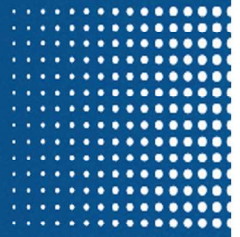




SYMPOSIUM

RETHINKING THE PROCESS FOR PEACE AND A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY IN ITS SECOND YEAR

DOCUMENTATION



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MAF-DAD

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Closing remarks

Dear participants, distinguished speakers, and friends,

On behalf of the Association for Democracy and International Law (MAF-DAD) and the Network of Kurdish Academics (Kurd-Akad), I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all to the symposium entitled 'Rethinking the Process for Peace and a Democratic Society in its Second Year'.

We have gathered here today not merely for a symposium, but to stand together at a difficult, painful and yet hopeful turning point in history. The times we are currently living through are no ordinary times. That is why I would like to begin my remarks with this striking observation by Abdullah Öcalan:

"We are living through days on which history is being written; these are very important days. On such days, people must mobilise all their abilities. The reckoning of centuries can suddenly manifest itself in a matter of weeks, in a matter of months ..."

This is indeed the case. There are times when the suffering, hopes and struggles accumulated over years, even centuries, suddenly come to a head. Time is running out, history is accelerating, and humanity finds itself at a moment of decision. We are witnesses to precisely such a time.

The topics we will be addressing here today – the balance between conflict and negotiation in Rojava, the analysis of the first year, the state of 'neither war nor peace', the search for peace amidst the tensions of violence and nationalism, the possibilities of coexistence and coming to terms with the past – are in fact different facets of a single, overarching question: Is peace possible? And if so, at what cost, with what courage, and through what process of coming to terms with the past?

The path to peace has never been an easy one. This path is often rocky, thorny; paved with memory, pain and truth. Peace is not merely the silence of weapons. Peace is also the voice of memory. It is the oppressed finding their voice. It is the overlooked becoming visible.

For without memory, there is no justice. Without justice, peace remains nothing more than a fragile silence.

As is the case in many parts of the world today, memory remains a subject of contention in this region too. Any approach that shies away from confronting the past leaves the future in darkness

as well. We know, however, that true peace can only take root on ground where the truth is courageously spoken, pain is acknowledged and justice is done.

At this point, it is worth recalling the following words of Nelson Mandela: "Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it." Peace, too, requires precisely this courage. The courage to choose to live together despite our fears, prejudices and historical burdens.

Yet serious obstacles stand in the way of this courage. Racism, nationalism and polarisation are not merely political problems, but also social crises. These crises alienate people from one another, undermine the idea of coexistence and frame differences as a threat.

Yet peace is precisely the endeavour to create a world in which differences can coexist.

Today, at our symposium, we will attempt to tread this difficult path together. Drawing on experiences in Rojava, we will explore the complex relationship between conflict and negotiation. We will discuss the impact on societies of the 'neither war nor peace' state in which political processes are stuck. We will examine how violence, nationalism and international dynamics shape the search for peace. And above all, we will remind ourselves once again that building peace is not solely the responsibility of states or political actors, but the responsibility of all sections of society.

For peace is not a process one merely observes; it is a process in which one participates.

That is why our very presence here is significant in itself. We are not merely listeners; we are also active participants in this process. By reflecting, discussing, challenging and reshaping, we are weaving this path together.

Perhaps the hardest thing is to keep hope alive. For hope is put to the test above all in dark times. Yet let us not forget that history is the story of people who, even in the most difficult moments, can change course.

The fact that different experiences, perspectives and memories are coming together here in this hall today does indeed point to a possibility for the future. This possibility is the possibility of thinking together and shaping the future together.

And perhaps that is precisely why these difficult times we find ourselves in are, at the same time, an opportunity. A threshold at which the problems accumulated over centuries can once again be overcome through collective will.

To conclude my remarks, I would like to emphasise the following: peace does not come about by itself. Peace is created. It requires commitment, patience and a willingness to come to terms with the past. Above all, however, it requires the courage of human beings to overcome their own limitations.

It is my hope that the discussions we are beginning here today will not remain confined to an academic setting, but will touch upon life, society and the future.

In the hope that we can all walk this difficult but honourable path together.

Thank you all for taking part.



Rojava: Between Conflict and Negotiation

Foza Yusuf, Member of the PYD Executive Council, Syria

The Middle East is currently undergoing a profound and complex period of conflict. As in the twentieth century, the global hegemonic powers continue to approach regional crises primarily through war, intervention and destruction. Historically and geographically, Kurdistan lies at the centre of these conflict dynamics; consequently, the Kurdish people remain among the communities most deeply affected by them. Syria, too, has become directly shaped by this wider environment of instability.

In recent years, the region has experienced major upheavals, particularly in relation to preparations for a possible war involving Iran. Within this context, we believe that the attacks targeting the self-governing structures in North and East Syria are directly connected to broader regional developments, especially those linked to Iran.

For a long time, we sought to establish a peaceful framework of dialogue and cooperation with the transitional government in Damascus. Numerous initiatives were undertaken toward this end. However, on 6 January, a decisive rupture occurred. In our assessment, a comprehensive plan targeting the self-administration in North and East Syria was developed with the consent of various international actors. The principal objective of this plan was to preserve the influence of hegemonic powers in the region while dismantling the self-administration model. In this sense, there was a clear attempt to extend what has been termed the "Gaza model" to the region.

Yet these attacks encountered strong resistance from our people, and the intended objectives could not be realised. This period became an extremely critical and decisive phase for the Kurdish people. The aims of the plan can be summarised as follows:

1. the dismantling of self-government;
2. the destruction of the women's movement;
3. mass violence and genocidal policies directed against the Kurdish people; and
4. the deepening of social fragmentation through the incitement of conflict between Kurds and Arabs.

Against this backdrop, various diplomatic and military initiatives were undertaken in an effort to prevent the escalation of violence. Proposals such as ceasefires and mutual withdrawals were brought onto the negotiating agenda. The self-administration took early steps to reduce tensions and avoid direct confrontation, and in some instances even considered unilateral withdrawal proposals.

However, the realities on the ground and the strategic priorities of the parties prevented these initiatives from producing a lasting outcome. Declared ceasefires were quickly violated, leading to both civilian and military casualties, while cases of mutual detention and capture increased simultaneously. This demonstrated that the conflict was not merely military in nature, but also rooted in a profound crisis of trust between the parties. These violations and the continuing atmosphere of conflict constituted some of the central dynamics that ultimately shaped the conditions leading to the agreement of 29 January.

The widespread resistance of our people, together with the reaction of the international democratic public and the growing political and social support for Rojava, generated a certain degree of pressure on the transitional government in Damascus and facilitated a return to negotiations.

The agreement of 29 January should therefore be understood not as a comprehensive settlement, but rather as a pragmatic attempt to prevent a further escalation of the conflict. Although the agreement does not provide a complete or ideal solution satisfying all sides, it nevertheless represents an important step toward reopening channels of dialogue under difficult circumstances.

At the same time, the implementation of the agreement faces serious structural and political obstacles. These include the military balance on the ground, centralist approaches to governance, legal ambiguities and a deep lack of trust between the parties. For this reason, it remains uncertain to what extent the agreement can be implemented in practice or whether it can evolve into a sustainable peace process.

One of the most important obstacles concerns differing and often contradictory interpretations of the concept of "integration". The parties understand this concept through fundamentally different political and ideological frameworks.

The transitional government in Damascus appears largely to interpret integration as the consolidation of all administrative and security structures under a single central authority. In practice, this approach risks gradually undermining and ultimately dismantling local self-governing mechanisms.

By contrast, the self-governance model in North and East Syria views integration as a process based on democratisation, recognition of local political will and the equal representation of diverse social groups. From this perspective, integration is not understood as a one-sided process of adaptation to central authority, but rather as a reciprocal transformation grounded in negotiation, mutual recognition and shared governance.

However, developments on the ground indicate that the government in Damascus continues to pursue a highly centralised and control-oriented approach, particularly in relation to administrative appointments and security structures. This has produced a serious crisis of trust between the parties.

For integration to lead to a lasting and sustainable settlement, a democratic, inclusive and binding constitutional framework is essential. Yet the absence of such a constitutional framework in Syria remains one of the principal factors deepening political and legal uncertainty.

Existing constitutional arrangements — as well as proposed alternatives — remain inadequate, particularly with regard to the recognition of ethnic and religious diversity, women's political participation and the principles of pluralistic governance. As a result, many communities, especially the Kurds, do not feel constitutionally protected.

For this reason, there have been repeated calls for the establishment of a constitutional committee capable of drafting a new constitution with the participation of all social and political actors. However, the formation of such a committee has repeatedly been postponed for political and diplomatic reasons. This delay not only prolongs the legal vacuum, but also undermines confidence in the negotiation process itself.

In our view, the absence of a constitutional framework remains one of the most serious structural obstacles preventing integration discussions from becoming a concrete and implementable political model.

Other major areas of concern include the continuing de facto siege of Kobanê, the insufficient consideration of local political will in administrative processes, and structural deficiencies regarding women's political participation.

Although the agreement of 29 January included provisions concerning the transfer of certain powers to local administrations and acknowledged the demographic and political realities of Kurdish-populated regions, in practice administrative appointments continue to be made largely by the central government. Consequently, local communities remain only marginally represented within decision-making mechanisms. This has generated growing debates concerning the legitimacy of governance structures.

Similarly, the issue of women's political representation highlights the gap between formal commitments and actual implementation. Although the transitional government in Damascus officially adopted a 20 percent quota for women, the fact that women hold only one out of twenty-three ministerial positions demonstrates the limited practical application of this principle.

By contrast, women's representation within the co-presidency system practised in North and East Syria exceeds 50 percent. In response, women's movements continue to voice their criticisms and demands through conferences, public statements and political initiatives.

At the same time, the future status of the YPJ (Women's Defence Units) remains unresolved. Although discussions have taken place between the YPJ command and the Ministry of Defence in Damascus, no concrete or binding framework has yet been established regarding the future of the organisation.

Legal uncertainty constitutes another major structural problem. The absence of a democratic constitution applicable to the whole of Syria has created a profound normative vacuum within governance structures, leading to confusion in both administrative procedures and political activity.

The situation is further complicated by the contradiction between the de facto collapse of the previous constitutional order and the continued application of certain legal frameworks derived from it. In this context, the continued enforcement of Law No. 107 on local administration remains particularly contentious.

While the self-administration rejects the legitimacy of this law, the government in Damascus continues to treat it as a valid legal framework. This disagreement significantly restricts the possibility of resolving legal disputes, since there is no consensus regarding which constitutional or legal framework should govern political life.

As a result, political parties, women's organisations and civil society groups all operate within a climate of profound uncertainty. In the absence of an institutionalised rule of law, it becomes extremely difficult to establish a predictable and sustainable model of governance at either the local or national level.

At the societal level, the spread of hate speech and acts of violence is also deepening mistrust within Syria's multi-ethnic and multi-religious social fabric. Kurds, Arabs, Syrians, Alawites and Druze alike are affected by this deteriorating climate.

Particularly in the Sheikh Maqsoud and Ashrafiya neighbourhoods of Aleppo, as well as in other predominantly Kurdish areas, there has been an increase in hate speech, property destruction, forced displacement and physical assaults. Likewise, incidents such as attacks targeting symbols of the Rojava Revolution in Qamishli demonstrate how deeply tensions have penetrated everyday life.

Moreover, these violations do not affect Kurds alone. Arab communities in regions such as Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor, especially those accused of links with the SDF, have also been exposed to violence and human rights abuses.

These developments further weaken social cohesion and intensify fears of a renewed large-scale conflict.

Despite all these difficulties, the beginning of returns to Afrin can nevertheless be regarded as one of the relatively positive developments of this period. The gradual return of displaced people to their homeland, even on a limited scale, represents an important sign of partial normalisation.

Nevertheless, these returns have not yet acquired a comprehensive or sustainable character. Serious shortcomings remain concerning the security of returnees, the restoration of property rights and the rebuilding of infrastructure. Likewise, although preparations are reportedly underway for returns to other areas such as Serê Kaniyê, these efforts remain at a very early stage.

In summary, although negotiations concerning the implementation of the 29 January agreement continue, the process remains slow, fragile and uneven.

Local actors and representatives of self-government continue to criticise the highly centralised character of decision-making mechanisms, viewing this as a serious obstacle to democratic participation and representation. Accordingly, the relevant political and social actors continue to express their objections through democratic means and political initiatives, calling for decisions to be reconsidered and revised on the basis of broader consensus.

The current situation can therefore best be described as a hybrid transitional phase: one in which channels of negotiation remain open, while deep structural and political tensions continue to persist.





"A Year-Long Dialogue Process, the Commission Report and Abdullah Öcalan's Approach"

Prof. Dr. Mithat Sancar, DEM MP, Member of the Imrali Delegation, Turkey

We know that there is a direct interaction and relationship between developments in Rojava and the process in Turkey. Developments there affect Turkey; developments in Turkey also affect Syria and Rojava.

So, what is the state of the process in Turkey? Approximately 16 months have passed. During these 16 months, there have been things that happened, things that did not happen, things that were expected, and situations where our expectations were not met. There are also things that need to be done going forward.

It was mentioned a moment ago that one of the key pillars of peace is coming to terms with the past. This is true. To come to terms with the past, we first need to engage in a proper reckoning with the present – that is, with the situation we are living through and the reality we find ourselves in. This reckoning directly influences future developments. If we can make such a reckoning genuine and inclusive, we will be better able to ground both our assessments and our expectations regarding the course of the process.

Why did I make this introduction? For this reason: such processes – those aimed at resolving conflict and establishing peace – are multi-dimensional and are set in motion by the influence of various factors. Among these are strategic imperatives, international developments, and both long-term calculations and short-term assessments. It must be stated from the outset that an idealistic perspective is insufficient for grasping these processes and does not facilitate an understanding of their nature. We would like to see factors such as a goal of resolution within the framework of peace and justice as decisive, but these are outcomes that may emerge or develop within the process. Consequently, assuming a priori that actors—particularly states and those in power—act out of a motivation such as the ideal of peace or idealism can lead us into error.

On the other hand, like all political spheres, conflict resolution and peace possess a complex structure based on various calculations, involving manoeuvres and tactical steps.

To put it more concretely: How should we adjust our expectations? How should objectives be defined? And what methods are required to achieve these objectives?

Past Attempts at Resolution

If we take October 2024 as the starting point, then yes, nearly 1.5 years have passed. This is not the first attempt in Turkey. Various initiatives have been undertaken previously to resolve the conflict, build peace and reach a solution regarding the Kurdish issue. Two of these stand out in particular: one from 2009 and the other from the 2013–2015 period. These are significant because they were both widely publicised and conducted within a much broader framework. Comparing them with other initiatives is somewhat more difficult. These initiatives have different dimensions. This is the third one.

We can trace the origins of unilateral declarations of intent to resolve the conflict in the Kurdish issue even further back. We know that Mr Öcalan explicitly expressed this in his 1988 interview

with Mehmet Ali Birand. In the years that followed, unilateral ceasefires and similar moves were also made. However, apart from 2009 and 2013, no framework resembling negotiations emerged. Unfortunately, those two experiences did not result in success either.

At the outset of this process – as we have stated in other meetings and reiterated at a conference – we are faced with a structure where conventional conflict resolution models have been, to a certain extent, turned on their head. In other words, the prioritisation of the decision to lay down arms and the organisation's decision to disband constitutes a significant difference. Unlike other experiences, the 27 February 2025 statement was essentially based on this call: a call for the PKK to take the decision to disband and lay down arms. The PKK also responded positively to this at its 12th congress convened in May 2025 and stated that it had complied with this call. There is no need to recount the subsequent developments; we are aware of them: a disarmament ceremony also took place. These were steps described as symbolic regarding the will to lay down arms and disband, but I have previously explained on other occasions that they held meanings beyond the merely symbolic.

The Decision to Lay Down Arms and Dissolve

So, does the decision to lay down arms and to dissolve the organisation mean that these will immediately be put into practice and become a reality? No. Here, we encounter characteristics similar to other processes. The decision to lay down arms and the organisation's declaration of its dissolution are an extremely important starting point. However, the implementation of the disarmament process requires further arrangements, steps and developments. Nevertheless, let us state this: At the heart of this 27 February call, the emphasis on it being the most crucial turning point in ending the conflict is clearly evident. In other words, Mr Öcalan had made this call with the primary aim of de-escalating the Kurdish issue from violence and bringing it onto a legal and political footing.

I will summarise the issues currently under discussion in bullet points shortly. So what happened next? Naturally, meetings took place on İmralı. There were meetings with the state, as well as with the İmralı Delegation and officials from the DEM Party. Meetings with political parties took place, but the most important were the talks held at İmralı. Following these talks and the dialogue in the political arena, the establishment of a special commission in Parliament to oversee the process was agreed upon. This can be described as a consensus reached after an extended period of discussion; in other words, it was not a step taken immediately or easily.

Why is the establishment of the commission important?

Bringing the process into the Turkish Grand National Assembly was a significant development in terms of both legitimacy and participation. The discussions, statements, presentations and reports submitted by the parties in the commission formed an important record. Those reports detailed the parties' approach to the issue and their expectations. They now stand as a record, and the fact that they were produced within the Assembly implies that all actors in the political landscape were, in some way, involved in this process. Whether they openly opposed the process, fully supported it, or supported it with reservations, all parties became part of this process.

The work of the parliamentary commission was significant. The main expectation was the joint report. The joint report was published approximately two months ago. The joint report offers a perspective and establishes a general framework for what needs to be done going forward. However, we were already aware that it was, by the very nature of the task, impossible for this report to determine the details. The commission's authority was also limited in this regard. Furthermore, other mechanisms must essentially be put in place to implement concrete regulations.

What happens now?

As you are all aware, there is a debate regarding a law – a code of law, a law specific to the process – and it is expected to be submitted to the Speaker of the Assembly. What will this law contain, or rather, what function will it serve? In short, it will establish the legal framework and foundations for disarmament and the surrender of weapons. In other words, questions such as how weapons will be surrendered and what will become of those who do so will largely be answered by this law.

It was discussed that the bill would be brought to the agenda in March, but this did not happen. Subsequently, it was announced, stated and discussed that more concrete developments were expected this month; that did not happen either. Whilst it is difficult to explain in detail why this has not happened, I can highlight two significant factors: Firstly, international or regional developments. The second is the parties' objectives, intentions and expectations regarding this matter. These two factors have played a significant role in the delay of the legislative process. There may be other factors as well. As I mentioned at the outset, states generally prefer the option that carries the lowest political and practical cost and strive to have it accepted. However, those who wish for a lasting peace will undoubtedly demand a realistic and fair arrangement. We, too, argue that for the disarmament process to function properly and for this threshold to be crossed so that paths to a solution can open up, the legislation to be drafted must be in keeping with the spirit of peace and a solution. It is well known that if legislation addressing disarmament within this framework does not emerge, we will face further disputes.

Disarmament and the violence-politics dialectic

Now, to explain the essence of disarmament, it is necessary to recall the violence-politics dialectic once again. We maintain that it would be insufficient for this law to contain only provisions relating to criminal law. It must also include provisions that will liberate the political sphere and ensure that politics takes the place of disarmament. Because those who lay down their arms wish to engage in politics. Armed struggle is not based solely on a motivation for violence; it is based on the preference to achieve certain political objectives through this method. When arms are laid down, political aims are not set aside, nor do political convictions cease to exist. Consequently, provisions are also required to enable those who have laid down their arms, or anyone associated in any way with the disbanded organisation, to engage in democratic politics within a legitimate and legal framework. The necessary conditions for politics to replace violence must be guaranteed through this law.

Undoubtedly, for such a law to be implemented and to yield results, it also requires dialogue and the pursuit of consensus with Mr Öcalan on İmralı. For it is he who has issued the call to lay down arms, and he will largely steer the process from here on. In this context, Mr Öcalan's views, assessments, proposals and requests are among the most significant factors influencing the process. This framework is crucial for the organisation to advance its self-dissolution process and lay down its arms completely.

The Kurdish political movement's two painful memories

It is also necessary to point out the following: the experiences we have lived through, and those we experienced in Turkey in the past, have created two distinct memories. We are faced with the need to examine the relationship between these memories from a slightly more detached perspective and to devise middle ground or compromise solutions. What do I mean by this? The years 1999 and 2009 hold significant weight in the collective memory of the PKK or the Kurdish political movement. 1999 is characterised by painful memories of the consequences that returning to the country without solid legal guarantees could entail. In the state's memory, whilst the exact dates may differ, the periods of 2009 and 2013–2015 are similarly significant, albeit in a different context. In 2009, the government and the state were calculating the potential political

cost of sabotage and attempts by those seeking to derail the process. The different outcome of the 2013–2015 period and the harsh, destructive clashes that followed the process's conclusion in 2015 have fostered a certain reflex of cautious action within the state's memory. We are now discussing and debating how we can reconcile these two distinct memories within this process and how we can move forward. It may not be framed in these terms—and I am aware that in many places it is not—but I have chosen to conceptualise it this way as I find it facilitates explanation.

In summary, the current stage—the stage we are at—involves the drafting of the legislation known as the 'code law' or 'process-specific law' within the framework of the Parliamentary commission's joint report; however, the report emphasises that we must not stop there. The joint report also identifies areas where no action has yet been taken, despite there being no obstacles to doing so. In other words, the Parliamentary Commission's joint report includes proposals that do not require legislative amendments or the enactment of new laws. For example, the implementation of rulings by the European Court of Human Rights and the Constitutional Court. These have not yet been carried out. No legislative amendment or new law is required for these. There is a delay here, and this delay is causing concern. It is causing concern both within our organisation and amongst the public. It is accelerating scrutiny of intentions, bringing the issue of trust back onto the agenda time and again, and thus increasing mistrust. The failure to take action on issues that could be resolved without any legislative changes is yet another matter linked to the issue of trust.

The Issue of Trustees

For instance, it would suffice for the Ministry of the Interior not to issue the renewal decision it currently takes every two months to allow the term of the trustees to end and for the elected mayors to return to office. The trustees' term is renewed every two months. If the Ministry of the Interior does not issue a renewal decision once the two months have elapsed, the elected mayors can return to office. A legislative amendment is required to resolve the trustee issue at its root, but there is no need for this to change the current practice. These developments naturally create a trust issue, and this trust issue can sometimes provoke quite negative or harsh reactions, leading to a weakening of faith that the process can move forward and yield results. I cannot, of course, claim that these feelings and attitudes are unfounded. However, I must once again remind you that it is not right to succumb to despair or abandon the process suddenly and swiftly when faced with such situations.

In the statements made following the 27 February call and in our discussions with Mr Öcalan, it is clearly stated that this process carries the potential and objective of a major transformation that will shape the coming decades. Such a transformation – a major transformation – is a process initiated with the aim of laying the foundations for a major transformation both in Turkey and across the entire Middle East, or in all the countries where Kurds live. A major transformation naturally gives rise to great fears, great anxieties, and great hopes. We are now oscillating between anxiety and hope, fear and optimism.

The 'Code Law' and the solution to the problem

So, will this law resolve the issue? This law – the law intended to regulate the disarmament process – is important. But as I said yesterday on a television programme, and I will repeat now: for the disarmament process to proceed smoothly, a plan is needed. A peace plan, a roadmap. I believe this roadmap must have at least three elements. Firstly, legal regulations – these must be comprehensive, fair and realistic. Secondly, mechanisms based on mutual agreements. Thirdly, a concrete package consisting of scheduled reciprocal steps. In other words, to ensure that expectations and approaches do not drift further apart during the disarmament process, but rather converge, there is an urgent need to draw up such a plan. So, do we currently have any concrete data regarding such a plan? There are certain efforts, certain intentions and

statements, but there is no data that would make it possible to say a concrete plan has been drawn up. If this plan were prepared, I could say that the disarmament process, the transition from arms to politics, and the transition from violence to a legal framework would progress much more healthily and rapidly.

What about the reforms regarding the resolution of the Kurdish issue and the reforms regarding democratisation? I have previously explained on other occasions that these must be addressed as part of an interconnected triangle. In other words, the disarmament process must operate in a way that opens channels towards resolving the Kurdish issue, whilst steps towards resolving the Kurdish issue also require an understanding and preparation that takes into account the issue of democracy in Turkey as a whole – the issue of democracy for the entirety of Turkey. These will take a long time, but in order to make rapid progress, we need to get through the first stage with a well-structured and acceptable, realistic, and convincing framework.

Is the process at a standstill?

No, the process is not at a standstill. This process is continuing, and discussions are ongoing. Debates regarding the legislation are also taking place. As the İmralı Delegation, we have the opportunity to meet with all parties and we are utilising this opportunity; we are conducting these meetings. We visit İmralı at regular intervals to discuss these matters with Mr Öcalan. At the point we have reached, there is a task before us to put forward formulas that will overcome this situation, which could be described as a 'deadlock'.

I need not add: it would be a mistaken approach to view the process merely as mutual discussions and negotiations between two parties. As our dear Dersim noted at the opening; this is essentially present in the 27 February statement, and in Mr Öcalan's subsequent statements as well. We are undergoing a comprehensive, long-term period of transformation in which everyone is, in some way, a stakeholder, a responsible party and an actor. Consequently, no one has the luxury of standing on the sidelines as an observer. On the contrary, there is a significant need to transform this process into a platform for social dialogue through activities such as the current one. Dialogue, exchange of views and efforts to understand one another with different sections of society.

Dialogue, not imposition; negotiation, not debate

We have experienced through various instances that proceeding through unilateral impositions is often not feasible. There are many such examples both in Turkey and across the world. Dialogue requires conversation and discussion. Negotiation means striving to find a way forward by persuading one another and talking to one another. Debate, however, is based on the notion of constantly proving oneself right and defeating the other side. What we must do now is avoid losing our way amid the tension between hope and despair, optimism and pessimism. Peddling hope is not a good thing; spreading despair is even worse. That is why, of course, we must see the realities of today clearly and confront them. We need to draw horizons from this confrontation and devise methods. This is the source of hope. But we must also recognise that spreading despair benefits no one and serves no purpose; on the contrary, it only widens the paths leading to harm and destruction.





“Neither War nor Peace”: The Kurds in the Grip of Conflict

Ass. Prof. Adnan Çelik, EHESS, France

Anti-colonial discourse was particularly influential among the Kurds in Turkey — that is, in Bakur — during the 1970s. In the second half of that decade, nearly all Kurdish political movements regarded Kurdistan as a colony, and the thesis of a “colonised Kurdistan” became widespread. Yet at the same time, the academic world showed remarkably little interest in Kurdish society or politics. Very few scholars worked on Kurdish issues.

After 2000, however, Kurdish Studies expanded enormously. Serious academic work began to emerge in Europe, the United States, and even in the four parts of Kurdistan, albeit often under censorship and political restrictions.

Over the last decade, we have witnessed a major transformation in the field of Kurdish Studies: what is now commonly referred to as the “decolonial turn”. Questions of colonialism and Kurdistan have become central themes in contemporary scholarship. I do not present this as a value judgement, but rather as an interesting historical observation. At the very moment when Kurdish political movements themselves were intensely debating colonialism in the 1970s, academia remained largely silent. Today, academia engages deeply with these debates, while Kurdish political movements — at least in the public sphere — have become more distant from this discourse.

This applies not only to Bakur, but also to Başur, Rojhilat and Rojava. Across all four parts of Kurdistan, political movements have, to varying degrees, moved away from explicitly anti-colonial frameworks. This shift tells us something important about the profound social and political transformations Kurdish society has undergone over the last four or five decades.

I have chosen the title “Neither War nor Peace” deliberately. In the social sciences, this phrase describes an intermediate condition — a transitional state suspended between two historical moments. The process that began roughly a year and a half ago still lacks a clear definition. Different actors describe it in different ways. For my part, I have referred to it as a “neither war nor peace” process.

This process may eventually evolve into peace. It may also relapse into war. For now, however, we are living through an uncertain transitional phase.

I have also deliberately used the word “dilemma”, because this process confronts the Kurds with a double predicament.

The first concerns the tension between freedom and security. Abdullah Öcalan himself has spoken about the need to establish a balance between Kurdish freedom and Kurdish security. The Kurdish political movement is therefore confronted with two simultaneous imperatives: preserving the struggle for freedom while ensuring the survival and security of Kurdish society under present conditions.

The second dimension of this dilemma is geopolitical. We are living through a historical moment in which regional and global dynamics increasingly overlap and collide. There is a direct connection between developments in Rojava and what is taking place in Bakur. Likewise, events in Iran and Rojhilat are deeply intertwined with broader regional transformations.

In this sense, the present condition of “neither war nor peace” resembles a difficult and precarious tightrope walk.

As an academic, I observe this process from the outside rather than participating in it directly. Yet even from this position, it is clear how fragile and delicate the situation remains.

For many years I have studied modern Kurdish history, particularly in Bakur. One issue repeatedly stands out: since the First World War, the language, grammar and political syntax of the Kurdish question have changed whenever regional and global dynamics have collided.

After the First World War and especially after the Treaty of Lausanne, the new Kemalist Republic sought international legitimacy through a dual discourse. To the West, it presented itself as a republican project committed to reaching the level of “modern civilisation”. To the Soviet bloc, it portrayed itself as a progressive and anti-feudal movement.

This dual legitimacy enabled the Kemalist regime to consolidate itself internationally while simultaneously plunging Kurdish political movements into a profound crisis. The result was the cycle of uprisings, repression and massacres that marked the 1920s and 1930s.

A similar dynamic emerged after the Second World War. The experience of Mahabad and the broader decolonisation wave opened a new horizon of expectation for colonised peoples across the world. Kurdish intellectuals and political actors also sought to position themselves within this emerging global order. This is evident in the memoranda drafted by the Kurdish delegation established in Paris by figures such as Kamuran Bedirhan and Şerif Paşa.

Yet another double bind soon emerged.

Turkey's rapid integration into NATO in the early 1950s enabled anti-communism to become a powerful instrument against Kurdish political expression. Kurdish identity itself was increasingly stigmatised through association with communism. During the Cold War — whether in Turkey, Iran under the Shah, Iraq or Syria — Kurdish actors sought to formulate a new political language within shifting geopolitical balances.

The anti-colonial discourse of the 1970s must also be understood within this Cold War context.

The third historical cycle began with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Fukuyama famously declared the “end of history”, arguing that liberal democracy had emerged as the victorious global model. In this new era, questions of human rights, memory and confronting the past gained greater visibility. Kurdish political actors again attempted to redefine their political language within this changing environment.

I locate the fourth cycle in the aftermath of the Syrian war.

The Syrian conflict inaugurated a period in which many of the norms established after the Second World War began to erode without any stable alternative taking shape. To borrow Gramsci's expression, we are living in an “age of monsters”: the old order is dying, while the new order has not yet been born.

Within this fourth phase, Kurdish political movements are once again attempting to formulate a new political grammar.

What is particularly striking today is that developments across the four parts of Kurdistan are unfolding simultaneously and with an unprecedented degree of synchronisation.

Historically, Kurdish resistance tended to emerge sequentially. During the 1920s and 1930s, resistance was concentrated largely in Bakur. In the 1940s, political developments shifted toward Rojhilat. From the 1960s onward, Başur became the primary centre of resistance.

I refer to this earlier pattern as “alternating resistance”. When one part of Kurdistan entered a period of exhaustion or defeat, another part generated a new political dynamic and renewed collective hope.

Today, however, developments are unfolding simultaneously across all four parts of Kurdistan. This simultaneity creates both extraordinary opportunities and extraordinary dangers. It could lead either to an unprecedented political transformation or to a simultaneous and far-reaching catastrophe.

The current phase includes a series of interconnected events: the siege of Kobani in 2014, the genocide against the Yazidis in Şengal, the 2017 independence referendum in South Kurdistan and its rejection by the international order, the destruction of self-administration initiatives in Bakur after 2015, and the “Jin, Jiyan, Azadî” uprisings in Rojhilat.

Since 2014, the Kurds have entered an entirely new political, social and geopolitical phase.

One of the most remarkable developments in this period is that Kurdish political movements across the four parts have, consciously or unconsciously, converged around a similar strategic position.

Discussions often focus exclusively on Abdullah Öcalan, as though the current process were solely the product of his personal decisions. I do not think this interpretation is sufficient.

In South Kurdistan, the PDK and YNK; in Rojhilat, various Kurdish political parties; and in Rojava, the autonomous political structures that emerged during the Syrian conflict — despite their differences — have all moved toward a similar conclusion.

That conclusion is this: while the struggle for freedom must continue, the immediate priority is ensuring collective survival and security.

This convergence is historically significant. For perhaps the first time in modern Kurdish political history, major Kurdish political actors across different regions are broadly aligned on a common strategic orientation.

At the same time, however, I believe certain problems have emerged within the current process.

First, while negotiations continue, the Kurdish movement appears increasingly hesitant to maintain a language of active political resistance. For decades, the vitality of the Kurdish movement derived precisely from its ability to resist under conditions of repression and to articulate an alternative political vision against the dominant order in Turkey.

Yet the negotiation process — particularly within the legal Kurdish political sphere — has weakened this oppositional language.

Negotiation and resistance should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. On the contrary, democratic opposition and political struggle must remain active components of any negotiation process. Without this balance, the process risks political stagnation.

Second, although this process concerns negotiations with the Turkish state, it also requires dialogue within Kurdish society itself.

Even if their political influence is limited, there are Kurdish political currents in Bakur that approach the process critically and articulate alternative interpretations. One may agree or disagree with them, but they cannot simply be ignored.

The absence of meaningful dialogue within the Kurdish public sphere has created certain political and intellectual gaps. In some cases, this has allowed unrealistic or conspiratorial narratives to gain influence.

I would also like to conclude with a literary reflection.

I have always admired Yaşar Kemal's novel *İnce Memed*. In the novel, İnce Memed becomes a social bandit and a folk hero after fleeing to the mountains. Yet after a certain point, he can no longer return, even if he wishes to do so. The people themselves prevent his return because they have come to see him as the embodiment of their hopes, dignity and resistance.

In this sense, the current condition of "neither war nor peace" should not be understood merely as a narrow negotiation between the Turkish state and the Kurdish movement. It is also a profoundly social process. The people who stand behind these actors — and who bear the burdens imposed by this conflict — also carry a responsibility. In one way or another, we are all implicated in this responsibility.

In conclusion, Mithat Sancar referred at the beginning of his speech to the importance of the decision to lay down arms. In my view, the significance of this decision has still not been sufficiently understood.

First, this decision is historically important because it reflects a paradigmatic and strategic transformation within the Kurdish movement itself. Beyond negotiations with the Turkish state, the movement reached a moment in its fifty-year history when it critically reassessed its own political practices and experiences. It gradually moved away from the revolutionary and anti-colonial political violence articulated in its 1978 manifesto, *The Path of the Kurdish Revolution*, and sought to redefine its strategic orientation accordingly.

This transformation has not been fully understood, either within Kurdish society or beyond it. To regard it merely as a tactical necessity would be to underestimate its historical significance. The history of revolutionary movements around the world shows that it is profoundly important for such transformations to emerge through internal political reflection rather than being imposed externally through defeat or coercion. Equally important is the capacity to prepare politically and socially for such a transition.

Second, efforts to establish negotiations have existed since the early 1990s. We witnessed this during the periods 1999–2004, 2009, and 2013–2015. Traditionally, the Kurdish movement approached negotiations on the assumption that disarmament would follow political recognition and agreement.

What was different this time was that Abdullah Öcalan approached the matter from an entirely different perspective. Rather than treating the laying down of arms as the final outcome of negotiations, he treated it as their point of departure. At first, this generated considerable

uncertainty and debate within Kurdish society. I still remember the day this statement was first read publicly. Only now, however, are we beginning to grasp the strategic importance of that moment.

This shift reflected an important realisation: that the discourse of "terrorism", propagated for decades by a state possessing one of NATO's largest armies, had become a major obstacle not only for the Kurds in Turkey, but also for Kurdish political struggles elsewhere, including Rojava. Continuing indefinitely within this framework risked producing little more than political paralysis and stagnation. Recognising this reality was itself strategically significant.

Of course, once armed organisations lay down their weapons, legal and political processes inevitably follow. That is inherent to any transition of this kind. Yet to expect an immediate democratic and peaceful resolution of the Kurdish question would be unrealistic and would contradict the very logic of the process itself.

We must accept that such transformations unfold gradually and through multiple phases. These are not developments that can be completed within a matter of months. Kurdish society, too, must move beyond the assumption that peace will automatically emerge the moment weapons are silenced. The process itself constitutes a new terrain of political struggle.

At the same time, the possibility of wider war involving Iran remains present. The fragile political order in Syria has yet to be constitutionally consolidated. More broadly, the world is currently undergoing profound geopolitical upheavals. In a moment defined by uncertainty and instability, expecting the Kurdish question in Bakur to be resolved immediately risks generating unrealistic expectations and inevitable disappointment.

What is required instead is a more sober and realistic political perspective. At present, the balance between freedom and security has shifted toward survival, protection and the preservation of existing gains.

As Jacques Rancière once suggested, crossing a river is not only about reaching the opposite bank, but also about learning to swim against the current. That is precisely what the present moment demands.

For this reason, it is deeply significant that not only the Kurdish freedom movement, but also other Kurdish political actors across Kurdistan, are attempting to establish a new balance between freedom and security.

We live in a world marked by prolonged instability, normalised violence and profound geopolitical uncertainty. Under such conditions, the question of survival cannot simply be dismissed as a political compromise. It is an existential question. And when we evaluate the choices now being made, we must remain attentive to the harsh realities within which those choices are being shaped.





The fundamental challenges facing the process of peace and a democratic society

Mahmut Şakar, MAF-DAD, Germany

In this talk, I shall attempt, on the basis of my own experiences, both to explain how I understand this process and to identify the fundamental problems standing in its way.

Over the past year and a half, the peace and democratisation process has been discussed from a wide variety of perspectives. The focus has primarily been on the state or the government. An approach has emerged that essentially concentrates on the structure of the existing state and poses questions such as: "Is peace possible with this state?" or "Are negotiations possible with this state?" Whilst I attach importance to the discussions that focus on the state, I believe that they are not sufficient to understand what is happening.

Kurdistan's struggle for freedom is also part of this process, and in my view, the process should be viewed not only through a state-centred lens but also through the prism of the struggle for freedom. Furthermore, there is no point in explaining the existing republic and its current power structure to the Kurds. For the Kurds already possess ample theoretical and practical knowledge of the nature of the regime. Apart from that, the Kurds and the freedom struggle are not negotiating with the state they had hoped for, but with the one they have found. After all, it is not we who determine the nature of this state.

Even after the international conspiracy of 15 February 1999, Mr Öcalan wanted to pave the way for a new process through peace and negotiations. A Turkish intellectual had asked us to convey a message or question to Mr Öcalan during a conversation: "Could you ask Mr Öcalan: This state does not change, nothing comes from this state, does he trust this state?" When we raised this issue, he was somewhat annoyed and said: "Our friends are actually telling us the following: "You cannot deal with this state either through war or through peace." There is, therefore, a state-centred perspective that overrides his own will and the resistance of the Kurdish freedom struggle. That is why one must also consider the question in relation to the Kurdish struggle. If we look at it in this way, it also becomes more logical and meaningful to discuss the shortcomings and responsibilities.

I would like to focus on the stance and approach of the freedom struggle on this issue. Excluding Mr Öcalan and the movement he represents from the process as passive subjects is neither realistic nor correct. Moreover, the Kurdish movement has experience in negotiations and in the struggle. It makes sense to view the process against the backdrop of this experience. This helps us to look beyond the everyday perspective and take a view of a broader context and a longer timeframe.

Similarities and continuities

From the outset, I have sought to compare the current process with the process of 1999–2004. This comparison, or the recognition of similarities, will give us the sense that many of the new developments are 'familiar' to us. I believe that a close look at the experiences from the 1999–2004 process will help us to understand Öcalan's stance and to grasp the problems we face today.

Even though Mr Öcalan frequently refers to the year 1993 and earlier processes his discussions with the DEM delegation during this trial, I believe that the 1999 trial represents a turning point or starting point in terms of discourse, style, dialogue and negotiation technique. It would make more sense to view the subject from that point to the present day within a holistic temporal context spanning 26 to 27 years. To understand how the Kurdistan freedom struggle and Abdullah Öcalan, as key figures, approached the cause, one must also examine this trial.

Interestingly, when listing their own experiences with peace and negotiations, Kurds hardly take the years 1999–2004 into account. I note that, whilst the Kurdish freedom struggle does not entirely erase the period from 1999 to 2004 from its collective memory, it does push it into the background, viewing these periods solely in the context of an international conspiracy and not granting them much space in its memory as a process of negotiation and struggle. I, on the other hand, believe that Öcalan's architecture of peace and negotiations emerged during this period. Much of what we know today, many of the issues we are experiencing today, were discussed, debated and tested there. There were moments of success and failure. This experience was further developed and deepened until we reached the present day.

I would like to highlight a few parallels. As Adnan Çelik has already mentioned, one of the first parallels that strikes me is the similarity in the international context. In one case, it is an international conspiracy; in the other, a new global situation that began on 7 October 2023. Even at my first meeting in Imrali, Abdullah Öcalan had expressed that we were standing on the brink of an abyss, that we would fall if we persisted, and that we could lead the adventure of freedom to success by paving a new path. He had very forcefully emphasised the international danger, the threat and the abyss on the brink of which the Kurdish people stood – namely, genocide. The trial in which we engaged most intensively in the genocide debate was the 1999 trial. Mr Öcalan sometimes said in his speeches: "Let us not forget what the Armenian people went through." At the first meeting, too, he emphasised that he was focusing on overcoming the danger of genocide, saying: "I want to bring my people safely to the other side." What does he say today? He speaks persistently of a "Gaza-isation". That is to say, the situation of great risks and threats created for our people by the international balance of power was very clear and decisive in both trials.

In 1999, the threat was a plot against Abdullah Öcalan, and through this an attempt was made to destroy all the achievements of the Kurdistan freedom struggle. Today, however, it is a process that affects Kurdistan as a whole. In my political life, I am experiencing for the first time a political situation in which the fate of all four parts of Kurdistan is intertwined. This process

encompasses the whole of Kurdistan. Rather, there is a threat to Kurdistan as a whole, to its achievements. We saw this in Rojava. The situation in the south and in Rojhilat is also unclear. At this point, a different, more strategic stance is required. The same perception of threat existed in 1999, and it still exists today.

Of course, there was also an international dimension during the period 2013–2015. The Arab Spring, the uprisings... But there was a grassroots movement there. It was a time when nation states felt threatened. The international pressure and the balance of power were different there. From the perspective of the international situation, the process of 2024 therefore bears much closer resemblance to that of 1999. In my view, the reflexes also show similarities.

There is a similarity in Abdullah Öcalan's approach in both trials. What does this consist of? The stance he adopted in the 1999 trial was aimed at safeguarding the achievements of the Kurdish people. In fact, whilst the leadership of a structure such as the PKK, which defines itself as a 'leading movement', may be taken prisoner, it does not suffer serious losses in military, political or other respects, nor does it face major destruction. This is closely linked to Abdullah Öcalan's strategy of preserving the gains and expanding them step by step. Öcalan's approach consists of securing these achievements through a proactive advance. In other words, it is a strategy not of maintaining the status quo, but of driving the achievements forward through a more proactive stance and thereby securing them.

In this context, Sırrı Süreyya Önder's statement following the first meeting – "Öcalan cares as much about the safety of the Kurds as he does about their freedom" – is important for understanding the similarities between these two processes.

There are also many similarities in terms of negotiating technique. Öcalan does not view the negotiations as a barter. In both phases, there is no discussion dominated by demands. The 'I'll do this, you do that' approach does not exist today, nor did it exist in 1999. The essential aim is to build a strategic relationship, to raise the question of Turkish-Kurdish brotherhood, and to develop a strategy from which both peoples can benefit. The language used in both phases also shows similarities.

The Oslo Process (2009–2011) mentioned by Mithat Sancar represents a departure from this 25-year line. Öcalan also makes a number of comments on the Oslo Process in the talks of 2013–2015: "In Oslo, our friends got bogged down in too many technical negotiations; that was something that benefited the state," he says. Öcalan thus criticises the manner in which this process was conducted, as well as the negotiating technique. In all the processes in which Öcalan has been central – 1999–2004, 2013–2015 and today – the focus is less on negotiations and more on building strategic relationships, addressing the issue at a higher level and embedding it within a new strategic context. Even today, he says: "Demanding something from the state is begging. Are we beggars?" That is his approach to negotiation tactics.

We also see similarities in the vision for a solution: in 1999, a democratic republic; today, likewise, a democratic republic and democratic integration. In 1999, he said: "This policy of the democratic republic is a strategy with an open-ended outcome, a strategy that will deepen through the struggle." Even today, in the session of 16 February 2026 (as reported in the DEM delegation's press release of 18 February), he says the following: "This process is one that constantly reassesses itself and determines its strategies and tactics." It is therefore not a deadlocked, concluded matter. "You can advance integration as far as your strength allows. And you can shape democratic society as far as your strength allows." It is therefore a process that is won not through narrow-minded negotiations, but through struggle.

An approach that does not focus on criticising the state, but rather incorporates it into the process, takes its concerns into account, and paves the way for the process with its own definition rather than directly opposing the state's terminology, also becomes a common language. However the state defines it, today it refers to it as the 'process of peace and democratic society' and does not argue too much with the state over this term.

It attempts to impose its own style, its own approach and its own perspective on the process, and does so with an extremely swift, active and fast-paced approach. The pace seen today was also present under the difficult conditions of 1999. You may recall that Prime Minister Ecevit once said: "We cannot get our work done because we are constantly arguing with Öcalan." One day he issues a statement, calls for a peace delegation and urges them to leave the country.

The approach of driving the process forward with unilateral steps, advancing it rapidly and, initially on its own initiative, bringing it to a point of no return – even from the state's perspective – is also similar. The PKK was disbanded at that time, and a call was made for the surrender of weapons. The foundations for much of what is happening today were actually laid back then.

Another similarity: the re-evaluation of the Kurdistan freedom struggle is present in both processes. We are familiar with the HDP project from 2013–2015. Towards the end of 1999, there were efforts to prepare HADEP for this process through a new party congress. Democratic politics took centre stage and had to be reshaped. Even today, there are discussions about DEM: how can it navigate this process? Or even: how can the struggle for freedom as a whole be reimagined?

The debates on real socialism, the dissolution of the PKK, the congress-style organisational form and the overcoming of the classical leadership model were discussions that lasted from 1999 to 2004. I might even go so far as to say: the organisational structure as we know it today emerged during this period. A congress-style model. In this context, the PYD was founded in September 2003 and the PJAK in April 2004; women's parties and armies emerged within the framework of the congress model. A model in which so many diverse, specific and autonomous structures emerged and converged into a coordinating structure. The organisational model we

know today is the model from 1999–2004; the model within which we still live. In this respect, we are speaking not only of a similarity, but also of a continuity.

Ideological focus, the development towards a new paradigm, the democratic nation, the struggle for women's freedom, democratic socialism, communal socialism... These discussions, too, were initiated under the conditions of that time. Today, 20 years on, there is naturally a further deepening and enrichment in the ideological sphere. But I believe that the fundamental principles and orientations have remained the same.

The foundational text of that era is the book 'Defending a People'. When one reads the book 'Defending a People' today, apart from a few contemporary nuances, it seems as though it were written for today; it describes the present. What is the central axis of defending a people? The defence of the commune and of women. Today's foundational text is the 'Manifesto for Peace and a Democratic Society'. What is the main focus of this manifesto? Women and the commune. Even the core ideological points are the same. I could cite dozens of different examples. From 1999 to 2004, it states: 'The change in leadership is the protective force.' Today it states: 'The commune-based democratic society is the force of construction.' There is an enrichment, a differentiation, but also an enormous continuity.

In summary, I believe that a negotiation model developed between 1999 and 2026, and that this model developed around Öcalan. One could also call it **the Öcalan negotiation model**.

Of course, there are also significant differences. The most fundamental difference is this: compared to 1999, the Kurdish freedom movement is much stronger today. The experience of Rojava has been gained. 1999 was, in a sense, a time when the movement had reached rock bottom. Today, the Kurdish movement is entering this new process at a time when it is much stronger and has been shaped by the experiences of the revolution in Rojava. Furthermore, a vast body of work has emerged since 1999 through defence briefs, materials, Öcalan's speeches and discussions with lawyers. A very strong body of discourse has emerged on the themes of the democratic nation, women and the democratic republic. In this respect, it speaks on the basis of a rich body of work. At the same time, it speaks from a more developed organisational position that influences the entire Middle East. In every respect, the Kurdish movement is entering this new process in a much stronger position than it was in the period from 1999 to 2004.

Having briefly touched upon these similarities and the dimension of continuity, I would like to address three fundamental problem areas.

Firstly: the state.

The state's desire to exercise excessive control over this process is one of the fundamental problems. The reason for this is partly understandable. The state wishes to conclude this

process as cost-effectively as possible before its own regime is democratised and the achievements of the Kurdish movement become entrenched.

The current situation means that there are not even remotely acceptable conditions for negotiation, let alone on an equal footing. It is therefore important to work on ways of reducing this state control. One way of doing this could be to strengthen the position of the other side in the negotiations, i.e. to give concrete consideration to Mr Öcalan's status and to advocate for it. His status as chief negotiator must be legalised and his scope for action expanded. This does not concern Öcalan personally alone. There is also a legal context, such as the right to hope and similar considerations. However, for the negotiations – particularly the struggle aspect – to make significant progress in future, this status issue must be resolved and scope for action created for Öcalan. I believe that the Peace Act will also serve this purpose. However, given the current balance of power, I consider it rather difficult for the state to agree to this. The Kurdish side must establish a balance.

Second fundamental point: nationalism.

In Turkey, nationalism has evolved since the 2010s, as it has worldwide. With the development of social media and other means of communication, a non-ideological nationalism in the global sense can be observed everywhere. In Turkey, too, the already strong nationalist tendency has deepened significantly.

In the process of 1999, following Öcalan's gestures of openness, there was a decline in nationalism, a decline in terrorist rhetoric, and society began to focus on Turkey's problems. At the end of this process, the possibility arose that the nationalist party might lose power or even fail to clear the electoral threshold. When the AKP came to power in 2002, such an atmosphere prevailed, and I believe that Abdullah Öcalan's stance in 1999 was crucial to the emergence of this atmosphere.

Today, however, the state is using nationalism almost like a reserve army to exert pressure on the Kurdish movement and the negotiation process and to downplay the demands of the Kurdish movement. The state has deliberately reinforced nationalist tendencies. I believe that it has not only promoted Turkish nationalism but has also constructed its negative image.

Let me briefly address two points here.

Firstly: we are developing this process on the basis of the destruction caused by the strategy of annihilation. We must never forget that. We have lived through a hellish ten-year process, and we have not yet fully come to terms with the consequences. Whilst the state exerted intense pressure on Kurdish society as part of the process of suppression, it may also have won over certain sections of Kurdish society. It is no coincidence that the state created the institutions that control communication technologies and channels.

Secondly, a more sociological observation. We are people of the 1990s. As the Kurdish movement developed in the 1990s, Kurdish identity developed as a liberal identity. When people spoke of 'Kurds' back then, they meant a Kurdishness that had been created by the National Liberation Struggle of Kurdistan. After 2015, alongside the weakening of the revolutionary/dynamic current, which was subjected to extreme pressure and violence, a new situation emerged in the perception of Kurdish identity. 'AKP Kurds', 'Hüda-Par Kurds' and so on – in this way, forces that had been loyal to the state in the past were also incorporated into Kurdish identity, and this increasingly took on a character associated with an ethnic-cultural state of nature, rather than being a liberal identity. This expansion of Kurdishness may have led to the anti-attitude of those sections that historically and currently maintain religious/emotional or economic ties to the state being framed as Kurdish reactions towards Abdullah Öcalan and the Kurdish freedom movement. We see that this "vacuous" new form of "state/Kurdish nationalism", which attacks LGBTQ people during protests, hoists the Israeli flag and uses the term "Kurdish nationalist", attacks everything that defines Öcalan and the freedom movement.

In 2003, after the AKP came to power, Öcalan told us: "If you focus solely on being Kurdish, the AKP will take away the pioneering role of Kurdishness from you." The AKP's process of rapprochement with the state was staged in collaboration with the state, with the aim of the AKP exerting influence over Kurdish identity.

Interestingly, this current form of 'Kurdish nationalism', fuelled by these two currents, has aligned itself with Turkish nationalism. Attacks on the peace process, the democratic nation approach, women's freedom, grassroots social organisations and the socialist approach are now coming from within 'Kurdish nationalism' itself.

Of course, the AKP/the state is also pursuing this process with the aim of crushing the PKK. That is clear and understandable. One of the most important ways of achieving this seems to be to destroy the ideological foundations on which Abdullah Öcalan and the PKK are based, from within, from within "Kurdish identity" itself.

Therefore, the path to peace and a democratic society can only be paved by fighting against both forms of nationalism. Above all, the Kurdish movement and society must be very persistent and clear on the issues of the democratic nation, women's freedom and social organisation. Furthermore, swift and decisive steps towards the unity of the Kurdish people will complete this situation.

Third point: The stance of the Kurdistan freedom movement.

The freedom movement has consciously engaged in this process alongside Mr Öcalan and acted swiftly, which has been effective in this regard. In this respect, I believe it has drawn a positive lesson from past experiences.

What surprised me, however, is that the discussion regarding the significance, reasons and context of the process, the lack of practical measures, the routine perception of the process and

the 'wait-and-see' attitude have dragged on for such a long period, and that no stance has sufficiently developed which defines its own structure and society even more clearly and focuses on its own programme. Despite all the experience gained since 1999, one of the problems that must be addressed in this process is that the Kurdish movement has failed to involve its own base more actively in this matter and has not reorganised itself on the basis of struggle, negotiation and construction.

The real problem is this: in order to loosen the state's grip on this process, create space for negotiations on an equal footing and resolve the question of nationalism, the Kurdistan freedom struggle, as the main force, must transform itself and shape the second part of the equation very strongly. If the first part of the equation consists of the state and nationalism, then the force that balances this is the endeavour of the freedom movement and the strength it derives from it.

Whilst negotiations with the state, the creation of spaces of freedom and the anchoring of peace in society continue on the one hand, on the other hand the focus must be on organising social reconstruction and democratic politics that penetrate right into the fabric of society. The dissolution of the PKK and the local community work at the heart of the manifesto are just as important as negotiations with the state and will have a decisive influence on the process.

Without shifting the entire burden of the process onto the negotiating table, independent dynamics must be created or put into practice in all areas of the struggle – as if they were part of these negotiations – whereby the respective forms of struggle and timetables for these areas are determined by the areas themselves. By fighting on the ground and at the local level for the issues on which each sector is working and for which it is responsible, it can make the negotiation process more meaningful and strengthen the negotiating table.

After all, one of the central issues in this entire 26-year process is the question of time. We must address the question of time in the peace process. Time is of the essence. I do not know how long this process will take, nor can I predict whether it will continue or not. But however long it may take, the fundamental question is how we use this precious time. Should this process fail tomorrow, the fundamental question we must ask ourselves will be: what determination and what pace have we demonstrated during the current period?





Building peace, shaping the future: opportunities for coexistence, coming to terms with the past and shaping the future

Dr. Özgür Sevgi Göral, EHESS, France

I too would like to draw on my own field of research to explain what this recent quest for peace tells us about the region, the world and the reality in which we live.

First of all, I would like to preface this by saying that I have not lived in Turkey for the past eight years, but in Paris, where I work as a researcher. I have returned to the place where I completed my PhD. What we say here must be understood as both criticism and self-criticism. If we all believe in the idea of a different Turkey, a different Kurdistan, a different world, then we are all responsible for the shortcomings addressed here. This should not be taken to mean that we are passing judgement from our vantage point; we are developing arguments in the hope of contributing to this collective thinking.

I would like to discuss the process I refer to as peacebuilding using three concepts: **the present, the past and the future**. Temporality plays a very important role in peacebuilding processes.

The Present

Some social scientists describe the 'now' in which we currently find ourselves globally as a 'multiple crisis' (polycrisis). Many things are in a profound crisis; they struggle to reproduce themselves and cope with this crisis by generating great violence. I would like to highlight three different crises here.

Firstly: the crisis of capitalism. Particularly following the economic crisis of 2008, the end of the world as we know it is upon us. Fifty years ago, for example, the majority of wage earners in Europe and Turkey still enjoyed job security; some of them could even afford to buy a house with their pension. Today, we do not know whether our children will ever be able to retire. On a global scale, the rise of the far right and neo-fascist movements is also part of this; there is a very fierce attack on the achievements of workers and the working class, and on top of that there is an ecological crisis. We find ourselves in a world that is becoming increasingly radicalised on the right. This is not a process that affects only the region or Turkey and Kurdistan, but one that is taking place all over the world.

Secondly: the political crisis. As Foza Yusuf describes, for example, the hostilities between Arabs and Kurds are in reality a political crisis, a 'crisis of coexistence'. This is an issue that is being debated anew worldwide. The fault lines – ethnic, political, religious and class divisions – are being revisited and integrated into different forms by the global shift to the right and the crisis of capitalism. A very strong hatred of equality is spreading from the current political crisis. In a conversation with Jacques Rancière, he describes this as a 'counter-revolutionary situation'. Of course, the quest for equality and freedom continues all over the world; protest movements are

springing up like mushrooms on the streets, yet these movements are generally decentralised. We are a long way from a world in which real socialism existed and which, despite all criticism, was supported by an International. Consequently, very strong and mass protests flare up like fireworks of freedom and then die down again.

We see the most important example of this political crisis in the cases of war and violence, first in Ukraine, then in Gaza and now in Iran. I would like to emphasise the significance of Gaza here. We have witnessed a genocide at close quarters through images and videos. We have observed both the suppression of political movements and the violence that went as far as the genocide of the entire population, and we have seen how Netanyahu spoke before the United Nations despite all the protests. This demonstrates the collapse of the human rights and principles of equality between states that have been in force since 1945, as well as of the liberal centre. The language of human rights and the functioning of transnational institutions and mechanisms will be reshaped.

Thirdly: the crisis of masculinity. If we do not talk about this, something remains incomplete. This crisis is closely linked to the crisis of capitalism and politics; these are crises that are all intertwined and interconnected. You saw what happened in Maraş on 14 April: young secondary school pupils, weapons in hand, sowed death. Many young men are representatives of such a crisis of masculinity; they are called 'incels'. The portrayal of unmarried men in the media... We call this the influence of fascism, but racism must also be added to the mix. Turkish supremacist ideas are hostile both to an egalitarian vision of coexistence and to the equal rights of women and LGBTI+ people, as well as to feminist and LGBTI+ movements. Shortly before the achievements of the civil rights movement in the US, a few years before the abolition of apartheid laws, we are witnessing a very strong wave of anti-Black violence. The struggle for freedom generates such fears. We see something similar in the struggle of women.

These three crises – the crisis of capitalism, the crisis of politics and the crisis of masculinity – are merging. Exclusion, loneliness, the loss of hope and prospects for the future, the exhaustion even of those who consider themselves organised, militant discontent. These are not processes taking place outside of us; they also operate within the freedom and equality movements and narrow our horizons by bringing about an endless shift to the right.

I believe that the Kurdish movement is very aware of this situation. The dilemma between security and freedom highlighted by Adnan, Mithat Hoca and Mahmut is of great significance to the people of Kurdistan. But this also holds true in light of the global situation.

The most important concept under attack from this multifaceted crisis **is that of connections**. The present in which we find ourselves essentially attacks the connections we have forged, can forge, or may yet forge at very different levels. The connections between individuals, the connections between peoples, the connections between struggles for freedom and liberation, the connections between the economy and politics, the connections between grassroots organisations and parties, the connections between parliament and society, the connections between institutions and different social strata. There is an attack on these connections.

I regard the proposal **for democratic integration** as an approach that is aware of this attack and creates a foundation for restoring these connections. How strong, equal and free these connections will be depending on the capacity of those fighting for them. Nothing is certain,

nothing is guaranteed. Peace-building depends on the capacity of the political movements shaping peace and on the potential they can mobilise.

The past

When I think of the past, one concept comes to mind: **voices**. The voices of the past, voices rising from the graveyards. In the context of the Kurdish conflict, we are talking – according to optimistic estimates – of 40,000, 50,000 dead – that is no small number.

If we express it in the language of coming to terms with the past, these are very difficult pasts, and there are demands from various political and social movements regarding these very difficult pasts. Demands that are similar to those in Europe, yet in some respects politicised differently. These are not merely demands put forward by civil society organisations or academics. They are radicalised demands for coming to terms with the past, which are supported by grassroots organisations such as the 'Mothers of Peace' and the 'Saturday Mothers', as well as by political and social movements, and are brought into the political struggle.

This is a key factor for Turkey. In fact, the same applies to Germany, for example. When the issue of coming to terms with the past first arose after the Second World War, all the nation states of the capitalist world adopted a similar approach; in this sense, there were no significant differences between them. States always seek to bring the past to a close in such a way that the status quo is disrupted as little as possible. The shortcomings in Germany and France are actually part of a process of coming to terms with the past that takes place within a framework shaped by the anti-communist consensus that emerged after the Second World War and the emphasis on the 'free world' and NATO. What changed this framework was that, above all, the youth movements and the '68 movements took up these demands and radicalised them, transferring them from street protests into their own programmes and into a different political framework, and asking their fathers and mothers: "What did you do back then?" The framework and mechanisms of coming to terms with the past are always radicalised by the intervention of political and social movements.

This was also the case in Turkey. In the early 2000s, Abdullah Öcalan brought this issue to the fore. Of course, these issues had already been raised and discussed, but this is how they found their way into politics. Öcalan's statement that one must "look to the example of South Africa and examine the truth commissions" sparked the debate.

Turkey has a past on various levels:

- a very difficult past spanning 100 to 150 years,
- a 40-year history (of the last Kurdish uprising),
- and the history since 2015.

After 2015, particularly in Bakur, very fierce resistance from the self-administration met with very harsh state violence. There were both a great many deaths and a process **of confiscation**. Confiscation by the state: the confiscation of institutions, of institutions and organisations by the trusteeship regime, of bodies, of prisons, of graves. The destruction of cemeteries, attacks on cemeteries that had previously been established without permission...

That is to say, the past layer by layer: a long history of denial and annihilation, a 40- to 50-year past and the last 10 years. One must not forget: the coming to terms with the past, transitional justice – whatever one may call it – in this context, Kurdish society here is **an unacknowledged victim**. A victim, yet at the same time it has put up resistance, founded organisations and refused to be absorbed into the Turkish sphere. It has developed various frameworks: nationalist, religious, Marxist-socialist. Employing different strategies of struggle, it has not merely refused to be a victim, but has fought and resisted. We are therefore speaking of a community that is not recognised as an accepted victim.

Consequently, there are diverse voices from the past. How can we interpret these voices? **The paradigm of transitional justice** is proposed. It comprises five mechanisms:

1. **Truth commissions** – a new shared narrative that listens to suppressed and silenced voices.
2. **Legal proceedings** – the prosecution of state officials involved in crimes, particularly those benefiting from impunity, before local, specialised, international or mixed courts.
3. **Disqualification mechanisms (vetting)** – preventing prosecutors implicated in criminal offences from practising their profession, and revoking the licences of doctors who have produced forensic reports to cover up torture. Examples of this can be found in the former Yugoslavia, Argentina and South Africa.
4. **New curriculum and education** – the development of more democratic school curricula.
5. **A new constitution** – a new political contract.

Coming to terms with the past, whatever one may call it – we are a long way from the 'honeymoon period' of transitional justice in the early 2000s. Let us return to a burning present. Whilst it is already a matter of debate just how transformative large-scale, state-led transitional phases, such as those in South Africa or Argentina, actually were, we are today a long way from that possibility. In Argentina, the far right has been elected. Let us consider the example of the former Yugoslavia: The proportion of those who believe in the Srebrenica genocide stands at around 40% in Serbia; 60% do not believe in the genocide, as extreme nationalism has increased, and they claim that the recognition of the genocide through an international court ruling is an imposition of American and EU imperialism.

We are therefore a long way from the peak of the transitional justice paradigm, but even at the time when this paradigm was most strongly applied, change depended on the strength of political movements. To the extent that movements for equality and freedom were able to establish themselves. Globally, there is a serious regression. I do not wish to idealise that era in any way, but I believe we will not even return to it. There is no such political and international constellation putting pressure on the Republic of Turkey. That world is dead; it was buried beneath the rubble of Gaza.

Therefore, if we intend to do this, alternative movements must take action instead of waiting for the state. With great seriousness, through work, for example by setting up alternative truth commissions and court proceedings. This was attempted in the Rojava court, and we have tried it on a small scale by drafting an alternative judgement regarding 10 October. Prefigurative movements – that is, movements that are already attempting to shape the future – will achieve this.

Future

We live in a time when prospects for the future have been severely shaken. Agathe Cagé, a political economist from France whom I hold in high regard, says the following: In the 1970s, 50 years ago, a French worker had to work continuously for 20 years to earn as much as a manager. Today, that period is 100 years. According to Cagé, this means that the concept of the future in the modern sense has vanished. The concept of the future implies that people believe they can die in a different position from the one into which they were born. Today, this belief has vanished. The children of workers are born as workers and will die as workers. We live today in an age where there is no horizon of the future and we are at the mercy of fate, as in the Greek tragedies. Breaking free from fate was possible with a horizon of the future.

I believe that the Kurdish movement is a movement that rebels against this fate. The decision to move from armed to political struggle was taken in order to organise new forms of resistance and political action. When a movement abandons armed struggle, neither its political programme nor the people who have rallied around it disappear. The transformation of the struggle can also be understood as an attempt to organise an alternative to this lack of future. For the fact that there is no future within the current order can expand the political space in which not only far-right and neo-fascist movements, but also egalitarian and emancipatory political movements exert influence. These movements can develop policies that inspire people to look forward to the future in different ways.

A radical future means a future that differs from the present one. A future in which Kurdish children and Turkish children do not die in the so-called MESEMs, these vocational training centres that crush children. It means talking, discussing and making policy together about child labour, women's freedom, democratic Islam and the LGBTI+ movements. This is a very difficult task; I am not saying it is easy. But I think that the peace process has laid a very important foundation for embarking on this path, and that this foundation is not being utilised sufficiently.

In my view, what the future demands – and in particular what radical visions of the future demand – are **new forms of relationship and new alliances**. This means both building new relationships within Kurdistan between the Kurdish freedom movement and its own grassroots, and forging new relationships with the movement's opponents; and furthermore – despite all the anger and conflict – forming alliances with all movements in Turkey. An alliance does not arise outside of conflict; conflict is the fundamental element of the alliance. It is wrong to wait for an alliance in which conflicts have ended. Conflict is not always bad. To remain amidst discussions and conflicts, to expand our organisations, to broaden our alliances, to form a broad peace coalition, to forge the widest possible alliance – that, in my view, is the fundamental task of today.

What we call 'building' is only possible in this way. Will this happen through a congress? Through the revival of the HDK? Through a new organisation? I do not know. But I do know this: five very different, diverse structures must be brought together under a left-wing programme – I say this not because I am a socialist, but because the situation demands it. We have no other choice but to stop presenting peace as something that only those at the top talk about, but rather as a foundation on which ordinary people, women, young people, LGBTI+ people, Muslims, the poor – in other words, those who have been even more at the mercy of their fate over the last 10 years – can break free from that fate.

Without youth movements, there is no peace. Without women's movements, there is no peace. It's as simple as that. Peace will not be created by a few influential men over 50. That is not peace; that is conflict resolution; that is negotiation. What we are building must encompass movements, new enthusiasm, new convictions, new forms of relationship-building and new ways of understanding the world, Kurdistan and gender roles.

In my opinion, the concept for this is **the murmur**. The future calls for it. A murmur cannot be understood quite clearly; it has no definite beginning or end; you do not know exactly what it is, but something calls to you. Your voice is there too, and that of others. Behind the last uprising lies a great struggle. This is a new stage of it. To do justice to this murmur, we must devise much more creative methods. This task falls to everyone, to all of us.



Dear participants, distinguished speakers,

Today we are not merely concluding a symposium; we are also pausing together at a stage in a long, arduous journey, one often marked by contradictions. What we call peace and democratic society is not the result of a single decision, a single document or a single negotiation. It is the name of a long path that stretches through time, confronts mistakes and is courageously reshaped.

There are no shortcuts on this path. Sometimes we pretend we are making progress, only to turn back; sometimes it takes years to formulate a single sentence. As we tread this fine line between conflict and negotiation, we realise once again just how valuable both patience and truth are.

Today's discussions can be compared to a book. The chapters have been written: chapters of pain, of resistance, of denial and of searching. Each has shaped this text with its own language and its own weight. And now we may find ourselves at the most difficult part: the final chapter. After all, the end of a book determines not only how it ends, but also what it triggers in the reader's mind. This final chapter, which we are about to write, will in fact be the threshold to a new beginning.

That is why, as we leave this place, we take with us not only our notes, but also our responsibility. The path to peace is long, yes. But this path only comes into being when one walks it. And as long as we keep walking, the final page of this book will never be closed; it will be rewritten anew each time.

I thank everyone who has contributed to this, and I hope that our courage and hope will not wane on this shared journey.

