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Between Respect and Rebellion an Interpretation of Reports on Kurds in Turkey¹

Sargi Islam²

ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to evaluate the reports which have been written on Kurds and the Kurdish problem in Turkey from the early Republic till the recent time. The article is based on primary sources such as reports submitted by political parties and government officers to the government and the Turkish National Assembly for a given period; it analyzes them in a chronological framework. Based on the sources, this article suggests that since the inception of the Republic of Turkey, the state and political parties from different ideological backgrounds, except the Kurdish party, have tended to formulate the Kurdish problem in terms of socio-economic underdevelopment; their suggestions mostly focus on solving such a problem and not addressing the oppression of the Kurdish population in Turkey. In addition, the paper argues that with the foundation of Partiya Karkeran Kurdistan (PKK), the problem that the state seeks to solve has shifted from a solely socioeconomic approach toward more security concerns.

Keywords: Turkey, PKK, East, Southeast, Kurdish problem.

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1. Introduction: A brief history of the Kurdish movement

After the Independent War, with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, a massive Turkification period started. The Kurds, as the biggest ethnic group in Turkey, were subjected to intensive assimilation. The young Republic had banned all Kurdish education institutions, associations, publications in the Kurdish language, and all other forms of cultural and ethnic expression in politics and social life (Meho 1997, p.9). The Turkish myth that based on Turkishness, Sunni Islam, and territory, resulted in a vertically designed politics and social life. The Kurds who believed that they were alienated and harshly oppressed rebelled several times in the 1920s and 1930s against the Turkish state. However, among various rebellions, three revolts in 1925, 1930 and 1937 have been predominantly discussed in modern

¹ Author Note: This paper constitutes some parts of my forthcoming PhD dissertation. However, it was rewritten and reformatted for publishing purposes.

² University of Szeged, Hungary, Email: iszeged509@gmail.com

Turkish history. While for the state and the pro-state academics, they were British-backed separatist terrorists, for the Kurds and pro-Kurdish movement, on the contrary, they were the result of Turkification and severe control of the state over Kurds in terms of ethnicity and geography. Nezan described 1925-1938 in the history of Kurds in Turkey as follows: "During these thirteen years of repression, struggle, revolt, and deportation... more than one and a half million Kurds were deported [or] massacred... The entire area beyond the Euphrates ... was declared out of bounds to foreigners until 1965 and was kept under a permanent state of siege till 1950. The use of the Kurdish language was banned. The very words 'Kurd' and 'Kurdistan' were crossed out of the dictionaries and history books. The Kurds were never even referred to except as 'Mountain Turks' (Meho 1997, p. 9-10).

After the Dersim massacre in 1937-1938, which resulted in the deaths of 13,000 Kurds, the Kurds consequently went into a long-term societal depression that no one dared to speak and act as Kurds. With the impacts of the Second World War and rising communism, Turkey attempted to "liberalize" its economy and politics after the war. Half forced by the USA and a half, with its vulnerability to the modernization of the country, led a considerable migration from the east to the west. Under the fastened modernization, the Kurds who migrated to either work or study in the big cities became activists under the roof of Turkish left since they were not allowed to establish any political parties related to the Kurds. After the coup in 1960 with the liberal aspect of the new constitution, the Kurds had organized several political initiatives from eastern rallies to the Revolutionary Eastern Hearts with the help of the Turkish left. Although in the 50s and 60s the Kurds formatted the Kurdish problem as the eastern problem, I will establish later, with the impact of the Barzani movement in Iraq, the fact that they were aware of some differences regarding ethnic and cultural features with the Turks (Besikci 1967, p. 24-25).

After the coup in 1970, the persecuted and imprisoned leftist activists went into a massive discussion, which has created the fragmentation of the Turkish left. Within the fragmented left, radical voices like Ocalan formatted the eastern problem as the Kurdistan, and with a group of students, they declared the PKK in 1978. Consequently, after the coup in 1980, the state started a vicious project to eliminate and wipe out the Kurdish identity, which was formulated by Ocalan from Marxist-Leninist ideology. With the first armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish army after 1984, the violence spread among the Kurdish regions, and by 1990, the violence had turned into societal violence. Until the year 2019, despite the several ceasefires, the oppression of Kurds, including the evacuation of the Kurdish towns, imprisonment of Kurdish politicians and activists, mass killing and closure of Kurdish political parties by the Turkish state.

Taking the debate to the Kurdish case, we know there has been a conflict between the Turkish state and PKK (Partiya Karkeran Kurdistan) for decades, with focus mostly on nationalism and violence. However, considering the reports submitted by political parties from different positions on the scale from left to the right, is apparent that from the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, the existence of Kurds have been the core of the problem. Furthermore, comparing reports pre-PKK and after PKK revealed that the debate on the result of political movements has changed; this paper argues that the results are not necessarily as accepted in the literature and indicates a change brought about by the movement. In this section, based on this debate, I aim to show that the analysis of the reports indicates that PKK had silent success in changing the terminology of the Turkish discussion surrounding the Kurds. The main argument of this article is that the radicalization of the Kurdish movement and the acts of PKK made a nation from people and an actor from the victim. In the following pages, I will analyze the reports from 1938, 1960, 1989, 1999, and 2013, written by political parties and officers, using content and discourse analysis.

In the following sections, I will seek to investigate how the formulation of the state concerning the Kurdish problem has been changed through time. The article is based on primary sources such as reports submitted by political parties and government officers to the government and the Turkish National Assembly for a given period; it analyzes them in a chronological framework. By the implementation of discourse and content analysis, I aim to present how the foundation of the PKK has changed the discourse of the state.

2. Ismet İnönü, Sark Islahat Raporu (Report of East Reform)

Ismet İnönü, who was one of the dominant political figures in early modern Turkish history, in his journey to the east “şark,” he visited numerous cities beginning from Adana to the eastern part of Turkey. He compiled his findings and observations as a report which was published in 1935 in Istanbul. Since he served as the general of the Turkish army, after Atatürk’s death, he became president and later prime minister. His report is fundamental to understanding the state’s policy concerning the Kurdish problem not only before the declaration of PKK but afterward as well. In his report, he repeatedly put the military as the center of the solutions of all problems; he believed that the army was the representative of the state in these regions. When he was in Elazığ, he came across a soldier in old clothes and wrote “... the center and army should work harder. The image of the army, which represents the prestige of the Republic, might deeper our political problems” (İnönü, 1935 p. 8). It is well known that uniforms have been one of the symbols of power and everything about the outfit, the colors, shape, and quality of the product is crucial not only to induce fear and respect among civilians but also to show the difference of the power and its representatives. For İnönü, it might be argued, remembering the rebellions against the Turkish state before his journey made him conclude that the clothes of the soldiers were fatal for the political problems of which he did not provide any detail.

With respect to Diyarbakır, considered the most prominent Kurdish city and referred to as Amed by Kurds, he wrote, “Diyarbakır is good enough to build a strong center of Turkishness” (İnönü, 1935 p. 7). For him, the existence of schools and big army and public houses (Halk Evleri) would represent the center’s power better. He argued that the major issues in Diyarbakır were the epidemics and the lack of accommodation for people. He asserted that the shape of the official buildings in the city was not appropriate to show the strength of the center and wrote, “today’s situation is far from states glory and politics” (İnönü, 1935, p. 8). Regarding another Kurdish city Mardin located on the border of French Syria, he stated that the border was mostly populated by Armenians and Arabs, however, they were primarily passive, and the real danger came from the Kurdish leaders. He believed that the manipulated French groups cross the border and to stop this, the state needs to replace the Kurds with the more “trustable” population and, in his words, “annihilate” the ones who cross the border. From his time in Siirt, his idea on the Kurdish problem and the way state should address the same is more evident. He wrote, “Siirt needs to be transferred to the east. The city is purely Kurdish, and that is why our army, officers, and buildings need to be stronger” (İnönü, 1935, p. 8). His suggestions lead to the conclusion that evacuation was considered a state policy to deal with the obstacles, primarily Kurds. While he recommended more support to the army and strict control over the region, he did not mention any real threat against the state. In a way, he accepted the existence of Kurds as a problem which needed to be solved immediately; to illustrate, “We need to go inside the people as soon as possible” which would mean the assimilation of Kurds. Furthermore, later in his report, we see is discussion of a significant debate on the Kurdish problem—while the Kurdish movement called most of the east and southeast of Turkey as Kurdish city or Kurdish-inhabited area, the state and pro-state entity denied this claim (İnönü, 1935 p. 9). However, İnönü wrote in his report, “Bitlis is an artificial Turkish center with the constant control and work of the state.” For him, the state must follow its policy in the city otherwise, in his words, “Bitlis might become Kurdish again.”

Moreover, since the city was a Turkish castle, it would be a bridge to reach other Kurds. His ideas reveal a vital element of the state’s policy which involved first changing the inhabitants of the territory and then using it as a bridge to reach non-assimilated Kurds and control them. His words indicate the significance of this idea, “if there was no Bitlis we had to create one” (İnönü, 1935, p.10). Beyond his suggestions in several cases, he employed a supremacist language to define Kurds. For instance, in his time in another city, Van, once again he wrote, “It is a Turkish city, but Kurdish who lives close to them are lazy and poor.” While he approached Kurds from a racist perspective, when it came to the Turks, he tended to soften the language and about Van he wrote, “Turks in the small neighborhoods are lonely and need our help. They told me to bring Turks from the west” (İnönü, 1935, p. 11).

His report also reveals crucial information regarding not only the Kurdish problem but also Armenian genocide. Regarding the city of Muş, he wrote, “Armenian homes are empty, and some of them taken by people. They told me do not lead us to leave the houses and I reported that I agree with them” (İnönü, 1935, p. 11). It can be argued that there was a tragedy within a tragedy. From the Armenian genocide and the destruction of Kurds, the state aimed to build and protect one nation of

Turks who supposedly held the ownership of the country. Later in the report, it seems that he believed the state succeeded in the Armenian case; he wrote, “after Hamidiye troops, and our policy people here respect us, and they are passive” (Inönü, 1935, p. 12). What he did not see was that the people whom he described as passive and respectful would commit the biggest “disrespect” against his tradition followed by almost all political parties from 1978 throughout the 20th century until today. From an argumentative approach, the Kurdish movement and the foundation of PKK would be considered disrespect toward the country by him.

For him, being Turkish or at least “attempting to be” Turkish was an identity that made people happy. For instance, he wrote, “people of Agri are Kurds, but they are close to Turkishness, they are happy but poor” (Inönü, 1935, p. 14). Besides the resettlement of the population by force, building bridges and schools to strengthen the military service for the assimilation were the tools for making people’s identities closer to Turkishness. The obligatory military service allowed the state to teach its ideology and, in fact, create a diffusion among Kurds. Inönü wrote, “I came across some man who came from military service. They seem to me they are closer to Turkishness” (Inönü, 1935, p. 17). In the second part of the report, he focused on the state’s prevention measures in terms of settlement, security, economy, education, and health with a particular focus on Dersim which, three years later, was going face one of the biggest tragedies in the modern Turkish history.

It is apparent that Inönü saw a significant threat from the Kurdish populated area and for him, the inspector would and should have controlled cities like Van, Muş, and Erzincan that, in his words, were “accessible to Kurdish expansion.” (Inönü, 1935, p. 54) Moreover, he suggested that gradually, the state should have built a Turkish center in these territories. The administration and the settling policy were not separable; on the contrary, the inspector was responsible for establishing what he calls the Turkish center. The people from the Black Sea region would be brought to the Kurdish cities. It is noteworthy that the population of the Black Sea region comprised most nationalists of the country. Considering, for instance, the national election results, we might observe is that people in this region primarily tended to vote for pro-state and nationalist parties (Inönü, 1935, p. 54)

Education had been an ideological tool to spread the state’s ideology and strengthen its hegemony over the society, especially among Kurds. From the beginning of the Turkish Republic, education from primary school to Ph.D. degrees was based on national values. Courses such as Atatürk’s revolutions and the Turkish language were obligatory at each level of education. Inönü’s report regarding education and the steps that he suggested the state should follow not only highlights the ideology of education but also how it had been used to assimilate Kurds. He wrote, “while there are not enough schools in Turkish cities to discuss if we should educate Kurds is a useless discussion.” Therefore, according to him, the state should have given priority to the Turkish in terms of education which also clarifies the argument I made previously that Kurds were considered strangers and tenants of Turkey. Even though he gave priority to Turks, he believed that primary education was essential and should start with “Turkified Kurds.” Furthermore, he stated, “However, if there will be applicable from Kurds for middle school, we should not refuse it.” While education of the Turks was considered the responsibility of the state, for Kurds, it was based on their willingness. Essentially, his perspective represented education as a so-called secret which would only be known by the government and the inspector.

3. Sosyaldemokrat Halkçı Parti (Social Democratic People’s Party)

After the foundation of PKK and its attacks, the political parties maintained a distance with the early Republic stance concerning the Kurdish problem. The party in its report defined the main problem of Turkey as “the spread and strength of democracy across the country, social injustices, rapid economic development and reducing national income difference between people and the regions” (SHP, [Doğu ve Güneydoğu Sorunlarına Bakışı ve Çözüm Önerileri, 1990, p. 5](#)). The report argues that while such problems were common in the country, the east and southeast gained priority status due to violation of human rights, terror, poverty, economic underdevelopment, unemployment, and identity depression. As also stated in other reports, it seems that the conceptualization of the problem was based on economy and terror. The report uses the word Kurd as it is but with a secondary word such as “Kurdish rooted.” In the description, the word ‘Kurds’ has been used five times and terror has been

used 23 times. The report discusses the problem using soft language and ambiguous sentences. For instance, forced migration from the regions has been described as "... recently because of the economic and political reasons, there has been an intense migration from the East and South East of Anatolia" (SHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Sorunlarına Bakışı ve Çözüm Önerileri, 1990, p. 28).

Similar to the Saadet Party's report and others, this party referred to Kurds as Kurdish rooted and wrote, "Kurdish rooted people had not faced any problem because of their ethnic identity in the regions that they migrated" (SHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Sorunlarına Bakışı ve Çözüm Önerileri, 1990, p. 8). The argument of the report is nothing but opposite of the reality. People were forced to leave their homes and faced significant problems in the cities where they settled. First, the elders who could not speak Turkish had to live in an isolated world, and it is well known that not even one percent of Turks speak the Kurdish language. Second, Kurds whose economy was based on agriculture and animal breeding faced unemployment and poverty later in jobs such as construction and other difficult hard jobs in which they worked without any insurance. The ethnic differences were evident considering the groups working in low-level positions and those holding high-level positions. If someone goes to Turkey and asks among people in the major cities like Istanbul and Ankara, they would find that Kurds occupy the vast majority of construction industry and if they go further and ask about the family history, they would learn that these are also the people who were forced to leave their houses in the 1990s. When it comes to the young who migrated, they fell into a sea of crimes such as robbery, drugs, and mafia. Although the class-based approach might explain these differences, it might fail to explain, for instance, why some specific groups hold some occupations. One might argue that the economic problem and poverty under which Kurds have been living is shared by other regions and Turks too, and it would be correct. However, what is to be kept in mind is that while the Turkish villager assumes that his station and poverty is because of the state's policy and lack of support, the Kurdish villager, on the other hand, might think that his poverty is because of his ethnic identity.

Putting this argument aside and hoping that an academic inquiry might find out how different ethnic groups approach poverty, the report argues that separatist terrorist groups and state's misunderstanding and corrupt police led to the Kurdish problem in southeast Anatolia. By glorifying the Republic's ideology and arguing that it is laic and based on ethnic plurality. (SHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Sorunlarına Bakışı ve Çözüm Önerileri, 1990, p. 29). The report, in a way, ignores and does not mention the pre-1980s and argues that the problem started with the 1980 military coup. It is demonstrated that instead of cultural, sociological, and economic tools, the state after the coup employed military force in the regions. Moreover, the report blames the group of soldiers who had undertaken the coup and covers the pre-coup period as I have described above.

Although the problem intensified after the coup, the report chooses to blame the soldiers, and by doing this, it simplifies the problem and does not criticize state policy and three years of military regime. According to the party, the state in the entire Republican history is not the guilty one, and the soldiers are to be blamed. Following this argument, the report in an unclear language refers to the coup as "southeastern events"; this suggests that there are two primary misunderstandings regarding "the events." The first is that "democracy and the rule of law are not the obstacles but the tools of the solution" (SHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Sorunlarına Bakışı ve Çözüm Önerileri, 1990, p. 30). The second is that corrupt politicians, violence-based regulation, and the hopelessness occurred in response to the these (SHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Sorunlarına Bakışı ve Çözüm Önerileri, 1990, p. 31). The party has indicated national unity as the solution to the problem. It might be argued that the party put national unity over democracy and argued that all problems of the country need to be solved with widespread agreement and map. Therefore, the report repeatedly focuses on citizenship without going into detail about the form of the nationalities. As the party believes that all ethnic groups are equal, it is suggested that "the problem is not Anatolian people's racism but wrong politician regulations" (SHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Sorunlarına Bakışı ve Çözüm Önerileri, 1990, p. 40)

The report goes further from merely simplifying the problem; it also criticizes the Kurdish movement without even mentioning its name and writing, "within the national unity we need to be against the ethnicity-based ideology and leave the primitive tradition" (SHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Sorunlarına Bakışı ve Çözüm Önerileri, 1990, p. 44). As mentioned previously, the report connects the coup in 1980 and the Kurdish problem and argues that the southeast problem and Kurdish problem are unseparated with democracy, and when the democracy was weakened by the coup, the problem

intensified. Besides, it is indicated that democracy that citizenship are one of the keys to the problem; “citizenship is a concept of living on a shared territory withholding same rights and willing to fight for share ideals.” This definition suggests that a country is where groups do not need to profess their ethnic identity; “... we need to get over our self and strength the common culture” (SHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Sorunlarına Bakışı ve Çözüm Önerileri, 1990, p. 45). It needs to be underlined that the even though it the kind of ideals or who needs to get over ethnic demands is not explained, it is evident that unity under the Turkish state and the prevailing culture refers to the Turkish culture. The report proposed five suggestions to solve the problem: politics, democracy, mother tongue and its freedom, culture, ideology, and security. From the political perspective it is stated that economic development is the key to build trust because the problem does not arise from the ethnic differences. Furthermore, the state should not fall into the terrorist trap because, according to the report, the terrorist group includes the people who are “opposed” to the state, therefore, the state should protect the citizens against terrorists. Secondly, democratic suggestions are “to end the state of emergency, build love and respect among citizen and build security on democracy.” Third, it is suggested that mother tongue can be spoken freely though privately (SHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Sorunlarına Bakışı ve Çözüm Önerileri, 1990, p. 43). Here once again, the party fails to argue that first, the state is not just an organization to give the right but should also support the language. However, considering the economic disparity in the region, the suggestion that the private sector can open schools and teach the Kurdish language is but a distortion of reality.

Furthermore, the report stated that the Turkish language would be the only official language, and the state will do everything to support teaching and spreading it. Additionally, in terms of culture and ideology, it is suggested that with the help of the state spreading education based on the Turkish language, it would be easy to build a common culture with love and respect. Finally, security-based suggestions state that the security needs to rely on security organization, citizens, and international aspects (SHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Sorunlarına Bakışı ve Çözüm Önerileri, 1990, p.45). The forces sent to the region need to be professional and educated in terms of the ethnic requirements of the area, and the small cities and villages should be reorganized to be controlled by a single security institution. It is noteworthy that although the report was written in 1989, 11 years after the declaration of PKK, the statements in the almost one hundred pages do not mention or use the word of PKK at all.

4. Halkın Emek Partisi (People’s Work Party)

Peoples Labor Party, Halkın Emek Partisi, (HEP) is the first legal Kurdish political party founded in 1990. Since then, six political parties from the same tradition have shut down by the Constitutional Court, and the last one Halkların Demokratik Partisi party’s leaders and five thousand members have been arrested since 2016. The party on October 21, 1991, with the general election, went to the parliament with the coalition. Although it created a massive disturbance when the parliamentary oath took place, two Kurdish members took their oaths in Kurdish in the Turkish parliament for the first time in the history. The Kurdish oath was in a way the expression of a battle not like PKK on the mountain but in the heart of the state. While with the establishment of PKK and later in 1998 with the first PKK attack, the state realized that the threat was real. The step taken in 1991 made the Turkish state realize that the danger was not merely a group of terrorists as they called it but the support of the millions who sent a political party to the parliament. Leyla Zana with a red, green and yellow bandage on her head said, “I oath to all Turks and Kurds,” while Mehdi Eker, started his oath saying, “my friend and me, we are repeating this speech under the force and pressure of the constitution.” Shortly after the oath, the police entered the parliament and arrested them.

HEP argued that the democratization of the institutions with its active theoretical approaches is the key to solve the Kurdish problem, and by saying so, they seem to consider that all groups in the country need to discuss at the equal position. Among all reports and programs analyzed in this section, HEP is the only group which mentions the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Helsinki documents and argues that a solution can be attained through peace (HEP, 1990, p. 18). In contrast with the others, it believed that that the solution is vital not only for Kurds but for Turkey as a whole. It is indicated that during that period, there were no circumstances to discuss the problem freely and equally as the Turkish constitution articles forbade the

acceptance of Kurds and the Kurdish language. From the beginning since the ownership of the country, the politics itself has been considered as Turks' arena. This party argues that as long as an integral part of the society, that is, the Kurds, does not participate in the discussion, there will be no solution (HEP, 1990, p. 16). Therefore, as the first step to discuss the problem, all constitutional and institutional obstacles that had barred the Kurds from the discussion need to be eliminated. The concept of the state's terrorism has been discussed in this report, while the other reports used terror (HEP, 1990, p. 25). Furthermore, the report argues that the state has been using state terror as a tool to keep its gain and control over society. This is the reason for the violence in the region, east and southeast; the "violation of law creates violent acts" (HEP, 1990, p. 19). The conflict described previously by other reports suggest a conflict between the state and terror. However, this Kurdish political party defined the same as state violence and resistance. Therefore, according to this party the former one results in the latter.

Even though they do not use the Kurdish movement in their report, they wrote that a resistance movement is an "act of self-defense." The constant interaction between these two types of violence has the potential to create a civil war. While other reports hold the belief that the force will result in slow development and unity, HEP sees and names the danger a civil war. It has been argued that pro-conflict cleavages hold power and correspondingly, the party argues that monopolism of the power in the hands of a group will lead it to employ terror to protect this power. For HEP, the solution to the problem lies on the democratization of the state by implementing voluntary participation instead of force and terror. The party indicated that the its aim is "the total equality among race, gender, and religious, ethnic groups in the country" (HEP, 1990, p. 22).

5. Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi 1999 (Republican People's Party)

A report submitted by the Republican People's Party, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (CHP), in 1999 stated that the "region suffers under terror, pressure, poverty, and a solid inequality" (CHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Raporu, 1999, p. 2). It argued that while Turkey faces these issues across the country, east and southeast Turkey suffer more than the others. In terms of lack of economic development, the rule of law, human rights, and social status, it is argued that that the failure of the state in solving the problem of terror and lack of democracy has put Turkey in crisis. Similar to the other reports mentioned in this chapter, this report specifically focuses on the 1990s and names the problem as a "crisis" (CHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Raporu, 1999, p. 3). For CHP, the separatist terror is the primary and the most significant cause of the crises, and domestic and foreign powers influence the same. They argued that feudalism, poverty, unemployment, violation of human rights, and security regulations had become the fate of the regions. The commission argued, just like other reports and party programs, that people suffer under "separatist, and Turkish Hezbollah and some dark forces" (CHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Raporu, 1999, p. 4).

Considering the demographic statistics of the region, this report argued that the economy is about to collapse in the aforementioned areas. Additionally, immigration and the feudal traditions in the regions have been defined as "the cause" which intensified the problem. While the report criticizes the state in the fight against the feudalist way of life, it states that "the ethnicity and race cannot solve the primitiveness of the region" (CHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Raporu, 1999, p. 50–51). It is noteworthy that the Second World War being followed by decolonization, national movements, and political movements in which people across the globe declared their ethnic, religious, and sexual rights, these approaches are outdated for the party. The commission goes further and states that there is a similarity between the region and the what they refer to as a terrorist group, that is PKK, and request that the group has been established based on the same feudal values (CHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Raporu, 1999, p. 43). It seems that although the PKK's documents are considered propaganda and crime, the commission voluntarily does not mention any sources. As discussed previously, PKK defined its aim not just as a free Kurdish-inhabited region independent of the Turkish state but also as being free from religious and feudal traditions. PKK's declaration was based on "total equality" between class, genders, and nations.

The report reveals a key feature of history writing by officials. To illustrate, in the section in which migration from the east is discussed, to justify the report's claim the state planning organization DPT has been referred to, with the statement, "in the research it is found that 40.2% people left their

homes because of the unemployment, 16% the terror group and 10% states pressure” (CHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Raporu, 1999, p. 12). Although the data has been obtained from one source, they repeatedly refer to the source in the plural form. Furthermore, while the Turkish parliament report states, “we do not have data how many people went to which city,” the report affirms that “some researchers” found these people and asked them (CHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Raporu, 1999, p. 13–14). Second, 3 million and 607 thousand Kurds who faced forced immigration left their territory after the state’s declaration of the evacuation of cities. Finally, at one point the report states that the people fled because of the terrorist activity, it proceeds to present data which shows that the main reason was unemployment; thus, one might assert that one of these two data is false. The report names the policy and the act of the state in the region as “exaggerated security concept” (CHP, Doğu ve Güneydoğu Raporu, 1999, p. 13). Though it is not clear what this means, a complete reading reveals that exaggerated security concept refers to the forced immigration, state of emergency, the pursuit of military, and violations of human rights.

The report suggests that the problem can be solved by social and economic development and democratization by differentiating between the terror problem and the Kurdish problem. While the terror problem needs to be addressed by the new security policy, the Kurdish problem might be solved with democratization. Like the state’s policy and other programs and reports, the party indirectly dismisses PKK as a Kurdish group. Thus, it can be debated that from the perception of both the state and the political parties, people who founded and attended PKK are not Kurds.

6. **Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)**

AKP’s first party program in 2003 for some was the end of an area of as Erdogan pronounced the end of old Turkey and created massive excitement among liberals, democrats, and pro-human rights groups. Erdogan’s government had created a slight change in the perception of the state among society and mainly Kurds, especially with the peace process of the Kurdish movement; however, it collapsed totally opposite the discourse of one state, one nation, one flag, and one country. After the result of the general election in which the Kurdish party, the People’s Democratic Party, passed the threshold and became the third biggest party in the parliament, Erdogan changed his approach from “Kurdish problem is my problem” to “there is no Kurdish problem,” and a bloody conflict occurred in southeast Turkey. Although the number of civilians who died is still unknown, according to human rights organizations, almost one thousand civilians died and one million were displaced. As described by Ahmed Davutoglu, “the east was going to become Toledo” (Milliyet, 2016). For Erdogan, there was a Kurdish problem that needed to be solved if he obtained support from the Kurdish electoral. One of the most predominant leaders in modern Turkish history, Erdogan and his Kurdish policy is beyond the focus of this study; nevertheless, the AKP’s program in 2003 showed how the party evaluated the problem which is crucial to demonstrate that the state’s policy was the main policy toward the Kurdish problem. In the program the Kurdish issue was titled as “east and southeast,” and it was argued that the differentiation in terms of naming such as Kurdish problem, southeast, and terror is, in fact, one of the biggest problems of Turkey (AKP, [Kalkınma ve Demokratikleşme Programı, 2003, p. 28–30](#)).

Similar to the reports discussed previously, the main focus is on the national unity and centrality of Turkish language which is why the report states, “... the terror which threatens our national unity we will solve from scratch” (AKP, [Kalkınma ve Demokratikleşme Programı, 2003, p. 29](#)). In the report, the Kurdish problem was replaced with “cultural differences” and quite understandably, the section has no mention of Kurdish problem at all. For AKP, the cultural differences accepted as “cultural enrichens” however, with their word, “the different identities would have the possibility to speak their language with the condition of the Turkish stay only official language” (AKP, [Kalkınma ve Demokratikleşme Programı, 2003, p. 29](#)). It seems that identity and cultural differences were comprehended in the most uncomplicated manner, and the reader might get the feeling that the problem is just “acceptance” and not “acceptance of enrichment.” The report asserts the belief that the problem can be solved as it has not turned into an ethnic conflict, and for the report, the reason is that “terror” is not perpetuated by the people and but by external powers. The report speaks on behalf of the Kurds and states, “our people are committed to our national unity” (AKP, [Kalkınma ve Demokratikleşme Programı, 2003, p. 30](#)). I would argue that while the first part of the sentence “our people” might indicate ownership of

one group, the second part refers to the unity of one group. For the party, the pressure on Kurds, the state of emergency, or the mass killing occurred in reaction to the terror and the acts were “beyond intention” disturb the people (AKP, *Kalkınma ve Demokratikleşme Programı*, 2003, p. 29). It is reported that the state needs to protect the innocents with “compassion”, and that is why it is argued that the state of emergency should be ended in Kurdish cities. The critique against the state is that after the intensified terror period was over, it did not do enough to reduce the gap of development among regions. Lack of services, unemployment, and poverty spread terror in the area, which was the basis of the problem. However, contradicting the aforementioned statement, the report argues that force, pressure, and terror feed each other, and the problem should be solved by respecting rights, economic development, and security in a related way. By criticizing old Turkey as a bureaucratic state, which caused the problems, the solution is suggested to be the democratic state which, however, has not been description in the program (AKP, *Kalkınma ve Demokratikleşme Programı*, 2003, p. 29–30)

7. Bağımsız Cumhuriyetçi Parti (Independednt Republican Party)

Bapımsız Cumhuriyetçi Party leader Mumtaz Sosyal, in the party program, argues that although there are ethnic differences within the country, it is used by imperialists to control Turkey with the help of ethnic right and political organizations which would eventually lead the federation (Bağımsız Cumhuriyet Partisi, 2007, p. 13). He in his report criticizes the leader of the Kurdish bourgeoisie who lives under a Kurdish identity and argues that the imperialist’s Middle Eastern policy is coordinated with the Kurdish agenda. For him, the essential imperialist plan is to build a small Kurdish entity in Iraq, Syria, and Iran and later Turkey and eventually build a Middle East Kurdish Federation. He believes that the Kurdish ruling class might create a domestic market and increase their gain which is why they seek the support of major international powers. He goes further and blames the Kurdish elites for serving and helping the imperialists destroy their country and for being willing to witness the death of citizens. Rights and freedom for him are nothing but “leading the built of invaders powers” (Bağımsız Cumhuriyet Partisi, 2007, p. 13–14). Once again, it seems that he, in his report, tends to use the word Kurd with another word, mostly ‘rooted.’ Moreover, he claims that a struggle for rights and freedom for any ethnic group, mainly Kurds, has nothing to give them and exemplifies Iraq (Bağımsız Cumhuriyet Partisi, 2007, p. 13).

As I discussed previously, although the reports mentioned fail to diagnose the problem, they at least criticize the state for its failed policy regarding the cause of Kurdish problem. Soysal, from a different perspective states, “people who define themselves as Kurdish when their rights violated tent to blame the Turkish Republic, but in fact, they need to blame the elites and the owner, Kurdish feudal, of the lands” (Bağımsız Cumhuriyet Partisi, 2007, p. 14). For him, the abuse of rights is not a Kurdish problem, it is a “common problem” among all citizens. Furthermore, the problem is not the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, but class-based struggles linked with imperialism and thus, for him, the solution is an anti-imperialist struggle. Though the report seems socialist and anti-imperialist, his argument justifies one of the main arguments of this study which is that although there have been different groups and cleavages when the discussion comes to the Kurdish problem, even the strict socialists use an elitist and nationalist language.

8. Saadet Partisi (Felicity Party)

Religious similarity among the citizens of Turkey has been systematically implemented in various situations to solve or, most of the time, hide the real problem. The Saadet Party, which is one of the descendants of the Milli Görüş besides AKP, holds the belief that the Islamic brotherhood and Ummah of Islam might be the solution to the Kurdish problem. Similar to all the parties’ reports on Kurdish or southeast issue, they systemically used words such as “economic development, brotherhood, unity, and terror.” The party and its tradition aim to make a difference between the southeast problem and the Kurdish problem (Saadet Partisi, Güneydoğu Raporu, 2013, p. 9). However, while the former implies the economic inequality and development, the latter suggests that Kurds also have identity-based claims such as freedom of language and civil liberties (Saadet Partisi, Güneydoğu Raporu, 2013, p. 12). Besides, their report also argued a third dimension which is terror supported by the

domestic and foreign powers. Essentially, this party also seems to fall in the trap by differentiating between the so-called dimensions liberty (Saadet Partisi, Güneydoğu Raporu, 2013, p. 16)

Not for the Saadet Party but most politicians and the state itself tend to differentiate between the Kurds who live in Turkey and PKK. It is noteworthy that while all Kurds do not support PKK, all PKK guerrillas are Kurd. It might be argued that while Kurdish sons and daughters live in the mountains, their mothers, fathers, and little siblings are the citizens of the country. The trap that not just the Turkish state but also all political entities are falling into is the ignorance of the fact that PKK is founded and attended by Kurds, and Kurds are a part of the country. Going back to the party's report, it is indicated that Kurds do not want to leave the country, and people are trapped between terrorists and the state with the belief that Kurds want their identity to be accepted.

In contrast to secular political parties, Saadet claims that religious authority in the region might be approved by the state to establish contact with the people by suggesting that Islam is the key to the problem (Saadet Partisi, Güneydoğu Raporu, 2013, p. 14).

Although this argument initially seems appealing, there are two problems with this discussion. First, putting a political issue which needs to be solved by legislative tools in a frame of uncertainty of religion and lack of knowledge about the religious orientation of the Kurdish people would deepen the conflict. Although many Kurds define themselves as Muslim, there are several different traditions and interpretations of Islam in the region.

Moreover, the second critique I may raise is that the report states that "laics, secular and independent Kurdistan will turn Muslim Kurds into the slave" (Saadet Partisi, Güneydoğu Raporu, 2013, p. 13). While the sentence emphasizes the word Muslim before the national identity, there is a hidden assumption claims that even though the Kurdish might have their state, they are cannot be free and eventually the future of Kurds is under the rule of the Turkish (Saadet Partisi, Güneydoğu Raporu, 2013, p. 15). For political Islam, the ignorance of Islam as the unifying power and the conflict between religious values and the state are the fundamental causes of the Kurdish problem. It needs to be highlighted that while the party critiques the state policy, as suggested by the details of the report, I would argue that similar to other reports, it mostly strengthens the politics of the state which has relied on the denial of Kurdish rights.

9. Conclusion

It is evident that the dynamics which created PKK would eventually give rise to different type of organization, but the primary statement would be that PKK changed the perception of the state and political parties regarding the eastern or Kurdish problem. İsmet İnönü's report and the reports from the 1960s show that before PKK, the problem was referred to as the eastern and southeastern problem. The assimilation of the Kurds, replacement of the population with Turks, and development to strengthen the power over the regions had been the main and common suggestions. These reports not only reveal the individuals' perceptions but also the state's politics. In contrast with the extensive literature on the change and differentiation concerning the Kurdish problem, I would argue that there have been relative changes not in the state policy but government policy with the impact of national and international dynamics.

The second finding of the reading is that the reports show the main problem to be the existence of Kurds that has been considered as the real threat for the state. As I demonstrated several times, the state sees given goodness and trust in Turks while any act of Kurds is considered the "rising threat." Third, the reports show that Kurds might be regarded as the tenants of the country while the owner of the land determines who lives, how they live, and whether there will be any violation of the rule of the state. One of the essential findings from the reports is that there was a transition of the policy regarding how to deal with the problems from government to government in the country. With the Armenian genocide, the evacuation of the territory applied to Kurds in 1938, 1990 and 2015. It seems that except Turks and Sunni Muslims, the consolidation of others, the tenants, was defined as the threat by the state. Moreover, it seems that the apparatus and the approaches implemented by the paranoid state present one of the vital features of the nation-state that the internal enemies should be divided geographically, culturally, and economically. The strength of these aspects of the enemies also

strengthens the paranoia of the state. Moreover, such dialectic has is what has created a semblance of the enemies for the nation-state.

Additionally, military service and education was used as a tool of Turkification and the spread of the state's hegemony and ideology. İnönü in his report states that Kurds who served their obligatory duty in military adhered to Turkishness, "when I met them, I saw there more tent to being Turkish." Similarly, while schooling was described as a fundamental problem for the development of Turkey, the priority was given to the Turks. As İnönü claims, the state did not have time to debate on launching schools in Kurdish regions. However, with the existing schools and education, the main aim was to weaken the generational ties between the old and the young and dissolve the society. With the boarding schools, for instance, children had to leave their family and stay at school, and the Kurdish were not welcome at the boarding schools. The outcomes of the education of the Kurdish students had a different result from what the state expected. The students who went to big cities and to university mobilized in time; they learned more about their history and the world and came up with a definite conclusion which was armed struggle against the state.

The first attack of the PKK made a shift in the state's policy which subsequently emphasized more on unity and human rights. For example, after decades of the denial of the existence of the Kurdish language, for the first time, it appeared in a political party's report; thus, the Kurdish language was accepted as a language. However, the armed conflict between PKK and the Turkish military gave rise to the perception of the state and the society that the Kurdish movement was a terrorist one. The argument that I derived from the aforementioned numbers is not that PKK changed the state and governments, but I believe that, most importantly, it could dispel the Turkish myth with both its ideological agenda and act of violence. Before PKK, Kurds had been subjected to assimilation and quick and efficient assimilation and ethnocide was the significant concern of the political parties. After PKK period, however, Kurds became an actor and an enemy for the state. Moreover, increase in the number of words, regarding the economy and security, depicts both the impact of the shock that forced the state and political parties to focus on dealing with the enemies or terrorists.

Thus, the reports submitted after the foundation of PKK showed significant transformation regarding the tone compared to the early releases. This does not imply that the state's policy was abolished; on the contrary, there was a continuity of the approach in terms of cause and solution of the problems. In these reports, I found that although several times the words "terror," "the eastern, southeastern problem" were used, they started using words such as "Kurds" with a second word as in "Kurdish rooted." It is hardly possible to see the word "Kurds" alone. More significantly, the reports after the 1980s criticized the state policy as too harsh and claimed that states on emergency, the hegemony of the military in the regions, and the civil liberties must be reconsidered. Despite the minor difference, they show a common perception of the solution and the reasons which are underdevelopment, unemployment, and terror, and the common suggestions for the state are to invest more in the Kurdish regions. All reports analyzed in this paper seem to agree upon national unity, Turkish as the only official language, and the ties to keep the population together. Furthermore, that in all the reports, I could not find any mention of PKK. It seems that during pre-PKK era, they talked about Kurds without mentioning them; after the foundation of PKK, they discussed PKK without actually mentioning it. One of the reasons might be the refusal to accept PKK as a political actor with an agenda and another could be the focus on differentiating between the Kurds and PKK. According to the state and political parties, the Kurds do not organize their claims under the umbrella of the Kurdish movement and those who founded and attended PKK were not Kurds but some foreign atheist separatists. Such an approach indicates that for the nation-state, dissolving the society economically, culturally, and geographically as well as politically involved creating a gap between politics and society. Essentially, the Kurds interested in politics were alienated. To understand the intention of the state in the creation of such a gap, one should remember how the politicized Kurds between 1960 and 1980 questioned and challenged the state's hegemony.

To conclude, I would argue that although it is quite early to discuss the outcomes and possible success of PKK, an important aspect is that PKK has been able to change the nature of the discussion and has forced politicians to accept that there are Kurds who have not been assimilated enough or most possibly refuse to fit within the system which has been built on the Turkish myth. PKK has not succeeded in freeing Kurdistan as they insist, but most importantly, PKK has been able to both interrupt

the nation-building process of the Turkish state and aggravated its paranoia, pushing the state to act more aggressively. And last but not least, before the declaration of the PKK, the Kurdish problem represented the problem of assimilation of Kurds into Turkish myth and strengthening it, but after the PKK, the problem has shifted to the protection of the Turkish myth.

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