available to Crisis Group, 2013.

[162] Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013. In leaked meeting notes from his island prison, Öcalan implied openness to considering a presidential system, but the BDP has since said it opposes the kind of presidency AKP proposes. Neşe Düzel, "Selahattin Demirtaş", op. cit. MHP also opposes a presidential system; a pro-MHP businessman said, "in Turkey we don't have an independent judiciary, and the legislature doesn't work. If we bring a presidential system on top of this, we will have established a sultanate!" Crisis Group interview, Bursa, June 2013.

[163] Wise Persons delegation reports made available to Crisis Group, 2013.

[164] Its removal was a main demand in Wise Persons delegation reports from both the East and South East Anatolia regions, made available to Crisis Group, 2013. Nationalist have argued that "Turk" in the pledge refers to citizenship, not ethnicity.

[165] The republic's first prime minister and second president, İsmet Inönü, said in the 1923 Lausanne Conference that Kurds were entitled to state-guaranteed cultural rights and freedoms. Cenk Saraçoğlu, *The Kurds of Modern Turkey*, op. cit., pp. 46, 48. An opposing argument among nationalists is that Atatürk was referring to local government, not autonomy, and elsewhere he stressed the unity of Kurds and Turks and warned against drawing new boundaries. See, for instance, Bayram Bayraktar, "Atatürk Güneydoğu'ya/Kürtlere özerklik vaat etti mi?" [Did Atatürk promise autonomy to Kurds/to southeast?], İleri, January-March 2013.

state, official discourse and practice regarding Kurds changed to one seeing them as "prospective" Turks, "a community that could be assimilated into the Turkish nation".[166]

Whether intentional or not, the ways history is taught and current events are reported fuel conspiracy theories that foreigners are mainly out to split the country, as European powers demanded in the unimplemented 1920 Treaty of Sèvres.[167] (It would have attached the Kurdish-speaking areas of today's Turkey to British-controlled Iraq). In the context of the Kurdish peace process, this means nationalists fear that as a result of agreements between the PKK and AKP, the "anti-Turkey Western powers, like vultures hovering above our country, will descend upon us and once again put the Sèvres map in front of us".[168] The curriculum also perpetuates a concept of an ethno-centric Turkish state as a single entity throughout history, presenting Turks as linear descendants of almost all past Anatolian civilisations, and presenting Islam as a natural component of the Turkish identity.[169]

C. *The Media: Everyone's Favourite Black Sheep*

Turkish nationalists and Kurdish movement activists alike criticise national and local media outlets about their treatment of the PKK and Kurdish problems. For decades, mainstream media has mostly followed the state's lead in portraying the issue as a purely terrorism challenge. While there has been more open debate in recent years, as many national taboos were broken, the media is still perceived as a hindrance.[170] However, a recent rise in readership for opposition newspapers with a Turkish nationalist tone indicates growing dissatisfaction with the government and its pressure on mainstream media outlets and should not be interpreted as a rise in the public's aversion to Kurdish reforms.[171]

Names the media uses for the PKK's Öcalan like "separatist/terrorist chieftain", "the butcher of İmralı" and "baby-killer" correspond to one strain of Turkish public sentiment and do not help create an atmosphere conducive to negotiations and empathy. While it may be understandable that the masthead of a pro-MHP newspaper reads "This country has been Turkish in the past, is Turkish today and will live as Turkish forever", it is problematic that a mainstream daily with high circulation still brandishes the slogan "Turkey belongs to the Turks".[172]

---

[166] See Cenk Saraçoğlu, *The Kurds of Modern Turkey*, op. cit. This was in part due to the introduction of a secular definition of nationhood that used to be based mainly on Islam. An AKP official called this republican construct a "custom-made nationalism in Turkey based on a Sunni-Hanefi Muslim identity" now shared by both secular and pro-Islamic actors in Turkish politics. Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013.

[167] The 1920 peace treaty between the Ottoman Empire and the Allied powers after the First World War put most of what is modern Turkey under French, British, Italian, Greek and Armenian control. It never came into effect due to the Turkish war of independence; a superseding treaty was signed in Lausanne in 1923 with more favorable terms for Turkey.

[168] Professor Dr Hidayet Sarı, "Teröristbaşılığından siyasi önderliğe İmralı süreci" [From terrorist chieftain to political leader: the Imrali process], İleri, January-March 2013.

[169] For more, see Tanıl Bora "Ders kitaplarında milliyetçilik: 'Siz bu ülke için neler yapmayı düşünüyorsunuz?" [Nationalism in textbooks: 'What will you do for this country?']; and Ayşe Gül Altınay, "Can veririm kan dökerim: Ders kitaplarında militarism" [I take lives, I spill blood: Militarism in textbooks], both in "Ders Kitaplarında Insan Hakları II" [Human Rights in Textbooks II], Tarih Vakfı, 2007.

[170] Members of the Wise Persons delegations said media covered their visits poorly. "They focused on the protests against us. But the meetings we held and the points people made there were much more moderate". Crisis Group interview, Fuat Keyman, member, Aegean region delegation, Istanbul, June 2013. The Black Sea delegation said the media made it appear there were major protests when just fifteen people were involved; local media was more conservative than the public; and the harshest comments against the peace process in the meetings came from journalists. Report made available to Crisis Group, 2013.

[171] The *ulusalcı* newspaper *Sözcü* is the fourth largest selling in Turkey (an average daily circulation of over 350,000); urban, secular readers saw it as an independent news source during and after the May-June anti-government protests. An avid reader said, "I buy *Sözcü* because it is not afraid to criticise the government, particularly Erdoğan …. I don't even pay attention to its comments on the Kurdish issue". Crisis Group interview, Istanbul, September 2013.

[172] See *Yeni Çağ* for the former and *Hürriyet* for the latter.

Media also feeds conspiracy theories, the most common being that the peace process is part of a supposed U.S. "Great Middle East Project" that plots creation of a puppet Greater Kurdistan.[173] Pro-MHP media calls the PKK an American organisation, and AKP its accomplice.[174] In fact, the U.S. designates the PKK as a terrorist organisation, gives Turkey valuable anti-PKK intelligence and targets PKK leaders as alleged drug-running kingpins.

The Kurdish movement and Kurds blame pro-government outlets for silencing dissent and stifling debate and say the government could use its influence on the partisan media to shape public opinion if it wanted to sell Kurdish reforms.[175] Prime Minister Erdoğan complains that PKK statements receive too much coverage.[176] His adviser accuses the opposition media of hindering AKP policies and seems to suggest more government control:

> Media needs to understand and discuss what "responsible publishing" is. In the cases of [Ireland's] IRA and [Spain's] ETA, [what brought success] was not only the opposition's open support and sharing of the government's burden, but also the attitude of the media. The countries that can deal with such problems are those where the media acts responsibly.[177]

VI. Conclusion

Turkey's current leadership created the ceasefire with the PKK, the start of talks and the valuable opportunity for an enduring peace that still exists. In the parallel process of democratisation that has benefited Kurds, the backlash that was always feared from the Turkish public so far has been minimal. Even nationalists now cite the existence of 24-hour Kurdish television as a sign of the country's tolerance, though it was a step they long stoutly opposed. The implacable "grey wolf" of Turkish nationalist legend is increasingly more of a figment of politicians' imagination than a reality in the population at large.

Both the Turkish government and the Kurdish movement have concerns about the peace process. It will take time and a longer period of zero casualties to dissolve fears. But a peace deal, anchored by new mutual understanding, can be achieved with determined leadership, consistent policies, conciliatory rhetoric, readiness to compromise, willingness to bring rights and local participation into governance, a revamped education system and new emphasis on common history that includes all viewpoints.

---

[173] For instance, the title of an article in a pro-MHP newspaper: "U.S. and Israel assign the mission; AKP, BDP and PKK play the separation game" (*Ortadoğu Gazetesi*, 29 May 2013). This thinking finds backing in nationalists' arguments: "The U.S. imposed the Kurdish initiative on the AKP in 2009 because of its decision to withdraw from Iraq. The initiative is against AKP's nature". Crisis Group interview, retired brigadier general, July 2013. Some popular Turkish TV shows, such as "Valley of the Wolves", build on regional conspiracy theories.

[174] For instance, see Arslan Bulut's columns in *Yeniçağ*, 13-14 August 2013.

[175] "The media is not independent. The government decides what gets published". Crisis Group interview, BDP official, Bursa, June 2013. "Turkish media is under the worst pressure ever in its history. We have a partisan media siding with the government. I have been a journalist for 30 years, and … I can't find work now". Crisis Group interview, pro-opposition former journalist, Bursa, June 2013. "It is hard to be on local TV with a peace discourse. The media takes its lead from the government. And the print media here is run by nationalists". Crisis Group interview, Rüştem Avcı, co-founder of İlle de Barış (Peace no Matter What) platform, Bursa, June 2013. An AKP official agreed the media has been compliant, saying this was "partly out of trust in the government, partly out of fear. Some traditional media does not want to cause trouble". Crisis Group interview, Ankara, July 2013. "If the government wanted to, it could control the nationalist reaction very well. It has access to so many media outlets. What major media do the nationalists have?" Crisis Group interview, Kurdish businessman and civil society leader, Istanbul, August 2013.

[176] "Erdoğan says PKK did not fulfill promises", *Today's Zaman*, op. cit.

[177] Yalçın Akdoğan, "Sorumlu davranmak çok mu zor?" [Is it too difficult to act responsibly?], *Star,* 19 April 2013.

Appendix A: Glossary

AKP – (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, Justice and Development Party), Turkey's ruling party, led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan It enjoys a strong parliamentary majority and popular support; its ideology mixes conservatism, religious piety, populism and economic development. The party won 50 per cent of the vote in the June 2011 elections for parliament, where it holds 326 of the 550 seats.

Atatürkçülük – Also known as Kemalism, it implies attachment to republican founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's ideology and principles (namely republicanism, nationalism, populism, statism, secularism and reformism). A main component is Turkish nationalism, which places all different ethnicities and groups living in Turkey under the umbrella of a Turkish nation.

BDP – (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, Peace and Democracy Party), the main legal Kurdish movement party in Turkey. Its six predecessors were closed by courts for links to the armed PKK. Thousands of BDP activists are currently charged with, or jailed on suspicion of, links to terrorism and PKK/KCK membership, though there are almost no charges of actual violent acts. BDP-affiliated candidates won 6.5 per cent of the vote in June 2011 elections. The party has 29 members in its parliamentary group and the support of several independents.

CHP – (Cumhuriyetçi Halk Partisi, Republican People's Party), the main left-of-centre opposition party; it has a new interest in Kurdish reforms and a deep-rooted loyalty to the statist, nationalist heritage of republic and party founder Kemal Atatürk. The party won 26 per cent of the vote and 135 of the 550 seats in parliament in June 2011 elections.

Hizmet (Service) movement – Turkish religious leader Fethullah Gülen's moderately Islamic, international initiative that primarily establishes educational institutions and involves hundreds of foundations, companies, and professional associations.

KCK – (Koma Ciwakên Kurdistanê, Union of Communities in Kurdistan), created by the PKK in 2005-2007, this is an umbrella organisation for all PKK affiliates in Kurdish communities in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria and the diaspora. The Turkish chapter is known as the KCK/TM (for Türkiye Meclisi, or Turkey Assembly).

KRG -- Kurdistan Regional Government (Hikûmetî Herêmî Kurdistan), the official governing body of the predominantly Kurdish region of northern Iraq. The president of the Iraqi Kurdish region is Masoud Barzani; its two largest parties – the KDP and PUK – have ruled since the KRG's inception in May 1992.

MHP – (Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, Nationalist Action Party), Turkey's main right-wing opposition party, won 13 per cent of the vote in June 2011 elections. It holds 56 of the 550 seats in parliament.

Milliyetçilik – Translates as **"**nationalism". In the political spectrum it refers to supporters of MHP or other conservative, right-wing parties that emphasise Turkish ethnicity, pan-Turkic ideals and a Turkish-Islamist ideology.

PKK – (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, Kurdistan Workers' Party), founded in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan, it started an armed insurgency in Turkey in 1984. The PKK has 3,000-5,000 insurgents based in northern Iraq and in Turkey and substantial minority support among Turkish Kurds. It is banned as a terrorist and drug-smuggling organisation by Turkey, the EU, the U.S. and a number of other countries.

PYD – Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Democratic Union Party), the Syrian Kurdish affiliate of the PKK/KCK, founded in 2003.

Ulusalcılık – Also translates as nationalism but refers mainly to the ideology of a large segment of CHP supporters as well as of other smaller parties that pledge allegiance to founder Atatürk's principles and emphasise the unitary, secular structure of the Republic of Turkey.

Ülkücü – Idealist nationalist, aslo referred to as "Grey Wolf", represents the members or sympathisers of MHP's more radical youth organisations (known as **Ülkü Ocakları*).***