

The Kurdistan Workers' Party Turns against the European Union

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The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is the largest Kurdish opposition group in Turkey, serving as an umbrella for a myriad of organizations. The PKK includes the following basic components:

1. Organizations

- an armed militia group, called Kongra-Gel/PKK (Kurdish People's Congress)
- a political party, the Democratic Society Party (DTP), which serves as its legal wing
- the Free Youth Organization
- the Free Women's Organization
- the Kurdistan Students Association
- the Kurdish Imams' Association

2. Media outlets

- three newspapers: *Yeni Ozgur Politika* in Germany and *Gundem* and *Azadiya Welat* (a Kurdish-language publication) in Turkey
- two news agencies: Firat News Agency and Dicle Haber Ajansi
- two satellite TV stations: Roj TV (Denmark) and MMC TV
- a radio station: Radio Serhildan

In February 1999 the PKK's founder and leader, Abdullah "Apo" Ocalan, was arrested in Kenya and brought to Turkey in a complex international

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operation. Shortly thereafter he was sentenced to death, but European Union pressure compelled Turkey to abolish the death penalty, and Ocalan's sentence was amended to life imprisonment. Not long after his arrest, Ocalan declared a cease-fire and ordered PKK militants to take refuge in northern Iraq. Ocalan justified this action with the argument that he had had "a change of heart and now considered violence inappropriate."¹ As a result, a relatively peaceful atmosphere prevailed between 1999 and 2004. However, in the latter year the PKK resumed its campaign of terror, arguing that Turkey had not responded positively to the cease-fire in that it had refused to seek a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question.²

The PKK's resumption of terror activities surprised many observers, because in order to meet EU accession requirements, Turkey had reformed many of the antidemocratic characteristics of its state system to the great benefit of its Kurdish and other minorities. For the PKK again to resort to terrorism was seen as impeding Turkey's EU negotiations and therefore threatening the Kurdish people's recent gains. Several conspiracy theories were offered to explain the PKK's intentions. Some anti-PKK Kurds accused the PKK of cooperating with so-called deep-state elements in Turkey's security bureaucracy.³ ("Deep state" is a term used to describe a group of Turkish security elements that oppose Turkish membership in the EU and operate clandestinely to undermine the accession process.) Such theories find a ready market among both Turks and Kurds who support Turkey's EU membership bid. Others believed the PKK had calculated that Turkey's EU membership would erode the PKK's grassroots support.⁴ These explanations are unsatisfactory. In this essay I examine more fully why the PKK and its subordinate organizations, including its legal wing, the DTP, have acted so decisively to forestall Turkey's EU membership.

In this essay I use the terms "Kurds" and "Apocu Kurds" (Apocu meaning, in Turkish, pro-"Apo"—Ocalan's nickname) interchangeably to represent those Kurdish opposition groups that function under the Kongra/Gel/PKK and DTP umbrella, considering jointly those who sympathize with or

1. Abdullah Ocalan, *Ozgur Insan Savunmasi* (Neuss: Mezapotamya, 2003), at www.abdullah-ocalan.com.

2. PKK.org, accessed 12 December 2006.

3. "The Wrongs and Rights of Minorities," *Economist*, 19 March 2005.

4. Nese Duzel, "PKK asil AK Partiye savas ilan etti," *Radikal*, 10 April 2006.

support either the PKK or the DTP. I acknowledge that the PKK and its affiliated organizations do not represent the totality of Turkey's Kurdish-speaking population. There are many Turkish Kurds and Kurdish organizations that support Turkey's EU membership. However, in this essay I specifically examine the attitudes of the Apocu Kurds toward the EU. I consider the role of the Apocu elites in Turkey's EU membership process: how they have positioned themselves according to changing circumstances, how they have reacted when their expectations are not met, and how they have mobilized their constituencies around their arguments.

After establishing a theoretical framework, I outline how EU negotiations benefit the Kurds. In this respect, I have discovered two chronologically distinct viewpoints of the Apocu elites toward the EU accession process. Between 1999 and 2005, these elites clearly supported accession negotiations. However, after September 2005 they withdrew that support. This reversal was due largely to the disappointment of Kurdish organizations with the EU's policies toward Turkey's Kurds, specifically the EU's September 2005 progress report, which accused the PKK of being the source of violence in Turkey's southeastern region.

I begin by analyzing the discourse of the Apocu elites and the way in which the policy shifts of Kurdish organizations reflect the changes in this discourse, and I demonstrate the marked shift in both discourse and policy that occurred after September 2005. My analysis focuses on the discourse of the PKK leadership, the discourse of the DTP leadership, the motives behind the PKK's 2004 resumption of terrorism, and the rationale and objectives of the PKK's September 2005 policy shift.

The primary sources used in this article are scholarly books and articles on these and related issues; pro-PKK media, including *Yeni Ozgur Politika*, *Gundem*, the ANF News Agency, the Dicle News Agency, and *Kurdishinfo.com*; interviews of Apocu elites by both Turkish and Kurdish sources; and news reports covering Kurdish political issues and terrorism.

Theoretical Framework

From a theoretical point of view, in order to examine Kurdish nationalism and the Kurdish community's preferences on current issues, we need to

examine the role of community elites. As Smith argues, "A secularizing intelligentsia led by educator intellectuals supplies the motor of transformation, as well as the cultural framework, which among lateral *ethnie* had been largely provided by the incorporating bureaucratic state."⁵ In contrast to Smith's emphasis on *ethnie*, Snyder argues that elites determine the form and expression of nationalism, specifically, whether or not the type of nationalism that emerges is prone to violence.⁶ Hechter ascribes importance to the imposition of direct rule by central authorities on local elites in culturally heterogeneous societies. Direct rule, he argues, reduces the resources of local elites, giving them an incentive to mobilize a nationalism-based opposition.⁷ Hroch sees three stages in this process. In the first phase, elites seek to identify shared linguistic, cultural, social, and possibly historical characteristics among a group of people. In the second, politicized activists attempt to awaken the national consciousness of the population. And in the third phase a national mass movement is formed.⁸

Thus a variety of scholars suggest that elites play a crucial role in the development of nationalism in that they frequently seek to develop and exploit nationalism in pursuit of their own political ends.

In the absence of a state elite that promotes nationalism, the ability of antigovernment nationalist elites to promote their nationalist agenda depends on the degree to which the government suppresses their activities. Depending on their availability, antigovernment elites may use a diverse array of techniques to achieve leadership in nationalist organizations: developing public education programs, organizing nationalist celebrations, suppressing the official language and the official nationalist narrative, drafting followers into a nationalist rebel army, and dispensing information and misinformation along with issuing emotional appeals through the media.⁹

5. Anthony D. Smith, "The Rise of Nation," in *Nationalism*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 153.

6. J. L. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict* (New York: Norton, 2000).

7. Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

8. M. Hroch, "From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe," *New Left Review*, no. 198 (March–April 1993): 73.

9. Joseph M. Whitmeyer, "Elites and Popular Nationalism," *British Journal of Sociology* 53, no. 3 (2002): 328.

In this process, as Gellner argues, elites often exploit events from the past that have been transmitted from generation to generation through narratives and myths, turning these narratives into political discourses.¹⁰ Nationalist elites may also exploit current social and political events to mobilize followers for their cause.

Reflecting these theories, elites have played a crucial role in the formation and development of Kurdish nationalism. Kurdish nationalist elites have used all means available to mobilize the masses around the nationalist cause, including the manipulation of traditional rituals. For instance, Nawroz is a traditional day of celebration in many Central Asian and Persian communities, but Kurdish elites have successfully promoted this annual festival as a unique Kurdish holiday. Thereafter, hundreds of thousands of Kurds have actively participated in Nawroz celebrations. Meanwhile, the Apocu elites are symbolically exploiting Nawroz and other Kurdish holidays and events in their anti-EU propaganda, and the PKK often stages terrorist events on crucial dates in the Kurdish calendar. As they have with the Newroz festival, Kurdish elites have played significant roles in reinforcing preferences of the Kurdish community on critical junctures, such as the EU accession process.

Kurds as a Minority in the EU Perspective

Like any country seeking to join the EU, Turkey is required to adhere to the Copenhagen Criteria, which list the basic requirements of EU membership. A candidate for membership must demonstrate that it conforms to these criteria in three categories:

1. Political: stable democratic institutions, respect for the rule of law, a working human rights regime, and respect for and protection of minorities
2. Economic: the existence of a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the union
3. Legislative: the acceptance of the union's *acquis communautaire*, a vast body of law and regulations that harmonizes relations among EU mem-

10. Ernest Gellner, *Nation and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

ber states and ensures common standards in a wide variety of areas — the environment, science and technology, and so forth¹¹

In order for the EU to consider opening accession negotiations with a candidate state, that state must show concrete progress toward fulfilling these criteria. The EU decided to open negotiations with Turkey in 2004, the European Council affirming the “decisive progress made by Turkey in its far-reaching reform process” and expressing confidence that the process would continue. The council invited the European Commission to develop a framework for negotiations, with a view to opening those negotiations on 3 October 2005.¹²

While Turkey’s record in implementing the EU-oriented reforms it has legislated is spotty, the reform program has brought many benefits to Turkey’s Kurdish population. Restrictions on freedom of expression have been eased. Education in the Kurdish language is now permitted, albeit on a private basis. Radio and television broadcasting in Kurdish and other minority languages is now permitted. While the development of regular Kurdish programming was initially a slow process, it has lately accelerated substantially. The EU has provided nearly 4 million euro in financial assistance to facilitate broadcasting in Kurdish.¹³ Random searches, common in many areas, but particularly in the Kurdish southeast, have been abolished; it is now illegal to search any individual or his or her residence without a court order. The government has also introduced an official policy of zero tolerance toward torture. Of substantial symbolic significance, four members of parliament (MPs) of the pro-Kurdish Democracy Party (DEP), who were imprisoned in 1991 simply because they had used Kurdish while speaking in parliament, were released from prison in 2004.

A state of emergency had been instituted in the region in 1980 but was finally lifted in 2002. Nonetheless, the area remains unstable, thanks largely to the resumption of PKK terror. A number of security measures, such as roadblocks and checkpoints, have been reintroduced in certain provinces in southeastern Turkey. Nevertheless, an increasing number of Kurdish civil organizations have been established and are flourishing because of the EU reforms.

11. See europa.eu/scadplus/glossary/accession_criteria_copenhagen_en.htm.

12. *European Commission Turkey 2005 Progress Report*, Brussels, 9 November 2005.

13. Ayse Yalazan, “Kurtce Yayina AB’den para destegi,” *Hurriyet*, 20 August 2006.

It is generally taken for granted that the Kurdish population has been the most immediate beneficiary of Turkey's efforts to achieve EU standards. It is further argued that the EU could bring about a solution to the Kurdish question if it compelled Turkey to liberalize further, particularly in the area of drafting effective regulations to implement its legislative achievements. Indeed, Moustakis and Chaudhuri contend that Kurdish communities will shun agitation for succession, because it would exacerbate tensions between the two communities and thus endanger the rights that have newly accrued to them under the EU accession process, rights that could expand through further negotiations over the *acquis communautaire*.¹⁴

Moustakis and Chaudhuri are not the only scholars who place high hopes in the EU process. Khaled Salih, a Kurd himself, expects that the European zone of stability and prosperity will be peacefully extended to include Turkey, which, *inter alia*, would transform the fate of Turkey's Kurds "in a dramatically positive way."¹⁵ The prominent American scholar on Kurdish issues Michael Gunter shares similar views with these scholars in that he thinks the EU membership process would provide a permanent solution for the Kurdish question of Turkey.¹⁶

At the other end of the spectrum, Gurbey argues that the EU views the Kurdish problem in the context of human rights and democratization rather than as an issue primarily of granting political rights to minority groups. "The reforms," according to Gurbey, "are to be framed in such a fashion that they rule out any interpretation specifically applying to Kurds. Thus the reforms will not lead to the cultural independence of Kurds as a group."¹⁷

14. Fotios Moustakis and Rudra Chaudhuri, "Turkish-Kurdish Relations and the European Union: An Unprecedented Shift in the Kemalist Paradigm?" *Mediterranean Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (2005).

15. Khaled Salih, "What Future for the Kurds?" *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 9, no. 1 (2005).

16. Michael M. Gunter, "Turkey's Floundering EU Candidacy and Its Kurdish Problem," *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2007).

17. Gulistan Gurbey, "Implications of Turkey's Constitutional Reforms for the Kurds," in *The Kurdish Question and the 2003 Iraqi War*, ed. Mohammad M.A. Ahmed and Michael M. Gunter (Costa Mesa, Calif.: Mazda, 2005), 152.

I: Apocu Kurds Initially Support EU Membership

In 2000, Ocalan offered a plan to establish peace between the Turkish and Kurdish communities. Gunter summarizes Ocalan's views as follows: if the obstacles to the use of Kurdish language and culture are removed, the integration of the Kurdish people with the state will take place. Negative perceptions of the state will change to positive perceptions and trust. The basis for rebellion and confrontation will be removed.¹⁸ Gunter also suggests that Turkey is strong and wise enough to respond to Ocalan's offer and take the measures needed to remove the pretexts for the Kurdish insurgency. However, the question arises: Turkey's implementation of the Copenhagen Criteria is arguably meeting many of the PKK's demands—why, then, does the PKK continue to fight? If the PKK really seeks a better life for the Kurdish people, and given that the EU accession process has provided cultural and political benefits to the Kurds and other minorities, why does it not cease hostilities? Yet the PKK not only has maintained its campaign of terror but also openly opposes Turkey's EU membership process.

At its December 1999 Helsinki summit, the EU recognized Turkey as a candidate for membership. The PKK Presidential Council claimed some of the credit for this development, declaring, "Turkey's candidacy was made possible because of our President Abdullah Ocalan's efforts . . . and the intense efforts of our party [PKK]. . . . Without our campaign for a democratic solution of Turkey's problems, it would have been impossible to create the favorable climate that led to the EU's decision to accept Turkey's candidacy for membership. The mobilization of 'Kurdish diplomacy' in Europe and similar efforts were crucial for the EU countries to overcome their doubts about Turkey."¹⁹

The PKK's support for the accession process was based on certain strategic calculations as well as the immediate benefits that accrued to the Apocu Kurds. Chief among the latter was Turkey's abolition of the death sentence, as required by the Copenhagen Criteria, which in effect saved Ocalan's life.

18. Michael M. Gunter, "The Continuing Kurdish Problem in Turkey after Ocalan's Capture," *Third World Quarterly* 21, no. 5 (2000):

19. "PKK Presidential Council Statement," 11 December 1999, at www.kurdishinfo.com.

(Ocalan had been sentenced to death shortly after his capture in 1999. It was likely that the nationalist parties that dominated the Turkish cabinet at the time would have insisted on his execution were it not for EU pressure. Of course, as PKK leader Murat Karayilan pointed out, had Ocalan been executed, the PKK would have abandoned the cease-fire it had recently announced and returned to armed struggle. Therefore the decision to commute Ocalan's sentence benefited Turkey in any case, however it may have affected the EU accession process.²⁰)

But specific issues like Ocalan's death sentence to one side, polling data suggests that Turkey's Kurds initially strongly supported Turkey's bid for EU membership. Adherents of the Democratic People's Party (DEHAP—the predecessor of the DTP) favored EU membership until the PKK revised its position in 2006. According to Pollmark, pro-EU sentiment among DEHAP voters reached 87.8 percent in 2004, at a time when the support of the Turkish population as a whole was only 73.4 percent.²¹ In February 2006, a Pollmark survey demonstrated the Turkish public's support for EU membership had declined to 61.9 percent, but it remained at the 69.6 percent²² level for DTP/DEHAP supporters.²³

II: The EU Disappoints the Apocu Kurds

The leadership of the PKK intended that a solution to the Kurdish problem should benefit them, and Ocalan specifically, in tangible ways. They hoped they could influence the EU to recognize the PKK or its legal wing as the defender of the rights of the Kurdish people and to compel Turkey to negotiate directly with them. In a letter to EU Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn, PKK leaders called on him to “invite both sides [the PKK and the Turkish state] to enter into a dialogue aimed at stopping the conflict which

20. “PKK lideri Karayilanla Soylesi,” *Ozgur Politika*, 11 January 2000.

21. Yusef Ziya Ozcab, Ihsan Dagı, Metin Toprak, and Ertan Aydin, “Nato ve Turk Dis Politikasi Arastirmasi,” Ankara, Pollmark, July 2004.

22. Hassan Dagı, Ibrahim Dalmis and Ertan Aydin, “Turk Dis Politikasi Arastirmasi,” Ankara, Pollmark, February 2006.

23. DEHAP in the intervening period disbanded itself, and Kurdish political elites formed a new political party called the Democratic Society Party, or DTP.

you and everyone else oppose.”²⁴ In a parallel letter to Rehn, Diyarbakir’s DEHAP mayor Osman Baydemir advocated that the EU facilitate the return of PKK leaders living abroad so that they could participate in democratic politics.²⁵

But the EU, starting in 2005, made it clear that it could not recognize the PKK, a terrorist organization, as the representative of the Kurds. The European Commission’s *Turkey: 2005 Progress Report* identified the source of violence in Turkey’s southeast as the PKK and its associated organizations.²⁶ On a number of occasions, EU diplomats, meeting with representatives of the DTP, asked them to distance their party from the PKK and Ocalan.²⁷

Ocalan developed a conspiracy theory to connect the EU’s attitude of ignoring the PKK with US interests in the Middle East. He blamed the United States for the EU’s opposition to him personally. He has told his lawyers on several occasions that the United States wanted to eliminate him from Kurdish politics. The United States, he argued, found him “an obstacle to the emergence of ‘primitive nationalism’ among the Kurds.” He stated, “The US wants to eliminate me, because my ideology is not nationalism, but democratic togetherness [for which read ‘democratic confederalism’]. The EU has collaborated with the US by supporting Kurdish rivals, nationalists like Kemal Burkay and Ibrahim Guclu.”²⁸ Later, Ocalan charged EU countries with trying to replace him with Leyla Zana,²⁹ one of the four MP’s jailed for addressing parliament in the Kurdish language. Acting on his suspicions, Ocalan forced Zana to cut her ties with the DTP and arranged for her to be replaced as party co-chair by Aysel Tugluk, his lawyer.

24. “Open Letter to EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Mr Olli Rehn,” Brussels, 16 November 2005, at www.Kongra-gel.org.

25. Osman Baydemir, “Urban and Regional Socioeconomic Problems and Democratization in Turkey and the Kurdish Question: Suggestions for and Expectations from the Turkey-EU Negotiating Process,” 1 September 2005, at www.Kongra-gel.org.

26. European Commission, *Turkey: 2005 Progress Report*, Brussels, 9 November 2005, ec.europa.eu/enlargement/archives/pdf/key_documents/2005/package/sec_1426_final_progress_report_tr_en.pdf.

27. Murat Yetkin, “Zana’ya AB Mesaji,” *Radikal*, 6 July 2004.

28. “Ocalan, cetecilige karsi demokrasi konferanslari onerdi,” 30 June 2006, www.kurdishinfo.com.

29. “Leyla Zana, Bruksel’de teröristlere af isteyecek,” *Zaman*, 26 September 2004.

The DTP Revises Its Position on the EU

Ocalan's selection of Tugluk as co-chairman of the DTP sent a clear message to EU diplomats. Zana was an independent spirit, but Tugluk is close to Ocalan—she is the sister of Ocalan's close friend, Alaattin Tugluk—and Ocalan plans to control the party through her. As his lawyer, she used to meet with him frequently, and he was obviously the dominating figure in their relationship. Regarding one of her meetings with "Apo," she said, "Before I met with him, I could not sleep all night long; and after the meeting, I cried for a long time."³⁰ It is reasonable to conclude that the elevation of Tugluk to co-chair was intended to demonstrate to the EU that Ocalan, the PKK, and the DTP are an inseparable whole.

Indeed, at a recent DTP convention, Tugluk directly challenged the EU's demands that the DTP distance itself from PKK terrorism,³¹ as did her fellow co-chair Ahmet Turk, who argued that the PKK and DTP had the same grassroots supporters, and it was impossible to isolate a political party from its supporters, be they pro-PKK or otherwise.³² "The PKK is a potent force," Turk continued. "If you exclude the PKK, you cannot solve the Kurdish problem. EU membership will be an important step towards Turkey's democratization and the guarantee of Kurdish rights, but for the Kurds, it is not enough."³³ EU pressure on Turkey to abolish restrictions on Kurdish language and culture is only somewhat helpful, Turk said. Above all, the Turkish government and people have to rid themselves of their paranoia that the Kurds are a potential danger for Turkey.³⁴ During the general election campaign of July 2007, the DTP claimed to win forty seats in parliament, although it won only half of what it claimed. Since the election, neither the EU nor the DTP have stepped back from their positions concerning the PKK. The EU ambassadors in Ankara reminded the DTP leadership right after the elections to put distance between themselves and the PKK. Nonetheless,

30. "Aysel Tugluk-Ocalan'in avukati, cocukluk yillarindan beri PKK'ya yakin," *Zaman*, 10 November 2005.

31. Aysel Tugluk, "Kongre Konsmasi," www.dtpgm.org.tr.

32. "Ahmet Turk: Tabanimiz Dagda," *Sabah*, 22 April 2006.

33. Nese Duzel, "Turk: AB Biz Kurler Icin Yeterli Degil," *Radikal*, 17 April 2006.

34. Nursun Erel, "DTP Chairman Ahmet Turk Speaks to TNA," *New Anatolian*, 10 July 2006.

the DTP organized its convention and selected Nrettin Demirtas as the new chairman. Demirtas represents a group that advocates hard-line politics and tightening the DTP's relationship with the PKK.

Osman Baydemir, the prominent DTP mayor of the large Diyarbakir municipality, at one time expressed the strong belief that Turkey's EU membership would benefit its Kurdish citizens. In a 1 September 2005 letter to the EU Commission, Baydemir stated, "A very important point for us is that the Copenhagen Criteria, which articulate the fundamental . . . liberal and democratic norms of the EU, represent a framework, both in form and in content, that can respond to both the socioeconomic and cultural-political dimensions of the Kurdish question. . . . As elected officials of the region, we have strongly supported the EU accession process, on the basis that implementation of Copenhagen Criteria-based reforms can bring about a sustainable social peace"³⁵ But one year later, Baydemir shifted his position dramatically, reflecting the new Ocalan position. He told the major Istanbul daily *Hurriyet* that "neither Brussels nor Washington is the place to solve the Kurdish question. The only place where a solution can be found is Ankara, because Kurds and Turks must learn to live together."³⁶ Tuncer Bakirhan, DTP's vice-chair came to a similar conclusion when he accused the EU of implementing a "double standard on the Kurdish issue." He argues that the place to solve the Kurdish question is the parliament in Ankara, not Europe.³⁷

During this period, certain lower-level Kurdish organizations wrote a letter pressing the EU to include Kurdish culture and education in the Kurdish language in the science and culture chapter of Turkey's EU accession negotiations.³⁸ This suggested that these organizations still considered the membership process important, but the leadership of the DTP and other Apocu Kurdish groups did not associate themselves with this letter, in accordance with their new, anti-EU position.

35. Baydemir.

36. Fatih Cekirge, "Bu Aile Kavgasi," *Hurriyet*, 31 July 2006.

37. Erdem Toprak, "Bakirhan: Kurt sorunu Avrupa'da degil Mecliste cozulur," ANF News Agency, 29 December 2006.

38. "Kurt Kurumlarindan AB'ye Mektup," 18 August 2006, www.kurdinfo.com.

The PKK Similarly Revises Its Position on the EU

It is necessary at this stage to examine whether the armed wing of the Kurdish opposition, the PKK, moved in tandem with the Kurdish political elite to adopt a hostile attitude toward the EU.

Responding to the EU's insistence that the DTP distance itself from the PKK, Murat Karayilan, the PKK's acting leader, stated that it made no sense to discourage the Kurdish people from supporting the PKK and Ocalan, because the Kurds see Ocalan as their leader and the PKK as their organization. The EU's demand that the Kurdish nation dismiss its leader and abandon its organization was intolerant and dictatorial and cloaked a desire to maintain the subordinate status of the Kurds in Turkey.³⁹

Furthermore, when the European Commission's *Turkey: 2005 Progress Report* identified the PKK and other Kurdish terrorist groups as the source of violence in the southeast, the PKK stated that "this caused us to seriously reassess our confidence, as Kurds, in the Enlargement Commissioner's office and the EU."⁴⁰ Thereafter there was a steady stream of high-level PKK criticisms of the EU. For example, on 1 January 2006 an official PKK press release asserted that "it is a lie both to say that Turkish democracy has advanced in response to EU demands, and to claim that the democratic reform process will continue because of the EU."⁴¹

Similarly, Cemil Bayik, a leading figure in the PKK, told a pro-PKK news agency that the EU obviously did not want to solve the Kurdish problem because it had neither a project nor a policy to do so. He complained that although the Kurdish question could not be solved without engaging the PKK and Ocalan, the EU discouraged Kurdish politicians from making contact with the PKK. Moreover, because the EU supported Turkey's policies toward the Kurds, Turkey did not feel the need to seek a solution. "Therefore," he concluded, "the EU should be held responsible for the Kurdish problem remaining unresolved."⁴²

39. "Karayilan: Cetelere karsi demokrasi gucleri hareket gecsin," ANF News Agency, 5 June 2006.

40. "Open Letter."

41. PKK press release, 1 January 2006, obtained from the web page of the organization, www.Kongra-gel.org.

42. Aziz Ugur, "Cemil Bayik: AB Kurt sorununu cozmek istemiyor," ANF News Agency, 8 May 2006.

It was left, however, to Murat Karayilan to make crystal clear that the PKK had changed its position toward Turkey's EU accession. In June 2006, he accused the EU of exploiting the Kurdish question cynically, using the issue to force changes in Turkish policies while blaming the PKK for the violence in the southeast. "This," he concluded, "is an ugly policy."⁴³

The PKK Terrorizes the EU Process

The PKK's new anti-EU policy is reflected in the management of its terror campaign. The available data demonstrate that the intensity and timing of PKK attacks correlate significantly with events in the accession process.

On 5 May 2006 Bayik provided a strategic rationale for the timing of intensified terror operations. "As far as we know, the EU wants stability in Turkey during the negotiation process. The only way for Turkey to have stability is to solve the Kurdish problem. [Otherwise] Turkey will never reach the level of life-style, democracy, and prosperity the EU requires. [Correspondingly], if the EU wants to have Turkey in Europe, they must solve the Kurdish problem."⁴⁴

It is significant that PKK terror attacks in 2005 increased markedly in July, August, and September. This is unusual. Normally, the PKK intensifies its terror campaign immediately after spring because of the suitability of the weather. But in 2005 there were few incidents in April, May, and June, whereas in July at least nine attacks were reported. These included the kidnapping of a soldier, the ambush of a military convoy, and the kidnapping of the mayor of Bingöl. During the first twenty days of August, at least eight separate incidents took place, including an ambush of the governor of Bingöl, an attack on an ATM machine in Mardin, an automobile explosion in Mersin, and several killings and kidnappings.

In mid-August Turkish prime minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in a meeting with Turkish and Kurdish intellectuals, formally acknowledged the existence of the Kurdish question. On 3 October, the EU was scheduled to take a decision on the opening of accession negotiations. Public pressure compelled the PKK to declare a unilateral cease-fire from 20 August to 3 October. Despite

43. Yıldız Tara, "Karayilan: AB gerçekleri carpitiyor," *Firat News Agency*, 14 June 2006.

44. Ugur, "Cemil Bayik."

the cease-fire, six incidents were reported in September, but after 3 October, the number of incidents declined: four in October and four in November. The PKK's intention was evident: to accelerate the pace of terrorist attacks in accordance with significant dates in the accession process.

In 2006, we could once again observe a strong correlation. In 12 June of that year, Turkey-EU talks were expected to open. The PKK stepped up its terror campaign substantially; from 1 May to 10 June at least twenty-five separate attacks took place, killing more than twenty people and wounding more than fifty. The organization also implemented a new form of terror campaign from 1 June to 15 July, which involved terror attacks and mass demonstrations in city centers. Later in the year, a combination of domestic and international pressure and the adverse winter climate compelled the PKK to declare a unilateral cease-fire, but it resumed its terror campaign in the spring.

III: Why Does the PKK Oppose Turkey's EU Membership?

A number of factors forced the PKK to reignite its terror campaign. First, after the 1999 cease-fire that followed the capture of its leader, Ocalan, the organization lost other leaders, members, and associates both in Europe and in Turkey. Also, many organization functionaries condemned Ocalan for changing the PKK's goal from an independent Kurdistan to a "democratic confederation, composed of Turks and Kurds on an equal footing."⁴⁵ They were surprised when he declared that Kemalism, if properly interpreted, could provide the foundation for resolving the Kurdish question,⁴⁶ and, as stated above, when he branded the Iraqi Kurdish leaders Barzani and Talabani, no friends of the Ankara government, as "primitive nationalists." These positions disturbed many Kurds, who began to see Ocalan as an "agent of the Turkish state" and became vocal critics of the PKK.⁴⁷ In the wake of these criticisms, leading Kurdish figures began to establish new associations, non-

45. "Ocalan: Kurdistan'da kavga yeni baskiyor," www.kongra-gel.org.

46. See meeting notes between Ocalan and his lawyers, 30 November 2005, www.welatparez.com/tr/arsiv/gorusmenotlari/.

47. Ferzende Kaya, *Mezopotamya Surgunu Abdulmelik Firat'in Yasam Oykusu* (Istanbul: Alfa, 2005).

governmental organizations,⁴⁸ and political parties that did not necessarily support PKK objectives. These new organizations and their programs further reduced public support for the PKK.

In order to stop this erosion and regain public confidence, the organization tried new tactics and strategies, including changing the PKK's name, first to Kadek (the Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress) in 2002, then to Kongra-Gel in 2003, and back to PKK again. It also established new affiliates, such as the Free Youth Organization and the Free Women's Organization.⁴⁹ However, none of these strategies worked, and the PKK's public support continued to decline. In the 2004 local elections, DEHAP lost its hold on the municipalities of Bingöl, Siirt, Van, Mus, and Agri, a clear sign that the PKK's popular appeal was on the wane. Thereafter, Ocalan initiated a process for the establishment of a new political party, the DTP. The DTP was intended to be a Turkish political party, not a Kurdish party—in other words, an inclusive rather than exclusive organization.⁵⁰

The leading Kurdish politicians Zana, Orhan Dogan, and Hatip Dicle announced the founding of the DTP in 2004. However, the DTP failed to win the support of many Kurdish intellectuals, or of Turkish intellectuals believed sympathetic to the Kurdish cause. Newly established associations in the region also hesitated to join the DTP. Moreover, the general election of July 2007 indicated that the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) organization in the area remained generally more influential than the PKK's legal wing and, after the start of EU negotiations, might become still stronger and even win in Diyarbakir, which had been the Kurdish movement's stronghold.

The PKK, now desperate, concluded that its only hope was to eliminate its rivals and perforce become the only representative of the region's Kurdish population. The organization began a systematic program of assassinating opponents of its policies and intimidating other leading figures who did not

48. For example, Ocalan's former lawyer Ahmet Zeki Okcuoglu formed a new group called Bizava Bakurê Kurdistanê. We should add Abulmelik Firat's Kurdish political party Hak-Par, former minister Serafettin Elci's Hur Kutler Grubu, and Mehmet Celal Baykara's Kurd-Kav to this list.

49. Under the umbrella of the Kongra-Gel, the Free Women Initiative program was formed. This branch of the PKK organized its first congress on 1 March 2006. See www.pkk.org/tr/YAJK.html.

50. "Kalkan: DTP demokrasi hareketini başlatmalı," Firat News Agency, 19 June 2006.

support its objectives. It became clear that the PKK simply would not permit other Kurdish opposition groups to form new political parties or organizations outside of its control. Hikmet Fidan and Kani Yilmaz, former pro-PKK politicians who advocated nonviolent struggle and supported Turkey's EU accession, were murdered by the PKK because of their efforts to form a rival political party.⁵¹

Ocalan and his associates believe that they have the right to exercise sole control over Kurdish nationalism since they nourished it with their militant followers' blood. They feel that they should be one of the parties at the table, along with Turkey, to negotiate the Kurdish issue during its negotiations with the EU. Therefore, any organization that establishes itself in the region and claims to be a defender of Kurdish rights by default threatens the PKK's position, and consequently the PKK feels compelled to engage in its campaign of murder and intimidation. Now the only remaining threat to the PKK in the region is the AKP, but the AKP cannot be eliminated very easily because of the power it derives from controlling the government, and the PKK fears its drive for EU membership will eventually help the AKP win the support of pro-EU Kurds.

The PKK has therefore identified the AKP as a prime target of its propaganda. A content analysis of the pro-PKK daily *Ozgur Politika* and the pro-PKK monthly *Serxwebun* shows the PKK criticizing the AKP government more than the Turkish military, heretofore the organization's enemy number one. The May 2004 issue, *Serxwebun*, analyzing the March 2004 municipal elections, described the AKP as an accomplice in the Greater Middle East Initiative and concludes, "In the region, the AKP's election victory was based on external support from the EU and the US."⁵² After the general election of July 2007, Apocu media outlets communicated a similar tone of criticism once again. Further, Apocu Kurdish organizations have been setting up street demonstrations to protest the AKP's policies, and set fire to the AKP's local offices in the Kurdish region. The tone of criticism is harsher toward the AKP than toward the Turkish military.

51. "HADEP eski Genel Başkan Yardımcısı ve PWD Türkiye Koordinatörü Hikmet Fidan, PKK canileri tarafından katledildi," www.welatparez.com/articles/2005/07/2005-07-06d.php.

52. "28 Mart Yerel Seçimleri ve Cikarılması Gereken Sonuclar," *Serxwebun* 23, no. 269 (2004).

For the PKK, the EU accession process poses two distinct threats. On a domestic level, the process favors the new Kurdish organizations and particularly the AKP, because many Kurds believe that the AKP is responsible for increased democratization in Turkey. The closer Turkey gets to EU membership, the more the PKK's supporter base is likely to erode. On the international level, the PKK's maneuvering room is narrowing because the EU as well as the United States recognize the PKK as a terrorist organization. Among the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, new Kurdish organizations are taking root in the Kurdish community and flourishing, which reduces PKK influence and diminishes its financial support.

Therefore, the PKK has concluded that it must oppose Turkey's EU membership and compel Turkey to recognize the PKK as a legitimate group with which Turkey must negotiate the Kurdish question. As the EU has declared that the "PKK is against the spirit of the EU,"⁵³ the PKK cannot hope to influence Brussels, and therefore is focusing its efforts on the Turkish target.

The PKK Attempts to Win Recognition

The PKK leadership is well aware that unless Turkey solves the Kurdish problem it cannot hope to join the EU. PKK terror has slowed down the EU membership process and has prevented the AKP government from receiving more support for the region. PKK leaders assume that if they intensify their activities, Turkey must relent and negotiate with them. Turkey, they calculate, cannot abandon its efforts to join the EU without suffering serious consequences. For example, at present the EU is Turkey's largest trading partner.

The PKK's presidential council member, Duran Kalkan, comments, "Turkey, by denying Kurdish rights, waging a war of ethnic cleansing against the Kurds, and holding our leaders in solitary confinement on Imrali Island prevents itself from becoming a member of the EU. The EU will accept Turkey as a member only if Turkey decides to be a democratic state. This requires Turkey to solve the Kurdish question in a democratic manner."⁵⁴

Justifying their argument that the first step toward democratization is for

53. "PKK Avrupa Mantigina Aykiri," *Hurriyet*, 20 August 2005.

54. "Kalkan: AB Kürtlerin iradesine saygili olmalı," *Firat News Agency*, 4 June 2006.

Turkey to recognize the PKK as the sole representative of Turkey's Kurds, the PKK and its affiliates note the recognition by Spain and Britain of the ETA and IRA as worthy negotiation partners. The DTP's European representative, Faik Yagizay, has condemned as "hypocritical" the EU's failure to recognize these situations as identical in nature.⁵⁵ The PKK also attempted to exploit a 17 August 2006 statement by US State Department spokesman Sean McCormack calling on the PKK to lay down its arms.⁵⁶ Kongra-Gel leader Zubeydir Aydar publicly interpreted this remark as "meaning that the US recognizes us."⁵⁷

Some Turkish intellectuals have begun to devote attention to the PKK's new strategy. Avni Ozgurel, a leading nationalist journalist, wrote, "If we continue our same old policies, the US and Barzani-Talabani will separate the southeast [from Turkey] in ten years' time. If we don't want this to take place, we should consider every possible scenario, including radical measures. The first radical step would be to negotiate a comprehensive agreement with Abdullah Ocalan. This agreement should guarantee the unitary nature of the country, [in return for] the cultural rights of the Kurdish people. Thereafter, we should allow all PKK members to return to Turkey [from their safe havens in northern Iraq]. This is a much better option than bargaining with Barzani and Talabani to do something against the PKK."⁵⁸ Enis Berberoglu of *Hurriyet* raised similar concerns, advocating some kind of a compromise between the PKK and Turkey.⁵⁹

The Impact of the Barzani/Talabani – Ocalan Rivalry

As noted above, Ocalan is a long-time rival of the two Iraqi Kurdish leaders, Barzani, president of the Iraqi Kurdish Region, and Talabani, president of Iraq, for the leadership of the Kurdish movement. Turkish journalist Cengiz Candar, a close friend of Talabani, claims that Talabani hates Ocalan.⁶⁰ Sim-

55. "DTP'den AB'ye Elestiri," ANF New Agency, 3 July 2006.

56. "ABD'den PKK'ya: Silah bırak," *Vatan*, 16 August 2006.

57. Ugur Ergan, "PKK: ABD bizi muhatap aldi," *Hurriyet*, 18 August 2006.

58. Avni Ozgurel, "Tuzagin Esiginde Turkiye (4)," *Radikal*, 16 August 2006.

59. Enis Berberoglu, "Her gorusme ihanet mi?" *Hurriyet*, 22 August 2006.

60. Nese Duzel, "Talabani Ocalan'dan Nefret Ediyor," *Radikal*, 6 August 2006.

ilarly, Ocalan has publicly accused Talabani and Barzani of being “agents of the imperialist powers.”⁶¹ In the 1990s Barzani’s Peshmerga fought against the PKK, side-by-side with Turkish forces, but were unable to uproot the PKK from northern Iraq at that time.

In the early 1990s, the PKK was the leading organization promoting Kurdish nationalism. Not only Turkish Kurds but also many Iraqi, Syrian, and Iranian Kurds fought under the PKK banner. At the time, militias loyal to Barzani and Talabani were in conflict, which enhanced the PKK’s image as the standard bearer for Kurdish nationalism around the Kurdish world.

Yet by the end of the decade, the PKK’s reputation had declined and it was Barzani and Talabani who had emerged as the “defenders” of Kurdish nationalism. Thanks to US involvement and support, the two Iraqi Kurdish leaders managed to sign a peace agreement with each other and to form a de facto unified Kurdistan. At the same time, the PKK suffered heavy defeats at the hands of the Turkish armed forces. Meanwhile, Barzani and Talabani’s alliance with the United States continued to prove of enormous benefit, and after the 2003 Iraq invasion, when Talabani became president of Iraq and Barzani president of the Kurdish Regional Government, they began to receive recognition from political leaders worldwide. Barzani, for example visited many European leaders and met President Bush at the White House.⁶²

These developments distressed many PKK leaders. Numerous prominent figures left the organization, including Ocalan’s brother, Osman, who sought refuge in Barzani’s territory. Sukru Gulmus, one of the PKK’s earliest adherents, condemned Ocalan for jeopardizing Kurdish gains in northern Iraq. He declared on his web page that the destiny of the Kurds lay in the Kurdish region of Iraq and that all Kurds must support Barzani and Talabani.⁶³

Ocalan and the rest of the PKK leadership interpreted these defections as might have been expected: they were all part of an American plot against the PKK, in support of US aims to eliminate the PKK and help Barzani promote a domesticated Kurdish nationalism that would serve US interests in

61. Nazli Ilıcak, “Terorün Panzehiri Demokrasidir,” *Dünden Bugüne Tercüman*, 2 September 2004.

62. “Barzani Beyaz Saray’da,” *Sabah*, 10 October 2005.

63. Sukru Gulmus, www.nasname.com, accessed on 1 August 2006.

the region. Ocalan believes the first stage of the US scheme was his 1999 capture by Turkish commandos in Nairobi with the support of the Central Intelligence Agency.⁶⁴

The PKK fears that Barzani's alliance with the United States has undercut the organization's leadership position in the Kurdish nationalist movement, and regards the attraction of the EU for many Turkish Kurds with great apprehension. The new Kurdish organizations and associations that have begun to flourish in Turkey, by allying themselves with the EU, are undermining the PKK's position. It is particularly galling to the PKK that the leaders of these new organizations initially enlisted in the movement as foot soldiers for Ocalan in the early 1990s. The PKK finds it hard to come to grips with this situation. Its rather contradictory response has been, on the one hand, to attempt to convince the new organizations' leaders to return to the fold, and on the other, to assassinate some and threaten others with the same fate.

At the same time, the PKK fears that, by opposing Turkish EU membership, it may lose its leadership position to a pro-EU Kurdish organization, which could claim its policies were more productive, particularly should Kurdish rights continue to expand during the accession process. A respected Kurdish intellectual, Enver Sezgin, a columnist in the Kurdish magazine *Ezmer*, points out that the PKK's emphasis on terrorist tactics diminishes its maneuvering room in the legal arena.⁶⁵ Another Kurdish intellectual, Umit Firat, analyzes the situation as follows:

The PKK opposes Turkey's EU membership because there is no place for the PKK in an EU member country. EU membership guarantees fundamental human rights, the rule of law, and freedom. The PKK claims that "there is no freedom for [Turkey's] Kurds." But if the EU secures those rights, the PKK position will be undercut. Once basic human rights and freedoms are guaranteed, alternative political organizations will emerge. In order to compete with them, the PKK has to adjust itself to this new reality, but that seems unlikely at best.⁶⁶

64. Ocalan, 127.

65. Nese Duzel, "Imrali'da PKK'yi yenidne kurdu," *Radikal*, 11 July 2005.

66. Nese Duzel, "PKK asil AK Partiye savas ilan etti," *Radikal*, 10 April 2006.

Conclusion: The Rank and File's Response to the Policies of the Elite

How have the Kurdish rank and file reacted to their elites' efforts to undermine the EU accession process? According to the theories of the elites' determining role in nationalist movements, public support for the EU among DTP supporters should be in significant decline.

Public opinion polls demonstrate that the Kurdish elite's effort to derail the EU process did indeed strongly influence Kurdish rank-and-file attitudes. Previously, the Kurdish minority community supported EU membership more strongly than the majority Turks, but in the first half of 2006, according to a Pollmark survey, that support declined below the Turkish level: 60 percent compared to 64 percent.⁶⁷

Moreover, this shift took place at a time when Turkish support for the EU was also in decline, for well-known reasons: differences with the EU over Cyprus, the Kurdish question, the Armenian question, and various other issues, which, taken together, have provoked a resurgence of nationalist sentiment throughout Turkey. In that context, the relative decline in Kurdish support becomes even more striking. This decline must be attributed to the influence of the Kurdish elites on the masses. For indeed, the reforms demanded by the EU have moved Turkey closer to a liberal democracy, and minorities are enjoying increased cultural and political rights. The Kurds, who had particularly suffered under previous regimes, have correspondingly become major beneficiaries of the accession process.

Some would argue that the PKK's terror campaign limited Turkey's democratization process and prevented a comprehensive liberalization of regime policies toward the Kurds. However, despite obvious setbacks, some Kurdish groups read recent history more positively. They point out that EU reforms have, for example, enabled the establishment of private instruction in the Kurdish language and of Kurdish TV and radio broadcasting.

This contradiction raises again the basic issue addressed in this essay: why has the PKK mounted a terrorist campaign to jeopardize Turkey's EU

67. Ihsan Dagi, Ibrahim Dalmis, and Ertain Aydin, "Turk Dis Politikasi Arastirmasi," Ankara, Pollmark, June 2006.

accession process, at the great risk of undermining the benefits the Kurds have gained so far? I have argued that this drastic policy change derived from the EU's decision to list the PKK as a terrorist organization, to the profound distress of its leadership. They had expected the EU to insist that Turkey negotiate with them as equals, and the EU did not in the least live up to their expectations.

By intensifying its campaign of terror, the PKK also assumed that it could inflict enough damage and embarrassment on Turkey to compel it to recognize the PKK as the legitimate representative of Kurdish interests. Moreover, the PKK's grassroots support had deteriorated gravely during the accession process, and the organization hoped that a resort to terror tactics would enable it to restore the vigor and cohesion of the organization. Opposition to Turkey's EU membership emerges, thus, as the inevitable policy option for the PKK, permitting it to survive without a wrenching adaptation to new international conditions. It has pursued this costly strategy even if its "strategic choice" creates a new tragedy for the Kurds of Turkey, whose rights it claims to be defending.

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