

The Kurdish Dilemma in Turkey



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Introduction

Kurds are the largest ethnic minority in Turkey. They make up around 18% of Turkey's population, and Turkey's largest Kurdish population lives in Istanbul (approximately 2 million). Some Kurds also live in other provinces in the east and southeast of the country, in an area known as Turkish Kurdistan. Most Kurds are Sunni Muslim, but their communities also include Alevi Shi'a Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Yezidi peoples.^[1]

The Middle Ages

The Marwanid dynasty (of Kurdish origin) ruled territory that included parts of Syria and Iraq from 984 up until 1083, directed from Diyarbakir.^[2] The Ayyubid dynasty, also of Kurdish origin, ruled sections of Anatolia in the 12th and 13th centuries.^[3]

According to historian Rohat Alakom, the first Kurdish tribe to arrive in Central Anatolia was the Modanlı tribe, which came to Haymana in 1184.^[4] The first Kurdish settlement in Central Anatolia was named Kürtler ("Kurds"), founded near modern-day Ankara in 1463.^[5] The earliest exile of Kurds to Central Anatolia was carried out during the reign of Selim I (1512–20).^[6]

Early Modern Period and the 19th Century

The Mahmudi or "Pinyanişi" was an Ottoman-Kurdish tribe in the Lake Van region, who – according to Evliya Çelebi – had 60,000 warriors.^[7] Their chief, Sarı Süleyman Bey, strengthened and reinforced the Hoşap Castle in the Lake Van region, in 1643.^[8] After 1800, the Cihanbeyli, Reşwan, and Şêxbizin tribes moved into central Anatolia.^[9] The total Kurdish population in Turkey was estimated at around 1.5 million in the 1880s.^[10]

20th Century

Kurds were forced to join the Turkish state as a result of the Treaty of Lausanne, which was negotiated at the Lausanne Conference during 1922-3 in Lausanne, Switzerland, and signed on 24 July 1923. The purpose of the treaty was to settle disputes between the Ottoman Empire and other parties including the Allied French Republic, the British Empire, the Kingdom of Italy, the Empire of Japan, the Kingdom of Greece, and the Kingdom of Romania after the onset of World War I.^[11] The Treaty of Lausanne was ratified by Turkey on 23 August 1923, and all the other signatories by 16 July 1924. On the 6th of August 1924, the instruments of ratification were deposited in Paris.^[12]

Post-ratification of the Treaty of Lausanne, the ratification of Turkey's 1924 constitution stripped Kurdish populations of their political autonomy. The 1924 constitution didn't allow the Kurdish language to be used in public places, and even the words "Kurd" and "Kurdistan" were forbidden. In 1924 there was also a mandate which forbade Kurdish schools, organizations, and publications from serving their people. Around this time, there was also a law that allowed the expropriation of Kurdish landowners, whose land was given to Turkish-speaking people.^[13] These privations and receding autonomy was coupled with deadly massacres of the Kurdish people.

Dersim Rebellion

Background

During the Ottoman period, many Kurdish tribes were led by chieftains (Agha) and prior to the fall of the empire they still had some more freedom in their designated territories. These territories were governed by feudal lords, tribal chieftains, and other authorities who owned the land and ruled its occupants. Ultimately, however, the overall political authority in the provinces – such as Dersim – was controlled by the Ottomans.^[14]

Following the creation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, some of the Kurdish and Zaza tribes grew dissatisfied with certain parts of Atatürk's "Kemalist policies," especially since they enforced a policy known as "Turkification," which includes land reform and the official removal of the "Kurdish race" in Turkish Kurdistan, among others harmful policies.^[15] Of course, many

Kurds were frustrated with the way both the Ottomans and the newfound Turkish government treated them. The Dersim province had been a particularly hard province for authorities to control, and there were 11 different armed Kurdish rebellions between 1876 and 1923.^[16]

The Aghas in Dersim didn't consent to lose their control over their manorial affairs (a form of land ownership) and as a result didn't pay their taxes; complaints from the provincial governors in Dersim were sent to Turkey's central government located in Ankara. The government preferred land reform and to control the country's agricultural resources, including planning production and mandating reductions thereof. In an Interior Ministry report in 1926, Turkish leadership considered it necessary to use force against the Aghas of Dersim.^[17] Notably, on November 1, 1936, during a speech in Turkey's parliament, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk said that Dersim is the country's most significant interior problem.^[18] "Turkification" was the proposed solution.

The Turkification process started with the 1934 Turkish Resettlement Law. This law included forced relocation of people within Turkey to develop cultural homogeneity.^[19] In 1935, the Tunceli Law was passed, applying the Resettlement Law to the Tunceli region, known as Dersim and heavily populated by the Kurdish.

Fourth General Inspectorate

The Turkish Grand National Assembly passed Law No. 1164 on 25 June 1927, which allowed the state to establish Inspectorates-General.^[20] This role was, "a regional governorship whose authorities prevailed over the civilian, military and judicial institutions under their domain but [who] had to comply with the orders of Turkish president Mustafa Kemal.^[21]" The Fourth Inspectorate-General was created in January 1936, in the Dersim region. The Fourth Inspectorate-General was controlled by a "Governor Commander" within a military authority. He was given wide-ranging authority and also had the ability to resettle people who lived in the Dersim region.⁷

The Turkish Interior Minister (Sükrü Kaya) made an order that forced boys and girls of the Dersim region to receive their education in boarding schools outside of Dersim. At them, they

were intended to be Turkified and be married off to each other post-graduation. Women were Turkified sooner than men since women had less contact with the outside world and were expected to pass the tenets of Turkification to their future kids. In September of 1937, an institute was created called the Elazig Girls' Institute that had the intention of creating Turkish women out of Kurdish girls, established in the Inspectorate Generals capital.^[22]

The Beginnings of the Rebellion

When the Tunceli Law was passed, the Turkish military made observation posts in certain districts. In January 1937, a letter was written to the local governor in objection to the Tunceli law. The writers of the letter were arrested and executed. In May 1937, locals from Dersim ambushed a police convoy in response.^[23] Soon after, Seyid Rıza (the chieftain of Yukarı Abbas Uşağı) brought his followers to the Haydaran, Demenan, Yusufan, and Kureyşan tribes to form an alliance.

Turkey's Military Response

In total, about 25,000 troops were sent to stop the Dersim rebellion, and the military completed their operation by the summer. The leaders of the rebellion – including leader Seyid Rıza – were hanged, and Dersim suffered aerial bombardments, as the rebel forces maintained an ongoing resistance. In late 1938 Turkish forces quelled the resistance, which only ended when they ran out of ammunition.

From September 10–12, 1937, Seyit Rıza arrived at Erzincan Province's government building for peace talks and was immediately arrested. The very next day he was taken to the headquarters of the General Inspectorate at Elazığ and hanged with some of his fellows from November 15–18, 1937.^[24]

The names of the victims were:

- Seyit Rıza
- Resik Hüseyin (Seyit Rıza's son, 16 years old)

- Seyit Hüseyin (Chieftain of the Kureyşan-Seyhan tribe)
- Fındık Ağa (Yusfanlı Kamer Ağa's son)
- Hasan Ağa (of the Demenan tribe, Cebrail Ağa's son)
- Hasan (a Kureyşan tribesman Ulkiye's son)
- Ali Ağa (Mirza Ali's son)

Soon after the executions, Prime Minister Celal Bayar agreed to an attack on the Dersim rebels.

This tragic attack started on January 2, 1938, and ended on August 7, 1938.^[25]

Aerial Attacks

Turkish planes flew sorties to attack the rebels. One of the pilots was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's adopted daughter, Sabiha Gökçen, who happened to be the first Turkish female fighter pilot. Kurdish leader Nuri Dersimi claimed that the Turkish air force bombed the district with poisonous gas in 1938.^[26]

Massacres

The Fourth General Inspectorate stated that 13,160 civilians were killed by the Turkish Army and 11,818 people were taken into exile, which led to the province being effectively depopulated.^[27]

Nuri Dersimi wrote that many tribesmen were shot after surrendering, and women and children were locked into haysheds that were set on fire, burning them alive.^[28]

Professor Christian Gerlach reported that around 30,000 Kurds were killed by the Turkish army in the wake of the rebellion.^[29]

Deportations

About 3,000 people were forcibly deported from the Dersim region.^[30] On May 4th, 1938, a Turkish Cabinet decision resolved that Turkish military forces which had previously been massed in the area would attack Nazimiye, Keçiğezek Sin, and Karaoglan. "This time all the people in the area will be collected and deported out of the area and this collection operation will attack the villages without warning and collect the people. To do this, we will collect the people as well as the arms they have. At the moment, we are ready to deport 2,000 people."^[31] This move was meant to kill Kurdish residents, and included orders to destroy their homes and deport those remaining.

Zilan Massacre

Background

With assistance from former Dashnaktsutyun members, the Kurdish nationalist group Xoybûn was established in Greater Lebanon on October 5, 1927, by ex-members of Kurdish nationalist groups and intellectuals who fled to Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Ihsan Nuri, a former officer in the Ottoman and Turkish armies, received a promotion to general (pasha) in 1927, and Xoybûn dispatched him to Erzurum with 20 companions. They founded a newspaper called Agirî and proclaimed the Republic of Ararat independent on October 8, 1927. Additionally in October 1927, Xoybûn made appeals to the League of Nations and the Great Powers and nominated Ibrahim Heski, one of the Jalali tribe's chieftains, as the governor of the Agrî province.^[32]

Cabinet Decision

The Turkish government passed an amnesty bill on May 9, 1928. Kurdish nationalists were released from prison, and any oppositional Kurds prepared to acquiesce to the Kemalist administration were promised amnesty.^[33] The Turkish government's attempts to begin substantive discussions, however, were unsuccessful. In response, the Turkish government decided to engage in direct negotiations with Ihsan Nuri Pasha, but this endeavor was equally fruitless.^[34]

On December 29, 1929, President Mustafa Kemal presided over a cabinet meeting that included the First Inspectorate-Inspector General's General, Brahim Tali Ngören, and the Chief of the General Staff, Fevzi Akkmak. In June, 1930 a government resolution was made to launch a military campaign against Mount Ararat.^[35]

The General Staff's Order

On 7 January 1930, the General Staff of the Republic of Turkey sent an order to IX Corps (as follows) with the text of the cabinet decision itself:^[36]

- Villages inhabited by Kurds between Bulakbaşı and Şihli Köyü and places of refuge will be occupied. And let rebels debar from livelihood bases.

- After cleaning the district of Kurds, follow towards the line of Ararat peak and establish garrisons in occupied territories.
- Only mobile gendarmerie forces will winter between 1930 and 1931. In the district, no residential areas, except needs for gendarmerie regiments, will not be left.
- In this wise, Kurds debarred from food and housing needs will be distributed or be forced to take refuge in Iran. In this case, the problem will be solved with Iran.
- The operation will begin in the last week of June 1930 and before the harvest season.
- The commander of the IX Corps will direct the military operation.

Temporary Halt of the Offensive Against Mount Ararat

Salih (Omurtak) was named IX Corps commander on March 18, 1930.^[37] On June 11, 1930, the Turkish military began armed warfare against the Ararat insurrectionists. Xoybûn pleaded for assistance on behalf of Kurds throughout Kurdistan. On June 18, 1930, Hasan Nuri gave İbrahim Agha an attack order.^[38] This command came from a Kurdish rebel to Turkish Captain Zühtü, an officer of the 2nd Mobile Gendarmerie Battalion in Idr. The insurgents' call for assistance was widely answered, and the Turks briefly halted their assault on Mount Ararat.

The Massacre Starts

It was generally accepted that the massacre occurred on July 13, 1930, but Yusuf Mazhar, who was the special correspondent for the daily Cumhuriyet (Turkey's most popular daily paper in the 1930s and 1940s), reported by telephone on July 12 that "the cleaning in districts of Erciş, Mount Süphan, and Zeylân was completely finished."^[39] The Turkish army used two corps (VII Corps and IX Corps) and 80 aircraft for the operation. The Zilan River was flooded with dead remains all the way to its mouth, according to the daily Cumhuriyet of July 16, 1930, resulting in over 15,000 reported deaths.^[40]

Ibrahim Tali Öngören, the general inspector of the First Inspectorate-General, said on July 15, 1930, that destruction was carried out by the armed forces with the assistance of the people, that over a thousand soldiers in the militia were lost, and that peasants who assisted the rebels were also exterminated.^[41] The Turkish "victory" at Ergish and Zilan, according to the British

Foreign Office, was a minor one. Turkish forces defeated a small number of armed men and a sizable portion of those killed were non-combatants.

Witnesses

The wife of ükrü (Erol), the eldest son of the leader of the Bekiri tribe, as well as Salih, her first child, and all of her other women were allegedly murdered. She escaped the carnage concealed from gunfire behind their dead bodies.^[42]

Mehmet Pamak's grandfather said that machine guns were used to slaughter thousands of people, including men, women, children, and the elderly, and that the valley was filled with blood for many days. Pamak's 80 year old great-grandmother and his infant aunt were both bayoneted to death.^[43]

One of the few surviving witnesses to the Zilan massacre, Kakil Erdem, claims that 35 of his relatives were slain, and that a pregnant woman's abdomen was sliced open by troops. Three of his relatives were scalped right in front of his eyes, and two of his brothers were killed by beatings.

In Turkish Media

A state-affiliated newspaper at the time, Cumhuriyet, published a clear account of the operation's results the next morning, “The sweeping began. All those in the Zilan Valley were exterminated, and none of them survived.”^[44]

Cultural Influences

Musa Anter learned about and discussed the Kurdish massacres, such as the Zilan Massacre of 1930, the Dersim Massacre of 1938, and the Thirty-Three Bullets Massacre, for the first time when he and three other friends from the Dicle Student Dormitory published a journal titled Dicle Kayna (Tigris Spring) in 1948.^[45]

In an interview in the 1950s, one of Turkey's most renowned authors, Yaşar Kemal, discussed his discovery of the Zilan Valley Massacre and how he was affected by it.^[46] He wrote about massacres in his book Deniz Küstü ("The Sea-Crossed Fisherman", 1978). Selim Balkç, the

novel's main character, was injured in the face during the Ararat battles and sent to Cerrahpaşa Hospital in Istanbul for treatment.^[47]

Censorship

Kakil Erdem, a 94-year-old living eyewitness, was interviewed by journalists Ercan ksüz and Oktay Candemir for the Dicle News Agency in 2007. The interview was published under the title "Zilan Katliam'n Tan Konuştu" (Witness of Zilan Massacre Talks). The journalists were found guilty of "inciting hate and enmity" by the Van 2nd Criminal Court of First Instance, and each was given an 18-month jail term in 2009.^[48]

Issues Facing Kurds Today

Education

Kurdish is not permitted to be used as the major language in the public education system in Turkey; Turkish is the sole language that is used to educate students.^[49] The Kurdish community in Turkey has long advocated for the inclusion of Kurdish as a topic and as a language of teaching in public schools. Due to dire economic circumstances, a private Kurdish-language school experiment was abandoned in 2004. At the time of publication, several unrecognized private institutions are now offering instruction in Kurdish.^[50] Although schooling in Kurdish was de facto legal as of 2008, access to it was relatively rare due to the prerequisites' extreme difficulty. If someone intended to establish and deliver educational opportunities in Kurdish, they frequently faced terrorism charges. Tertiary education has also hit road blocks: although colleges are allowed to offer Kurdish as a topic, there are very few programs available.^[51]

Assimilation

Due to the significant Kurdish population in Turkey, several administrations have seen the assertion of Kurdish identity as a threat to Turkish unity. The state's long-standing repression of the Kurdish language is one of the principal charges of forced cultural assimilation. Under a variety of legal justifications, Kurdish periodicals that were published in the 1960s and 1970s

were shut down.^[52] Kurdish was formally outlawed as an accepted language for governance and administration after the military coup in Turkey in 1980.^[53]

US Congressman Bob Filner described a "cultural genocide," highlighting the "alarming rate of disappearance of a way of life known as Kurdish."^[54] According to Mark Levene, the methods of assimilation extended beyond cultural absorption, and the events of the late nineteenth century persisted up until 1990.^[55]

According to paragraphs 2(a) and 2(e) of the UN Genocidal Convention, Desmond Fernandes, and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas assert that Turkey implemented a genocide campaign against Kurds with the intention of assimilating them.^[56] Due to both internal and external factors, no major nation officially recognize the "genocide" designation. Senior lecturer at De Montfort University Desmond Fernandes divides the Turkish government's strategy into the following groups:

- Forced assimilation that included, among other things, the outlawing of the Kurdish language and the deportation of Kurds to parts of Turkey that was not mostly populated by Kurds.
- The prohibition of any groups that are hostile to category one.
- Brutal suppression of Kurdish opposition.

Cultural Expression

Publicity, publication, and/or broadcasting in any language other than Turkish was prohibited between 1983 and 1991 unless that language was the first official language of a nation with which Turkey had diplomatic ties.^[57] Although this restriction legally extended to all languages, it had the most impact on Kurdish, which is widely spoken in the Kurdistan region but is not a first official language of any nation.^[58] The ministry declared it unconstitutional to provide

information in languages other than Turkish about municipal services including culture, art, environment, city cleanliness, and health.^[59]

The public television network TRT in Turkey started airing a half-hour Kurdish show in June 2004, and on March 8, 2006, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) approved the restricted use of the Kurdish language by two TV stations (Gün TV and Söz TV) and one radio channel (Medya FM).^[60] In an effort to satisfy one of the conditions set forth by the European Union in its discussions regarding Turkish EU membership, this law went into effect in 2006. The new rule will allocate four hours of television and five hours of radio programming per week.^[61] TRT Kurdî, the first channel entirely in the Kurdish language, was introduced by the Turkish public broadcaster TRT in January 2009.^[62]

Despite these improvements, until a few years ago there were still restrictions on the use of Kurdish in public and government organizations. Abdullah Demirbaş was ousted from his position as elected mayor of the Sur district of Diyarbakır by the Interior Ministry on June 14, and several elected city council members were likewise expelled. The high court agreed with the ministry's judgment.

The ministry's stance held even though, according to the aforementioned municipality, 72% of district residents utilize Kurdish on a regular basis. In another instance, Osman Baydemir, the mayor of Diyarbakır, went through a similar set of questioning and legal procedures. He was charged in relation to the municipality's usage of the Kurdish greeting *Sersala We Pîroz Be* (Happy New Year) in its new year greeting cards. The prosecutor wrote, "It was determined that the suspect used a Kurdish sentence in the celebration card, 'Sersala We Piroz Be' (Happy New Year). I, on behalf of the public, demand that he be punished under Article 222/1 of the Turkish Penal Code."^[63]

The Municipality's official website is now available in three languages: Turkish, Kurdish, and English.^[64]

The HDP

Background

Halkların Demokratik Partisi, or in Kurdish, *Partiya Demokratîk a Gelan* (The Democratic Party of the Peoples, sometimes known as the Peoples' Democratic Party) is a pro-minority political organization in Turkey. The party, which leans left-wing in general, strongly supports feminism, LGBT rights, minority rights, youth rights, and equality. It is a party inside the Progressive Alliance, a consultative member of the Socialist International, and an associate member of the Party of European Socialists.^[65]

The HDP was established in 2012 as the political arm of the Peoples' Democratic Congress, a confederation of numerous left-wing movements that had previously fielded candidates as Independents to get around the 10% election threshold. The HDP aims to fundamentally challenge the current Turkish-Kurdish divide as well as other established parameters in Turkish politics. The HDP and the Kurdish Democratic Regions Party (DBP), sometimes referred to as the HDP's sibling party, are allies. Politicians from the DBP took part in peace talks between the Turkish government and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) from 2013 to 2015.

The leadership of the party is co-presidential, with a chairman and a chairwoman.^[66] The party's nominee for president in 2014 was Selahattin Demirtas, who received 9.77% of the vote. The party decided to run party lists in the forthcoming June 2015 general election rather as independent candidates despite worries that it would not reach the 10% election threshold. It polled at 13.12%, exceeding expectations, and moving up to third place among legislative groups. Ali Haydar Konca and Müslüm Doan, MPs for the HDP, were appointed as the Minister of European Union Affairs and the Minister of Development, respectively, in the interim electoral cabinet established by AKP Prime Minister Ahmet Davutolu on August 28, 2015. The party is in control of the municipalities they won the elections in thanks to a co-mayorship made up of a man and a woman.^[67]

The HDP vehemently condemned the coup after the failed 2016 coup attempt in Turkey and highlighted the past suppression of democratic forces by military authorities. In response,

Turkish purges targeted suspected Gülen movement members, and the HDP was at first disregarded and excluded from the post-coup national peace. Eventually, however, the Turkish judiciary began accusing elected HDP members of supporting terrorism. In September 2016 Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, the HDP's co-chairs, were among the lawmakers who were imprisoned in November 2016, which significantly hampered the party's capacity to communicate and participate in politics. [68]

Salim Kaplan, co-deputy chairman of the HDP for local governments, claimed in December 2020 that "since 2016, 20,000 of our members have been taken into detention and more than 10,000 of our members and executives have been sent to jail" and that the government had taken and occupied 48 towns in the crackdown. [69] The governing Justice and Development Party (AKP) accuses the HDP of having close ties to the PKK and alleges its actions were terroristic until the matter was withdrawn in March 2021. [70]

How the HDP Became King-Makers

The AKP risks losing the support of conservative Kurds because of its sharp shift to hard-line nationalism. Now resentful Kurds are emerging as key players in the Turkish elections. Kurdish voters became kingmakers in the crucial legislative and presidential polls. With that in mind, opposition parties are looking for means of cooperation to beat Erdogan and save Turkish democracy.

Kadir Atalay, who owns the PIAR polling company, said former Kurdish supporters of the AKP and Erdogan no longer support the AKP. Atalay claims that the main reason Kurds backed Erdogan was because of their trust in his commitment to resolving the Kurdish question. But after his sudden turn to nationalism, they are "deceived and abandoned." [71] Some specific examples of this are the AKP's alliance with the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP), the crackdown on Kurdish militants in 2015–2016 that destroyed towns and neighborhoods, Ankara's threats against Iraqi Kurds over their bid for independence last year (2021), and the Turkish offensive on the predominately Kurdish city of Afrin in Syria.

Atalay's findings company found that dissuading Kurdish supporters have cost the AKP about 4 points of its vote. According to Atalay, "our surveys on AKP losses indicate that the party has lost 4 points through Kurdish voters who are against the environment of conflict and support the peace process."^[72]

According to Abdullatif Sener, "[this is] the only method to steal away the Kurds who have supported the AKP and Erdogan." Abdullatif Sener is a former deputy premier who has also had issues with Erdogan. He advised opposition parties to work together.

The Opposition and the Kurdish Cause

The Republican People's Party (CHP) is a Kemalist and social-democratic political party in Turkey.^[73] It is also the oldest political party in the country, founded by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the first president and founder of the modern Turkish Republic. The party is also cited as the founding party of modern Turkey.^[74] The CHP describes itself as a "modern social-democratic party, which is faithful to the founding principles and values of the Republic of Turkey."^[75] It is the main opposition party to the ruling conservative Justice and Development Party in the Grand National Assembly with 135 MPs.

Turkish politics have followed a specific formula since 2002: The country holds elections on a regular basis, and the winner is always the ruling Justice and Development Party, which is led by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The exceptions to this norm were the most recent municipal elections on March 31, 2019, and the rerun election in Istanbul on June 23. The opposition won nearly all of Turkey's main cities, including Istanbul and Ankara, handing the AKP its worst electoral loss to date.

The opposition, especially the main opposition, the CHP, will find it difficult to manage its new electoral successes and maintain the coalition behind it. The nationalist Good Party (İyi Party) and the secularist CHP comprise the official opposition alliance, but unofficially, the minor Islamist Felicity (Saadet) Party and the pro-Kurdish HDP also self-identify as a part of the opposition and often caucus with CHP.

The CHP must find a way to appease the pro-Kurdish HDP's political demands while also preventing the opposition group from disintegrating because it is the dominant party inside it. The CHP has a challenging task to preserve political momentum following the municipal elections.

Politically, a shift in the opposition CHP's attitude toward the Kurdish problem may be the clearest indication that the party is moving toward further change. Excepting a brief period (the late 1980s and early 1990s) when the Social Democratic People's Party (SHP), the predecessor of the CHP, attempted to advance a political solution to the Kurdish issue in contrast to the then-dominant military approach, the CHP has largely adhered to the statist and the status quo policy on the matter.^[76]

The CHP, however, has hinted at a change in stance. For instance, the CHP vehemently denounced the government's decision to remove the three Kurdish mayors of cities in Turkey's southeast and east on the basis of flimsy, politically driven accusations. The party referred to it as an illegal political takeover. Ekrem Mamolu, the newly elected CHP mayor of Istanbul, went to Diyarbakir to support the Kurdish mayors. Additionally, he recently announced that Kurdish-language classes will be added to the ISMEK (Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Art and Vocational Training Courses) program, assuming there is enough teacher and student interest. Additionally, there have been rumors that the CHP is getting ready to present its own viewpoint on how to resolve the Kurdish problem. Together, these actions point to a significant shift in Kurdish policy. The CHP is obviously not in power, so its new strategy won't have an immediate impact on policy. However, if maintained, this new policy direction might be beneficial and significant for a number of reasons.^[77]

The CHP may plant the seeds of historical reconciliation between the dominant ideology and its principal victim if it adopts and maintains a reformist political position on the Kurdish question. It is important to remember that despite the early encouraging indicators, however, it is still too early and immature to predict that the CHP would follow this course of action.

The CHP is in a difficult situation regarding the Kurdish question. The Good Party could ultimately lose if Kurdish demands are met. The CHP, on the other hand, is likely to alienate, if not agitate, the Kurds because of its excessive sensitivity to the Good Party's concerns. Trying to “get by” isn't a viable long-term policy strategy.

What can the opposition, and specifically the CHP, do at this point, except create a clear policy in favor of the rights of the Kurdish language, oppose the anti-Kurdish regional policy, and support the political agency of the HDP? It can and should try to alter the political agenda that is dominated by Kurdish issues. Unfortunately, given Turkish incursions into Syria and the responses from other countries to the operation, it will be difficult to shift the agenda favorably towards productive discourse. The CHP must – at the very least – present some fresh ideas. The opposition bloc set the agenda before a recent municipal election, which placed the ruling coalition on a defensive footing. The opposition lost this aggressive impetus following the election. Once more, it appears like the government is dictating Turkish politics while the opposition tries to catch up.^[78]

The CHP must emphasize new issues for the opposition to continue to be relevant. Such political endeavors will keep the government's flaws and vulnerabilities in the public eye and force the AKP to remain reactive rather than setting the agenda.

Conclusion

This paper touched upon the background of Kurdish history and issues they face in Turkey, descriptions of a couple of notable Kurdish rebellions, as well as issues surrounding education, assimilation, politics, and cultural expression in the Kurdish community.

The Kurdish population in Turkey continues to struggle with both religious and secular parties alike, such as AKP and CHP. Turkey must be able to approach the tensions and issues facing its Kurds realistically. To achieve this, the CHP needs to work with the HDP to unite and lead to a stronger and more prosperous country for all.

[1] <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/faq/kurds-turkey>

[2] Gunter 2018, p. 226.

[3] [Gunter 2018](#), p. 51.

- [4] Cevdet Türkay, *Başbakanlık Arşiv Belgelerine Göre Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Oymak, Aşiret ve Cemaatler*, Tercüman Yayınları, 1979, p. 502.
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- [6] Mark Sykes, "The Kurdish Tribes of the Ottoman Empire", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. XXXVIII, 1908.
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- [14] Faik Bulut, *Devletin Gözüyle Türkiye'de Kürt İsyanlar (Kurdish rebellions in Turkey, from the government point of view)*, Yön Yayınları, 1991, 214-215.
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