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Vera Eccarius-Kelly*

MODERN TURKEY: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES. THE KURDISH DIASPORA AND EUROPE'S GATEKEEPING AFTER KOBANE

ABSTRACT

While the armed forces of Kurdish guerilla and militia fought first against ISIS forces on the Şengal Mountain in Iraq and then against Assad's army for the control of Kobane, a part of the territory of Rojava in Northern Syria that became a symbol of Kurdish autonomy, the media presented this struggle as a fight for survival of all Kurds. At that time, the large Kurdish diaspora showed heretofore unprecedented levels of unity, launching a very modern, multimodal and multilevel campaign that focused on raising civic awareness through large-scale publicity events, collection of funds to aid victims of violence, and extensive lobbying. One of their aims was the removal of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) from the list of terrorist groups. The young generation of the Kurdish diaspora, Europe-born and well educated, consciously used opportunities provided by social media and their network of relations to build up the image of Kurdish military groups as trustworthy partners in the fight against ISIS, simultaneously trying to undermine and shame the Turkish government, already criticized for their management of the Syrian conflict.

Key words

Kurdish diaspora, Rojava, gatekeeping, PKK de-listing

*   School of Liberal Arts, Siena College in Loudonville, United States,
    e-mail: veccarius-kelly@siena.edu

Introduction

In early August 2014, days before Western media grappled with the humanitarian disaster around Şengal/Sinjar Mountain in Northern Iraq, Kurdish satellite channels disseminated disturbing images to Kurds in Europe. The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) had begun to carry out murderous attacks on Yezidi Kurds and other religious minorities. Between 40,000 and 50,000 Yezidis managed to escape to a mountain plateau, but ISIS fighters slaughtered hundreds of men, women and children. An unknown number of women and girls were abducted and brutalized by ISIS. The Şengal Mountain survivors relied on international airdrops for assistance, while various Kurdish militias defended them from further assaults. Among the regional Kurdish guerrilla units that resisted ISIS were the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), the Turkish and Iraqi-based Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), and Iraqi-Kurdish Peshmerga forces. Jointly, they struggled to open a corridor that eventually allowed an estimated 30,000 Yezidis to escape to nearby Syria and then escape into Iraqi Kurdistan.

Meanwhile, Kurdish diaspora communities in Europe focused on collecting aid for the victims of violence but also increasingly relied on media projects to increase public awareness about the plight of Kurdish populations in the homeland regions. About 5 weeks after the prolonged attacks on Yezidi areas, ISIS fighters forced their way into the town of Kobane, located near Syria's northern border with Turkey. Nearly 90 percent of Kobane's approximate 45,000 inhabitants fled soon after ISIS invaded outlying neighborhoods of the town. The remaining civilians stayed to protect properties and to defend their autonomous Kurdish enclave. The exact ethnic composition of Kobane is not known, but pre-war records of Syria's Aleppo Governorate suggest that a large majority of the region's population was ethnically Kurdish, followed by approximately 10 percent Arab and Turkmen communities, and several smaller Christian groups (O'Shea, 2004; Tejel, 2008, p. 10; Vanly, 2005, p. 114).

Two years earlier, during Syria's intensifying civil war, Syrian Kurdish YPG units had taken control of the town of Kobane as opportunities emerged to establish a Kurdish autonomous enclave. In January 2014, Kurdish leaders proclaimed the existence of the de-facto autonomous zone–one of three self-governing cantons in Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan). The town of Kobane (Arabic: Ayn Al-Arab)

was to serve as the Kurdish canton's administrative center. When ISIS initiated its assault on Kobane's inhabitants in September 2014, Europe's Kurdish communities organized an international media and solidarity campaign that would prove to be decisive in mobilizing against ISIS.

Kurds showed unprecedented levels of unity in continental Europe and in the UK (noteworthy efforts to organize were also made in the US, Canada and Australia). Kurdish leaders called for solidarity marches and gatherings that focused on raising civic awareness ('Appell an den Westen', 2014). Kurds in Germany, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, the UK and many other countries sponsored large-scale publicity events, pushed for the collection of funds to aid victims of violence, and initiated extensive lobbying efforts. The rescue of Kobane, or what in the end turned out to be an act of wrenching neighborhoods of rubble from the control of ISIS, became a highly symbolic moment for Kurds worldwide. Some 200,000 displaced Kurds (and other communities) had fled in significant numbers to Turkey, while ISIS maintained a brutal chokehold on Kobane until the end of January 2015. (Brumfield, Levs & Tuysuz, 2014) After months of fighting against motivated Kurdish guerrillas and militias, along with the constant aerial bombardment from a US-led campaign, ISIS acknowledged its withdrawal from the area. Despite the prolonged trauma and devastation, Kurds celebrated a rare and deeply symbolic victory.

In the struggle for Kurdish cultural identity, human rights and self-determination, few comparable moments exist that produced such levels of pan-Kurdish unity as the desire to liberate Kobane from the control of ISIS. Once Kurdish media framed the battle for Kobane as the ultimate stance for Kurdish physical and cultural survival, Kurds with very diverse political affiliations and ideological commitments as well as geographic and socio-cultural backgrounds united behind the notion of defending the right of Kobane to exist as an autonomous area. Yet despite the deeply emotional sense of unity among Kurds, the heterogeneity of their past experiences and the diversity of their organizational structures in the diaspora produced fissures along regional, religious and ideological lines. While Kurdish factions engaged in unprecedented efforts to collaborate in fall 2014 and winter 2015, it would have been overly optimistic to propose that a sense of pan-Kurdish unity could outlast the threat of ISIS. Disagreements stood on the horizon over which groups could lay claim to legitimately representing Kurdish interests and which one offered authentic political leadership to achieve Kurdish self-determination.

1. Europe's Kurds

Kurdish community members in Europe have articulated quite diverse and occasionally counter-intuitive political perspectives (Demir, 2012). Despite some need for generalizations to adequately discuss the interests of the broader diaspora, Kurds tend to represent a diverse and disunited ethnic collective that consists of many sub-groupings, which frequently compete with each other for influence and recognition. Since Kurds live in many European countries, it is also extremely difficult to capture the multitude of socio-political nuances that have emerged in specific countries. Today the largest and most influential Kurdish diaspora communities with familial connections to Turkey live in Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Austria. More than 1.5 million Kurds from Turkey reside within the European Union and about 800,000 of them are in Germany. No accurate statistical data exists about the exact number of Kurds in Europe as most European states recognize nationality based on passports rather than ethnic background after migrants and refugees arrive. Only Finland and Sweden have collected information based on an immigrant's preferred or native language, which offers a closer estimation of the number of self-identified Kurds in those countries (Wahlbeck, 2013 and 1999).

The presence of Kurds in Europe will be even harder to calculate in the future as thousands continue to arrive without papers and then remain in the shadows as undocumented laborers in Europe. In particular, Kurdish arrivals from Iraq and Syria have increased over the last several years, which will further contribute to making Kurdish communities invisible in population statistics (Sirkeci 2006). Despite variances as to when and why Kurds arrived in different countries in Europe, it is important to recognize that personal backgrounds and familial as well as regional experiences shaped integration patterns. Kurds in Germany tend to have connections in Turkey and frequently hail from working class milieus in contrast to experiences of Kurds in Sweden, who often arrived with higher levels of education and primarily focused on cultural and linguistic projects (Baser, 2012). After the 1980 military coup in Turkey, the PKK intensified its efforts to politically mobilize Germany's Kurdish diaspora, but also engaged with Kurdish communities in the Netherlands, Austria and elsewhere.

Kurds in the diaspora often lay claim to hybrid cultural identities and emphasize their interconnectedness with allied cultural groups as well as lobby local, state, and supranational governments to gain socio-political recognition (Ayata, 2008; Eccarius-Kelly, 2011). European-centered Kurdish political actions, including militant manifestations, deserve careful analysis to challenge

misleading assumptions about Kurdish communities and their varied interests in shaping Turkish politics. At the time of socio-political upheaval within Kurdish communities in Turkey and the horrific warfare in Syria that engulfed Kurdish villages, it is particularly illuminating to examine the changing nature of the Kurdish diaspora's strategies and its alliances with amalgamated groups of activists and political parties at the international level.

In early February 2015, French President Francois Hollande invited three Syrian Kurdish leaders to Elysee Palace to engage in conversations about creating a sustainable future for Rojava. Over Ankara's objections and despite President Erdoğan's insistence that the Syrian Kurdish PYD (Democratic Union Party) and its YPG forces represent terrorist organizations because of their collaboration with the PKK, the French government welcomed Asya Abdullah, co-chair of the PYD, Khaled Issa, the PYD's representative in France, and Nesrin Abdullah, the commander of the Kurdish Women's Protection Forces (YPJ), to meet with Hollande (Taştekin, 2015). This opportunity to interact with a high profile European leader bestowed a layer of legitimacy upon Syrian Kurds. In addition, joint photos taken at Elysee Palace represented an unprecedented media opportunity for the PYD and the YPG. The photos also communicated to the wider European Kurdish diaspora that the French government abhorred the 2013 executions of three Kurdish women activists in Paris, including a high-ranking PKK member, Sakine Cansız.

In essence, the European Kurdish diaspora presents itself as an interlocutor for broadly conceived Kurdish interests and strongly supports efforts that enhance the level of legitimacy for Kurds at the international political level. Syrian Kurdish politicians and fighters against ISIS had the best chances to make inroads in Europe in 2015. However, it is worth noting that all Kurdish political players downplay the likelihood of future competition between Iraqi-Kurdish Peshmerga forces and PKK and YPG fighters in a post-ISIS environment.

2. Patterns of Mobilization

European Kurdish communities have engaged in multilayered efforts to position themselves as allies to Kurds in the embattled homeland regions. In the aftermath of the ghastly attacks by ISIS, new patterns of Kurdish diasporic engagement have emerged. Kurdish activists expressed a growing cognizance that Kurdish communities in Turkey, Northern Iraq and Syria would benefit from a transformation of the diaspora's mobilization patterns. During the battle for

Kobane, Kurdish activism focused on engaging more broadly with the European public. The goal was to intensify demands for the recognition of Kurdish identity, cultural heritage and the right to self-determination. Another key demand, promulgated primarily by groups of ethno-nationalist, leftist Kurdish protesters, was to de-classify the PKK as a terrorist group in Europe. They argued that experienced PKK guerrilla fighters could move effectively to oppose the advancement of ISIS once the PKK was removed from the list of terrorist organizations (Youth for Kobane, 2014).

European countries that once recruited guest workers from Turkey in the 1960s and 1970s and former migrants who later claimed Kurdish identity experienced significant transformations over the past decades. Østergaard-Nielsen identified that fluctuations in the accessibility of opportunity structures for diaspora communities shaped the sense of identity among migrants. She distinguished so-called midwife periods that provided extensive discursive opportunities for diaspora communities from gatekeeper periods that led to ethnic organizations being banned after European politicians linked them to transnational gangs and homeland-oriented networks (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2006).

In Europe, long established socio-political and cultural demands of Kurds had been expressed through conventional but also militant approaches. In fall 2014 during the height of ISIS' siege of Kobane, Kurdish activism in Europe reached far beyond the customary and recognizable street-level solidarity marches and political protests. Increasing numbers of diaspora Kurds made use of their advanced degrees to formulate online petitions that asked for funds, organized caravans of supplies to support vulnerable refugees, and wrote compelling op-eds. ('Kurds across Europe', 2014) Many also reached out to international academic and media circles. The rise of a Euro-Kurdish intelligentsia succeeded in elevating Kurdish claims for recognition and historical justice, and their discussions received public attention. Kurdish researchers integrated themselves into intellectual circles and scholarly networks and produced studies that directly challenged neocolonial perspectives on Kurds. Euro-Kurdish academics and intellectuals focused on bestowing legitimacy on the claims of Kurdish activists and aggregated moral resources through the production of documentaries and artistic or musical projects.

As European governments formed more critical views of Turkey's handling of ISIS during summer and fall 2014, European Kurdish communities also intensified their public relations campaigns to shame the Turkish government. Turkey was characterized as problematic and unreliable in international coalitions, especially since President Erdoğan's emphasis had focused primarily on

removing Syrian dictator Assad. A trove of secret documents was released on the Internet in an attempt to indict Turkey's intelligence services (MIT) as having supplied jihadists in Syria with weapons over the past years. Kurdish activists and affiliated lobby groups believed that such disclosures about Turkey provided further opportunities for Kurds to position themselves as trustworthy partners to the Western alliance against ISIS.

Meanwhile, sympathizers of the PKK focused primarily on enhancing the organization's reputation as a reliable force against ISIS. The PKK gained significant regional standing following the dramatic rescue efforts of Yazidis during the height of ISIS' attacks on minority communities near Şengal/Sinjar. Parallel to the growing respect for the PKK among Kurds, European public opinion also shifted in favor of assisting Syrian-Kurdish YPG fighters in Kobane. European Kurdish activists accused the Turkish government of preventing humanitarian aid from reaching Kobane and aggressively pursued the demand that Turkey allow the establishment of a corridor for weapons and Kurdish fighters to reach the embattled city (Youth for Kobane, 2014). The rise of large scale protests and solidarity marches throughout nearly all major cities in Europe produced a clear understanding that the conflict between the PKK and the Turkish military needed to be mitigated to stabilize the Kurdish border regions of Turkey, and to prevent further influx of refugees.

A range of European countries including France, the UK, Germany, Italy, Denmark and numerous Eastern European governments initiated deliveries of small arms and protective gear. Later some countries added heavier weaponry, logistical support and training to assist Iraqi-Kurdish Peshmerga units. To the disillusionment of many Kurds, the military assistance excluded support for the PKK and was channeled through Baghdad, which created complications and obstacles for a unified Kurdish resistance. From the perspective of a significant number of the Kurdish diaspora, Europe wanted Kurdish allies in Northern Iraq to defend the region against jihadi incursions but shied away from directly providing the necessary tools to do so. Additionally, the Kurdish diaspora became disillusioned as Europe only cautiously challenged Turkey's mistreatment of its own southeastern Kurdish populations. To counteract Europe's reluctance to fully engage with broader Kurdish agendas, a highly motivated and ideological segment of the European Kurdish diaspora focused on presenting the PKK and its Syrian-Kurdish affiliate, the YPG, as the most effective and reliable fighting forces against ISIS. Arguing that Iraqi-Kurdish Peshmerga forces had failed to keep ISIS at bay and that Europe needed motivated PKK and YPG militias, Kurds sympathetic to the PKK recruited young diaspora Kurds with medical training

and social media expertise to join them. German media, for example, suggested that about 50 Kurds had left for Iraqi-Kurdistan ('Appell an den Westen', 2014). Some of the recruits attracted additional media attention because they belonged to a Kurdish biker gang known as the Cologne-based Median Empire MC (Gold, 2014).

Sympathizers of the PKK within the Kurdish diaspora focused on converting the PKK's popularity into tangible progress, but essentially failed to do so in the short run. They pushed extensively to lift the gatekeeping restrictions on the PKK and relied on political allies for press coverage. Some politicians on the left of the political spectrum openly supported ending the ban on the PKK while centrists and conservatives remained squeamish, although a few considered the idea initially (Üstündağ, 2014). A group of 10 German MPs of the left-wing party Die Linke displayed a PKK flag in the Bundestag in November 2014, expressing solidarity with Kurds and pushing for a debate on ending the organization's ban (Rudaw, 2014).

3. Kurdish Transformations

It is commonly acknowledged that an estimated 35,000 people perished in the war between the Turkish state and the PKK. As a revolutionary organization, the PKK became active in Turkey in the late 1970s and engaged in full-blown insurgent activities by 1984. Turkey's military pursued counter-insurgency strategies which resulted in blatant and widespread human rights offenses. The country's armed forces either directly employed or indirectly collaborated with secretive paramilitary units to target suspected guerrillas, their urban networks, and rural systems of support. Some 3,000 villages were destroyed and up to 3 million people internally displaced (Gunter 2007). In addition, the state established a so-called village guard system, which placed between 60,000 and 80,000 armed rural men on the state's payroll to protect and "cleanse" villages of infiltrating PKK units (KHRP, 2011).

However, the PKK demonstrated ideological flexibility and adapted to its changing environment. As an insurgent group it underwent multiple transformations, and with each new phase the PKK introduced revised tactics to reflect the organization's ability to reinvent itself. For years the PKK followed traditional insurgency strategies to maintain control over its ideological vision, and the leadership enforced a rigid system of internal hierarchy and control. Its command structure, led by Abdullah Öcalan, endorsed the use of extreme violence

(Marcus 2007, Romano 2006). To appeal more effectively to the rural Kurdish population, the PKK reshaped its revolutionary ideology in the mid-1980s by integrating a fiercer ethno-national appeal. This significantly improved the PKK's ability to recruit young people in rural communities of Turkey and expanded its logistical support networks into neighboring Iraq and Syria. Recruiters reached out to marginalized population groups and relied on profoundly impoverished and youthful members to fill the ranks of the PKK (van Bruinessen, 1988).

During the early 1990s the PKK initiated a parallel European strategy by engaging in outreach and awareness raising campaigns among labor migrants in Europe. Kurdish political refugees, asylum seekers and PKK operatives who settled in Europe further enhanced this dynamic (Eccarius-Kelly, 2011). Once ensconced in EU member states, particularly in Germany, the Netherlands, France, Belgium and Austria, PKK operatives and sympathizers emphasized collective protest actions, fundraising schemes and bombings of commercial Turkish interests abroad.

From 1994 until the capture of the organization's leader Öcalan in 1999, the PKK pursued a more conciliatory political phase in Europe using extensive pressure campaigns spearheaded by radical elements within the Kurdish diaspora. Political activism became an effective long-term strategy for launching a transnational Kurdish agenda. Instead of openly seeking an independent homeland, Kurdish activists pushed for the recognition of minority status for Kurds in Turkey. European governments, while considering Turkey for membership in the European Union, demonstrated a degree of support for Kurdish demands by advancing the notion that the Kurdish minority be recognized as a separate ethnic group in Turkey. EU parliamentary committees began to investigate human rights violations in the Southeastern provinces of Turkey and sent fact-finding missions to speak with representatives of Kurdish civil society (Casier, 2011). European PKK branches shifted toward urging EU governments to demand the recognition of minority Kurds as part of the conditions for Turkey's inclusion in the EU. This decision to network with NGOs and to engage with the political process initiated a cautious thaw between the PKK and an array of other Kurdish diaspora groups.

Between 2009 and 2010, after then Prime Minister Erdoğan's AKP (Justice and Development Party) lost electoral ground in the southeastern and predominantly Kurdish provinces, Turkey's government feared a legitimacy crisis because of the emerging assertiveness among Kurdish civil society groups. Hoping to reclaim its ability to represent the interests of Kurdish voters, the AKP announced a Kurdish Opening, which was supposed to contain the Kurdish

movement (Casier, Jongerdon & Walker, 2013). Allegations of inauthentic and manipulative outreach to the Kurdish community aside, Erdoğan's AKP government and Öcalan forged ahead and continued to consult through intermediaries.

Meanwhile in Europe nationalist Kurdish activists of the second and third generation carefully monitored the murky negotiation process between the Turkish government and the PKK. Kurdish associations benefited from the growing number of highly educated European-born Kurds who had begun to thrive in numerous professional careers. Activists who had gained advanced levels of education and improved skills relied on innovative discursive spaces to reach audiences through cultural events, art and photo exhibits, satellite programming and later through social media campaigns as well (Hassanpour, 1998; Sheyholislami, 2011). Kurds had encountered and endured the consequences of assimilationist social and educational environments in Europe. Shaped by their interactions with state representatives such as teachers and social workers and confronted by complex and regulatory bureaucracies, activists learned to pursue discursive opportunities during midwife periods and circumvented state controls in times of gatekeeping (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). As a result, Kurdish activists frequently employed combinations of unconventional and confrontational strategies which were followed by periods of softer and more predictable methods. Exposure to complex bureaucratic architectures shaped mobilization patterns and practices over time. Experiences with incongruity among EU member states forced Kurdish communities to adapt, adjust, and transform themselves. If activists once seemed comfortable with provocative and combative tactics in the streets, they also began to embrace the use of collaborative projects that focused on lobbying special interest groups (Eccarius-Kelly, 2002).

The question pondered within numerous Kurdish communities has been how specific demands can be articulated in an assertive manner without jeopardizing and compromising emerging political opportunities. Some Kurds have feared that confrontational tactics or the recognition of the PKK as a legitimate organization could result in a renewed categorization of all Kurds as a marginal group. Attempts to increase the visibility of the PKK in such countries as Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium frequently reinforced the perception that the PKK manages a large share of Kurdish political activities in Europe. A significant factor that has motivated Kurdish activists is the drive to gain recognition as a people with a legitimate right to self-determination, which increases pressure on the PKK to transform itself further.

4. Turkish Authoritarianism

In 2012, a cease-fire negotiation resulted in a partial withdrawal of PKK guerrillas from Turkish territory to Iraqi-Kurdistan, but by 2013 the PKK expressed growing frustration with the glacial pace of the negotiation process. Turkey's AKP leadership, however, demonstrated little urgency in response. From the perspective of the European Union (EU), Turkey's commitment to democracy continued to falter. The AKP government's reaction to the 2013 Gezi Park protests increased misgivings about what had been praised as a Turkish model that successfully blended moderate Islam with democracy.

When allegations emerged that pointed to wide-ranging graft and corruption patterns within the highest circles of the AKP government, Turkey's reputation as a champion of moderation was tarnished further. The AKP initiated the introduction of additional anti-democratic legislation by repressing critical media outlets, manipulating the rule of law, silencing civil society organizations, reducing civil liberties and arresting large numbers of journalists. President Erdoğan continued to rely on standard authoritarian techniques to dismiss his critics and political opponents in 2014 and 2015. His government created laws to regulate and control the content of the Internet and claimed that civil society groups with foreign ties were fomenting unrest to undermine the government's accomplishments. These dynamics have damaged Turkish civil society groups and weakened long-standing ties with Western allies.

In the summer of 2014, when the EU failed to articulate a unified policy in response to ISIS' threat to Kurdish communities in Iraq and Syria, diverse Kurdish activists in the diaspora focused on mobilization efforts to end what they considered the chronic disregard of Kurdish peoples' interests and rights. Some Kurdish activists proposed that the recognition of Kurds as an ethnic community in Turkey and in Europe overlapped with European interests to stabilize the region and reduce the flow of refugees. Part of this yet to be fully recognized narrative is the Kurdish diaspora's growing ability to document a gap between Turkey's discourses intended to soothe Europe's concerns and the behavior of the Turkish state toward Kurdish communities. Focusing on such discrepancies, Kurdish activists in Europe expanded their international political contacts and broadened their base of sympathizers. Kurds increasingly rely on cultural and moral resources and improve their collaborative relationships with members of scholarly networks, academic communities and former rival groups. Diaspora Kurdish discourses have become increasingly poignant in their appeals for communal justice and broadly envisioned human rights.

The larger Kurdish diaspora in Europe faces complicated choices today as a peace agreement between the PKK and the Turkish government can only be achieved if Turkey is willing to make some concessions. For supporters of the PKK this means the release of Öcalan, their symbolic leader from prison, but it also includes the right of return for former guerrilla members, and their ability to participate in the political sphere. For less ideologically motivated Kurds in Europe it is essential that Turkey respect human rights, recognize Kurdish claims to self-determination and accept its responsibility in past wrongdoings. Kurdish activists in Europe disagree on the path that will lead to their recognition as an ethnic community. Those who are sympathetic to the PKK believe that lifting the ban on the PKK in Europe will create tremendous pressure on Turkey to pursue an arrangement with Kurdish communities in 2015. With the PKK's legitimacy at an unprecedented level following its successes in battle against ISIS, increasing numbers of younger Kurds are reflecting on how to push European political parties to recognize this reality by reducing if not ending its gatekeeping restrictions on the organization.

Among the most disliked gatekeeping restrictions for PKK supporters are legal boundaries that curtail the ability to organize political meetings and fundraising campaigns. European gatekeeping patterns have focused on disrupting a variety of Kurdish attempts to raise awareness, including public demonstrations that directly challenge Salafist messages. Security agencies hope to avoid violent clashes in the streets of Europe and try to contain the most mobilized segments of the Kurdish diaspora. PKK sympathizers, however, continue to argue that long-standing taboos already were broken when Kurdish forces received weapons from European governments. Suggesting that PKK and YPG forces are strong regional partners to weaken ISIS, PKK sympathizers propose that European and Kurdish socio-political, cultural and economic interests are increasingly converging.

5. De-Listing the PKK

A close examination of changes within the Kurdish diaspora shows that it has matured into a politically astute and very diverse community in Europe. The increasing influence of European-born Kurds and immigrant Kurds with EU residency papers shifted the diaspora's emphasis toward establishing political networks within the EU system. European Kurds participate in public debates as legitimate insiders rather than from a marginal position that warrants a mere

minimum of agency. As legitimized voters and participants in political councils and parties, Kurds no longer perceive themselves as living in permanent exile.

Diaspora activists grapple with competing ideas in regard to leveraging the newly gained respect for the PKK and the YPG in its struggle against ISIS into reducing the gatekeeping efforts in Europe. So far, the push to remove the PKK from the European list of terrorist organizations continues to be perceived by PKK sympathizers as the most effective way to pressure Turkey and advance Kurdish interests. Increasingly, however, members of the Kurdish diaspora worry that Kurds face insurmountable obstacles if Europe fails to challenge the AKP's lackluster approach to resolving the so-called Kurdish question. That in turn will make it harder to convince youthful Kurds in Europe to remain focused on outreach and educational efforts instead of taking their frustrations into the streets.

More than a dozen European governments have agreed to deliver weapons to Kurdish Peshmerga forces, yet all heavy arms continue to be transferred through the central Iraqi government in Baghdad. Among the most valuable weapons for Kurds are anti-tank missile systems, but their delivery has caused tremendous resentment and irritation in the ranks of the Turkish military. Ankara considers it unrealistic to assume that such weapons will not change hands and fears that anti-tank missiles will be used by YPG or PKK fighters against Turkish targets in the future if a peace deal fails to materialize. In this context, it was particularly galling for the Turkish government that Syrian Kurdish YPG leaders received a warm welcome by President Hollande.

Europe has mostly disappointed pro-PKK Kurds since no country has lifted the ban on the organization. However, after the ISIS inspired attacks on the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* and the supermarket in Paris in January 2015, Syrian Kurdish militias appear to be considered allies against ISIS. Representatives of the PYD expect to be granted visas for meetings in Washington, DC. Kurds in Europe carefully observe how representatives of Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) are treated by European government officials. The PYD and its military wing seem to have been re-classified as legitimate Kurdish partners in some European capitals. The question that remains is whether this change could translate into reduced gatekeeping practices for other Kurdish organizations. The Turkish government certainly perceives President Hollande's meeting with Kurds as a warning that Europe may be losing its patience with the many unresolved grievances in Kurdish communities.

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